

# Drawing Unlimited

The Graphic Art Department at the Centre Pompidou holds one of the most extensive collections of 20th- and 21st-century works on paper, comprising over 35,000 drawings, collages, prints, notebooks and assorted objects. Light-sensitive and delicate, this collection can only be exhibited for short periods and remains little known. For the first time, “Dessins sans limite” [Drawing Unlimited] allows an in-depth look at this collection, presenting nearly 300 works by 120 artists, including many masterpieces.

Long regarded as a preparatory exercise, drawing asserted its independence in the 20th century, emerging as a work of art in its own right. This limitless field of experimentation has embraced practices such as cut-outs, papiers collés and imprints, and now reaches beyond the sheet into photography, film, digital media and installation.

As an original and universal act, drawing records the memory of a moment, conveying both personal stories and broader historical narratives. It also unfolds over time, from quick sketches and animated lines to precise calligraphy and spontaneous performance. More than a simple medium, drawing has evolved into a space for experimentation, remaining open to new approaches, at the forefront of artistic practice.

Rather than follow a chronological order, the exhibition presents a nuanced and subjective journey through the collection, where the works engage in unprecedented dialogues. The display is structured around four aspects of drawing: study, narration, trace and animation.

## Study

Since the Renaissance, drawing has played a crucial role in the creation of artworks. In the 20th century, many artists continued to use drawings to explore form and composition before executing works in other media. While often conceived as preparatory studies, drawings also offered artists a repertoire of forms and ideas for future compositions. Some, however, acquired a distinct status when signed or exhibited, recognised by their creators as artworks in their own right. In the classical tradition, knowledge is gained through the imitation of appearances. While some modern artists challenged this system, which emphasised the study of the human body, they nonetheless continued to employ drawing as a tool for analysis. Over time, artists moved away from copying classical models and began engaging with other cultures: drawing shifted from reproducing styles or motifs to uncovering or revitalising the underlying logic of a work. Still crucial for conveying or analysing the mechanics of form, drawing became an instructional exercise in its own right.



Fernand Léger, *Quartier de mouton* [Cut of Lamb], 1933. India ink on paper, 40 × 30,5 cm. © Adagp, Paris, 2025 ©Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Dist. GrandPalaisRmn

## Narration

More than a form of social satire, caricature plays a key role in the reinvention of drawing. Schematizing and deliberately regressive, it demonstrates the psychological force of the line. Functioning as a shorthand for character and attitude, it brings artists closer to everyday life and lends itself to more political, dissenting voices.

Because it relies on the simplest of tools, drawing is an ideal medium for spontaneous expression. Executed more quickly than any other art form, it enables artists to externalise intense and sudden emotions. The first expressive medium, drawing dates back to the dawn of humanity and the complex vocabulary of stylised figures and geometric forms found in cave art. Modern artists continually sought to recapture this primal impulse by breaking conventions and taboos, occasionally imitating the naivety of a child, or doodling to liberate form from thought and generate new images.

When artists draw an object or a figure, they first break down what they see before reconstructing it. In the case of the human body, this process of deconstruction questions what defines the uniqueness of a face or form. It also challenges the cultural and social assumptions that shape how individuals are represented. When artists turn their gaze on themselves, sketching their own reflection, they enter into a silent dialogue with the self: more than a simple likeness, each self-portrait implicitly reveals traces of a personal and biographical narrative.



George Grosz, *The Voice of the People is the Voice of God*, 1920. India ink and newspaper cut out and glued on paper, 35,3 × 56 cm. ©Estate of George Grosz, Princeton, N.J. / Adagp, Paris, 2025 ©Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Dist. GrandPalaisRmn

## Trace

In the 20th century, drawing moved beyond representation to become a trace of the artist's gesture. Extending from the hand to the entire body, this performative dimension took shape through diverse experimental approaches. Drawing was no longer confined to the page; it was coextensive with real space, allowing artists to experiment graphically, imprint their bodies on the surface, and make their actions visible on the sheet. Drawing and writing are closely related processes. Many modern artists radically reimagined their graphic practices by looking to non-Western scripts, particularly those from the East. Engaging with artists from Asia enabled some to reconnect with the spiritual and universal potential of abstraction—an approach that accords a central place to paper itself.



Robert Longo, *Men in the Cities* (*Triptych Drawings for the Pompidou*), 1981-1999. Charcoal, graphite pencil and synthetic paint on paper laid down on board, 242 × 150 cm. © Adagp, Paris, 2025 ©Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Philippe Migeat/Dist. GrandPalaisRmn

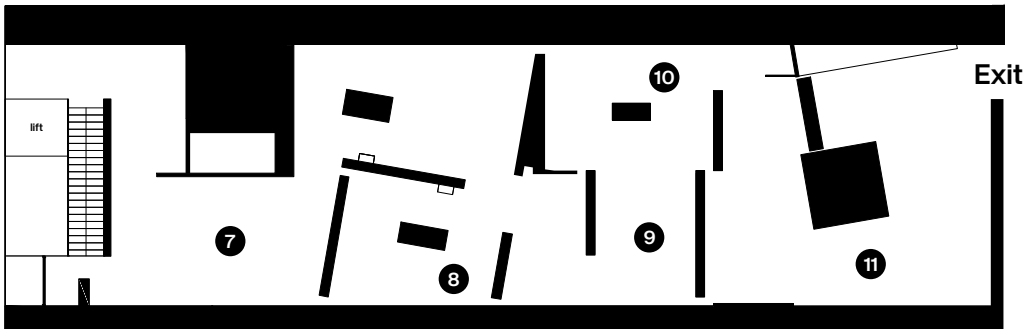
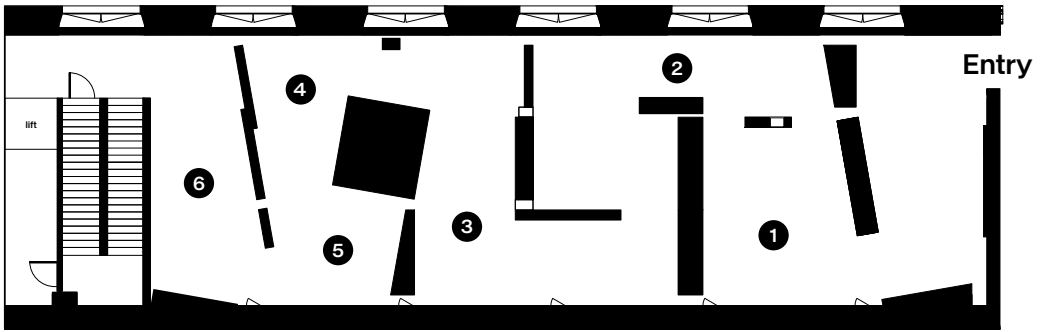
## Animation

Collage replaces the drawn line with paper, asserting the material reality of the medium as a surface for juxtaposing fragments of raw reality. Cubist collages visually and disjointedly articulate the experience of intuitive time where past, present and future coexist. Influenced by Dada, Kurt Schwitters' collages lean towards visual poetry, exalting the remnants of everyday life. Robert Rauschenberg's assemblages likewise maintain a close dialogue between art and life by bringing together images drawn from mass culture.

Before it becomes form, drawing is a trajectory through space—an ideal medium for conveying the energy that underlies a world in constant motion. Rhythm plays a central role in this process: precise geometric lines and planes structure and animate the space, while their sequenced rhythms set the tempo of a visual music. In a grid—an abstract structure—background and form become indistinguishable, eliminating depth. Anti-mimetic, it rejects both reality and narrative. As a repetitive system through which the artist enters a meditative state, the grid acquires a metaphysical dimension, functioning as a metaphor for universal harmony.



François Morellet, *Étude n° 38* [Study No. 38], 1951. Gouache on paper, 26,3 × 37 cm. © Adagp, Paris, 2025 ©Centre Pompidou, MNAM-CCI/Philippe Migeat/Dist. GrandPalaisRmn



#### STUDY

1. Preparation
2. Analysis

#### TRACE

7. Performance
8. Writing

#### NARRATION

3. Caricature
4. Howl
5. First falterings  
steps
6. Identity

#### ANIMATION

9. Juxtapose
10. Rythm
11. Grid

After four years of work, the Grand Palais, an emblematic Parisian monument, gradually reopened for the Olympic and Paralympic Games in 2024. It hosts exhibitions and events as part of a generous, festive program organized by the GrandPalaisRmn.

In 2025, the Centre Pompidou embarked on a transformation that will allow it to remain active throughout the renovation of the Beaubourg building, slated to reopen in 2030.

During this unprecedented period, the spirit of the Centre Pompidou will continue to thrive through its Constellation programme, which offers a vast array of exhibitions, live shows, films, meetings and workshops in France and abroad.

The GrandPalaisRmn and the Centre Pompidou are thrilled that the Grand Palais takes on such a central role in this Constellation.

## Exhibitions

**Curators:** Claudine Grammont and Anne Monfort-Tanguy

**Associate curators:** Valerie Loth and Laetitia Pesenti

**Project Manager, Grand Palais:** Pierrette Besse

**Production Manager, Centre Pompidou:** Malika Noui

**Exhibition Designer:** Pauline Phélouzat

**Graphic Designer:** Lacasta Design

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## Useful information

16 December 2025 to 15 March 2026  
Tuesday to Sunday, 10 am to 7.30 pm  
Late opening Fridays until 10 pm  
Grand Palais, entrance Square Jean Perrin,  
Galerie 8

## Admission

**Standard:** €15

**Reduced:** €12 (Valid for members,  
18 to 25-year-olds, students up to 30,  
large families)

**Tribu:** €42 (Valid for groups of four people,  
including two people aged 18 to 25)

**Free** (Valid for people under 18, jobseekers,  
people with disabilities, Pass GrandPalais  
and Carte Pop)

## Publications



### *Dessins sans limite*

Under the direction of Claudine Grammont  
and Anne Montfort-Tanguy  
Co-published by Éditions du Centre  
Pompidou / GrandPalaisRmn Éditions  
256p., €45, only in French

## Teaching pack

Download the exhibition teaching pack:

<https://www.grandpalais.fr>

## The Grand Palais mobile app

Download the app from the App Store or Google Play (in French and English) to stay informed, plan your visit and make the most of exhibitions and events at the Grand Palais. You can also follow dedicated visitor routes designed to guide you through the building and its exhibitions.



Download the Grand Palais app  
for a complete selection of exhibition  
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## Visits

For information on guided tours organised  
by the Grand Palais:

<https://www.grandpalais.fr>

For information on guided tours organised  
by the Centre Pompidou:

<https://www.centrepompidou.fr>

## Podcast

Explore the top picks of the Centre Pompidou's  
educators and guides. The podcast is  
available from the Centre Pompidou website  
and on the Grand Palais app. A full transcript  
can be downloaded for free from the Centre  
Pompidou website. Only in French



## 'Performance-Drawing'

15 January — 1 February 2026

**The Drawing Lab and the Centre Pompidou**  
are offering a programme of six performances  
by artists in which the practice and tools  
of drawing are fully explored and questioned.  
With Juliette Blightman, Christine Herzer,  
Jean-Christophe Norman, Diogo Pimentão,  
Jimmy Robert, and Georgia Sagri.

At the Drawing Lab, 17 rue Richelieu,  
75001 Paris

Free admission, subject to availability.

Detailed programme available in December  
at [centrepompidou.fr](http://centrepompidou.fr)

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