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Autor: Schädler, Linda
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From Pattern Book to Allegory: Cornices in Print

Linda Schädler

Linda Schädler is director of the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zurich.

The emergence of printmaking in the late-fifteenth and (especially) in the sixteenth centuries contributed greatly to the formation of collective visual memory in Europe and played a crucial role in disseminating a formal syntax of art and architecture. In particular, easily transportable print heralded a new mobility of images, bridging distances not only geographical and temporal but between media. This mobility, combined with increasing travel by artists themselves, led to a transfer of representational conventions and, concomitantly, to a transfer of knowledge. The shift also affected the dissemination of the formal vocabulary of Renaissance architecture from Southern Europe, with its distinctive cornices. Cornices soon began to appear in prints, and hence in built architecture, in northern European countries, albeit more often as the stimulus for innovation rather than through precise reiteration. From the fifteenth to the eighteenth century in particular, prints depicting cornices became especially widespread and diverse.

In the 1970s, an understanding arose that prints were not only an agent of change but—more important—were crucial for standardization and for establishing a canon.[1] This notion, evidenced mainly by the transfer of a vocabulary of forms, has rightly been questioned since. Today, scholars emphasize that, despite the print being a medium defined by replication, the formal repertoire depicted was volatile well into the eighteenth century. This is especially true for the appropriation of architectural elements within a print, which was mostly selective and applied to local tradition in a variety of ways; that is, it was a perpetual cross-cultural interchange. Michael J. Waters, for example, argues that "Renaissance architectural prints in general were dynamic objects of transmission" in the early sixteenth century.[2] Edward H. Wouk points out that this revised notion of Renaissance prints—and of later ones—also induced changes in the methods of their study. Recent research, Wouk observes, has noted

> *"a shift, from examining the printed image as an index for an absent invention in another medium—a painting, sculpture, or drawing—to considering its role as a generative, active agent driving modes of invention and perception far beyond the locus of its production."*[3]

The templates for cabinetmaking in *Differents pourtraicts de menuiserie* (Various designs for furniture, ca. 1583) by Hans Vredeman de Vries (ca. 1527–1604) are striking examples of prints as active agents.[4] The suite of etchings was at the time something of an innovation. Vredeman's etchings form the first cohesive series of furniture designs; prior to that, single-sheet prints were common practice. [5] The Dutch architect, painter, and engineer presented his sixteen etchings devoid of explanatory texts, placing the focus instead entirely on the visual representation of the examples. [6] In these designs, Vredeman shows a preference for clearly accentuated cornices, with Print 11 devoted entirely to this architectural element. **fig. 1** The depictions are considerably influenced by the vocabulary of forms of the Renaissance, which Vredeman de Vries richly ornamented with elements not unusual for Northern Europe. With this amalgamation, he was able to create "*furniture phantasies*, which, in their exemplariness, had the character of didactic references." [7] The designs were not intended to be executed as shown but to serve as repertoires of ideas, and so the series has the character of a pattern book. The title page explicitly states that it is aimed at "Propre aux Menuiziers et autres amateurs de telle science" (cabinetmakers and other aficionados of this art). From the outset, Vredeman de Vries presented his project as one in which the images would appeal not only to skilled craftsmen but also to collectors.

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[1] Among others, see Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1979), 80–88.

[2] Michael J. Waters, "A Renaissance without Order: Ornament, Singe-Sheet Engravings, and the Mutability of Architectural Prints," in "Architectural Representation 2," special issue, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 71, no. 4 (December 2012): 488–523, here 489–90, 502.

[3] Edward H. Wouk, "Toward an Anthropology of Print," in *Prints in Translation, 1450–1750: Image, Materiality, Space*, ed. Suzanne Karr Schmidt and Edward H. Wouk (London: Routledge, 2017), 1–18, here 3.

[4] The series of etchings was undertaken by Pieter van der Borcht.

Vredeman de Vries's prints *of* architecture represent a genre whose impact on the dissemination of forms, including cornices, was crucial. In contrast to this example, the focus in the following pages is prints *with* architecture—depictions in which cornices are primarily part of an overall pictorial composition. Cornices in prints can take on imaginative forms and even present architectural paradoxes. In built architecture, cornices are restricted to being an element on a facade and are usually given responsibility for distinguishing the characteristics of an urban plan or for emphasizing the tectonics of a building.

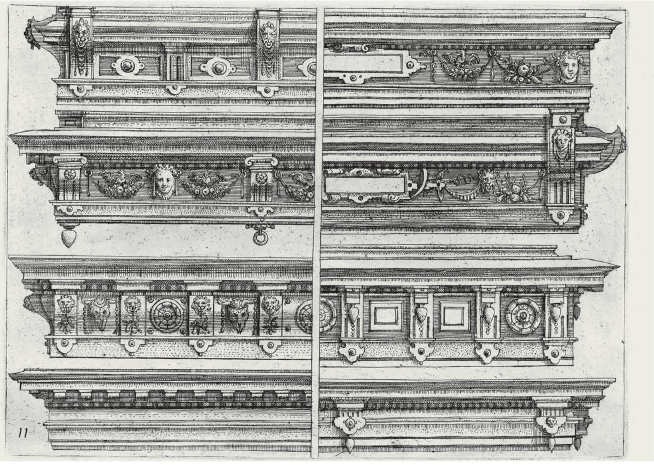

fig. 1 Hans Vredeman de Vries, "Differents pourtraicts de menuiserie" (Various Designs for Furniture, ca. 1583), Print 11

Since the emergence of central perspective, the relationship between architecture as a motif and as a technique to construct pictorial space in two dimensions has been especially strong. By means of the mathematical constructed perspectival system elaborated in the early Renaissance, one can create a coherent pictorial space in which the medium itself fades into the background: it becomes transparent, and the pictorial reality (the subject) comes to the fore. Only through irritations, ambiguities, or fractions is mediality rendered visible. Cornices, when forming part of the composition of an artwork, are a particularly effective means

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[5] As, for example, by sculptor, designer, and printmaker Peter Flötner (ca. 1490–1546) or by the French architect, decorator, and engraver Jacques Androuet Du Cerceau (ca. 1520–1585).

[6] See, for example, Anja Grebe, "Die Möbelentwürfe von Hans Vredeman de Vries—Zwischen Schreinervorlagen und Sammlerwerk," in *Hans Vredeman de Vries und die Folgen*, ed. Heiner Borggrefe and Vera Lüpkes (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2005), 109–117, here 109.

[7] Grebe, "Die Möbelentwürfe von Hans Vredeman de Vries," 114. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

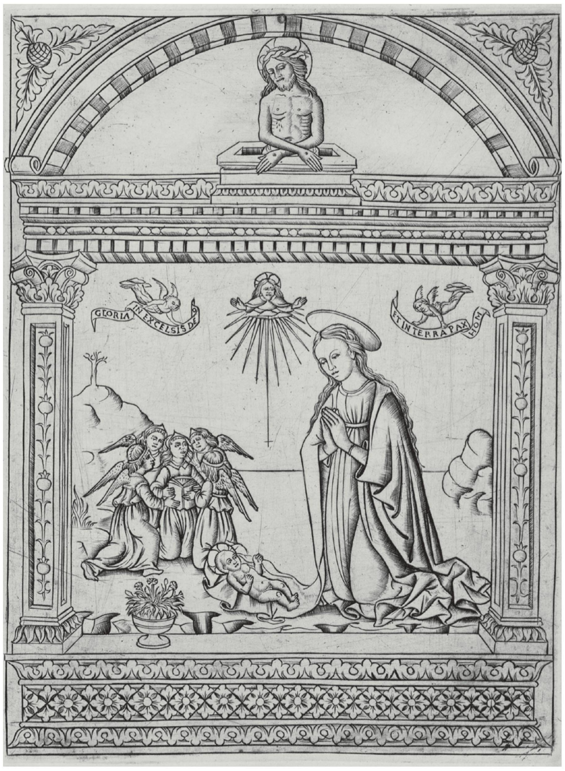

fig. 2 Anonymous Florentine engraving; printing plate dated to ca. 1470. The original brass plate is in the British Museum (ppa102513). In addition to the work in the British Museum, modern imprints can be found in Berlin, Paris, in the Rothschild Collection (Musée du Louvre, Paris) and in the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zurich.

to reflect or subvert a construction principle such as the central perspective and hence make media perceptible. [8] Although other building elements could also have this effect, the cornice is particularly likely to be used in compositional roles in artworks since it defines a horizontal axis. This is—especially in conjunction with central perspective—exceptionally useful for emphasizing or disturbing depth effects. Moreover, the cornice, as not only a horizontal but also a protruding architectural element, is ideal for staging scenes handed down from a narrative (e.g., from the Bible or mythology), especially when distorted or stretched in a depiction, without wholly giving up its architectural role.

The cornice, far from being solely an *object* of cultural transfer, developed a life of its own, as this article will make clear. By presenting selected works from the Graphische Sammlung ETH Zurich, I explore the role and function of cornices as intrinsic elements of images. On the basis of a close reading of five examples, I show that cornices are important not only for specific modes of representation (e.g., central perspective) but are so in conjunction with the semantics of a work of art.

Framing

ETH Zurich's Collection of Prints and Drawings includes numerous Renaissance-era prints depicting cornices primarily as part of a composition and only secondarily as architecture. Take the late-fifteenth-century engraving known as *Nativity: The Virgin Adoring the Child*, by an unknown Florentine artist. **fig. 2** Two scenes unfold here. In the lower rectangle, one can see the Christ Child with the Virgin Mary in an arid landscape, its depth evoked in the background by a horizontal line, some rock formations, and a group of angels. In the upper segment, Jesus is depicted as the *vir dolorum* (Man of Sorrows), a half-length figure rising from the sarcophagus, in a manner typical of iconography from the twelfth century onward. The background of the lower scene is outlined with only a few lines, while subtle use of hatching lends plasticity to the figures and objects. In contrast to this restrained aesthetic, the cornice, round arch, and pilasters are all richly ornamented, and the different types of stone, such as those in the arch, are distinguished by cross-hatching. This lends prominence to the architectural details, which echo the structure of an altarpiece. Although they frame the simple scenes, their wealth of detail grants them the same prominence as the figures and the landscape.

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[8] On the topic of mediality, see, for example, Dieter Mersch, "Absentia in Praesentia: Negative Medialität," in *Mediale Gegenwärtigkeit*, ed. Christian Kiening (Zurich: Chronos, 2007), 81–94.

David Landau and Peter Parshall note that, for the most part, prints of Christian themes

> *"were used as cheap substitutes for devotional paintings. This is suggested not only by their choice of subject matter—normally confined to one of the main episodes of the New Testament or the depiction of a locally venerated saint—but also by the similarly direct, simplified, and didactic approach to the treatment of such subjects."* [9]

Such devotional prints are bounded by one or more frames that suggest a perspectival space. This compositional device is inspired by illuminated books in which the motif is delineated by frames or borders. Similarly, in Italian printmaking, attempts were made to imitate the frames of paintings and even, in some cases, to create a *trompe l'oeil* effect. [10] The pilasters, cornices, and round arch in *Nativity: The Virgin Adoring the Child* all suggest pictorial depth, yet the oscillation between frontal, upward, and downward views defies any notion of classical central perspective and undermines any *trompe l'oeil* effect. More importance is placed in this devotional print on the *separation* between the scene in the picture and the experience of the viewer, and between the two scenes within the picture. Consider the analogy between window and picture formulated by Leon Battista Alberti in the 1430s: "first of all, on the surface on which I am going to paint, I draw a rectangle of whatever size I want, which I regard as an open window through which the subject to be painted is seen." [11] In Alberti's descriptions, the window—or, more precisely, the frame—divides a motif from all that lies outside it. The subject composed within the picture is a law unto itself, differing as it does from the reality outside, without necessarily causing any friction. Or, as Johannes Grave writes,

> *"by creating a division between exterior and interior, between the view appearing in the window and the wall, while at the same time making their reciprocity tangible, the window is uniquely suited as a figure of thought describing how the perspectival image relates to reality."* [12]

In the print at hand, *separation* is shown as something to be overcome. Compositionally, the architecture acts as the frame that separates the scenes in the picture from the viewer, as well as from one another. At the same time, however, the two scenes are interlinked: Christ as the Man of Sorrows gazes upon himself as an infant. In the lower part of the picture, the cornice acts as the depository for a bouquet of carnations, which can be read as a symbol of the Crucifixion and as a further element referring to Christ and his preordained fate. The cornices are used as elements on which small scenes are set; that is, they go beyond their exclusive function as a framework and actually intervene in what is happening in the picture. In the upper part, the cornice turns into a load-bearing element for the sarcophagus—even though the lack of central perspective makes the sarcophagus appear to be placed in front of the cornice. The frames, or rather the architectural framing elements, distance the viewer from the scenes, which can be observed only by looking at them from "outside," but the links woven by the placement of the sarcophagus and the carnations bring the viewer closer again. The cornices, in particular, enable a visual transition from the real to the pictorial space without disengaging the scenes. The oscillation between frame and architecture is as much a hallmark of this work as the oscillation between distance and proximity. What is depicted forms a cohesive but ambiguous whole that pulls the frame into the picture and, with that, into the overall composition. As is appropriate for a devotional picture, all these devices serve to suggest the plausibility of the communication between distant points of time and space and between the mundane and the divine.

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[9] David Landau and Peter Parshall, *The Renaissance Print 1470–1550* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 81.

[10] Landau and Parshall, *The Renaissance Print*, 81–2. Erwin Panofsky wrote a study of the first page of Giorgio Vasari's *Libro*, where he describes the use of frames in detail. Since Panofsky's focus is on the Gothic style in the judgment of the Italian Renaissance and not on the question of how cornices are reframed, it is not elaborated in the present article. See Erwin Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1955), 169–225. On Panofsky's study, see, for example, Anne-Marie Sankovitch, "The Myth of the 'Myth of the Medieval': Gothic Architecture in Vasari's Rinascita and Panofsky's Renaissance," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 40 (Autumn 2001): 29–50, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20167537 (accessed: April 16, 2021).

[11] Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting and on Sculpture: The Latin Texts of De Pittura" and "De Statua,"* trans. Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon, 1972), 55.

[12] Johannes Grave, *Architekturen des Sehens: Bauten in Bildern des Quattrocento* (Paderborn: Wilhelm Fink Verlag 2015), 41. Quote translated by Ishbel Flett.

Staging

The cornices in the *Nativity* are therefore not only architectural framing elements but a prop in a kind of stage design. A few visual elements of highly symbolic character are placed on the cornices in a way that would—in a built environment—not appear likewise. This particular function of staging is yet more apparent in the work of the Augsburg artist Daniel Hopfer (ca. 1470–1536), who is widely acknowledged as the inventor of iron-plate etching. [13] Cornices occur frequently in his works, both in interior settings and urban scenes. This is in no small part due to the fact that he was active in Augsburg, a city that played a significant role in the reception of Renaissance art. Augsburg had thriving trade links with Italy from the fifteenth century onward and, as the city flourished, so, too, did patronage of the arts by leading merchants such as the Fugger and Welser families. Augsburg took pride in identifying with its Roman past. This not only encouraged the collection of fragments of classical antiquity that could be found in and around the city but also promoted an interest in publications featuring, for instance, inscriptions from ancient ruins. Conrad Peutinger, for example, who at the

[13] On Daniel Hopfer, see Christof Metzger, *Daniel Hopfer: Ein Augsburger Meister der Renaissance* (Munich: Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, 2009). On his transfer of forms, not only between the north and the south but also between different media, see Freyda Spira, "Between Paper and Sword: Daniel Hopfer and the Translation of Etching in Reformation Augsburg," in *Prints in Translation, 1450–1750*, 59–73.

time was city clerk and counselor to Emperor Maximilian I, actively promoted the collection and study of fragments and ruins. Such factors set in motion the transfer and adaptation of Renaissance architecture in Augsburg much earlier than in other cities of the German-speaking world. Prints played a particular role, given that they prominently featured Renaissance elements up to twenty years before those elements began to be incorporated into actual buildings. [14]

One example of this is Hopfer's iron-plate etching *Monstrance with Last Supper, Manna from Heaven, Apostles and Deesis*. [15] **fig. 3** Here, the monstrance is designed as a miniature architectural entity. A richly ornamented foot supports a structure teeming with Renaissance decor that recalls a three-aisled church. Like a doll's house, the composition opens up glimpses into various scenes peopled by groups of biblical figures. The architecture is defined by the columns, vaulting, and arches widespread during the Renaissance, and transfers and coalesces many of the forms mentioned above. Hopfer amalgamated Renaissance architectural elements with others borrowed from the Gothic — such as the tower structure of the monstrance — and his own idiosyncratic ornamentation. The many and varied cornices are particularly striking. They not only top the columns or arches but separate the various levels from one another. The views of the cornices alternate several times, from foot to tip of the monstrance, between upward, downward, and frontal aspects. On the one hand, this allows Hopfer to suggest architectural height and depth, while on the other it gives him the possibility of presenting important scenes with greater pictorial depth. Take for instance the Last Supper (in the upper area of the foot) or the meeting of Abraham with Melchizedek, who offers him bread and wine (on the left), as well as the Passover meal with Jews

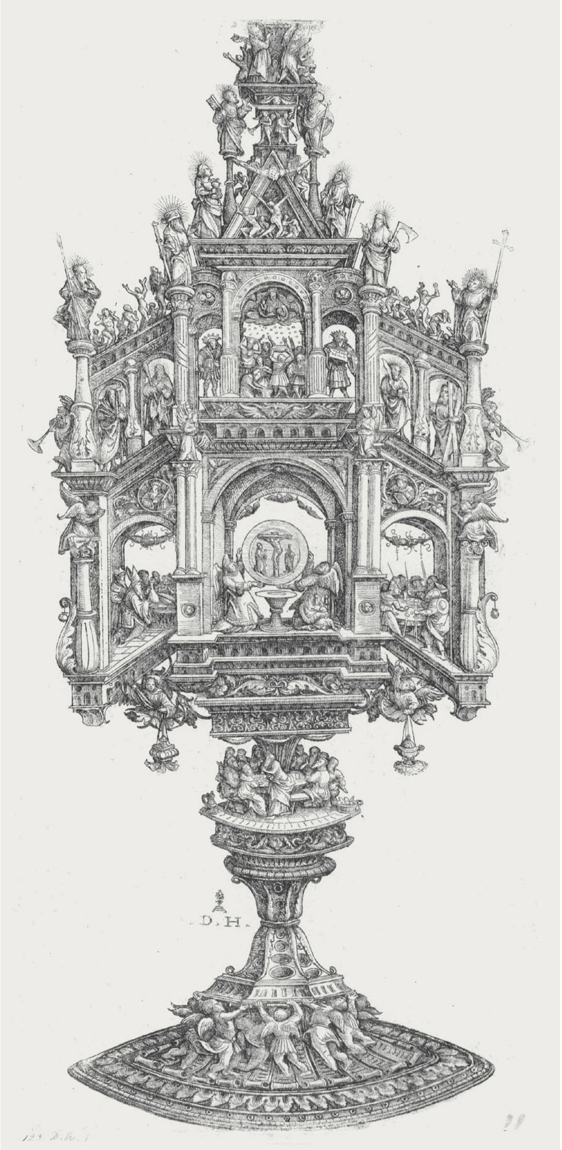

fig. 3 Daniel Hopfer, *Monstrance with Last Supper, Manna from Heaven, Apostles and Deesis*. Ironplate etching; printing plate created 1505–1522; this print was made a century later.

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[14] See, for example, Christoph Bellot, "Burgkmair und die Frage der Stilwahl: Zu Architektur und Ornament in Augsburg nach 1500," in *Hans Burgkmair: Neue Forschungen*, ed. Wolfgang Augustyn and Manuel Teget-Welz (Passau: Dietmar Klinger Verlag, 2018), 69–156, here 75.

[15] Printing plate created 1505–1522; print, early seventeenth century. According to Metzger, the function of the print is not known. Some claim that it served as a model for a gold work or, vice versa, that a gold work was the model for the print. See Metzger, *Daniel Hopfer*, 360.

gathered around a table (on the right). In these side wings of the monstrance, especially, we find an interplay of tipping points, such as the cornices in the lower section protruding forward while those above stretch out sideways.

Here, the autonomy of the print freed from the constraints of built architecture is particularly evident. To enable the viewer to see the different biblical scenes, Hopfer composes the pictorial structure in such a way that the evocation of a coherent space is no longer key, partially distorting the perspective. By establishing such architectural paradoxes, the cornices adopt new, additional roles: they not only form part of the structure of a three-dimensional object but also turn into scenes of action. The cornice thus becomes a place—or the setting, even the stage—for visual elements that have a symbolic and narrative nature.

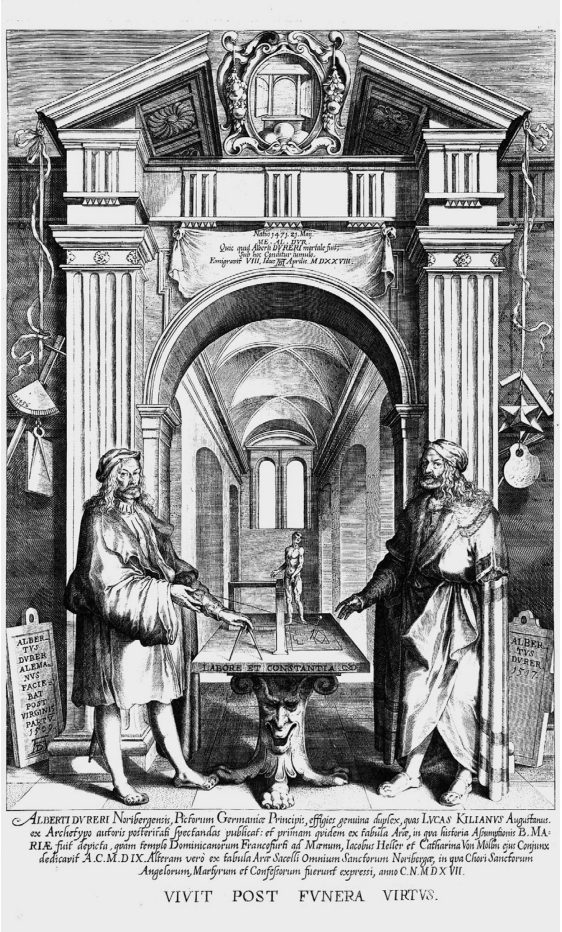
Aligning

The *Nativity* and Hopfer's *Monstrance* make clear that cornices should be regarded not just as architectural motifs but also as a constituent part of the construction of pictorial space. Grave, in particular, stresses this correlation of architecture and image: "deploying architecture not only determined *what* was represented in the picture, but also *how* it was represented." [16] The architectural structures therefore give insight into the conventions of representation. It is hardly surprising that this phenomenon should manifest itself in an era when central perspective was a key form of the rational representation of nature. This applied not only to pictorial composition but also to the built environment, where cornices not only structured the facade but pointed beyond it toward the wider urban context, where they were used to emphasize aspects such as street alignments. As Dieter Mersch notes, central perspective combined "the subjectivity of the gaze with the constructivity of the mathematical," [17] whereby the gaze of the viewer "becomes the foundation of the pictorial construction: the eye of the painter, like the eye of the viewer, must be fixed on one clearly calculable point, which, particularly during the Renaissance, was often achieved with the aid of perspective apparatus." [18] Albrecht Dürer was a crucial figure in this development, as he explored central perspective both in his art works and in his writing; his impact on contemporaries and artists cannot be overestimated. Especially later in his life, he wrote pivotal works on proportion theory, geometry, and mathematics, including *Underweysung der messung mit dem zirckel und richtscheyt in Linien ebnen unnd gantzen corporen* (*Instructions for Measuring with Compass and Ruler, in Lines, Planes, and Whole Bodies*, 1525).

[16] Grave, *Architekturen des Sehens,* 11.

[17] Dieter Mersch, "Abbild und Zerrbild: Zur Konstruktion von Rationalität und Irrationalität in frühneuzeitlichen Darstellungsweisen," in *Instrumente in Kunst und Wissenschaft: Zur Architektonik kultureller Grenzen im 17. Jahrhundert*, ed. Helmar Schramm, trans. Ishbel Flett (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 21–40, here 23.

[18] Linda Schädler, *James Coleman und die Anamorphose: Der Blick von der Seite,* trans. Ishbel Flett (Munich: Silke Schreiber, 2013), 31.


LABORE ET CONSTANTIA
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ex Archetypo autoris posteritati spectandas publicat: et primam quidem ex tabula Aræ, in qua historia Assumptionis B. MA-
RIÆ fuit depicta, quam templo Dominicanorum Francofurti ad Mænum, Iacobus Heller et Catharina Von Möllin ejus Conjunx
dedicavit A.C.M.D IX. Alteram verò ex tabula Aræ Sacelli Omnium Sanctorum Noribergæ, in qua Chori Sanctorum
Angelorum, Martyrum et Confessorum fuerunt expressi, anno C.N.M D X VII.
VIVIT POST FVNERA VIRTVS.

fig. 4 Lucas Kilian, *Double Portrait of Albrecht Dürer.* Copperplate engraving; printing plate 1617

In his copperplate engraving *Double Portrait of Albrecht Dürer*, Lucas Kilian (1579–1637) shows him in both roles, as artist and scientist, emphasizing his theoretical acumen by presenting him in the act of calculating and measuring. **fig. 4** For his print, which dates from the beginning of a burgeoning Dürer euphoria that arose in the early seventeenth century, the artist took two self-portraits by Dürer and placed them in the foreground of a portal that opens up into the depths of the picture. [19] The viewer's gaze is led from the double portrait, along the slightly elevated view of the tabletop with figure, toward a twin window whose center post precisely marks the vanishing point. The cornices in the interior space distinctly emphasize this sense of elongated depth, acting, at one and the same time, as structural element, motif, and construction principle. However, a cornice also appears in the foreground above the portal arch, and, unlike the interior cornices, it closes the scene and sets it apart, with an angle of view from slightly below accentuating the height of the arch. The almost exaggerated emphasis on central perspective makes the print seem like a manifestation of this compositional technique. It is neither symbolically charged, nor is it the location of a narrative event, as in the examples of the anonymous engraving or Hopfer's *Monstrance* but instead is more a meta-commentary on the mathematically constructed architecture. The slight shifts in perspective embedded in the image show the potential of the mathematical construction of images by means of central perspective; that is, it renders a type of representation explicit.

Deixis

About a century after the creation of Kilian's print, cornices appear increasingly often in *vedute*. One example of this is the etching by Antonio Visentini (1688–1782) after Canaletto's painting of Piazza San Marco and its basilica. **fig. 5** Constructed like a proscenium stage, the picture is flanked on three sides by ostentatious

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[19] The one on the left is taken from the 1509 Heller Altarpiece, while the one on the right is from the Holy Trinity Altarpiece, Nuremberg. In the inscription, Kilian incorrectly gives the date as 1517 instead of 1511. See, for example, Jaya Remond, "Lucas Kilian: Double Portrait of Albrecht Dürer," in *Prints and the Pursuit of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Susan Dackerman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 50. On the Dürer Renaissance, see *Albrecht Dürer and His Legacy: The Graphic Work of a Renaissance Artist*, ed. Giulia Bartrum (London: British Museum Press, 2002), 266–67.

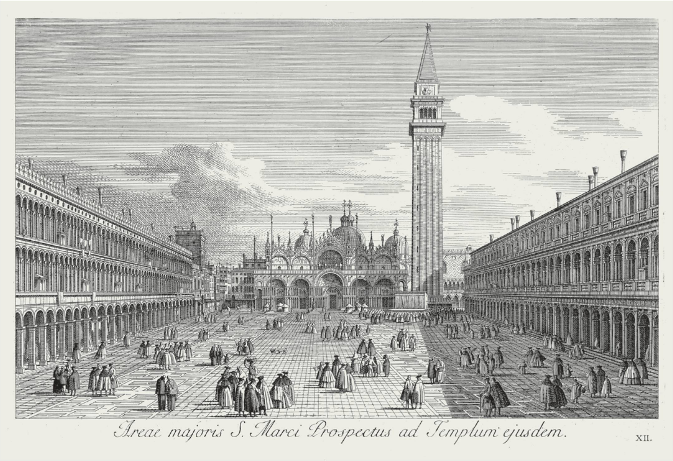

Areae majoris S. Marci Prospectus ad Templum ejusdem.
XII.

fig. 5 A view of Piazza San Marco. Engraving printed on laid paper (papier vergé). Print 12 of the third part of the series *Urbis Venetiarum Prospectus Celebriores*; Printing plate 1735/42, published 1773. The preparatory drawing (pencil, quill, ink, and sepia) is in the Museo Correr, Venice. In the preparatory drawing, Visentini omitted the clouds and shadowed zones that can be seen in this print. Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), *Piazza San Marco with the Basilica*

buildings. Shown from an elevated viewpoint, the cornices of the buildings on the left and right, defining each floor, catch the eye and draw the gaze toward the basilica in the background. The elongated depth is emphasized by this horizontal building element. At the same time, the cornices in the image manage to activate the space between the buildings as a stage. The square is animated by finely dressed people, with the artist using this staffage to considerable effect in accentuating not only the size of St. Mark's Square but also the height of the buildings. Comparable to built architecture, the structures in such depictions are deictic, pointing beyond themselves toward the wider urban setting.

As with Canaletto's painting of San Marco, the second *veduta* presented here, by Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778), also structures the space between the buildings to catch the eye. The work forms part of his long-running *Vedute di Roma* project, which by 1774 had grown to 135 grand-scale prints. His *View of Palazzo Odescalchi* shows that Piranesi used the selected detail and viewpoint to construct his composition in a way that places importance on the role of the buildings and, especially, their pronounced cornices. **fig. 6** The overall composition is shaped by the diagonal alignment (due to the angle of view being slightly to the right) and the light falling from the side. The gaze is drawn to the background of the picture via the long and sunlit palazzo with its prominent cornices. Even though the cornices on the right-hand building, which lies in shadow, further emphasize the depth of the central perspective, they are clearly not drawn to scale. Palazzo Odescalchi is disproportionately large and plays the leading role. The building attracts attention and simultaneously frames the square in front of it as a stage on which the gentry, strolling in their finery, make an appearance, along with country folks and their animals. *Vedute* such as these are based on real cityscapes.

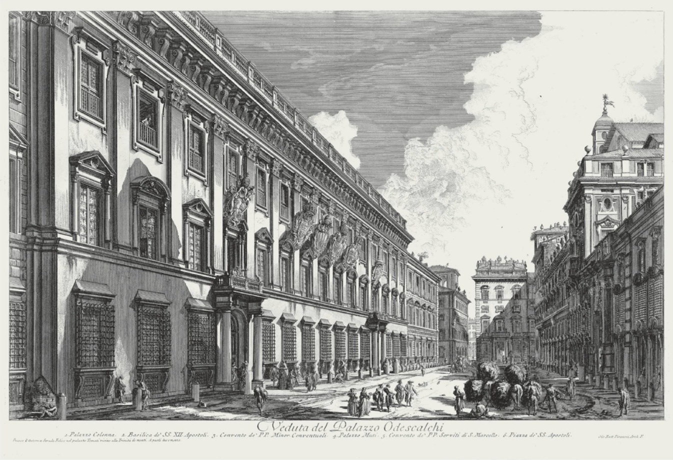


fig. 6 Giovanni Battista Piranesi, "View of Palazzo Odescalchi"; print from the series *Vedute di Roma*; printing plate 1753; etching on papier vergé

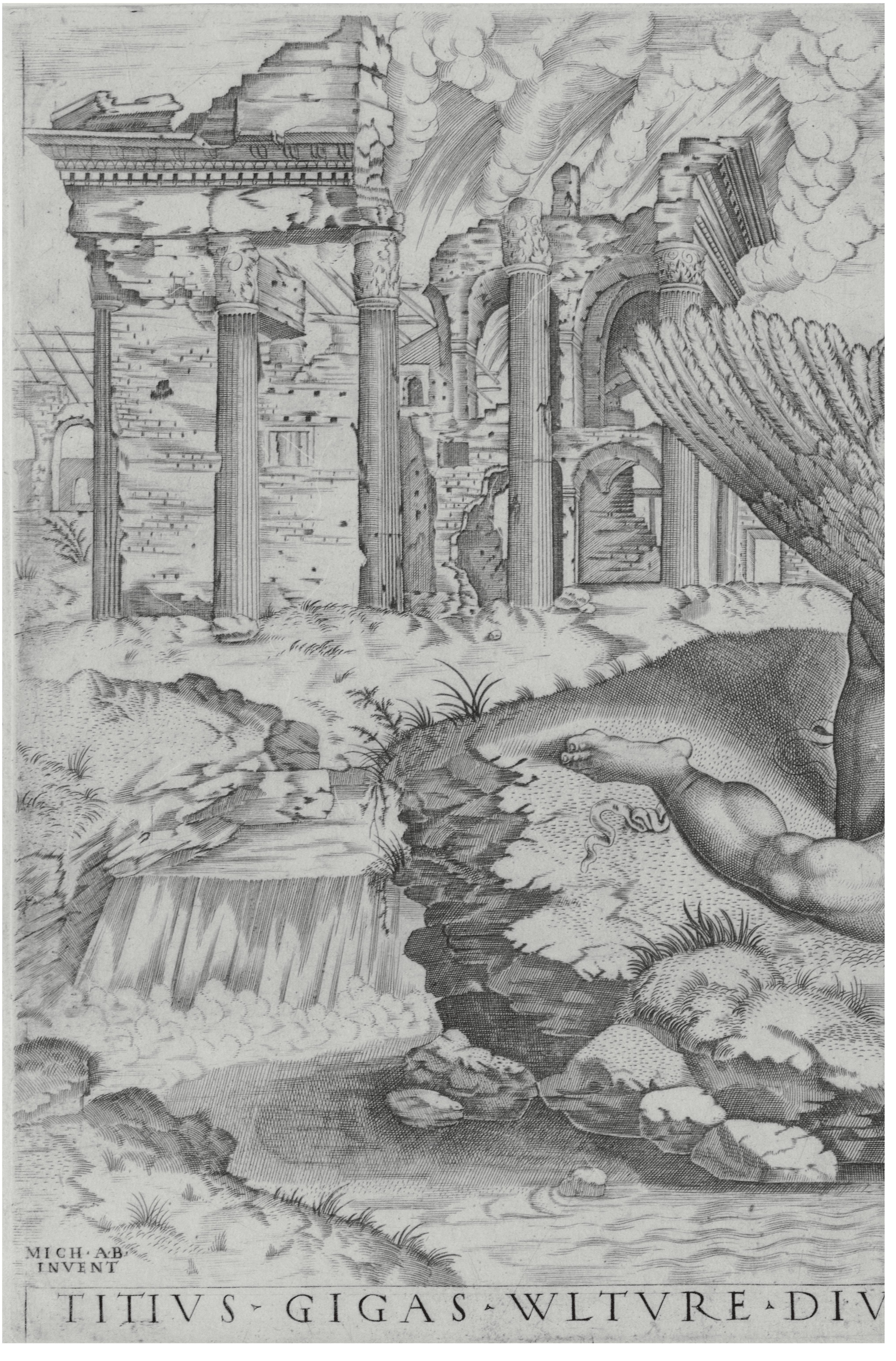
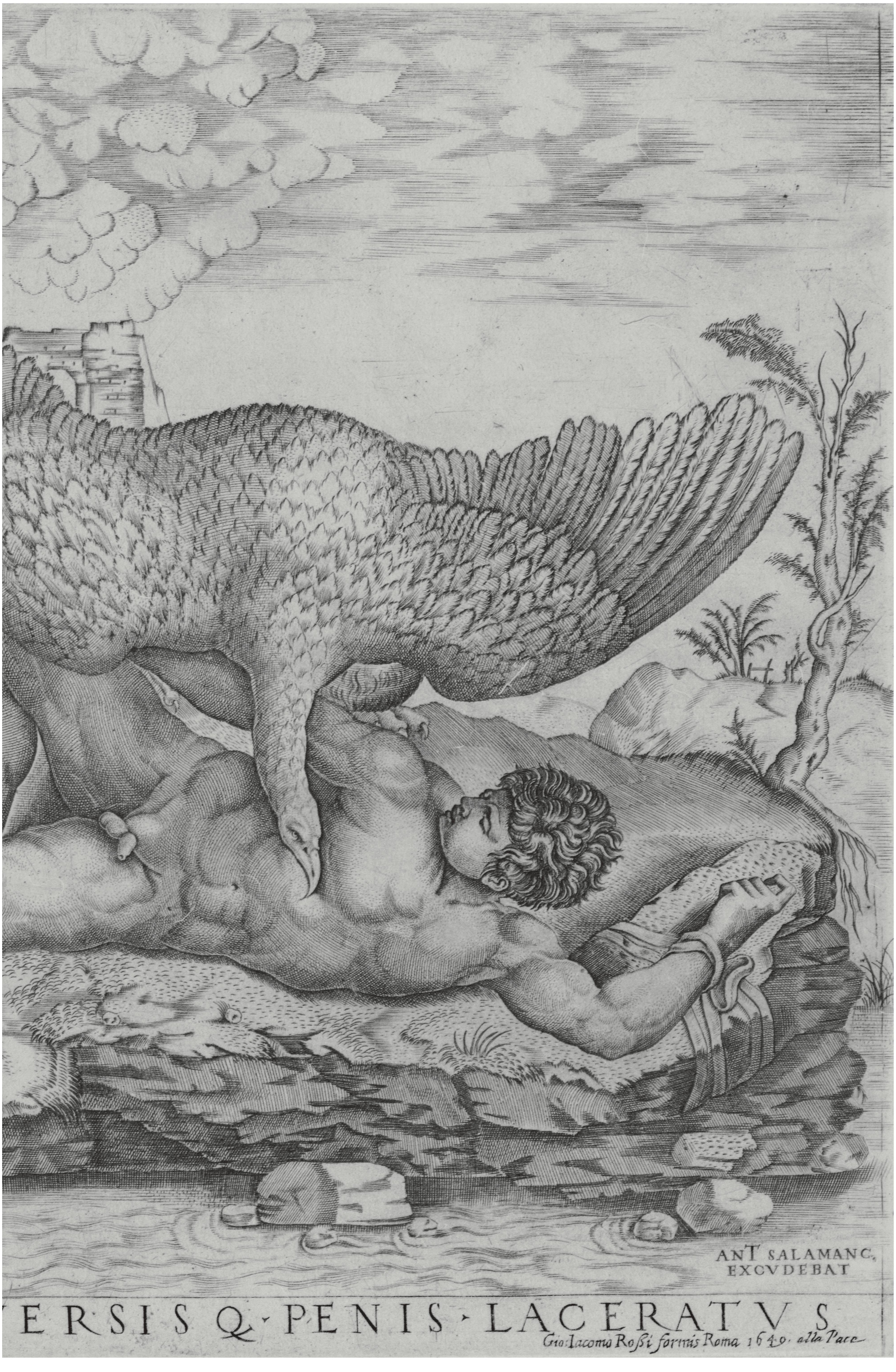


fig. 7 Copperplate engraving after a drawing by Michelangelo, attributed to Nicolas Beatrizet. The plate itself was made on an unknown date. This image was printed by Giacomo de Rossi in 1649. On the work's attribution, see Silvia Bianchi, "Catalogo dell'opera incisa di Nicola Beatrizet (II parte)," in *Grafica d'arte: Rivista di storia dell'incisione antica e moderna e storia del disegno* 14, no. 55 (2003): 3–12, here 5


ANT SALAMANC.
EXCVDEBAT
ERSIS Q· PENIS· LACERATVS
Gio: Iacomo Roßi formis Roma 1649. alla Pace

Intended to be recognizable, they provide a precise record of the local situation. At the same time, this genre is known to include slight amendments. The artist might push certain buildings a little closer together for dramatic effect or make reductions or enlargements to accentuate the perspective. Artists did not seek photographic precision *avant la lettre*. [20] Instead, the accuracy of the buildings shown takes second place to the overall effect. This is especially the case in Piranesi's print, in which the palazzo is slightly distorted to dramatize the picture.

Allegorizing

Piranesi was also known for staging Roman antiquities in his *vedute*, as well as in his later works. This went hand in hand with debates of the time concerning the primacy of Greek or Roman antiquity. However, the inclusion of ancient buildings or ruins in a composition was by no means new, as shown by the final example, a copperplate engraving, attributed to Nicolas Beatrizet (1515–ca. 1566), after a drawing by Michelangelo. fig. 7 Michelangelo had taken his inspiration for his black chalk drawing from the fate of the giant Tityus as described in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. fig. 8 Having attempted to rape Lato, the mother of Apollo and Diana, Tityus was punished by being chained to a rock in Hades. Each day, a vulture would rip out his liver, the seat of lust. The liver regrew each night, and so the torture was repeated every day for all eternity. Michelangelo's drawing, like several others, was intended for his close friend Tommaso dei Cavalieri. Although distinctly private in character, Tommaso would show it on request, and the motif was subsequently adopted by others. [21]

One example is the print attributed to Beatrizet. From Michelangelo's drawing, Beatrizet adopted the depiction of the magnificent eagle spreading its wings over the naked Tityus before attacking his body. The scene plays out on a rock, which Beatrizet surrounds with water, making it a small island. The most striking change, however, is the background addition of the ancient Temple of Minerva in the Roman Forum of Nerva, a building with no prior association with the Tityus myth. [22] Whether Beatrizet's compositional addition can be read as intending "to give a kind of antique aura to the scene" and whether the ultimate explanation was that "the printmaker or his publisher didn't quite know what would interest potential buyers," as Bernadine Barnes writes, remain moot points. [23] Of interest here is that the cornices drawn by Beatrizet are particularly weighty and massive compared to the slender columns. With the temple ablaze and little more than a ruin, the cornices—themselves in danger of collapse—take on an ominous presence: on the one hand, they hold the remaining architectural elements together; on the other hand, they seem capable of crushing what remains by the force of their own weight. This tension — between holding up and being destroyed — allegorizes Tityus's fate between death and life. That is, the narrative of the foreground scene is allegorically reflected in the background, even though the two parts of the picture are not connected in the overall composition. Moreover, the cornices appear as compositional elements that dramatically heighten both the content and the structure of the image.

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[20] See, for example, André Corboz, "Die venezianische Vedute zwischen Wirklichkeit und Mythos," in *Mythos Venedig* (Milan: Electa 1994), 20–37, here 26, 31.

[21] Several drawings after Michelangelo were created. See *Tityus* by Agnolo Bronzino after Michelangelo, ca. 1550, black chalk, as well as *Tityus* by an unidentified artist after Michelangelo, ca. 1550, black chalk. Details in *Michelangelo and His Influence: Drawings from Windsor Castle*, exh. cat., ed. Paul Joannides (London: Lund Humphries Publishers, 1996), 68–71. In addition, "Michelangelo's drawing had served as a design that was engraved on rock crystal by Giovanni Bernardi da Castel Bolognese for Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici around 1530." That work is now in the British Museum. See Christopher L. C. E. Witcombe, *Print Publishing in Sixteenth-Century Rome: Growth and Expansion, Rivalry and Murder* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2008), 185. Some scholars believe Tommaso permitted engravers to copy the motif.

[22] Witcombe, *Print Publishing Rome*, 185.

[23] Bernadine Barnes, *Michelangelo in Print: Reproductions as Response in the Sixteenth Century* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 153.

Conclusion

In previous scholarship, two-dimensional depictions of the cornice have mainly been objects of study as "prints *of* architecture" — pattern books and instruction sketches; for example, Vredeman de Vries's series of prints. In contrast, this article concentrates on cornices in "prints *with* architecture." In such imageries, cornices form part of an artwork and hence are part of the compositional structure.

In seeking to understand two-dimensional depictions of cornices in prints with architecture, a focus on works created from the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries is particularly productive. During that period, cornices were especially common owing to the formal vocabulary deriving from the Renaissance, which favored clearly accentuated cornices. Besides, a cornice defines a horizontal axis and is therefore not only a suitable means to evoke a coherent pictorial space but can also question the images' principle by manipulating it: slight aberrations, such as distortions, immediately disturb the unity of the visual field and its characteristic vanishing-point system (e.g., in Hopfer's *Monstrance*). As a consequence, a cornice can make the system visible to the eye and hence reveal the construction of central perspective. It can also be staged as the setting for a symbolically charged narrative event, as in anonymous devotional engravings or Hopfer's *Monstrance*. A distinctive accent can be set by means of perspectival anomalies, or a compositional scheme can be dramatically heightened, as in Piranesi's *vedute*. Furthermore, a cornice can be deictic, pointing to architecture and beyond, as in the case of Canaletto, or allegory, in Beatrizet. However, a cornice can also be a meta-commentary of a mode of representation,

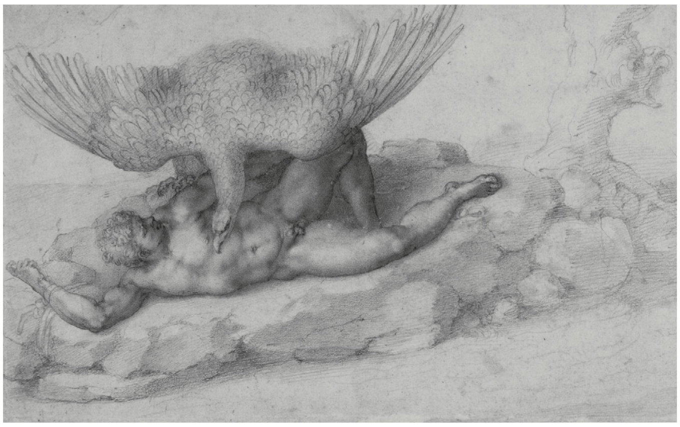

fig. 8 Michelangelo Buonarroti, *The Punishment of Tityus*, 1532, black chalk drawing, 19 × 33 cm. Source: Royal Collection Trust

as exemplified by Kilian's *Double Portrait of Albrecht Dürer*. In such cases, the cornice appears as a motif while at the same time helping to define the way the pictorial space is structured, so that subject and representational principle become inextricably intertwined.

The architectural element cannot only break the rules of construction but can also be turned into a place or a stage on which pictorial elements containing a symbolic or allegorical meaning can be gathered. Thus, even within a single image, the different functions of the cornice always overlap. A cornice in a "print *with* architecture" converges on a web of reference structures involving not only the form of the architectural element but also the overall composition, the mode of representation, and even the content of the picture.

Note
All prints reproduced in this article are in the Graphische Sammlung, the Collection of Prints and Drawings of ETH Zurich.