

Goltzius and the Third Dimension

Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617) was one of the most prolific and respected printmakers working in the Netherlands in the late sixteenth century. The prints in this exhibition, many of them executed during a period of intense activity in the late 1580s, demonstrate both his extraordinary virtuosity and his remarkable knowledge of human anatomy. For the first time, these prints are being shown together with a number of bronze statuettes by the Dutch sculptor Willem Danielsz. van Tetrode (ca. 1525–1580). Similarities between the prints and the sculptures—the range of poses, the hugely muscled male nudes, and the facial types—suggest that Goltzius knew, and perhaps owned, bronzes by Tetrode. This exhibition explores the relationship between the two-dimensional engravings and woodcuts and the three-dimensional bronzes and tests the theory that Goltzius employed sculptural models by Tetrode in designing some of his most powerful images of male strength.

This exhibition was made possible by the generous loan of thirty-three prints and three bronzes from the Collection of the Hearn Family Trust.

Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617)

Despite Goltzius's decision to abandon engraving in favor of painting in 1599, his reputation rests almost exclusively upon his achievements as a graphic artist. In his Haarlem workshop, Goltzius developed a remarkable engraving technique, using a systematic network of overlapping curved lines to describe the swellings and recesses of the human body. He also excelled as a maker of chiaroscuro woodcuts, in which light and shade are suggested by printing several tones from a number of different woodblocks. Powerfully built male and female figures like those in Goltzius's prints and in Tetrode's statuettes, with their bulging muscles and intense facial expressions, appear in the work of other sixteenth-century artists, most notably Bartholomeus Spranger (1546–1611). A court painter of Emperor Rudolf II, Spranger specialized in mythological and allegorical figure compositions, and his paintings influenced a whole generation of northern artists. After Goltzius traveled to Italy in 1590, his work became more restrained in tone, his figures less emphatically anatomical than the mannered nudes associated with Tetrode and Spranger.

Willem Daniëlsz. van Tetrode (ca. 1525–1580)

Willem Daniëlsz. van Tetrode was born in Delft but spent several years in Italy from the mid-1540s, working in the Florentine workshop of Benvenuto Cellini and then in Rome under Guglielmo della Porta. He returned to the Netherlands sometime after 1566, perhaps attracted back by the lure of commissions to replace church statuary that had been destroyed during an outbreak of iconoclasm. Tetrode introduced Dutch collectors to the genre of small bronze statuettes that were fashionable in Italy. During a second wave of iconoclasm in 1573, he fled to Cologne, where he carried out several commissions for prominent citizens. Tetrode is less well known today than he was in the sixteenth century because relatively few of his works have survived, and art historians are only now attempting to reconstruct his oeuvre.

Living and Breathing Sculptures

In *Het Schilder-boeck* (*The Painter's Book*), a biographical dictionary and treatise on painting published in 1604, the Netherlandish artist Karel van Mander wrote that Goltzius and other artists working in Haarlem during the 1580s drew “from life, to which end [they] chose from the best and most beautiful living and breathing antique sculptures.” The explanation of this puzzling phrase is that artists in Goltzius’s circle did not usually work from living models. Instead, they learned about human anatomy by studying a variety of other sources: ancient sculptures, modern casts, and reproductions in the form of prints and drawings. They became very skilled at borrowing limbs from one source, a torso from another, a head from a third, and such, combining these elements to produce interesting and original poses. This makes it rather difficult to identify specific models with any degree of reliability, but compelling visual evidence in this gallery suggests that Goltzius referred to Tetrode’s bronzes, among other sources, for some of the figures in his series of *Roman Heroes* and for several other engravings and woodcuts executed between 1586 and 1588.

The Roman Heroes

This series of ten engravings, dedicated in 1586 to the Emperor Rudolf II, consists of two title pages and eight full-length figures based on historical subjects described in Livy's *History of Rome*. The Latin verses inscribed in the lower margins suggest that Goltzius's prints were intended for a learned humanist audience. In his *Roman Heroes*, Goltzius perfected a format he used again three years later in his *Great Hercules*: the main figures are placed insistently in the foreground, with smaller images of their great deeds relegated to the distance. The active poses, aggressive nudity, and distinctive facial expressions of these heavily muscled figures bear especially close comparison to Tetrode's bronze statuettes.

Sculptural Models

Specific pieces of sculpture are themselves the subjects of a number of engravings by Goltzius and his pupils, most notably Jan Muller (1571–1628). Occasionally, these sculptures are shown from several different angles so that the viewer is presented with an experience similar to observing a statue in the round. The images bear inscriptions identifying the piece of sculpture to which each engraving refers, suggesting that the prints were intended to serve an educational as well as an antiquarian function. Reproductive engraving was highly respected in the late sixteenth century, and these prints would have been immensely valuable both to art students and to collectors and connoisseurs.