



Renaissance Impressions: Chiaroscuro woodcuts from the Collections of Georg Baselitz and the Albertina, Vienna

The Sackler Wing of Galleries

15 March – 8 June 2014

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Renaissance Impressions: Chiaroscuro woodcuts from the Collections of Georg Baselitz and the Albertina, Vienna will examine the artistic development of the revolutionary, yet short lived, printing technique of the chiaroscuro woodcut in the sixteenth century. Often based on designs by celebrated Renaissance masters such as Parmigianino, Raphael and Titian depicting well-known biblical scenes and legends, chiaroscuro woodcuts were the first colour prints that made dramatic use of light and shadow – *chiaroscuro* – to suggest form, volume and depth. The exhibition will present over 100 rare prints by artists from Germany, Italy and The Netherlands held at the Albertina Museum in Vienna and in the personal collection of the Honorary Royal Academician, Georg Baselitz.

In the early 1500s, several printmakers competed to claim authorship of the chiaroscuro woodcut. In Germany, the artist Lucas Cranach even back-dated two of his works to prove that he had invented the new technique. It is however widely thought that the first known example came from his compatriot Hans Burgkmair the Elder, with his depiction of *Emperor Maximilian on Horseback*, 1508, commissioned on the year of his coronation. This novel, complex printing method involved supplementing the black line block (the key block) with one or several tone blocks to create gradations of colour from light to dark for aesthetic effect. The result produced greater depth, plasticity of form, atmosphere and pictorial quality than the earlier, plainer woodcuts. The making of chiaroscuro woodcuts involved collaboration between the artist, responsible for drawing the design, and the craftsman, whose role was to carve it in relief on the woodblock. *St George and the Dragon*, c. 1508–10, for instance, is signed by both Burgkmair and the Antwerp woodcutter, Jost de Negker.

The chiaroscuro woodcut was adopted by other German artists, including Hans Baldung Grien and Hans Wechtlin from the circle of Albrecht Dürer, and subsequently further developed in Italy and the Netherlands. A few years after its invention in Germany, the celebrated Italian artist Ugo da Carpi, who also claimed to have pioneered the medium, made his mark with such works as *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, c. 1523–27, and *Archimedes (?)*, c. 1518-1520 after Raphael. Unlike his Northern European counterparts, Ugo da Carpi cut his own woodblocks and increasingly avoided the use of the black key block, working exclusively with tone blocks. His innovative use of the chiaroscuro woodcut, such as unevenly cut colour fields led to works that have a more painterly character, as if

they had been modelled in colour and light. His successors, Antonio da Trento and Niccolò Vicentino advanced the technique and influenced other artists such as Domenico Beccafumi in Siena and Andrea Andreani, whose *Rape of a Sabine Woman*, 1584, inspired by Giambologna's famous sculpture in Florence and printed in several versions, will be on display.

The technical potential of the chiaroscuro woodcut was also explored in the Netherlands, particularly in the highly sophisticated work of Hendrik Goltzius, the medium's most important proponent there. Highlights by the artist in the exhibition include the powerful *Hercules Killing Cacus*, 1588 and Goltzius' remarkable series of landscapes and deities, comprising *Landscape with Trees and a Shepherd Couple*, c. 1593–98 and *Bacchus*, c. 1589–90.

Chiaroscuro woodcuts were collected across Europe; from inexpensive versions sold by monks to travelling pilgrims to costly impressions commissioned by aristocratic patrons and connoisseurs. Whether conceived as independent compositions or reproductions of works in other media, the woodcuts were enjoyed in their own right and admired for their sheer technical brilliance and visual power. They were also an effective means of disseminating popular subjects, kingly images and the celebrated creations of the great Renaissance artists.

ORGANISATION

Renaissance Impressions: Chiaroscuro woodcuts from the Collections of Georg Baselitz and the Albertina, Vienna, has been organised in association with the Albertina, Vienna and the Royal Academy of Arts, London. The exhibition has been curated by Dr Achim Gnann, curator, the Albertina, and by Dr Arturo Galansino, exhibitions curator, Royal Academy of Arts.

The Albertina in Vienna holds one of the world's greatest museum collections of works on paper comprising over 50,000 Old Master drawings and nearly one million graphic works of art ranging from the late Gothic period to the present day. Its chiaroscuro print collection, and indeed the Albertina itself, was formed with the collection of the founder of the museum, Duke Albert of Saxe-Teschen (1738-1822) which was joined by the holdings of the Imperial Court Library after the first World War in 1920, after the demise of the monarchy.

The German artist Georg Baselitz Hon RA (born 1938) has had a long fascination with the print medium, and most specifically chiaroscuro woodcuts which he began collecting in earnest from 1965 when he was first exposed to the works when taking up a scholarship at the German Academy at the Villa Romana in Florence. Some of his own work has been directly informed by the imagery and technique employed in these sixteenth-century woodcuts.

CATALOGUE

The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with contributions from Dr Achim Gnann and Dr David Ekserdjian.

DATES AND OPENING HOURS

Press View: Tuesday 11 March 2014
Open to public: 15 March – 18 June 2014
10am – 6pm daily (last admission 5.30pm)
Fridays until 10 pm (last admission 9.30pm)

ADMISSION

£10 full price; concessions available; children under 12 free; Friends of the RA go free

TICKETS

Tickets for **Renaissance Impressions: Chiaroscuro woodcuts from the Collections of Georg Baselitz and the Albertina, Vienna**, are available daily at the RA or visit www.royalacademy.org.uk. Group bookings: Groups of 10+ are asked to book in advance. Telephone 020 7300 8027 or email groupbookings@royalacademy.org.uk

IMAGES

Publicity images for **Renaissance Impressions: Chiaroscuro woodcuts from the Collections of Georg Baselitz and the Albertina, Vienna**, can be obtained from Picselect, the Press Association's image service for press use. Please register at www.picselect.com and once registered go to the Royal Academy folder in the Arts section of Picselect.

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THE LONDON ORIGINAL PRINT FAIR 2014

Main Galleries

24 – 27 April 2014

Press View: Wednesday 23 April, 5.30 – 6.30pm

Coinciding with **Renaissance Impressions: Chiaroscuro woodcuts from the Collections of Georg Baselitz and the Albertina, Vienna**, the London Original Print Fair (LOPF) will be held in the Main Galleries. Now in its 29th year, LOPF is the world's longest running specialist fair dedicated to prints. With over 50 international exhibitors, the fair offers a rare opportunity to buy affordable works as well as masterpieces from across five centuries.

ABOUT THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF ARTS

The Royal Academy of Arts was founded by King George III in 1768. It has a unique position in being an independent, privately funded institution led by eminent artists and architects whose purpose is to be a clear, strong voice for art and artists. Its public programme promotes the creation, enjoyment and appreciation of the visual arts through exhibitions, education and debate.

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