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Veduta del Tempio di Antonino e Faustino in Campo Vaccino

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Abstract

Giovanni Battista Piranesi is one of history's best etchers and architects. His two main series of copper etchings, *I Carceri* (The Prisons) and *Vedute* (The Views) spread out across the European continent and beyond both during his life and after his death. The "Wonders of Nature and Artifice" exhibition at Schmucker Art Gallery is lucky to have one of his original prints from the *Vedute* series generously on loan, from the Collection of Professor Charles F. Emmons, Professor of Sociology here at Gettysburg College. The print sizes in at 35 inches by 25 and a half inches, depicting a temple-church combination that stands in the Roman Forum with 18th century Rome stretching out behind it, and various denizens of the 19th century surrounding the structure. The title of the print, *Veduta del Tempio di Antonino e Faustina in Campo Vaccino* is a very literal one, translating to "View of the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina in Campo Vaccino", Campo Vaccino being a cow pasture that became the Roman Forum before the area was excavated. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *I Carceri*, *Vedute*, Rome, etching, Temple of Artemis

Disciplines

Ancient, Medieval, Renaissance and Baroque Art and Architecture | Fine Arts | History of Science, Technology, and Medicine | Industrial and Product Design | Intellectual History

Comments

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Veduta del Tempio di Antonino e Faustino in Campo Vaccino

By Emma Conant-Hiley

Piranesi made prints that show off his view of what the Eternal City looks like, both in its glory and as a decaying monument to past ideals.



Piranesi's *Veduta del Tempio di Antino e Faustina in Campo Vaccino*, 1748-1774

Etching, 35 x 25 1/2 in. On loan from the Collection of Professor Charles F. Emmons – Scan by Carolyn Sautter and Sydney Gush, Special Collections, Gettysburg College

Giovanni Battista Piranesi is one of history's best etchers and architects. His two main series of copper etchings, *I Carceri* (The Prisons) and *Vedute* (The Views) spread out across the European continent and beyond both during his life and after his death. The "Wonders of Nature and Artifice" exhibition at Schmucker Art Gallery is lucky to have one of his original prints from the *Vedute* series generously on loan, from the Collection of Professor Charles F. Emmons, Professor of Sociology here at Gettysburg College. The print sizes in at 35 inches by 25 and a half inches, depicting a temple-church combination that stands in the Roman Forum with 18th century Rome stretching out behind it, and various denizens of the 19th century surrounding the structure. The title of the print, *Veduta del Tempio di Antonino e Faustina in Campo Vaccino* is a very literal one, translating to "View of the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina in Campo Vaccino", Campo Vaccino being a cow pasture that became the Roman Forum before the area was excavated.

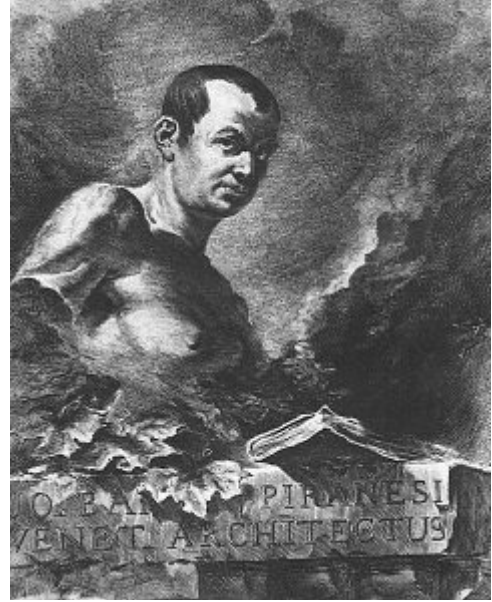
Professor Emmons was motivated to buy the print in 1978 at Eastern Kentucky University, as he had seen the temple himself at age 19 and was fascinated by the building, much as Piranesi was himself, for the building is not a ruin alone, but contains a Byzantine church, La chiesa di San

Lorenzo in Miranda de Speciali, as noted and labeled by Piranesi on the print, and is more well preserved than other structures in the area.

Giovanni Battista Piranesi, the Artist

Giovanni Battista Piranesi was born in Mogliano Veneto in the Northeast of the Italian Peninsula, not far from Venice, in 1720. The man “was first and foremost an architect, although he displayed a vast repertoire of exceptional skills in various technical fields and arts”.¹ It is said that Piranesi had little chance of being anything but an architect and printer as his father was a stone mason and the region of Mogliano Veneto has produced every greatest architect after Michelangelo.² However, Piranesi rejected the region of his birth, for the metropolis of Rome.

At age 20 Piranesi was given the prestigious position of the Venetian ambassador to Rome and the new Pope, Pope Benedict XIV thanks to the intervention of Piranesi’s brother, a monk³. This position allowed Piranesi to travel to what he believed to be the center of civilization, and by moving there, wanted “to restore the architecture of Rome, and thus its way of life and society, to the standards of ancient times”.⁴ Piranesi often expressed his disgust at the decay of morals that his modern society experienced; modern society “had become degraded, corrupt, frivolous, and unworthy of its past. His goal was nothing less than the restoration of the Eternal City to the magnificence of its ancient splendor”.⁵ Piranesi wanted his work to assist people in finding the correct, yet ambiguous morals and order that were expressed during the utopian society that was Ancient Rome.



Engraved self portrait of Giovanni Battista Piranesi, circa 1760, scan by Web Gallery of Art, Public Domain, Wikimedia Commons



Etching by Giuseppe Vasi (and possibly Piranesi), Scan by Wikimedia Commons

both, including a few of the *Vedute* prints.

The man trained in etching in both Rome, during his stint as the Venetian ambassador, and in Venice upon his return to the area three years later, when he ran out of money.⁶ While in Rome he trained either under or with a Sicilian man named Giuseppe Vasi. The men shared many things including both technique and tempers, clashing often, which meant that, though their work together was iconic, Piranesi left Vasi’s workshop after only a short stay.⁷ Historians still have problems discerning whether a print is the work of Piranesi, Vasi, or

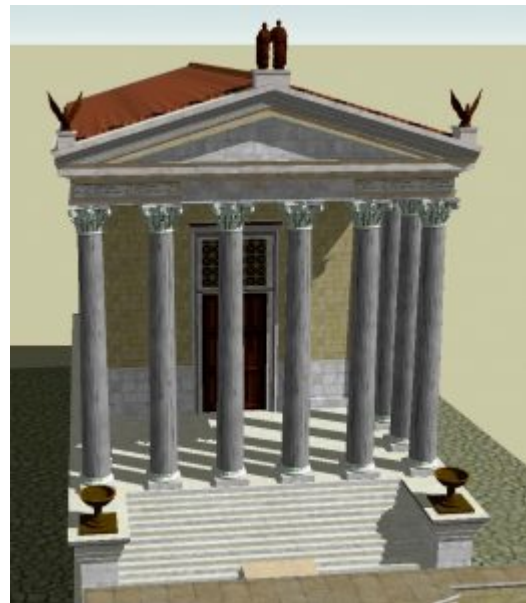
After further training in etching in Venice, Piranesi returned to Rome, now age 32, with his wife and her hefty dowry. He used this sizable amount of money to buy copper plates, which he etched and published the on his own. It was an expensive undertaking especially after his sponsor backed out of the deal, and yet he continued the unusually expensive work with no other help.⁸ Only Maria Sybilla Merian has published something as expensive on her own, and his prints were more successful than hers immediately.

Piranesi's prints were successful not only in Italy itself, but throughout the European Continent and beyond. His prints were taken as fact, rather than a commentary and many were disappointed when they saw the true ruins. His prints made the ruins bigger than life, with a grandeur worthy of the Gods.

The Temple

The temple was built in 141 CE by Emperor Antoninus Pius for his wife after her death and consecration; her cult was one of the more popular ones during that era. After Antoninus Pius died his successor, Emperor Marcus Aurelius rededicated the temple to both Antoninus and Faustina, complete with statues of the couple at the apex of the pediment.⁹ The first and original inscription read solely "Divae Faustina Ex S.C.", translated as "To the Divine Faustina by decree of the Senate"; Marcus Aurelius added the second half of the inscription, placed on a line above the first "Divo Antonino et" after Antoninus' death and defied him as well, though his cult was never as popular as his wife's cult. The entire inscription read "Divo Antonino et Faustina Ex S.C.", translating as "To the Divine Antoninus and the Divine Faustina by decree of the Senate".

The temple was built with Ancient Roman architecture, which includes a porch, surrounded by columns with corinthian caps, and a singular main room. There were statues of Antoninus and Faustina sitting atop the apex of the pediment of the temple (the triangle) with statues on the corners of the building. The pediment, statues, and roof, as well as most of the original main building no longer stand. In its place is a baroque church, which contains a single nave that sits on the footprint of the original temple. The façade is unusual in terms of baroque architecture, as it is far simpler than many churches of the same style, such as St. Peter's Basilica and St. Peter's Square; however it does contain the use of the extension of the face up into the space beyond the building, as well as ornamented swirls that end curves and false capitals of false columns that run along the façade. The door of the church is rectangular, though decorations surrounding it create a sense of an arch.



3d recreation of the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina as it was when it was made, A derivative work of a 3D model by Lasha Tskhondia – L.VII.C.

foreground early in [Piranesi's] works"¹¹. This print is the opposite of that. The sky is covered in clouds, distinctly unclear, while the foreground is brightly highlighted.

The Vedute series was aimed at the rich tourists that filled Rome as part of their *Grand Tour*. He allowed them to have a piece of the city to bring home as a souvenir, as well as to spread throughout the continent, indeed the world.¹² Piranesi used his architectural background to reimagine the ruins, and record them for future generations.

“When I saw in Rome how most of the remains of ancient buildings lay scattered through gardens and sloughed fields where they dwindled day by day...I resolved to preserve them by any means of engravings. I have therefore drawn these ruins with all possible exquisiteness.”
~Giovanni Battista Piranesi¹³

This series is not what Piranesi wanted the city to be. While, the success of the series was quite gratifying, as he had the entire series printed using the money from his wife's dowry, Piranesi wanted the people viewing his views to see how the city and more were crumbling around them, and therefore gave them a piece of himself in the prints, *his* view and desires for Rome.

Moralistic Implications of Piranesi's Print

The print is a commentary on society in Rome, and how the morals of the city. The foreground contains the temple, the people, and everything in between. The background is the sky and the buildings built behind the temple. The temple is shown from a corner angle, with its façade gazing off into a grand distance that the viewer cannot see, while the its surroundings are both modern for Piranesi and crumbling. People, the rich further away from the temple and the poor against the temple, surround it, while another group of men work furiously at the remains of a cart and wheel. A cross stands at the apex of the temple's Baroque architecture.

The temple portico is in ruins, as it is in modern day, with a Baroque façade tacked up front and the porch built to accommodate the church. However the temple is depicted as larger than it should be in reality. Each column is measured at 56 feet, from base to capital. The temple is depicted as partially buried, which is what Piranesi saw when he was creating the prints. The Roman Forum, where the temple is located, was not excavated until 1803, almost thirty years after Piranesi's death. The building is still a church, though there are no masses held and the church is only open two hours a week. There are current minor restoration and archaeological digs on the buildings currently occurring, and the building is dug out to reveal more stairs and base of the building in modern day than were displayed during the 18th century.

The scale of the temple is off. Comparing the height of the



Temple of Antoninus and Faustina, front view, 2008, photo by Wknight94, Wikimedia Commons

columns (56 feet) to the people that surround it, giving the temple a grandeur that it would not otherwise have. This scaling is common within Piranesi's work, as people become smaller, the size of children, horses are the size of dogs, and "the most modest of Baroque buildings assumes heroic proportions".¹⁴ It would take more than nine men of six feet tall to make the height of the temple in reality, while in the print, a man further away from the temple stands more than nine of him tall of a partially buried column, where it should take fewer.

The building was one of many decaying throughout the forum, though it is one of few from Piranesi's *Vedute* that has survived throughout the centuries, due to the upkeep from the church. The building was not only a church, but also housed a school of medicine funded by the Roman Catholic Church. Piranesi despised this type of schooling, and encroachment of his era onto the perfection of the past and displaying a sense of regret within this print, and others.¹⁵

The temple is a monument to the eternal city that Piranesi so revered, while the church that is attached to the temple lords over the temple as a reminder to the current standards. Where the temple is in ruins, the church, a modern building to him, is in perfect condition, complete with a gate spanning the stairs that allow entrance, instead barring anything from ruining the current decaying morals. Anything modern to him was incredibly flawed and needed to stay away from the Ancient Roman architecture.¹⁶



Detail of Men

To compliment the stone representation, Piranesi uses human ones. Various decrepit figures lean against the temple and beg, as the man sitting on the stairs is doing, or resting with his head down and covered in rags, as the man near the protruding corner of the temple is doing. These are the morals and order of Ancient Rome and the eternal city that Piranesi so revered.¹⁷ In contrast various well dressed groups of people stand away from the temple, but gaze upon the glory that once was, only to soon ignore it when they leave the scene, should they not be frozen within the print, for

they are people of the modern (18th century) era, tourists who are traveling on their Grand

Tour.¹⁸ They point at the spectacle but have no concept, nor do they want to, of what the temple really means, what it means to be part of the city.

The temple is a remnant of the Great Roman Empire. Piranesi saw the world as corrupt, and decaying so he created the world he saw, *his* Rome, rather than the reality of what was physically there. He was not "interested in a photographic scenic postcard reality...but imaged reality imbued with a personal vision and a philosophy of being".¹⁹ Piranesi presented his distorted vision, as he wanted to change the perception of the populace, to make them realize where they were going wrong, and return to past order, however rather the opposite happened and people flocked to Rome as his prints were disseminated throughout Europe, only for these same tourists to be disappointed as the majesty they viewed within the prints was not the reality they

experienced.²⁰ Piranesi's hands were magic with carving tools, however his prints could not return the Rome of his era to the indeterminate, yet still idolized morality and order of Ancient Rome.

In a Renaissance Cabinet

This print fits well into a Renaissance era Wonder Cabinet as it brings the classics into a personal collection, even if the owner could not have the physical object. They settled for a piece of art that depicted such. These prints were also proof of how well traveled the owner and proprietor of the cabinet was, having obtained a print *from Rome*, done by a Roman artist. No collection would be complete without such a perfect and majestic Piranesi print among the works of art that adorn the collector's wall.



Detail of wall in the "Wonders of Nature and Artifice Exhibit", Photo courtesy of Felicia Else

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3. Ibid, 280.
4. Luigi Ficacci, *Giovanni Battista Piranesi* (New York: Taschen, 2016), 8.
5. Ibid, 7-8.
6. A. Hyatt Mayor, "Piranesi" *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 33, no 12 (1938): 280.

7. Myra Nan Rosenfeld, "Picturesque to Sublime: Piranesi's Stylistic and Technical Development from 1740 to 1761" *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 4 (2006), 55.
8. A. Hyatt Mayor, "Piranesi" *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 33, no 12 (1938): 282.
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11. Myra Nan Rosenfeld, "Picturesque to Sublime: Piranesi's Stylistic and Technical Development from 1740 to 1761" *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 4 (2006), 63.
12. Grishin Sasha. 2014. "ROME: PIRANESI'S VISION." *Craft Arts International* no. 91: 100-101.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Zarucchi, Jeanne Morgan. "The Literary Tradition of *Ruins of Rome* and a New Consideration of Piranesi's Staffage Figures", *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35 no. 3 (2012). 377.
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18. Grishin Sasha. 2014. "ROME: PIRANESI'S VISION." *Craft Arts International* no. 91: 100-101.
19. Sasha Grishin, "Rome: Piranesi's Vision" *Craft Arts International* 91 (2014), 100.
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