



Urania, Muse of Astronomy, from the series "The Nine Muses"

Date

1592

Primary Maker

Hendrick Goltzius

Medium

Engraving

Description

Hendrick Goltzius was a virtuosic engraver who created and published reproductive prints as well as his own compositions. He perfected two techniques that gave his compositions greater tonal effects: the swelling line, which widened and narrowed gracefully over the surface of the copper plate (thus appearing darker and lighter, respectively, in the final print), and the addition of tiny dots and lozenges in the interstices between lines. Urania, Muse of Astronomy is from a series of his own design, "The Nine Muses." In ancient Greek and Roman mythology, each of these goddesses presided over a different science or art form, including history, epic poetry, dance, and music. Urania was the muse of astronomy and is often depicted holding a globe; here, she is also shown with a compass in her right hand and an astrolabe on the ground beside her. These tools were used to take measurements, especially of celestial bodies' altitudes and sizes, and were essential to guiding European ships across the Atlantic Ocean in the period of

colonization during which the print was created. Goltzius made this series of prints soon after a visit to Italy, from October 1590 to the end of 1591, during which he studied antique sculpture and Renaissance painting and made numerous drawings on which he would rely in later years. His style changed upon his return to Haarlem, as he began to move away from Mannerism toward a more classical style and subject matter, as seen in "The Nine Muses." Printed at the bottom of the sheet are several lines on the subject of Urania by the Dutch humanist poet Franco Estius, who contributed many Latin verses to Goltzius's prints between the years 1589 and 1594. The artist dedicated the series to a prominent Flemish printmaker of the period, Jan Sadeler I, whose acquaintance he may have made in Italy, as the former also traveled there in the early 1590s. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017)

Dimensions

Sheet (trimmed to edges of plate): 9 5/8 × 6 5/8 in. (24.4 × 16.8 cm)