

LUST, LOVE, and LOSS

IN RENAISSANCE EUROPE



**LARGE PRINT LABELS &
EXHIBITION TEXTS**



Lust, Love, and Loss in Renaissance Europe

Passion, violence, and virtue emerge in this exhibition as fundamental, intertwined elements in the art of Renaissance Europe. The objects on view—created for enjoyment or edification in private homes—offer glimpses into the lives of artists and their audiences. Painters, print-makers, and craftsmen, inspired by popular literary sources including Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, and the Bible, interpreted their stories for everyday settings. Their artworks played an essential role in intimate, personal experiences, while shaping and responding to massive intellectual, political, and religious shifts throughout Europe between 1400 and 1700. Christian audiences sought stability from both biblical and classical exemplars as they grappled with their rapidly evolving world.

Many of the works presented here attest to the

centuries-long popularity of certain narratives and themes throughout the European continent, while some represent more localized cultural traditions. Fifteenth-century Italy saw an explosion of objects and images tied to familial rites of passage, including marriage and childbirth. Domestic artworks, such as painted panels and ceramics, commemorated these momentous life events, yet their narratives were often not overtly festive. Imagery might recount the dire fates of mismatched lovers, revealing societal anxieties about fidelity and paternity. Meanwhile, the Northern European interplay between virtue and vice manifested in innumerable engravings and woodcuts showing even happy and passionate couples faced with the inexorable progression of time. Images of hapless lovers pursued by menacing skeletons starkly confronted viewers with their own mortality. Artists working and traveling north and south of the Alps produced vibrant canvases and complex print series that echoed

these ideas in grander formats, purposefully highlighting the consequences of moral trespass or opportunities for redemption. Taken together, the works of art on display illuminate the many ways that Renaissance objects lay at the heart of the cultural rituals and consuming desires through which relationships were formed, celebrated, and extinguished.

At Home in the Renaissance

The works of art on view in this section—acquired at the time of betrothals, marriages, and births—once surrounded Renaissance families in their homes. At times of celebration, middle- and upper-class families would commission a wide range of objects, while those of lesser means might buy things ready-made from craftsmen, acquire them on the second-hand market, or borrow them. Although familial rites of passage could certainly offer personal joy and fulfillment, they were primarily occasions when private life aligned with public obligations. Alliances between families—and the offspring that resulted—were intended to solidify dynastic allegiances for reasons of economic and political security. Accordingly, the artworks that commemorated marriages and birth emphasized themes of duty and virtue. Yet, the delightfully ribald or dramatically gruesome narratives that adorned such objects could entertain as much

as they instructed. Many of these artworks offer insights into the social, sexual, cultural, and visual experiences of Renaissance women in particular. Women's lives revolved around their families, but their homes were also places where objects helped them form other social bonds. According to the fifteenth-century courtier Giovanni Pontano, individuals should conduct their lives with decorum and refinement, and their homes should be characterized by elegance, taste, and propriety. Following this advice, one Renaissance conduct manual instructed married women to "Take [your guests] ... and guide them around the house, and in particular show them some of your possessions, either new, or beautiful, but in such a way that it will be received as a sign of your politeness and domesticity, and not arrogance: something that you do as if showing them your heart."



MASTER OF THE APOLLO AND DAPHNE LEGEND

Italian (Florentine), active circa 1480–1510

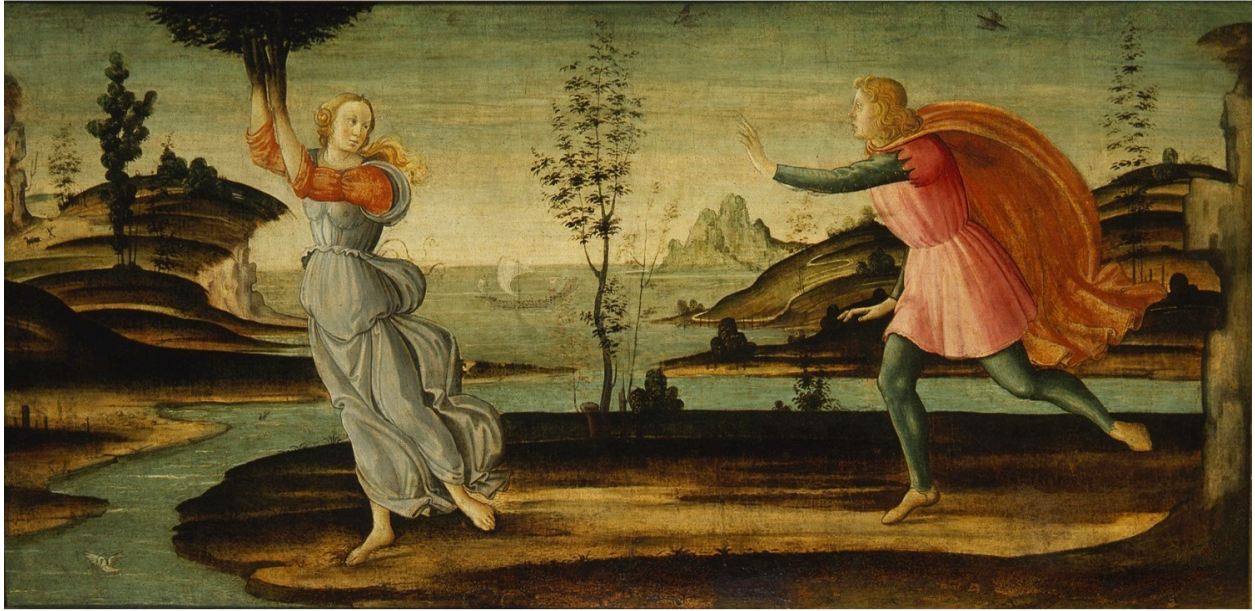
Daphne Found Asleep by Apollo

Spalliera panel; part of a series with 1973.45
circa 1500

Oil, formerly on panel, transferred to canvas

Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation

1973.44



MASTER OF THE APOLLO AND DAPHNE LEGEND

Italian (Florentine), active circa 1480–1510

Daphne Fleeing from Apollo

Spalliera panel; part of a series with 1973.44
circa 1500

Oil, formerly on panel, transferred to canvas

Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation

1973.45

These *spalliere* panels, hung roughly at shoulder or “*spalla*” height, would have been commissioned for the bedroom of a newlywed couple. They depict the myth of Apollo and Daphne told in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, which begins when the boastful god mocks Cupid’s archery skills. Seeking revenge, Cupid shoots Apollo with an arrow that fills him with lust for Daphne and hits her with an arrow that compels revulsion. As Daphne flees from Apollo, she shouts for help from her father, the river god Peneus. He responds by transforming her into a laurel tree, thereby thwarting Apollo’s advances. Unconventionally, this artist also has depicted a moment just before Daphne’s dramatic transformation, in which Apollo watches her sleep. As Ovid does not describe such a scene, the artist may be recalling other stories, such as Giovanni Boccaccio’s fourteenth-century tale of Cimone and Efigenia, in which the handsome but half-witted Cimone is intellectually transformed by gazing upon the beautiful, sleeping Efigenia.

Such a blending of ancient and modern sources would have delighted the panels' owners, their choice of decoration demonstrating their erudition.

While Ovid's tale may seem incongruously gloomy for the bedroom of newlyweds, these paintings speak volumes about the cultural ideals around marriage in fifteenth-century Italy. In addition to emphasizing the necessity of a suitable match, the story highlights the importance of chastity, defined in the Renaissance as sex within the confines of marriage. Daphne's father—symbolized by the river—looms in the background, underscoring the notion that young women must remain under their families' protection, lest they be taken advantage of. Meanwhile, men are reminded to pursue proper matches for themselves and, eventually, to be vigilant fathers to their daughters.



UNKNOWN ARTIST

Italian

Desco da Parto (Birth Tray) depicting The Triumph of Love

1950

Tempera on panel

Davis Museum at Wellesley College,
Wellesley, Massachusetts, Museum purchase
in honor of Lilian Armstrong, Wellesley Class of
1958 and Professor Emerita in the Art Depart-
ment, through a generous gift from her Welles-
ley classmate Phoebe Dent Weil (Class of 1958)

This birth tray depicts one of Petrarch's *Triumphs*, a series of six complex allegorical poems by the renowned fourteenth-century Tuscan writer. Both his "Triumph of Love" and "Triumph of Chastity" were popular subjects for domestic works of art, the former celebrating physical love and the latter a more spiritual version. Here, in the "Triumph of Love," Cupid stands victoriously atop a chariot pulled by two white horses, as if he were a conquering hero, and leads an extended procession suggested by the figures in the rear. Featuring this allegory on a birth tray valorizes a successful conception, associating it with the ancient and contemporary triumphal processions that followed military victories, further linking the procreative role of the family to the stability of the state.



GIOVANNI DI FRANCESCO TOSCANI

Italian, circa 1370–1430

Scene in a Court of Love: Filocolo's Parable
circa 1425

Tempera and gold on wood panel

Chazen Museum of Art, University of Wisconsin–
Madison, Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation

This painted panel was once mounted into the front of a *cassone*, or “large chest,” that would have held a new bride’s possessions. Here, Giovanni di Francesco Toscani, who referred to himself in his 1427 tax declaration as a “confa-naio,” or painter of *cassoni*, created a scene that is both festive and nuanced. It is taken from the romance *The Filocolo*, written by the widely read fourteenth-century author Giovanni Boccaccio. A young woman, courted by two admirers who have come to blows over their rivalry, is asked to make a choice to maintain the peace. She does so by exchanging garlands from her own head with those of the suitors, thereby mollifying them by convincing each that he was the chosen one. The artist renders Boccaccio’s clever tale of courtship with equal wit and delight, offering viewers a colorful scene replete with charming vignettes.

The Realm of Venus

As the classical goddess of love and beauty, Venus provided artists with an endless source of inspiration. Beginning with the late-fifteenth-century excavations of ancient sculpture, Venus's virtues as well as her indiscretions captivated painters and printmakers. They depicted her in a variety of poses and circumstances motivated by her amorous escapades recounted in ancient epics such as Homer's *Odyssey* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. She could be a doting mother to her son Cupid—himself the god of desire and erotic love—a temptress, a woman swayed by seduction, an ideal of feminine beauty, or a metaphor for art itself. Renaissance artists vied with their classical counterparts to render ever more enticing interpretations of the goddess, offering lifelike painted flesh in place of austere white marble. Yet the renewed interest in Venus extended far beyond the revival of antique culture, as artists

and their audiences saw pagan divinities as avatars for contemporary concerns and mores. The increased publication of texts on the physical allure of women and feminine advice manuals on how to enhance one's appearance coincided with the proliferation of images of the goddess, and artists represented their wives, mistresses, or favorite models in the guise of the deity. In addition, subjects like Venus's tempestuous affair with Mars, the god of war, and her husband Vulcan's discovery of their liaison, supplied both tantalizing tales and moralizing messages. Such divine exploits—often intentionally humorous as well as instructive—were meant to remind husbands and wives of the standards of marital conduct, as well as the threat that adultery posed to social stability and dynastic continuity.



LUCA CAMBIASO

Italian, 1527–1585

Venus and Cupid

circa 1570

Oil on canvas

The Art Institute of Chicago,
A. A. Munger Collection

Here, Venus cradles her son Cupid in a sweet and touching domestic scene. Beside them, Cupid's discarded quiver signifies this as a rare moment of peace, in which the meddlesome infant is not shooting arrows at hapless mortals, causing them to fall victim to undesired, uncontrollable—and often unrequited—love. Cambiaso's elegant depiction sets the mother and child in a luxurious sixteenth-century Genoese interior, replete with objects of desire enlivened by the play of light across satin, silk, and pearls. The red canopy into which the mother and child are nestled renders the setting simultaneously domestic and dramatic, befitting the pair's divine status. Venus's hairstyle and jewelry reflect contemporary fashion, straddling the boundary between real and ideal, while the alabaster bodies of Venus and Cupid call to mind the kinds of marble antiquities admired or perhaps even possessed by the painting's owner.

HANS BALDUNG

German, 1484/1485–1545

Adam and Eve

1519

Woodcut

The Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of
the John Huntington Art and Polytechnic Trust



Hans Baldung, a student and close friend of Albrecht Dürer, created this woodcut after Dürer returned from Italy with drawings of the recently excavated antique marble sculptures that had created a tremendous sensation. In an overt synthesis of classical and Christian themes, Eve's posture mimics the ancient goddess of love's well-known pose called the Venus Pudica, or the "Venus of Modesty," in which the divinity gently bends to chastely cover her unclothed body with her hands. Unlike the demure marble beauty, however, Eve's hands fall away as she clutches two forbidden apples, leaving Adam to cover her with a branch. By excluding the serpent from the scene, Baldung asserts that Eve is acting upon her own desires. The artist also cleverly links the fall of man to his own inevitable mortality through the gesture of Eve casually overturning his monogram with her foot in the lower right corner.



JAN BRUEGHEL THE YOUNGER

Flemish, 1601-1678

HENDRICK VAN BALEN I

Flemish, 1575-1632

Venus at the Forge of Vulcan

1617

Oil on panel

Grohmann Museum Collection at Milwaukee
School of Engineering

This sumptuous painting portrays an episode from Virgil's *Aeneid*, the ancient Latin epic that tells of the events leading to the founding of Rome. Here, the beautiful young Venus seduces her reluctant husband Vulcan, the god of fire and a blacksmith, into crafting armor for her son Aeneas, the titular hero of Virgil's poem. Although divine, the couple is clearly mismatched in age, suggesting the potential for future discord. The scene is replete with Renaissance luxury items and glistening metalware, thus emphasizing the artists' association of the divine blacksmith's artistic virtuosity with their own. Vulcan's presentation to Venus of an elaborate shield with French Bourbon royal coat-of-arms, then belonging to King Louis XIII, likely refers to the wealth and political power of the painting's still-unknown patron.



CARLO MARATTI

Italian, 1625–1713

Portrait of Francesca Gommi Maratti

circa 1701

Oil on canvas

The Cleveland Museum of Art,

Mr. and Mrs. William H. Marlatt Fund

Carlo Maratti's arresting portrait of his longtime mistress turned wife, and mother of his only child, Francesca Gomme, offers a clever visual interplay between her earthly desirability and the allure of the goddess of love and beauty. In her left hand, Francesca holds what appears to be a small preparatory sketch on canvas. The subject is an exceptionally unusual depiction of Venus forging Cupid's arrows, supplanting traditional representations of her husband, Vulcan, at work. Here, the muse becomes the maker, perhaps suggesting Francesca's own generative powers, further emphasized by the still-unfinished canvas. The sketch also offers a clever reversal of the then common sexual entendre of the masculine hammer repeatedly impressing itself on the feminine anvil.



HENDRICK GOLTZIUS

Dutch, 1558-1617

AFTER BARTHOLOMEUS SPRANGER

Flemish, 1546-1611

Mars and Venus

1588

Engraving on paper

Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art,
Northwestern University, Purchased in memory
of Gilbert "Pape" Prevostean

Goltzius's image of the blissfully oblivious Venus and Mars foreshadows the mayhem that will soon ensue. In a story told in both Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Homer's *Odyssey*, the sun god Apollo spies the entwined couple from his chariot above and immediately alerts Venus's jealous husband, Vulcan, whose vengeance Goltzius depicts in the adjacent engraving. Here, Venus's conspicuous yet incongruous belt no doubt refers to a tale from the *Iliad*, in which Homer describes the ornamental garment as the object into which the goddess's "charms had been wrought—love, desire, and that sweet flattery which steals the judgement even of the most prudent." The addition of this telling detail likely alludes to contemporary Dutch debates about the dangerously seductive nature of women. Such a blending of multiple antique literary sources with current discourse would have held special appeal to the learned men who were the primary audience for Goltzius's prints.



HENDRICK GOLTZIUS

Dutch, 1558–1617

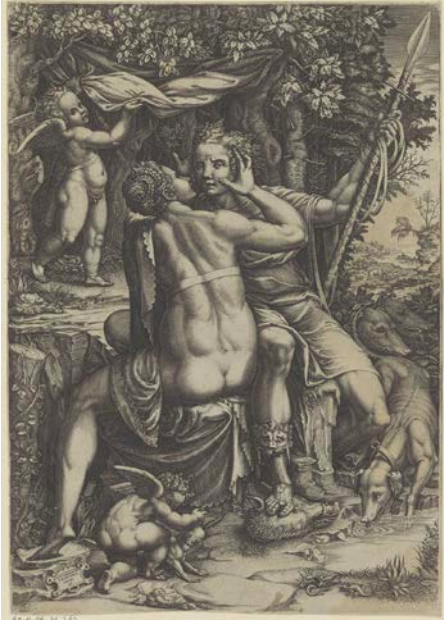
Mars and Venus Surprised by Vulcan

1585

Engraving on laid paper

Middlebury College Museum of Art, Gift of Mr.
and Mrs. Hugh M. Taft

Here, Goltzius presents a continuous narrative of three parts of a story told by both Ovid and Homer. The printmaker's virtuosic composition cleverly uses the prominent legs of the voyeuristic gods to physically point to the episodes below: Vulcan forging a nearly invisible net, Venus and Mars ensnared in the net placed upon the bed, and the gods taunting Vulcan from the heavens. Summoning his fellow deities to peer at the lovers he so artfully captured, and expecting vindication, Vulcan is instead humiliated by their laughter and ridicule. The tale must have resonated with Dutch male viewers who feared being similarly shamed, as sixteenth-century writings chronicle the incidence of adultery in a culture where wives were often much younger than their husbands. Rather than straightforwardly condemning this marital perfidy, Goltzius presents the amusing tale with the same wry humor of Ovid and Homer for both the instruction and the entertainment of his audience.



GIORGIO GHISI

Italian (Mantuan) 1520–1582

AFTER TEODORO GHISI

Italian, 1536–1601

Venus and Adonis

circa 1570

Engraving on paper

The Fralin Museum of Art at the University of Virginia; Museum purchase with Acquisition Fund and Curriculum Support Fund

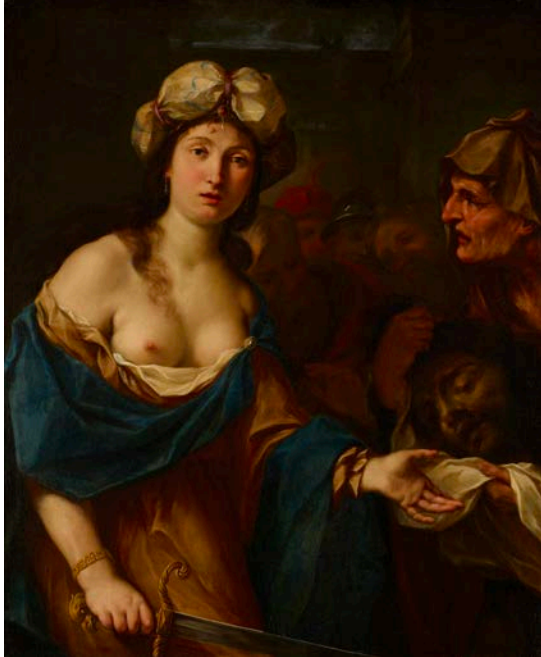
Venus's adulterous affair with Adonis, as recounted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, is perhaps the goddess's most tragic liaison, leading her to abandon her husband and her home on Mount Olympus. After Cupid accidentally scratches her with his arrow, she falls hopelessly in love with the astonishingly handsome young mortal. Frightened by Adonis's proclivity for foolish acts of bravery as a hunter, Venus desperately implored him to avoid ferocious prey. In this print, Ghisi depicts the couple entwined in their woodland bower with two cavorting cupids. The lovestruck goddess clings tenaciously to Adonis, who dismisses her pleas and strains to disentangle himself so he can go hunt with his spear and dogs. To the couple's right, Ghisi shows us the tale's grisly denouement, assembling two narrative moments in a single scene. In the distant background we see Adonis, mortally wounded by a boar, a devastating end to their extramarital affair.

Paragons of Virtue

Exemplary women from the Bible, mythology, and ancient history provided Renaissance artists with dramatic subjects for their artworks. As the objects of unwanted and misdirected desire, these celebrated figures faced tragedy and violent death—whether their own or another's. Their bodies served as sites of conflict about virtue and desire that frightened, but also inspired and enlightened audiences. By adding contemporary settings or clothing to their scenes, artists connected these women's stories to the political, religious, and cultural upheavals of the time.

In the early 1500s, the Catholic Church faced unprecedented turmoil with the onset of the Protestant Reformation, a dissident movement that contradicted fundamental tenets of the Church and papal authority. To combat this dissent, the Church launched the Counter

Reformation, a century-long campaign begun in the mid-1540s. Disputes extended even to the Bible, with Protestants rejecting the stories of Judith and Holofernes and Susanna and the Elders as spurious. In response, the Church reinterpreted the triumphs of both Hebrew women as allegories of its victory over nonbelievers and heretics. Meanwhile, women from ancient history, such as Lucretia and Virginia, served as secular saints. Their lives and shocking deaths, first presented in Livy's *History of Rome*, symbolized traditional civic ideals counterposed against political corruption. Mythical figures like Diana, the goddess of the hunt, could also inspire and instruct. Her vigorous defense of her virginity offered an example for women, but also prompted men and women alike to consider their capacity to determine their own fates. Far from simply pitting victims against perpetrators, these stories reveal the complex and nuanced range of thought that Renaissance viewers brought to the uneasy liaison of violence and virtue.



GIOVAN GIOSEFFO DAL SOLE

Italian, 1654–1719

Judith with the Head of Holofernes

circa 1695

Oil on canvas

Lent by the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Gift of
the Bernard H. Ritter Family

Giovan Gioseffo dal Sole's painting of Judith holding the head of Holofernes captures the Old Testament heroine having decapitated the Assyrian general in order to free her fellow Israelites from his assault on their city. Making use of his desire to seduce her, Judith coaxed Holofernes into drinking too much wine and then killed him with his own sword. With her long, flowing gown accidentally exposing one breast, Judith resembles the sculpture type known as Venus Genetrix, or "Venus the Mother," named for a cult statue of the goddess as the ancestor of the Roman people. Judith's posture not only alludes to her sensuality—the reason for her victory—but also to her heroic protection of her people. Here, Judith is safely back inside Bethulia's city gates, where a crowd gathers to catch a glimpse of the once-mighty general's severed head. As her maid-servant lifts his head from the sack, Judith invites us to join the spectators.



JACQUES BLANCHARD

French, 1600–1638

Susanna and the Elders

circa 1628

Oil on canvas

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond,
Adolph D. and Wilkins C. Williams Fund

The young and beautiful wife of a prominent Hebrew citizen, Susanna enjoyed daily walks in their luxurious gardens. As she bathed there one hot day, two elders who had been visiting her husband accosted her, demanding she satisfy their lustful desires. They threatened that if she did not acquiesce, they would accuse her of adultery, a crime punishable by death. Unwilling to compromise herself, Susanna resisted and cried out, sending the elders running from the garden to begin spreading their lies. Jacques Blanchard's luminous canvas depicts this monstrous assault but preserves Susanna's dignity as she gazes piously heavenward. The light falling upon her between the parted trees suggests that her virtuous equanimity will be rewarded. Allegorizing Susanna as the Church battling heretics, Blanchard depicts the elders with darker skin and hooked noses, features which in the seventeenth century were thought to denote non-Christian foreigners.



CORNELIS CORT

Netherlandish, 1533–1578

AFTER TITIAN

Italian (Venetian), 1488–1576

Tarquin and Lucretia

circa 1571

Engraving in black on ivory laid paper

The Art Institute of Chicago, Amanda S.

Johnson and Marion J. Livingston Endowment

Titian chose the virtuoso engraver Cornelis Cort to reproduce his paintings because of Cort's ability to convey the atmosphere and tone of the Venetian artist's coloristic canvases. This story of sexual violence, first told by Livy, is a parable of the abuse of personal and political power. The sixth-century BCE prince, Sextus Tarquinius, raped the famously virtuous Lucretia after threatening to kill her and a servant if she did not submit, claiming that he had discovered them in an adulterous act. Lucretia chose to reveal his crime, committing suicide in front of her husband and father so as to preserve her family's bloodline. The incident sparked a momentous rebellion that overthrew the corrupt monarchy of Rome and established the Roman Republic. Contemporary viewers of Cort's widely circulated print would have associated this ancient story—along with the related plight of Virginia seen nearby—with the political upheavals of their own time.



UNKNOWN ARTIST

Italian

AFTER FRANCESCO ALBANI

Italian (Bolognese), 1578-1660

Actaeon Surprising Diana and Her Nymphs

circa 1617

Oil on canvas

Gift of the Samuel H. Kress Foundation

1973.43

This intimate workshop copy of an original oil painting by Francesco Albani in the Louvre Museum depicts the story of Diana and Actaeon. In this tale, narrated most famously in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the hunter Actaeon discovers the goddess Diana bathing with her retinue. Angry, the virginal goddess kills him by turning him into a stag who is then devoured by his own hunting dogs. Artists in the Renaissance typically depicted this story by showing Actaeon recoiling or fleeing, but in this instance, Albani shows Diana pointing imperiously at Actaeon, causing antlers to sprout from his head. Meanwhile, the sail-shaped drapery that Diana's nymphs use to cover their mistress recalls popular images of Fortune, the deity who possesses ultimate dominion over the fate of mortals. The voyeuristic Actaeon stands by calmly, perhaps denying his transgression. Albani's composition thus gives both protagonists direct and assertive roles in the outcome of the dramatic story.

Morality and Mortality

Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Renaissance artists, particularly those in Northern Europe, generated an ever-growing number of images of Death personified. These scenes, which sharply contrasted the youth and beauty of lovers with grotesque skeletons, warned viewers against the sins of lust and excess. Artworks evoking these *memento mori* themes—based on the Latin dictum “remember that you will die”—reflected the anxieties of a population confronted with waves of plague, war, and famine. Timekeeping devices, such as hourglasses or clocks, further reminded viewers that their time was finite. The notion of *vanitas*, a related but more capacious term, expanded the *memento mori* idea to include images that not only directed viewers to guard against sin for the sake of their souls, but also to be cognizant of the transience of worldly delights. Such depictions—like those of the mismatched couples exchanging money for plea-

-sure—admonished viewers about the potential folly of love or foolishness of old age.

This preoccupation with mortality and impermanence coincided with an explosion of innovative printmaking, especially in the neighboring German cities of Nuremberg and Augsburg. There, prosperous economies supported flourishing intellectual and cultural endeavors. Like the artists of the epic narratives found elsewhere in the exhibition, the creators of these more understated scenes often imbued their social criticism with morbid or wry humor. Despite the seemingly secular nature of many of the works shown here, the connection between erotic love and punishment is, at its core, biblical. These haunting images allude to the Renaissance European view that human mortality is the ultimate consequence of the original sin of Adam and Eve, which first and forever linked desire and death.



ALBRECHT DÜRER

German, 1471-1528

The Ill-Assorted Couple

circa 1496

Engraving in black on ivory laid paper

The Art Institute of Chicago, The Joseph
Brooks Fair Collection

Depictions of mismatched lovers proliferated in Northern Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. These images of rapacious exchanges typically featured an exaggeratedly elderly individual lusting after someone youthful and fetching, who in turn exacts payment from his or her admirer. Young women with older men were much more commonly portrayed than the reverse, seen in the Cranach school painting hanging nearby. The dramatic age differences evoked *vanitas*, the fleeting nature of pleasure and the inexorable passage of time. Dürer added further moral commentary by dressing the younger woman in a large bonnet to indicate that she is married. He places the trysting couple in a remote wood, far away from prying eyes. Seated on the ground, the frankly transactional nature of their relationship is made obvious by their exchange of money from purses placed strategically in their laps.



CIRCLE OF LUCAS CRANACH THE YOUNGER

German

The Unequal Lovers

16th century

Oil on panel

Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Wellesley,
Massachusetts, Museum purchase, The Class of
1947 Acquisition Fund

This painting, perhaps by an associate of the prolific artist Lucas Cranach the Younger, offers a reverse scenario from that found in the adjacent Dürer print, *The Ill Assorted Couple*. Here, a smiling old woman wraps herself around a foppish young man dressed as an infantry soldier, oblivious to his double-fisted thievery. Far from the battlefield, this grinning gigolo not only removes the coins from both of her moneybags, but also her keys, thus gaining access to her household possessions as well. Viewers may have understood the comedic nature of this painting as a lighthearted commentary on the ways in which love induces both foolishness and loss, while also sensing its graver implications. Like Dürer in his engraving, this painter alludes to societal fears about cuckoldry and humiliation, concerns also conveyed by later prints and paintings of Venus and Vulcan on view elsewhere in the gallery.



HANS BURGKMAIR THE ELDER

German, 1473–1531

Lovers Surprised by Death

1510

Chiaroscuro woodcut

Saint Louis Art Museum, Friends Fund and
the Julian and Hope Edison Print Fund

This inventive print is the work of Hans Burgkmair, an artist who lived and worked in the German city of Augsburg, a thriving international hub of printmaking. It is the earliest known three-block chiaroscuro woodcut, a technique in which one carved block provided the lines and two others the colors, in imitation of a wash drawing. Although Death personified is an especially Northern subject, the print is clearly indebted to Burgkmair's 1507 trip to Italy. The setting appears to be a benign, refined Venetian piazza, but it is instead the dominion of death, as evidenced by the architectural relief carving of skull and crossbones. The man's attire—ancient Roman military garb—refers to the contemporary notion that women were as lethal as war. Meanwhile, the pose of the woman, who is also wearing antique clothing, recalls the mythical Daphne's terrified flight from Apollo, a painting of which is on view nearby.



ALBRECHT DÜRER

German, 1471-1528

Young Woman Attacked by Death (The Ravisher)

circa 1496

Engraving in black on ivory laid paper

The Art Institute of Chicago, The Joseph
Brooks Fair Collection

Thought to be one of Albrecht Dürer's earliest engravings, this sinister image depicts a young woman in the clutches of Death. As is the case here, Dürer often envisioned Death as a master of disguise and deception, capable of ensnaring licentious or simply naïve young women before they realized their fatal mistakes. While the present setting is reminiscent of the bucolic venues in which fifteenth-century artists frequently placed happy lovers and the pastoral landscapes where Dürer often set his images of the Virgin Mary, the serpentine branches and prickly grass here are anything but inviting. Such perverse inversions further emphasize the close correlation between a woman's marital virtue—in this case the woman's headdress signifies that she is a wife—and her mortality.



ALBRECHT DÜRER

German, 1471-1528

The Promenade

circa 1496

Engraving

Lent by the Minneapolis Institute of Art,
Bequest of Herschel V. Jones

Dürer's elegant engraving shows a happy couple strolling atop a hillside, oblivious to the skeleton prancing along after them and brandishing an hourglass indicating that their time is running out. The artist's depiction of this ultra-fashionable young man and woman as the epitome of virility and femininity teeters on the edge of the comical. The lady's dress and posture emphasize her breasts and fecundity, while her companion's codpiece and strategically placed sword imply barely contained desire. Dürer's composition calls attention to their attire and thus leaves no mistake about the illicit nature of their romance—her bonnet indicates her married status, while his plumed cap designates him as a bachelor. His gesture further emphasizes the adulterous nature of their affair, as he leads her more deeply into the forest, away from the constraints and protections of civilized society suggested by the city in the distance.



MICHAEL WOLGEMUT AND WORKSHOP

German, 1434–1519

Image of Death (Imago Mortis), from the Nuremberg Chronicle

circa 1493

Hand-colored woodcut in black on cream
laid paper

The Art Institute of Chicago,
Joseph Brooks Fair Fund

A band of skeletons gambols gleefully above an open grave in this woodcut from the Nuremberg Chronicle, a densely illustrated universal history of the world, and one of the most advanced examples of early printing. Wolgemut's woodcut accompanies one of the Chronicle's final chapters, "Of Death and the End of Things," in which the author reminds the reader that human mortality is the fault of Adam and Eve's succumbing to temptation. The chapter's ostensibly dark theme is countered by the exuberant merriment of the dancing deceased and the text that attends them, which speaks of Death as a comforting companion, arriving to relieve the torment endured by the living. Under Wolgemut's vivid woodcut image, a moving passage adapted from Petrarch establishes this sentiment: "Nothing is better than Death, nor anything worse than an unfair Life, O great Death, you are men's eternal rest from labor ... Without you the life of the suffering is a perennial prison."



SEBALD BEHAM

German, 1500-1550

Death Seizing a Woman

1547

Engraving

Lent by the Minneapolis Institute of Art, Gift of
Tom Rassieur in memory of Tracey Albainy

Sebald Beham's diminutive engraving concisely captures the intertwined themes taken up in the three Dürer prints above and to the right. Despite the overt *memento mori* subject—emphasized by the carved Latin inscription, “Death destroys all human beauty”—this tantalizing scene remains somewhat inscrutable. Whether the voluptuous woman is willingly yielding to her deadly suitor is unclear, as is his identity. With his skeletal head atop a muscular winged body, he is perhaps a fantastical hybrid of Cupid and Mors, the winged gods of love and death, bestowing her with his kiss of death.

GEORG PENEZ

German, 1500-1550

The Triumphs of Petrarch plates 1-6

circa 1539

Engravings in black on ivory laid paper

The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Potter Palmer

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT

The Triumph of Love, plate 1



The Triumph of Chastity, plate 2



The Triumph of Fame, plate 3



BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT

The Triumph of Time, plate 4



The Triumph of Death, plate 5



The Triumph of Eternity, plate 6



Struggling with the emotional and psychological toll of the Black Death in 1348 and its successive waves, Petrarch wrote the *Triumphs* over the course of two decades in part as a means of grappling with the devastating losses of loved ones. Although they were not originally written as one text, the poems collectively convey the ways in which one stage of life leads inexorably to the next: Love yields to Chastity, which is conquered by Fame, soon subsumed by Time, eradicated by Death, and finally resolved by the ultimate triumph of Eternity. Both universally symbolic and individualistic, this unrelenting procession, from the basest carnal state of existence to the most exalted and pure, reflects in part the author's deep, abiding love for a woman named Laura and his grief at her passing.

Depictions of the *Triumphs* were ubiquitous in fifteenth-century Italy—as in the adjacent *desco da parto*—and by the sixteenth century

their popularity extended to Germany, France, and Flanders. Pencz engraved his interpretation around the time of his 1539 travels through Italy, where he encountered innumerable representations on artworks including paintings, ceramics, manuscripts, and stained glass.

While Petrarch wrote only the first triumph as a chariot-led pageant, artists imagined all six of them as such, depicting Petrarch's panoply of Biblical, historical, and mythological figures as participants in a parade. Each triumph is personified by a figure at the helm of the chariot. For example, Love is allegorized as a blindfolded Cupid, demonstrating how love is dangerously blinding, while Chastity is represented as woman who has bound the powerless Cupid to her chariot. Pencz's engravings continue this tradition, while the Latin inscriptions below are excerpted from myriad ancient Roman texts such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that testify to the enduring relevance of their themes.

HANS COLLAERT THE ELDER

Flemish, circa 1530–1581

AFTER GILLIS COIGNET THE ELDER

Flemish, circa 1538–1599

“The Story of Susanna” Set, plates 1–4

circa 1579–1585

Engravings on laid paper

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College,
Hanover, New Hampshire, Purchased through a
gift from Jane and W. David Dance,
Class of 1940

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT

The Elders Trying to Seduce Susanna, Plate 1



The Elders Accusing Susanna of Adultery; Susanna Before the Judges, Plate 2



BELOW, LEFT TO RIGHT

**Daniel Intervening on Behalf of Susanna;
Daniel Questions the Elders, Plate 3**



**The Elders Stoned for Bearing False Witness;
The Stoning of the Elders, Plate 4 f**



Hans Collaert's four-part series illustrates the pivotal moments of Susanna's story from the Book of Daniel: her assault, her trial, Daniel's intervention, and the execution of the elders. Such prints enjoyed wide distribution throughout Counter Reformation Europe, circulating alongside instructional manuals for women that cited Biblical heroines as exemplars of wifely virtues. But, bold and brave, Susanna had become an inspiration to men and women alike throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Audiences generally touted Susanna's righteousness in a variety of well-known texts, from the fourth-century sermon of Saint Augustine, in which he called her "God's Athlete," to a sixteenth-century treatise that suggested that morally wayward men could be reformed by looking at images of irreproachable biblical figures, such as Joseph and Susanna. In addition, Susanna's staunch defense of her innocence and Daniel's discovery of the deceit of the elders, who were themselves judges, conveyed the message of vigilance against legal and moral corruption.



ALBRECHT DÜRER

German, 1471-1528

The Temptation of the Idler (The Dream of the Doctor)

1497-1498

Engraving

Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, Purchase
with the Nancy Everett Dwight Fund

This image of an idle gentleman whose daytime slumber invites dreams of temptation wittily demonstrates how a momentary lapse of virtue leads readily to vice. The sleeping man's forbidden desires, blown into his ear by a gruesome demon, manifest themselves in the form of the voluptuous and inviting Venus and the playful Cupid, who teeters precariously on stilts made of his own arrows. Warming himself by a large, tiled stove as he surreptitiously naps, the doctor perfectly embodies the contemporary proverb: "Idling is the pillow of the Devil."