OXFORD, UNITED KINGDOM

# Ashmolean Museum: Masterpieces

## Twenty paintings and drawings, from Uccello's hunt vanishing into a dark forest to Grünewald's study of a single upper arm



The Ashmolean in Oxford is one of the oldest public museums in Britain, and it is more than a picture gallery: its collections take in archaeology as well as art, from many places and periods. These twenty paintings and works on paper are one way into the pictures. They range from Uccello's forest hunt to Mark Gertler's portrait of Thomas Balston, and take in Sydney Carline's view of Kirkuk from the air along the way.

Some were made as finished pictures to hang. Others are studies, or were taken to very different degrees of finish, and some of the most rewarding works here are drawings: Raphael's possible self-portrait, Michelangelo's portrait of Andrea Quaratesi, Canaletto's ink view of the Grand Canal. Canaletto appears in paint as well, at Dolo on the Brenta. Shakespeare turns up twice, in Arthur Hughes's Ophelia and Robert Braithwaite Martineau's Katherine and Petruchio. Around them are nineteenth-century British pictures by Rossetti and Seddon, Anna Alma-Tadema's girl on a blue pillow, the double portrait of Hester Tradescant and her stepson, portraits by Manet and Gertler, and quieter landscapes by Levitan, Corbet and Maitland.

Artline made this selection independently of the Ashmolean, from works documented in its collection. Dates and attributions keep the qualifications given in the collection records.

## Explore this selection in Artline

See the selected works alongside books and events from their period, or compare when the artists lived. The books and events provide context, not evidence of direct influence. Works without confirmed dates remain in this guide.

Artworks in context  Who lived when?

artlines.org/guides/ashmolean-museum

# The selection · 20

1. The Hunt in the Forest
   Paolo Uccello · c. 1465–1470
2. Portrait of a Youth, Possibly a Self-Portrait
   Raphael · c. 1498–1499
3. Andrea Quaratesi
   Michelangelo · 1532
4. The Exposure of Moses
   Nicolas Poussin · c. 1650
5. Ophelia
   Arthur Hughes · c. 1863
6. The Daydream
   Dante Gabriel Rossetti · 1872 - 1878
7. Girl in a Bonnet with Her Head on a Blue Pillow
   Anna Alma-Tadema · 1902
8. Asolo
   Edith Corbet · 1899
9. Dolo on the Brenta
   Canaletto · 1728
10. The Grand Canal near the Rialto Bridge
    Canaletto · 1725
11. Hester Tradescant and Her Stepson, John
    Thomas de Critz · 1645
12. Over the Hills of Kurdistan: Flying above Kirkuk
    Sydney Carline · 1919
13. The Poor Actress's Christmas Dinner
    Robert Braithwaite Martineau · c. 1860
14. Katherine and Petruchio
    Robert Braithwaite Martineau · 1855
15. Thomas Balston
    Mark Gertler · 1921
16. Copse by a Lake in Autumn
    Isaac Levitan · 1898
17. View on the Nile
    Thomas Seddon · 1855
18. Beech Trees at Sunset, Kensington Gardens
    Paul Maitland · 1905
19. Portrait of Mademoiselle Claus
    Édouard Manet · 1868
20. Study of an Upper Arm
    Matthias Grünewald · 1512 - 1514

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# The Hunt in the Forest

Paolo Uccello

c. 1465–1470 · Tempera and oil on panel, with traces of gold · Ashmolean Museum



Paolo Uccello. The Hunt in the Forest. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Riders and hounds run between rows of trees into a dark forest, growing smaller as they go, and they shrink with almost mathematical regularity. Uccello is remembered for his interest in perspective, and here the geometry has a job to do: it gives the hunt its direction, drawing it on into depth and darkness. What stops the panel from becoming a diagram is the hunt itself. The dogs run, the horses push into the wood, and the scene is busy, almost noisy.

Object source · Open artwork

02 / 20

# Portrait of a Youth, Possibly a Self-Portrait

Raphael

c. 1498–1499 · Black chalk with white heightening · Ashmolean Museum



Raphael. Self Portrait. Image: WikiArt. Public domain (WikiArt label). Proportionally resized and JPEG compressed; no crop. · Public domain (WikiArt label)

Raphael puts his shadow where it matters most, gathering the black chalk around the youth's eyes and cheek; the hair and cap get by with far fewer marks. The title is careful to say "possibly". A self-portrait is an attractive idea, and the directness of the face may encourage it, but directness proves nothing and the identification is still open. What the drawing does secure is a particular face, recorded as a likeness and not as a type.

Object source · Open artwork

03 / 20

# Andrea Quaratesi

Michelangelo

1532 · Chalk on paper · Ashmolean Museum



Portrait of Andrea Quaratesi. WikiArt; Michelangelo. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Public domain

Andrea Quaratesi, unlike Raphael's youth, has a name. Michelangelo models his head with continuous shading, carrying the chalk through cheek and jaw without a break, where Raphael had gathered his shadow in a few places. The shoulders and clothing are drawn far more lightly and left unfinished, so a closely worked head rests on a body that is barely more than suggested.

Object source · Open artwork

04 / 20

# The Exposure of Moses

Nicolas Poussin

c. 1650 · Oil on canvas · Ashmolean Museum



Nicolas Poussin. The Exposure of Moses. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/nicolas-poussin/the-exposition-of-moses · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

The subject is the biblical episode in which the infant Moses is left beside the water. Several figures react to the child, each with a gesture of their own, and Poussin does not draw them together into one shared action. The setting opens out in the same way, with trees and distant buildings carrying the eye well beyond the group. For an abandonment this is a measured treatment, and some viewers may find it a cool one: each figure has room to respond separately, and the child the story is about does not hold all the attention.

Object source · Open artwork

05 / 20

# Ophelia

Arthur Hughes

c. 1863 · Ashmolean Museum



Arthur Hughes. Ophelia. Image credit: Arthur Hughes; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Hughes shows Ophelia standing upright beside a tree and holding flowers, her pale figure hemmed in by vegetation. She is neither floating, as in Millais's painting, nor seated, as in Hughes's own earlier version.

In Shakespeare's Hamlet, Ophelia drowns. Here that end is still only a threat, though anyone who knows the play may feel the crowding plants bringing it closer.

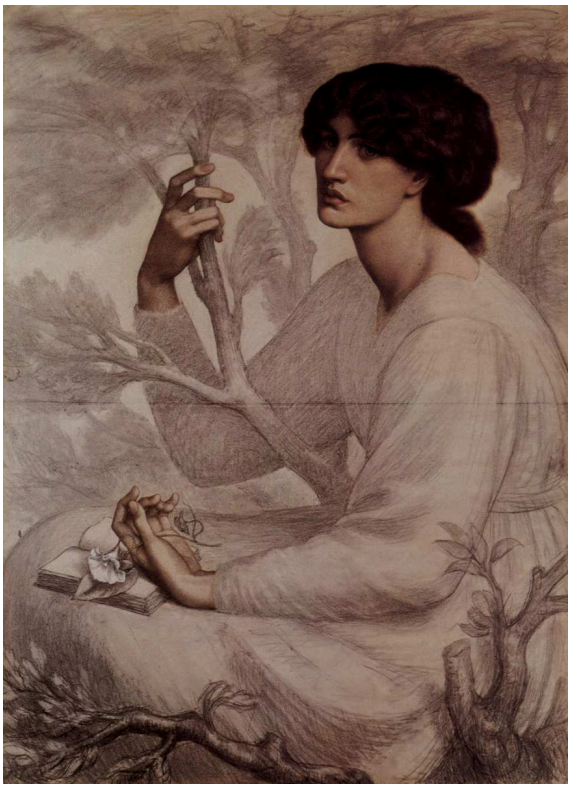
Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: WA1977.23

06 / 20

# The Daydream

Dante Gabriel Rossetti

1872 - 1878 · Ashmolean Museum



Dante Gabriel Rossetti. The Daydream. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/dante-gabriel-rossetti/the-daydream-1878 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

The book lies open, but the woman has stopped reading. A small branch is raised near her hands. Rossetti describes the setting only lightly, so the attention stays on her and on the pause. What the daydream is about, nothing in the picture says.

Object source · Open artwork

07 / 20

# Girl in a Bonnet with Her Head on a Blue Pillow

Anna Alma-Tadema

1902 · Ashmolean Museum



Anna Alma-Tadema. Girl in a Bonnet with her Head on a Blue Pillow. Image credit: Anna Alma-Tadema; Source credit: https://wsimag.com/art/12787-great-british-drawings. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Even the title gives the pillow its colour. The girl's cheek rests against it, and that contact between face and fabric is the centre of the image, with the ruffles of her bonnet and other pale materials gathered round it. Against all that pallor, the blue is strong enough to give the pillow almost as much weight as the girl herself.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: WA1964.81

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# Asolo

Edith Corbet

1899 · Ashmolean Museum



Edith Corbet. Asolo. Image credit: Edith Corbet; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Corbet comes at Asolo the long way round, across fields and long stretches of ground that tie the town's buildings to the lived-in country around them, under a broad sky that leaves room for those open intervals. Asolo is reached by crossing its land and is not set apart as a monument or a picturesque sight.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: WA1969.20

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# Dolo on the Brenta

Canaletto

1728 · Oil on canvas · Ashmolean Museum



Canaletto. Dolo on the Brenta. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/canaletto/dolo-on-the-brenta · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Buildings line the Brenta at Dolo, with small figures and working structures along the banks, and a bell tower stands up clearly among the low roofs. Canaletto spaces his distances so that the small activities by the water register without crowding out the town, and the town does not swallow them either.

Object source · Open artwork

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# The Grand Canal near the Rialto Bridge

Canaletto

1725 · Ink on paper · Ashmolean Museum



The Grand Canal near the Ponte del Rialto. WikiArt; Canaletto. Proportional resizing and JPEG compression; source frame preserved. · Public domain

Canaletto goes over some edges again with repeated ink strokes and lets others stand open, sometimes leaving a single line to do the work. A few decisive lines set out the space, and detail gathers only in places. Boats, façades and the course of the canal are all recognisable, though the drawing has none of the continuous surfaces of a finished painting. Set beside the painted Dolo, it shows him building a view in line instead of paint.

Object source · Open artwork

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# Hester Tradescant and Her Stepson, John

Thomas de Critz

1645 · Ashmolean Museum




Thomas de Critz. Hester Tradescant and her Stepson, John. Image credit: Thomas de Critz; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

This double portrait, attributed to Thomas de Critz, joins Hester Tradescant and her stepson John by the meeting of their hands in the foreground. Their different heights and clothing keep them distinct as two likenesses. The title is exact about the relationship, stepmother and stepson, a tie made by marriage, and the joined hands keep that tie in view.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: WA1898.14

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# Over the Hills of Kurdistan: Flying above Kirkuk

Sydney Carline

1919 · Ashmolean Museum



Sydney Carline. Over the Hills of Kurdistan: Flying above Kirkuk. Image credit: Sydney Carline; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

A wing of the aircraft cuts across the land below, placing the view firmly in a particular machine in flight, and other aeroplanes share the air above the hills and fields. Carline keeps all of them in the picture, so the panorama is never quite clear. Few pictures in this selection are so frank about where the viewer has been put.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: WA1929.30

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# The Poor Actress’s Christmas Dinner

Robert Braithwaite Martineau

c. 1860 · Ashmolean Museum



Robert Braithwaite Martineau. The poor Actress's Christmas Dinner. Image credit: Robert Braithwaite Martineau; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Poor, actress, Christmas: every word of the title carries weight, and the drawing itself says much less. Much of the woman's body is only lightly sketched around the act of eating, so the small dish draws more attention than its size would suggest. That modest dish, set against the word Christmas, is where the poverty named in the title becomes visible.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: WA1941.61

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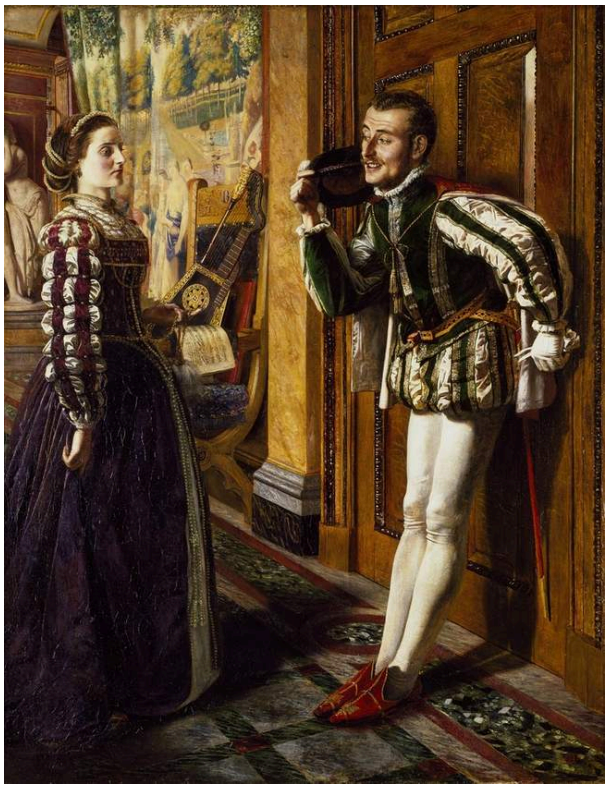
# Katherine and Petruchio

Robert Braithwaite Martineau

1855 · Ashmolean Museum



Robert Braithwaite Martineau. Katherine and Petruchio. Image credit: Robert Braithwaite Martineau; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Martineau's other work here is a good deal louder. Katherine and Petruchio are the couple at the centre of Shakespeare's The Taming of the Shrew, and in Martineau's furnished room their postures are opposed and a vessel is raised, turning the scene into a confrontation. The gestures make the quarrel clear before anyone has identified the play; costume and setting then place it within the social roles the characters perform.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: WA1950.197

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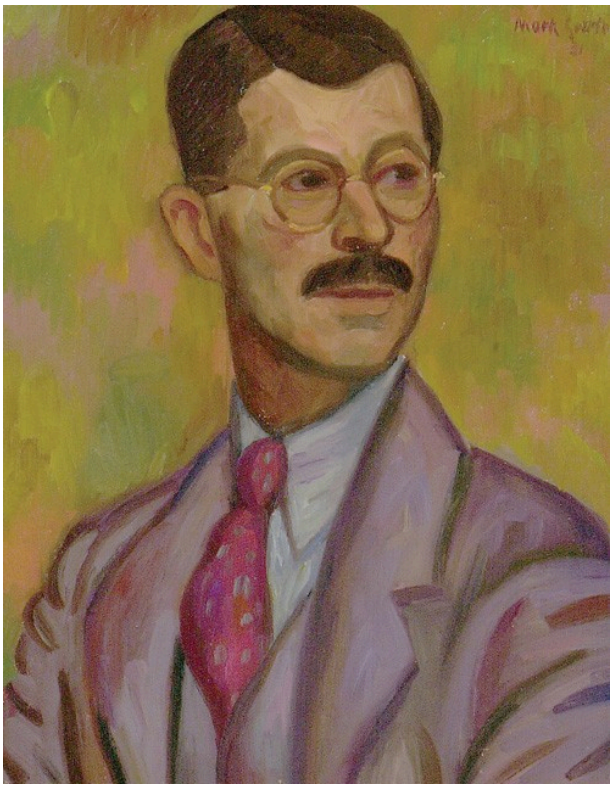
# Thomas Balston

Mark Gertler

1921 · Ashmolean Museum



Mark Gertler. Thomas Balston. Image credit: Mark Gertler; Source credit: Ashmolean Museum. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Gertler uses colour to separate Thomas Balston from his surroundings: a lilac jacket against a greenish ground, both laid in as broad areas. The head is described more precisely, and a bright tie below it adds a smaller, sharper accent. The difference in handling gives the face priority.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: WA1968.21

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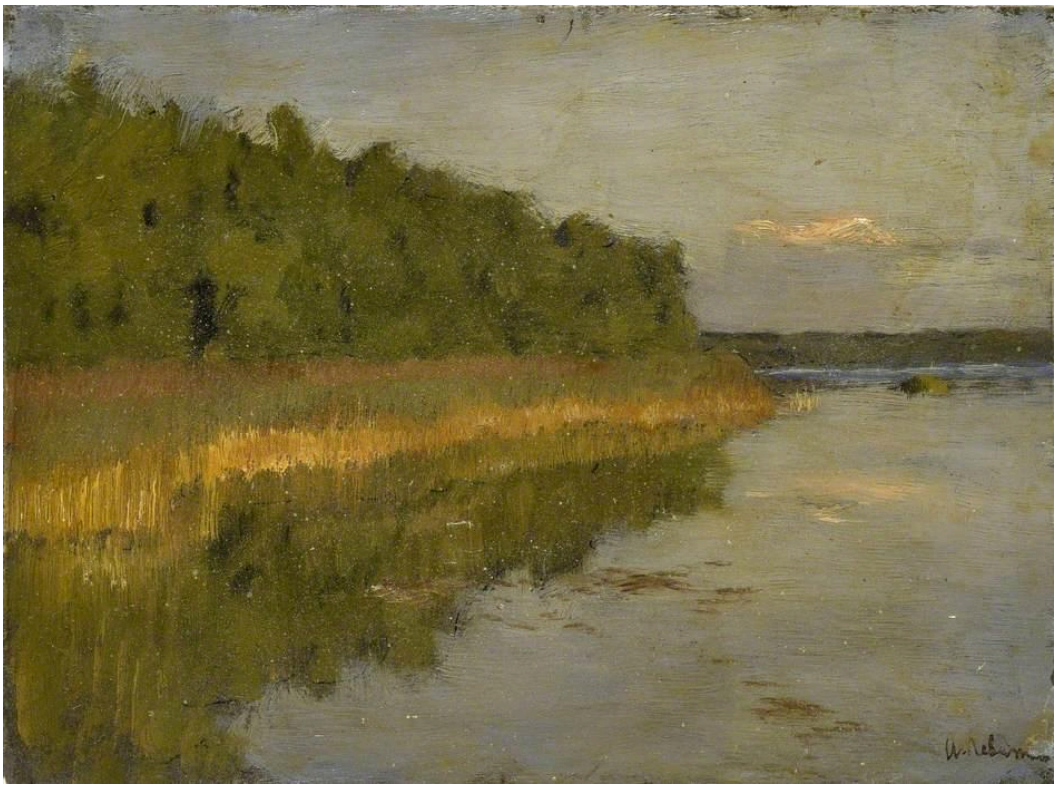
# Copse by a Lake in Autumn

Isaac Levitan

1898 · Ashmolean Museum



Isaac Levitan. Copse by a Lake (Autumn). Image credit: Isaac Levitan; Source credit: Art UK. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Proportional resize and JPEG compression; full source frame retained. · Public domain

A low bank runs on through trees and reeds above their darker reflections. Nothing dramatic happens, and there is no landmark to find. Autumn shows itself in small changes of colour building up along an ordinary, unbroken stretch of lake.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: WA1949.313

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# View on the Nile

Thomas Seddon

1855 · Ashmolean Museum



Thomas Seddon. View on the Nile. Image credit: Thomas Seddon; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Long bands of bank, water and evening sky dominate Seddon's view, and a pale sail cuts across them on a diagonal. Reflections link the river to the distant light. The boats are distinct objects, but the horizontal spread of the scene runs on past them, and the width of the view counts for more than anything that happens in it.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: WA1944.31

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# Beech Trees at Sunset, Kensington Gardens

Paul Maitland

1905 · Ashmolean Museum



Paul Maitland. Beech Trees at Sunset, Kensington Gardens. Image credit: Paul Maitland; Source credit: Art UK. Wikimedia Commons. Public domain (https://creativecommons.org/publicdomain/mark/1.0/). Resized and JPEG-compressed; selected source frame preserved. · Public domain

Maitland's beeches reverse the spread of Seddon's Nile. Their trunks stand at close, repeated intervals and shut off most of the distant view, and what depth there is comes from the small lit gaps between them. This part of Kensington Gardens becomes an enclosed space, made of verticals and the sunset light filtered through them.

Object source · Open artwork · Inventory: WA1961.31

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# Portrait of Mademoiselle Claus

Édouard Manet

1868 · Ashmolean Museum




Édouard Manet. Portrait of Mademoiselle Claus. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/edouard-manet/portrait-of-mademoiselle-claus-1868 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

Mademoiselle Claus's face is more resolved than her dress, and far more resolved than the partly developed figure beside her, whom the title does not name. A green railing helps hold this unevenly finished arrangement together. The painting is a likeness and, as it stands, also a record of Manet's decisions at different stages of completion.

Object source · Open artwork

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# Study of an Upper Arm

Matthias Grünewald

1512 - 1514 · Chalk · Ashmolean Museum



Matthias Grünewald. Upper arm Study. WikiArt source label: Public domain. Proportional resize and JPEG compression; no crop. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/matthias-grunewald/forearm-study-1514 · Public domain (WikiArt source label)

An upper arm, and nothing else: no body, and no hint of the action it might eventually have served. Chalk and lighter passages are enough to model its curve, and Grünewald's contour and shading give this single part of a body real force.

Object source · Open artwork

# Studies and degrees of finish

Several works in this selection are unevenly finished, and that is part of their interest. The chalk drawings by Raphael, Michelangelo and Grünewald, Canaletto's Grand Canal, Martineau's poor actress and Manet's Mademoiselle Claus all set fully worked passages beside others cut short or barely begun. Taken together, they show where the effort was spent. In the portraits it goes mostly to the face, with caps, shoulders and clothing left to lighter marks. In Canaletto it goes to chosen edges. Grünewald takes this furthest, drawing a single part of a body with nothing around it. None of this says for certain what each artist meant to finish.

# Further reading

## The Practice and Science of Drawing

Harold Speed · Read free · English

Harold Speed's guide to drawing practice discusses line and tone in working terms, and that vocabulary suits the drawings here by Raphael, Michelangelo, Canaletto and Grünewald. It helps in putting words to differences such as Canaletto's repeated ink strokes against his open edges, or Raphael's concentrated shading against Michelangelo's continuous modelling.

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Museum website · Official collection guide

Sources and visitor information checked: 2026-10-12

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