PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS

PRINTS

FRANCESCO ROSSELLI
Italian, 1448–before 1513

Saints John the Evangelist and Jerome
Fragment of The Crucifixion
1490s (?)
Engraving
5 5/8 \times 7 7/8 in. (14.3 \times 7.3 cm)
Purchase, Dr. and Mrs. Goodwin M. Breinin Gift, 1988
1988.1102

This fragmentary impression is the only one known of an engraving of The Crucifixion by the prolific Florentine miniaturist and engraver Francesco Rosselli. Brother of the more renowned Cosimo Rosselli (who is represented by three paintings in the collection of the Metropolitan), Francesco produced an engraved oeuvre of at least eighty plates. These were long known to scholarship within the general classification “Florentine Broad Manner,” but they have recently been attributed to a single hand; since many of the prints are unique or exist in only a few impressions, it is reasonable to assume that other images by Francesco are now lost.

The complete composition of The Crucifixion can be reconstructed from another engraving, also a unique impression, in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, which includes these same two figures, identical in size. Saints John and Jerome stand underneath the cross bearing the crucified Christ; the Virgin is on the opposite side, and Mary Magdalene kneels at the foot of the cross, her back to the spectator, her hands at her head in despair. Three angels with chalices catch the blood from the wounds in Christ’s hands and side, and two hover above the heads of the Virgin and Saint John. The engraving in Boston is technically inferior and thus may be a copy of Rosselli’s print, or both may derive from the same original drawing, the style of which is close to that of Filippino Lippi. Saint Jerome, who is depicted kneeling and holding the stone of voluntary penance, was born more than three hundred years after the Crucifixion, and thus his inclusion in the composition makes the image a devotional rather than a narrative one. In fact, a print such as The Crucifixion would have been regarded more as an object of use than of art—an attitude that, combined with its quite easy replaceability, would account for the nearly complete disappearance of the print. Two Rosselli engravings in the Metropolitan’s collection from a series of fifteen subjects of

Entries by Janet S. Byrne, Curator; Suzanne Boorsch, Associate Curator; Maria Morris Hambourg, Associate Curator; David W. Kiehl, Associate Curator; Ellen Handy, Senior Research Assistant.
The Life of the Virgin and of Christ, for example, were transformed into inexpensive paintings for a private chapel by being covered in opaque colors and mounted on wood panels; similar painted engravings are in museums in Europe. Whether deterioration or change of artistic style came first, sooner or later such images would have been replaced by new ones, at which time the old ones would simply have been discarded.

**Jean Mignon**
French, active 1535–1555

*The Creation of Eve*
After Luca Penni, Italian, 1500–1557
About 1544
Etching
Sheet, 17 5/8 x 23 5/8 in. (44.7 x 60 cm)
Purchase, Anne Stern Gift and The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1989.1036

Of the four major etchers of the school of Fontainebleau—the group of printmakers who produced an extraordinary group of prints after designs by the artists working at the Château of Fontainebleau for Francis I in the 1530s and 1540s—Jean Mignon in his works after Luca Penni is the most consistent and the most harmonious. Penni was born in Italy in 1500 and worked in Rome, Genoa, and perhaps Mantua before going to France; he appears on the payment rolls at Fontainebleau between 1536 and 1549 and lived in Paris at least from 1553 until his death in 1557. He bore the title peintre du roi, and yet if it were not for prints after his designs, Penni’s name and style would be virtually unknown. Only three extant paintings have been attributed to him, while at least eighty prints are known after his designs. The largest number of these are by Mignon, an artist about whom even less is known, but who is presumed to have been French because of his name. Mignon signed only two prints, minor early works; another sixty or so are ascribed to him on the basis of stylistic affinity with these. Five are dated, one in 1543, the others in 1544. Over half of the etchings attributed to Mignon are after drawings by Penni, many of which survive; the prints are of roughly identical dimensions but in the reverse direction. No drawing, however, is known for *The Creation of Eve*. The elaborate frames that surround the central subjects of this and a dozen other prints are of Penni’s invention and are similar to the borders used around the central image in sixteenth-century tapestries. Penni is, in fact, documented as having produced drawings for tapestries, and, although no tapestry designed by him is known, it is possible, if only conjectural, that *The Creation of Eve* and other images were intended for such works.

Automatically, any anamorphic (secret or hidden) portrait of King Charles I is dated “after 1649,” the year in which he was beheaded. A man with a penchant for visibly doing things wrong politically, Charles was judged a tyrant and an enemy of his own nation. In his forty-ninth year he was beheaded in front of Inigo Jones’s Banqueting Hall at Whitehall. After his death there was a certain demand for portraits of him, but these painters and engravers remain intentionally anonymous. They distorted the image optically so that, to recognize the portrait, the viewer needed to look from a specific and unusual point of view or use cylindrical or conical mirrors.

It would seem that our engraver was not really intent upon hiding Charles, for the famous visage is recognizable, and the sitter is wearing the medallion of the Order of the Garter. Below the figure is a large capital letter A, and above, an inscription gives the clue:

King Charles y’ first head Drawn in Optiks Place the letter A to your Eye and glance it A long.

Our impression of this little-known print has been folded horizontally into a small rectangle, perhaps for hiding in a pocket or bureau drawer.
Ferdinand Olivier's training as a landscape painter and etcher is especially visible in his set of seven lithographic views of Salzburg and Berchtesgaden. In 1814 and 1817 he made two sketching trips from Vienna, where he was living, and these well-known landscapes are skillfully chosen and seen through a painter's eye. Unfamiliar with the then new lithographic technique, Olivier relied on his experienced printer Friedrich Adolph Kunike for help, but several of the scenes are more linear than tonal; they look as though they had been etched. Arranged according to a program of seven days of the week, "Sunday" initiates the series with churchgoers at the Franciscan church in Berchtesgaden. "Friday" (illustrated here) shows reapers and a wayside shrine beside the fields at Aigen, near Salzburg, and "Saturday," ending the week, depicts the cemetery churchyard of Saint Peters-Friedhof in Salzburg. There is obvious but unobtrusive religious symbolism in each day.
Theodore Roszak's color lithograph Staten Island is one of the few American prints of the 1930s associated with the Constructivist movement. A medley of vibrant primary colors and geometric forms of maritime derivation, the work evokes a sense of isolation not apparent in Roszak's 1933 painting of the same name (private collection), which has a neon-lit city on the horizon and the rising moon with its geometric reflection. The framework of specific time inherent in the painting is lost in the print through the use of two unusual shades of blue. In some impressions of Staten Island the blue water has been printed in rosy reds, further enhancing the enigmatic quality of timelessness. Roszak printed the lithograph on his own press, thereby accounting for the individuality of each impression.

Although Roszak's work is often identified with his emotion-packed, expressive sculpture of the post-World War II period, his career merits broader recognition. Born in Poland and raised in America, he was awarded a fellowship for European study by the school of the Art Institute of Chicago based on his work as a traditional figurative painter. Instead of lingering in Paris, Roszak went to Prague. There, he was inspired by the peculiar melding of Constructivism evident in the work of László Moholy-Nagy, the subjects depicted by the Italian Futurists (particularly the stark cityscapes of Giorgio de Chirico), and a singular Czech interpretation of Cubism. Among the first acts of the newly created Republic of Czechoslovakia was the founding of a national gallery, and appropriate funds were used to purchase the work of the most avant-garde artists of Paris, Germany, and the rest of Europe. Roszak's painting and sculpture from the years following his return to the United States were dominated by the formality of Constructivist theory and an understanding of Cubist form, which were both intensified by his belief in the metaphysical truths of Science and Technology; human form was progressively replaced by the strict forms of geometric shapes and solids. This lithograph of Staten Island exemplifies Roszak's move from the painterly restrictions of the canvas to the relief constructions that characterize his artistic output of the 1930s. At present, Staten Island is the earliest example of his work in the Museum's collections.

D W K


PHOTOGRAPHS

JOHN B. GREENE
American, 1832–1856

Medinet-Habu
1854
Salted paper print from paper negative
9 7/8 x 11 3/4 in. (23.4 x 30.1 cm)
Purchase, Gilman Paper Company Gift, 1989
1989.1063

John Greene was American, but his interests and talents were shaped in Paris, where his father was a banker. Thus when the well-heeled young man learned to photograph in the early 1850s, he adopted Gustave Le Gray’s newly perfected waxed-paper negatives—the technique preferred by French connoisseurs for its portability and its admirable balance between tonal massing and finely rendered detail. Unlike the great artist-photographer Le Gray, Greene was an archaeologist whose purpose was predicted by François Arago at the medium’s birth in 1839: Images made by light would replace the laborious hand-drawn replicas of Egyptian hieroglyphics.

From 1852 to 1855 Greene traveled in Egypt, concentrating his studies and excavations at Thebes and Deir el-Bahri. At Medinet-Habu (Thebes) he cleaned important inscriptions. This photograph represents a corner of the second courtyard of the temple and shows the last eighteen lines of the Inscription of the Year Five of the reign of Ramses III, recounting with effusive praise the king’s victories over the peoples to the north.

Whether or not we can decipher the writing upon the wall, the message of Greene’s picture is clear. In the penumbra behind the massive pylon, we see the story of a perished people preserved in stone. The velvet shadows of this eggplant-colored print make tangible the millennia between Ramses’s glory and that less distant moment when the young archaeologist contemplated the chronicle he had exposed.

Some ninety-four of Greene’s negatives of Egypt were printed by Louis-Désiré Blanquart-Evrard’s establishment and published as Le Nil in 1854. Our print, which matches the ruddy hues of those in Greene’s presentation albums at the Institut de France, is a rare example printed very likely by Greene himself. As Greene the archaeologist was the first to read the freshly exhumed inscriptions and Greene the photographer the first to record them for the modern world, perhaps the power of his evocative image owes as much to his respect for photography’s capacity to replicate concrete fact, as to his precocious artistic ability to hold and transcribe the mood of the immediate moment.

Carleton Watkins made his name with views of Yosemite Valley, which he photographed repeatedly over a twenty-year period beginning in 1861. By that date he was a virtuoso practitioner of the difficult wet-collodion process on “mammoth” glass plates and was well connected with influential businessmen and local legislators. His 1861 views of Yosemite caused a sensation. The praise of Oliver Wendell Holmes and Ralph Waldo Emerson, joined by that of the New York public who saw the work at Goupil’s gallery, aroused interest in the natural splendor of Yosemite Valley. This attention and support were later legislated into the Yosemite Bill, which declared the valley “inviolable” and led the way to the National Park Service.

In 1865–66 Watkins returned to Yosemite with the California Geological Survey. With the assistance of the group, Watkins worked freely; his equipment (weighing nearly a ton) was transported by mule team, and water (necessary for development) was hauled over long distances. By the end of the sojourn the party had ascended the Sentinel Dome; Watkins’s response to this unparalleled view was to make three photographs, each an integral, self-sufficient picture, that when seen together form a broad and encompassing embrace of the vast surrounding space.

The panorama is not only a technical tour de force, it is also a triumph of artistic vision. The work simplifies inchoate immensity into three perfectly resolved units, each boldly hewn into triple bands of light, dark, and middle tones. Presented together, these tripartite images in turn become variations on the landscape theme, which the panorama as a whole unites in a harmonious descant for three voices.

Provenance: [Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco].


After serving in the Army during World War II, William Klein moved to Paris in 1949 and briefly studied painting with Fernand Léger. His first photographs were made in 1954 on a visit to New York and were published two years later in a book entitled *Life is Good and Good for You in New York.* William Klein *Trance Witness Reveals.* The verve of these pictures, made with a hand-held camera under diverse lighting conditions, won him a contract with Vogue, where his radically casual style pioneered a new philosophy of fashion photography. Klein’s book antedated Robert Frank’s influential volume *The Americans* (first published in 1958) and reflected the vision of a native returning home, while Frank’s photographs recorded the fascinated but detached point of view of a newcomer to the country. Stylistic parallels, however, abound between the two, particularly in their rapid-fire, asymmetrical images of life in public spaces.

Klein’s photographs of society events replace the prevailing conception of elegance of the day with renderings that emphasize the moment rather than the individual. What is lost in precise description is redeemed in the broad patterning and spontaneity of the captured instant; Klein’s photographs are brilliant transcriptions of passing time. They work to convince the viewer that the meaning of life is carried in these ephemeral moments, described within the intimate scope of a turning head or a lifting arm. The loss of definition in these images results in vivid forms that come dangerously close to incoherence and confusion. In Klein’s understanding, “It’s not necessary to make order out of chaos. Chaos itself is interesting.”
