

# *Gathered Leaves* exhibit assembles rare art collection in Whistler

THE SHOW IS OPEN AT THE AUDAIN ART MUSEUM UNTIL OCT. 13, FEATURING FIGURES LIKE PICASSO, DEGAS AND VIGÉE LE BRUN

BY **DAVID SONG**

***GATHERED LEAVES:*** *Discoveries from the Drawings Vault* is not just some run-of-the-mill art exhibition.

The National Gallery of Canada (NGC) has been acquiring the works that make up this collection for more than 100 years. Contributions from iconic artists like Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, Gustav Klimt, Edgar Degas, Théodore Géricault, Wassily Kandinsky and Edvard Munch are featured alongside those of historically underrepresented women such as Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, Margaret Macdonald and Elisabetta Sirani.

In addition to its eclectic variety of talent, this showcase highlights a diverse range of mediums like graphite sketches, watercolour renderings, inks and pastels: noteworthy and delicate in equal measure.

"It is one of the best collections of European drawings and prints in all of North America," says Audain Art Museum director and chief curator Dr. Curtis Collins. "Last year, it was in Ottawa. This summer, it's in Whistler. Next fall, it'll be in Newfoundland, and then these works will go back into the vault and will not appear in any public context for at least a decade. That has to do with the fragility of these works.

"[The Audain] has heat, humidity and security controls that are at an international standard. So in other words, the National Gallery wouldn't lend this work to just any institution."

**RARE AIR** **Edgar Degas, "Racehorses", c. 1895-1899, pastel on tracing paper, mounted on cardboard, 55.8 x 64.8 cm. Purchased 1950, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.**

*PHOTO COURTESY OF THE NGC*

*Gathered Leaves* puts together what Collins describes as "a full purview of drawing": a ubiquitous art form employed in several ways throughout history. While some, like Chagall, produce drawings for their own sake, many others like Klimt use drawings as preparatory sketches for larger subsequent paintings. Some may depict existing artworks on paper, as Giovanni Battista Tiepolo did with his "Head of Giulio Contarini": a drawing based on a sculpture by Alessandro Vittoria.

Drawings don't always portray recognizable subject matter like people or landscapes. Kandinsky (whose work has never been shown in Whistler before now) uses geometric shapes as his subjects in "Braun," a 1924 watercolour.

"What you're getting is not only a range of materials, a range of functions for drawing, but also a really nice cross-section of major stylistic moments in the history of European art," says Collins.

## 'THE VARIETY HERE IS ASTOUNDING'

One of many stylistic trends represented in *Gathered Leaves* is Impressionism: a 19th-century movement defined by pure colours, short brushstrokes that generate an effect of spontaneity, and an emphasis on lighting effects (with shadows and highlights often rendered in colour instead of whites, greys and blacks).

France's Degas is known as one of the founders of Impressionism. Via skilful use of pastels, he brings an expressive quality of colour and line to grant an impression of his subjects—be they racehorses, ballerinas or anything else—therefore eschewing a photographic or photorealistic depiction.

The Renaissance is also well-represented in *Gathered Leaves* by one such as Pontormo, who is considered to be in league with the likes of Michelangelo and Leonardo. Pontormo is known, among other things, for his classic renderings of the human body that resemble archetypal Greek statues.

While individuals like Kandinsky and Degas composed some of their pieces on paper, others like Macdonald showed a preference for vellum: which traditionally was a form of parchment made from calfskin. Macdonald is a notable Scottish artist whose portfolio includes watercolours, graphics, metalwork and more.

Other key women include Vigée Le Brun, who achieved considerable success in Russia, Italy and her native France, as well as Sirani, an innovative talent who became one of the most requested Bolognese artists in the 1600s and 1700s.

"The other thing that's really important about this show and a larger mandate of the National Gallery and [the Audain] is that there's a very concerted effort here to present a greater balance between male and female artists," Collins points out. "Traditionally, the canon of Western European art has been predominantly men."

A total of 84 artists and 130 pieces make up *Gathered Leaves*, with eras represented spanning the 15th to 20th centuries. It is on display at the Audain until Oct. 13, and is not an experience that art aficionados will want to miss out on.

"The variety here is astounding," remarks Collins. "With such detailed work and so many different artists, this is a show that ... you'd have to come back to again and again, and one more time after that. This show puts the history of B.C. art [into context], which in some respects, is Western art practice grafted onto North America."

Find out more at audainartmuseum.com/exhibitions/gathered-leaves. ■

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