

Giovanni Battista Piranesi | Genius of Italian Baroque Printmaking

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Olomouc Archdiocesan museum | Gallery

AUTHORS OF EXHIBITION | Blanka Kubíková, Dalibor Lešovský

CURATOR | Helena Zápalková

GRAPHIC DESIGN | Vladimír Vaca

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN | Marek Novák

EXHIBITS PREPARING | Jarmila Franková, Veronika K. Wanková

INSTALATION | Vlastimil Sedláček, Filip Šindelář, Ondřej Žák

PROMOTION | Petr Bieleš

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES | Hana Lamatová, Marek Šobáň

The exhibition is held under the auspices of H. E. Aldo Amati, Ambassador of Italy to the Czech Republic

Giovanni Battista Piranesi is one of the most accomplished figures of 18th-century Italian art. This architect, printmaker and designer was born in 1720 in the town of Mogliano Veneto near Mestre. He spent his childhood and youth in Venice, where he received his artistic training. In the 1740s, he settled in Rome and came under the spell of its ancient monuments. He delved into their detailed study and drawing. He mastered the etching technique and began printing his first plates. Initially, he was mainly recognized for his vedute of Roman landmarks: both the views of Rome's ancient monuments and its Baroque churches, palaces, squares and famous fountains. Many visitors of noble rank and scholars would travel to Rome, particularly owing to their impressions of Piranesi's visually compelling prints, returning home with still other series of his etchings.

Modern-time viewers are especially captivated by the mysterious world of his volume of prints entitled Carceri d'Invenzione (Imaginary Prisons). The disquieting atmosphere of the endless corridors and staircases of ancient prisons has fascinated audiences since Romanticism. The stark, mesmerizing mood of this drawing series enchanted such luminaries as Victor Hugo, Honoré de Balzac, Charles Baudelaire, Aldous Huxley, Surrealist painters and many others.

However, Piranesi's oeuvre is thematically much broader. His works include architectural projects (the church of Santa Maria del Priorato in Rome), heated scholarly treatises and albums of etchings devoted to archaeology, in which the artist illustrated the vanishing ancient monuments with scientific precision and the passion of a devoted admirer. He received high acclaim for his archaeological works throughout Europe, which were sold from Ireland to Scandinavia and all the way to Russia. He was even elected to an Honorary Fellowship of the Society of Antiquaries of London for his meritorious work.

A man of many professions, Piranesi performed all of them with the utmost zeal and devotion. He had always considered himself an architect but went down in

history above all as a brilliant printmaker, whose creative output is still admired today.

In his day, Piranesi's oeuvre was enthusiastically embraced all over Europe. Bohemian and Moravian aristocracy was also eager to acquire his works, and their collections often include albums of etchings by the artist. Czech collectors were mainly intrigued by Piranesi's vedute that came to adorn many palaces or country mansions.

This exhibition, held by in collaboration with the National Gallery in Prague, explores Piranesi's graphic work in a broad range of themes and artistic expressions. Besides his celebrated vedute (city views) and scenes from his famous Carceri series, the display will also focus on illustrations depicting the ancient structures of Rome, the environs of Tivoli, Castel Gandolfo and Cori, as well as the famous Doric temples at Paestum.

The prints from the National Gallery in Prague's holdings will be shown alongside unique graphic sheets on loan from the Olomouc Archbishopric, prints from the Moravian Library in Brno and a private collection. The rare cork models of ancient buildings have been loaned from the Rájec nad Svitavou State Chateau, administered by the National Heritage Institute in Kroměříž.

KONTAKT PRO MÉDIA

Mgr. Petr Bieleš

tiskový mluvčí

Muzeum umění Olomouc | Denisova 47 | 771 11 Olomouc

K: Muzeum moderního umění | Denisova 47 | 771 11 Olomouc

T: 585 514 282 | M: 724 202 905

E: bielesz@olmuart.cz | [web](#) | [facebook](#) | [twitter](#)

