

Mayer Print Gallery Exhibitions December to April

Opening December 26 and on view through February 20 is the exhibition Stanley William Hayter, Master Printer. A large gift from Mark and Helen Hooper and works donated by other generous supporters provided the Elvehjem with a collection of seventy-eight prints by Hayter. Work in this exhibition spans his career from before Atelier 17, through its New York years, and into the mid 1970s. They show his development from such early conservatively composed and inked works as the small engraving Rue dareau of 1927, through his various explorations of color printing through the 1930s and 1940s exemplified in the important Cinq personnages of 1946.

Hayter, born in the first year of the twentieth century, brought to traditional printmaking the revolutionary excitement that the century visited on painting and sculpture. He pursued his career as a chemist while he studied art and held his first exhibition of paintings at his company's headquarters in 1925. Having passed this milestone, he moved to Paris to study art full time. Here he first learned to engrave, a skill that he practiced the rest of his life, together with other such traditional printmaking techniques as aquatint, soft ground, and lithography. In 1933, after exhibiting with the surrealists, he started his own printmaking workshop in Paris at 17 rue Campagne-première, an address that gave the name to his famous Atelier 17 workshop. Atelier 17 became a hub of printmaking activity, especially for Hayter's surrealist compatriots; Miró, Ernst, and even Picasso visited regularly. Chagall, Dali, Pollock, and Motherwell all worked with Hayter at Atelier 17 over the next twenty years.

Hayter's unusual combination of experience as a chemist and devotion to modern ideas about art made his workshop an inviting place for these artists. He had the skills that come from classical training combined with the adventurous outlook of a contemporary artist. This made him a sympathetic collaborator, who could bring his considerable technical experience to problems but also let him share his innovative viewpoint. His art reflected these same qualities. Starting in a fairly conservative vein, he quickly transformed his style, using traditional techniques at times but continually experimenting to discover new effects. In the 1950s and 1960s his prints incorporated such techniques developed at Atelier 17 as viscosity printing, which involved creating a deeply bitten plate that could be inked to different depths by different thicknesses of inks, applied by harder or softer rollers.

Hayter's lifelong devotion to developing new techniques for creating and printing from metal plates was directly related to his belief that "a technique is an action in which the imagination of the user is excited," and that this excitement, arising from the realizing the potentials of a given material, is crucial to the creation of art.

Piranesi's Views of Rome opens in Mayer Gallery on February 26 and continues through April 23. The exhibition shows prints selected from two important series, Alcune Vedute di Archi Trionfali (Some Views of Triumphal Arches), and Vedute di Roma. Vedute, literally "views" were a style of print popularized in the early 1700s. They may be literal scenes, or they may be partly or wholly made up from the artist's imagination. Piranesi spent much of his productive life recording and embellishing such scenes of Rome. His first important success was his publication of Alcune Vedute di Archi Trionfali which brings together views of the most famous sites in Rome and from elsewhere in Italy.

These exquisite images celebrate the Rome familiar to tourists, and Piranesi received much support during this period from the British community in Rome.

Born in 1720, Giovanni Battista Piranesi grew up in Venice. He was probably educated by his uncle, an architect and engineer. He studied with the most important set designers of the day, the Bibiena family. These influences are clear from his earliest surviving works, which consistently take architecture as their subject. During his formative years he learned the history of Rome and fell in love with its grandeur. He first traveled to Rome in 1740 as a designer to a court noble. Sickness forced him to return to Venice in 1744 for a year, but he returned to live in Rome for the rest of his life. His reputation grew for his creations of views of his beloved city. During this same period, Piranesi began work on the project that occupied him for the remainder of his life, the much larger Vedute di Roma. Eventually numbering 135 plates, the vedute incorporate Piranesi's skill as a printmaker and his experience as a student of architecture and reflect his keen interest in the contemporary archeological explorations of Rome. In other series he records inventories of the surviving pieces of sculpture and tomb inscriptions.

Piranesi was a passionate man, and his dedication to the Roman past was not always tempered by careful judgment, as in his attempts to prove that Roman forms of architecture must have developed from the traditions of the Etruscans, rather than the Greeks. Still, Piranesi's vision of Rome was so widely dispersed across Europe that it is sometimes credited with inspiring whole generations to make the pilgrimage to Rome to bask in the antique. Sometimes they were not entirely satisfied, as when Goethe toured Italy, and found that the baths of Diocletian and Caracalla did not live up to Piranesi's views of them. Nevertheless, Piranesi's views continue to impress with their extraordinary perspectives and unmistakable style.

@Cutline: Stanley William Hayter (British, 1901–1988), Cinq personnages, 1946, engraving and soft ground etching, 14 15/16 x 23 7/8 in. Gift of Mark and Helen Hooper, 1977.1384

Giovanni Battista Piranesi (Italian, 1720–1778), The So-called Temple of Bacchus, Now the Church of S. Urban, 1758, etching and engraving, 16 x 24 3/8 in. Transfer from State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 05.1.38