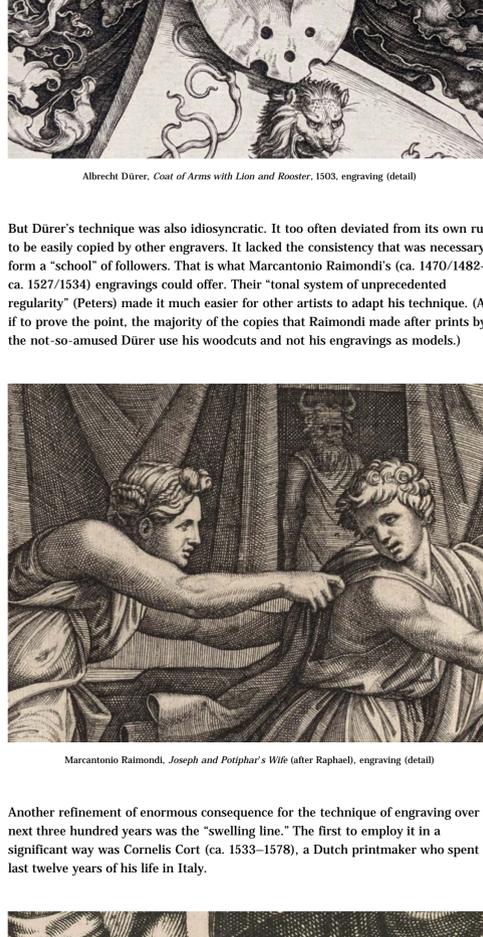


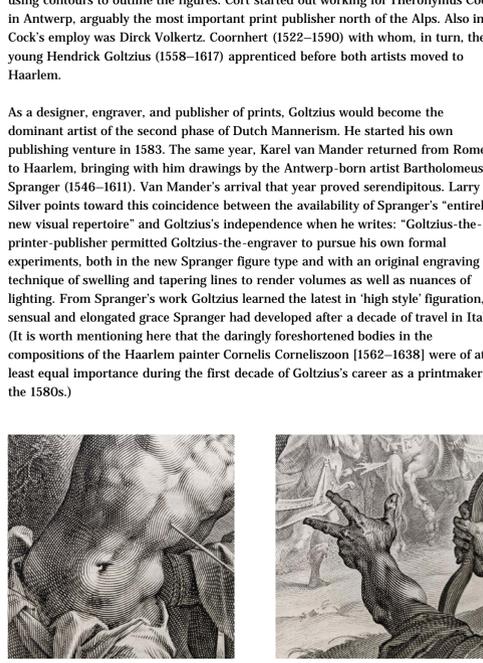
Distraction / Abwechslung
19 October 2021

In many ways, Dürer perfected the art of engraving. His prints provided, as Emily Peters observes in the seductively beautiful catalogue to her exhibition *The Brilliant Line* (held at the Rhode Island School of Design in the fall of 2009–10), “atlases of manual knowledge for other engravers.”



Albrecht Dürer, *Coat of Arms with Lion and Rooster*, 1503, engraving (detail)

But Dürer’s technique was also idiosyncratic. It too often deviated from its own rules to be easily copied by other engravers. It lacked the consistency that was necessary to form a “school” of followers. That is what Marcantonio Raimondi’s (ca. 1470/1482–ca. 1527/1534) engravings could offer. Their “tonal system of unprecedented regularity” (Peters) made it much easier for other artists to adapt his technique. (As if to prove the point, the majority of the copies that Raimondi made after prints by the not-so-amused Dürer use his woodcuts and not his engravings as models.)



Marcantonio Raimondi, *Joseph and Potiphar's Wife* (after Raphael), engraving (detail)

Another refinement of enormous consequence for the technique of engraving over the next three hundred years was the “swelling line.” The first to employ it in a significant way was Cornelis Cort (ca. 1533–1578), a Dutch printmaker who spent the last twelve years of his life in Italy.



Cornelis Cort, *The Betrayal of Christ* (after Girolamo Muziano), 1568, engraving (detail)

By varying the pressure with which the burin is pushed into the surface of the copper, the engraver could now create a line that tapers at both ends. Evenly spaced and crossed with each other, these elegant wavy lines were able to modulate forms without using contours to outline the figures. Cort started out working for Hieronymus Cock in Antwerp, arguably the most important print publisher north of the Alps. Also in Cock’s employ was Dirck Volkertz. Coornhert (1522–1590) with whom, in turn, the young Hendrick Goltzius (1558–1617) apprenticed before both artists moved to Haarlem.

As a designer, engraver, and publisher of prints, Goltzius would become the dominant artist of the second phase of Dutch Mannerism. He started his own publishing venture in 1583. The same year, Karel van Mander returned from Rome to Haarlem, bringing with him drawings by the Antwerp-born artist Bartholomeus Spranger (1546–1611). Van Mander’s arrival that year proved serendipitous. Larry Silver points toward this coincidence between the availability of Spranger’s “entirely new visual repertoire” and Goltzius’s independence when he writes: “Goltzius-the-printer-publisher permitted Goltzius-the-engraver to pursue his own formal experiments, both in the new Spranger figure type and with an original engraving technique of swelling and tapering lines to render volumes as well as nuances of lighting. From Spranger’s work Goltzius learned the latest in ‘high style’ figuration, a sensual and elongated grace Spranger had developed after a decade of travel in Italy.” (It is worth mentioning here that the daringly foreshortened bodies in the compositions of the Haarlem painter Cornelis Corneliszoon [1562–1638] were of at least equal importance during the first decade of Goltzius’s career as a printmaker in the 1580s.)



The Amsterdam artist Jan Harmensz. Muller (1571–1628) briefly collaborated with Goltzius in 1588–9 and quickly adapted the latter’s—by then fully developed—engraving style. The son of the printmaker and publisher Harmen Jansz. Muller (ca. 1540–1617), Jan soon returned to Amsterdam to publish his own prints with his father, thereby setting up a rival business to Goltzius’s Haarlem operation. What undoubtedly helped in this enterprise was that Muller continued to secure designs from Spranger, who had by then settled in Prague to become court artist to Emperor Rudolf II. In our latest *Kleine Auswahl*, we can offer two of the younger Muller’s most ambitious prints after Spranger.



Mannerism in Haarlem, Amsterdam, and Prague

With Spranger working in far-away Prague and the Muller team 550 miles away in Amsterdam (Google calculates a total walking distance of 165 hours between the two cities; unfortunately, the site does not offer an alternative time for travel on horseback), the question arises how designer and printmaker communicated with each other.



Bartholomeus Spranger, design for a print by Jan Muller, ca. 1591, pen and ink (Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

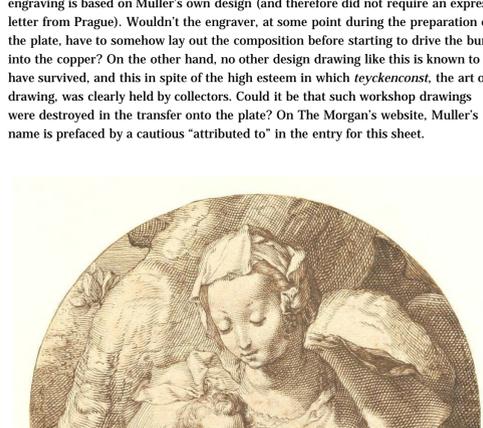
The answer seems to be: by mail. “Post uit Praag” (Mail from Prague) was hence the witty title Huigen Loefflang gave to his article in the 2008 *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum*. It describes the fortuitous acquisition of a drawing that the Rijksprentenkabinet in Amsterdam had been able to make the year before. When it came up at auction, it received little attention, given that its condition was anything but perfect. Most crucially, it was folded once over vertically and three times horizontally—a flaw that probably happened for the very reason that it had been enclosed in a letter.



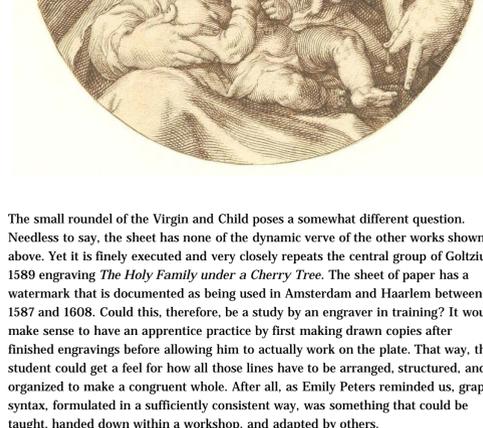
Jan Muller, *Minerva Guides Hercules and Scipio on the Path to Virtue* (after Bartholomeus Spranger), ca. 1591, engraving

The composition shows how the goddess Minerva is leading Hercules and Scipio onto the path to virtue. It became the subject of one of the first prints Muller made in ca. 1591 after his collaboration with Goltzius had ended. The drawing displays all the *pen-handelen* (pennmanship) and *gracelijskste actie* (most graceful movement) that Van Mander praises as characteristic of Spranger’s art. What surprises, though, is that such a drawing, in all its rapid sketchiness, could suffice as design for the elaborate linework of the print. It therefore illustrates how the engraver’s work was anything but reproductive. He, and not the designer of the composition, was the one who created the graphic syntax necessary to project the visual inventions of painters as well as sculptors onto a two-dimensional picture plane. It was the engraver’s visual imagination that translated volume, texture, and tone from the compositional designs into the linear black-and-white medium.

The admiration that the finished prints enjoyed at the time led to the intriguing phenomenon that their bravura linework would itself become a model emulated in drawings and even paintings.

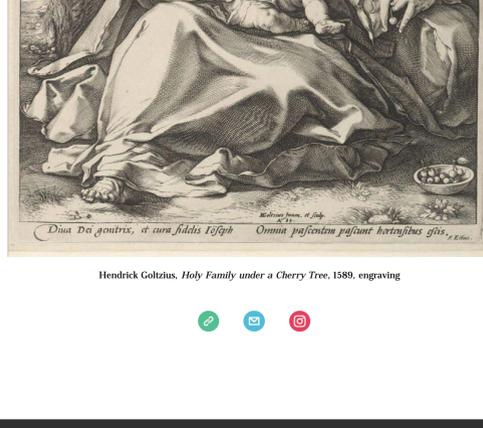


Hendrick Goltzius, *Sine Cerere et Libero Trigo Venus* (Without Ceres and Bacchus, Venus Would Freeze) ca. 1600–03, ink on canvas with touches of oil paint (Philadelphia Museum of Art)



Hendrick Goltzius, *Young Man Holding a Skull and a Tulip*, 1614 pen and brown ink on paper (The Morgan Library and Museum, New York)

Such *Federkunststücke*, which the Dutch call *penwercken* (pen works), were a specialty of Goltzius and two masterful examples from American collections are shown here. These astonishing drawings use the graphic language of prints, but are very much independent works, *trompe l’oeils* that play with the illusion of looking like prints. Yet if this is the case, how does another drawing, now also owned by the Morgan Library, fit into this context?



Jan Muller (?), *Arion Playing the Harp*, ca. 1589–90, pen and brown ink over red chalk and charcoal (The Morgan Library and Museum, New York)

Unlike Goltzius’s *penwercken*, it is not a finished composition, and the figure of Arion playing a lyre is directly related to Jan Muller’s print of the same subject.

Jan Muller, *Arion Playing the Harp*, ca. 1590, engraving

Since the drawing shows Arion in reverse, it was obvious to suggest that this might actually be a preliminary drawing made in preparation for the print. After all, the engraving is based on Muller’s own design (and therefore did not require an express letter from Prague). Wouldn’t the engraver, at some point during the preparation of the plate, have to somehow lay out the composition before starting to drive the burin into the copper? On the other hand, no other design drawing like this is known to have survived, and this in spite of the high esteem in which *teyckkenconst*, the art of drawing, was clearly held by collectors. Could it be that such workshop drawings were destroyed in the transfer onto the plate? On The Morgan’s website, Muller’s name is prefaced by a cautious “attributed to” in the entry for this sheet.

Hendrick Goltzius, *Holy Family under a Cherry Tree*, 1589, engraving

The small round of the Muller and Child poses a somewhat different question. Needless to say, the sheet has none of the dynamic verve of the other works shown above. Yet it is finely executed and very closely repeats the central group of Goltzius’s 1589 engraving *The Holy Family under a Cherry Tree*. The sheet of paper has a watermark that is documented as being used in Amsterdam and Haarlem between 1587 and 1608. Could this, therefore, be a study by an engraver in training? It would make sense to have an apprentice practice by first making drawn copies after finished engravings before allowing him to actually work on the plate. That way, the student could get a feel for how all those lines have to be arranged, structured, and organized to make a congruent whole. After all, as Emily Peters reminded us, graphic syntax, formulated in a sufficiently consistent way, was something that could be taught, handed down within a workshop, and adapted by others.

Hendrick Goltzius, *Holy Family under a Cherry Tree*, 1589, engraving