

# Jacques Callot

## Dramatic acquisitions for the Baillieu Library Print Collection

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### Callot and the Baillieu Library Print Collection

Jacques Callot (1592–1635) was a printmaker whose well-known works include series of etchings on military and religious subjects. He is well represented in the University of Melbourne's Baillieu Library Print Collection, with 64 of his prints being among the large collection donated by Dr J. Orde Poynton in 1959.<sup>1</sup> There are now more than 80 prints by or after Callot in the collection, including those from his most famous series, *Les misères et les malheurs de la guerre* (The miseries and misfortunes of war) of 1633. But before 2009 there were very few examples of Callot's theatrical court art in the collection. In this article I discuss the acquisition of an etching by Callot, describe his contributions to the history of printmaking, and explore those of his etchings that depict festivals during his time as a court artist.

With the encouragement of Kerriane Stone, Special Collections Officer (Prints), in 2009 I prepared an acquisition proposal for an etching by Callot, from a series that commemorates a court festival. At the time, I was undertaking a student project with the collection through the university's Cultural Collections Projects Program.

Since then, a late 20th-century etching after Callot's famed *La tentation de Saint Antoine* (The temptation of St Anthony) has also been acquired, as well as another Callot etching depicting court pageantry.

In an environment where accountability and public interest underlie the fundamental practices of museums, universities and collecting institutions, the concept of assessing significance as part of developing and documenting a collection is particularly valuable. Having a comprehensive significance assessment for the Print Collection has been integral to understanding which works and artists are currently represented, and for determining future areas of collecting.<sup>2</sup> Drawing upon *Significance 2.0*, a useful tool in assessing the significance of a work or collection against qualitative assessment criteria,<sup>3</sup> I prepared the acquisition proposal focusing on the relationship of the nominated etching to the Baillieu's existing print corpus and policy documents. Poynton's relationship to the collection is an important aspect of its significance that is reiterated in the collection policy. Therefore, when considering a new acquisition, I made particular reference to Poynton and his donation.

### Callot's innovations in etching

Callot's first advance in the technique of etching was the use of a harder ground of mastic and linseed oil.<sup>4</sup> This is the acid-resistant medium applied to those areas of the etched metal plate that are intended to remain unbitten when it is placed in the acid bath. Previously, weaker grounds had not adhered well to the plate and had chipped off, which meant that acid began to bite in areas not intended. (The result is known as 'foul biting'.) The harder ground meant that Callot could take his time over a plate or series, enabling him to perfect the practice of making repeated bitings to enhance effects of light and space.<sup>5</sup> This is evident in Callot's etchings, where background detail has shallower, lightly bitten lines while the wide, sweeping strokes of the foreground have been bitten multiple times.

Callot also began using a new type of etching tool with an oval point (the *échoppe*), similar to the burin (the traditional tool of engraving).<sup>6</sup> The traditional etching needle could not create lines that swell and diminish, and the hard ground Callot used on the metal plate provided an excellent surface for exploiting the *échoppe*. The detail in Callot's prints is remarkably fine,



Jacques Callot, *Entrée de Monsieur de Couvonge, et de Monsieur de Chalabre*, plate 3 from *Le combat à la barrière* (Combat at the barrier), 1627, etching, 15.2 x 24.0 cm (plate). Reg. no. 2009.0112, purchased 2009, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne

as he used a magnifying glass when drawing with his etching tool.<sup>7</sup>

### Theatre and court art of Callot

By 1614 Callot was living in Florence and receiving commissions from the Medici court.<sup>8</sup> His time there inspired him to represent vibrant theatre scenes through the medium of etching. Florence in the early 17th century was celebrated throughout Europe as a centre for theatre, under the rule of Grand Duke Cosimo II de' Medici. Callot recorded many court-sponsored pageants and elaborate theatrical productions at that time. Working under Giulio Parigi, a Florentine architect, engineer and court designer, Callot learnt to organise space in his prints through mathematical perspective, and began to set his figures in the foregrounds of animated scenes. He was also influenced by Parigi's elegant stage sets and fantastic costumes.<sup>9</sup> An etching from 1620, *Foire de l'Impruneta* (The fair at Impruneta) is a masterful representation—in minute detail—of a large crowd, as well as a competent creation of perspective through dark and light shading. At this stage Callot also began to merge his own taste for the bizarre and grotesque aspects of daily life with fanciful elements

of court theatre.<sup>10</sup> After Cosimo's death in 1621, Callot returned to Nancy where he executed two series inspired by Florentine subjects. *Gobbi* (1622) depicts dwarf entertainers and *Balli de Sfessania* (1621) shows street performers inspired by the *commedia dell'arte*.

### *Entrée de Messieurs de Couvonge et de Chalabre*

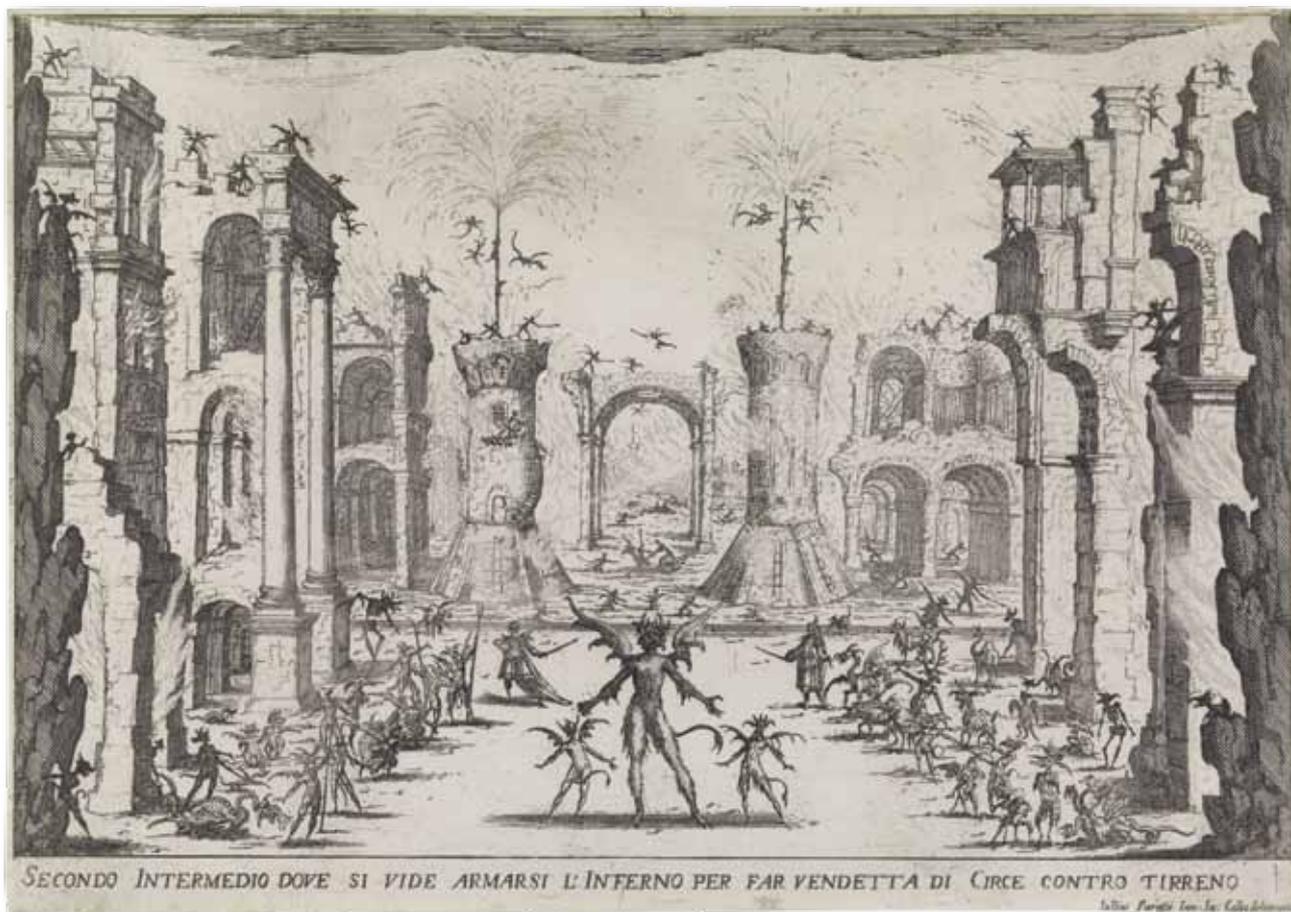
Callot's family connections with the ducal court in Nancy enabled him to use his artistic skills to become an artist of the feudal power. *Le combat à la barrière* (Combat at the barrier) (1627) was executed at a time when Callot was undertaking commissions from the court of Charles IV, the Duke of Lorraine. Late in 1626, Charles had given political asylum to his cousin, the Duchess of Chevreuse, and while she was at Nancy a pageant and tournament were staged in her honour. Callot recorded the event in a series of 11 etchings, brought together with descriptive text passages.

Plates 9 and 10 from *Le combat* were part of the collection that Poynton donated to the Baillieu in 1959. *Entrée de MM de Couvonge et de Chalabre* (1627) is the third in the series and depicts two noblemen, Monsieur de Couvonge and Monsieur de Chalabre, entering

the fête on a dragon vehicle that represents hell and its demons (illustrated above). While the work is historically significant because it records a real event, it is also significant to the Print Collection because two other prints from the series were donated by Poynton. It therefore strengthens the existing Callot corpus as well as providing insight into Callot's artistry and technical skill.

Working under the court painter Claude Deruet (the artistic director of all ducal entertainment), Callot designed the actual wagons, costumes and décor for the event, as well as etching the plates for *Le combat à la barrière*.<sup>11</sup> His tutelage under Parigi during his time in Florence had equipped him with the skills to be an independent designer. The fire-breathing-dragon wagon and sinuous creatures with feathery limbs wielding snakes and flying above in *Entrée de MM de Couvonge et de Chalabre* suggest that this is an exaggeration of the real event. It is very likely that the actual wagon was re-used year after year, with different decorations added on this occasion. Indeed, a preparatory drawing of this scene shows a considerably toned-down affair.<sup>12</sup> This print is an excellent example of Callot's skill in making a visual record of theatrical court festivals.

Jacques Callot, *Secondo intermedio dove si vide armarsi l'Inferno per far vendetta di Circe contro Tirreno* (Second interlude: Hell arms itself to avenge Circe against Tirreno), plate 2 from *Les intermèdes or La liberazione di Tirenno et d'Arnea* (Liberation of the Tyrrhenian Sea), 1617, etching, 18.8 x 28.5 cm (plate). Reg. no. 2011.0003, purchased 2011, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne



### *Hell arms itself to avenge Circe*

In 2011, the Baillieu Library acquired another of Callot's theatrical fantasy prints (illustrated opposite). *Secondo intermedio dove si vide armarsi l'Inferno per far vendetta di Circe contro Tirreno* (Second interlude: Hell arms itself to avenge Circe against Tirreno) of 1617 is an etching from *Les intermèdes* or *La liberazione di Tirenno et d'Arnea* (Liberation of the Tyrrhenian Sea). It is the second plate in a three-part series that records a spectacle at the Uffizi designed by Parigi for the marriage of Cosimo's sister Caterina to Ferdinand Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua.

There is a much deeper sense of space in *Secondo intermedio* than in *Entrée*. *Secondo intermedio* has an intricate architectural backdrop of decaying buildings with Corinthian columns and double-storey archways that function like a stage set. This print demonstrates the influence of Parigi in the creation of perspective by receding architectural lines, and the figures are characteristically very similar to those in *Entrée*. What makes these works so effective is Callot's ability to imagine wide landscapes and ruins teeming with figures, and also to invite the viewer to scrutinise the intimate behaviour of horned beasts and winged creatures.

### *Erik Desmazières and La tentation de Saint Antoine*

Callot etched the subject of St Anthony twice in his career: at the beginning and the end. The earlier version was executed in 1617, in the same year as *Les intermèdes*, and the later version shortly before his death in 1635. Both depict wide architectural spaces containing hellish scenes with grotesque figures, although the figures in the former are feasting and dancing, while in the latter they are engaged in combat. Although dealing with religious subject matter, both versions still show Callot's sense of pageantry. The Baillieu Library Print Collection holds neither version of Callot's *La tentation de Saint Antoine*, although the second version is held by the National Gallery of Victoria.<sup>13</sup>

As the Print Collection represents mainly Old Masters and Australian artists, it is not often that contemporary international works become available that relate to artists already represented. However, three prints by Erik Desmazières, acquired in 2009–10, are important additions, both in their own right and also because of their referential value; one of these, *La tentation de Saint Antoine* (illustrated on page 52) is after Callot's earlier version. Desmazières (born 1948)

is a French printmaker, who is currently chairman of the Société des Peintres-Graveurs Français (Society of French Engravers). Many of his works are clearly influenced by Old Master prints, and have strong architectural aspects and psychologically charged elements.

The interpretive potential of Callot's etchings from *Le combat à la barrière* and *Les intermèdes* would be further extended if other plates from these series could be acquired in future. As well as the newly acquired etchings being useful in demonstrating Callot's artistic and technical skills, and in illustrating French courtly life in the 17th century, the Desmazières print can offer insight into Callot's strength as a master printmaker, continue the narrative of artistic inspiration from the subject of St Anthony, and reference the tradition of reproductive printmaking (prints made after other works of art such as paintings; these were much more common before the advent of photography in the mid-19th century).

At the recent symposium *Print matters at the Baillieu*, Professor Jaynie Anderson reminded us all that the core function of the Baillieu Library Print Collection is to teach and inspire students.<sup>14</sup>

Erik Desmazières, *La tentation de Saint Antoine* (The temptation of Saint Anthony), 1993 (after Mei Tinghi and Jacques Callot), roulette, etching and aquatint, 74.5 x 91.9 cm (plate), first state, edition 47/75. Reg. no. 2010.0007, purchased 2010, Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne  
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Dr Alison Inglis and Dr Meaghan Wilson-Anastasios documented the history of the Print Collection's use in teaching programs, which include creative ways to increase the collection's accessibility.<sup>15</sup> The Cultural Collections Projects Program is just one way in which students can get up close and personal with prints in the collection.

Alice Clanachan graduated with a Master of Cultural Heritage from Deakin University in 2010. In 2011 she completed an internship at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York. Alice currently assists in the Prints and Drawings Department of the National Gallery of Victoria.

The Baillieu Library Print Collection is available for research via the Cultural Collections Reading Room on the third floor of the Baillieu Library. For contact details and to search the catalogue see [www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/special/prints/](http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/special/prints/).

- 1 Sarah Thomas and Esther Szabo, 'Significance assessment: Baillieu Library Print Collection', unpublished report, November 2005, p. 1.
- 2 Thomas and Szabo, 'Significance assessment'.
- 3 Roslyn Russell and Kylie Winkworth, *Significance 2.0: A guide to assessing the significance of collections*, Adelaide: Collections Council of Australia, 2009.
- 4 H. Diane Russell, *Jacques Callot: Prints and related drawings*, Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1975, p. xx; Esther Averill, *Eyes on the world: The story and work of Jacques Callot*, New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1969, p. 52.
- 5 Russell, *Jacques Callot*, p. xx; Averill, *Eyes on the world*, p. 52.
- 6 Sue Welsh Reed and Richard Wallace, *Italian etchers of the Renaissance and Baroque*, Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1989, p. 222.
- 7 Averill, *Eyes on the world*, p. 54.
- 8 H. Diane Russell, 'Callot, Jacques', *Grove art online*, [www.oxfordartonline.com](http://www.oxfordartonline.com), accessed 3 September 2009.
- 9 Reed and Wallace, *Italian etchers*, p. 222.
- 10 Russell, 'Callot, Jacques'.
- 11 Gerald Kahan, *Jacques Callot: Artist of the theatre*, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1976, p. 54.
- 12 Kahan, *Jacques Callot*, p. 56.
- 13 This work can be seen in the exhibition *The four horsemen: Apocalypse, death and disaster*, to be held at the National Gallery of Victoria International from 31 August 2012 to 28 January 2013. Many works from the Baillieu Library Print Collection will also be on display.
- 14 *Print matters at the Baillieu* was held at the University of Melbourne on 3 September 2011. Papers presented can be found in the corresponding publication: Kerriane Stone and Stephanie Jaehrling (eds), *Print matters at the Baillieu*, University of Melbourne, 2011, including Jaynie Anderson, 'Orde Poynton and the Baillieu Library' (pp. 7–20).
- 15 Alison Inglis and Meaghan Wilson-Anastasios, 'Prints at the Baillieu Library: Teaching and learning from the collection', in Stone and Jaehrling (eds), *Print matters*, pp. 103–18.