



Augustus and the Tiburtine Sibyl

Date

c. 1527-1531

Primary Maker

Antonio da Trento

Medium

Chiaroscuro woodcut from two blocks (pale green and black)

Description

The printmaker Antonio da Trento, active in Bologna, was presumably named after the city of his birth, in the far north of Italy. Antonio may have created upwards of thirty-six chiaroscuro woodcuts over the course of his nebulous career. Invented in the first decade of the sixteenth century, chiaroscuro woodcuts require at least two carved woodblocks, each corresponding to a different color of ink. With the addition of the unprinted areas of the paper, which provide the white highlights, compositions of at least three colors are possible. Such prints could reproduce ink-and-wash drawings and oil paintings more accurately than traditional woodcuts, engravings, or etchings could do. Augustus and the Tiburtine Sibyl was created from two blocks, and versions exist with diversely colored midtones: a grayish green, as seen here, as well as a warm brown and a darker brown. The composition was

based on a design by the painter Parmigianino, with whom Antonio worked on at least six chiaroscuro woodcuts, four of which are mentioned by Giorgio Vasari in his seminal text of 1550 (revised 1568), *Le Vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori* (Lives of the Most Eminent Architects, Painters, and Sculptors). According to Vasari, Parmigianino had arrived in Bologna after fleeing Rome during Charles V's sack of the city in 1527. It was likely then that he met Antonio and employed him to create a number of prints. Parmigianino was one of the most prolific draftsmen of his time, and his subjects are easily identifiable by the long, attenuated limbs and digits that mark the artist's Mannerist style. The subject of this print was sourced from the *Legenda aurea* (Golden Legend), a medieval collection of stories about Christ and the saints. The ancient Roman emperor Augustus is said to have asked the Tiburtine sibyl—one of a number of female oracles, this one based in Rome—if a greater ruler than he would ever exist, upon which he had a vision of the Virgin Mary with the Christ Child, seen in the print at the upper left. Extremely popular during the Renaissance, the story reflects ongoing efforts to reconcile the ancient past with biblical narratives. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, *INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS*, 2017)

Dimensions

Block: 13 3/4 × 10 7/16 in. (34.9 × 26.5 cm) Sheet (trimmed to edges of block): 13 3/4 × 10 7/16 in. (34.9 × 26.5 cm)