Views of European Capitals:

Piranesi, Méryon and Their Contemporaries in Italy and France

Talia Matury-Vacaro
Exhibition Thesis Proposal
Kenneth Bendiner, Primary Reader
October 14, 2008
Statement of the Problem to be Addressed

As early as the first century CE the subject of towns and cities has been present in Western Art. However, more often than not, the town was included as a backdrop to the primary subject matter. With the archeological discoveries of Herculaneum and Pompeii in the first half of the eighteenth century and the Haussmannization of Paris under Napoléon III, the cityscape began to be popularized as a significant genre in its own right. I would like to curate an exhibition which focuses on the cityscape and how it is portrayed in eighteenth and nineteenth century Italian and French prints. The two primary artists to be represented will be Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Charles Méryon. Their works will be displayed in conjunction with those by Canaletto, Félix-Hilaire Buhot, Auguste Lepère and others. My catalogue will contextualize images of cityscapes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries within the framework of historical and societal developments including the expansion of tourism.

Rationale

Most of the artists I will be dealing with are well known. Much scholarship has addressed the works and lives of the artists represented in this show. Since 2000, however, few major art museums have held exhibitions specifically pertaining to eighteenth and nineteenth century Italian and French prints depicting cityscapes. Both Piranesi and Méryon have been featured in several exhibitions across the United States throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. However, with the exception of a show held at the Charles Allis Museum in 2007, there has not been an exhibition with my focus in the greater Milwaukee area for at least a decade. To my knowledge, an exhibition held at the Rutgers University Art Gallery in 1971 is the most recent show to

focus on Piranesi and Méryon. The catalogue emphasizes the desire of Piranesi and Méryon to aggrandize the architecture of the eras which preceded their own: ancient Rome and Medieval Paris respectively, through "architectural interpretation." With my exhibition, I hope to take this one step further by acknowledging what effects the intended function of the work and cultural and historical happenings of the period may have had on the appearance of the artists’ cityscapes.

This thematically-based exhibition will show various ways in which printmakers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries depicted the subject of the city. The plates to be displayed offer a variety of viewpoints ranging from panoramas to individual architectural elements. Although all of the images are "accurate" depictions of the actual physical spaces represented, the artists embellished the scenes, whether it be making certain objects appear larger than one would find them in reality or combining multiple viewpoints, to emphasize the artists’ intended meaning.

Although the two primary artists of the exhibition lived roughly a century apart and worked in different countries, they may be linked through the French Academy and changes in style at the turn of the century. Piranesi spent his early career in Rome working with students from the French Academy in the city. Like many antiquarians of his day, Piranesi felt that classic art and architecture should hold precedence over other forms. This preference was reflected in the Neoclassical ideals of the Academy in France at the turn of the 18th century. Given the pervasive authority of the Academy in French art and societal circles, it is without doubt that Méryon and his contemporaries were aware of the classical trend. Méryon’s work may be seen as a reaction against not only

---

the rapidly changing city under Haussmann but also as a reaction against the Academic institution and its established paradigm.

The artists to be represented and their work reflect significant societal and historical changes which occurred from the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries in Europe. Currently my preliminary research efforts have been unable to locate much scholarship specifically pertaining to Italian and French cityscape as a genre within the context of historical happenings. It seems that most scholars tend to focus on specific artists and their work rather than the subject matter and its transformations throughout the ages. J. G. Links’s comprehensive history of the evolution of the townscape in art discusses the theme only through the eighteenth century. His interpretation of the sole object of the work produced by Canaletto may be applied to that of Piranesi, Méryon and the other artists to be displayed: “to portray the city […] in all her splendour…”

Although each artist employed a different stylistic technique to create this effect and had a different vision of what exactly made their respective cities splendid, they each did so by representing specific architectural structures in the printed media.

As mentioned above, Piranesi esteemed the Classical elements of Rome to be the city’s splendour. This preference is often interpreted as a reaction against the Baroque style of the preceding century. His etchings of ancient Rome acted as a springboard from which the primacy of the Classical was developed. In turn, this development heavily influenced the Romantic Classicism movement in architecture promoted by J.-N.-L.

---

Durand and practiced in Paris in the early nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{5}

Henry-Russell Hitchcock refers to the Second Empire mode of architecture, which commenced around 1850 in France, as "the heir [...] of the Romantic Classical."\textsuperscript{6} The style of the Second Empire was the definition of cosmopolitan modernity, which ironically was exemplified by the use of historicism. The transformation of the French capital coincided with the height of Méryon’s career during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. His work dealt with the conflict between this modern historicism under Napoléon III and the pre-existing historical buildings of Paris.

**Procedure**

Most of the works I plan to show in the exhibition will come directly from institutions in the Milwaukee area. The *Vedute* etchings by Piranesi are in the UWM collection. Many of the Méryon, Canaletto, Rivière and Buhot works will be loaned from the Milwaukee Art Museum. The Haggerty Museum of Art, the Chazen Museum of Art and the Art Institute of Chicago will also be contacted in an attempt to receive additional works. I will also consult travel books of the time, such as those written by Maximilien Misson and Joseph Addison of the eighteenth century and Baedekers from the nineteenth century. Such guides may also be included as objects to be displayed in the exhibition.

\textsuperscript{5} Henry-Russell Hitchcock. *Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Pelican Books, 1987), 47. Durand was a professor at the École Polytechnique, originally called the École centrale des travaux publics, established in 1794. His *Précis des leçons d’architecture donnée à l’École Polytechnique* (1802-5) published in two volumes was widely seen as a sort of manual for Romantic Classicism in architecture in the first half of the nineteenth century.

\textsuperscript{6} Hitchcock, *Architecture*, 192.
Preliminary List of Potential Works for Exhibition  
Note: All measurements are of the sheet size.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Works of Art</th>
<th>Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Piranesi, Giovanni Battista  
*Veduta della Piazza Basilica di S. Giovanni in Laterno*  
Etching on paper, (24 7/8" x 35 3/8") | UWM              |
| Piranesi, Giovanni Battista  
*Veduta Della Piazza del Popolo*  
Etching on paper, (24 6/8" x 35 5/16") | UWM              |
| Piranesi, Giovanni Battista  
*Veduta del Tempio di Giove Tonante*  
Etching on paper, (24 3/4" x 35 1/4") | UWM              |
| Piranesi, Giovanni Battista  
*Veduta del Tempio di Cibele a Piazza Della Bocca Della Verita*  
Etching on paper, (24 6/8" x 35 5/16") | UWM              |
| Piranesi, Giovanni Battista  
*Veduta dell'Isola Tiberina*  
Etching on paper, (24 6/8" x 35 5/16") | UWM              |
| Piranesi, Giovanni Battista  
*Veduta di Campo Vaccino*  
Etching on paper, (24 3/4" x 35 1/4") | UWM              |
| Piranesi, Giovanni Battista  
*Veduta dell'Arco Tito*  
Etching on paper, (24 7/8" x 35 3/16") | UWM              |
| Piranesi, Giovanni Battista  
*Veduta della gran Piazza e Basilica di S. Pietro*  
Etching on paper, (25 5/8" x 35 5/16") | UWM              |
| Canaletto  
*View of Town with a Bishop's Tomb, 1741-1747*  
From *Vedute* series  
Etching | Milwaukee Art Museum              |
Canaletto
*The Portico with the Lantern*, 1741-1746
From the Suite *Vedute da Antonio Canal*
Etching

Canaletto
*The Prison*
Etching on paper

Méryon, Charles
*La Pompe Notre Dame*, 1852
From the series *Eaux-Fortes sur Paris*
Etching and drypoint

Méryon, Charles
*La Morgue*, 1854
Etching and drypoint

Méryon, Charles
*La galerie Notre Dame*, 1853
Etching with engraving and aquatint

Méryon, Charles
*Le Petit Pont, Paris*, 1850
Etching and engraving in dark brown on ivory laid paper, (346 x 263 mm)

Méryon, Charles
*Pont-au-Change, Paris*, 1854
Etching on ivory laid paper, (325 x 458 mm)

Méryon, Charles
*Pont-Neuf, Paris*, 1853
Etching on tan laid chine, (248 x 263 mm)

Méryon, Charles
*An Arch of Pont Notre-Dame, Paris*, 1853
Etching and drypoint on verdâtre (pale green) laid paper, (213 x 242 mm)

Félix-Hilaire Buhot
*National Holiday on the Boulevard Clichy*, 1878
Etching; soft-ground etching; drypoint; aquatint
Henri Rivière
Les Trente-Six Vues de la Tour Eiffel, 1888-1902
Book

Auguste Lepère
Près de la Porte St. Denis, 1890
Wood-Engraving

Auguste Lepère
Woodblock for Près de la Porte St. Denis, 1890
Woodblock
Addison, Joseph. *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, &c. in the Years 1701, 1702, 1703.* Dublin: T. Walker, 1773.


Smollett, Tobias. *Travels through France and Italy: Containing observations on character, customs, religion, government, police, commerce, arts, and antiquities. With a particular description of the town, territory, and climate of Nice. To which is added, A register of the weather, kept during a residence of eighteen months in that city*. London: Printed for R. Baldwin, 1766.


Checklist

For Thesis:

- Approval of Thesis Proposal
- Research
- Rough draft of thesis essay by start of spring semester
- Revisions of thesis essay completed by end of March, 2009

For Exhibition:

- Contact the Haggerty and Chazen to view potential works, October 2008
- Commence loan process with the Milwaukee Art Museum, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Haggerty Museum of Art, October 2008
- Obtain permission for use of reproductions of works in exhibition catalogue
- Create exhibition catalogue
- Plan layout and design of exhibition
- Cut matt-board and frame works
- Create signs and wall texts
- Organize the opening event
- Install exhibition April 21-22, 2009
- Open exhibition April 23, 2009
- Take down exhibition May 15-16, 2009