

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Masters of the Bitten Line: Etching in the Age of Rembrandt

8 April – 6 August 2006

Auckland Art Gallery celebrates the 400th anniversary of Rembrandt van Rijn's birth (1606-1669) with the exhibition Masters of the Bitten Line: Etching in the Age of Rembrandt.

Best known today as a painter, Rembrandt was also a remarkable printmaker, executing nearly 300 etchings throughout his career. In his own time, his prints were highly sought after and he is still recognised as one of the most innovative and accomplished etchers to have used the medium.

Masters of the Bitten Line places Rembrandt's work alongside other masters of the seventeenth century, including Annibale Carracci, Anthony van Dyck and Salvator Rosa. It explores the period in which etching reached its peak in Europe by highlighting gems from the Gallery's collection.

Etching, whereby the lines of the printing plate are 'bitten' by acid, became increasingly popular with artists during the seventeenth century. In contrast to engraving, little physical effort was required and they were quicker to produce. In addition, due to the technique's similarity to drawing, it appealed particularly to painters.

As artists used the medium, they discovered its potential and began to exploit this in their work. Whereas engraving was exacting in the use of line, artists discovered etching's ability to play with line, to revel in its sketchy properties or to use it lyrically to describe form. They experimented with the variety of effects of inking and wiping the plate and discovered the tonal ranges possible through 'multiple bitings'. As a relatively new medium, etching was also free from the pressures of conventions, allowing artists to explore and experiment with new themes and genres, to execute reproducible studies or to represent contemporary events



Rembrandt van Rijn *Rembrandt in a Heavy Fur Cap* 1631
etching
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, purchased 1961



Rembrandt van Rijn *Christ Driving the Money Changers from the Temple* 1635
etching
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, purchased 1976

Masters of the Bitten Line brings together masterpieces printed on paper from the seventeenth century. The best etchings combine the spontaneity of drawing with the pictorial effects of painting, while also harnessing the intrinsic possibilities of the technique. As the prints in this exhibition by Rembrandt and his contemporaries demonstrate, they did this through mastery of the bitten line.

The exhibition is on display at the Auckland Art Gallery until 6 August. It is accompanied by a catalogue.

Admission is free of charge.

For further information please contact:

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