



*Masters of the*  
**BITTEN LINE**  
ETCHING IN THE AGE OF REMBRANDT



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[-FIG. 01]

1981/50/87

Lucas van Leyden, (Flemish, c.1494-1533), Uylenspiegel ('The Owl-glass' or The Beggars), 1520. Etching, 175 x 142 mm.

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1981.

[-FIG. 02]

An etcher using an échoppe. The fine point of an etching needle is depicted at its other end.

Abraham Bosse with revisions by Sebastien Le Clerc, Traite des manieres de graver en taille-douce sur l'airain, par le moyen des eaux fortes et des vernis durs et mols, 1st pub. 1645, (Paris: Pierre Aubouin et Charles Clousier, rev. ed. 1701), pl.5.

Courtesy of Special Collections, Auckland City Libraries.

[-FIG. 03]

A means of pouring acid onto the plate.

Bosse with revisions by Le Clerc, Traite des manieres de graver en taille-douce, pl.6.

Courtesy of Special Collections, Auckland City Libraries.

[-FIG. 04]

An etcher demonstrating another method by which the plate could be etched. On the wall behind him a print is hung on rods, on the table to his right volumes reminiscent of print albums rest, and two shelves above old plates can be seen.

Bosse with revisions by Le Clerc, Traite des manieres de graver en taille-douce, p.31.

Courtesy of Special Collections, Auckland City Libraries.

[-FIG. 05]

A printing press in operation.

Bosse with revisions by Le Clerc, Traite des manieres de graver en taille-douce, pl.16.

Courtesy of Special Collections, Auckland City Libraries.

[-FIG. 06]

1981/50/112

Rembrandt van Rijn, (Dutch, 1606-1669), Clement de Jonghe, Printseller [?], 1651. Etching with drypoint and engraving, 207 x 162 mm.

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1981.

[-FIG. 07]

Illustration of the effects of multiple biting.

Bosse with revisions by Le Clerc, Traite des manieres de graver en taille-douce, pl.8.

Courtesy of Special Collections, Auckland City Libraries.

# The INTRO- DUCTION





[FIG. 01]

AMONGST THE PANTHEON OF GREAT ARTISTS WHO HAVE EMBRACED THE TECHNIQUE OF ETCHING REMBRANDT HARMENSZ. VAN RIJN IS STILL RECOGNISED AS THE MOST INNOVATIVE AND MASTERLY PRACTITIONER OF THE MEDIUM. NOW BETTER KNOWN AS A PAINTER, IN HIS DAY REMBRANDT WAS MORE WIDELY APPRECIATED AS AN ETCHER – CONTEMPORARY CRITICS CONSIDERED MUCH OF HIS PAINTING FLAWED WHILE HOLDING HIS PRINTS IN HIGH REGARD.<sup>1</sup> *Masters of the Bitten Line* EXPLORES THE PERIOD WHEN ETCHING REACHED ITS ZENITH IN EUROPE AND PLACES REMBRANDT'S WORK ALONGSIDE OTHER MASTERS OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY INCLUDING ANNIBALE CARRACCI, ANTHONY VAN DYCK AND SALVATOR ROSA. AS 2006 IS THE 400TH ANNIVERSARY OF REMBRANDT'S BIRTH THIS CONSIDERATION IS CERTAINLY TIMELY.

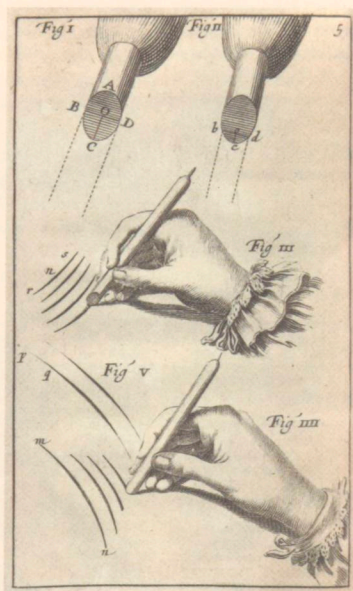
In the 1600s etching was still a relatively new medium, with the first dated etching produced in 1513.<sup>2</sup> Etching's early history has been described as 'a series of false starts'.<sup>3</sup> The major print artists of the time such as Albrecht Dürer and Lucas van Leyden briefly experimented with the medium, but despite showing great facility in their attempts returned to engraving. By the following century, however, inclinations had changed; engraving was now largely the preserve of specialist printmakers, whereas etching had much wider appeal. Indeed, the French term *peintre-graveur* was subsequently coined to describe the large number of painters who took up the medium. In contrast to engraving, whereby the artist cuts into the plate directly with a graver or burin, etching required little physical effort and was quicker to produce. In addition, due to its similarity to drawing, it was a much more accessible medium for non-specialists, leading sixteenth-century artist and scholar Giorgio Vasari to refer to the etchings of one practitioner as 'printed drawings'.<sup>4</sup>

Bamber Gascoigne uses an analogy which evocatively illustrates the differences in the handling of the two mediums, suggesting that you 'imagine the surface of the paper as a thin layer of snow on a frozen pond. The engraver is limited to making lines with the edge of a skate; the etcher can draw with a pointed stick'.<sup>5</sup> Such a description highlights the attraction of the medium for painters not accustomed to the resistance of metal and the strictures of line imposed by engraving.

To make an etching the artist would prepare a metal plate, usually copper hammered so that it was very thin, and cover it with a ground impermeable to acid.<sup>6</sup> Numerous recipes existed for grounds, but there were two main types – a hard ground, used expertly by Jacques Callot, which offered a great deal more resistance, and a softer waxy ground preferred by *peintre-graveurs* such as Rembrandt.<sup>7</sup>

Using an etching needle the artist would incise their design into the ground. Abraham Bosse, who published the first treatise on

[FIG. 01]

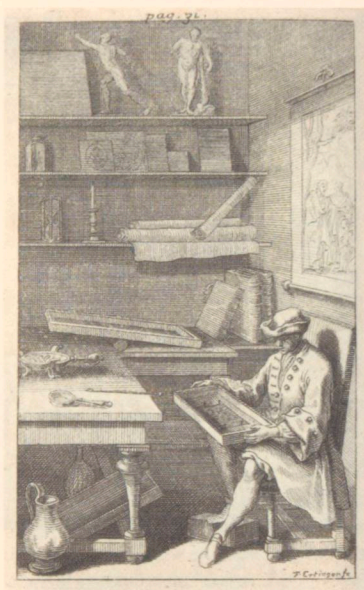


[FIG. 02]

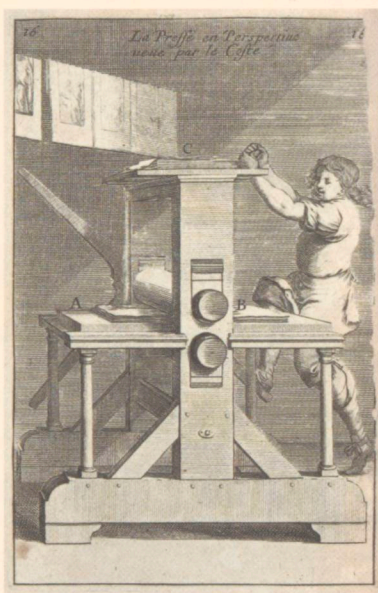


[FIG. 03]





[-FIG.04]



[-FIG.05]

etching in 1645, warned artists of the impressionability of the ground telling them to take great care 'lest the buttons on your sleeve should rub off the varnish'.<sup>8</sup> Acid would then be applied to the plate which would 'bite' the lines where the metal was revealed. At stages throughout this process the plate could be inked and impressions taken resulting in the different 'states' of an image.

[-FIG.03/04]

[-FIG.05]

Rembrandt's plates often went through many states, and the transformation within them can be remarkable. For example, his portrait of Clement de Jonghe, Printseller [?], 1651, is known in five original states.<sup>9</sup> The first merely records the features of the sitter, but in the subsequent states the artist uses line and shadow to intensify the psychological nature of the portrait so that by the fifth state, illustrated here, one has much more of a sense of the man portrayed.<sup>10</sup>

[-FIG.06]

While early etchers tried to simulate the effect of engraving, the *peintre-graveurs* of the seventeenth century sought to discover the unique properties of the medium. They were extraordinarily inventive. Whereas engraving was exacting in the use of line, etching opened up the possibility to play with it; Rembrandt revelled in its sketchy properties, while Stefano della Bella used the medium to lyrically describe form. Unsuccessful aspects could be scraped and burnished off the plate, as Rembrandt did many times, and etching could be combined with burin work and drypoint to achieve different effects. Etchers discovered that plates could be bitten numerous times and that varnish could be used to 'stop-out' certain sections. This would halt the biting in those areas, while allowing other lines to be more deeply bitten, with them printing more darkly in consequence. As Bosse illustrates, by this means an etcher could convey a sense of recession in a landscape or the progression of shadow on a body.

[-FIG.01]

[-CAT.01-03]

[-CAT.10]

[-FIG.07]

Professional etchers such as Callot and his disciples, who continued to emulate the look of engraving, were not blind to these developments and were also innovative in

their approach. Indeed, Callot is credited in particular with harnessing the potential of multiple bitings, as can be seen in the wonderful depth of field he achieves in *The Temptation of St Anthony*. He also pioneered the use of an *échoppe*, a tool with an oval end cut on an angle which when turned could replicate the swell of an engraved line.<sup>11</sup>

Despite etching being primarily a linear medium great depth of tone could be achieved using very fine cross-hatching, as seen in the deep velvety-blacks of Adriaen van Ostade's work. And, as Rembrandt shows us in *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple*, through the clever use of the white of the paper, light could seemingly emanate from within a print.

Where previously artists had embraced etching and engraving for the ability to make multiple copies, Rembrandt exploited the individual effects that could be achieved through printing. Rather than wiping the plate completely clean of ink, for example, he would leave a thin film on the metal, referred to as plate or surface tone. In the instance of *Landscape with an Obelisk* the sky has been wiped completely clean, while plate tone has been left on the foreground, thereby giving solidity to the building and warmth of colour to the surrounding landscape.

As a relatively new medium, etching was also free from the pressures of conventions, allowing artists to explore and experiment with new themes and genres, to execute reproducible studies or to represent contemporary events that could be quickly printed for the market as Callot and Della Bella did while in the service of the Medici.

Rembrandt's inventive use of the medium has been one of the great attractions of his work for collectors, with specific states and effects especially sought after by certain connoisseurs, while others have tried to collect his complete printed oeuvre. Historically, print collectors were a heterogeneous group, as the relative affordability of prints meant that they were within the means of a broad cross-section of society. Artists, in particular,



[FIG.06]



[FIG.07]



were avid collectors. Rembrandt owned a significant collection of prints by Dürer, Van Leyden, Carracci and Van Dyck amongst others, and the influence of these works can often be seen quite directly in his own prints.<sup>12</sup> In turn, Rembrandt's etchings were eagerly sought out, for example, by Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione and Della Bella. Both made works after his etchings, and the latter is known to have owned at least four impressions by the master.<sup>13</sup> The knowledge of Rembrandt's work by his Italian peers also demonstrates the speed with which prints and, by association, an artist's fame could spread across Europe.

In the seventeenth century, prints were bought and sold from specialist print sellers, bookshops, at auctions and markets, directly from the publishers or the artists themselves.<sup>14</sup> Even at this time collectors were concerned with the provenance and rarity of a print.<sup>15</sup> Many prints still bear former collectors' marks, for example, the unidentified blind stamp 'M.W.' is just discernible in the top right corner of Rembrandt in a Heavy Fur Cap.<sup>16</sup> While the matting and framing of prints as they are seen in exhibitions today is a relatively new phenomenon, in the seventeenth century prints were also displayed on the wall, pinned, framed, or hanging from rods. Prints were also bound together in volumes with other examples of the artist's oeuvre, with works of like subject, or kept in portfolios or chests, where they could be examined individually by the collector or perused with other connoisseurs.<sup>17</sup> Such various uses of prints can be seen in the illustration of a print workshop.

*Masters of the Bitten Line* highlights the gems of seventeenth-century European etching within the Gallery's works on paper collection. As artists experimented with this new technique they discovered its potential and began to exploit this in their work. The best etchings combine the spontaneity of drawing with the pictorial effects of painting, while also harnessing the intrinsic possibilities of the medium. As the prints by Rembrandt

and the other artists presented here demonstrate, etchings in the seventeenth century became much more than Vasari's 'printed drawings' developing their own distinctive qualities through mastery of the bitten line.<sup>18</sup>

JANE DAVIDSON  
Assistant Curator

1. Christopher White, *Rembrandt as an Etcher: A Study of the Artist at Work*, 2nd ed., (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p.255.

2. Historical evidence suggests that Daniel Hopper's portrait of Konrad von der Rosen may predate Urs Graf's 1513 work *Woman Washing her Feet* by at least a decade. Arthur M. Hind, *A History of Engraving and Etching: From the Fifteenth Century to the Year 1914*, 3rd rev. ed., (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), p.108. The technique of etching metal was however known before this time by armourers and goldsmiths who used it to etch designs into metal. Antony Griffiths, *Prints and Printmaking: An Introduction to the History and Techniques*, 2nd ed., (London: British Museum Press, 1996), p.58.

3. For a detailed discussion of etching in this period refer to David Landau and Peter Parshall, *The Renaissance Print 1470-1550*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), pp.323-58.

4. Giorgio Vasari quoted in Sue Welsh Reed and Richard Wallace, *Italian Etchers of the Renaissance and Baroque*, (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1989), p.xvii.

5. Bamber Gascoigne, *How to Identify Prints: A Complete Guide to Manual and Mechanical Processes from Woodcut to Ink Jet*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986; reprinted 1995), section 55e.

6. From Rembrandt's eighty-one copper plates still in existence, we know that he used plates less than two millimetres thick. White, p.6; and Ludwig Münz, *A Critical Catalogue of Rembrandt's Etchings and the Etchings of His School Formerly Attributed to the Master with an Essay on Rembrandt's Technique and Documentary Sources*, 2 vol., (London, Phaidon Press, 1952), vol. 2, pp.11-2. For a detailed discussion of the etching process in the seventeenth century see Münz, vol.2, pp.11-30; and Ad Stijnman, 'On Feathers, Candles and Wet Rags: The Etching Techniques Used by Van Dyck and His Contemporaries', in Carl Depauw and Ger Luijten, *Anthony van Dyck as a Printmaker*, (Antwerp

and Amsterdam: Antwerpen Open and Rijksmuseum Amsterdam, 1999), pp. 26-39.

7. Stijnman, p.29.

8. Ibid. p.28.

9. Münz, vol.2, p.68.

10. White, pp.154-5; and Felice Stampfle, Eleanor A. Sayre, Sue W. Reed and Clifford S. Ackley, *Rembrandt: Experimental Etcher*, (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1969), pp.55-61.

11. H. Diane Russell, *Jaques Callot: Prints and Related Drawings*, (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1975), p.xxxi.

12. White, p.19; Ger Luijten and Saskia Sombogaart, "...with the hand": The Collecting of Van Dyck prints', in Depauw and Luijten, p.11; and William W. Robinson, "This Passion for Prints": Collecting and Connoisseurship in Northern Europe during the Seventeenth Century' in Clifford S. Ackley, *Printmaking in the Age of Rembrandt*, (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1981), p.xxxxv.

13. White, p.256.

14. Robinson in Ackley, p.xxi; and Luijten and Sombogaart in Depauw and Luijten, p.10.

15. Luijten and Sombogaart in Depauw and Luijten, p.13.

16. This mark closely resembles that of Maximilian Wellner. However, the description of Wellner's collection as 'prints of the Bohemian landscape' is not consistent with him having owned this work. Frits Lugt, *Les Marques de Collections de Dessins & Estampes*, 2nd ed., (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956), suppl. vol., p.278, no. 1921. Author's translation.

17. Luijten and Sombogaart in Depauw and Luijten, p.9; and Robinson in Ackley, p.xxi.

18. Welsh Reed and Wallace, p. xvii, xxx.

1961/4/4

Rembrandt van Rijn,

(Dutch, 1606-1669) *Three  
Heads of Women, One Asleep*,  
1637. Etching, 127 x 90 mm.

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o  
Tāmaki, purchased 1961



**REMBRANDT VAN RIJN**

(Dutch, 1606-1669)

**ADRIAEN VAN OSTADE**

(Dutch, 1610-1685)

**FERDINAND BOL**

(Dutch, 1616-1680)

**ANTHONY VAN DYCK**

(Flemish, also active in England, 1599-1641)

**JACQUES CALLOT**

(French, also active in Italy, 1592-1635)

**ANNIBALE CARRACCI**

(Italian, 1560-1609)

**GIOVANNI BENEDETTO CASTIGLIONE**

(Italian, 1609-c.1665)

**STEFANO DELLA BELLA**

(Italian, also active in France, 1610-1664)

**SALVATOR ROSA**

(Italian, 1615-1673)



Ambrandt

f 163.7



The  
ETCHINGS

## REMBRANDT VAN RIJN

(Dutch, 1606–1669)

*Rembrandt in a Heavy Fur Cap*

1631. Etching, 63 x 57 mm

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1961



In the early years of his career Rembrandt etched numerous representations of his own face. Christopher White resists calling these self-portraits, in the sense that works of later years were portrayals of the artist as a person, rather classifying these etchings as studies of physiognomy, expression and emotion.<sup>1</sup> In this work, however, Rembrandt does not assume a pose, instead meeting our gaze; his slightly furrowed brow and the creases of his eyelids adding to the penetrating portrait of the artist as a thoughtful and pensive young man.

The evolution of the image is revealed within it, as Rembrandt's hair is clearly visible beneath the cap. It is likely he originally intended a bare-headed self-portrait, subsequently deciding to add the cap over the top of his hair.<sup>2</sup>

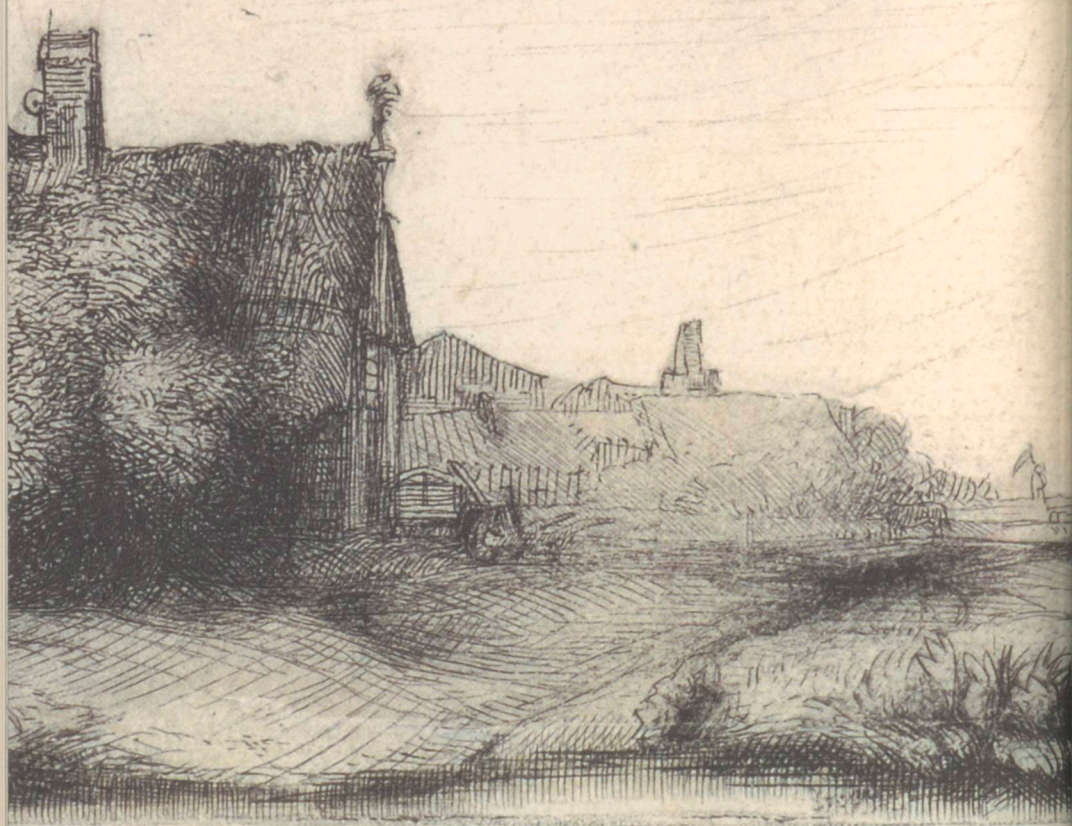
Reproductions of this work give a false sense of its scale and grandeur as in reality it is not quite the size of a playing card. Such magnification of the work does nonetheless allow you to consider the way Rembrandt used line to record himself. The fine mesh of curved lines which describe the contours of the shaded side of his face contrast with the almost bare paper of the side bathed in light, where the briefest dots and lines merely indicate stubble around the edge of his jaw. His acute skills of observation are also clear recording the way light catches the right of his moustache, the area just outside the shadow cast by his nose. Writing in 1699, Roger de Piles noted, 'One sees in the portraits which he has etched, how every stroke of the needle, like every stroke of the brush in painting, gives to the parts of the face a character of life and truth which makes one admire his genius.'<sup>3</sup>



PL 1631.









2

## REMBRANDT VAN RIJN

(Dutch, 1606-1669)

*Landscape with an Obelisk*

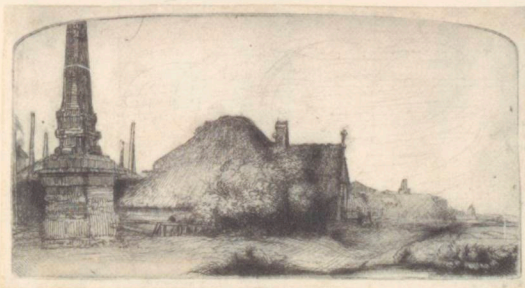
c. 1650. Etching with drypoint, 84 x 163 mm

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1961

Landscape as an independent subject within art was still a relatively new phenomenon in the seventeenth century. Rembrandt was drawn to the genre at times throughout his career and in this work we see him at his most inventive.

He depicts a location near Halfweg, which marks the halfway point between Amsterdam and Haarlem.<sup>4</sup> The flatness of the country confronted the artist with the problem of how to create a sense of depth. He repeated the solution seen in this work many times; focusing on farm buildings or other such structures in the immediate foreground, thus making background elements seemingly recede.<sup>5</sup> This is emphasised here by the relative scale of the tiny figure in the distance on the far right who can just be made out holding a scythe. Additionally, as already discussed, he made use of plate tone to further accentuate the distinction between the earth and its atmosphere.

Drypoint, whereby the needle incises directly into the copper giving a burr which prints lines of



velvety-black, was also used in this etching. In its first state the drypoint prints much more darkly, but Rembrandt decided to reduce this effect scraping back some of the burr. It can, however, still be seen in this, the second state, in the clumps of grass along the bottom edge of the plate and in the cottage's shadows.<sup>6</sup>

A unique feature of this print, seen in the small white arc on the obelisk and in the horizontal white line in the right foreground, occurred during printing.<sup>7</sup> These are the result of printing creases which amongst other things are caused by overly damp paper or uneven pressure in the press.<sup>8</sup> The work must have been flattened in the past, but such a treatment would not be carried out by conservators today as the consequent white spaces distract from the composition.

3

REMBRANDT VAN RIJN

(Dutch, 1606-1669)

*Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple*

1635. Etching, 137 x 168 mm

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1976

[-FIG. 08]

Albrecht Dürer,  
(German, 1471-1528),  
*Christ Driving the  
Money Changers from  
the Temple, The Small  
Passion*, c.1508-9.

Woodcut, 126 x 97 mm.  
Courtesy of the Wetmore  
Print Collection,  
Connecticut College,  
New London,  
United States.



Rembrandt has been characterised by some authors as unsophisticated as he never travelled outside the Netherlands. A consideration of his extensive print collection, numbering thirty-four albums at the time of his bankruptcy in 1656, suggests that instead he found his aesthetic stimulation from other sources.<sup>9</sup> This collection was not just for his appreciation as a connoisseur, but was a tool he used in his own work.<sup>10</sup> In this instance he borrows the figure of Christ from Dürer's woodcut of the same subject, merely reversing the pose.

The scenes are however markedly different. Where Dürer's print is relatively static, the movement and energy in Rembrandt's is palpable. He achieves this partly through the inclusion of the

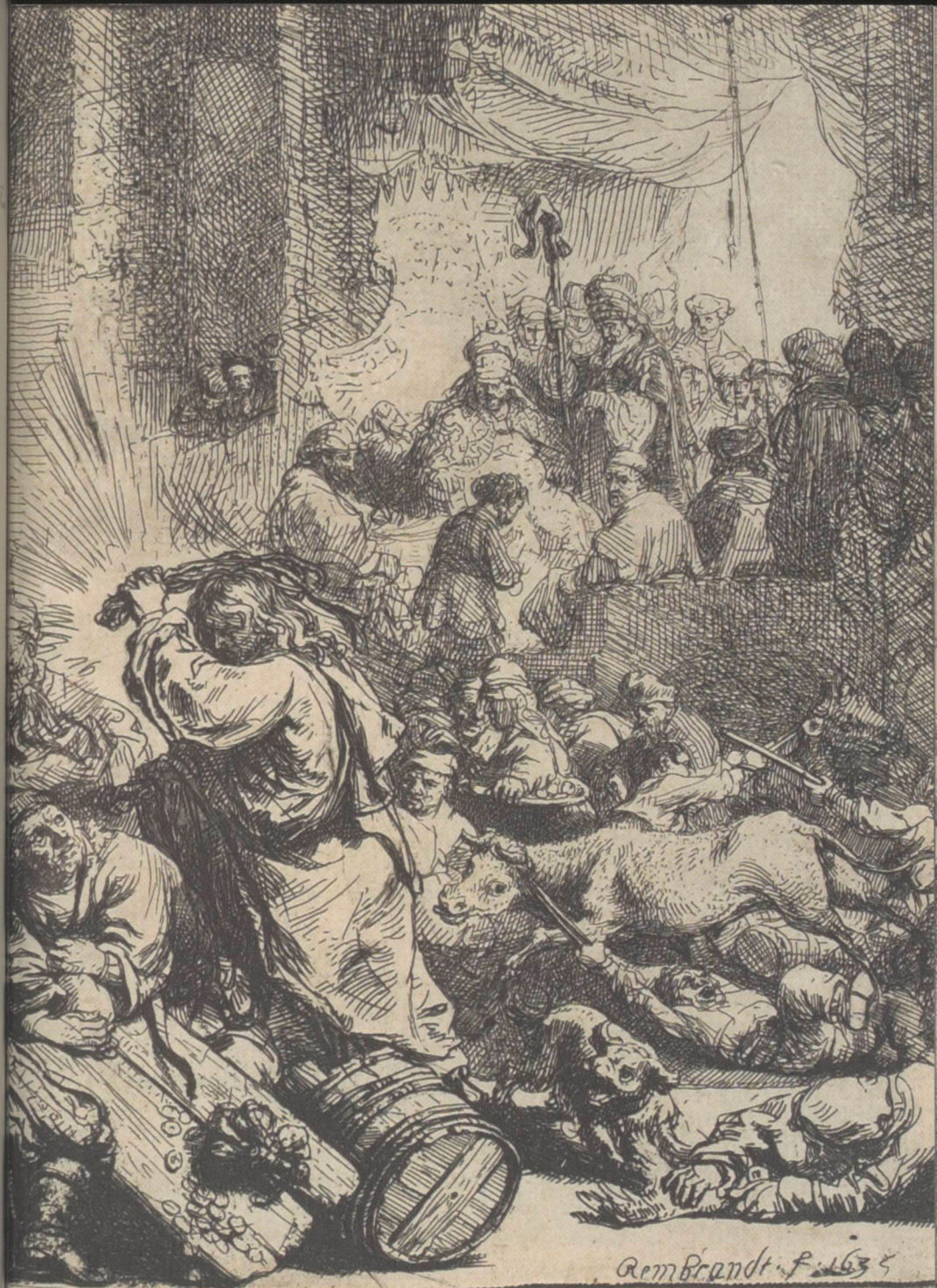
crowds in the foreground who scramble away from Christ, upsetting a table in the process. The expression and emotion of those in the immediate skirmish contrasts with the temple officials in the upper right who seem barely disturbed, but for one who turns, calmly observing the fracas. The calligraphic quality of his line is filled with a sense of activity and agitation. Light is skillfully used to further heighten the action, seemingly radiating from Christ's hand holding the scourge.

Rembrandt brought to his representation of biblical scenes his own personal interpretation and, but for its source, this work has much in common with his genre works. This is particularly evident in the lower right where one man is dragged by a cow, while another attempts to rescue a fowl from the clutches of a dog. His etchings are filled with the drama of the Baroque, while rejecting its classicising ideals.

This splendid print has a noteworthy provenance, having once belonged to Viscount Downe, described by Frits Lugt as having 'perhaps the most important private collection of Rembrandts in [twentieth-century] Great Britain.'<sup>11</sup>

[-FIG. 08]

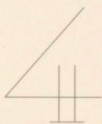












## ADRIAEN VAN OSTADE

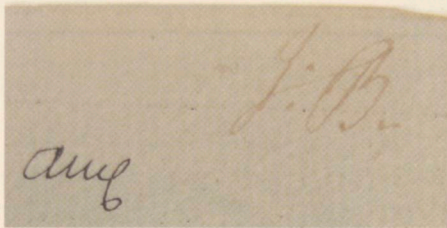
(Dutch, 1610–1685)

*Peasant Settling His Debt*(also known as *Peasant Paying His Reckoning*) c. 1650–3. Etching, 102 x 85 mm

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1981

By the seventeenth century, genre subjects were firmly established within Northern art. The ‘mirror of everyday life’, such scenes focused particularly on beggars and ‘low-lives’,<sup>12</sup> Peasants were a subject that Van Ostade returned to numerous times throughout his career. Seen as a group, you get the sense that you are revisiting familiar haunts and encountering acquaintances as they go about their business. Other examples from the Gallery’s collection show a baker blowing his horn to announce that his bread is baked, while another shows a fiddler busking to a captive audience.<sup>13</sup> It is as if he creates a lively graphic neighbourhood peopled by known characters and locales.

Van Ostade crafts this interior scene using the flagstones and roof beams to create a sense of depth. His fascination with the effects of *chiaroscuro* (the depiction of light and shade) is clearly visible. The light falling on his subjects is expertly conveyed using the white of the paper, which sharply contrasts with the deep black of his shadows. The rays of light coming through the door direct the viewer to the narrative,



highlighting the peasant counting out his debt to his usurer. In the background a figure sits within the chimney stoking the fire, while his companions converse, illuminated by its flames.

Clifford S. Ackley remarks with regard to another print, that the artist takes ‘visual pleasure in picturesque dilapidation’. Adding that such an interest is also borne out in his depiction, as ‘Everything is drawn in irregular, sketchy, broken strokes, lending surfaces an appropriately shaggy or crumbly texture.’<sup>14</sup> Ackley’s comments are equally applicable here.

This work has a remarkable provenance dating back to the collection of John Barnard (d. 1784), a fact recorded by the cursive initials JB on the verso of the print. Lugt notes that ‘of all the English collectors’ marks his is the most revered’, further commenting that ‘its presence on a sheet assures one ... that a better impression is unobtainable.’<sup>15</sup>

[FIG. 09]  
Initials of eighteenth-century collector John Barnard on verso of *Peasant Settling His Debt*. To the left beneath this are the initials of a later owner, Arthur Melville Champenowne.

[FIG. 09]

5

FERDINAND BOL  
(Dutch, 1616–1680)

*Woman with a Pear*

1651. Etching, 146 x 120 mm

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1981



Described as Rembrandt's most loyal follower, Ferdinand Bol entered Rembrandt's studio in 1637, studying under him until the early 1640s.<sup>16</sup> The master's influence on his work was both stylistic and thematic, but Rembrandt clearly had a certain regard for his pupil, holding prints by the younger artist in his collection.<sup>17</sup> Best known as a painter, Bol's small printed oeuvre includes this etching made in the year he abandoned the medium.<sup>18</sup>

The artist focuses our attention on the woman's face, chest, hands, and the pear she holds, by picking out the areas with light, leading one to question just what sweet

delectations are for sale. While this is only supposition, and the motif of a figure at a window was common at this time, as Eddy de Jongh and Ger Luijten emphasise 'meaninglessness' was not a concept understood in seventeenth-century art.<sup>19</sup> Other authors have grappled with the iconographic complexities of this print and come to similar conclusions. The pear, like fruit generally, is frequently linked to earthly delights. Ackley records its appearance in Dutch art and literature of the period, listing examples in which the pear is an emblem connected with the loss of sexual innocence.<sup>20</sup>

The woman is crafted using the finest strokes, which convey the softness of her flesh, light fabric of her dress, heavier weave of her cloak and delicate embroidery of her veil. These are distinguished from the rougher surfaces of the door and bleached stone sill upon which she leans. Tone is used to supreme effect to create a mysterious interior behind her and depth is further accentuated by the fall of her shadow on the door. The half shadow, cast by the fine fabric of her veil onto her brow, is also worth noting.













## ANTHONY VAN DYCK

(Flemish, also active in England, 1599–1641)

*Justus Sustermans*

Early 1630s, printed 1665 [?]. Etching, 250 x 167 mm

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1981

In the early 1630s Van Dyck embarked on an ambitious project to etch portraits of illustrious men, today known by the eighteenth-century title as the *Iconography*.<sup>21</sup> While such portrait series were not new, the involvement of such a prestigious artist and the use of etching for its execution was innovative.<sup>22</sup> In total Van Dyck made seventeen etchings for the series, with engravers producing the other portraits after his works.<sup>23</sup>

Technically Van Dyck's etchings are magnificent failures. The drawing shows his virtuosity, but the etching demonstrates that he was a careless and inexpert practitioner. His plates were not well prepared as can be seen by the fine vertical lines printed across the surface which resulted from sanding the plate.<sup>24</sup> Although he used stopping-out varnish to prevent the edges of his prints from being etched he was sloppy in its use. The white spot below the buttons on Sustermans' chest and in the right corner of the portrait resulted from drops of varnish falling on the plate, thus preventing the areas from being bitten by the acid.<sup>25</sup> Yet the technical deficiencies of Van Dyck's etchings do not take away from the works. If anything, combined with their sketchy quality and refreshing



simplicity, they give the works an immediacy suggestive of the speed with which he must have worked.

Viewed under raking light this print reveals an aspect of the paper's making; a rope mark runs horizontally across it, just below its centre.<sup>26</sup> Once the sheets of paper were formed, they were dried on ropes in a similar way to the prints hanging above the press in Bosse's illustration. As seen here the ropes could make an impression of their own. The printing date noted above derives from its acquisition documents and research has not yet confirmed it. Galleries Paper Conservator, Ute Strehle, does observe that it is on very fine laid paper with an unidentified jester's head watermark.<sup>27</sup>

[-FIG. 05]

7

## JACQUES CALLOT

(French, also active in Italy, 1592–1635)

*The Temptation of Saint Anthony*

1634, dated 1635. Etching, 360 x 467 mm

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1957



It is easy to be seduced by the fantastical elements of Callot's *Temptation* but the message of the hellish vision he presents would have been clear to his viewers. It refers to an episode from the life of the saint in which the Devil tried to tempt him. As the inscription tells, Lucifer was not successful, 'The mind fixed on heaven and restoring its strength from the Source, endures on earth the battles, which he derides, in the upper air.'<sup>28</sup>

Callot had made a version of the etching nearly twenty years prior when working in the Medici court and H. Diane Russell notes that both versions draw heavily on his knowledge of theatre staging. She suggests that implicit within these prints is a moral critique of

the excesses of the court, pointing in particular to the procession of beasts in the left middleground who use the carcass of a large animal as a sled, strongly recalling the floats of the spectacles he recorded.<sup>29</sup>

Theatre sets are often invoked when discussing this work, as Callot's interpretation of the subject has no art historical precedents. The recession of space recalls that of a stage, with the rocks at the print's edges the proscenium arch, the ruined buildings behind the set itself, and the distance beyond the painted backdrop.<sup>30</sup> This sense of depth is accentuated by the tonal variation of line, achieved by biting the plate for different lengths of time.<sup>31</sup>

Callot was a professional etcher and consequently his motivations for making prints were somewhat different to *peintre-graveurs* such as Rembrandt. He often worked on commissions which required that his plates could make a large number of impressions. To this end he perfected the use of a hard ground and the *échoppe* both to ensure sharp strong lines and to replicate the swell and taper of engravings.

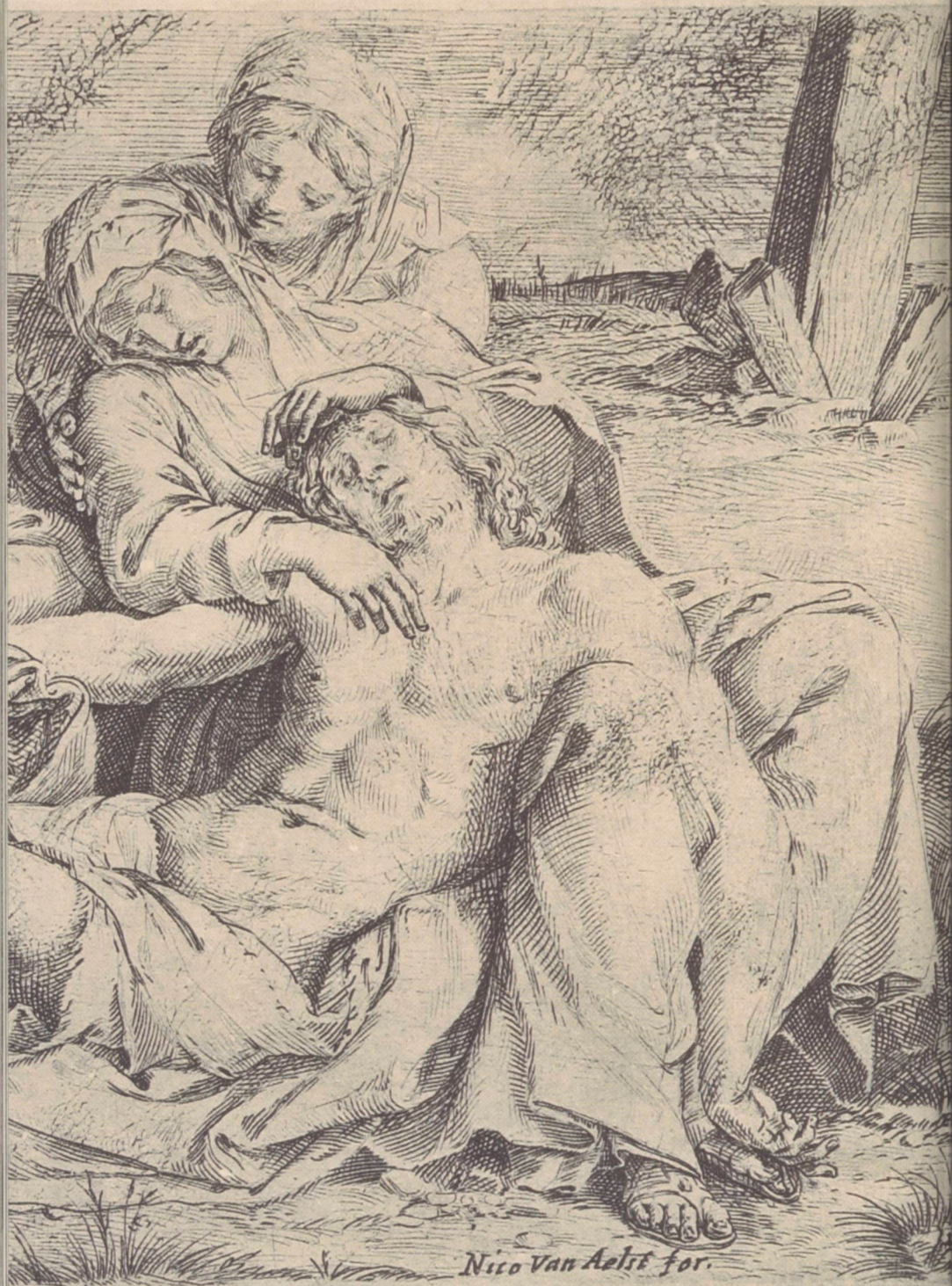
[-FIG. 07]

[-FIG. 02]













ANNIBALE CARRACCI

(Italian, 1560-1609)

*Pietà (The 'Caprarola' Lamentation)*

1597. Etching with engraving and drypoint, 124 x 163 mm

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1981

Compared to the works of Northern artists, Italian etching was characterised by a lightness of touch. In addition to the expected religious subjects there was generally a greater interest in classical and allegorical themes, as well as landscapes, while everyday scenes were eschewed. However, the graphic art of the North was influential, as demonstrated in the work of Castiglione and Della Bella.

As a member of an earlier generation, Annibale Carracci stands apart from this group. Within his small etched oeuvre he is credited with being one of the earliest Italian artists to realise the possibilities of the medium.<sup>32</sup> Richard Wallace elaborates that the fascination seen in his painting 'with light, colour, luminous surfaces and textured brushwork', combined with his 'free, fluid drawing style, would have made etching, with its potential for sketchy, irregular, spontaneous handling and vibrant, shimmering light effects, especially attractive for him.'<sup>33</sup>

Made while he was painting his famous fresco cycle in the Galleria Farnese, in Rome, his *Pietà* takes its colloquial title from the nearby town where it was etched. Based on a painting by Antonio Correggio, Annibale brought to the subject



his characteristic naturalism and emotional resonance. The narrative is only sparsely elaborated through the bases of the crosses planted in the background and the three nails lying by Christ's feet, yet the torment of the figures is tangible. Much has been made of the way the sky with its brooding storm clouds adds to the emotional intensity of the scene. It is probable that the effect was the result of foul biting, whereby the ground breaks down allowing the acid to bite the plate. Although accidental, the artist realised the potential of the effect, using it to his benefit. With this exception, the lines in the print are extremely fine and it is difficult in places to tell which were etched and which were later added with the burin.<sup>34</sup>

GIOVANNI BENEDETTO CASTIGLIONE

(Italian, 1609–c. 1665)

*The Genius of Benedetto Castiglione*

1645–7, dated 1648. Etching, 368 x 245 mm

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Peter Tomory Collection, purchased 2004



Executed at the highpoint of his etching career, shortly before his return to Rome from his home town of Genoa, this is a prodigious example of the artist's talent for the medium.<sup>35</sup> The work is not intended as a direct representation of the artist, but is rather an allegorical portrayal in which the youth represents Fame and by extension Castiglione's Genius, to which the trumpets and laurel wreath also allude. Ann Percy explains that the symbolism is less self-congratulatory than initially apparent, with the sculptural plinth sprouting vegetation and the palette and crumpled sheet music casually left in the company of game, 'hinting at the ... futility of human accomplishments.'<sup>36</sup>

The etching does not show the stylistic influence of Rembrandt, which is seen in Castiglione's works from 1650 onwards, although he was probably familiar with the Northern master's work at this time. The bust which sits on the aforementioned pedestal with palm behind is highly reminiscent of Rembrandt's unfinished etching *Artist Drawing from the Model*, c. 1639 in which similar objects appear. The resemblance may be coincidental, but as Sue Welsh Reed points out, the inscription dedicates the work to a Dutch nobleman who could well have been one of Castiglione's informants on Rembrandt's oeuvre.<sup>37</sup>

Volume is created using fine strokes of varying weights, which suggest the contours of his forms and their textures. By this means he contrasts the alabaster-like figure of the youth, with the rough wall upon which he rests. He uses a similar technique to achieve the lightness of the feathers of the youth's plumed cap, while giving a sense of weight and wiriness to the hair beneath it. Unlike some of his Northern counterparts depth of tone is not achieved through multiple bitings, but rather through the use of fine many-directional lines.<sup>38</sup>





Genium Io.  
Benedicti  
Castilionis  
Amen ~  
Inu Fe.

Illy. atq. Or.  
D. Ma.  
Da Merito Dns de  
Clothmice honor Aratum  
Macerati dms fmo







10

## STEFANO DELLA BELLA

(Italian, also active in France, 1610–1664)

*La Mort à Cheval (Death on Horseback)*

1648. Les Cinq Morts (The Five Deaths) series. Etching, 170 x 143 mm

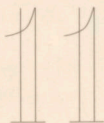
Mackelvie Trust Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki,  
bequest of Dr Walter Auburn, 1982

Della Bella's vision of Death on Horseback refuses to be contained within its etched oval, attempting to jump out at the viewer. It is one of The Five Deaths he executed in an elliptical format towards the end of his time in Paris. As the hoof of the horse in this work demonstrates, they were not etched on oval plates, a fact exploited by the artist here.

The artist had previously treated a similar subject and upon his return to Italy added a sixth work to the series.<sup>39</sup> To the modern eye this obsession with death seems somewhat macabre, but within the context of seventeenth-century Europe death was ever present, whether from the plague, warfare or, if one was lucky, old age. There is also an art historical precedent for the subject; 'The dance of Death' was a medieval theme and Della Bella's drawings after Hans Holbein's interpretation demonstrate his awareness of it.<sup>40</sup> With trumpet in hand Death on Horseback proclaims the causalities of war. Silhouetted against the sky his skeletal figure dominates all he surveys. In the distance legions are marshalled by a chariot-driving man of bones, while directly behind him an army of corpses picks over human remains.



A professional etcher, Della Bella followed in Callot's footsteps as an artist to the Medici. His initial works owed a great debt to the earlier master, but by this time his own unique manner can be seen. Death and his steed are fashioned using directional lines which add to his menacing sense of speed and movement seen particularly in his hair, the drapery flying free of the trumpet and the mane and tail of the horse. In the first state only the figure of Death was etched with background figures added in this, the second state.<sup>41</sup>



SALVATOR ROSA  
(Italian, 1615-1673)

*The Rescue of the Infant Oedipus*

1663. Etching with drypoint, 724 x 472 mm

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, purchased 1978

Eighteenth-century Romanticism was responsible for much myth-making about Rosa, who according to one story grew up in the hills of Naples amongst bandits.<sup>42</sup> Such views were fuelled by his compositions, which were often dramatic, depicting the climatic moment of a story. Uniquely, here he chose not to represent such a scene, but rather the moment at which Oedipus' fate was sealed. According to tradition, it was prophesised that the tragic Greek figure would kill his father and marry his mother. This knowledge led his father, King Laius, to order that his son be killed by exposure to the elements, however, as Rosa records, the infant was rescued by a shepherd and subsequently adopted by the King of Corinth. Unaware of his origins Oedipus later fulfilled the oracle, then blinded himself in horror when the truth was revealed.

Rosa's representation of the infant hanging from a tree finds no previous model, but plays on his name which means 'swollen footed', and is elaborated by the inscription. Richard Wallace interprets the pose of Oedipus as foreshadowing 'his tragic fall'.<sup>43</sup>

The abbreviations 'Inv. Pinx. Scul.' on the plate record that the scene was invented, painted and



carved by the artist, yet he never painted the subject, rather, as he reported in a letter, he hoped that someone on seeing the etching might commission him to do so.<sup>44</sup>

According to documentary sources Rosa drew the tree directly onto the plate which is reflected in the spontaneous line of its gnarled form.<sup>45</sup> Its scale overwhelms the two figures, and combined with the mountainous range which sweeps into the distance, conveys a sense of great isolation. Rosa reminds the viewer that even in such places beauty is found with his wonderfully observed foreground study of a pool which throws reflections of the bank bordered by verdant vegetation.





Julio Marinello e Amico Cario del  
Orpini hic fons, neque de altera pluvio  
Eadem ad Artem quondam tre videri  
Salvator Rosa Incipit Scal.



1. White, pp. 116-7.
2. Impressions of the plate are only known in this state. Münz, vol. 2, p. 57.
3. Roger de Piles quoted in White, p. 169.
4. Ibid., p. 234.
5. Ibid., p. 212.
6. Ibid., p. 235.
7. I am indebted to Ute Strehle for this observation.
8. André Béguin, *A Technical Dictionary of Printmaking*, [www.polymetal.nl/beguina/alfabet.htm](http://www.polymetal.nl/beguina/alfabet.htm)
9. Robinson in Ackley, p. xxxv.
10. Numerous examples of Rembrandt's borrowings are given in White, pp. 19-112.
11. Lugt, suppl. vol., p. 106, no. 719a. Author's translation.
12. Eddy de Jongh and Ger Luijten, *Mirror of Everyday Life: Genreprints in the Netherlands 1550-1700*, trans. Michael Hoyle, (Amsterdam and Ghent: Rijksmuseum and Snoeck-Ducaju and Zoon, 1997), p. 7, 26.
13. Julie Robinson, *Five Centuries of Genius: European Master Printmaking*, (Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2000), p. 64.
14. Ackley, p. 157.
15. Fris Lugt, *Les Marques de Collections de Dessins & Estampes*, 1921 ed., (La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, reprinted 1956), p. 256, no. 1420. Author's translation.
16. Burton B. Frederickson and Richard J. Kubiack, *Etchings of Rembrandt and His Followers*, (Santa Barbara and Los Angeles: Santa Barbara Museum of Art and J. Paul Getty Museum, 1977), p. 7; and Marijke van der Meij-Tolsma, 'Ferdinand Bol', *The Dictionary of Art*, 34 vol., ed. Jane Turner, (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1996), vol. 4, p. 249.
17. Robinson in Ackley, p. xxxv.
18. Ackley, p. 148.
19. De Jongh and Ger Luijten, p. 38.
20. Ackley, p. 206.
21. Ger Luijten, 'The Iconography: Van Dyck's Portraits in Print', in Depauw and Luijten, p. 73.
22. Hind, p. 165.
23. Luijten in Depauw and Luijten, p. 79.
24. Stijnman in Depauw and Luijten, p. 27.
25. Ger Luijten, '[Catalogue] 16 - Justus Sustermaans' in Depauw and Luijten, p. 146.
26. I am grateful to Ute Strehle for this observation.
27. The series from which this print comes was not bound together, in the form that later became known as the *Iconography* until 1645, four years after the artist's death, when published by Gillis Hendrick. The plates remained in Hendrick's possession until the publisher's death in 1677, during which time this impression of the painter Justus Sustermaans was presumably made. See Ger Luijten in Depauw and Luijten, p. 74, 87.
28. Russell, p. 178.
29. Ibid., p. 159.
30. Ibid., pp. 156-9.
31. Ibid., p. 160.
32. Marcus S. Sopher with Claudia Lazzaro-Bruno, *Seventeenth-Century Italian Prints*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford Art Gallery, 1978), p. 41.
33. Richard Wallace, 'Annibale Carracci' in Welsh Reed and Wallace, p. 106.
34. Ibid., p. 110.
35. Sue Welsh Reed, 'Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione' in Welsh Reed and Wallace, p. 267.
36. Ann Percy, Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione: *Master Draughtsman of the Italian Baroque*, (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1971), p. 143.
37. Sue Welsh Reed, 'Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione' in Welsh Reed and Wallace, p. 267.
38. Welsh Reed and Wallace, p. xxx.
39. For details concerning the chronology of these works see Alexandre De Vesme with Introduction and Additions by Phyllis Dearborn Massar, *Stefano della Bella: Catalogue Raisonné*, 2 vol. (New York: Collectors Editions, 1971), text vol., p. 67.
40. Ibid., text vol., p. 66.
41. Ibid., text vol., p. 66.
42. Richard Wallace, 'Salvator Rosa', in Welsh Reed and Wallace, p. 187.
43. Ibid., p. 194.
44. Ibid., p. 194.
45. Richard Wallace, 'Etchings', in *Salvator Rosa*, (London: Arts Council, 1973), p. 64.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many may be surprised to discover that the Auckland Art Gallery has such a fine collection of prints by Rembrandt and his contemporaries. Early in its history, the Gallery became home to the Mackelvie Trust Collection which included old master prints. Just short of 100 years later, the Trust's Collection was significantly augmented by Dr Walter Auburn's bequest of his collection. These gifts have been added to by the judicious purchases of directors and curators. The most significant acquisition in recent years being the personal collection of former Gallery director Peter Tomory in 2004, which enriched our holdings of Italian etchings in particular.

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