

New Cambridge exhibition to explore the incredible power inside the humble pencil

Grey Matters: Graphite

29 November to 11 March 2012 | The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

- Famous artists on show including William Blake, Degas, Toulouse Lautrec and Burne-Jones
- Display showing the wide range of forms graphite can take, from the raw mineral to pencils, batons and even powder
- Boundary-pushing contemporary works: graphite 'painting' and a performance video of exploding graphite balloons

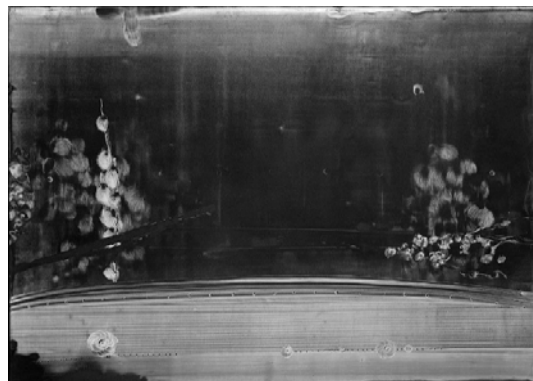
The latest exhibition from the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge explores the creative power and versatility of the pencil and its raw material graphite, from the first 17th century drawings on paper and vellum to the latest in contemporary art.

In the UK today relatively little is widely known about the history of the pencil and its graphite core, but Britain was in fact the world's first supplier of graphite. Before the 17th century the material was little-used, the main drawing materials being metalpoint, then chalk, ink and charcoal. The first high quality graphite mine was discovered in Cumbria in the early 1500s, and through British export graphite, and its later form in pencils, became the most widespread artistic tool in the known world.

The mineral graphite is named from the ancient Greek 'to draw/write' and is one of the most common materials used in drawing today. It is also one of the most versatile, allowing the artist to exploit a vast range of effects, from a needle-sharp contour line to the velvety depths of soft pencil shading, sometimes worked into a gleaming, metallic-like sheen.

Grey Matters: Graphite explores these techniques through four centuries of graphite drawings, from incredibly detailed miniatures and architecture drawings, to first sketches and softly shaded portraits.

The extraordinary range of ways in which the material has been used will be shown through a case of graphite samples, from raw minerals and powder, to graphite batons and pencils used to create infinite shades of grey.



Drivetime, 2003 © Christopher Cook



Mr and Mrs Joseph Woodhead and Mr Henry Comber in Rome (detail), Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres © The Fitzwilliam Museum



Portrait of Captain John Wood (detail), John Brown (1752-1787) © The Fitzwilliam Museum

Trumpington Street
Cambridge CB2 1RB
England

01223 332900
www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

Press enquiries: email
fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk

Finished drawings, studies and sketches by renowned artists form the heart of the exhibition, demonstrating their amazing skill in creating fine detail and dramatic shading just with the graphite pencil as their only tool.

These include:

- First ideas on paper by artist and poet, William Blake, usually known for his highly coloured printed work
- Sketches by Impressionist artist Degas, showing this modern master's knowledge of Renaissance drawing techniques
- Drawings by George Romney from the Fitzwilliam's collection of over 650 works, the largest collection of his drawings in the world. Known as a painter of portraits, these show a new dimension of his work.
- Compositional drawings by Pre-Raphaelite artist Burne-Jones of figure studies drawn in the 1870s and 80s, inspired by Florentine Renaissance painters

In contrast, the exhibition will also show how contemporary artists have pushed the medium to its extremes. Artist Christopher Cook uses a 'primal soup' of graphite powder, oil, resin and solvents to create enigmatic imagery that blurs the boundaries between drawing, painting, and photography. Artists James Eden and Olly Rooks have created a performance video in which balloons filled with graphite powder explode over a paper surface: in these, the artists' hand unleashes the potential of the medium to create its own, mysterious, forms.

- Ends -

For further information and images contact the Marketing and Press Office:

Telephone: 01223 33294 | Email: fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk

Notes to editors:

Grey Matters: Graphite | 29 November 2011 to 11 March 2012
The Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB
ADMISSION FREE

OPEN: Tuesday - Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00
Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 - 17.00
CLOSED: 24-26 & 31 December and 1 January

The history of graphite in Britain

(Source materials for this section include Wikipedia (entries on Pencils & Graphite) and the website of The Cumberland Pencil Museum <http://www.pencilmuseum.co.uk/>)

"Legend has it that in the early 1500s, a violent storm in the Borrowdale area of Cumberland led to trees being uprooted and the discovery of a strange black material underneath. This material turned out to be graphite, and shepherds began using it to mark their sheep." - The Cumberland Pencil Museum website

The graphite discovered in Borrowdale would turn out to be the most important graphite mine in Europe and the known world. The deposits found were the softest and of the best purity, giving England the global monopoly over exportation of the material.

Its rise in use began in the reign of Elizabeth I (1533-1603), when Borrowdale graphite was used to line moulds for cannon balls. The rounder balls could be fired further, leading to the

Trumpington Street
Cambridge CB2 1RB
England

01223 332900
www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

Press enquiries: email
fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk

rising supremacy of the English navy. As the immense value of the material grew to be understood, the mines were taken over by the Crown and flooded following mining to prevent theft until further deposits were required.

However, graphite was smuggled out for use in pencils, the sticks initially wrapped in string or sheepskin to draw with. The news of the usefulness of these early pencils spread far and wide, attracting the attention of artists all over the known world.

England was one of the world leaders in the production of pencils until the method of reconstituting graphite powder into a compressed pencil was widely implemented in the 18th century. Today pencils are still manufactured in Keswick, near the original mines, where Britain's unique story of the graphite pencil is celebrated at the Cumberland pencil museum.

The Fitzwilliam Museum

Founded in 1816 the Fitzwilliam is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge, with collections exploring world history and art from antiquity to the present day. It houses over half a million objects from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, masterpiece paintings from the Renaissance to the 21st century and outstanding collections of applied arts, ceramics, coins, and Asian arts.

Welcoming over 400,000 visitors a year, the Fitzwilliam presents a wide ranging public programme of major exhibitions, events and education activities, and is an internationally recognised institute of learning, research and conservation.

www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

Trumpington Street
Cambridge CB2 1RB
England

01223 332900
www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk

Press enquiries: email
fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk