



Veduta dell' Anfiteatro Flavio detto Il Colosseo (View of Flavian Amphitheater, called the Colosseum), from the series "Vedute di Roma (Views of Rome)"

Date

1776

Primary Maker

Giovanni Battista Piranesi

Medium

Etching

Description

Giovanni Battista Piranesi was one of the premier printmakers of the eighteenth century. His lifetime output consisted of hundreds of prints, many of which depicted the remains and ruins of ancient Roman culture. Such a focus is not surprising, considering that the artist was also an architect and the son of a stonemason and master builder. In 1740, Piranesi moved from Venice to Rome, where he apprenticed with Giuseppe Vasi, a popular printmaker who created views of the city for pilgrims and tourists. Through his printmaking practice, Piranesi was able to explore his interests in both architecture and antiquity. This view of the Colosseum is from one of the artist's best-known bodies of work, the *Vedute di Roma* (Views of Rome)—135 compositions on which he worked from about 1747 until his death in 1778, two years after the completion of this etching. It is one of four prints in the *Vedute* featuring the Colosseum, which was originally named the Flavian Amphitheater for the dynasty of Roman emperors who built it, having been begun under Vespasian and completed in 80 CE by his son Titus. The amphitheater, the largest in the Roman Empire at the time, hosted gladiatorial combats, mock naval battles, and public executions. During the Middle Ages, it became known as the Colosseum, seemingly not for its own size but for that of a large bronze statue that once stood just outside it. Although Piranesi based his compositions on actual ruins, he brought great creativity to their depictions, often dramatizing them through bold chiaroscuro effects and unusual perspectives. The bird's-eye view seen here would not have been available to contemporary visitors, but it allowed the artist to represent the entirety of the Colosseum, including its interior. In 1987, David and Anne Beilby Strauss donated this work to the Emerson Gallery. The print had passed down to Anne from her grandfather, George H. Sicard, Class of 1906, who himself had received it from Melancthon Woolsey Stryker, president of the College from 1892 to 1917. (SOURCE: Alcauskas, INNOVATIVE APPROACHES, HONORED TRADITIONS, 2017)

Dimensions

Composition: 19 3/8 × 27 3/4 in. (49.2 × 70.5 cm) Plate: 19 5/8 × 28 3/8 in. (49.8 × 72.1 cm) Sheet: 20 5/8 × 28 11/16 in. (52.4 × 72.9 cm) Frame: 29 1/16 × 39 × 2 in. (73.8 × 99.1 × 5.1 cm)