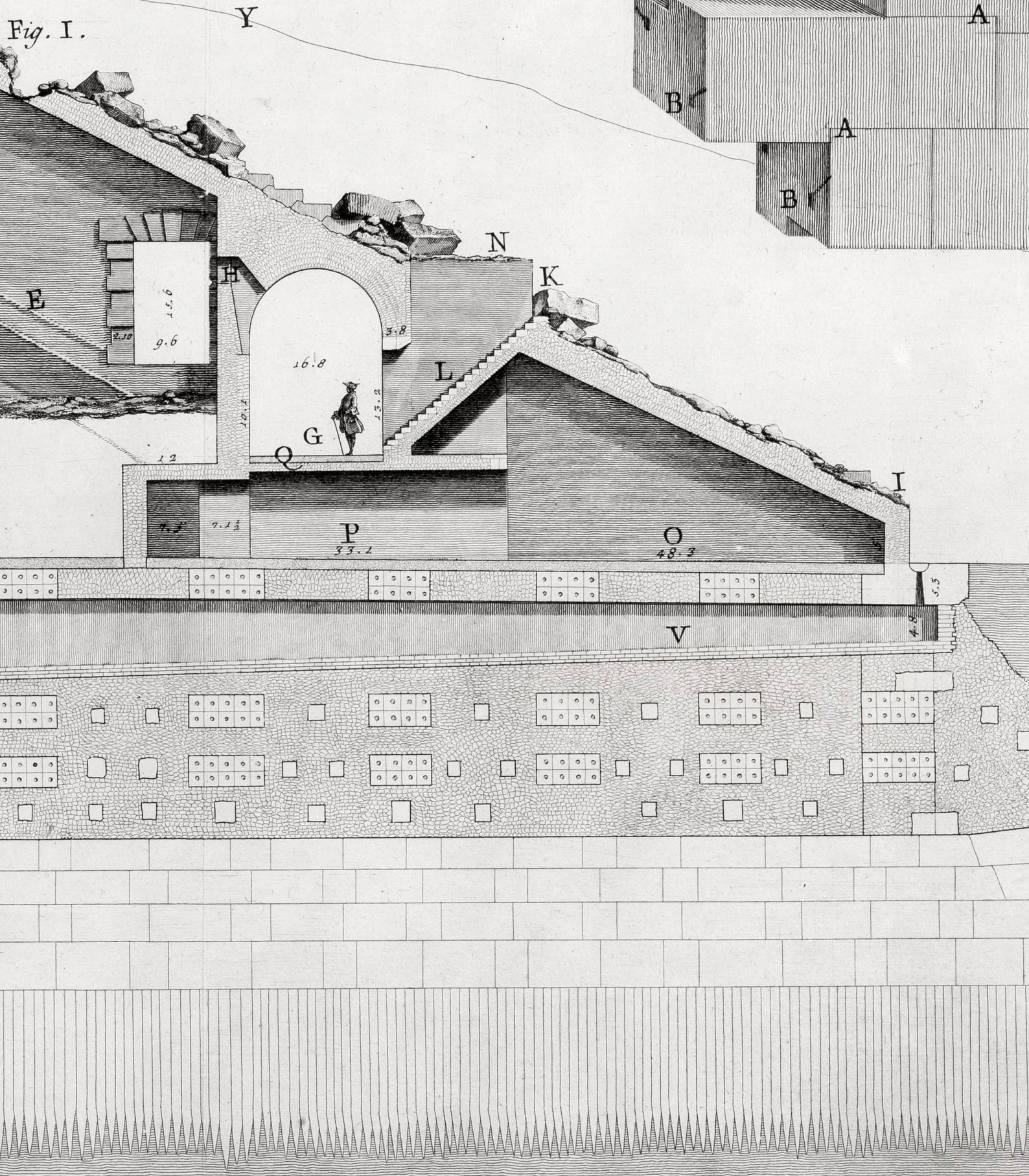


Fig. II.

# Re-constructing Arcadia: Early Modern Fragments



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Director: Rhana Devenport  
Curator: Emma Jameson  
Editor: Clare McIntosh  
Proofreader: Emma Jameson  
Design: Imogen Greenfield and Jeannie Ferguson  
Photographers: Jennifer French and John McIver

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Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki  
PO Box 5449  
Cnr Kitchener and Wellesley Streets  
Auckland

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Cover

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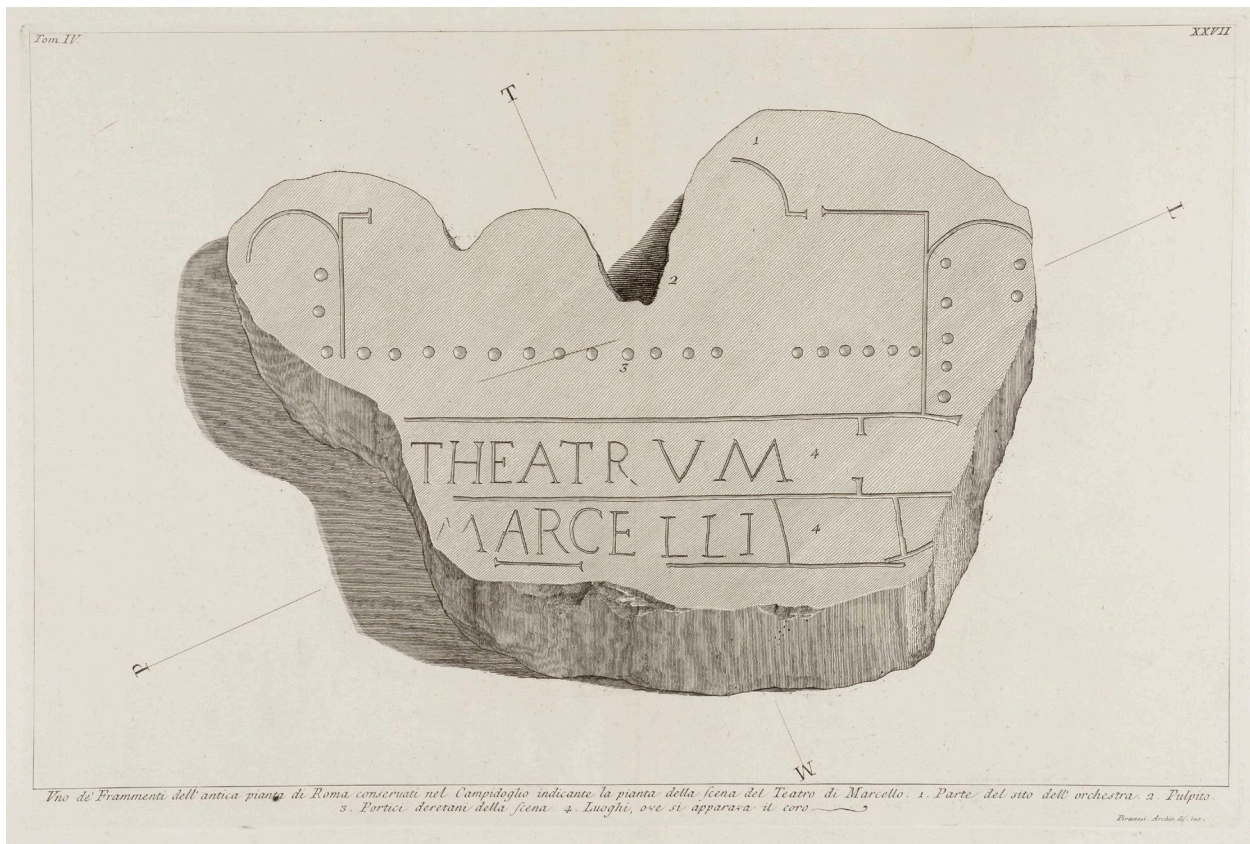
**Giovanni Battista Piranesi**  
*Sezione di uno de' Cunei del Teatro di Marcello*  
(*Section of One of the Banks of Seats in the Theatre of Marcellus*), *Le Antichità Romane*, 1756–57  
etching  
Mackelvie Trust Collection  
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki  
bequest of Dr Walter Auburn, 1982

**AUCKLAND**  
**ART GALLERY**  
**TOI OTĀMAKI**

# Re-constructing Arcadia: Early Modern Fragments

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**Giovanni Battista Piranesi**

*Uno de'... Frammenti dell'antica pianta di Roma conservati nel campidoglio indicante la pianta della scena del Teatro di Marcello (One of the fragments of the ancient plan of Rome, preserved on the Capitoline, which shows the plan of the stage building of the Theatre of Marcellus), Le Antichità Romane, 1756–57*

etching

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

## **Fragments of Fantasy:** Constructing a New Order in 18th-century Europe

Emma Jameson

The 18th-century European landscape was strewn with fragments. The period occasioned radical shifts in power structures, scientific understanding and philosophical thought that ruptured pre-existing relationships between people and the world in which they lived. Within this context of social deconstruction and revision, the fragment became a potent symbol that encapsulated the spirit and aspirations of a European society hovering on the precipice of the modern era. Symbolising all that was broken and lost, the fragment's incompleteness equally offered the promise of future construction unburdened from established parameters. The rediscovery of classical ruins in Italy in the 18th century prompted a particular fascination with how the remnants of the classical past could be resuscitated to improve a society caught between old and new orders. This article will consider how and why fragments captivated the 18th-century's imagination, providing a contextual background for the second essay by Sarah Treadwell, which will examine Piranesi's etchings of architectural fragments.

### **Fragments of an Old Order**

The political and social shifts of the 18th century fractured previous systems into liberating disorder. The numerous scientific discoveries and theories of the 17th and 18th centuries fundamentally changed perceptions of the world; in Italy Galileo Galilei's (1564–1642) postulation that the Earth revolved around the Sun challenged previous conceptions of the Earth existing at the centre of the universe, while in England Isaac Newton's (1642–1727) laws of motion and universal gravitation rationalised the mechanisms of the universe into mathematical equations. Rather than being an abstract, divinely created entity, the Earth was instead conceived as a natural phenomenon that could be interpreted, understood and possessed through empirical observation, investing man with knowledge and, consequently, power.

Such revelations in turn prompted philosophical discourses heralding the self-determined rights and powers of individuals. John Locke's (1632–1704) treatise 'Two Treatises of Government' was seminal in influencing the turn of events in the 18th century. By asserting the free and equal status of all individuals, Locke radically defied the myth of divinely ordained monarchical power. The system was, as prophesised by Bernard le Bovier Fontenelle's (1657–1757) in 'Dialogues on the Plurality of Worlds' (1686), in revolt. Revolutions in France (1789–99) and America (1775–83) ensued, shattering previous power structures and sending shockwaves of political upheaval throughout the world.

## The Fragment and the Romantic 'Aspiration of the Infinite'

The fragment was a potent emblem for the social disorder and disintegration of the late 18th century. Irregular and unfinished, the fragment appealed to the Romantic 'aspiration for the infinite' and fascination with the unusual, the individual and the ambiguous.<sup>1</sup> From the late 18th century the German Romantics in particular seized upon the fragment as both a literary and philosophical concept, and poems left deliberately unfinished were published in journals like *The Athenaeum* as works in their own right. For the German writer Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), the literary fragment's refusal to conform to traditional genres and its necessitation of individual imagination rendered it a truly 'modern' form of poetry. It was, as such, the only appropriate vehicle to express the revolutionary insights of the time; all other 'customary divisions of poetry are only a dead framework for a limited horizon'.<sup>2</sup> Other writers evidently agreed; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1749–1832) *Faust*, *A Fragment* was published as a fragment in 1790 and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's (1772–1834) *Kubla Khan; or, A Vision in a Dream: A Fragment*, followed suit in 1797 (published 1816). In 1749 the philosopher Denis Diderot (1713–1784) had argued against a universal truth; rather, humankind's existence was entirely subjective and based on how individuals correlated various fragmentary encounters. The literary fragment harnessed this understanding of the world. Devoid of a linear narrative, the poetic fragment could be 'completed' only with the subjective input of the reader, producing a multitude of interpretations that were as distinct and varying as each individual.

1 D F Rauber, quoted in Anne Janowitz, 'The Romantic Fragment', *A Companion to Romanticism*, Duncan Wu (ed), Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Blackwell Reference Online, 1999.

2 Friedrich Schlegel, quoted in Anne Janowitz, 'The Romantic Fragment'.



Giovanni Volpato  
*Veduta del Gimnasio a Pesto (The Gymnasium at Paestum)*, 1780  
 hand-coloured engraving  
 Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki  
 on loan from J A Tylee and C E van Kraayenoord

## The Classical Fragment: A Key to the Lost Past

The fragmented remnants of ancient Greece and Rome provided a physical and visible counterpart to the poetics of this literary movement. The discovery of ancient ruins at Volterra (1728), Herculaneum (1738) and Pompeii (1748) precipitated a widespread fascination with antiquity and they became popular tourism attractions for British aristocrats travelling on their Grand Tour of cultural enlightenment. These sites brought classical fragments, and the lost civilisations that they signified, to the fore of the 18th-century imagination. Christoph Martin Wieland's (1733–1813) essay *Fragmente von Beiträgen . . .* (Fragments of Articles . . .) from 1778 exemplifies the period's correlation between classical fragments and poetry. Wieland's essay describes a journey through a ruinous landscape littered with classical architectural fragments: 'Die zerbrochnen Marmorsäulen ragten aus wildem Gebüsch hervor' (the broken marble columns towered up out of the wild-brush).<sup>3</sup> Symbolising decay and impermanence, Wieland harnessed the imaginary classical landscape as a metaphor for the fragmentary nature of human existence and the collapse of systematic thought. Conversely, the (perceived) stability, strength and monumental achievements of ancient civilisations provided an aspirational antidote for the tumultuous 18th century and, for some, the route to social salvation. The art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717–1768) was one such person who fervently believed that, 'the one way for us to become great, perhaps inimitable, is by imitating the ancients'.

Ancient fragments offered a portal to this world and were avidly sourced by scholars, collectors and Grand Tourists. Ancient sculptures and architectural fragments were collected by wealthy aristocrats such as Sir John Soane (1753–1837) and Bryan

<sup>3</sup> Martin Wieland, translated and quoted in Elizabeth Wanning Harries, *The Unfinished Manner: Essays on the Fragment in the Later Eighteenth Century*, University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville, 1994, p 59.

Faussett (1720–1776) and the assemblage of fragmented ancient texts became a central focus of classical scholarship. While the acquisition and interest in ancient relics certainly was not a new phenomenon, the widespread popularity and fascination with classical fragments gained notable traction throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. This fascination was, on the surface, driven by scholarly interest; it was believed that fragmented ruins, sculptures and texts offered a key to understanding the complex totality of antiquity. Yet the fragments' incompleteness presented other evocative, subjective possibilities that extended beyond objective, historical fact. Separated from their 'whole', that is the civilisations of ancient Greece and Rome, classical fragments were devoid of a conclusive narrative. Like Schlegel and Coleridge's poetic fragments, they could be completed in various ways according to the fancy of the visitor, viewer, or reader, presenting endless possibilities for how an idealised vision of antiquity could be reconstructed in the present for inspiration and emulation. Collectors and connoisseurs in Rome had, from the 16th century, displayed ancient sculptures and fragments in their homes and gardens, and these were a source of inspiration for contemporary artists.<sup>4</sup> Sculptors like Orfeo Boselli (1597–1667) were tasked with 'completing' broken ancient sculptures by adding heads, arms or legs of their own creation. This interaction with ancient remnants became more imaginatively playful in the 18th century. Eighteenth-century aristocrats constructed fake ruins and reassembled classical sculptures and architectural parts in new configurations within their stately homes. Visitors to Sir John Soane's home were entertained by an elaborate parlour game in which they were given a manuscript describing a fake ruin and were tasked with proposing how it could be completed.

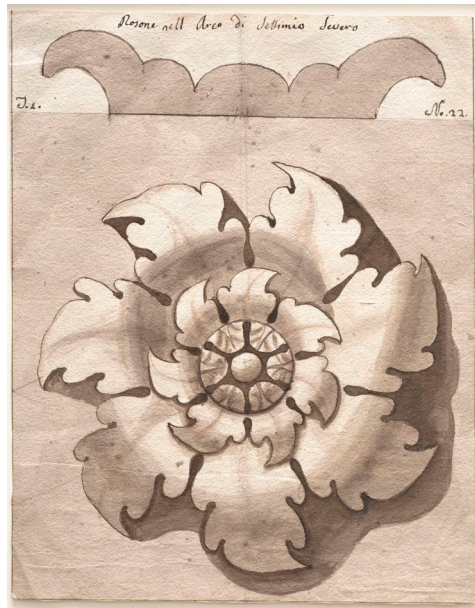


**Sir John Soane**  
*Classical Building by Moonlight*, circa 1800,  
 pen and watercolour  
 Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki  
 purchased 1954

<sup>4</sup> Phoebe Dent Weil, 'Contributions toward a History of Sculpture Techniques: 1. Orfeo Boselli on the Restoration of Antique Sculpture', *Studies in Conservation*, vol 12, no 3, Aug 1967, p 83.

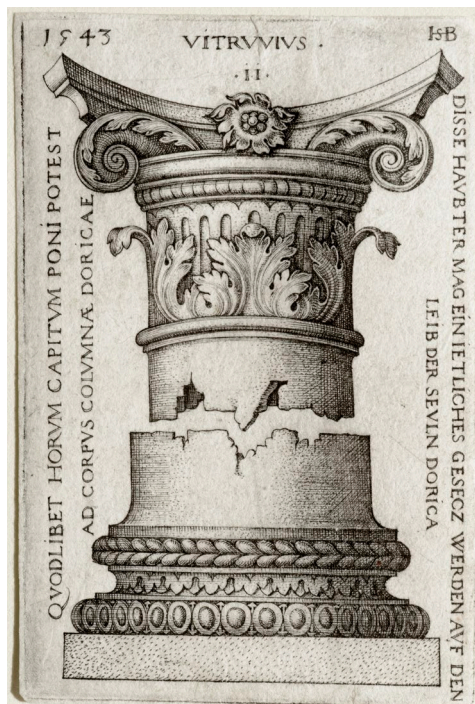
**Carlo Antonini**

*Drawing for an Engraving: Rosone nell'Arco di Settimio Severo (Rosette from the Arch of Septimius Severus), circa 1781*  
sepia, pen and wash  
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki  
purchased 1955



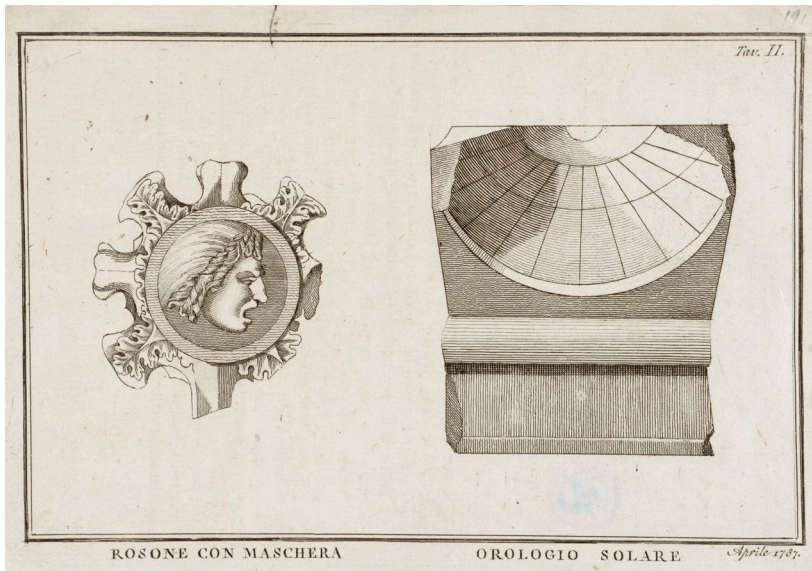
**Hans Beham**

*Capital and Base of a Column (Vitruvius II), 1543*  
engraving  
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki  
purchased 1981



## Printed Fragments

Prints of classical fragments were also disseminated, collected and reassembled. Easily reproduced and transportable, engravings and etchings were essential in transferring and disseminating knowledge about ancient architecture and visual culture in the early modern period, providing widespread access to knowledge of the ancient world. Single-sheet engravings of ancient architectural fragments such as the illustrated example by Hans Beham were in circulation as early as the late 15th



**Unknown artist**

*Rosone con Mashcera; Orologio Solare*  
(Rosette with Mask; Sun Dial), 1787

etching

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki  
purchased 1955.



**Pietro Savorelli**

*Livia (Cameo found at Palestrina)*, 1787

etching

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki  
purchased 1955

century and were pasted into sketchbooks by collectors. Although these engravings were intended to categorise and distribute information about ancient Rome, they were subject to fanciful invention. Artists and architects freely modified ancient fragments to create interesting aesthetic variations and the engravings were assembled in new combinations by avid print collectors, in the process constructing a fluid vision of antiquity.<sup>5</sup> The 18th-century's major advancements in printmaking technology and the rapidly increasing commercial market for prints provided a fertile environment for these seeds of classical inspiration to flourish. Printed compendiums of classical statues and buildings proliferated within the period and often depicted various, unrelated artefacts alongside each other on the same page with little to no

<sup>5</sup> See Michael J Waters, 'A Renaissance without Order: Ornament, Single-sheet Engravings, and the Mutability of Architectural Prints', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol 71, no 4, Dec 2012, pp 488–523.

Giovanni Battista Piranesi

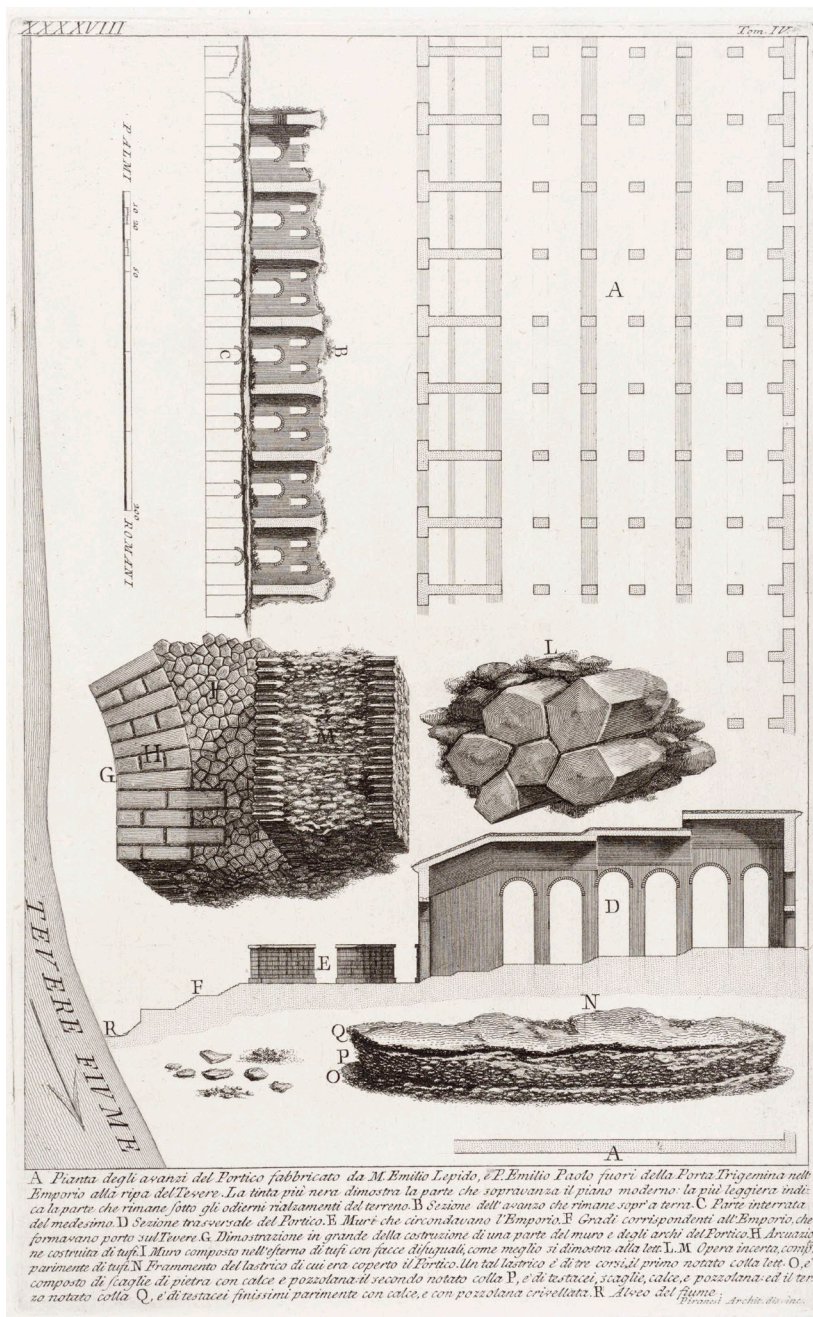
*Camera sepolcrale inventata a disegnata conforme al costume, e all'antica magnificenza degl'Imperatori Romanti (Imaginary speulcral chamber designed according to the fashion and ancient magnificence of the Roman Emperors...), Prima Parte di Architettura, e Prospettive, 1743 etching*

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



accompanying information. Divorcing classical monuments from their original material, historical and political contexts, these prints acted as fragments of knowledge that enabled classical artefacts to free-float and constellate in the mind of the viewer, producing an enduring, imagined past for the 18th-century consumer.

Piranesi's prints of ancient Rome and its architecture encapsulate the 18th-century's enthusiasm for the imaginative possibilities of classical fragments. Trained as a structural engineer, Piranesi considered himself first and foremost as an architect. After training as a printmaker with Giuseppe Vasi (1710–1782), the leading producer of etched views of Rome for Grand Tourists, Piranesi found an outlet for his passion for ancient architecture. Rome was, in the mid-18th century, littered with architectural fragments. Renaissance, Baroque and newly constructed Rococo buildings existed alongside ancient ruins, creating a disjointed architectural landscape of eclectic styles and scales. Piranesi sought to remedy this by reconstructing and rejuvenating the grandeur of ancient Rome. His series *Le Antichità Romane*, 1756–7 was a landmark in the history of classical archaeology. Focusing on classical monuments around Rome, the series comprises 'multi-



Giovanni Battista Piranesi

*Pianta degli avanzi del Portico fabbricato da M. Emilio Lepido, e P. Emilio Paolo fuori della Porta Trigemina nell'Emporio alla riva del Tevere* (Plan of the Remains of the Arcade Built by M. Aemilius Lepidus and P. Aemilius Paullus outside the Porta Trigemina at the Emporium on the Bank of the Tiber), *Le Antichità Romane*, 1756–57 etching

Mackelvie Trust Collectio

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bequest of Dr Walter Auburn, 1982.

informational' images in which Piranesi includes a multitude of visual facts for various ancient buildings: aerial and frontal views, dissected views of how specific architectural components fit together, details of the textures of various materials, et cetera.<sup>6</sup> This can be seen, for example, in *Plan of the Remains of the Arcade Built by M. Aemilius Lepidus and P. Aemilius Paullus outside the Porta Trigemina . . .*, 1756–7 from the fourth volume of *Le Antichità Romane*. The etching depicts, in astonishing detail, the plans of the arcade, a lateral view and cross-sections of the arrangement of bricks comprising the edifice.

<sup>6</sup> Susan M Dixon, 'The Sources and Fortunes of Piranesi's Archaeological Illustrations', *Art History* vol 25, no 4, Sep 2002, pp 469–87.

The series was pioneering in its treatment of fragmentary forms as architectural objects in their own right, and Piranesi's enthusiasm for ancient Roman architecture and his skill as a structural engineer is palpable. Within and across each print the viewer can deconstruct and reconstruct ancient Rome, methodically appreciating the structural components of antiquity's monumental buildings. The prints' intricate details should not, however, trick the viewer into regarding the series as an entirely objective, factual record of ancient Rome.<sup>7</sup> Rather, the prints are the result of Piranesi's selection, manipulation and synthesis of architectonic details into his personal vision of ancient Rome, as encapsulated by his statement that, 'the wonder I felt in observing the Roman buildings up close, of the absolute perfection of their architectonic parts . . . I will tell you only that these living, speaking ruins filled my spirits with images . . .'<sup>8</sup> In turn, by tracing the working processes of Piranesi's fantasies, the series invites the viewer to make their own 'images' from the depicted fragments, in the process re-visioning ancient Rome. Because *Le Antichità Romane* does not include any depictions of the buildings in their original totality, the possibilities for this process are boundless.

To conclude, it is apt to quote contemporary American philosopher and intellectual historian Susan Buck-Morss, who describes ruins as ' . . . the form in which images of the past century appear, as rubble, in the present. But it refers also to the loosened building blocks (both semantic and material) out of which a new order can be constructed'.<sup>9</sup> By signifying a lost past, the fragment ignited the imagination of the present and was incorporated within the rubble of post-Enlightenment society. In an era that celebrated the powers of the enlightened mind and the necessity for radical revision, the fragment, eternal in its incomplete state, presented tantalising opportunities to imagine the endless possibilities of what might have, and what could, constitute its 'whole'. Piranesi's multi-informational images, by preserving and dissecting the remnants of ancient Rome, act as fragments in themselves. Divorced from their structural edifices on the printed page, each column and brick is free to roam endlessly in the viewer's imagination, producing a blue-print for ancient Rome that piques the Romantic "aspiration for the infinite".

7 See Dixon, 'The Sources and Fortunes of Piranesi's Archaeological Illustrations'.

8 Giovanni Battista Piranesi, quoted in Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-gardes of Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1987, p 28.

9 Susan Buck-Morss, quoted in Sophie Thomas, *Romanticism and Visuality: Fragments, History, Spectacle*, Routledge, London, 2007, p 53.

# Architectural Drawings: Measurement and Lively Matter

Sarah Treadwell

Giovanni Battista Piranesi's work is devoured by disciplines and time. Volume one of his complete works brings together his early architectural fantasies, his grotesques and inventions, and his archaeological works, which are also described as architectural.<sup>1</sup> While Piranesi's work has been appreciated for its fine craft it is also deployed to signal the limits and complications of architectural representation. Architectural historian Manfredo Tafuri's impressive analysis of Piranesi reveals the frisson of contradictions that lodge in his etchings and engravings:<sup>2</sup>

'Piranesi . . . recognizes the presence of contradiction as absolute reality. And we do not ask which contradiction. The tools of his work exclude a similar specification, reaching levels of abstraction that permit multiple interpretations. The greatness of his 'negative utopia' lies in his refusal to establish, after such a discovery, alternative possibilities: in the crisis, Piranesi seems to want to show, we are powerless, and the true 'magnificence' is to welcome freely this destiny.'

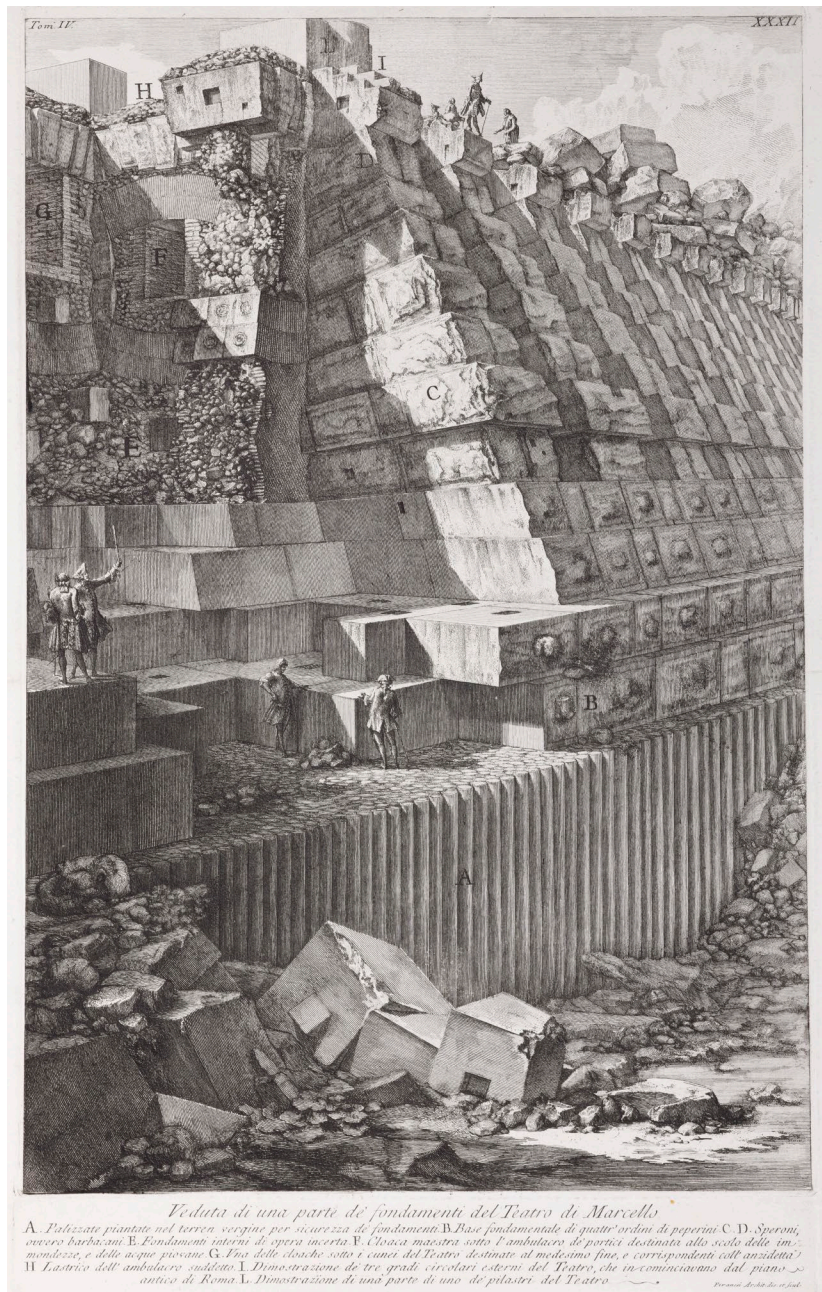
Writings on Piranesi's work are numerous and will, no doubt, increase in volume over time. In a recent exhibition at the Venice Biennial of Architecture 2011 new versions of his work were presented: 'Piranesi's Prisons within a virtual reality installation, the Caffè degli Inglesi as a full-scale evocation, as well as a touch-screen browser to interact with Piranesi's sketchbooks' and it included 'objects made from Piranesi's designs using the most advanced digital technologies and output methods (3D printing).'<sup>3</sup> Piranesi's work continues to invite contemporary architects and artists to engage with the rich strangeness and fine detail of his work.

1 John Wilton-Ely, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi: The Complete Etchings*, Alan Wofsy Fine Arts, San Francisco, 1994.

2 Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-gardes of Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1987, p 53.

3 Factum Arte, 'The Making of the Work. Part 1', *The Art of Piranesi: Architect, Engraver, Antiquarian, Vedutista, Designer*, Venice Biennale of Architecture 2011, [www.factum-arte.com/pag/582](http://www.factum-arte.com/pag/582), accessed 30 Nov 2017.

Giovanni Battista Piranesi  
*Veduta di una parte de' fondamenti del Teatro di Marcello* (View Showing a part of the Foundations of the Theatre of Marcellus), *Le Antichità Romane* 1756–57  
 etching  
 Mackelvie Trust Collection  
 Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki  
 bequest of Dr Walter Auburn, 1982



Piranesi's engravings often include radically different modes of drawing: a dramatic pictorial scene, of a bridge or a theatre, might be followed by a clean architectural image of building details. An expressive perspective seemingly clarified by an analytical section. The juxtaposition of engaged and atmospheric imagery with spare, cerebral information is a characteristic of Piranesi's work. For example, the *View Showing a Part of the Foundations of the Theatre of Marcellus*, 1756–7<sup>4</sup> is placed next to a measurable part-elevation of the Theatre's reconstruction. Reading his engraving carefully can reveal that different modes are frequently combined within one image.

4 G B Piranesi, *View Showing Part of the Foundations of the Theatre of Marcellus*, Plate XXXII, in Wilton-Ely, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi: The Complete Etchings*, vol 1, p 554.



Giovanni Battista Piranesi  
*Dimostrazione in una parte de' portici del prim'ordine del Teatro di Marcello (Reconstruction of a Part of the Arcade of the First Order of the Theatre of Marcellus)*  
*Le Antichità Romane*, 1756-57  
 etching  
 Mackelvie Trust Collection  
 Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki  
 bequest of Dr Walter Auburn, 1982

The *View Showing a Part of the Foundations of the Theatre of Marcellus* is a dark perspective of a brooding but organised heap of stones. Heavily rendered with printer's ink, massive stones, erect or fallen, construct the sloping buttresses that hold back gravity and matter. It is an image of architecture's mission to raise material into the air, to rise out of the ground and into the cloud-filled sky depicted as a breath-filled domain by Piranesi. In this image, where time has tumbled the facing blocks, small, elegant figures inspect the structure, indicating scale which is an architectural concern and suggesting the performative nature of architecture – knowing that it refuses to stay still over time.

The contrast between the delicate figures and the substantial stonework seems to allude to the miraculous nature of such constructions – how were the stones raised and at what human cost? Technology is exaggerated, celebrated, even as the inevitability of decay is acknowledged. Hands that push the burin, scrape needles across plates, also determine relationships between body, technology and building. Performing at a remove from building the engraver locates human occupancy imaginatively in the drawings and the buildings.

The adjacent part-elevation titled the *Reconstruction of a Part of the Arcade of First Order of the Theatre of Marcellus*, 1756–7<sup>5</sup> contains elevational and sectional details of the theatre. The architectural order is delineated with column, capital and entablature; the ornamental arrangements of the building, complete with measurements, are precisely imagined in these

<sup>5</sup> G B Piranesi, *Reconstruction of a Part of the Arcade of First Order of the Theatre of Marcellus*, Plate XXXIII, in Wilton-Ely, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi: The Complete Etchings*, vol 1, p 555.



Giovanni Battista Piranesi

*Dimostrazione in grande di alcune delle parti della facciata dell'ingresso principale del portico d'Ottavia* (Reconstruction of Some of Details of the Façade of the Principal Entrance of the Portico of Octavia), *Le Antichità Romane* 1756–57

etching

Mackelvie Trust Collection

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

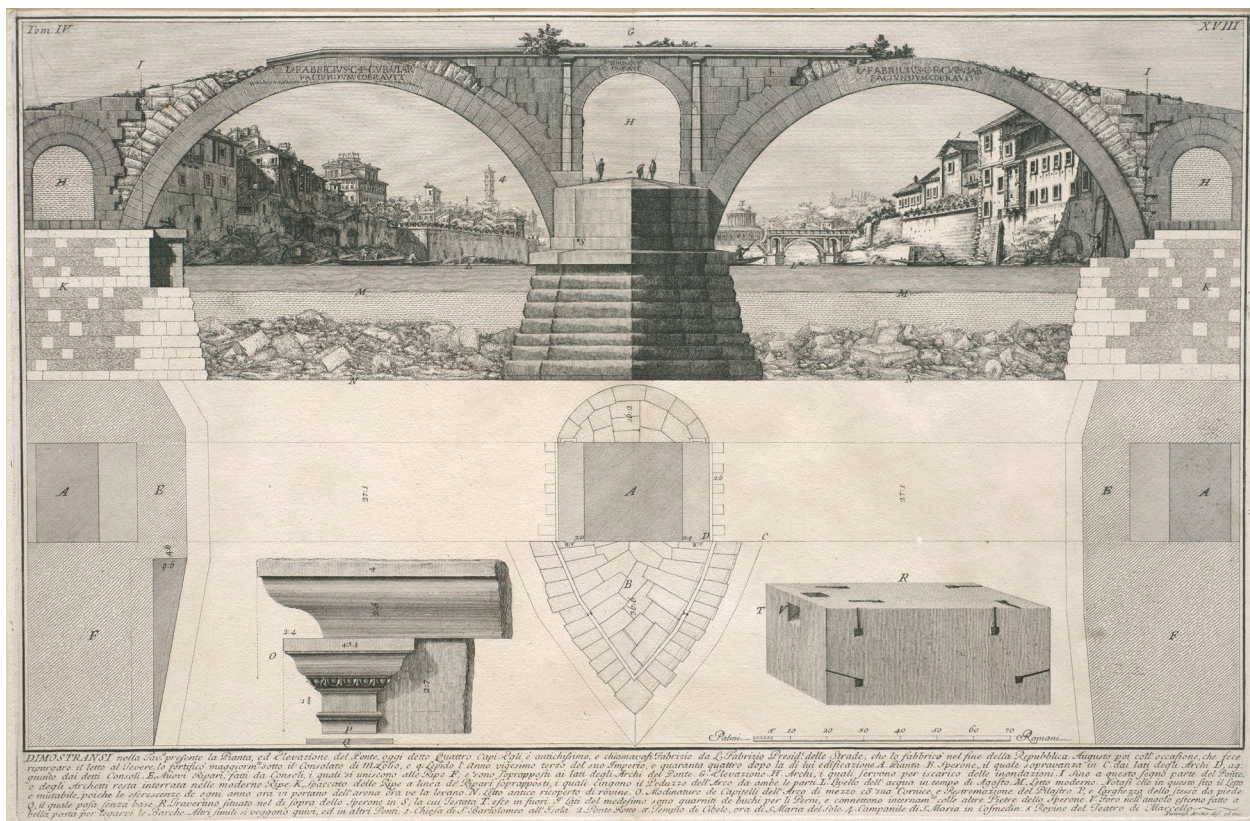
bequest of Dr Walter Auburn, 1982

disciplinary drawings. Elevations and sections talk of proportion, arrangement and composition; they are architect's drawings that indicate exact design decisions, that locate the architect's aesthetic preferences as well as the status of the building. However, into this analytic, non-perspectival, rectilinear grid of space on which elevations and sections depend, Piranesi inserts two figures. A rather bored guard, leaning on a wall is approached by another man – for a chat perhaps? The space of measurement and analysis is inhabited by three dimensional bodies with emotions and intentions.

Drawings such as architectural elevations, in their measurability and exactitude, indicate that the depicted design could be built. Piranesi's reconstruction drawings not only record an imagined past but these wonderfully skilful engravings, which make travertine shimmer, also seem to invite emulation and a future construction. Time is mobile in Piranesi's work. The design of the order in Piranesi's *Reconstruction of Some of the Details of the Façade of the Principal Entrance of the Portico of Octavia*, 1756–7<sup>6</sup> depicts a finely wrought capital in which curls and scrolls of acanthus leaves surpass the small piece of scrubby vegetation lodged in the entablature. The ornamental capital might grace future buildings but it is also a theatrical device; the engraving plays with the idea of an artificial presentation of a constructed natural order and the invasive weed asserts another level of reality, confirming Piranesi's knowledge of the stage architecture of the Bibiena and Valeriani families.<sup>7</sup>

6 G B Piranesi, *Reconstruction of Some of the Details of the Façade of the Principal Entrance of the Portico of Octavia*, Plate XLII, in Wilton-Ely, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi: The Complete Etchings*, vol 1, p 565.

7 Peter Murray, *Piranesi and the Grandeur of Ancient Rome*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1971, p 8. Jonathan Jones, 'No Way Out', *The Guardian*, [www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/nov/06/artsfeatures.highereducation](http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/nov/06/artsfeatures.highereducation), accessed 30 Nov 2017.



## Theatrical Working Drawings

It has been pointed out that in his well-known series *Carceri d'Invenzione*, 1745–50 Piranesi's use of drawing techniques did not follow conventional rules of perspectival construction; space in the dark prints is manipulated with sickening effects. The nature of the space produced, seemingly without limits or context, has been a source of fascination for architects.<sup>8</sup> Steven Jacobs, for example, in his article 'Eisenstein's Piranesi and Cinematic Space', as well as observing the diagonal forces in Piranesi prints that induce movement, suggests that the work prefigures spectacular cinema. Jacobs follows film director and theorist Sergei Eisenstein's view that 'Piranesi's etchings are based on a spatial layout and framing, which acknowledge and even emphasize a montage-like combination of discontinuous fragments.'<sup>9</sup>

Melancholic and disturbing, the *Carceri d'Invenzione* engravings are generally separated from Piranesi's architectural and reconstruction drawings which engage with accuracy and reproducibility. But his bridge engravings such as the *View of the Bridge of Fabricius, . . .*, 1756–7<sup>10</sup>, a supposed record of an existing structure rather than a fantasy, evokes a trace of the

Giovanni Battista Piranesi

*Dimostransi nella Tav. presente la Pianta, ed elevazione del Ponte oggi detto Quattro Capai egli e antichissimo, e chiamavasi Fabrizio da L. Fabrizio Presid delle Strade, che lo fabbrico' nel fine della Repubblica (. . . View of the Bridge of Fabricius . . .), Le Antichità Romane, 1756–57 etching Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki purchased 1971*

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Jones, 'No Way Out', *The Guardian*, [www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/nov/06/artsfeatures.highereducation](http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/nov/06/artsfeatures.highereducation), accessed 30 Nov 2017.

<sup>9</sup> Steven Jacobs, 'Eisenstein's Piranesi and Cinematic Space', [www.academia.edu/23035954/\\_Eisensteins\\_Piranesi\\_and\\_Cinematic\\_Space\\_2016\\_?auto=download](http://www.academia.edu/23035954/_Eisensteins_Piranesi_and_Cinematic_Space_2016_?auto=download), accessed 30 Nov 2017.

<sup>10</sup> G B Piranesi, *View of The Bridge of Fabricius, Today Called the Ponte dei Quattro Capi*, Plate XVI, in Wilton-Ely, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi: The Complete Etchings*, vol 1, p 538.

Giovanni Battista Piranesi  
*The Gothic Arch, Carceri d'invenzione*, 1st edition,  
1749–50  
etching with engraving  
British Museum  
© Trustees of the British Museum.



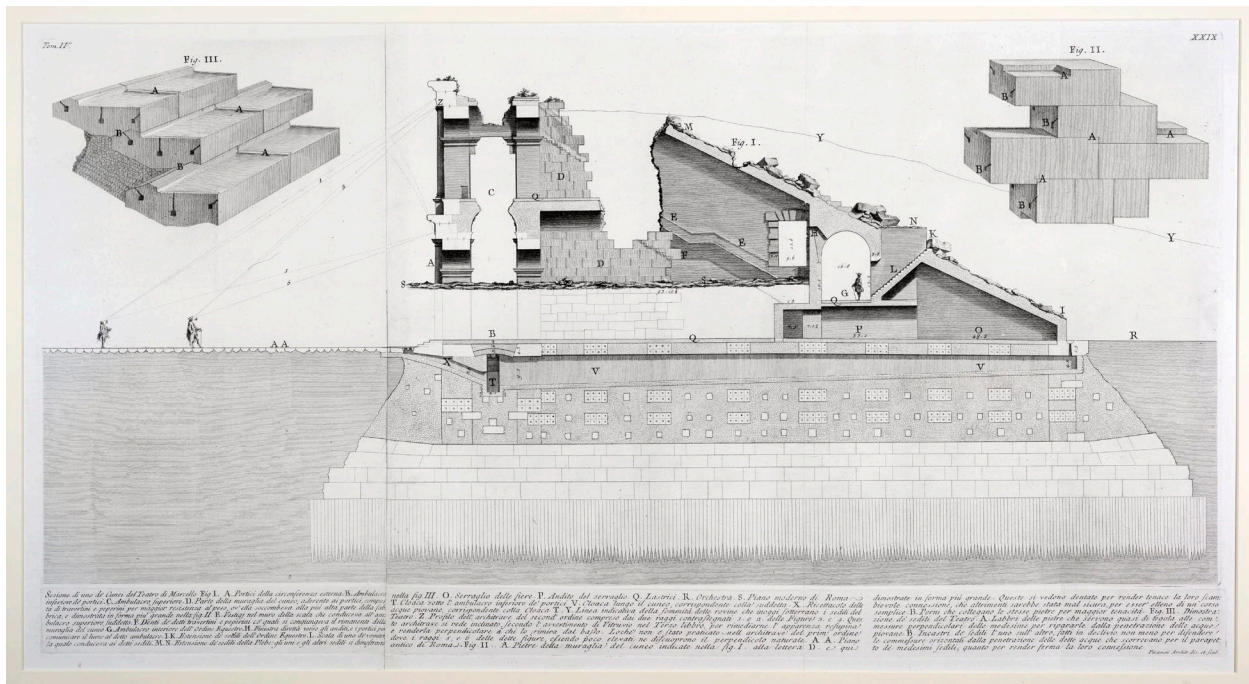
Giovanni Battista Piranesi  
*The Smoking Fire, Carceri d'invenzione*,  
1st edition, 1749–50  
etching with engraving  
British Museum  
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atmosphere of the prison images, such as *The Gothic Arch*, circa 1749–50<sup>11</sup>. At the back of both images, through the arches, is a darkness that swallows surface detail. In both engravings ground planes are multiple and confusing. The oblique lines of beams and pulleys in *The Gothic Arch* are repeated in the *View of Bridge of Fabricius*, 1756–7 with boatmen's poles and nets and in the edges of the shadows that fall obliquely. There is a stickiness that clings to *View of Bridge of Fabricius* in the glistening oily water which is echoed by the sooty corners of *The Smoking Fire*, 1749–50<sup>12</sup> in the *Carceri* series.

11 G B Piranesi, *The Gothic Arch*, Plate XIV, in Wilton-Ely, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi: The Complete Etchings*, vol 1, p 74.

12 G B Piranesi, *The Smoking Fire*, Plate XIV, in Wilton-Ely, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi: The Complete Etchings*, vol 1, p 58.



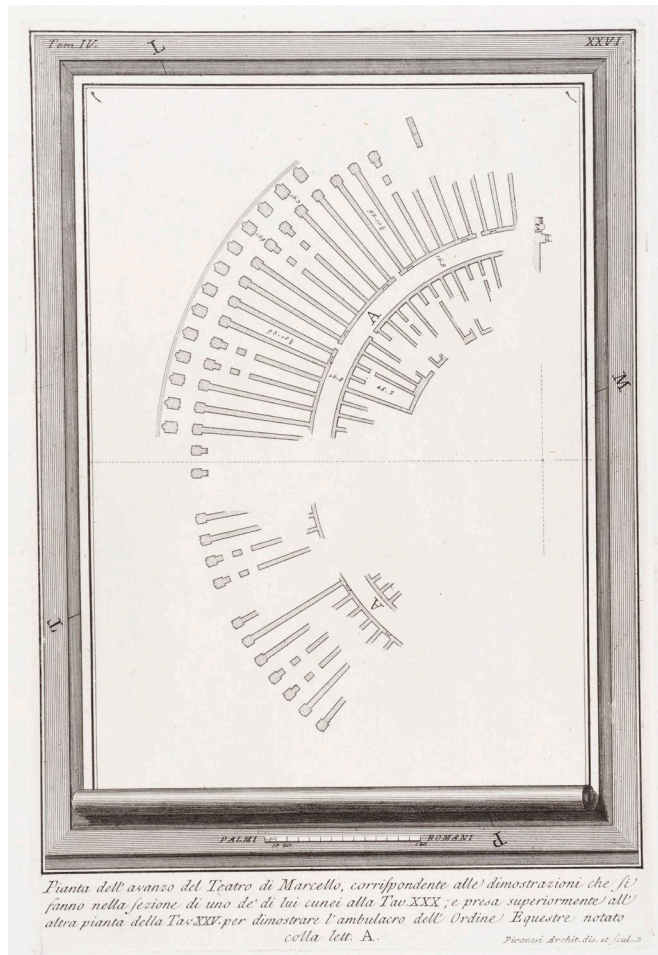
Giovanni Battista Piranesi

*Pianta dell'avanzo del Teatro di Marcello* (Plan of the Remains of the Theatre of Marcellus), *Le Antichità Romane*, 1756–57

etching

Mackelvie Trust Collection

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki,  
bequest of Dr Walter Auburn, 1982.



The hybrid section brings together experiential information about occupation and materiality with precise vertical measurements and also includes signs of the various ages of the building. While the plate attends carefully to the ground the upper regions of the plate/sky are occupied by two axonometric details. These assemblages of heavy stones float freely, located in the architecture only through notation and caption. Piranesi's drawings remember the weight and physical nature of building even as they delight in the quality of their own construction. Intricate linear patterns indicate the depth of foundations and the amount of cold heavy substance that must be removed for serious stonework to rise. The drawings effortlessly perform the labour to be undertaken.

In contrast to the hybrid section/detail in the *Section of One of the Banks of Seats in the Theatre of Marcellus*, 1756–7<sup>14</sup>, with its information about construction and structure combined with a commentary on ruination and occupancy, the architectural plan of the theatre is a minimal affair. Plans are architectural drawings that indicate the horizontal spread or contraction of space; they allow the viewer to walk through and to imagine the passage of the sun or the social hierarchy supported by the building. *The Plan of the Remains of the Theatre of Marcellus*, 1756–7<sup>15</sup> attends to the geometry of the structure which is represented as a remnant.

14 G B Piranesi, *Section of One of the Banks of Seats in the Theatre of Marcellus*, Plate XXIX, in Wilton-Ely, Giovanni Battista Piranesi: *The Complete Etchings*, vol 1, p 551.

15 G B Piranesi, *Plan of the remains of The Theatre of Marcellus*, Plate XXVI, in Wilton-Ely, Giovanni Battista Piranesi: *The Complete Etchings*, vol 1, p 548.

Framed and separated from the explanatory text the plan is located in relationship to a neutral grid with an implied symmetry. It attempts to seal off the disturbing underground evident in the hybrid section of the building. As Manfredi Tafuri asks,<sup>16</sup>

'Is Piranesi the 'archaeologist' interested in caves, underground passages, and substructures purely by chance, then? Rather, cannot this interest in 'what is hidden' in ancient architecture be interpreted as a metaphor for the search for a place in which the exploration of the 'roots' of the monuments meets with the exploration of the depths of the subject?'

Piranesi's drawings probe the materiality that occurs at the junction of ground and architecture, a sensitive point of potential disaster for both building and architect, and in his delicate delineations presented in the exhibition at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki this obsession can still be traced.

<sup>16</sup>   Manfredo Tafuri, *The Sphere and the Labyrinth: Avant-gardes of Architecture from Piranesi to the 1970s*, The MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1987, p 38.