

A Matter of Tone: Chiaroscuro Woodblock Prints, 1520-1800, July 16, 2004-October 31, 2004

In 1516, Ugo da Carpi petitioned the Venetian Senate for exclusive copyright for "a new way to print *chiaro et scuro* [light and dark]." His technique relied on printing multiple woodblocks over each other on a single piece of paper to create layers evoking the tonal washes of ink drawings. Ugo's interest in tone (the range of values from black through grays to white) paralleled a new and growing contemporary Italian interest in monochromatic drawings, paintings, and façade decorations for houses. Ugo stated that the technique would be "useful to many who take pleasure in drawing" (see Evelyn Lincoln, *The Invention of the Italian Renaissance Printmaker*. New Haven: 2000, p. 72); yet from the start, chiaroscuro prints required the translation of drawing into what became an independent exploration of value, tone, and form in print media.

Despite Ugo's claim to have invented chiaroscuro printmaking, works on paper created with multiple colors and multiple woodblocks dated back more than a half century in northern Europe. The colored initial letters that appeared in German books of the mid-15th century were followed by experiments with chiaroscuro techniques in the first decade of the 16th century. Whereas northern artists typically used a key block to provide a continuous outline, Ugo's innovation dispensed with the key block and relied solely on tone blocks to create an image built from overlapping areas of different tonal values. Chiaroscuro prints were difficult and expensive to produce. They required multiple runs through the press, and the layers of ink were easily printed out of alignment. Only a few artists took up the challenge, and by the 19th century the technique was rarely used; yet the tonal range and virtuoso block-cutting continue to fascinate viewers to this day.

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Hendrick Goltzius, Dutch, 1558-1617

Demogorgon in the Cave of Eternity, from the series *Demogorgon and the Deities*, ca. 1588 - 1590

Chiaroscuro woodcut from three blocks in tan, green, and black

Gift of Mr. Henry D. Sharpe 49.049

The full meaning of this series has yet to be discovered. Helios (Sun) and Nox (Night) represent the heavens. Proserpine and Pluto (not included here) represent the underworld. Oceanus and his wife, Tethys (the pair is sometimes identified as Neptune and Galatea), represent the seas. The seventh, Demogorgon, is the father of all the gods, creator of chaos and order, accompanied by Eternity, the snake with her tail in her mouth, and Mother Nature, who brings forth plants and animals.



RISD MUSEUM

Demogorgon was probably the first print cut and has the most comprehensive line block. As the series progressed, Goltzius increased his use of the tone blocks, reducing the line particularly in Oceanus, perhaps the last woodblocks he carved in the series. There is some debate about whether Goltzius cut all or some of the blocks for his chiaroscuro prints or hired another artist as a blockcutter. In this series, each of the prints except Proserpine is inscribed with the monograms "HG f." or "HG fe.", which stand for "Hendrik Goltzius fecit" (Latin, "made it"), indicating that Goltzius cut these blocks himself. When he printed the blocks, Goltzius experimented with different combinations of colors. The earliest impressions in this series were printed in shades of gray, as is the Museum's Oceanus; then tan, green, and black, such as Proserpine, Helios, Tethys, and Demogorgon; followed by the last impressions in ochre, brown, and black, as seen in Nox.

Paulus Moreelse, Dutch, 1571-1638

Cupid between Two Women, 1612

Chiaroscuro woodcut; two blocks in brown and black

Museum purchase: Gift of Henry D. Sharpe 50.140

Only two chiaroscuro prints are attributed to Moreelse, and the block may have been created by an unknown carver after his design. The Latin phrase contains an elaborate warning against luxury and the judgment of "eternal death," yet the two dancing women have already succumbed to Cupid.



Bartolomeo Coriolano, Italian, fl. 1627-1653

Guido Reni, Italian, 1575-1642

St. Jerome, 1637/40

Chiaroscuro woodcut from three blocks in light blue gray, medium blue gray, and black

Gift of Henry D. Sharpe 50.138

Bartolomeo Coriolano made 18 chiaroscuro prints after Guido Reni's designs, but his work was not always appreciated by that temperamental artist. Contemporary biographer Carlo Cesare Malvasia reported that Reni ordered an engraving of his chiaroscuro painting *Fall of the Giants* from a French engraver "whose work satisfied Guido more than did the wood engravings made on three plates with much effort by Coriolano, who claimed to have corrected and improved many things in his prints and always irritated Guido with them" (Catherine and Robert Enggass, trans. and intro., *The Life*

RISD MUSEUM

of *Guido Reni*. University Park and London: 1980, p. 104). Perhaps Reni also objected to Coriolano's pride, revealed in this print by the inclusion of Coriolano's coat of arms (a cross above three wings), as well as "Eques" ("Knight"), a reference to his title of "Cavaliere di Loreto," given him by Pope Urban VIII.

Antonio Maria Zanetti I, Italian, 1680-1757

Francesco Mazzuoli, called Il Parmigianino, Italian, 1503-1540

St. John and the Lamb, 1723

Chiaroscuro woodcut

Museum purchase: gift of Henry D. Sharpe 50.144

Venetian artist and collector Antonio Maria Zanetti claimed to have revived the art of chiaroscuro printmaking. He is best known for his prints after a group of Parmigianino drawings, which he bought in England in 1720 from the collection of the Earl of Arundel. Although the blocks were mostly cut in the 1720s, Zanetti gathered the prints in several volumes in 1731, 1739, and 1749. Unlike earlier artists, Zanetti often chose vividly contrasting colors rather than varying shades of the same color. As a result, the prints look less like the subtle tonal washes of the drawings.

Antonio Maria Zanetti I, Italian, 1680-1757

Francesco Mazzuoli, called Il Parmigianino, Italian, 1503-1540

Madonna and Child, 1723

Chiaroscuro woodcut from three blocks in tan, green, and black

Museum purchase: gift of Henry D. Sharpe 50.143

RISD MUSEUM

Antonio Maria Zanetti I, Italian, 1680-1757

Francesco Mazzuoli, called Il Parmigianino, Italian, 1503-1540

An Old Man Standing, 1723

Chiaroscuro woodcut

Museum Works of Art Fund 66.297



Antonio Maria Zanetti I, Italian, 1680-1757

Francesco Mazzuoli, called Il Parmigianino, Italian, 1503-1540

Woman with an Amphora, 1724

Chiaroscuro woodcut from three blocks in pink, dark pink, and blue

Museum purchase: Gift of Henry D. Sharpe 50.142



Antonio Maria Zanetti I, Italian, 1680-1757

Francesco Mazzuoli, called Il Parmigianino, Italian, 1503-1540

St. John in the Desert with an Angel and the Lamb, 1725

Chiaroscuro woodcut from two blocks in blue and black

Museum Works of Art Fund 50.232

Hendrick Goltzius, Dutch, 1558-1617

Landscape with a Farmhouse, from the series *Four Small Landscapes*,
ca. 1597 - 1600

Chiaroscuro woodcuts from three blocks in light green, dark green,
and black

Gift of Murray S. Danforth, Jr. 50.153



Hendrik Goltzius made his name as an engraver and started designing chiaroscuro prints around 1588. At this time he was increasingly interested in tonal effects, often drawing with brush and wash, pen and ink on colored papers and then adding white highlights. Over the next 15 years he produced at least 18 chiaroscuro prints.

These imagined landscapes were probably created about 1597, when Goltzius was also designing 14 illustrations for Karel Van Mander's translation of Virgil's pastoral poems, *The Eclogues and Georgics*.

The earliest states were printed on blue paper with just the black line block, before Goltzius added the tone blocks. Bartolomeo Coriolano later copied at least three of the four landscapes in the series, which suggests that they were popular and probably had found a ready market.

Hendrick Goltzius, Dutch, 1558-1617

Cliff on a Seashore, from the series *Four Small Landscapes*, 1597 -
1600

Chiaroscuro woodcuts from three blocks in light green, dark green,
and black

Gift of Henry D. Sharpe 50.154



RISD MUSEUM

Hendrick Goltzius, Dutch, 1558-1617

Proserpine, from the series *Demogorgon and the Deities*, ca. 1588 - 1590

Chiaroscuro woodcut from three blocks in tan, green, and black
Gift of Henry D. Sharpe 50.150



Hendrick Goltzius, Dutch, 1558-1617

Oceanus, from the series *Demogorgon and the Deities*, ca. 1588 - 1590

Chiaroscuro woodcut from three blocks in light, medium, and dark gray

Museum purchase: gift of Henry D. Sharpe 50.148



Hendrick Goltzius, Dutch, 1558-1617

Helios, from the series *Demogorgon and the Deities*, ca. 1588 - 1590

Chiaroscuro woodcut from three blocks in tan, green, and black
Gift of Henry D. Sharpe 50.151



RISD MUSEUM

Antonio da Trento, Italian, ca. 1510-ca. 1550

Niccolò Vicentino, Italian, 1540 - 1550

Francesco Mazzuoli, called Il Parmigianino, Italian, 1503-1540

St. Thomas, ca. 1530

Chiaroscuro woodcut from three blocks in, gray brown, brown, and black

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Bates Lowry 68.004

Hendrick Goltzius, Dutch, 1558-1617

Tethys, from the series *Demogorgon and the Deities*, ca. 1588 - 1590

Chiaroscuro woodcut from three blocks in ochre, brown, and black

Gift of Henry D. Sharpe 50.149



Benedetto Luti, Italian; Florentine, 1666-1724

Venus and Adonis, late 1600s- early 1700s

Pen and brush and brown ink (possibly black originally) over graphite

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.434

Chiaroscuro prints were initially developed to evoke tonal drawings, but such drawings were made in very different styles across the period. Parmigianino's *Antique Head* reveals subtle tonal washes and his characteristic cross-hatching. The 16th-century image of *St. Michael* is typical of a drawing worked with red chalk wash as the middle ground and defined with lighter and darker washes of brown ink and additional white highlights. The highlights are translated in the chiaroscuro prints into the negative space of the white paper. The later drawing, attributed to Benedetto Luti, allows the white of the paper to represent the highlights while middle tones are created by



RISD MUSEUM

clearly worked layers of gray ink, comparable to the chiaroscuro prints in gray tones by Hendrik Goltzius.

The Study of an Antique Head of Julius Caesar is one of a group of drawings by Parmigianino from the same sculpture bust, an earlier collector in the 17th or 18th century mistakenly attributed the drawing as being by Leonardo da Vinci.

Hendrick Goltzius, Dutch, 1558-1617

Mars, 1589 - 1590

Chiaroscuro woodcuts from three blocks in ochre, brown, and black
Gift of Mr. Henry D. Sharpe 50.147

Warrior and Drinker, Mars and Bacchus represent two types of man and two different seasons, as indicated by the signs of the zodiac in each print. Aries (the Ram), usually March 21 to April 19, accompanies the warrior, Mars. The ancient Romans named the month of March for Mars, and started their military campaign season on March 1. Scorpio, usually October 23 to November 21, encompasses the harvest, especially the grape harvest, the time of Bacchus. Goltzius printed the earliest impressions of these images in tan, green, and black; followed by those in ochre, brown, and black; before the last impressions in three shades of brown.



Hendrick Goltzius, Dutch, 1558-1617

Bacchus, 1589 - 1590

Chiaroscuro woodcuts from three blocks in ochre, brown, and black
Gift of Henry D. Sharpe 50.146



John Baptist Jackson, British, 1701-ca. 1780

Paolo Veronese, Italian, 1528-1588

Marriage at Cana, Titiani Vecelii, Paul Caliarrii, Jacobi Robusti et Jacobi de Ponte; Opera Selection a Joanne Baptista Jackson, Angelo, Ligano Coelata et Coloribus Adumbrata, 1740

Chiaroscuro woodcut on two sheets from five blocks in light tan, dark tan, light brown, brown, and dark brown

Museum Collection 47.396.6

After experimenting with chiaroscuro prints in Paris, Jackson developed his methods further in Venice, where in 1735 he designed a cylinder press capable of printing larger sheets under greater pressure. Jackson was introduced to Zanetti, whose prints he later dismissed as “a trifling Performance” (see Jacob Kainen, *John Baptist Jackson: 18th-Century Master of the Color Woodcut*, no. 222, United States National Museum Bulletin, Smithsonian Institution [1962], p. 25).

He was critical particularly of their having been hand-printed, rather than done on a press. Jackson turned to the challenge of reproducing oil paintings to capitalize on the market for images of paintings seen by British and other travelers on the Grand Tour. The ambitious “Venetian Set” reproduces 17 different paintings, often printed on two or more sheets. Commissioned by British consul and renowned collector Joseph Smith, the series sold by subscription and took four and half years to complete. Despite artistic success, it was a commercial failure. Jackson returned to England and started a chiaroscuro wallpaper business in 1752, which also failed.

The pressure of the cylinder press allowed Jackson to emboss the paper deeply with each block, as can be seen in the texture of the sky and columns of *Marriage at Cana*. As a result, the sheets could not be completely flattened without damaging the embossing, and the buckling of these impressions is typical of the series. The differences in the tones of the inks in the two sheets are due to the difficulties of matching exact shades before the invention of commercial standardized inks.

John Baptist Jackson, British, 1701-ca. 1780

Paolo Veronese, Italian, 1528-1588

RISD MUSEUM

The Marriage at Cana, Titiani Vecelii, Paul Caliarii, Jacobi Robusti et Jacobi de Ponte; Opera Selection a Joanne Baptista Jackson, Angelo, Ligano Coelata et Coloribus Adumbrata, 1740

Chiaroscuro woodcut on two sheets from five blocks in light tan, dark tan, light brown, brown, and dark brown

Museum Collection 47.396.7

Bartolomeo Coriolano, Italian, fl. 1627-1653

Guido Reni, Italian, 1575-1642

Mars and Bacchus, ca. 1589-90

Chiaroscuro woodcuts from three blocks in ochre, brown, and black

Gift of Henry D. Sharpe 50.139



Bartolomeo Coriolano, Italian, fl. 1627-1653

Guido Reni, Italian, 1575-1642

Sleeping Cupid, ca. 1640

Chiaroscuro woodcut from two blocks in gray blue and black

Gift of Murray S. Danforth, Jr. 50.365



RISD MUSEUM

Antonio da Trento, Italian, ca. 1510-ca. 1550
Francesco Mazzuoli, called Il Parmigianino, Italian, 1503-1540
Narcissus, ca.1527-30
Chiaroscuro woodcut from two blocks in green and dark gray
Museum Works of Art Fund 69.180

The similarity between Parmigianino's drawing style and Antonio's cutting of the line block have led scholars to conclude that Parmigianino may have drawn directly onto the block before turning it over to the cutter. Typical of Antonio's method, the green tone block provides the middle ground with highlights created by the white of the paper and darks by the hatchings of a gray line block. Other impressions have been printed with blue, brown, or red for the tone block.



Vasari lists this print as *Seated Man from Behind*, but the beautiful young man has been more recently identified as the mythical Narcissus, gazing into a shallow pool. In the foreground is Echo, the nymph who loved Narcissus in vain and gradually wasted away to a pile of rocks, leaving only her voice behind.

Andrea Andreani, Italian, 1558/59-1629
Domenico Beccafumi, Italian, 1486-1551
Eve Kneeling, 1587
Chiaroscuro woodcut from three blocks in tan, brown, and black
Mary B. Jackson Fund 78.103.1

The subtle tones of this print correspond to the colors of the print's model, the ochre and green inlaid marble depiction of Eve on the floor of the Siena cathedral. This impression includes a key block printed in black for the outline and two tone blocks. Early chiaroscuro printmakers often added or subtracted tone blocks to experiment with the effect of the images, and other impressions of this print have as few as one or as many as three tone blocks.

Andrea Andreani, Italian, 1558/59-1629
Jacopo Ligozzi, Italian, 1547-1626
Virtue Attacked by Love, Ignorance, Opinion and Error, 1585
Chiaroscuro woodcut from four blocks in light, medium, and dark ochre and black
Gift of Winslow Ames in memory of Mrs. Malcolm Chace 51.021

RISD MUSEUM

Virtue, who has already dropped her scepter, sword, and scales of justice, battles Love (the cupid), Ignorance (with a mask), Opinion (the woman with donkey's ears), and Error (with batwing ears). This allegory would have appealed to humanist scholars at the court of Medici Grand Duke Francesco I, who would have also appreciated the virtuoso display of figures in complicated poses.

Despite the complexity of the subject and of the fine lines of the block, the printing of the impression reveals some of the problems inherent in chiaroscuro technique. The lightest ochre ink was unevenly absorbed by the paper when printed. The alignment (registration) of the blocks for printing the different colors is noticeably off. Traces of the darkest ochre at the top left corner reveal the accidental printing of the gouge marks in the block for the darkest tone.

Antonio da Trento, Italian, ca. 1510-ca. 1550

Francesco Mazzuoli, called Il Parmigianino, Italian, 1503-1540

The Tiburtine Sibyl Showing the Virgin and Child to Augustus, ca. 1527-1530

Chiaroscuro woodcut from two blocks in blue and black

Gift of Mrs. Robinson and her children in memory of Professor Charles A. Robinson, Jr. 65.061

In his *Lives of the Artists*, 16th-century chronicler Giorgio Vasari lists this print and *Seated Man Seen from Behind* among four chiaroscuro woodcuts by Antonio da Trento, who was hired by Parmigianino to reproduce his designs.

As told in *The Golden Legend*, the Sibyl, a female prophet, revealed to Emperor Augustus a vision of the Virgin and Christ Child, who would eclipse all the Roman gods. This popular tale connected Ancient and Christian Rome, implying foreknowledge of the coming of Christ by the greatest of Roman emperors.

The collaboration between Antonio da Trento and Parmigianino ended unexpectedly. Vasari records that Parmigianino awoke one morning to discover that the printmaker had stolen Parmigianino's drawings and all his prints (or perhaps copper plates and blocks—Vasari's text may be translated either way). The blocks were eventually recovered, but Antonio was never heard from again.



RISD MUSEUM

Giuseppe Cesari, Italian, 1568-1640

Giovanni Caroto, Italian, 1488/1495-1563/1566

St. Michael as the Weigher of Souls Destroying the Forces of the Underworld, 1580 - 1620

Red chalk wash, black chalk, pen and brush with brown ink, white highlights

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.438



Francesco Mazzuoli, called Il Parmigianino, Italian, 1503-1540

Study of an Antique Head of Julius Caesar, ca. 1530/31-1535

Pen and ink, brush and wash, white heightening on laid paper

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 20.517



Hendrick Goltzius, Dutch, 1558-1617

Nox, from the series *Demogorgon and the Deities*, ca. 1588 - 1590

Chiaroscuro woodcut from three blocks in ochre, brown, and black

Gift of Henry D. Sharpe 50.152

