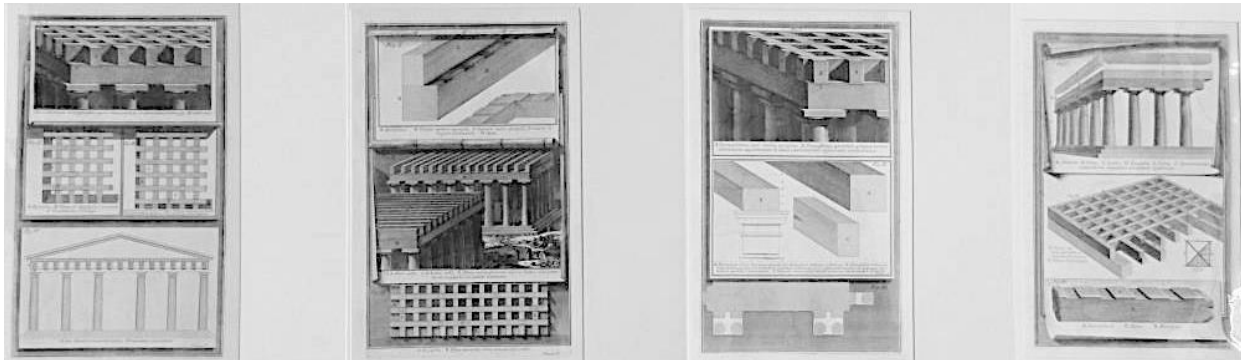


LEARNING FROM PIRANESI: ARCHITECTURAL REPRESENTATION AND TECTONICS

An Exhibition Celebrating the 300th Birth Anniversary of Giovanni Battista Piranesi

13 January to 13 February 2021 (postponed from October 2020)



G. B. Piranesi, "Three Diagrams of Doric Temple Construction" Plate XXIII; Plate XXIV; "...and an Elevation of the Doric Temple after Vitruvius" Plate XXV; and Plate XXVI; 4 etchings, 1758-61, *Della Magnificenza ed Architettura de Romani*

October 04, 2020, marks the 300th birth anniversary of Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-78), the celebrated Venetian-born Roman architect, delineator, and theorist. During his relatively brief but productive life Piranesi created (with the assistance of his sons and others) over 1,000 copper plates from which he may have produced as many as 4 million impressions—etchings almost exclusively of the world he saw every day, albeit not always precisely as he saw it. For much of his career he sold them from his shop, either as single sheets, or as bound collected volumes.

Even those casually interested in architecture and Roman history will be familiar with his famous *vedute* (views) of ancient and modern (read, 18th-century) Rome. His etching technique—still a standard against which others are judged—was influenced by Jacques Callot (1592-1635), Salvator Rosa (1615–1673), Giuseppe Vasi (1710-1782), and others whose names we may never know. Moreover, his work influenced generations of architects and painters, in his own time and centuries later, from Sir John Soane and the Adam Brothers, to early 20th-century Russian film theory, Parisian Interwar avant-garde art. In the late 20th-century it enjoyed yet another revival vis-à-vis the work of Daniel Libeskind and Zaha Hadid—the former in his whose *Choral Works* and *Mircomegas* drawings, and the latter in her first international success, The Hong Kong Peak Competition. Both explored Piranesi's *Carceri d'Invenzione* (*Prisons of Invention*) as propellants for re-envisioning a spatial and formal network that echoed the work of Kazimir Malevich and the Russian Suprematists.

The core of the exhibit strays from the better-known *Carceri d'Invenzione* and the majestic *Vedute di Roma*, to Piranesi's many studies of ancient Roman construction techniques published in several of his major collected works, including *Della Magnificenza ed Architettura de Romani* (1758-61). These analytic-like compositions are remarkable because of what they document, depict, and demonstrate. Often lost in discussions of Piranesi's work is the extraordinary degree to which he felt compelled to document the ongoing decay of the ancient monuments which, technically were brought under Papal protection by Papal Bull in 1462, but continued in varied ways well into the 20th century.

Piranesi's unparalleled mastery of the most avant-garde representational techniques—both physically and in terms of image production—continues to distinguish the works from predecessors and followers alike. In this exhibition however, it is the content of his depictions—the demonstration of Roman construction and engineering techniques, at times in service of larger architectural ideas, that is central.

The exhibit is organized around this central core of etchings. Accreted to this core are contemporaneous works of well-established and accomplished architects, landscape architects, and designers, along with the work of future architects who have worked in a seminar-workshop using Piranesi's etchings as springboards for digitally-based excursions. The architects and designers are all former Fellows of the American Academy in Rome (AAR), invited to submit work which, in their view, is marked by their study of Piranesi and an appreciation of the material presence of ancient Roman construction apprehended during their sojourn at the AAR. Together, the exhibition's contemporaneous components demonstrate Piranesi's continuing capacity to incite private reveries for public consumption and colloquy.

"Learning from Piranesi: Architectural Representation and Tectonics," will be on display at the University of Tennessee's Ewing Gallery of Art+ Architecture, after which it will travel to several schools of architecture in North America.