

C. G. BOERNER

DEALERS IN FINE ART SINCE 1826

Distraction / Abwechslung
9 September 2020

The concept of money has forever stood at the core of an apparently inescapable hypocrisy. Very few people would unabashedly admit to love it for its own sake—Croesus and, perhaps, Gordon Gekko come to mind—but most of us might agree that it’s not a bad thing to have. It surely helps us get around, and having a bit more of it usually doesn’t hurt either. One can, among other things, enhance the quality of one’s life by buying art.

Yet heed the warning Paul the Apostle gives in his first letter to Timothy. After he reminds his young colleague in Ephesus that “we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1 Timothy 6:7), he writes: “For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (6:10). The phrasing is important: it is the love of money, not money itself, that is the root of all evil—a nuance that appears to have been lost on the designer of this hand-colored woodcut which survives as a unique impression in Amsterdam’s Rijksprentenkabinet.



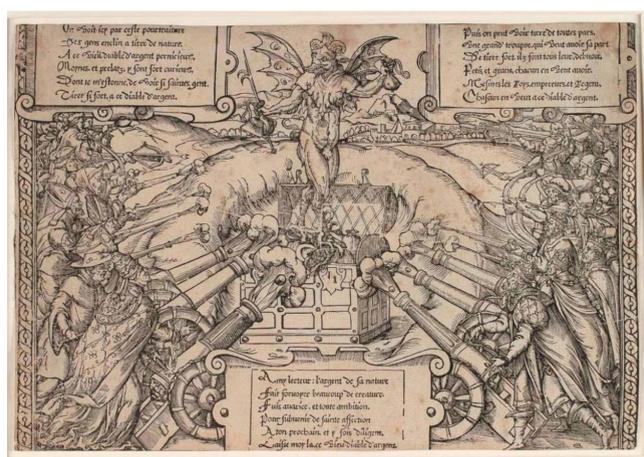
It shows money personified as the devil incarnate surrounded by all the worldly and spiritual leaders—emperors, kings, and noblemen to the right, the pope, a bishop, cardinals, and monks to the left. They aim their combined weaponry at the bat-winged monster, which is made of coins and is standing on an open treasure chest. That the highest-ranking members of society are placed so prominently in the foreground could, however, suggest that the allegory does indeed grasp the apostle’s warning and that what we see is an attempt at some Freudian exorcism. The top “one percent” of their day are trying to eradicate what they most desire. Yet one can’t help feeling that they’ll be rewarded with little success. The creature remains cheerful enough and seems to be mocking its assailants—not unlike the robotic aliens in the epic third-season finale of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. When faced with the firepower of the entire Star Fleet, the aliens—all machine and algorithm—remained utterly unfazed and had only one brief sentence for poor Captain Jean-Luc Picard: resistance is futile!

The woodcut bears the address of Jacques Boussy (1533–before 1587), the son of Jean Boussy (d. 1547), who was among the first publishers to settle in Rue Montorgueil in Paris. Opening his print shop there established a tradition that lasted for over a century. The street still exists today on the Right Bank of the Seine. From the sober pages of *Print Quarterly* I learned that the area was, until the late 1970s, the flourishing center of the red-light district. Today it is celebrated for more family-friendly tarts: as my German colleague reminded me, Stohrer, Paris’s oldest patisserie, is located on rue Montorgueil. Founded in 1730, it is nearly a century older than even C.G. Boerner.

La plus ancienne pâtisserie de Paris

Yet from the late 1540s to the 1630s, the street was the hub for a different kind of trade. The street was lined with shops whose exclusive specialty was the publishing of woodcuts on a wide range of subjects: saints, maps, drolleries, political subjects, sets with biblical stories, and, as this example shows, satirical broadsides. The prints usually incorporated letterpress texts and were often issued colored by hand (a bright orange that has a very 1970s feel to it is a telltale sign of contemporary coloring). Many of the artisans that appear in the records are therefore referred to as “peintre en papier.”

As *images populaires*, those woodcuts were never meant to be collector’s items. They could be used by minstrels on the street or hung on the walls of homes. As a result, many of these prints survive merely as *unika*, the majority of which are in a single album that the Bibliothèque Nationale de France acquired in 1881 for no less than 40,000 francs, a respectable price at the time. To this can now be added some 50-plus prints, probably deriving from a similar type of album. They came up for sale in Chartres in 2004 and were nearly all preempted by the BNF. As a result of this, there is only a smattering of examples in print rooms outside of Paris. We are excited, therefore, to be able to offer one of those rue Montorgueil prints here, especially one with such a relevant subject matter:



The composition is closely related to the Amsterdam print. The text in ours is the same but appears to be xylographic, not set in letterpress, and the devil here has a humanoid figure sporting a beak-shaped snout and bat wings. Unfortunately, the publisher’s address has been trimmed off, but the Bibliothèque Nationale owns a woodcut with yet another iteration of the composition featuring the figure of Death at its center. That one retains the address of its publisher and is framed by a border that is very similar to that of our *Money Devil*. This allows its attribution to the same workshop, namely that of Germain Hoyau and Mathurin Nicolas, or perhaps even to the earlier partnership Hoyau had formed with Olivier Truschet when they published a celebrated map of Paris in 1553. Our print, therefore, in all likelihood predates Boussy’s version in Amsterdam and could have served as its model since its composition is more complex and the quality of the cutting is superior. This would make the newly discovered *Money Devil* the earliest known surviving depiction of a subject that captured the French imagination well into the nineteenth century, when versions of it were still issued in the willfully naive woodcuts known as *Épinal* prints.

Le Diable d'argent

