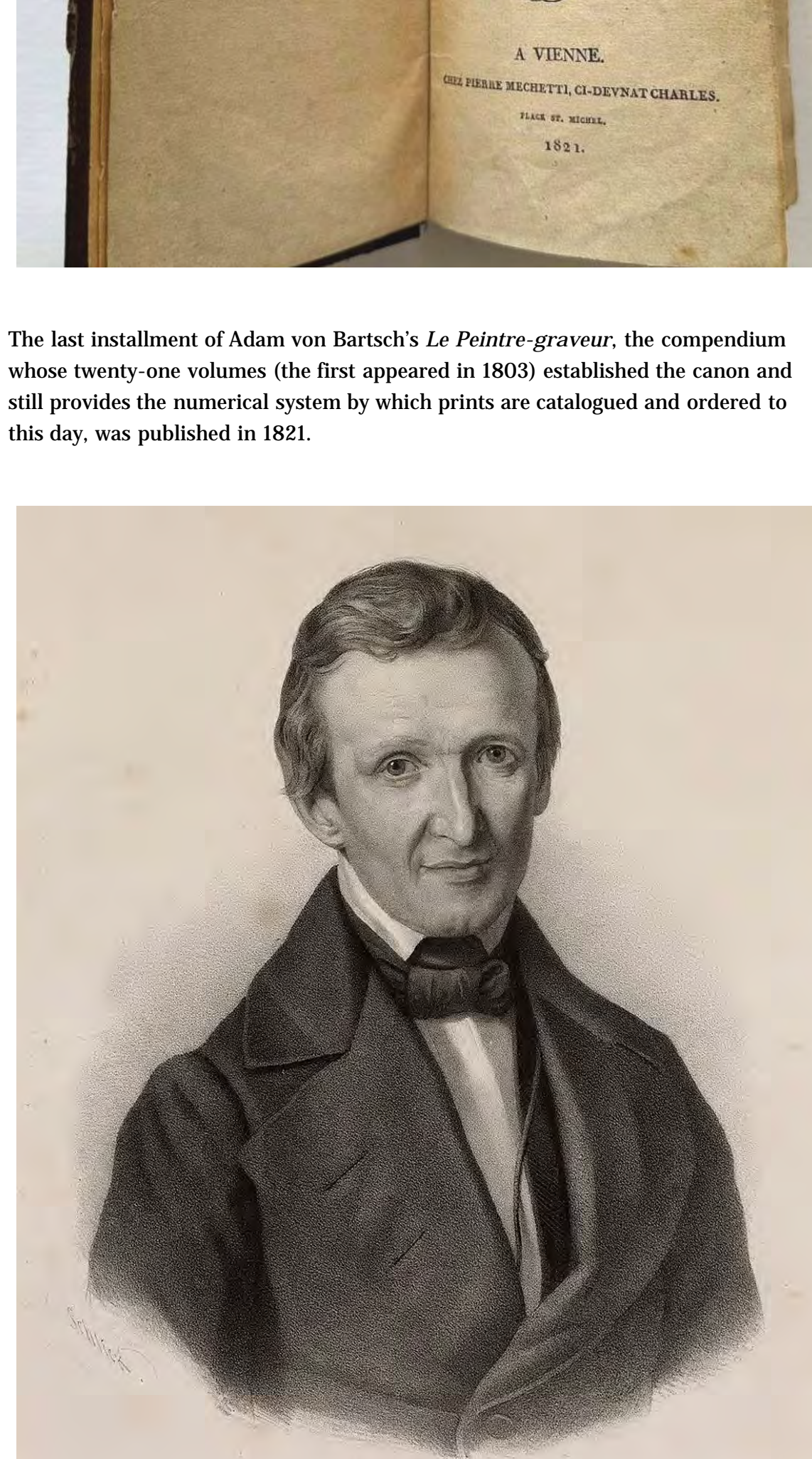


C. G. BOERNER

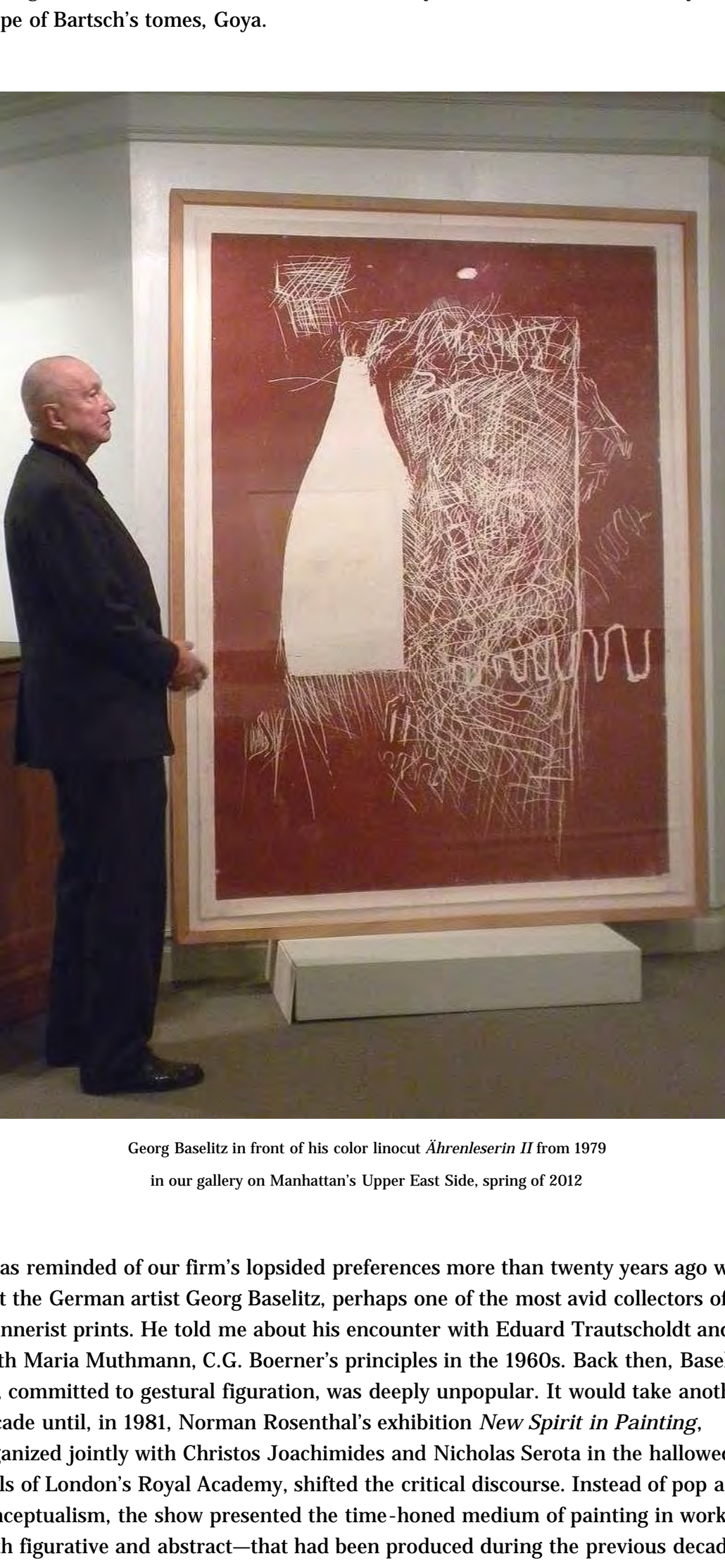
DEALERS IN FINE ART SINCE 1826

Distraction / Abwechslung
12 May 2023

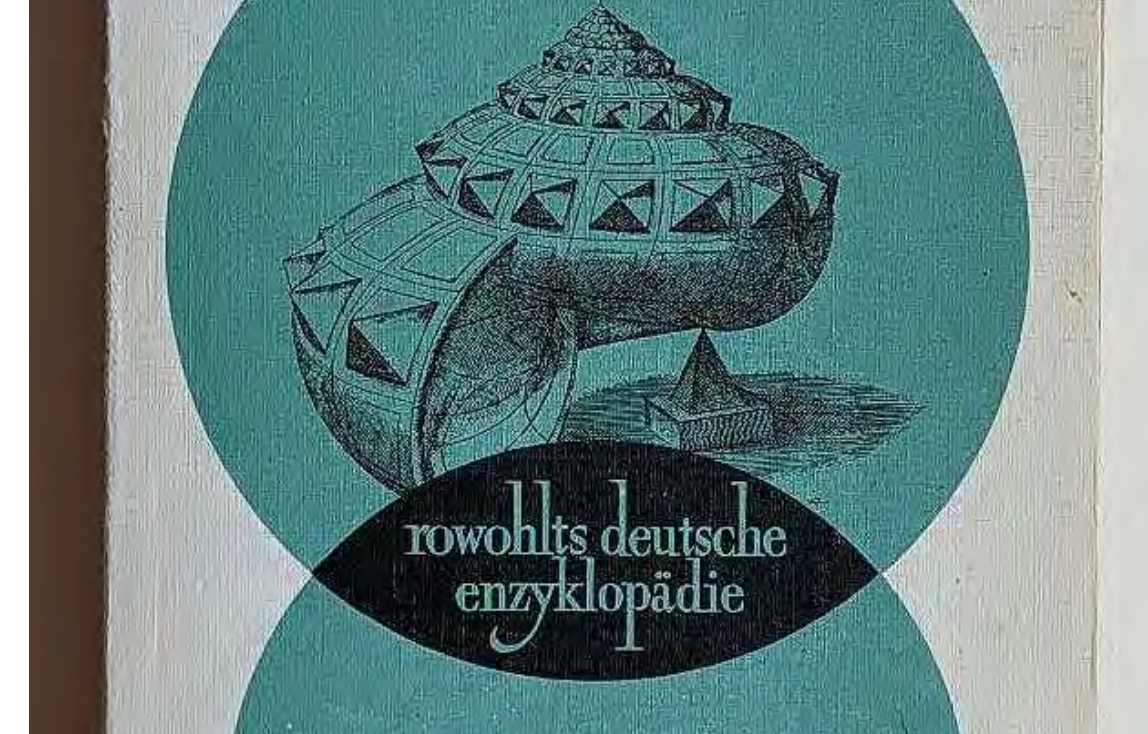
Historically, C.G. Boerner's relationship with Mannerist prints has been characterized by a certain reservation, one might even call it *Berührung Angst* (fear of contact). Perhaps, given the fact that the firm is nearly two hundred years old, this reluctance might be understood in the context of a distinctive chapter in the history of taste.



The last installment of Adam von Bartsch's *Le Peintre-graveur*, the compendium whose twenty-one volumes (the first appeared in 1803) established and canonized and still provides the numerical system by which prints are catalogued and ordered to this day, was published in 1821.



It was only five years later that Carl Gustav Boerner decided to exchange his life as an artist for that of a dealer of prints and drawings. Bartsch's bias, born out of the Romantic idea of the artist as genius inventor, provided the young firm of C.G. Boerner (as well as the print market in general) with welcome guidelines. The top of the canon was reserved for the true "painter printmakers" (French *peintre-graveurs*), artists, that is, who invented the images they carved or engraved on woodblocks or copperplates themselves. The lodestars in this universe were Schongauer, Dürer, then Rembrandt, and, finally, for the "moderns" and beyond the scope of Bartsch's tomes, Goya.



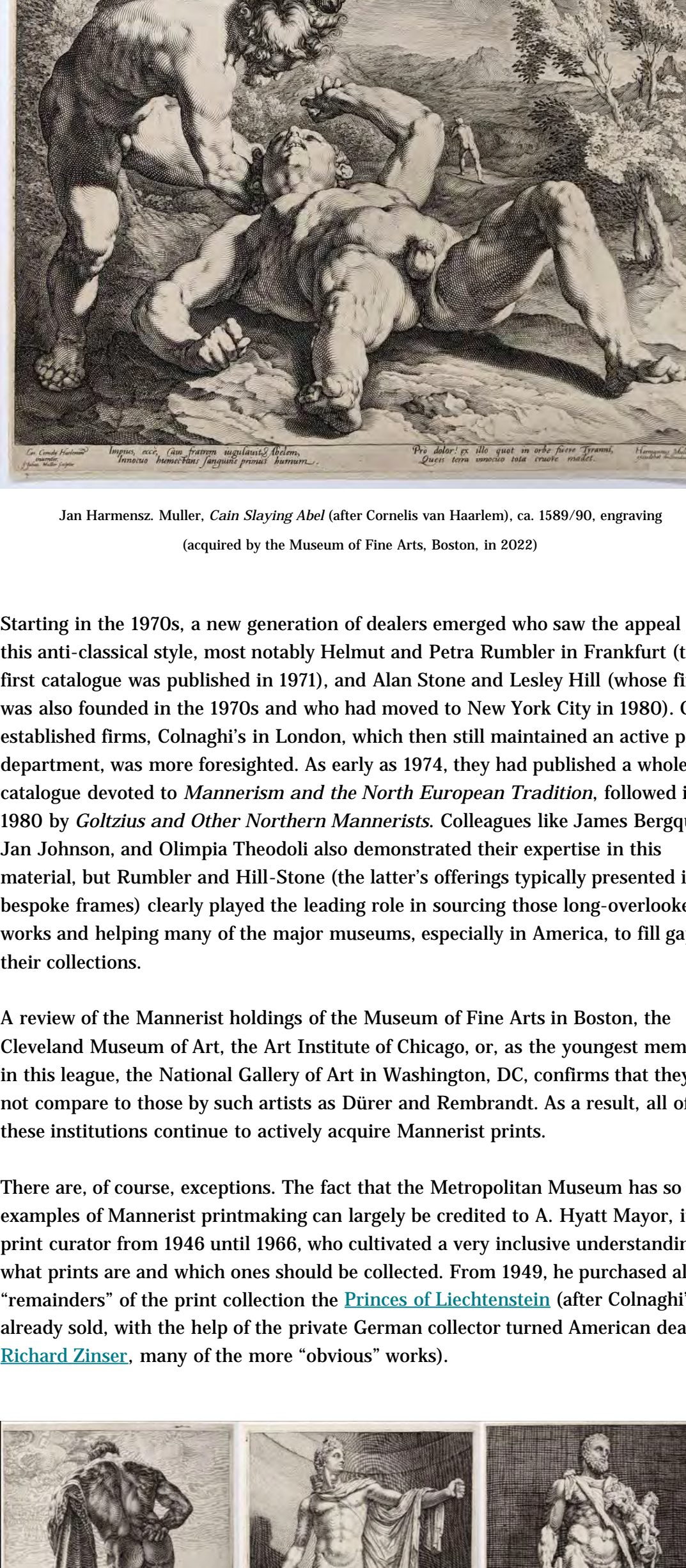
Georg Baselitz in front of his color linocut *Ahrensleserin II* from 1979 in our gallery on Manhattan's Upper East Side, spring of 2012

I was reminded of our firm's lopsided preferences more than twenty years ago when I met the German artist Georg Baselitz, perhaps one of the most avid collectors of Mannerist prints. He told me about his encounter with Eduard Trauttscholdt and Ruth Maria Muthmann, C.G. Boerner's principles in the 1960s. Back then, Baselitz's art, committed to gestural figuration, was deeply unpopular. It would take another decade until, in 1981, Norman Rosenthal's exhibition *New Spirit in Painting*, organized jointly with Christos Joachimides and Nicholas Serota in the hallowed halls of London's Royal Academy, shifted the critical discourse. Instead of pop and conceptualism, the show presented the time-honed medium of painting in works—both figurative and abstract—that had been produced during the previous decade.

Baselitz had left East Germany for West Berlin in 1957. He had just started making prints and when, in 1965, he won a six-month fellowship at the Villa Romana in Florence. For the first time, he saw the originals of works he knew only from the poor illustrations in Gustav René Hocke's pioneering study *Die Welt als Labyrinth*. Published in 1957 as part of the popular paperback series *Rowohlts Deutsche Enzyklopädie*, Hocke's book played a significant role in reviving the interest for an art-historical period that was somewhat situated in a blind spot beyond the Late Renaissance and before the beginning of the Baroque. Difficult to categorize, it had been neglected for a long time.

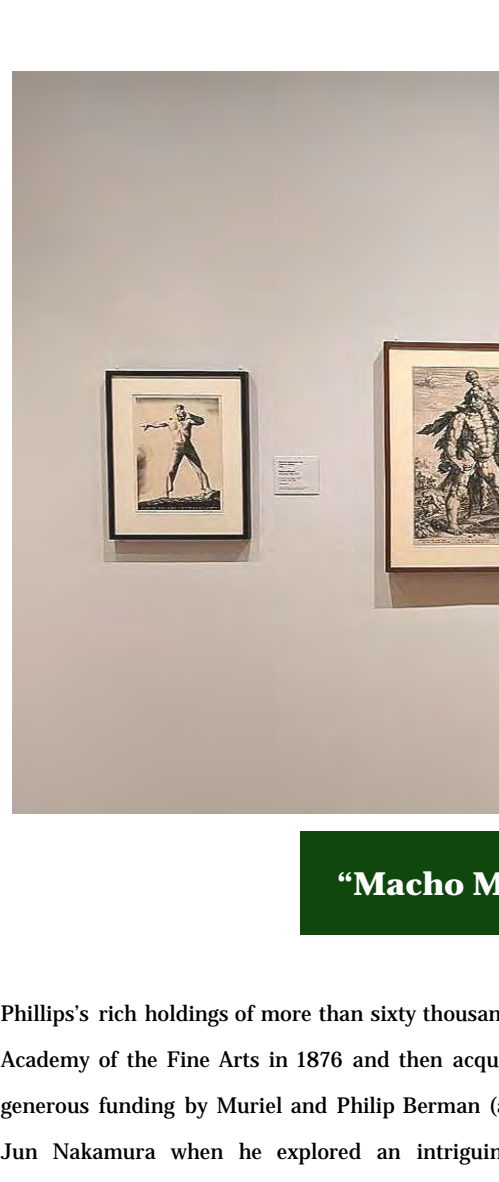


By rummaging in the bins of antiquarian bookshops and visiting flea markets in Italy, Baselitz was, even with the modest means then at his disposal, able to build a veritable collection. However, professional success still remained elusive for an artist who stubbornly held his ground against the grain of critical opinion. Ultimately, he was forced to sell his collection, and his dealer at the time, Michael Werner, recommended he offer it to C.G. Boerner, the leading German firm in the field. Baselitz must have experienced a painful disappointment at the response of the illustrious company's proprietors: those prints "are not for us." In Düsseldorf, the staff was still fully under the spell of Adam von Bartsch. Mannerist prints were deemed merely "reproductive"; Hendrick Goltzius's engravings depended on the designs of Cornelis Cornelisz. van Haarlem; Jan Harmensz. Muller adhered to the sketches sent from Prague by Bartholomäus Spranger or Hans von Aachen; the printmakers associated with the court of Fontainebleau used the drawings and wall decorations of Rosso Fiorentino and Francesco Primaticcio as their models. And the Italian etchers? Compared to the "brilliant line" of Dürer and those much-revered French master engravers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their works appeared unaccomplished.

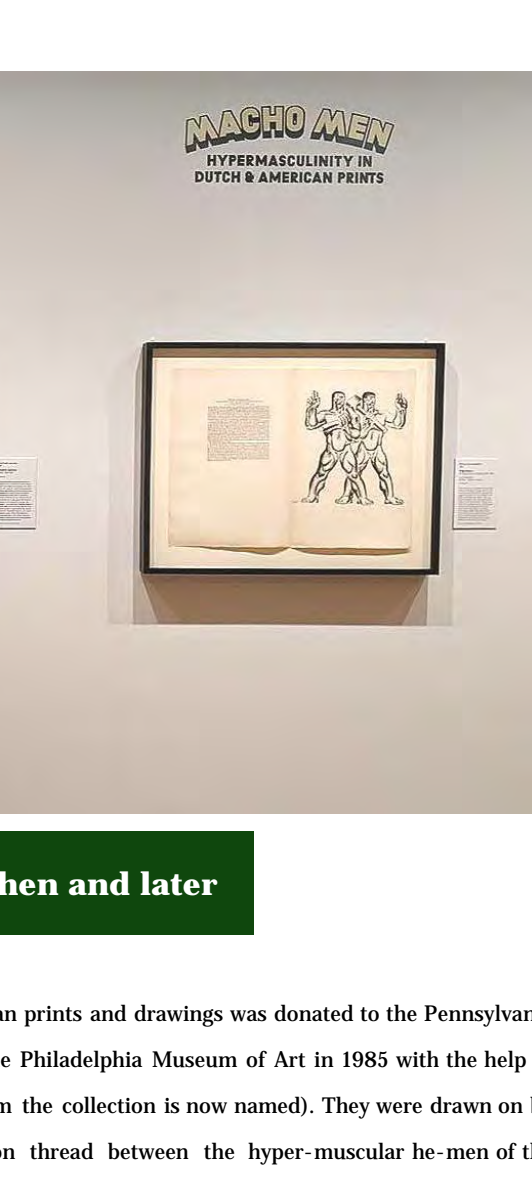


Schiavone, *The Holy Family Witnessing the John the Baptist's Homage to the Christ Child*, ca. 1540–50, etching with additional pen work, traces of brown wash and white heightening on prepared paper

Just think of the messy experiments of an Andrea Meldolla, known as Schiavone, filled with patches of foul biting and rust spots, and compare them with *le style Drevet*:

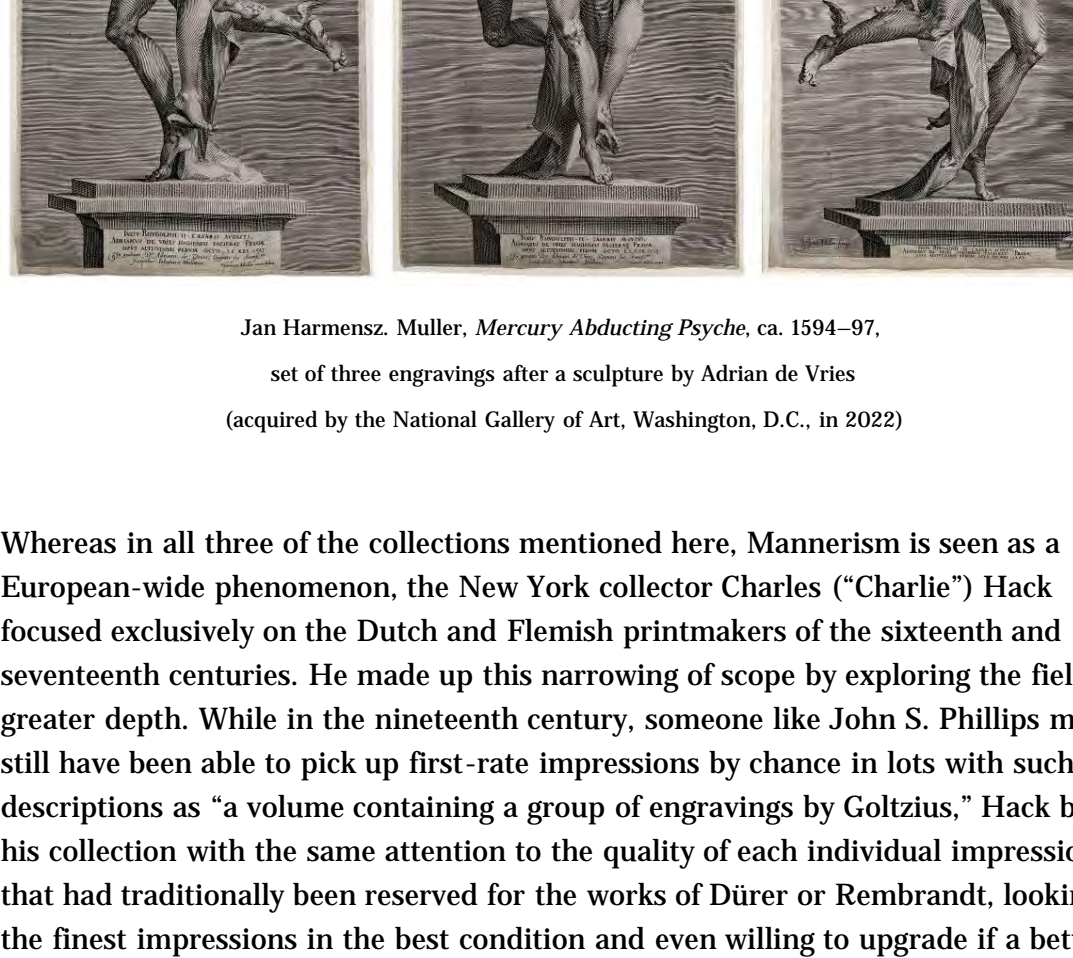


Claude Drevet, *Portrait of Charles de Vintimille* (after Hyacinthe Rigaud), 1736, engraving



Pierre Drevet and his son Claude achieved a level of technical perfection that was able to translate "Rigaud's great edifices of satin and ermine, his tumbling masses of drapery and the richly embroidered brocades, the rich carving of chairs and tables and gilded thrones" into a line-work with such minute precision that "nothing of the original save the color is lost" (Thomas Head Thomas).

There must have been a reason why the fussy Albrecht Dürer put the scratchy stylus down and went back to the elegant *taille* of the burin. Yet it was exactly the messy awkwardness that excited the renegade artist. As Baselitz remembers: "Schiavone's experiments, especially his lack of technical acumen interested me more, and by the way—they were much cheaper." In the end, Herr Baselitz had to go to France to sell his treasures, and rumor has it that this, his "first" collection, still resides with the descendants of the buyer.



Jan Harmensz. Muller, *Cain Slaying Abel* (after Cornelis van Haarlem), ca. 1589/90, engraving (acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 2022)

Starting in the 1970s, a new generation of dealers emerged who saw the appeal of this anti-classical style, most notably Helmut and Petra Rumbler in Frankfurt (their first catalogue was published in 1971), and Alan Stone and Lesley Hill (whose firm was also founded in the 1970s and who had moved to New York City in 1980). Of the established firms, Colnaghi's in London, which then still maintained an active print department, was more foresighted. As early as 1974, they had published a whole catalogue devoted to *Mannerism and the North European Tradition*, followed in 1980 by *Goltzius and Other Northern Mannerists*. Colleagues like James Bergquist, Jan Johnson, and Olimpia Theodoli also demonstrated their expertise in this material, but Rumbler and Hill-Stone (the latter's offerings typically presented in bespoke frames) clearly played the leading role in sourcing those long-overlooked works and helping many of the major museums, especially in America, to fill gaps in their collections.

A review of the Mannerist holdings of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, or, as the youngest member in this league, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, confirms that they do not compare to those by such artists as Dürer and Rembrandt. As a result, all of these institutions continue to actively acquire Mannerist prints.

There are, of course, exceptions. The fact that the Metropolitan Museum has so many examples of Mannerist printmaking can largely be credited to A. Hyatt Mayor, its print curator from 1946 until 1966, who cultivated a very inclusive understanding of what prints are and which ones should be collected. From 1949, he purchased all the "remainders" of the print collection the *Princes of Liechtenstein* (after Colnaghi's had already sold, with the help of the private German collector turned American dealer [Richard Zinser](#), many of the more "obvious" works).

Hendrick Goltzius, *Three Famous Antique Roman Statues: The Farnesian Hercules – Hercules and Telephos – Apollo Belvedere*, 1592, set of three engravings (acquired by the Cleveland Museum of Art in 2022)

Significant Mannerist groups in other institutions usually reflect the activities of wealthy individuals with an "encyclopedic approach to collecting," as John Ittmann describes it for the Philadelphia philanthropist John S. Phillips. In his comprehensive endeavor, Phillips could take advantage of the fact that Mannerist prints, even in fine impressions, hardly ever commanded prices as high as those for the "canonical" master printmakers. Ittmann notes that "in less fashionable areas, such as the Mannerist prints of Hendrick Goltzius and his followers, [Phillips] was able to buy many hundreds of first-rate examples."

"Macho Men," then and later

Phillips's rich holdings of more than sixty thousand European prints and drawings was donated to the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1876 and then acquired by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1985 with the help of generous funding by Muriel and Philip Berman (after whom the collection is now named). They were drawn on by Jun Nakamura when he explored an intriguing common thread between the hyper-muscular he-men of the Netherlands of the 1590s with the strongly accented masculinity evident in many American prints from the years of the Great Depression. His 2022–23 exhibition *Macho Men: Hypermasculinity in Dutch & American Prints* was definitely one of the most fascinating transhistorical shows I have seen in recent years.

It was not only American museums that were filling their "Mannerist gaps," however. Private collectors were also very active. One of them was Mary Stansbury Ruiz in Los Angeles; in the early 1970s, she became captivated by what Bruce Davis described as "the hothouse artificiality and eccentricity of Mannerism." Davis wrote the groundbreaking catalogue that honored the generous bequest of the collection to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 1988, shortly after Ruiz's untimely death the previous year. The Mannerist print holdings of Kirk Edward Long were catalogued by Bernard Barryte in a daunting seven-hundred-page tome comprising twelve essays by eminent scholars in the field and 674 catalogue entries, published in the spring of 2016 on the occasion of a large exhibition at the Cantor Center for Visual Arts at Stanford University. And, let's not forget, Georg Baselitz continues to augment his "second" collection to this day.

Jan Harmensz. Muller, *Mercury Abducting Psyche*, ca. 1594–97, set of three engravings after a sculpture by Adrian de Vries (acquired by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., in 2022)

Whereas in all three of the collections mentioned here, Mannerism is seen as a European-wide phenomenon, the New York collector Charles ("Charlie") Hack focused exclusively on the Dutch and Flemish printmakers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He made up this narrowing of scope by exploring the field in greater depth. While in the nineteenth century, someone like John S. Phillips might still have been able to pick up first-rate impressions by chance in lots with such descriptions as "a volume containing a group of engravings by Goltzius," Hack built his collection with the same attention to the quality of each individual impression that had traditionally been reserved for the works of Dürer or Rembrandt, looking for the finest impressions in the best condition and even willing to upgrade if a better example became available.

Two substantial groups of prints provided the foundation for Hack's endeavors. The first was originally formed by the Chicago collector couple Lewis ("Lew") and Susan Manilow. The Manilows were so enthralled by the Mannerist style that they even named their boat at Martha's Vineyard the "Goltzius." In the end, however, they sold the collection, mainly because prints, unlike their other great passion, modern and contemporary art (Lew Manilow was among the founding sponsors of Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art), could not be displayed so easily at all times. The second of those "founding acquisitions" was a group of prints the art dealer [Norman Jack Leitman](#) had collected privately. Hack acquired them soon after the Manilow group in the late 1990s. A person who must not be forgotten in this context is the late Robert ("Bob") Light, a private dealer in prints and drawings who was another important promoter of this area of the market and had brokered both deals.

The reason for sharing this cursory survey of changing tastes and collecting habits is the news that the Manilow prints have now found their way back to the windy city—together with many other treasures amassed by Charlie Hack over the last three decades. Last week, the Art Institute of Chicago officially announced the purchase of his entire Dutch Old Master print collection.

a recent acquisition by the Art Institute of Chicago

With this bold move, Chicago now boasts the finest and most comprehensive collection of this material in the United States—one surpassed in scope and quality perhaps only by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. And despite the fact that these are "only" prints, made by old-fashioned (but perhaps now fashionable again) old masters and, worse, long damned as merely "reproductive," the much-inflated term "transformative" is, for once, truly appropriate to describe this acquisition. The curators Kevin Salatino and Jamie Gabbarelli must be congratulated, and kudos is also due to my dear colleague Mireille Mosler, who, with great patience and perseverance, orchestrated the transaction. Lastly, given C.G. Boerner's somewhat ill-fated history with Mannerist prints, it felt a little bit like making amends when we were allowed to play a small part in putting this deal together.