

THE
DRAWINGS
OF
HENRY
FUSELI

FROM
THE
AUCKLAND
CITY ART
GALLERY



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ORGANIZED BY THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS
AND THE AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY

THE DRAWINGS OF HENRY FUSELI brings an exceptional collection of graphic work by this Romantic artist to North America for the first time. To his contemporaries, Fuseli was a respected author and classical scholar who traveled in literary and artistic circles and was familiar with the German and English Romantic movements. Fuseli was born Johann Heinrich Füssli in Zurich, Switzerland, in 1741, the son of an artist. Under pressure from his father he studied theology, was ordained in the Zwinglian Church in 1761, but rejected its restrictive life-style a year later. He traveled to Berlin and then to London in 1764 where, with the exception of eight years spent studying art in Italy, he lived until his death in 1825. Elected to the Royal Academy in London in 1790, Fuseli held a variety of posts there over the years, including Professor of Painting and Keeper of the Royal Academy. Individually and as a group, the works in the exhibition are notable for their high quality and diversity, and provide a singular opportunity for a first encounter with Fuseli's work.

BY PETER TOMORY

The drawings that comprise this exhibition were acquired by the Auckland City Art Gallery in 1965 as a collection from a private owner in New Zealand. The high quality of all the drawings, the variety of subject matter, and their chronological spread—1764 to 1823—suggest that Henry Fuseli chose them himself as gifts for another artist. My first thought was that this might be Moses Haughton, Jr., Fuseli's engraver, but more recent internal and external evidence have led me to propose that the recipient could have been William Blake, a close friend of Fuseli throughout their working careers.

The two earliest drawings, *Caius Marius and the Cimbrian Soldier* (no. 1, c. 1762–65) and *Aphrodite Carrying Off Paris after His Battle with Menelaos* (no. 2, 1766–69), are sufficiently accomplished to explain why, several years after the artist's arrival in London, Fuseli was advised by Sir Joshua Reynolds that his work was promising enough for him to study in Italy. On his return to London in 1778 following eight years in Italy, his professional career developed and was recognized by the exhibition of *The Nightmare* in 1781.

Fuseli's progress toward mastery of the medium is best studied in his drawings of the human figure, which he considered the central motif of all great art. His forms—based on those of antiquity, Michelangelo, and Raphael—reflect his concept of a noble but not necessarily ideal race of men and women. The selection of subjects testifies to Fuseli's concept of "Poetic Painting," its themes chosen from the great epics and dramas of literature, but relying on the artist's choice of the most salient point and its imaginative presentation to give the scene an identity independent of its thematic source. It is important to realize the conceptual foundation of these works, since many artists of Fuseli's period have been disparaged in the past as being simply "illustrators."

Checklist

- 1
CAIUS MARIUS AND THE
CIMBRIAN SOLDIER,
c. 1762-65
Pen and ink with gray wash
12 × 19½ in. (30.6 × 48.6 cm)
- 2
APHRODITE CARRYING OFF
PARIS AFTER HIS BATTLE WITH
MENELOS, 1766-69
Pen with gray and pink wash
8½ × 7 in. (21.8 × 17.8 cm)
- 3
THREE WOMEN AT A CURTAINED
WINDOW, 1779
Pencil and brown wash
6½ × 6½ in. (16.5 × 16.7 cm)
- 4
SUBJECT FROM MILTON'S
L'ALLEGRO, c. 1780-85
Pencil heightened with white
13 × 16½ in. (33 × 41.1 cm)
- 5
A SCENE FROM SHAKESPEARE'S
TIMON OF ATHENS, 1783
*Pen and brown ink with brown,
yellow, and pink wash (on oiled
paper)*
8½ × 11¼ in. (20.5 × 29.9 cm)
- 6
DAVID AND GOLIATH,
c. 1790-95
Pen and gray wash
13½ × 12¼ in. (34.3 × 31.1 cm)
- 7
MRS. FUSELI SEATED AT A
TABLE, c. 1790-91
*Pen with gray, brown, and pink
wash*
8½ × 6½ in. (22.7 × 15.7 cm)
- 8
A WOMAN WITH A FAN,
STANDING, SEEN FROM THE
BACK, 1791
*Pencil with blue, brown, black,
and pink wash*
9½ × 7½ in. (23.3 × 18.8 cm)
- 9
A WOMAN ON A BALCONY WITH
HIGH DRESSED HAIR AND HAT,
c. 1790-92
*Pen with black, blue, pink, and
yellow wash*
9½ × 7½ in. (23.4 × 18.7 cm)
- 10
BUST PORTRAIT OF MRS. FUSELI,
c. 1795
*Pen with black and blue wash,
heightened with white*
6⅞ × 5½ in. (17.4 × 14.4 cm)
- 11
A WOMAN, STANDING,
ATTENDING TO A MAN: A
STANDING MALE NUDE, SEEN
FROM THE BACK,
1790-92
*Pen and brown ink with
watercolor*
8⅞ × 6⅞ in. (22.5 × 16.3 cm)
- 12
MRS. FUSELI SLEEPING,
c. 1795
*Pen and brown ink, with gray,
blue, and pink wash*
8½ × 7½ in. (22.7 × 18.6 cm)
- 13
TWO COURTESANS WITH
FANTASTIC HAIRSTYLES AND
HATS, 1790-92
*Pen with brown, pink, and
gray wash*
7 × 6⅞ in. (17.9 × 16.2 cm)
- 14
A WOMAN STANDING, SEEN
FROM THE BACK, DRAWING A
CURTAIN ASIDE, 1795-1800
*Pencil and pen with gray, brown,
and pink wash*
12½ × 6½ in. (30.7 × 17.3 cm)
- 15
PROMETHEUS AND IO,
1800-1810
Pen and ink with gray wash
18½ × 11½ in. (46 × 30 cm)
- 16
HAMLET, HORATIO, AND THE
GRAVEDIGGER, 1804
*Pen with gray, blue, and pink
wash*
14½ × 11½ in. (37.2 × 29.5 cm)
- 17
PARENTAL CARE, c. 1795-1800
*Pen and ink with gray and
blue wash*
7½ × 11½ in. (19.2 × 28.8 cm)
- 18
CHRIEMHILD THROWING
HERSELF ON THE BODY OF
SIEGFRIED, 1805
Pen and ink with brown wash
7½ × 12½ in. (18.6 × 31.9 cm)
- 19
SIEGFRIED HAVING SLAIN THE
DRAGON, 1806
Pen, pencil, and gray wash
13½ × 9½ in. (34.8 × 23.7 cm)
- 20
SIEGFRIED AND CHRIEMHILD,
1807
Watercolor
18⅞ × 14½ in. (48 × 36 cm)
- 21
CIRCE ABSOLVING MEDEA AND
JASON OF THE KILLING OF
MEDEA'S BROTHER ABSYRTOS,
1808
Pencil with brown and gray wash
16½ × 10½ in. (42.5 × 27.1 cm)
- 22
EROS AND PSYCHE, 1808
Pen, pencil, and watercolor
9½ × 14½ in. (23.3 × 35.8 cm)
- 23
IXION AND NEPHELE, 1809
*Pencil with brown, gray, and
pink wash*
10½ × 8 in. (26.7 × 20.3 cm)
- 24
HEPHAESTUS, BIA, AND CRATO
SECURING PROMETHEUS ON
MOUNT CAUCASUS, 1800-1810
*Pen and pencil with gray and
pink wash*
14⅞ × 11½ in. (35.9 × 30.2 cm)
- 25
SELENE AND ENDYMION, 1810-11
Pen, pencil, and watercolor
14½ × 11½ in. (37.3 × 30.2 cm)
- 26
AMAVIA FINDS HER KNIGHT, SIR
MORDANT, BEWITCHED IN
ACRASIA'S BOWER OF BLISS, 1810
Pencil and pen with gray wash
12½ × 15½ in. (31 × 39.8 cm)
- 27
IXION SLAYING PHORBAS AND
POLYMELOS IN REVENGE OF HIS
MOTHER, MEGARA, WHO HAVING
REFUSED THEM AS SUITORS WAS
KILLED BY THEM, 1810
*Pen and black ink, with gray,
pink, and green wash*
10 × 7½ in. (25.4 × 19.6 cm)
- 28
THE GREAT FATHER AND
ANCIENT NIGHT, 1800-1810
Pencil with gray and blue wash
17½ × 11½ in. (45 × 30 cm)
- 29
ALLEGORY OF VANITY, 1811
Pen, pencil, and watercolor
7⅞ × 10½ in. (20 × 27 cm)
- 30
VERGIL, DANTE, AND GERON,
1811
Pen and brown ink
7¼ × 11½ in. (19.8 × 29.3 cm)
- 31
PORTRAIT OF LAVINIA DE URUJO,
1813
Pencil and gray wash
14¼ × 6½ in. (26 × 17 cm)
- 32
A CAPRICCIO OF THE HORSE
TAMERS, c. 1810-15
Pencil with blue and gray wash
18½ × 12½ in. (46.6 × 31 cm)
- 33
ACHILLES CRYING OUT AT THE
TRENCH, CONFUSING THE
TROJAN ARMY, c. 1815
*Pencil with mauve and
gray wash*
15¼ × 10½ in. (40 × 27.7 cm)
- 34
UNDINE AND HULDBRAND,
1819-22
Pencil and watercolor
18½ × 12½ in. (48.1 × 31.9 cm)
- 35
POLYPHEMUS HURLING THE
ROCK AT ODYSSEUS, c. 1819
*Pencil with gray, blue, and
brown wash*
18½ × 11½ in. (46 × 30 cm)
- 36
DEATH AND SIN BRIDGING THE
"WASTE" OF CHAOS AND MET BY
SATAN ON HIS RETURN FROM
EARTH, c. 1819-21
Pencil, pen, and watercolor
15½ × 12½ in. (39.3 × 31.5 cm)
- 37
SATAN LEAVING THE GATES OF
HELL, GUARDED BY SIN AND
DEATH, 1821
*Pencil with gray, brown, and
yellow wash*
15½ × 11½ in. (39.8 × 30.1 cm)

It is clear in some cases that Fuseli chose his subject as an analogy to some contemporary political condition or, frequently, some social question. In other cases, the link to such issues is uncertain; analogy, in contrast to allegory, is suggestive only and lacks an emblematic language which would allow us to interpret its meaning. For example, the drawing from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* (no. 5, 1783) can be taken at face value as illustrating an episode which takes place in Act IV, Scene 3. However, the Greek inscription ("man is the dream of a shadow") and trivialization of Alcibiades (a character of integrity in the play), as well as external evidence, allow the interpretation of this drawing as an analogy to the artist in contemporary society. The artist as treasure seeker—Timon digs up gold in his cave—throws his genius, as Timon throws his gold, at a frivolous public interested only in ephemeral fashion.

In a great many of his interpretations, Fuseli—like a pictorial Balzac—investigates the human condition. Unlike the Frenchman, who found his sources in the salon and on the street, Fuseli's inspiration was the over-lifesize heroes and heroines of the epic past. The artist belonged to the Sturm und Drang generation of German poets and writers, whose works were characterized by rousing action and high emotionalism and who used words like "elastic" and "electric" to describe their creative leaps of the imagination and flashes of inspiration.

Fuseli's interpretation on occasion acts as a "reducing glass" in which we are given his view of the sexes. In a drawing from the German medieval epic *Nibelungenlied* (no. 19, 1806), for instance, Siegfried, having slain the dragon, will bathe in its blood to make his skin impervious to any weapon. But the artist has given this hero—who is dominated by Chriemhild and Brunhild, the strong women of the poem—an effeminate hairstyle. Of related interest is the series of drawings (see nos. 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, and 13) that the artist

made of his wife, who had been a professional model. These studies provide an emblematic guide to the artist's conception of the roles played by women in modern society. They show Mrs. Fuseli as herself, as a fashionable hostess, and as a courtesan. The aura of sexual menace and, in *Two Courtesans with Fantastic Hairstyles and Hats* (no. 13, 1790–92), the aggressive and metallic hairstyle symbolize Fuseli's view of the heartless nature of loveless sex.

It is also in this group of drawings (nos. 10, 12, and 13) that one can see best the artist's marvelous handling of color. Fuseli used watercolor and body color like Chinese white with a skill that may in fact have been honed by William Blake. He was self-taught and confessed that success with color frequently eluded him, as is often evident in his large oils. As with other artists of his period, his best work is in his drawings and small-scale oil sketches. This is ironic for, again like some of his contemporaries, Fuseli dreamt of huge cycles of paintings on towering walls. Faced with a vanishing patronage and an indifferent public, he was able only to realize them on half-folio sheets. Fuseli did achieve one major ambition, however—his Milton cycle—which was exhibited in 1799 and 1800 when it was praised by the critics and ignored by the public. One of the later drawings, *Satan Leaving the Gates of Hell* (no. 37, 1821), is a much-reduced memory of a subject from the 1799 Milton cycle, of which many of the canvases were as large as fourteen by eleven feet. This drawing is indeed "the shadow of a dream," as only a few of the paintings of that cycle survive.

Born to an artistic and intellectual family, Fuseli was himself an intellectual who read literature in at least eight languages. He was a romantic whose prodigious energy and abhorrence of mediocrity combined in a very remarkable artist.

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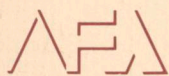
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