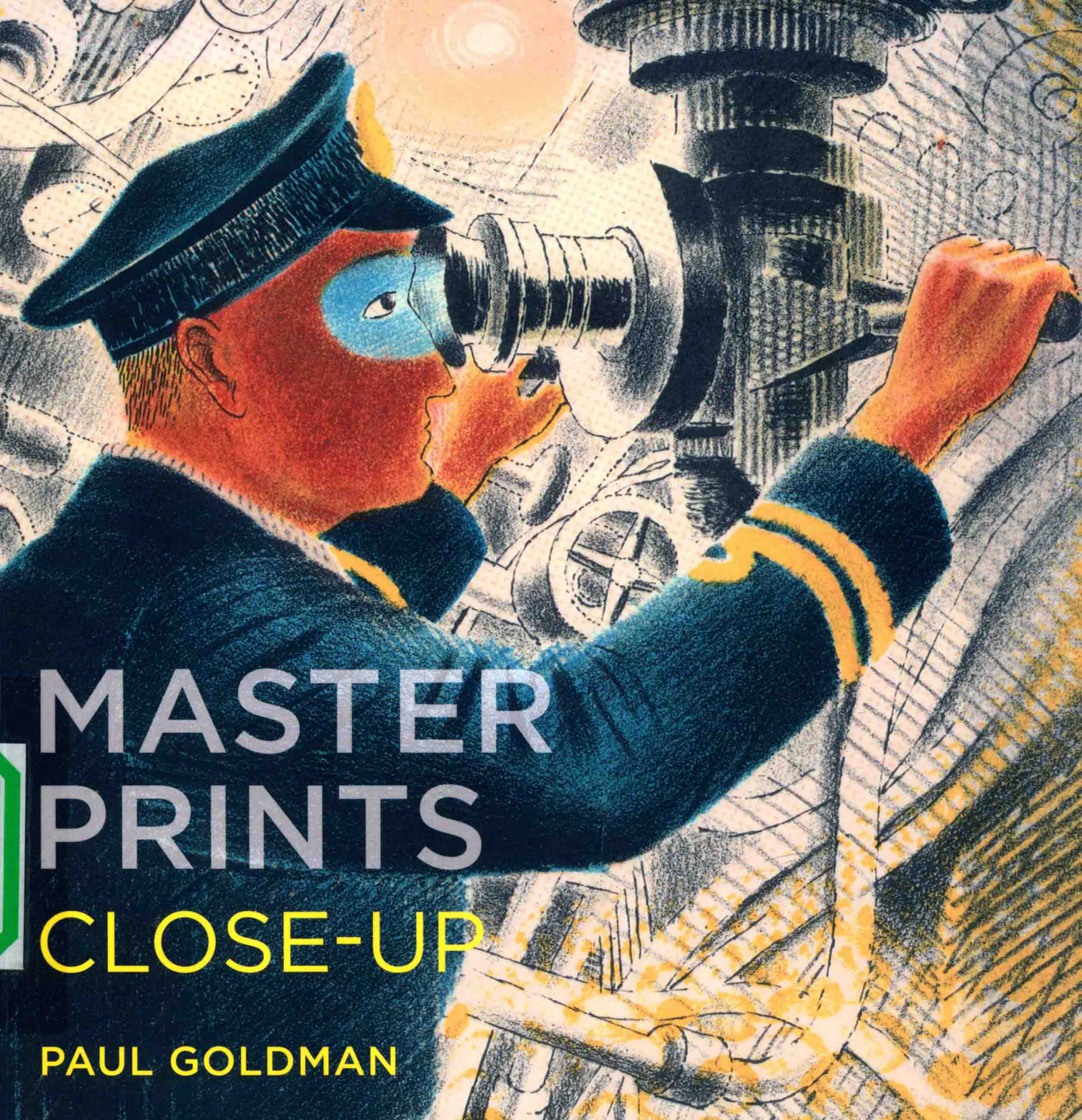

MASTER PRINTS

CLOSE-UP

PAUL GOLDMAN

MASTER PRINTS CLOSE-UP

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藏书章

PAUL GOLDMAN

THE BRITISH MUSEUM PRESS

For Corinna, as always,
and in memory of Tessa Sidey,
friend, colleague and expert on prints

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Paul Goldman has asserted the right to be identified as the author of this work

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The papers used in this book are natural, renewable and recyclable products and the manufacturing processes are expected to conform to the environmental regulations of the country of origin.

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Page 6: Blanche Lazzell (American, 1878–1956), *The Blue Vase* (detail). 1927. Colour woodcut, 35.4 x 30.9 cm (PD 2003, 1231.14; donated by Leslie and Johanna Garfield through the American Friends of the British Museum in honour of Stephen Coppel)
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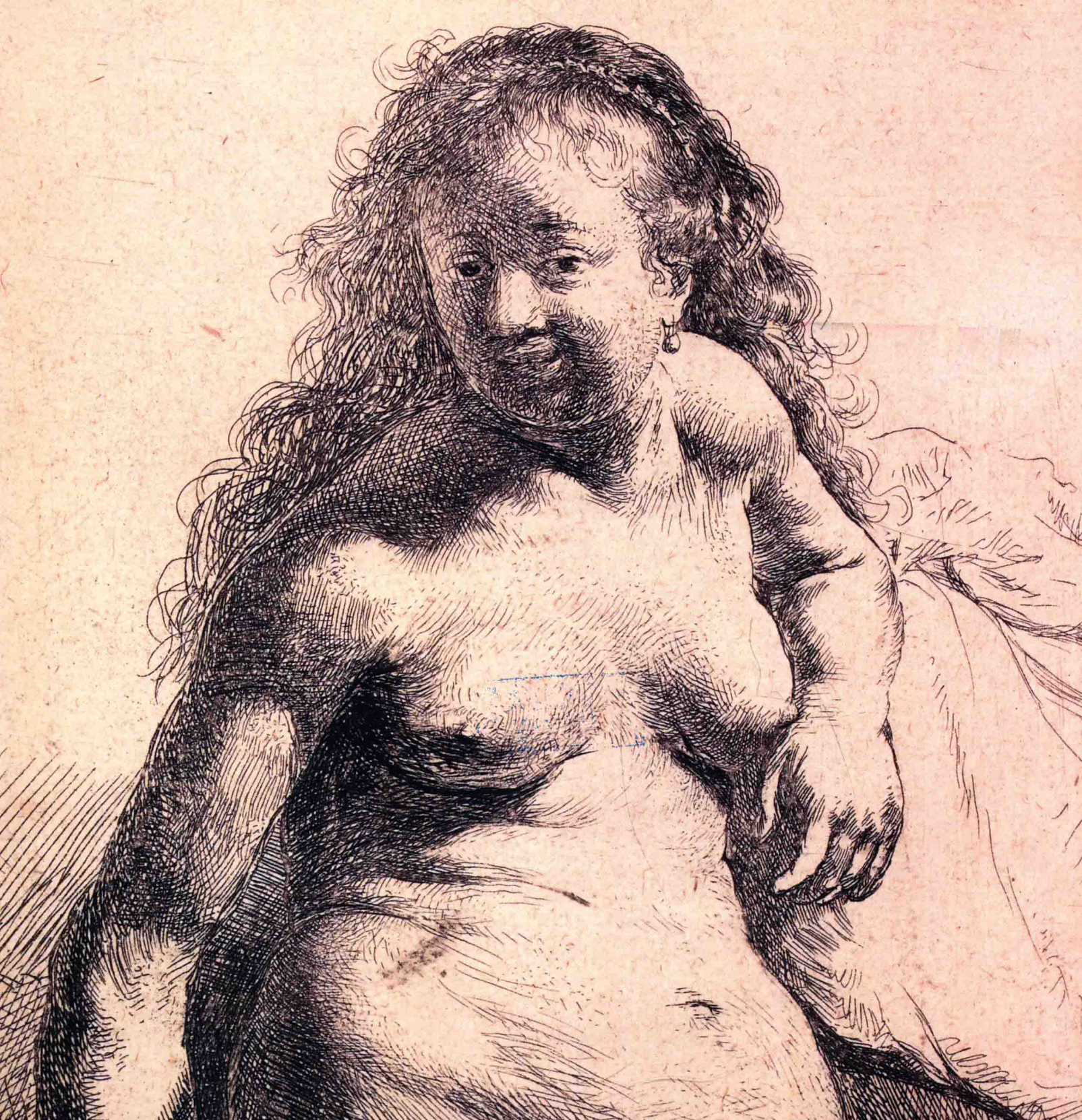

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Paul Goldman

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The aim of this book is to introduce the general reader and art-lover to a selection of masterpieces of original European and North American printmaking, both historic and contemporary, from the comprehensive collection of the British Museum. Magnified details are provided to enable the viewer to see in close-up something of the complexity of form, and variety of line and texture, which make prints so special as complete works of art. In the world of printers' inks, on papers of different hues, weights and thicknesses, it is possible, I would argue, to come closer to an artist's intention than in almost any other medium. The sensitive and meticulously photographed enlargements included here allow the reader to appreciate the subtle differences in texture, shading, line, tone and colour that artists can achieve in media such as *engraving*, *etching*, *lithography* and *screenprinting*. Brief discussions of each of the forty-five examples highlight the genius of printmakers including Dürer, Rembrandt, Goya and Cézanne, to name but four among a host of major artists.

Prints can appear somewhat puzzling, in a world where paintings, sculptures, photographs and installations – produced essentially as unique items – appear to reign supreme and frequently command massive prices at auction. How can a work of art be really genuine, valuable and collectable if it exists in perhaps several hundred apparently identical examples? This is just one of the conundrums that *Master Prints Close-Up* aims to solve. Another is the meaning of the word 'print' itself – a term much used but, in this particular context, frequently misunderstood. What about 'reproductive prints'? What on earth are they, and can they have any interest or intellectual worth? How do prints differ from drawings, in both appearance and function, and what exactly is meant by the term 'original print'? This book sets out to answer these and other questions, both practical and philosophical, by providing clear explanations alongside striking visual examples. Technical terms (shown in *italics*) are explained in the Glossary on pp. 106–10. I hope the result will prove as attractive and appealing as it is informative.

What is a print?

'It is only a print.' This is an oft-repeated phrase, usually expressing the speaker's belief that a print is something worthless, uninteresting, of secondary importance, and essentially an item that copies or reproduces another work of art such as a painting or a drawing. Today the very word 'print' is perhaps an unfortunate one – we talk of photographic prints, the print media (newspapers), and so on. However, a fine art print, a master print, an artist's print – call it what you will – is something entirely different.

A print is really and importantly a finished and a complete work of art. It is a statement made by an artist, just as valid and significant as an oil painting or a sculpture. It differs from those works only in one particular regard: it is usually produced in more than one example or – more correctly – *impression*.

However, it is this very multiplicity that sows uncomfortable seeds of doubt in the minds of viewers, art enthusiasts and collectors. How is it possible for a work of art to have value (both in monetary terms and aesthetically) if more than one person can possess it? It might be that there are several hundred impressions surviving of prints by an artist such as Rembrandt, so can they all be valuable and worthwhile?

However, the comparison should perhaps be made not with paintings or with sculptures, but with musical recordings and books. It is not necessary, for example, to own the original manuscript of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony or Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in order to appreciate those masterpieces in performance, recording, or in innumerable editions both on paper and in digital form.

In another sense, though, a print is entirely unique and remarkable. With the possible exception of digital prints (see no. 45), the artist has complete authority and control over the sheet of paper and what appears on it. The work has invariably been made using a *matrix*, plate, lithographic stone, woodblock or the like, which he/she has worked onto directly, by etching, engraving, drawing and so on. In this way, then, a print is a work of art that the artist makes specifically to appear in the form of ink on paper. However, the philosophical problem remains: prints are multiples.

The concept of prints as multiples is difficult to grasp. However, I would maintain that every impression of a print made by any of the methods illustrated

here (with the sole exception of digital prints) is subtly different from every other impression. Each impression pulled from a plate or other matrix can be distinct in terms of the amount of ink left on, different wipings, slight changes in colour, different papers used, and so on. In other words, each impression is, in its own way, an unique item – just as individual as a work created in any other medium.

The limited edition

'Limited edition' is another term invariably found on contemporary prints. For example, a pencilled 7/100 indicates that the impression is number 7 out of a total *edition* of 100. However, the practice of limiting the number of impressions of a print in order to create an artificial rarity is a relatively recent development (and in some ways an unhelpful one). It dates from the final quarter of the nineteenth century. In earlier periods, prints continued to be made until the plate wore out; the artist invariably wanted to make the work available to as many people as possible. This concept is anathema to proponents of the limited edition. Ironically, it should be pointed out that items such as *giclée* prints (a form of digitally generated image, usually reproductive) are regularly issued in enormous so-called 'limited' editions. A limited edition of, say, 5000 is a contradiction in terms, and prints from such enterprises are less likely to become rare or sought-after, even if each one is signed by the artist (as they so regularly are).

Varieties of prints

Prints can be created in numerous ways, as the forty-five examples in this book make clear. These methods, however, tend to be categorized by the three main kinds of printing, and types of presses employed in them: relief, intaglio and planographic.

In *relief printing*, areas that are not to print are cut away, leaving the design standing out in raised relief on the block. The surface of the block is inked using a dabber or roller. The *printing ink* has to be of a stiff consistency so that it remains on the raised parts of the block and does not flow into the hollows. The press is similar to an ordinary type-printing press – pressure is applied uniformly from above, but need not be heavy. Relief printing methods encompass *woodcut* and *wood-engraving*.

In *intaglio printing*, the press is something like an old-fashioned clothes-mangle. A sliding bed moves horizontally between two rollers as the operator turns the wheel. The inked plate of an *etching* or an *engraving* is placed on the bed with a sheet of dampened paper on top, and then special blankets are laid over both, to ensure that the pressure exerted is even. The plates used in these and related techniques have the lines cut out from the metal, so all ink not lying in the incised lines must be scrupulously wiped off before printing. As the bed passes under the heavy roller the paper is forced into the lines and the ink transfers to the paper. When the process is complete, the paper impression is hung up to dry.

In *planographic printing* (which fundamentally means *lithography*, *monotype* and stencil-printing/*pochoir*), the ink is taken from the flat surface of a plate or lithographic stone. A flat-bed 'scraper press' is normally used – the paper is laid face down on the inked plate and then rubbed along the back to transfer the ink. *Digital printmaking* is, for convenience, included in this third group – uniquely, digital prints are made using computer technology so no physical matrix is involved (see no. 45). *Screenprinting* (also called serigraphy in the United States) is a variety of stencil printing.

What is an original print?

The term 'original print' can be confusing. It is probably clearest to define it as a print, made by an artist, which emerges as a creation based on no previous model or idea. In contrast, a 'reproductive' print is one that replicates or reproduces a painting or a drawing, made by the artist him/herself or, frequently, by another artist entirely. The word *after* is employed here to denote that the print is based on another work of art. These works are far more than mere 'reproductions', however. They often record compositions now destroyed or details in surviving works today obscured by dirt or damage, and they can themselves be remarkable and treasurable examples of supreme mastery of printmaking. There are several such reproductive prints included here (see nos 5, 6, 18, 19 and 21) and none is to be despised.

Prints and drawings: the function of prints

In the British Museum (and indeed in many similar institutions across the world) prints and drawings are housed together, usually for convenience of storage or for historical reasons.

However, prints are distinct from drawings in one significant way. Drawings (with the exceptions of finished watercolours and so-called 'presentation drawings') are fundamentally working tools, made by artists in preparation for, say, a painting or a sculpture; prints are essentially finished, complete works of art. The working stages in the making of a print are known as *states* and the recording of each such state, in complex detail, forms the bedrock of catalogues raisonnés devoted to printmakers. However, the final state of a print is the one the artist wants the public to see, and because of this important point, one should consider such a print in the same way one might view a painting or a sculpture – as a finished statement and creation.

The appeal of prints: black and white or colour

A number of the examples chosen for this book are in black ink on white paper (for example nos 8, 16). For some, this in itself can be problematic, for we live in a world in which we are bombarded by colour images – cinema, television and the digital world are all dominated by colour. However, I would argue that there is colour aplenty to be found in the subtle gradations of shade and tone to be discovered in the works of masters of printmaking in black and white. In addition, those prints made in colour are themselves full of life, interest and appeal. The richness of creativity is only matched by the technical skills exhibited and the tactile nature of so many works printed in ink on paper. With many prints it is possible to feel the ink standing proud on the paper (although I would actively discourage anyone from touching the surface of prints in museum collections).

Finally, and practically, prints remain affordable. Few perhaps could aspire to purchase a print by, say, Rembrandt or Dürer, but there are many other printmakers whose works are still within reach of those of modest means. While paintings and sculptures spiral in price ever skyward, many prints are still, as is often stated, 'the poor man's paintings' or even, 'the democratic art'.

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