

A unique scholarship

Luke Morgan

I began my Harold Wright and Sarah and William Holmes Scholarship in August 2004, soon after having submitted my PhD at the University of Melbourne. I remember feeling both excited and, initially at least, somewhat daunted by the remarkable freedom of the scholarship. After a long period of focused study and writing (on the early 17th-century French architect Salomon de Caus), the unique opportunity to range widely in a print collection of the scale and quality of

the British Museum's was extremely appealing to me. Harold Wright and Sarah and William Holmes Scholars are free to determine their own course of study. There is no requirement to produce a publication or give a talk or complete any other research 'output', as it would now be called. In an era in which scholarship is continuously measured, quantified and reported, the objective of the award seems even more enlightened now than it did then.

In planning my course of study, I decided to follow the only stipulation of the scholarship as closely as possible—'to carry out an intensive study of prints at the British Museum in London'—although I did also pursue one or two projects that I had already begun. For example, my article on early modern perspective paintings of gardens on exterior walls, primarily in France, benefited significantly from access to engraved representations of this now mostly lost art form. In general, however, I spent long days immersed in the collection without a specific research objective. Looking back over the notebooks that I kept, which amount to more than 600 closely written pages, I recall that I set out with the intention of being as methodical as possible. I began with 15th-century German, Dutch and Flemish woodcuts, before moving on to German and Netherlandish engraving. The prints of Albrecht Dürer, Albrecht Altdorfer, Lucas van Leyden, Hendrik Goltzius and, of course, Rembrandt, stand out in my memory, as I expect they do to many before me. Next, I worked my way through the Italian and French schools, before turning to Hogarth, Goya and, especially, the museum's extraordinary Italian drawings, from Bellini to Michelangelo. Throughout, my method was simple: I studied as many prints as I could, comparing states and artists, with Bartsch, Hind, Hollstein and other essential catalogues open on my desk before me.



My British Museum notebooks have proved themselves to be an invaluable resource in the years since. I frequently refer to them for details of a motif or an idea. There are, for instance, many references to images of fountains and gardens, which have enriched my subsequent writings on these topics. Some of the prints that I studied still intrigue me. On Cornelius Cort's 16th-century engraving of Hercules besieged by pygmies, a subject previously unfamiliar to me (perhaps because it is not included among the twelve labours), I wrote: 'This subject is, apparently, taken from an ekphrasis in Philostratus' *Icones*. The pygmies seem to be picking at Hercules' headdress with some sort of odd tool. An army of them approaches. The whole thing is quite comic and bizarre'. At other times, I was clearly taken with the interpretations of the historians whom I read alongside my study of the prints. A description of Goltzius' *Massacre of the innocents* (pictured) as 'a furious brawl at a naturalist campsite' is heavily underlined.

In retrospect, the physical surrounds of the Department of Prints and Drawings are almost as memorable as the works themselves. I occupied a spot on the upper level of the wood-panelled interior, from where I had an excellent view of the operations of the Print Room. Scholars and members of the public regularly filed in to view particular works. Most memorable of all, however, was the extraordinary and generously offered expertise of the keepers, especially Antony Griffiths, Hugo Chapman, Mark Macdonald and Martin Royalton-Kisch. If ever an argument is needed for the continuing relevance to art history of connoisseurship, to my mind they collectively embody it.

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