Placing contemporary artists side by side with master draftsmen across five centuries, *Lines of thought* explores the history of drawing as a thinking medium, giving us insight into the minds of some of the world’s greatest artists in operation. Bringing together seventy drawings selected from the British Museum’s unparalleled graphic collection, this will be one of the largest ever UK touring show from the British Museum’s Prints and Drawings department.

The exhibition examines the enormous variety of ways in which artists have used drawing as a means of both recording and provoking thought from the fifteenth century to today. Opening first at Poole Museum in September and then travelling to the University of Hull and Ulster Museum, Belfast in 2017, *Lines of thought* is the latest touring exhibition to open up the British Museum’s collection to audiences across the country. The show will help visitors to understand drawing and inspire them to draw too.

A drawing can capture and preserve a record of an artist’s thoughts, rendering visible ideas and decisions that are often eliminated from a finished work. Since the Renaissance, drawing has been the foundation of any artistic education, yet shifts away from representational art in the twentieth century have led many art schools to neglect a previously fundamental part of their curriculum. Drawing continues to be relevant to every aspect of artistic production, and the exhibition will emphasise the numerous and invaluable lessons one can learn from looking at the drawings of past masters in the context of artists working today.

From recording exploratory thoughts and generating ideas, to developing and refining them, drawing remains a key conceptual tool at every stage of the artistic process. Spanning centuries and schools, the exhibition is arranged to demonstrate some of the different types of thought process that drawing encourages and illustrates: First Thoughts and Brainstorming, Enquiry and Experiment, Insight and Association, and Development and Decisions. *Lines of thought* thus emphasises the continuing vitality and fundamental nature of drawing, and its importance for artists from Michelangelo to Mondrian, Rembrandt to Rachel Whiteread, Piranesi to Picasso. What unites all of these artists, from the Renaissance through to contemporary practitioners and all those in-between, is the use of drawing as a way of thinking on paper.

Drawing’s simplicity and economy make it one of the most common means of giving visible and concrete form to initial ideas or impressions, acting almost at the speed of thought. Examples of *primi pensieri* (first thoughts) include a tree study by Piet Mondrian which paved the way to the development of his iconic grid paintings, and an *en plein air* sketch by Rembrandt for later development in the studio. In his drawing for the *Last Judgement* in the...
Sistine Chapel in the early sixteenth century, we see Michelangelo brainstorming ideas in a manner similar to modern British artist Richard Hamilton’s sheet of alternative ideas for an illustration to James Joyce’s *Ulysses*.

Whether analysing an object, form, situation or idea, the scrutiny inherent in drawing requires an effort not only to see, but to understand, making it a primary instrument of enquiry. Stunning examples include Paul Cézanne’s investigation into the form of a sculpture of Cupid, which he continued to draw from for over thirty years, and the German renaissance master Albrecht Dürer establishing the pose for Adam in preparation for his celebrated engraving of 1504, *Adam and Eve*. In opposition to this rational, methodical approach, drawing is also particularly conducive to associative thinking. Examples include contemporary artist Peter Doig’s drawn response to a still from the film *Friday the 13th* and Rembrandt’s interpretation of a print after his friend and contemporary Jan Lievens’s *Raising of Lazarus* into an Entombment (c. 1635). The refining and development of an idea is visible both in a sheet of studies by Leonardo da Vinci of the Christ Child with a cat, continuing from one side of the sheet to the other, and in Frank Auerbach’s signature employment of constantly erased and redrawn charcoal.

This exhibition is the result of a three year programme, generously supported by the Bridget Riley Art Foundation, to encourage art students to look at drawings, and to draw from them. Students were brought into the Study Room during more than 100 workshops to view drawings, informing the selection of works which they had found particularly engaging and that will now be part of the tour.

Following a successful tour of three British Museum partnership venues in the UK in Poole, Hull and Belfast, *Lines of thought* will travel to two international venues in New Mexico and Rhode Island.

Notes to Editors:

**Lines of thought: Drawing from Michelangelo to Now**

**A British Museum Partnership Exhibition**

Poole Museum (3 September – 6 November 2016)
The Brynmor Jones Library Art Gallery, University of Hull (3 January – 28 February 2017)
Ulster Museum, Belfast (10 March – 7 May 2017)

*Generously supported by the Bridget Riley Art Foundation*

**International venues:**

New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe (27th May – 17th September 2017)
Rhode Island School of Design, Providence (28th September 2017 – 7th January 2018)

The beautifully illustrated volume *Lines of thought: Drawing from Michelangelo to now*, by Isabel Seligman, with foreword by Bridget Riley, is available to purchase from Thames and Hudson. Softback.

**The Bridget Riley Art Foundation**

The Bridget Riley Art Foundation is supporting a three-year programme at the British Museum which uses the Museum’s collection of Prints and Drawings to encourage drawing among art students. Support for the programme includes the touring exhibition *Lines of thought* to three venues in the UK during 2016-17.

**The British Museum National Programmes**

The British Museum is a national presence and each year works with hundreds of UK partner organisations through its wide-ranging National Programmes activity. This includes single-object Spotlight tours, touring exhibitions, partnership galleries, short-term loans and long-term loans, with the lead support of the Dorset Foundation in memory of Harry M Weinrebe. In 2015/16, over 3,000 objects were loaned to nearly 170 venues in the UK, reaching 7.7 million people outside London. The Museum will continue to develop partnerships within the UK as part of its commitment to sharing the collection as widely as possible.

**The British Museum International touring exhibitions**

The British Museum aims to share its rich and diverse collection, together with its curatorial expertise, with a worldwide audience through a programme of international touring exhibitions. Touring exhibitions draw on the expertise of world-class curators, conservation experts, scientists, project managers and many other Museum professionals who are able to support the exhibition at every stage of development.
The Department of Prints and Drawings

The Department of Prints and Drawings contains the national collection of Western prints and drawings, in the same way as the National Gallery and Tate hold the national collection of paintings. It is one of the top three collections of its kind in the world. There are approximately 50,000 drawings and over two million prints dating from the beginning of the fifteenth century up to the present day.

The collection is available to the public through the Study Room and through a programme of temporary displays, touring exhibitions and loans.

For further information
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