

Release Date: June 22, 2018

First Comprehensive Exhibition of Chiaroscuro Woodcuts from Italian Renaissance on View at National Gallery of Art, October 14, 2018, through January 20, 2019



**Ugo da Carpi, after Parmigianino**

***Diogenes*, c. 1527–1530**

chiaroscuro woodcut from four blocks in light green, medium green, brown, and dark brown, state iii/iii  
sheet: 47.9 x 34 cm (18 7/8 x 13 3/8 in.)

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Pepita Milmore Memorial Fund

Washington, DC—Chiaroscuro woodcuts are among the rarest and most beautiful prints that flourished throughout Renaissance Italy. This exhibition, with its accompanying catalog, addresses all aspects of this remarkable art form, from attribution and chronology to materials and processes, intention and reception. The first comprehensive study devoted to the Italian chiaroscuro woodcut, the exhibition is based on new art-historical and technical research carried out over the last decade. Presenting some 100 of the finest impressions from American and British collections, ***The***

---

***Chiaroscuro Woodcut in Renaissance Italy*** will be on view at the National Gallery of Art from October 14, 2018, through January 20, 2019.

"One of the earliest and most successful ventures into color printing, the chiaroscuro woodcut redefined what viewers in the Renaissance had come to expect from the art of printmaking. This unique exhibition celebrates the spirit of innovation and collaboration embodied by these prints, while shedding new light on the remarkable achievements of their makers," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "The collaboration between the National Gallery of Art and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art represents a milestone in the study of early printmaking."

The chiaroscuro woodcut, which took its name from the Italian term for modeling in light and shadow, involved the superimposed printing of multiple woodblocks that were accurately aligned and inked in different gradations of a color. Over the course of the 16th century the technique engaged such celebrated painters and draftsmen as Titian, Raphael, and Parmigianino and underwent sophisticated advances in the hands of talented printmakers active throughout the Italian peninsula. Embraced as a means of disseminating designs and prized as works of art in their own right, these prints exemplify the rich imagery, artistic innovation, and technical virtuosity of the Italian Renaissance.

The exhibition is organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington. It is on view at LACMA from June 8 to September 16, 2018.

### **About the Exhibition**

The exhibition casts new light on the beginnings and remarkable efflorescence of the chiaroscuro woodcut in Renaissance Italy. Although highly regarded through the centuries, this complex process has remained one of the least understood phenomena of early printmaking. Arranged according to its broad chronological evolution, and bringing new attention to the materials and means of production, the exhibition presents the principal chiaroscuro workshops, with several works displayed in different color palettes. Developments in style, approach, subject, and format testify to the fascination among artists and collectors in the range of aesthetic possibilities that this exquisite technique offered.

The history of the technique in Italy began with Ugo da Carpi (c. 1468/1470–1532), who, in 1516, claimed he had discovered a "new method of printing in *chiaro et scuro*," and applied for a privilege from the Venetian Senate to protect his discovery from copyists. Through his technical proficiency and distinguished associations with Titian in Venice and Raphael's circle in Rome, Ugo created chiaroscuro woodcuts of outstanding sophistication. He rapidly advanced the technique from a basic two-block linear mode to a more complex tonal approach using as many as four blocks. While Ugo did not conceive new designs, he was closely involved in all other aspects of production, from cutting to printing. His 15 attributed chiaroscuros established the foundation for the technique that flourished in Italy through the Renaissance.

---

---

Ugo da Carpi went on to collaborate with Parmigianino on the masterwork *Diogenes*, an unparalleled achievement in the technique's history. During his activity in Bologna in the years 1527–1530, Parmigianino also engaged the printmaker Antonio da Trento (active c. 1527–1540s) to make chiaroscuros. Antonio's refined cutting of calligraphic strokes sensitively transmitted Parmigianino's fluent drawing hand. The seven chiaroscuro woodcuts and one combination technique print issued by Parmigianino from his Bolognese shop matched the artist's graceful draftsmanship with skilled cutting, fine inks, and exacting printing.

The workshop of Niccolò Vicentino (active c. 1540s) was the most prolific of the 16th century, both in the number of chiaroscuros executed and the impressions pulled of them. Most were modeled on Italian designs from the mid-1510s to the late 1530s, including several by Raphael and Parmigianino. Vicentino's workshop introduced bold, saturated colors and prioritized expediency in its production methods, pointing to the technique's increased commercialization. Although some uncertainty has surrounded the attribution of Vicentino's unsigned works, close study of block-cutting, printing characteristics, and publishing histories provides new grounds for establishing his workshop's oeuvre.

The prints of Domenico Beccafumi (1484/1486–1551), like his drawings and paintings, display the Sienese artist's fertile invention, bold draftsmanship, and fluent expression of dramatic chiaroscuro. Beccafumi is unique among chiaroscurists in having designed and cut his own blocks, and his prints are immediate, spirited expressions of his artistic vision. In his nine pure chiaroscuro woodcuts and six engravings printed with tonal blocks and dating to the 1540s, he used unconventional tools and cutting methods and exploited fully the technique's inherent potential for variations, changing the manner in which he inked and printed his blocks.

Alongside the major practitioners, other Italian painters and printmakers from the 1530s through the 1580s also explored the chiaroscuro woodcut to great creative ends. The designs of Titian, Raphael and his circle, and Parmigianino continued to be important sources through mid-century. However, as enthusiasm for the novel technique spread to secondary artistic centers from Cremona to Naples, different styles and manners were espoused. Complementing the activity of these smaller workshops in late century was a rise in the republication of earlier prints.

Andrea Andreani (c. 1559–1629) first took up the chiaroscuro technique around 1583 and quickly became its most accomplished practitioner of late century. Andreani worked collaboratively with esteemed artists of his day and also translated the great masters of earlier generations. He produced monumental works, introduced new subjects, and looked beyond traditional graphic and painted sources for his models, turning to sculpture, bronze reliefs, and marble intarsia designs. His output, aimed principally at high-end collectors and art connoisseurs, brought the chiaroscuro woodcut to new heights of technical and visual refinement.

## **Exhibition Curators**

---

---

The exhibition is conceived and organized by Naoko Takahatake, curator of prints and drawings at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Her research began at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, as a graduate curatorial intern in 2006 and as Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow (2008–2010). The exhibition is coordinated in Washington by Jonathan Bober, Andrew W. Mellon Senior Curator of Prints and Drawings, National Gallery of Art.

## **Related Activities**

### **Lecture**

*Introduction to the Exhibition—The Chiaroscuro Woodcut in Renaissance Italy*

October 14, 2:00 p.m.

Naoko Takahatake, curator of prints and drawings, Los Angeles County Museum of Art. A signing of the exhibition catalog follows.

### **Exhibition Catalog**

The exhibition is accompanied by a 288-page, fully illustrated catalog edited by Takahatake, with contributions by Bober; Jamie Gabbarelli, assistant curator of prints, drawings, and photographs, Rhode Island School of Design Museum; Antony Griffiths, former keeper of prints and drawings, British Museum; Peter Parshall, former curator of old master prints, National Gallery of Art; and Linda Stiber Morenus, former conservator, Library of Congress.

Featuring more than 100 rare chiaroscuro woodcuts and related drawings and prints, this book incorporates interdisciplinary research from the fields of art history, conservation, and material science to present the first comprehensive assessment of the subject. Essays and entries trace the technique's creative origins, evolution, and reception, and interpret the materials and means of production. This groundbreaking study offers fresh interpretations of these remarkable prints that capture the beauty and innovation of Italian Renaissance art.

The catalog is available for purchase in the West Building and East Building Shops; [shop.nga.gov](http://shop.nga.gov); (800) 697-9350 (phone); (202) 789-3047 (fax); or [mailorder@nga.gov](mailto:mailorder@nga.gov).

### **Press Contact:**

Laurie Tylec, (202) 842-6355 or [l-tylec@nga.gov](mailto:l-tylec@nga.gov)

## **General Information**

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW, and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The

---

---

Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or visit the Gallery's Web site at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt), Twitter at [www.twitter.com/ngadc](http://www.twitter.com/ngadc), and Instagram at <http://instagram.com/ngadc>.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Department of Communications

National Gallery of Art

2000B South Club Drive

Landover, MD 20785

phone: (202) 842-6353

e-mail: [pressinfo@nga.gov](mailto:pressinfo@nga.gov)

Anabeth Guthrie

Chief of Communications

(202) 842-6804

[a-guthrie@nga.gov](mailto:a-guthrie@nga.gov)

### **Subscribe to Our E-mail Newsletters**

Stay up to date with the National Gallery of Art by [subscribing to our e-mail newsletters](#): Web, educators, family programs, fellowships/internships, films, lectures, music programs, and teen programs. Select as many updates as you wish to receive. To edit your subscriber information, please go to our [subscription management page](#).

---

PRESS KIT

**Exhibition Press Release**

**Exhibition Checklist** (PDF 339 kb)

Curator Biography:

**[Jonathan Bober](#)**

---

AVAILABLE PRESS IMAGES

---

---

## Order Exhibition Press Images

To order publicity images: Click on the link above and designate your desired images using the checkbox below each thumbnail. Please include your name and contact information, press affiliation, deadline for receiving images, the date of publication, and a brief description of the kind of press coverage planned.

---

### PRESS CONTACT

Laurie Tylec  
(202) 842-6355  
[l-tylec@nga.gov](mailto:l-tylec@nga.gov)

---

### ONLINE RESOURCES

#### [Exhibition Page](#)

---

Questions from members of the media may be directed to the Department of Communications at (202) 842-6353 or [pressinfo@nga.gov](mailto:pressinfo@nga.gov)

The public may call (202) 737-4215 or visit [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov) for more information about the [National Gallery of Art](#).

RSS (NEWS FEED)

[http://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/press/rss/press\\_feed.xml](http://www.nga.gov/content/dam/ngaweb/press/rss/press_feed.xml)

NGA NEWSLETTERS:

Stay up to date with the National Gallery of Art by [subscribing to our e-mail newsletters](#): Web, educators, family programs, fellowships/internships, films, lectures, music programs, and teen programs. Select as many updates as you wish to receive. To edit your subscriber information, please go to our [subscription management page](#).

---

