The freaks and hobgoblins of northern imagination fascinated the Renaissance Italians. Here the whole horde of Gothic nightmare charges down the wind with a roar like a Roman triumph.

Italian Prints

by A. HYATT MAYOR Curator of Prints

From March 2 through April 9 the Museum will show 154 drawings from Italian collections. To accompany this magnificent loan, made possible by the Italian Government, some of the Museum’s own prints and illustrated books will be on display in the Auditorium Lounge until April 30. Both exhibitions span roughly the same four hundred years of the Renaissance, the baroque, and the eighteenth century, but they differ in their historical roles, for the drawings preserve an artist’s private studies and projects, whereas the prints act as published proclamations, aimed at the largest possible audience, to spread artistic ideas over the widest possible areas. Since the main stream of history runs through the prints, they have been equipped with informal notes commenting on various human aspects of the age, all the way from Raphael’s influence on Manet to the inconveniences of the plague in Rome.

Fig. 2 (opposite). Diogenes, after Parmigianino, by Ugo da Carpi (about 1460-1525), Italian. Color woodcut. 19 x 14 3/8 inches. Rogers Fund, 1922

When Diogenes overheard the Platonic Academy defining man as a featherless biped, he tossed them a plucked chicken, remarking, “There’s your man.”
Fig. 3 (left). A Sabine, by Luca Cambiaso (1527-1585), Italian. Woodcut washed with ink. 10 7/8 x 7 7/8 inches. Gift of Janos Scholz, 1950

This snappy woodcut shows the back view of a group that Cambiaso painted from the front in a complicated ceiling decoration for a palace near Genoa.

Fig. 4. Saint Philip or Saint Andrew, after (or possibly by) Domenico Beccafumi (1486-1551), Italian. Woodcut. 16 3/4 x 8 3/4 inches. Dick Fund, 1930

This woodcut reproduces a marble slab that Beccafumi designed for the pavement of Siena cathedral. The inlaying of marble simplified the massing of light and shade with a grandeur that carried over into no other early woodcuts.
This engraving, probably made under Mantegna's eye, has purposely been left "unfinished" to bring out the Madonna. It was really Mantegna, and not Michelangelo, who invented the "unfinished" work of art.

The Greek anatomist Galen described man's anatomy from his dissections of monkeys, and Renaissance anatomists excused errors in his descriptions by assuming that man had changed since ancient times. Here Titian is saying, "If Galen had been correct, this is how ancient sculpture would have looked."