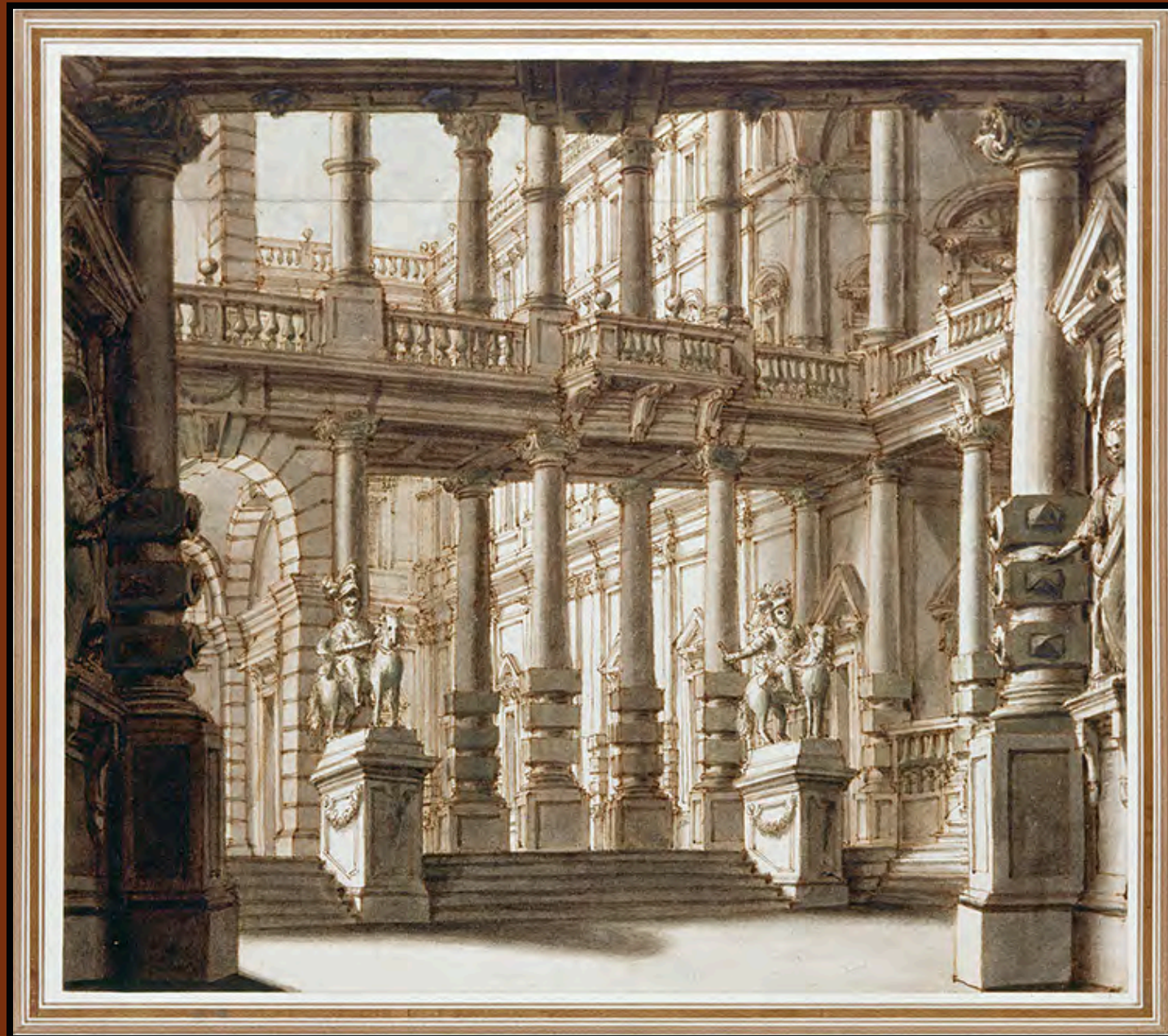


THE ROMANCE OF RUINS

The architects of the Graeco-Roman world left behind a vast legacy destined to fuel the imaginations of artists and architects for centuries. Beginning with the Italian Renaissance of the fifteenth century, the classical styles were reborn on a grand scale. During the succeeding Neoclassical and Romantic movements, architects continued to imitate classical buildings while painters and printmakers were increasingly inspired to create works based on the ruined grandeur of classical antiquity.

Some artists documented existing sites but exaggerated their decay, in an attempt to imbue their images with an elegiac longing for the past, a theme often pursued during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Others created fantasy structures, inventive “reconstructions” inspired by actual ruins. Still others created nothing more than wistful, imaginary vistas with ancient monuments succumbing to the onslaught of nature and time. As the era progressed, the taste for romantic decay became a mark of the aesthete, and classical nostalgia reached a near mania by the nineteenth century. Images of ruins abounded in books, fine art, furniture, jewelry, and other personal items. They even appeared on textiles and wallpaper. The interest continued into the twentieth century, though in a more documentary style that was less prone to romantic whimsy.

Today the architectural styles of the Graeco-Roman world are no longer as commonly used as they were in the past, but their timeless allure can still be experienced through the ruins themselves and the countless examples of art and architecture they inspired.



Antonio Galli Bibiena (Italian, 1700–1774)
Stage Design: Interior of a Courtyard with Equestrian Statues and Columns
Pen and ink, blue and gray washes
Museum purchase (76.74)

Antonio Bibiena came from a distinguished family of Italian painters and architects. Like his father, Ferdinando (1657–1743), he was a master of illusionism, best known for his architectural views and theatrical designs. Antonio's fantasy courtyard was probably intended as a stage set, though whether it was ever executed is unknown. It was probably based on the ruins of Roman theater stages.

Along with theater and opera, stage design reached a pinnacle in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As illustrated here, typical characteristics of stage design and other architecture of the period include a sense of movement, exaggerated spatial effects, and heightened drama.



Anonymous (French)

Box with Classical Scene, 19th century

Painted tortoiseshell with gold hinge and clasp

Gift of Miss Sarah Catherine France in honor of her brother Charles B. France (69.1047)

By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, interest in ruins had developed into a near mania in popular culture. Images of ruins appeared on everything from furniture to wallpaper to personal items, such as this keepsake box. Architects even constructed fake ruins in the gardens of the elite to satisfy the growing taste for romantic decay.

Tortoiseshell is a material used since antiquity. By the nineteenth century, machines pressed and steamed the shells into flat sheets, which could then be fashioned into objects such as this box. Since 1973, tortoises with valued shells are endangered species.



Richard Earlom (English, 1743–1822)
Pastoral Landscape with Arch of Titus, 1776
Etching and aquatint
Perhaps a gift of John Pickard (X-70)

Richard Earlom was an English printmaker celebrated for his mezzotints, engravings, and etchings. He is best known for his 200 etching facsimiles of drawings by the French artist Claude Lorraine (1604–1682).

Earlom's *Pastoral Landscape with the Arch of Titus* shows the Arch of Titus (at right), probably from the northwest. The arch stands on the western edge of the Roman Forum, next to the temple of Venus and Roma. The emperor Domitian built the arch in 85 CE to commemorate his deceased brother, the emperor Titus. It is unclear, however, whether this image actually represents the forum or whether the arch has been incorporated into a fantasy landscape. Titus' ruined arch was also the model for Napoleon's neoclassical Arc de Triomphe in Paris.



Sir William Russell Flint (Scottish, 1880–1969)
The Temple of Juno at Girgenti, Sicily, ca. 1918
Color lithograph
Museum purchase (2005.4)

The son of watercolorist Francis Wighton Flint, William Russell Flint had a long and distinguished career as a painter and printmaker. After attending the Royal Institution School of Art in Edinburgh, Flint went to work for the *Illustrated London News*. He also continued to paint and became President of the Royal Society of Painters in Watercolour in 1936.

Probably executed after Flint's release from WWI service, the dramatic, color lithograph of the Greek temple of Hera (Juno) at Girgenti (modern Agrigento) reflects both Flint's watercolors and the nineteenth-century nostalgia for the Graeco-Roman past, though in a less romanticized way. With its series of ruined temples dramatically sited along a craggy ridge, the Sicilian countryside has long inspired artists and other visitors. So taken by the beauty of the site, German writer Johann Wolfgang Goethe wrote upon his visit that such an experience "is so rarely granted us during our mortal lives." The temple of Hera was built about 450 BCE by Greek colonists; it was burned in 406 BCE during the Carthaginian sack of the island.



Le Roy, Julien-David (French, 1724–1803)
Vue des Ruines d'un Temple de Corinthe, 1758
Engraving

Gift of Museum Associates in honor of Dr. Jane C. Biers (2006.8)

The son of a court clockmaker, Julien Le Roy was an architect and antiquarian, often remembered today for his notorious spats with British antiquarians James Stuart and Nicholas Revett. Both Le Roy and the Stuart-Revet team wanted to be first to publish sumptuous volumes on the ruins classical antiquity. Le Roy won the race with *Les Ruines des plus beaux monuments de la Grèce* (*Ruins of the Most Beautiful Monuments of Greece*) in 1758. Angered at the headstrong Frenchman, Stuart and Revett gave his book a scathing critique, haughtily dismissing it as “ill-conceived and amateurish.” Today, Stuart and Revett’s *Antiquities of Athens* (1762) is far better remembered and still in print.

The temple Le Roy illustrated from ancient Corinth is the Doric temple of Apollo built in the 6th century BCE. Le Roy documented it while many of its columns were still standing. By 1815, only seven remained, the same that still stand today. Also vanished are the Ottoman buildings in the background of Le Roy’s print.



Giovanni-Battista Piranesi (Italian, 1720–1778)

Veduta del Sepolcro di Cajo Cestio

(View of the Tomb of Gaius Cestius)

From the series *Vedute di Roma* (*Views of Rome*)

Etching and engraving

Museum purchase (2005.1)

The printmaker Giovanni Battista Piranesi was particularly fascinated by Rome and its ruins. Trained as an engineer and architect, Piranesi also studied perspective and stage design. These skills allowed him to produce his spectacular *vedute*, a series of 135 etchings of ancient and contemporary Rome.

The pyramidal tomb of Gaius Cestius, built on the outskirts of Rome, reflected the first-century Roman interest in “exotic” Egyptian art and architecture. The monument has fascinated visitors since its construction, and its conspicuous ruins were an ideal subject for later artists who catered to antiquarian tastes. Piranesi’s work reflects his interest in romantic, rather than accurate, views of ancient ruins. He accentuated the dramatic atmosphere of the scene, manipulating the view, distorting the pyramid’s size, and probably exaggerating the overgrowth.

Today, this area is much-changed: gone is the lush vegetation and the atmosphere of remoteness. Instead, ancient ruins are surrounded by the heart of modern, urban Rome.



Abbé Jean-Claude Richard de Saint-Non (French, 1727–1791)
Gardens with a Classical Fountain, 1767

Aquatint and etching on a blue-gray paper

Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (90.127)

Abbé Jean-Claude Richard de Saint-Non was a French designer, engraver, etcher, and aquatint artist of noble birth. He produced his first print in 1753, and had created nearly 400 etchings and engraving by the end of his life. Because of his aristocratic background, Saint-Non had the means to become an important patron of the arts, and he was ultimately elected as an honorary associate of the esteemed French Academy.

Saint-Non spent 1759–1761 in Italy where he became close friends with Jean-Honoré Fragonard and Hubert Robert. Upon returning to France, Saint-Non issued a set of prints after Fragonard's and Robert's studies of classical antiquities. Based on one of Robert's drawings, Saint-Non's *Gardens with a Classical Fountain* reflects the trend of creating fantasy scenes of ruins based on actual monuments, such as Roman triumphal arches. Wistful and elegiac, such scenes catered to antiquarian longing for the vanished past.



Joseph Pennell (American, 1857–1926)
The Way Up to the Acropolis, from his book
In the Land of the Temples, 1913
Lithograph
Museum purchase (2005.5)

Philadelphia-born Joseph Pennell attended the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts but ultimately settled in London. Pennell illustrated primarily for English publications and lectured on the art of illustration. In 1908, he co-authored a biography of James McNeill Whistler, whom he greatly admired.

After a Boston aesthete called Pennell a “ragtag sketcher” who “couldn’t draw Greek art,” Pennell visited southern Italy, Sicily, and Greece in the spring of 1913. He wrote of his trip: “I say this regretfully... I should have seen more... I could not have been so moved as I was by what I saw in the Land of the Temples...” The poetic longing in Pennell’s words is typical of many early travelers who saw a haunting, plaintive beauty in the ruins of the vanished Graeco-Roman civilization. In this image, Pennell shows the great staircase leading up to the Acropolis of Athens. He wrote: “The fragment of the steps that is left shows how imposing the whole must have been.” Undoubtedly, many visitors over the centuries have had the same thoughts upon seeing this memorable stairway to one of the most famous ruins in the world.