



RECENT ACQUISITIONS OF ITALIAN RENAISSANCE PRINTS

Ideas Made Flesh

Prints were a primary form of artistic expression in sixteenth-century Italy. Better than any other art form, prints satisfied an exploding demand for the images of the day. They ranged from depictions of the remains of antiquity, to creations inspired by modern humanist thinkers, to religious imagery supporting the Catholic Church's response to the Reformation. Interpreting works in other media, prints transmitted styles across Europe, filling the contemporary imagination and establishing an enduring canon. Engravers and woodcutters reproduced designs supplied by great masters, notably Raphael and Titian. A few painters, such as Parmigianino and the Carracci, put their hands to etching, thereby conveying their own graphic personalities. These two approaches, of systematic reproduction and spontaneous expression, would define the poles of all later printmaking.

While the roles and uses of sixteenth-century Italian prints are generally recognized, their inherent aesthetic quality is often undervalued. This is due in part to the Italian printmakers' emphasis on the concept underlying an image or the essence of a model they were interpreting, whether a drawing or painting. The materials and execution of a print were usually a secondary concern: plates and blocks were frequently handled with less care, and individual impressions pulled with less consistency. Even those who collected Italian Renaissance prints long after their creation tended to value invention and composition over diligence and finish. The striking beauty the prints can attain—the sensuousness with which they express ideas—remains unfamiliar except to specialized scholars and discriminating collectors.

This exhibition is an opportunity to appreciate both the importance and the quality of sixteenth-century Italian prints. It presents some thirty works, all recently acquired, that represent the principal techniques, types, and phenomena of the period: the extravagant invention of Roman and Florentine artists early in the century; the refined artifice of Parmigianino and his interpreters; the technical advances and incipient naturalism of Venetian printmakers; and the compelling expression of masters associated with the Counter-Reformation, especially the Bolognese. Many of the prints are rare, and most of the impressions are exceptionally fine, of the kind briefly printed and seldom seen.

This exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington.

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DEX 1

BACCIO BANDINELLI

Gaiole in Chianti (Siena), 1488 – Florence, 1560

Two Male Nudes

c. 1520

pen and ink

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 1971

This drawing is a preparatory study for the engraving of the *Massacre of the Innocents*, at right. In Bandinelli's perfectly schematic style, it offers two distinct ideas for the Roman consul on the top step, just right of center. The first shows the figure in profile, his pose echoing that of the consul to the left of center in the print. The second idea renders the figure in a frontal, more confrontational, and more difficult pose. Bandinelli chose to develop this option in what must have been a detailed study for the entire composition. The drawing is precious evidence of the sculptor's spatial imagination and creative process.

DEX 2

GIORGIO GHISI

Mantua, 1520 – 1582

The Prophet Joel, after Michelangelo

early 1570s

engraving

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 1985

DEX 3

ANTONIO DA TRENTO

Italian, c. 1508–1550 or after

The Martyrdom of Saint Peter and Saint Paul,
after Parmigianino

c. 1530

chiaroscuro woodcut printed from three blocks in ochre and black

Gift of Ruth Cole Kainen, 2006

During the first half of the century in Italy, the principal alternative to engraving for reproducing designs in other media was the chiaroscuro (Italian for light and shade) woodcut printed in color from multiple blocks. More than any other Italian artist, Parmigianino took advantage of the technique in a sustained collaboration with the printmaker Antonio da Trento. This is their largest, most elaborate project in an impression of particular clarity. Emphasizing Parmigianino's artifice and elegance, such chiaroscuro woodcuts profoundly influenced the next generation of Italian artists and helped establish the standard of European court style.

DEX 4

GIAN JACOPO CARAGLIO

Verona or Parma, c. 1500 – Cracow, 1565

Fury, after Rosso Fiorentino

c. 1525

engraving

Gift of Ruth Cole Kainen, 2006

The imagery of this print is as fantastic as its meaning is elusive. Traditionally, it has been considered an emblem of Fury or Frenzy because of the agitated state of the figure. It could just as easily represent the rational side of human nature threatened by the irrational or, like some other prints of this moment, render a dream state. In any case, Rosso Fiorentino's design exemplifies the anticlassical tendency of advanced art in the 1520s, while Caraglio's interpretation demonstrates a new variety and refinement in the technique of reproductive engraving.

DEX 5

LÉON DAVENT

born in France (?), active 1540/1556

***Jupiter Bringing Water of the Styx to Psyche,*
after Giulio Romano**

c. 1540

engraving

Gift of Ruth Cole Kainen, 2006

DEX 6

ITALIAN 16TH CENTURY

The Resurrection, after Francesco Salviati

1546/1550

engraving

Gift of Ruth Cole Kainen, 2006

DEX 8

CAMILLO PROCACCINI

Bologna, 1561—Milan, 1629

The Rest on the Flight into Egypt

c. 1595—1600

etching

Gift of Ruth Cole Kainen, 2006

DEX 9

ADAMO SCULTORI

Mantua, c. 1530—1585

*The Setting of the Sun with Chariots of Apollo
and Diana, after Giulio Romano*

engraving

Gift of Ruth Cole Kaine, 2006

DEX 11

BATTISTA FRANCO

Venice, c. 1510—1561

The Sacrifice of Abraham

1550s

etching and engraving

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 2007

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GIAN JACOPO CARAGLIO

Verona or Parma, c. 1500—Cracow, 1565

The Marriage of the Virgin, after Parmigianino

c. 1526

engraving

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 2007

DEX 13

DOMENICO DEL BARBIERE

Florence (?), c. 1506–Paris, probably 1565/1575

Gloria, after Rosso Fiorentino

1540/1545

engraving

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 2007

DEX 14

AGOSTINO CARRACCI

Bologna, 1557–Parma, 1602

Giovanni Gabrielli

c. 1599

engraving

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 2008

DEX 15

ANNIBALE CARRACCI

Bologna, 1560—Rome, 1609

The Crucifixion

1581

engraving

Gift of Kate Ganz, 2008

This iconic image was Annibale Carracci's first print and one of his earliest works in any medium. Its grand scale, austere composition, and solemnity would have appealed to devout contemplation rather than aesthetic enjoyment. That emphasis is consistent with the dictates of the Council of Trent, concluded in 1563, which charted the reform and revitalization of the Catholic Church. At the same time, Carracci's lightly incised and freely arranged work with the burin—the tool used to carve the design in the copper plate—gives the impression of atmosphere, coherent light, and immediate sensation. The pursuit of this new naturalism would lead Carracci to the more personal, flexible, and fluid technique of etching in later prints like *The Holy Family with Saint John the Baptist*, on the right.

DEX 16

ANNIBALE CARRACCI

Bologna, 1560—Rome, 1609

The Holy Family with Saint John the Baptist

1590

etching and engraving

Gift of Kate Ganz, 2008

[volume open in floor case, plate to be selected]

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DEX 18

MARCO DENTE

Ravenna, c. 1493—Rome, 1527

The Skeletons, after Baccio Bandinelli

c. 1518

engraving

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 2012

A brilliantly talented and fiercely ambitious sculptor, Bandinelli was Michelangelo's only serious rival in Florence. Inspired by Raphael's example, he created numerous designs showing off his powers of invention and entrusted them to professional engravers. This was his first such effort. At the center of the composition, a winged skeleton symbolizing Death recounts the life of the skeleton below as the surrounding figures listen and grieve. Vasari, the famous biographer of Italian artists, wrote that the print, "filled with every kind of anatomy, elicited much praise."

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MARCO DENTE

Ravenna, c. 1493—Rome, 1527

Saint Michael, after Raphael

c. 1520

engraving

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 2012

DEX 20

CORNELIS CORT

Hoorn (Alkmaar), Netherlands, 1533–Rome, 1578

The Assassination of Saint Peter Martyr,
after Titian

1567

engraving

Purchased as the Gift of Jimmy and Jessica Younger, Houston, 2012

In 1567 Titian sent a painting of the death of Saint Peter Martyr (died 1252) to Rome as a gift to the recently elected pope, Pius V. The painting has been lost, but this engraving preserves its appearance along with the artist's dedication to Pius. Although the work is usually attributed to the activity of its Venetian publisher, Bertelli, it is unmistakably the work of Cornelis Cort, who was in Rome at the time of the gift to Pius. Beginning in 1565, Titian engaged the Netherlandish engraver as exclusive interpreter of his compositions. This engraving exemplifies Cort's style: his burin strokes are distinctively varied in path and complex in organization, so that hue, tone, and specific textures are conveyed with unprecedented fidelity to painted representation.

DEX 21

NICOLÒ DELLA CASA

born in France, active in Rome, c. 1543–1547

Baccio Bandinelli

c. 1544

engraving

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 2013

DEX 22

GIOVANNI BATTISTA FONTANA

Ala (Trent), c. 1524–Innsbruck, 1587

The Vision of Ezekiel

1579

etching with engraving

Ruth and Jacob Kainen Memorial Acquisition Fund, 2013

The book of Ezekiel, 37:1–14, relates a vision in which the prophet addresses a valley of dry bones. If they listen to the word of the Lord, their bodies shall be restored and their life return. This remarkable print adheres closely to the text, with Ezekiel declaiming the verses inscribed below him, God the Father appearing above, skeletons rising from a vast field to take on flesh, even cherubs seeming to restore breath. The most prolific etcher of an important group in Verona, Fontana was routine in technique but fertile in imagination and unusually gifted at coordinating large-scale compositions of complex narrative.

DEX 23

NICOLÒ BOLDRINI

Vicenza, c. 1510 – c. 1570

Hercules and the Nemean Lion,
partially after Raphael

c. 1566

chiaroscuro woodcut printed from two blocks in tan and black ink

Pepita Milmore Memorial Fund, 2014

The first of Hercules's famous labors was to defeat the invulnerable lion of Nemea. Throughout the Middle Ages, the subject had symbolized the triumph of virtue over vice. The composition of two neatly interlocked bodies is typical of sixteenth-century representations of the event and was inspired by ancient examples, notably a relief in Villa Medici in Rome. In this, the period's most elaborate treatment of the subject, the motif is set within a typically Venetian landscape of deep extension, flowing transitions, and varied forms. Equally distinctive is the Venetian approach to chiaroscuro woodcut, featuring a densely articulated line block — the detailed design printed in black ink — and large areas of a single tone.

DEX 24

NICOLAS BEATRIZET

Lunéville (Lorraine), 1515—Rome, 1565 or after

The Massacre of the Innocents,
after Marco Dente, after Baccio Bandinelli

1540s (?)

engraving

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, and Purchased as the
Gift of Robert B. Loper, 2014

This was Bandinelli's most famous design for a print, engraved by Marco Dente and repeated some twenty years later by Beatrizet. The ostensible subject is the slaughter of children of Bethlehem by order of King Herod in an attempt to kill the infant Jesus. But even contemporaries understood the subject as pretext for the display of artistic prowess. Vasari noted that the engraving was "one of the largest that had been created to that point" and explained that it "demonstrated [Bandinelli's] masterful design in the figures and his knowledge of musculature and the parts of the body, bringing him great fame across Europe." Bandinelli's study for one of the figures is displayed at left.

DEX 25

BATTISTA ANGOLO DEL MORO

Verona, c. 1514—Venice, 1573

The Finding of Moses

1540s

etching

Ruth and Jacob Kainen Memorial Acquisition Fund, 2014

When Pharaoh's daughter went to bathe in the Nile, she saw a basket holding the infant Moses, took pity, and ordered that he be rescued (Exodus 2:1–5). The scene here is rendered broadly and rapidly, with rhythmic movement, flickering light, and graphic freedom privileged over exact description and careful finish. A sophisticated painter, Angolo del Moro was one of the first artists to take up Parmigianino's proposition that pure etching was equivalent to drawing and held potential for personal expression. Later Veronese painters, such as Fontana and Pittoni in the next room, would follow Angolo's example, making the city an early center of artistic etching.

DEX 26

ORAZIO DE SANTIS

Born in L'Aquila (?), active 1568–1584

*The Holy Family with Saints Elizabeth and the
Young John the Baptist, after Pompeo Cesura*

1568

engraving

Purchased as the Gift of Robert B. Loper, 2015

Within the conventional formula of the Holy Family with saints this engraving reflects a very personal approach to both religious imagery and technique. Bulky, unstable in their postures, and abrupt in their gestures, the figures represent a coarse but vigorous take on the elegant stylization coined by Parmigianino. The handling itself is loose and energetic, so that the surface is infused with an iridescent light and nervous animation. Typical of De Santis, who was active in the provincial center of L'Aquila, the image is expressionistic, conveying spiritual feeling through eccentric form rather than naturalism, like that of Annibale Carracci.

DEX 28

CHERUBINO ALBERTI

Sansepolcro (Arezzo), 1553–Rome, 1615

Genius with the French Royal Coat-of-Arms

c. 1600

engraving, proof before additional letters

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 2007

DEX 29

GIORGIO GHISI

Mantua, 1520–1582

The Calumny of Apelles, after Luca Penni

1560

engraving

Pepita Milmore Memorial Fund, 2006

Apelles was the most famous painter of ancient Greece. Slandered by an envious colleague, he created an allegory of Calumny. Based on a written account by the ancient Roman satirist Lucian, Renaissance artists often attempted to recreate the appearance of the lost masterpiece. This engraving is one of the most celebrated interpretations. Calumny, holding a torch and accompanied by haggard Envy and snaring Deceit, drags a child, Innocence, before the throne of donkey-eared Foolishness, flanked by Ignorance and Suspicion. In the background Time rescues Truth. Thanks to a long period of activity in Antwerp and Paris, Ghisi was the rare Italian engraver to achieve the technical brilliance and inherent attractiveness of northern printmaking.

DEX 33

GIOVANNI BATTISTA PITTONI

Vicenza, c. 1520–1583

Colossaei. Ro. prospectus 3

(Third View of the Colosseum in Rome)

c. 1561

etching on blue paper

Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 2015

BENEDETTO BORDONE

Padua, 1460–1531

***The Triumph of Europe, in Francesco Colonna,
Hyperotomachia Poliphili***

1499

bound volume with 172 woodcut illustrations

Florian Carr Fund, 2012

The *Hyperotomachia Poliphili*—translated in English editions as *Poliphilo's Strife of Love in a Dream*—is widely regarded as the most beautiful illustrated book of the Italian Renaissance. It is also one of the most complex and influential creations of Venetian humanism. The text recounts Poliphilo's pursuit of Polia, the woman who had rejected him, through a series of dreams and across an imaginary landscape invoking ancient mythology and antique forms. The book's greatest significance, however, is visual: the elegance of its design, the refinement of its typography, and above all the illustrations. Its woodcuts are so exact in perspective and exquisite in drawing that they bear comparison with the most advanced painting of the time. Indeed, the relationship was reciprocal. Contemporary painting, especially in the schools of Venice and Ferrara, often involves imagery first presented in the *Hyperotomachia*.

MATTEO DE' PASTI

Verona, c. 1420–Rimini, after 1467

***An Elevating Siege Tower and
A Siege Engine in the Form of a Dragon,
in Robertus Valturius, De re militari***

1472

bound volume with 100 hand-colored woodcut illustrations

Purchased with Funds from an Anonymous Donor, 2013

The most significant recent acquisitions of fifteenth-century Italian prints have come in the form of fine illustrated books. This volume, a treatise on war machines, was the first printed book illustrated by an Italian artist, probably the architect and medalist Matteo de' Pasti, and the first to contain scientific or technical images. The present copy is all the more special for the original hand-coloring of its illustrations. The two machines seen here are typical of the range of invention, from the clever but fairly straightforward mechanics of the siege tower, to the rich and potent fantasy of the siege engine. In this combination of practical application and artistic imagination, these illustrations anticipate Leonardo da Vinci's famous studies of the kind.