



**SOUTHEASTERN  
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# **REVIEW**

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## Mannered Bodies: European Prints of the Late Renaissance

The San Diego Museum of Art  
San Diego, California  
April 3–June 27, 2010

**M**annered Bodies: European Prints of the Late Renaissance was a small but exquisite exhibition of Mannerist prints. It was put together as a teaching exhibit by John Marciari, the museum's curator of European art, as a result of a class on museum practices he taught at the University of San Diego. The exhibit was conceived and realized in collaboration with these students.<sup>1</sup>

After the decline of the High Renaissance—a fact that coincided with a host of historical events such as the rise of the Reformation in the North, the death of major artists such as Leonardo (1519) and Raphael (1520), the Sack of Rome (1527)—and a general shift in political and social life, the new style of Mannerism emerged. It became common currency for artists across Europe for the remainder of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Many changes occurred in this period; one of the most noticeable was a shift in patronage. While Renaissance patrons consisted mostly of members of the clergy and rich individuals, Mannerism turned out to be a style of the courts. All of a sudden there seemed to be a market for elegantly drawn, slender-limbed figures, intricate compositions, jarring colors, visual puns, and compli-

cated iconographies designed to delight a well-read and well-educated audience. While Mannerism as a style was employed in all media—painting, sculpture, decorative arts—some of the most beautiful examples can be found in prints. Francis Haskell once referred to these works as “the strangest and most exotic blooms.”<sup>2</sup> John Marciari

and his students rework this quotation into “the hot-house flowers of the Renaissance.” This description fits well with the assortment of prints displayed in a small room of the museum with walls painted a deep orange.

Parallel to the emergence of a large amount of graphic art at this time, a growing number of collectors and connoisseurs started to amass sizable collections of drawings and prints. A veritable collection mania developed. Patrons not only collected artworks, decorative objects, personal mottos, puns and *imprese* in all variants but also works on paper, sometimes in large quantities. For these types of patrons Mannerist print makers frequently chose to depict subjects of many kinds in series such as the

four seasons, the temperaments, or the hours of the day. These works sometimes displayed unabashed eroticism, in addition to more traditional subject matter such as religious or mythological themes.

Even though Mannerism began in Italy, the far larger number of Mannerist prints was eventually produced north of the Alps. This fact is reflected in the small number of Italian prints included here. Only two of the



Figure 1. Jacques de Gheyn II after Hendrick Goltzius, *Musketeer* from *Soldiers and Officers*, 1587, engraving, San Diego Museum of Art. (Photo: Courtesy of the British Museum, © Trustees of the British Museum)

prints on display are Italian by origin, one by Giorgio Ghisi, the other by Giovanni Jacopo Caraglio after a design by Rosso Fiorentino showing the figure of Neptune. The print is dated 1526 and shows the work of this pupil of Marcantonio Raimondi at the beginning of his career before his sojourn to Poland. Each work in this exhibit is identified with both the name of the designing artist as well as the printmaker responsible for the execution of the print. Acknowledging this collaboration was intended to highlight the talents of both the creative artist in the composition as well as the interpretation and translation of the subject matter into a new medium by the printmaker. Sometimes these boundaries were somewhat blurred.

Without a doubt, Hendrick Goltzius was the predominant personality in this genre north of the Alps as a designer, master printmaker, and later, as a painter. Some of the earlier prints produced after his designs shown here were two from the series *Soldiers and Officers* (1587). While Goltzius was responsible for the designs, Jacques de Gheyn II was the master printer. The whole portfolio consists of twelve prints; the two appearing in this exhibition are the *Musketeer* (Fig. 1) and the *Arquebusier*. At one point, these brawny warriors were believed to be portraits of the bodyguards of Emperor Rudolf II, to whom these prints were originally dedicated. It is, however, more likely that the whole project had



Figure 2. Hendrick Goltzius, *Frederick de Vries*, 1597, engraving, San Diego Museum of Art. (Photo: Courtesy of the British Museum, © Trustees of the British Museum)

tion of his artworks but also in decisions about iconography. One example from 1589 is an engraving entitled *The Creation of Dry Land and the Seas* executed by Jan Muller.<sup>3</sup> Here we see the third day of creation: land, sea, and plants. “Land” is represented by a man sitting within rich vegetation, while “Sea” is a woman with shells in her hair reclining nearby. The round shape of the finished product reflects the shape of the earth.

In the center of the small exhibition room was a series of the *Four Seasons* from the same year. The design is attributed to Goltzius. The printer is Jacob Matham, a famous engraver, printer, and draftsman, as well as Goltzius’s stepson. All four prints have the unusual

a more general relation to the Dutch civic guard and provided a boost to the national identity. It may even have served as military propaganda in the larger context of Dutch independence. During this decade, Goltzius developed an astonishingly varied inventory of intricate cross hatchings, creating increasing exaggerations and complexity in movement. Meanwhile, the figures with their over-arched backs sometimes appear strangely artificial. They seem to be burdened with a sense of heightened self-importance.

Early on, Hendrick Goltzius surprised with his unusual solutions not only when it came to the execu-

round format and show evidence of a lot of symbolism. The figures symbolizing the seasons grow older as the year progresses. The landscapes in the background include a multitude of elements that don't reflect mythological or allegorical symbolism. Rather, they add the theme of the "Labors of the Seasons" derived from the calendar pages of medieval manuscripts. The landscape settings themselves vary from print to print and add to the perception that the entire series is intended to present a comprehensive view of the laws of nature, the ways of human life, and the world in general.

During his journey to Italy in 1590-91, the already internationally-known Goltzius absorbed the art of the Italian Renaissance. The San Diego exhibit presents one design inspired by such Italian models, an "Isaiah" figure after Raphael from 1592. In the same year, Goltzius tried his burin at a design of Polidoro da Caravaggio. He created a series of prints imitating the Italian artist's frescos on the facades of Roman palazzi. The original frescos are mostly gone today, but during the Late Renaissance, accounts of young artists using them for educational purposes were plentiful. The exhibit includes the figure of "Sol" and a "Jupiter" in this context. These and other designs made following his journey demonstrate that Goltzius began to use more classical proportions while still showing a love for exuberant virtuosity. This



**Figure 3.** Jan Saenredam after Abraham Bloemaert, *Abijah*, 1604, engraving, San Diego Museum of Art. (Photo: Courtesy of the British Museum, © Trustees of the British Museum)

“Perchance you do not understand what this print means. Here is the meaning in a few words. Simplicity seeks and loves fidelity. The faithful dog and the simple boy, whom Goltzius has brought to life in copper with a skilled hand, like that of Phidias.” Goltzius compares his artistic prowess to that of the classical sculptor and introduces more abstract concepts such as fidelity—a sentiment often attributed to a dog—and simplicity.

In 1604, Jan Saenredam created an interesting pair of prints depicting the life of Old Testament prophet Abijah. The designs are attributed to Abraham Bloemaert and are fascinating in many respects. At first glance, the figure of Abijah seems to be an odd choice but it makes sense

tendency led him to branch out into the field of oil painting after the turn of the century.

An interesting engraving by Goltzius from 1597 depicts Frederick de Vries, a young boy and son of fellow artist Dirck de Vries, with a pet spaniel (Fig. 2). The depiction of the child is awkward, his proportions appear like those of a dwarf. The general giddiness of the child seems strangely out of place. In contrast to the depiction of the boy, the artist took greater care with the animal. One reason for this might be the fact that the dog was Goltzius' own pet and more readily available for careful studies. The inscription below reveals some of the meaning of the work but certainly not all of it:

when considering that Holland was now largely Protestant. According to the Book of Kings, the prophet Ahijah, though a pillar of righteousness, tried to convince Jeroboam to engage in idolatrous actions. Idolatry was one of the major points of criticism that divided the movement of the Reformation from the mainstream branch of Christianity represented by the Pope in Rome. A storyline that addresses the subject would have been seen as a markedly different interpretation of this issue. Another idea that was abandoned by the Reformation was the worship of saints. The depictions of saints were closely linked to the new view of idolatry and the practice as a whole was deemed undesirable. But worship

of saints was practiced for many centuries before the advent of Protestantism, especially by the lower ranks of society. These habits die slowly even when religious, social and political circumstances change. This series of prints offers a new narrative for an older story—this time without a saint as the main protagonist. In one of the prints, Ahijah divides his cloak and hands it to a poor man on the road (Fig. 3). The whole setup is strikingly



**Figure 4.** Hendrick Goltzius, *Great Hercules*, 1589, engraving, collection of Norman Leitman and Todd Butler. (Photo: Courtesy of the British Museum, © Trustees of the British Museum)

ingly similar to the depiction of Saint Martin who also shares his cloak with a beggar. A solution in which a Roman saint can be changed into an Old Testament prophet might have helped the target audiences—probably newly reformed Protestants—to associate the new philosophies of the Reformation with imagery known from previous centuries. Since the depiction of a saint was no longer acceptable, the same iconography was used in a new interpretation.

Most of the 33 prints exhibited here came from the museum's own collection; some were fairly recent gifts. Two of the more spectacular pieces—including Hendrick Goltzius' *Great Hercules*

(Fig. 4)<sup>4</sup>—were on loan from local collectors Norman Leitman and Todd Butler. According to curator John Marciari, the exhibition presents not a “hard and fast” chronology of Mannerist prints but, rather, a counterpoint to the lack of Mannerist paintings in the museum's collection. The result is a lovely encounter altogether.

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#### Endnotes

1. Students involved included: Kelsey Day, Chase Doolan, Alexander Karol, Katherine Morris, Megan Pehl, and Jordan Wendt.
2. The original quote, “...some of the strangest and most exotic blooms...,” is found in Francis Haskell, “Painting and the Counter-Reformation,” *Burlington Magazine*, 100 (November 1958): 396-399.

3. Jan Muller was the son of Harmen Muller, a successful Amsterdam printer, engraver and publisher.
4. This work is extensively discussed in the Goltzius literature. For some background information on auction values see: Sotheby's London auction, December 6, 2001 (accessed Monday, June 7, 2010), <http://www.sothebys.com/en.html>.