

# HATCHING *it* OUT

An exhibition of Old Master drawings reveals the endless nuances possible with the venerable technique of hatching.

BY JERRY N. WEISS

To speak of great drawing is, by implication, to refer to the art of hatching. It's a technique born of a practical consideration: how best to translate three-dimensional imagery to paper. Notwithstanding the effectiveness of ink wash and the popularity of charcoal, hatching has long been the standard embellishment to a figure drawing's contours. The practice originated in the Middle Ages and has never gone out of style.

At its most basic, *hatching*, also called *hachure*, refers to setting down a pattern of short, rhythmic, parallel lines close together and evenly spaced in order to darken a passage or increase the sense of form in a drawing. The initial "screen" of hatching may be overlaid with subsequent series of lines drawn

at contrasting angles, creating *crosshatching* and further darkening the value of the area. Hatching, however, functions not only as a means of suggesting form, texture, space and movement but also as a sample of an artist's unique calligraphy. In other words, a beautifully drawn passage offers its own rewards and is expressive of the artist's personality as much as it is devoted to illusion.

This past summer, the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles mounted the exhibition "Hatched," which brought together 22 Old Master drawings culled from the museum's splendid collection. The works on view ranged from the Renaissance to the Post-Impressionist era, and each offered a different inflection on hatching, putting the beauty and versatility of the technique on full display.

#### Portrait of Joseph Roulin

by Vincent van Gogh, 1888, reed and quill pens and brown ink and black chalk, 12 $\frac{5}{8}$  x 9 $\frac{5}{8}$ .

All artwork this article collection J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, California.



The basic illusion of hatching is that a sequence of separate lines will read as a solid value from a slight distance. With hachure a draftsman can evoke a middle tone, a core or cast shadow or the atmosphere around a figure, as well as provide a means by which disparate elements of a drawing are unified. A superb demonstration of this unity is displayed in one of the oldest drawings in the exhibition, Leonardo da Vinci's (1452–1519) *Caricature of a Man With Bushy Hair*. The man's face and body are modeled by an unidirectional rain of lines; as has often been noted, the angle of Leonardo's hatching indicates that he drew with his left hand. These lines vary little in thickness or value and function rather like the first state of an etching, before any subsequent

cross-directional hachure has been added. The hatching continues under the man's chin and above and behind his head; in this way all the areas of the drawing are connected. And how like Leonardo to create an image of a slightly ridiculous subject with an approach that is eminently disciplined and refined.

If Leonardo's drawing invokes comparison to the etching process, the relationship is explicit in *Esther Before Ahasuerus*, by Frans Crabbe van Espleghem (ca. 1480–1553). Crabbe was an innovative printmaker, and this, his only known drawing, was a precise study for an etching. The scene is from the Bible and depicts multiple figures within a grand interior. The hatching is intricate yet freely applied. In the architectural passages, the



LEFT  
**Esther Before Ahasuerus**  
by Frans Crabbe van Espleghem, ca. 1525, pen-and-dark-brown-ink with touches of gray-brown wash over black chalk, 9 3/8 x 7 7/8.

OPPOSITE PAGE  
**Caricature of a Man With Bushy Hair**  
by Leonardo da Vinci, ca. 1495, pen-and-brown-ink, 2 5/8 x 2 1/8.



**Esther Before Ahasuerus (details)**

