Classical Convergence

Greek and Roman Myths in European Prints

Classical mythology has served as inspiration to artists over the centuries, as seen in paintings, prints, sculptures, and other art forms. In accordance with its very nature, Classical mythology is filled with memorable gods, heroic mortals, and assorted fantastical creatures.

The Trojan War, a narrative cycle which began with the judgment of Paris, was an important story to the ancient Greeks and Romans. The *Iliad*, which begins in the tenth year of the war, is our source for many Trojan War stories, but most of the epics in the cycle are lost. The *Iliad* ends not with the conclusion of the war, but when Achilles defeats the Trojan hero Hector, who is then given a heroic funeral and burial. These stories were told or sung by poets, such as Homer, and only later appeared in written form. The *Aeneid*, written by the Roman poet Vergil (70-19 BCE), tells the story of the Trojan hero Aeneas, who escaped the sack of Troy. Within Vergil's poem, Aeneas dramatically describes the destruction of the city, accomplished through the Greek ruse of the Trojan horse.

In addition to tales related to the Trojan War, this exhibition also depicts other mythological subjects, many of which are told by the Roman poet Ovid (43 BCE-18 CE) in the *Metamorphoses* and other poems. Some of the most famous stories surround the hero Hercules, identifiable by his lion skin and club. One of the creatures who shares some of Hercules' more distasteful traits, such as drunkenness, is the satyr Silenus.

Prints, which are more easily mass produced than other art forms––and thus more affordable and widely disseminated––served as an ideal medium for artistic expression and the retelling of Greek and Roman myths. Consumers avidly collected prints with Classical themes as a way to show off their learnedness and appreciation of the Classical past. Through the techniques of woodcut, engraving, and etching, the prints in this exhibition, ranging from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, show how artists used varying styles and approaches to depict scenes from Classical mythology that continue to appeal to viewers today.

Giovanni Girolamo Frezza (Italian, 1659–after 1741)
After Carlo Maratti (1625–1713)
The Judgment of Paris, seventeenth century
Engraving
Museum purchase (76.8)

A golden apple inscribed "to the fairest" incited discord in a crowd of gods when it was tossed into their midst by the goddess Eris. Three goddesses claimed it; Paris, a prince of Troy, had to judge the winner. Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, was his reward for choosing Aphrodite (Venus), the goddess of love. The Greeks launched an attack on Troy in order to retrieve Helen, thus starting the Trojan War.

In this print the youthful god of desire, Eros (Cupid), stands beside Aphrodite, perhaps in reference to her bribe. On either side of Aphrodite stand the other contestants: Hera (Juno, at left), identified by her peacock, and Athena (Minerva, at right), indicated by her helmet, spear, and shield. The runners-up both react angrily to having not being chosen.

This is one of at least two images of the ill-fated beauty contest that Frezza engraved. This version of The *Judgment of Paris* reproduces a painting by Italian artist Carlo Maratta, a work now housed in the Catherine Palace in Pushkin, Russia.

cura, jubent Agamemnona fortes
Immeritam fara ndtam mactate Diana.
De Gerardum de Lairesse invent et sculp. in pict Nicolaum Vifscher Exc. cum Privil. Ordin. Gene. Belgic Fæderati. nunc apud Lov. Valk.

Gerard de Lairesse (Flemish, 1640–1711)
The Sacrifice of Iphigenia
Late seventeenth–early eighteenth century
Etching
Museum purchase (64.112)

While the Greeks were preparing to sail to Troy, their king, Agamemnon, killed a stag sacred to the goddess Artemis (Diana). In retaliation the goddess stalled Agamemnon's ships, and a seer revealed that he must sacrifice his daughter, Iphigenia, so his fleet could launch. In some versions of the story, Artemis takes pity on the young princess and spares her life at the last minute. Iphigenia then becomes a priestess and devotes herself to serving the goddess.

Gerard de Lairesse left his version of the spectacle open-ended. Horrified onlookers shield their faces from the impending bloodshed, elevating the sense of drama. Lairesse is sometimes known as the "Dutch Poussin," because, like French artist Nicolas Poussin, his work generally focused on classical and allegorical themes.

Cornelis Cort (Dutch, 1533–1578)
Achilles Carrying Troilos, 1574
Engraving
Museum purchase (67.134)

Many of Cornelis Cort's designs reproduced famous paintings and sculptures. This engraving depicts a Roman marble statue now in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples. Cort's engraving captures the qualities of the three-dimensional sculpture by showing the base on which the figure stands as well as the shadow the statue casts on the side of the rounded niche in which it is set. Although Cort trained in the Netherlands, he lived and worked in Italy, where he found inspiration for his numerous engravings.

The statue depicted here is usually identified as *Achilles Carrying Troilos*. Troilos was one of the sons of King Priam of Troy, and it had been prophesied that Troy would not fall if he lived into adulthood. Therefore the Greek warrior Achilles sought him out early in the Trojan War, ambushing and killing the youth. Here, Achilles, sword in hand, carries the dead boy slung over his shoulder. Later Achilles is said to have mutilated the body of his young victim.

Master F.G. (French, active sixteenth century)
After Francesco Primaticcio (Italian, 1504–1570)
Hector Carried before the Walls of Troy, ca. 1540s
Engraving
Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2006.6)

As related in Homer's *Iliad*, after the Greek warrior
Achilles defeated prince Hector in battle, he dragged the
dead Trojan's body around the city walls to taunt and
torment the Trojans. Achilles then took the body away,
not allowing it to be properly buried. King Priam of Troy,
Hector's grief-stricken father, later convinced Achilles
to return his son's body for burial. Here we see the dead
Hector carried by his comrades before the walls of Troy,
while two soldiers blow horns heralding his return.
Hector's limp, motionless body seems to gaze sadly out
at the viewer while the eyes of those following in the
procession have sorrowful, downcast attitudes.

This print, by an artist identified only by the initals F.G.,
reproduces a painting by Francesco Primaticcio, a leading
Italian artist of the sixteenth century. Primaticcio was
court artist to the French kings Francis I and Henry II at
the famed palace of Fontainebleau outside Paris.

Jan Sadeler I (Flemish, 1550–1600)
After Maarten de Vos (Flemish, 1532–1603)
The Burning of Troy, late sixteenth century
Engraving
Gift of Barbara Stratton Bolling and Deborah S. Booker
in memory of Arthur Mills Stratton (78.48)

At the conclusion of the Trojan War the city of Troy descended into chaos after the Greeks gained entry by the ruse of the Trojan horse and brought devastation upon the inhabitants. Many Trojans were slaughtered, some women and children were abducted as slaves, and the city was burned to the ground.

This print depicts the violence of war and its horrors. While one man stabs another in the head, a woman grieves the dead by tearing at her hair. Corpses of humans and animals litter the scene, and several children approach a nursing mother, who shares her scant food with them.

Jan Sadeler was a member of one of the most prominent printmaking families in northern Europe. He was master of the Antwerp artists' guild and spent time working in Germany and Italy. Several of Sadeler's prints, like this one, are based on designs by Maarten de Vos, a leading Antwerp artist in the late sixteenth century.

Ludolph Busing (German, 1599 or 1602–1669)
After Georges Lallemand (French, d. 1636)
Aeneas Saving His Father from Troy, sixteenth century
Chiaroscuro woodcut
Museum purchase (64.110)

A warrior carries an elderly man on his shoulders and
grasps the hand of a young boy as they flee a city that
burns in the distance. The subject illustrated here is an
episode from the Roman author Vergil's Aeneid in which
the Trojan hero Aeneas carries his lame father Anchises
out of Troy as it is overtaken by the Greeks. The boy is
Ascanius, Aeneas' son. According to subsequent events in
the story, Aeneas set sail to find a new homeland together
with other Trojan refugees, who eventually become the
ancestors of the Romans.

Aeneas Saving His Father from Troy is an example of a
chiaroscuro woodcut, in which tones and shading are
employed by treating separate wooden printing blocks
with washes of ink or pigments. Busing was originally
from Germany, but was apprenticed at a young age to
the Parisian printer Georges Lallemand. Busing seems to
have mostly executed Lallemand's designs rather than
creating his own compositions.

Anonymous
(German, active late fifteenth–early sixteenth century)
Aeneas Passing the Sirens' Cliffs
From *Opera Vergiliana*
1517
Woodcut
Gift of Joseph Fischer in honor of Professor Saul Weinberg (77.104)

Three beautiful and tempting maidens beckon to Aeneas and his crew while they sail past jagged cliffs. These sirens were known for lurking near treacherous rocks and using their beauty and voices to lure unsuspecting sailors to shipwreck. Aeneas and his men, however, escaped unharmed by the alluring creatures. This episode from the *Aeneid* is similar to an adventure of the Greek hero Odysseus.

The first printed version of Vergil's *Aeneid* was published in 1502 by Johann Grüninger in Strasbourg, less than fifty years after the invention of the printing press. In 1517 a French version was published by Jacques Sacon. Both books contained the same woodcut prints; the one displayed in this exhibition is from the French edition. Both versions are remarkable because of their extensive illustrations—nearly 200 images were featured throughout its 450 pages. As was customary at the time, rather than setting the scene in the ancient Mediterranean, the artist placed the characters in a familiar northern European landscape and depicted them in contemporary clothing.
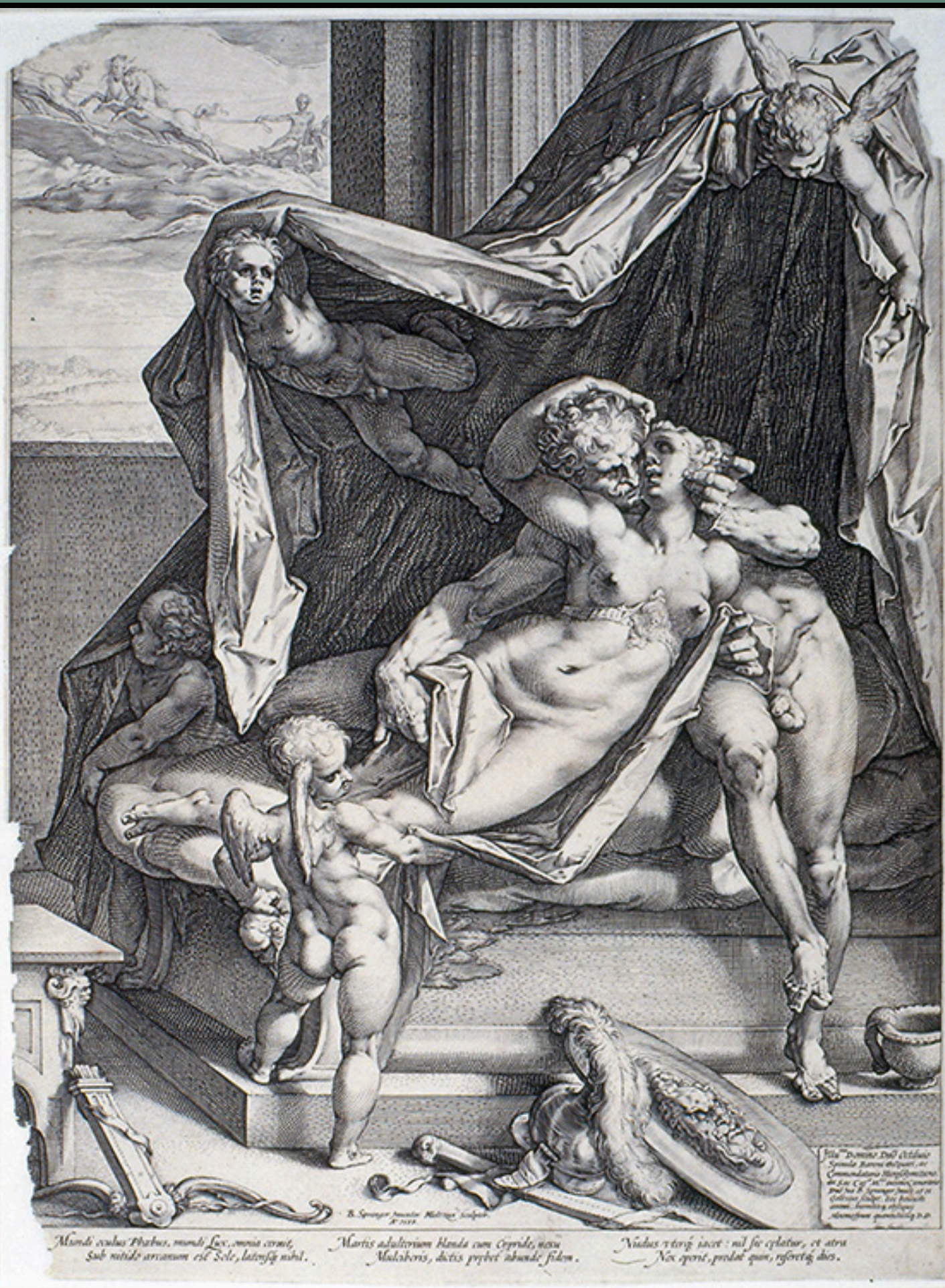
Hendrick Goltzius (Dutch, 1558–1617)
After Bartholomeus Spranger (Flemish, 1546–1611)
Mars and Venus, 1588
Engraving
Museum purchase (63.37)

During the Renaissance, the story of Mars and Venus was interpreted as an allegory of conflict or violence overcome by love. This theme is alluded to in this print. Attended by cupids, Mars has cast his armor and weapons aside in favor of Venus' amorous embrace. Venus encircles the head of Mars with her arm, her love physically bridling his violent tendencies. A moralizing inscription at the bottom of the print states that the couple's affair cannot be hidden from Apollo, who is seen ushering the sun across the sky through a window at top left.

This print copies a design of the Flemish Mannerist painter Bartholomeus Spranger, whose paintings of mythological subjects exhibit similar fleshy figures and eroticism. During the sixteenth century Hendrick Goltzius was the head of the largest and most important printing and publishing workshop in Haarlem, Netherlands. His many students included Jan Saenredam, whose work is also included in this exhibition.

After Hendrick Goltzius (Dutch, 1558–1617)
Minerva at Envy's Cave, late sixteenth century
Engraving
Museum purchase (65.201)

In a scene from Ovid's Metamorphoses the goddess Minerva, spear in hand and her owl at her feet, stands in a barren, storm-battered landscape in front of a cave, where Envy crouches in the shadows. Minerva has come to order the snaky-haired old hag—horrid in appearance, with poisonous breath and venomous touch—to instill jealousy in the heart of Aglauros, a greedy maiden who had previously offended the goddess. The story epitomizes the terrible outcome that ruinous envy engenders.

Hendrick Goltzius's publishing workshop in Haarlem produced many prints such as this to fill a demand for mythological subjects during the late sixteenth century. This is one of over fifty designs that Goltzius and his workshop created for an engraved series of the *Metamorphoses*.

Jan Saenredam (Dutch, 1565–1607)
After Hendrick Goltzius (Dutch, 1558–1617)
Pallas, 1596
Engraving
Museum purchase (64.99)

Pallas is the most commonly used epithet for the goddess Athena (Minerva). Pallas Athena is identified here by her attributes: an owl standing behind her and the head of the gorgon Medusa, which appears on the shield at the goddess' side. The smaller scene at the bottom of the oval illustrates a story told by the Roman author Ovid. In this tale, Pallas visits the nine Muses in order to listen to their songs and see their sacred spring, which was formed when the winged horse Pegasus struck a rock with his hoof.

Jan Saenredam was one of the more famous students of Hendrick Goltzius, and this engraving is a close copy of one Goltzius made in 1596. Two other prints by Goltzius are included in this exhibition.

Raptus Proserpinæ.

Johann Jakob Frey the Elder (Swiss, 1681–1752)
Raptus Proserpinae (The Rape of Proserpina), 1746
Engraving
Gift of Jeffrey B. Wilcox (97.5)

A visibly distressed Proserpina (Persephone) is carried toward a crevasse by Pluto (Hades), god of the Underworld. She was later forced to become his wife. Ceres (Demeter), Proserpina's mother and the goddess of agriculture, pleaded to the other gods for help in returning her daughter to safety above ground. According to the Roman poet Ovid, Jupiter (Zeus) decided that Proserpina could return home if she had not eaten while in the Underworld. Unfortunately, she had consumed seven pomegranate seeds and thus had to remain Pluto's consort for half of every year.

As a young man Johann Frey lived and trained in Rome, where he encountered the work of famed painters and sculptors. Frey drew his inspiration for this print from a sculpture of the same subject by Italian Baroque artist Gianlorenzo Bernini.

Schelte Bolswert (Dutch, 1586–1659)
After Anthony van Dyck (Flemish, 1599–1641)
The Drunken Silenus, mid seventeenth century
Engraving
Museum purchase (65.187)

The drunken satyr Silenus, a woodland creature, is assisted by his companions in this engraving based on a painting by Anthony van Dyck. The cause of his inebriation is referenced by the grapevine-entwined tree in the background, laden with plump grapes from which intoxicating wine is made. Indeed, one member of the satyr's group reaps the benefits of the harvest by swigging sloppily from a wine jug.

A companion, tutor, and favorite satyr of the wine god Bacchus (Dionysos), Silenus was said to be constantly inebriated. Although old and wise, his perpetual consumption of alcohol often landed him in trouble. The Latin caption at the bottom of the print translates as:
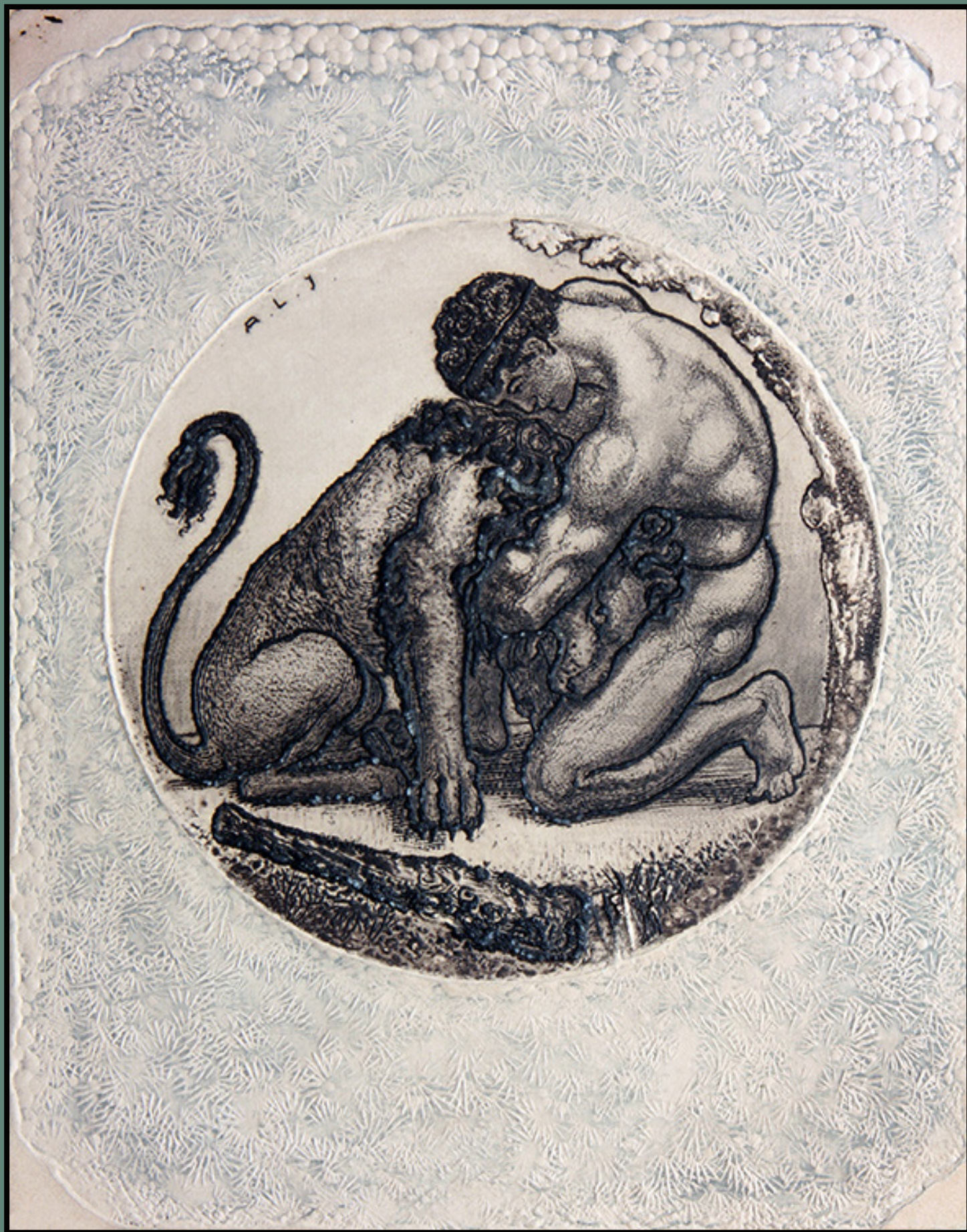
> *His knees give way, his head nods, and the ox*
> *Would fall to the ground,*
> *But for the support of others' hands.*
> *Sleep, Silenus.*
> *A better rest will restore to your limbs their strength*
> *than the god [Bacchus] provided you before.*

Henri-Arthur Lefort des Ylousses (French, 1846–1912)
Hercules and the Lion, late nineteenth century
Etching and embossing
Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2013.7)

The hero Hercules (Herakles) here performs the first of his Twelve Labors: slaying the Nemean lion, which had been terrorizing the countryside. Not able to kill the beast with arrows, for its hide was impenetrable, Hercules first subdued it with his club and finally strangled it to death. He then skinned the animal using its own claws, and from then on wore its skin as a cloak.

The techniques used to make this image are particularly interesting. In some areas the artist allowed the acid etching bath to bite deeply into the copper plate on which he had drawn the image. When the paper was pressed onto the inked plate, the deep relief transferred to the paper, imparting an almost sculptural three-dimensional quality. The lacelike relief surrounding the image is the result of the paper having been pressed onto a blue-inked molded plaster surface. The use of plaster to create texture in prints is known as gypsography, invented by Pierre Roche in the late nineteenth century. Gypsography allowed artists like Roche and Lefort des Ylousses to enhance their artistic creations.