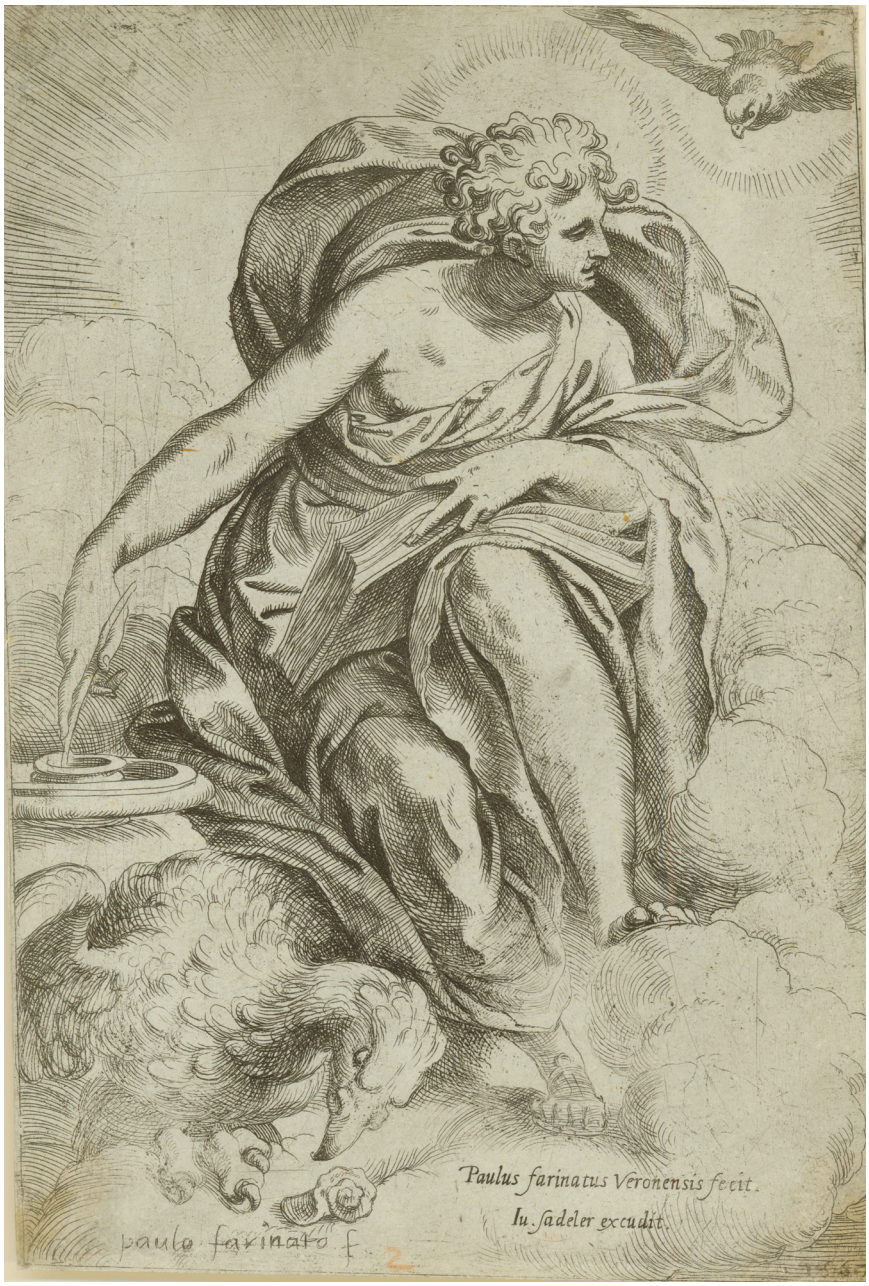
Signatures, Invention, and Agency in 16th-Century Prints



ORGANIZED BY HANNAH WIRTA KINNEY, ASSISTANT CURATOR OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMS, WITH LUCY HASKELL '20, CURATORIAL ASSISTANT IN ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

ALLEN MEMORIAL ART MUSEUM, SPRING 2022

Allen Memorial
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Signatures, Invention, and Agency in 16th-Century Prints

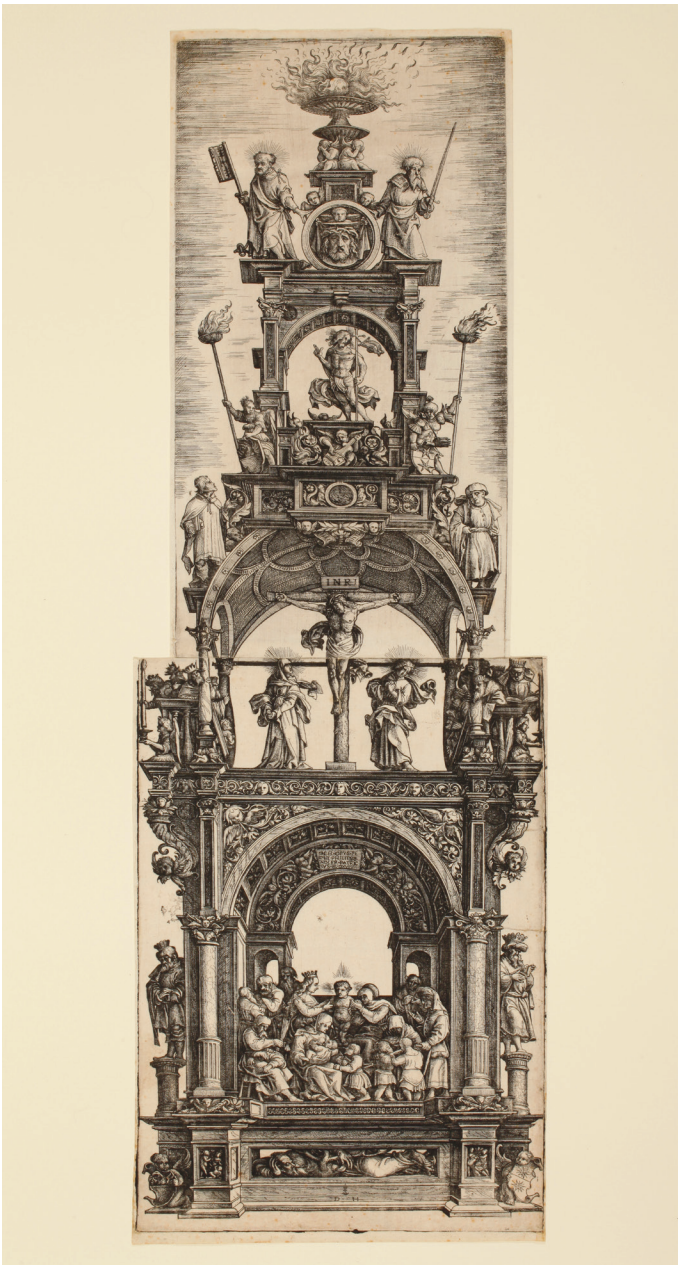
As modern viewers, we often come to a work of art expecting to find the signature of a single artist, testifying to their presence at the moment of the work's creation. Yet 16th-century prints are filled with a multiplicity of names that point to the diverse agents—draftsmen, engravers, and publishers—whose hands brought a printed image into being.

The earliest signs of a maker's agency in these prints appeared in the early decades of the century as monograms, a means of testifying to the quality of the work, drawn from craft practice. As the century progressed, increasing value was placed on the power of an artist to imagine an image in his mind, known as *invenzione*. On prints, this act was signaled by the term *invenit*, as opposed to the more manual practice of making the printable image, often indicated by the term *fecit*. Though in artistic writing of the period the growing dichotomy between art and craft, mind and hand, prioritized artistic *invenzione* over execution, the legal system of print privileges, a nascent form of copyright that began around 1500, often provided commercial advantage to makers and publishers, indicating a more complex notion of authorship in this period.

This exhibition asks you to look closely at the inscriptions on prints as a means of seeing beyond the page to the multifaceted network of interests that met on the printed page. By doing so we might begin to ask: is a signature a claim of authorship or agency?

— *Hannah Wirta Kinney, Assistant Curator of Academic Programs*

Daniel Hopfer
(German, ca. 1470–1536)
The Large Altar with the Tree of Jesse, Crucifixion, and Resurrection, 1518
Iron etching
Friends of Art Fund, 1989.2

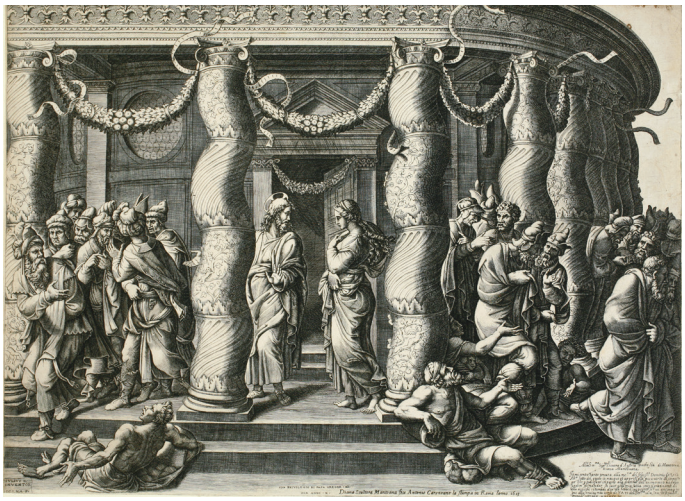


The small size of the signature (a D.H. with a small pinecone emblem above) within this image is difficult to locate at first glance. The longer inscription, Och Opus Philipus Adler Patricius MDVIII, held by two putti in the lower arch, draws the viewer's attention first to the name of the patron: Philipp Adler.

Daniel Hopfer's monogram, topped by an emblem at the base of the altar depicted in the print, closely follows the format of the mark a metalsmith would use to indicate the quality of his work, a type of trademark. Augsburg, where Hopfer worked, was an important armor-making center. Hopfer is regarded as the first person to print an etched plate, around 1500. This etching was made on iron, suggesting the relationship between the etched decoration of armor and the printed image.

As the century would progress, the increasing importance of invention over manual execution, which was associated with crafts like metalsmithing, would influence artists' signatures. But monograms reference an earlier system through which a craftsman used his name to stand for quality.

Diana (Ghisi) Scultori
(Italian, 1547–1612)
Christ and the Adulteress, image created 1576, this impression printed 1613
Engraving
Friends of Art Endowment Fund, 1984.50



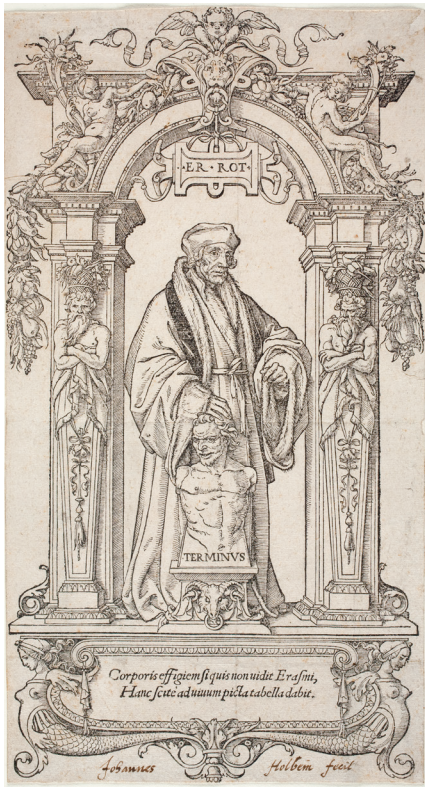
An abundance of inscriptions in different hands—added to the plate at diverse moments—stretches across the bottom of this print, illustrating the complex networks of agency that met on the printed page. Diana Scultori was the first Italian woman to sign her prints with her own name. She strategically used inscriptions to place herself in conversation with artists and patrons.

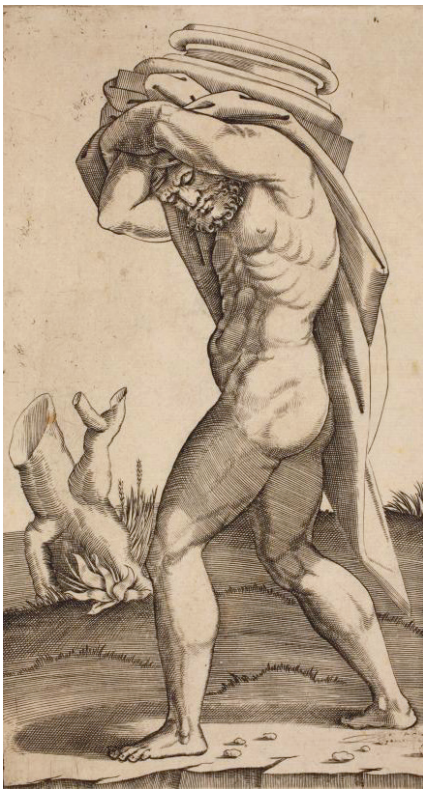
Starting at far left, the inscription Julius R Inventor reveals that the image this work is based on was the invention of Giulio Romano (1499–1546). Yet this engraving was made by Diana Scultori of Mantua, whose father had trained with Romano. In 1575, she received a 10-year papal privilege, visible in the block-letter inscription beginning "Con privilegio" at

center, which granted Scultori ownership rights of the print, enabling her to sell this image as her own "invention," though she identifies Romano as the inventor here. The inscription to the right, documents that Antonio Carenzano published this image again in 1613, after Scultori's death. The final inscription is a dedication to the Duchess of Mantua, which signaled Scultori's connection to the court of her birth city.

Hans Holbein the Younger
(German, 1497–1543)
Erasmus of Rotterdam, early 16th century
Woodcut
Gift of the Max Kade Foundation, 1976.11

A signature that reads "Johannes Holbein fecit," executed in ink at the bottom of this print, aligns with our modern notion of an artist signature: proof of the artist's presence in making the work. Yet Holbein's name here was added by a later hand, not his own, therefore serving more as an identificatory label than as a signature. The practice of adding a singular artist's name to a work was common in the 19th century, the period that also codified many modern ideas about authorship and artistic ownership that were not reflective of 16th-century practice. The works in this exhibition offer opportunities for returning to an early modern understanding of authorship and agency.

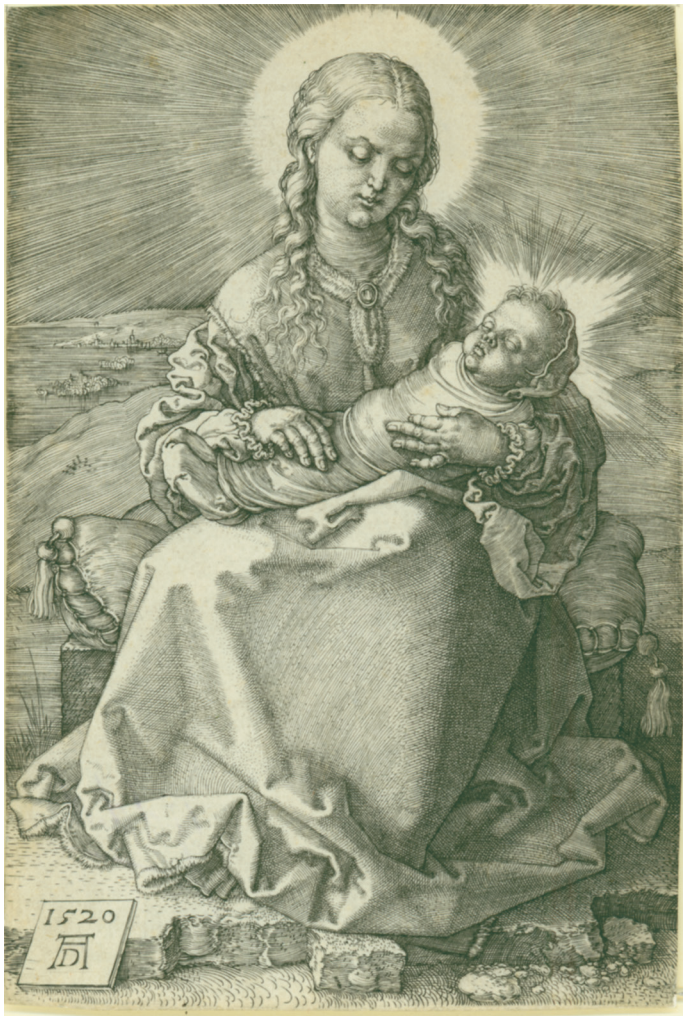




RIGHT: Agostino Veneziano
(Italian, 1490–1540)
Man Carrying a Column Base (detail), 1515–30
Engraving
Gift of Edward J. Olszewski, 2017.21.5

Agostino Veneziano and Marcantonio Raimondi, whose print is shown on the next page, worked in the same Roman printmaking workshop, where many reproductive prints, primarily after Raphael's designs, were adapted. Around 1515 the workshop began to use tablets embedded in their images, seen to the right of the figure's foot, as a type of signature. Below the tablet in this print are hints of a now illegible inscription removed from the plate. Throughout the early modern period, printing plates had multiple lives, shaped by designers, engravers, and publishers who contributed to them.

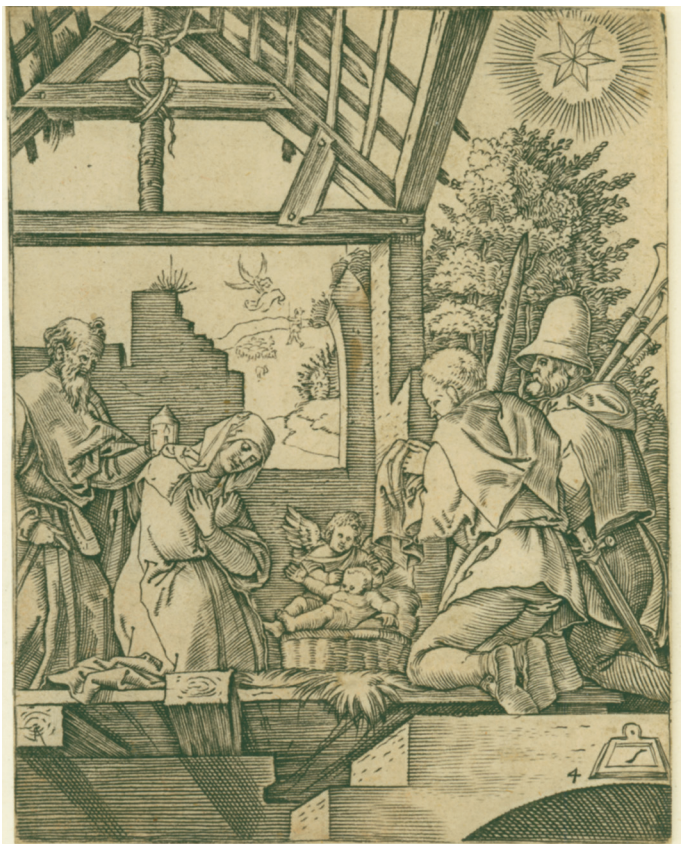
Albrecht Dürer
(German, 1471–1528)
Madonna with the Swaddled Infant, 1520
Engraving
Gift of the Max Kade Foundation, 1968.65



Revered in his time as an artist who emphasized his individuality, Albrecht Dürer began to include his monogram on drawings and panel paintings as early as 1493, and soon after on engravings and woodcuts. Like the German Daniel Hopfer, whose work is on the opposite wall, Dürer's use of the monogram as a form of signature was likely influenced by trade practice. His father was a goldsmith.

As a publisher of his own prints, Dürer's monogram advertised the singular control he had over the ideation, execution, printing, and distribution of his works. But in at least two legal battles—including one in Venice with Marcantonio Raimondi—he discovered that it was easier to control the circulation of his monogram than his images.

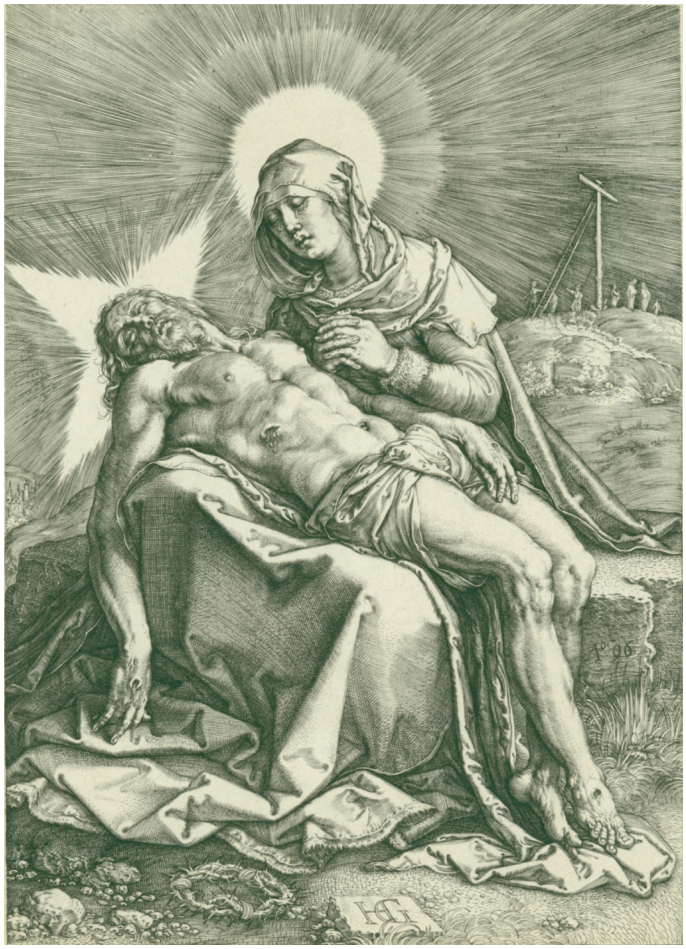
Marcantonio Raimondi
(Italian, ca. 1480–ca. 1534)
Adoration of the Shepherds, after the *Small Passion* by Albrecht Dürer, ca. 1515
Engraving
Oberlin-Carnegie Corporation Fund, 1931.55



Using a Dürer print as his model, Marcantonio Raimondi inventively translated the visual characteristics of woodblock printing into engraving, a completely different form. A tablet in the lower right corner has taken the place of Dürer's monogram in the image Raimondi reproduced, pointing to the relationship between copy and original.

Roughly 10 years before this image was made, Dürer had appealed to the Venetian senate to stop Raimondi from reproducing his images with his monogram included. Without a Venetian privilege protecting Dürer's images, Raimondi was able to continue to legally reproduce them by replacing Dürer's A.D. with his M.A.F. In 1515, around the time Raimondi replicated Dürer's *Small Passion* series, of which this print is a part, Raimondi removed his initials altogether, instead signaling his presence through an empty tablet. Interestingly, the tablet in this print includes a letter that looks like an "s", perhaps indicating this is a copy after Raimondi's copy of Dürer's image.

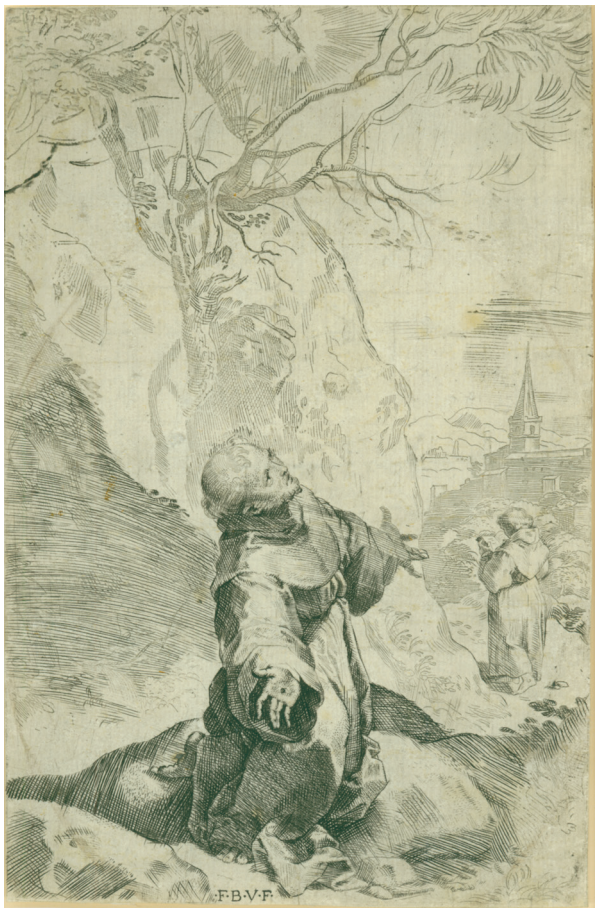
Hendrick Goltzius
(Dutch, 1558–1617)
The Virgin with the Dead Christ, 1596
Engraving
R. T. Miller Jr. Fund, 1942.48



After a trip to Italy in 1590, the Dutch artist Hendrick Goltzius created a set of prints emulating six great masters. In this print, he has closely adapted Dürer's style of engraving, an example of which is at your far left, most strikingly in the rendering of the halos. Upon closer inspection, the affinities between the folds of fabric, as well as the fur in the cuff here and around the Virgin's collar in the Dürer, exemplify an observation by 16th-century Flemish art historian Karel Van Mander that Goltzius's engraving was "cut precisely in the manner of Dürer."

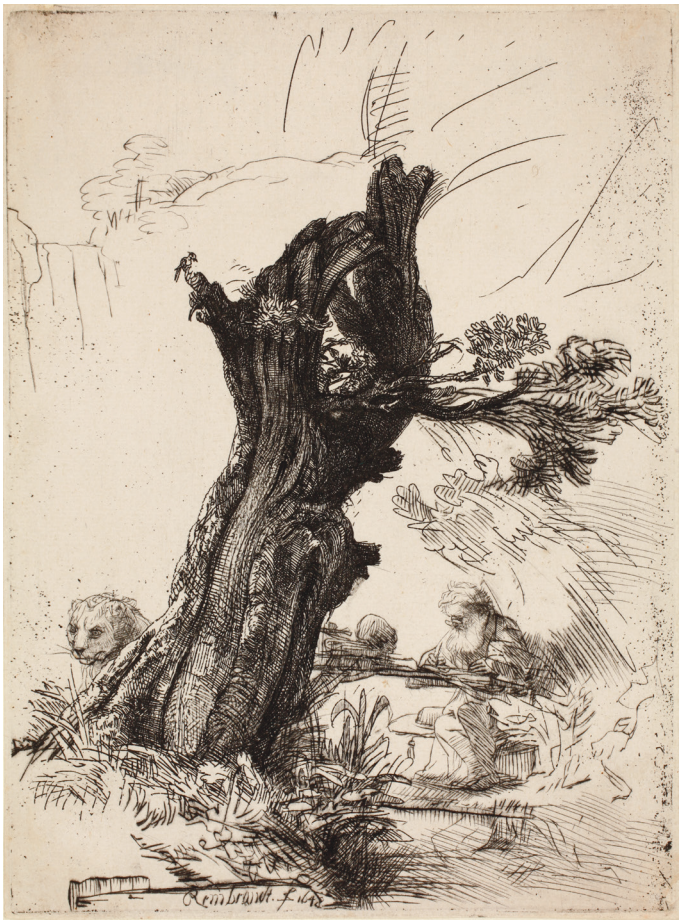
In drawings and prints Goltzius often used an interlocking H and G monogram. Its placement on a stone in the foreground of this print directly references the location of Dürer's monogram in the multiple engravings of the Virgin and Christ Goltzius drew from to create this emulation.

Federico Barocci
(Italian, ca. 1535–1612)
The Stigmatization of St. Francis, ca. 1581
Etching and engraving
Gift of Parks and Christie Campbell, 1983.32



Although Federico Barocci often relied on other printmakers to engrave his designs, this is one of four prints invented and executed by Barocci himself. Inscribed beneath the saint's knees are the letters F.B.V.F. for Federico Barocci of Urbino made it (*fecit*).

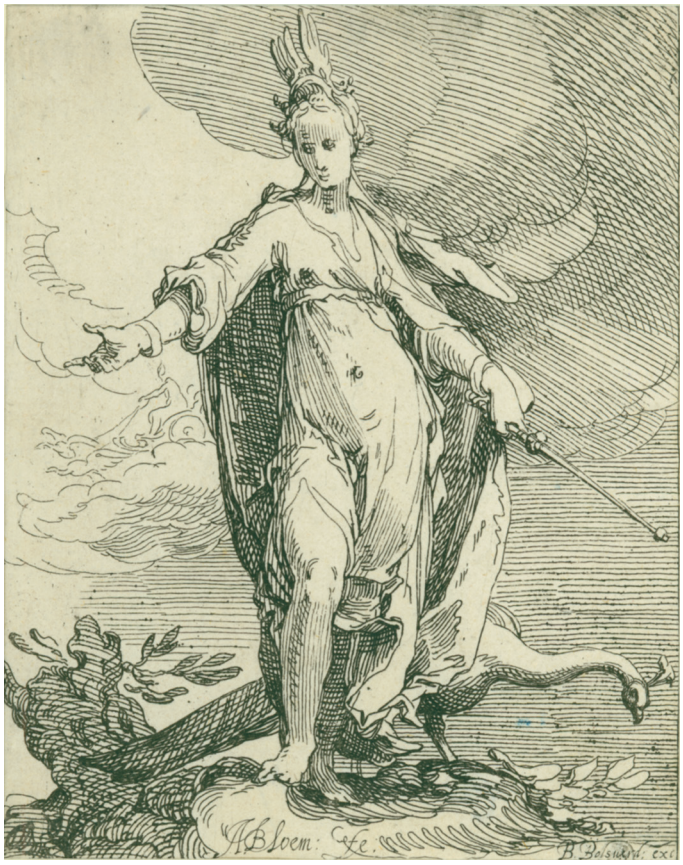
Though a striking, independent image, this print was likely an experiment through which Barocci refined his technical ability to achieve tonality—ranging from dark blacks delineating St. Francis in the foreground to lighter indications of place in the background—through the etching process. This experimentation prepared him for a much larger print, *Il Perdono di San Francesco*, made to publicize his painting in the church of the Observant Franciscans of Urbino, Italy. While in this plate Barocci claimed that he made (*fecit*) this image, in the *Perdono* Barocci claimed that he was both the "inventor" of the image and its engraver. This difference demonstrates how a print's potential audience could impact an artist's presentation of his agency through his signature.



Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn
(Dutch, 1606–1669)
St. Jerome Beside a Pollard Willow, 1648
Etching and drypoint
Gift of the Max Kade Foundation, 1967.42

A series of deep interlocking lines forming a rich, velvety knotted tree trunk at center is juxtaposed with a light, sketch-like suggestion of the landscape beyond. Beneath the tree, depicted in varying levels of attention, the scholarly, bespectacled St. Jerome concentrates on his text. Around the edges of the impression are small pits, revealing the imperfect application of the protective resist into which Rembrandt drew. These details reveal how the artist utilized an etching plate much like a piece of paper, as a place to explore an idea.

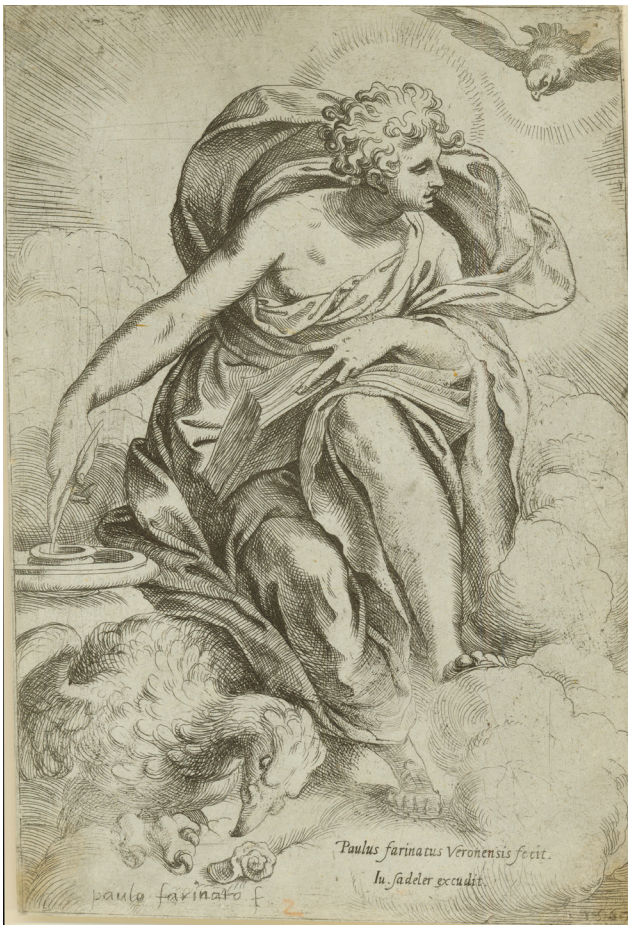
At the bottom, his script-like signature followed by f. (*fecit*) aligns with our modern notions of the function of a signature as a signal of presence, indicative of how much ideas of artistic authorship in prints had evolved by the mid-17th century.



Abraham Bloemaert
(Dutch, 1564–1651)
Juno, 1608–12
Etching
Special and Miscellaneous Funds, 1973.32

The fluid and script-like signature at the bottom of this print is reminiscent of Rembrandt's, at center in this case. The scrolling lines and decorative flourishes making up the letters Fe., for *fecit*, are similar to the lines that form the goddess Juno, the subject of this etching.

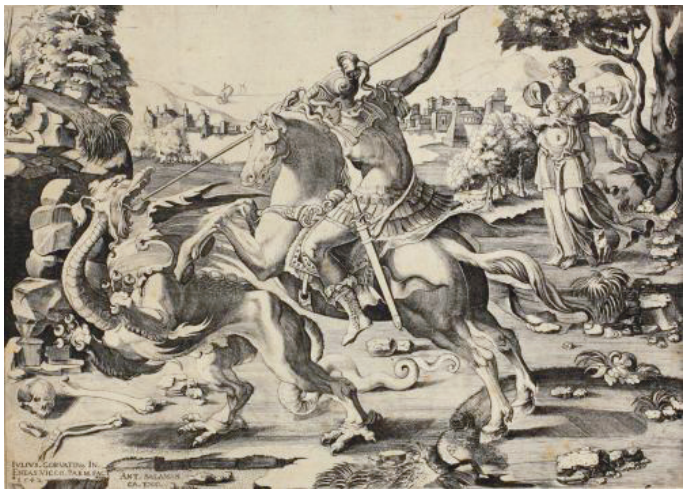
This is the only print that painter Abraham Bloemaert etched into a plate himself. It was conceived as part of a series that he never completed. In the lower right corner, we see the shortened name of Boëtius Adamsz Bolswert, followed by exc., from the Latin *excudere*, meaning to print or publish.



Paolo Farinati
(Italian, 1522–1606)
St. John the Evangelist, 1567
Etching
Friends of Art Fund, 1984.25

Paolo Farinati was primarily a draftsman and painter, who executed only 10 prints during his career, all after his own inventions. Farinati's loose handling of the needle, which creates a sketch-like appearance, coupled with his name followed by the letter f. at bottom left indicates the artist both imagined and executed this image.

The 1567 inscribed in the bottom left corner documents when Farinati completed the work. The vastly different script just below the feet of the evangelist denotes that the plate was subsequently purchased, reworked, and recirculated by Justus Sadeler, a Flemish engraver and publisher living in Venice. Sadeler's family did not arrive in Venice until 1599, decades after Farinati made this plate. The dueling inscriptions then hint at the practice of plates circulating after the death of the artist.



Enea Vico
(Italian, 1523–1567)
St. George and the Dragon, 1542
Engraving
Richard Lee Ripin Art Purchase Fund, 2018.26

The inscriptions in the lower left corner of this print document the growing importance of the value of ideas, *invenzione,* in 16th-century artistic practice. This plate, like that by Diana Scultori on the opposite wall, divides the labor manifest in this print into two parts: the invention, or conceptualization of the image, and the making, or actual engraving of the image into the plate. The first appearance of the term *invenit* on a print was on a work Marcantonio Raimondi made based on a design by Michelangelo in 1509. By the end of the century, this division commonly appeared on prints. Into this network of agents, Antonio Salamanca added his name as the publisher, the one who made the circulation of the prints possible.