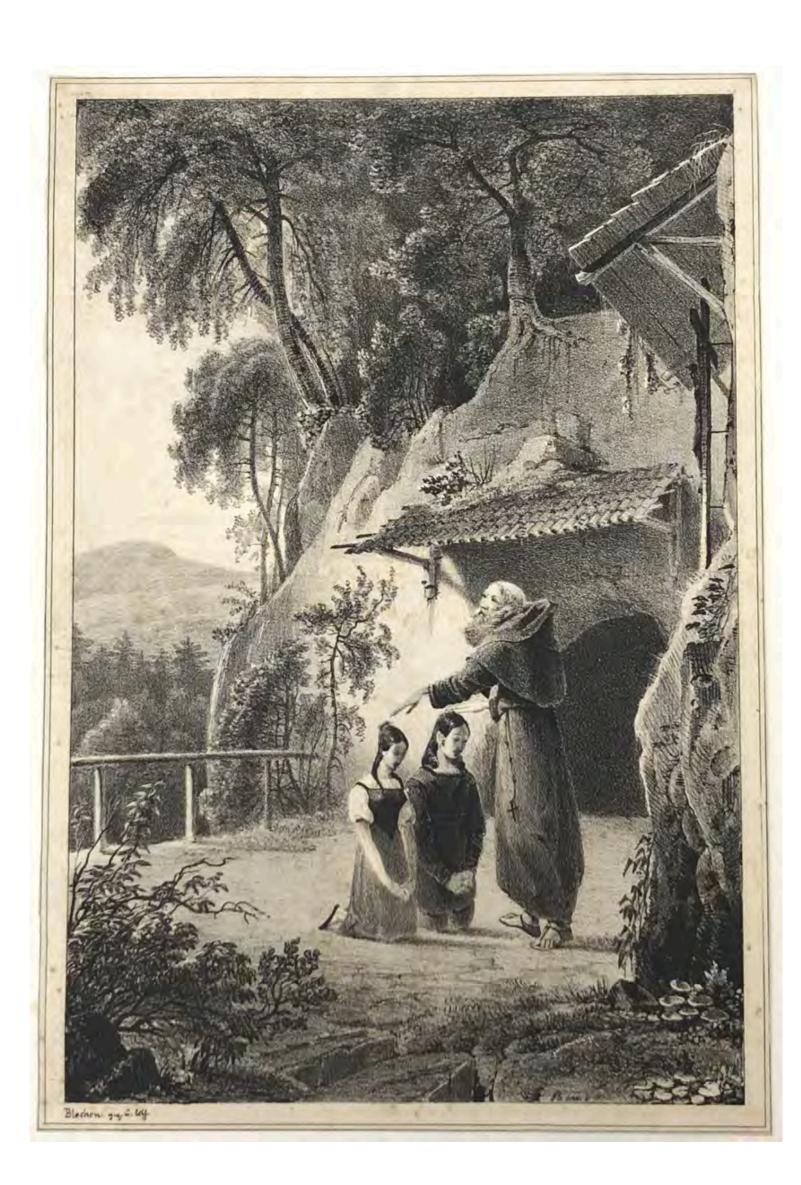# C.G. BOERNER
DEALERS IN FINE ART SINCE 1826

Distraction / Abwechslung
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Hermits should be adopted as the patron saints of social distancing! They were devout people who chose to live by themselves in the wilderness to attain higher wisdom, emulating the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert. We know of a first wave of such recluses in the fourth century A.D. Their diminishing numbers in later centuries have probably to do with the fact that many of those who harbored an inclination to drop out of society were soon able to find a home in monastic life, once it was instituted by Benedict of Nursia (480–543). Much later, of course, there was Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), the temporary recluse from Walden Pond.

Meanwhile, back in Europe, hermitages had become popular features in the landscape gardens of the second half of the eighteenth century. 'Twas the age of sentimentalism and a (preferably ruinous) hermitage was seen as an ideal place for contemplation – and sometimes, budget permitting, it even came with a resident hermit.

Plenty of lonely monks also wander through the literature of German Romanticism, especially in the then-popular subgenre of the "monastery novel." The visual arts followed suit—many of you will be familiar with Caspar David Friedrich's Monk by the Sea, painted 1808–10. The lithograph by Carl Blechen (1798–1840), shown above, is another example, albeit less sublime. It relates to a group of drawings by the artist, all of them depicting a bearded sage in monastic habit meeting with some young folks who are about to go out and explore the world. After a selection of these drawings was presented at the Berlinische Künstlerverein, its members decided to publish this one as a lithograph in 1828.

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Let's hope that each of us, like all of these hermits, will be able to garner some wisdom during this time in the wilderness of pandemic-induced isolation – and that we, too, might be able to impart what we've learned on a future, post-Corona generation.

More on Blechen