

Universalmuseum Joanneum Press

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The English Manner Mezzotint Masterpieces

Alte Galerie, Schloss Eggenberg, Eggenberger Allee 90, 8020 Graz

Opening: April 24, 2014

Duration: April 25 to July 20, 2014

Curator: Karin Leitner-Ruhe, Christine Rabensteiner

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For the first time ever a printing method is the focus of a special exhibition in the Alte Galerie. *Black Art* or *Mezzotint* is one of the most elaborate and fascinating printing methods in history. It was invented by the German Ludwig von Siegen in the 17th century and is characterised by a velvety, deep black background that is then scraped by the artist to create paler shades of light. With its incredibly soft blending of the various shades of grey it is best compared to black and white photography of the 19th century in its mimetic effects. Mezzotint had its heyday in British art in the 18th century and the exhibition presents numerous highlights of the best mezzotint artists.

Mezzotint is the first surface technique using intaglio printing – quite different to etching and copper engraving. Previously one had sought to print surfaces, like skies or a room in candle light, with closely shaded parallel or cross-hatching, whilst this new method allowed a close-meshed dot or line pattern.

One of the main purposes of mezzotint was the reproduction of oil paintings, the distinct challenge being the conversion of colours into a black and white medium. The artists of centuries past had to convert first mentally and then manually what today is done by the computer.

The copper engraving cabinet room of the Alte Galerie owns about 350 sheets of these unique prints, nearly 50 of which are presented in this special exhibition. There are works on show from the early days of this method from the Netherlands like *Portrait of Prince Ruprecht of the Palatinate* by Wallerant Vaillant or *Jumping White Dog* by Jan Verkolje. The Dutch were instrumental in passing on this method to England where it enjoyed its heyday in the 18th century; thus it is often referred to as the *manière anglaise* or *English manner*. The Alte Galerie shows brilliant works from this area of art like James McArdell's *Time Prunes the Wings of Love*, William Pether's *A Scholar is Holding a Lecture at the Table Planetarium* or Richard Earlom's *Piece of Fruit* after an oil painting by Jan van Huysum.

Only the German-speaking countries developed as a counterpart to England in the second half of the 18th century. Thus there is proof only in Vienna of a Mezzotint Art School which also produced artists from Styria: Johann Veit Kauperz, founder of the Styrian Estate Drawing Academy and his pupil Ignaz Rungaldier.

We are grateful for the support of this exhibition in the form of a mezzotint sheet specially created for the show by the Luxembourg-based artist Marc Frising. He is one of the few contemporary graphic artists to master and execute this elaborate technique. The genesis of such a print is demonstrated by means of corresponding copperplates and sheets in various phases of the process.

The show is complemented by loans from the Steiermärkisches Landesarchiv and the Neue Galerie Graz.

A 136-page catalogue is published with the exhibition costing 14.90 €.