

CANALETTO'S *VEDUTE* PRINTS

An Exhibition in Honor of Adolph Weil Jr.

HOOD MUSEUM OF ART, DARTMOUTH COLLEGE

MONTGOMERY MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS



INTRODUCTION

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The Hood Museum of Art and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts are delighted to present *Canaletto's Vedute Prints: An Exhibition in Honor of Adolph Weil Jr.* This partnership reflects the indelible imprint that this remarkable collector's legacy has borne on the museums of his hometown, Montgomery, Alabama, and of his alma mater, Dartmouth College, which he attended from 1931 to 1935. Both the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts and the Hood Museum of Art have in the past mounted exhibitions of Mr. Weil's prints that are now held by the institutions. In this collaborative venture, we celebrate another important aspect of Mr. Weil's outstanding collection, Canaletto's magnificent etchings of eighteenth-century Venice. This project was planned jointly to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of the donor, and to celebrate his vision and dedication as a collector of Old Master prints.

Canaletto's Vedute Prints highlights a relatively unknown body of work by the eighteenth-century Italian artist known predominantly for his sumptuously painted views of Venice. This focused exhibition shows a group of etchings that Giovanni Antonio Canal, known as Canaletto (1697–1768), created during a pivotal moment in his career, when he departed from his familiar topographical Venetian views and explored not only a new medium, etching, but also atypical subject matter. On his title page to the series, Canaletto described the etchings as *Vedute Altre prese da i Luoghi Altre ideate* (*Views, Some Taken from Places, Others Invented*). Indeed, in these scenes, Canaletto moved in and out of reality, presenting both

actual sites and imaginary vistas, and at times even interweaving the familiar with the fantastic. Through these prints, Canaletto revealed an unseen Venice to what he hoped would be a new audience and a new market: collectors spurred by the revival of printmaking in eighteenth-century Italy. The results of his project were unexpected and revelatory, and as magical today as in Canaletto's own time.



Adolph "Bucks" Weil leading a gallery talk during *Master Printers: Dürer, Rembrandt and Beyond from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Adolph Weil Jr.*, Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, July 17, 1994.

For all his love of multiples, Adolph “Bucks” Weil was an original. Collectors of art come to their passion from a multitude of perspectives and motivations. Some are simply acquisitive for its own sake. The late nineteenth-century New York financier J. P. Morgan was said to have purchased so much art that he never got around to unpacking a lot of it. Others take joy in envisioning an “edifice” of art, with individual elements that need to be assembled to create a whole. They become obsessed with the hunt for that elusive piece of the puzzle to fill a void. Bucks Weil fit neither category. His love of art was as much an intellectual pursuit as an aesthetic one, studying actual objects and catalogues of objects with a view to understanding what great artists of the past saw, and the varying ways in which they expressed themselves and their ideas through their art.

Once Bucks Weil made the decision to collect, he chose a field in which he knew he could afford to purchase outstanding examples of the type he most appreciated. He focused his collecting specifically on the greatest early European master printmakers—Dürer, Rembrandt, Canaletto, Callot—and on their most talented successors, such as Goya and Whistler. In collecting prints, as in his business, Mr. Weil was meticulous. “I don’t purchase on a whim,” he once told a reporter.¹ Understanding the inherent value of expertise, he asked the right questions of knowledgeable dealers, conservators, and academics.

Seemingly hand in hand with his interest in collecting was his interest in the ultimate disposition of the works he collected. More than contemplating an ultimate gesture of philanthropy, Mr. Weil devised a process that accommodated his own appreciation of the works while carefully preserving them, but also acknowledging that they could inevitably play a larger role in two communities that he loved. The Weil Graphic Arts Study Center of the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts serves as a space for the exhibition and study of works on paper, and the superb selection of Old Master prints

Mr. Weil donated to the Hood Museum of Art continues to play a vital role in the institution’s teaching mission.

After Bucks Weil passed away in 1995 at the age of eighty, the two museums that meant the most to him, the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts and the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth, were the ultimate beneficiaries of his collecting vision. On behalf of the boards, staffs, supporters, and visitors of both institutions, we wish to honor Adolph “Bucks” Weil Jr. on the centenary celebration of his birth, along with his wife, Jean, and their children, for their unwavering dedication to the preservation of the fine art of printmaking, as demonstrated through the holdings of the Hood Museum of Art and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts for the education and appreciation of our audiences now and well into the future. The two institutions elected to focus this memorial exhibition on prints by Canaletto because Bucks Weil donated to each museum outstanding examples by the artist—thirty to the Hood Museum of Art and seven to the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts. We recognize the research and scholarship of the curators who managed the project, Margaret Lynne Ausfeld, Curator of Collections, MMFA, and Sarah Powers, Assistant Curator for Special Projects, Hood Museum of Art. We appreciate the assistance of other members of our staffs who contributed to the project, and we celebrate this partnership of two institutions that were dear to the heart of Bucks Weil.

NOTE

1. Quoted in “Master Printmakers: Dürer, Rembrandt, and Beyond from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Adolph Weil, Jr.,” *The Montgomery Advertiser*, July 1, 1994.

CANALETTO'S *VEDUTE* PRINTS: WINDOWS ONTO A HIDDEN VENICE



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It is difficult to imagine an artist more intricately intertwined with a city than Canaletto. For centuries, his name has been synonymous with topographical views of Venice known as “*vedute*” (views); his luminous and meticulously detailed paintings of such familiar vistas as the Grand Canal and Piazza S. Marco celebrate the stunning beauty of the “Queen of the Adriatic.” Canaletto’s signature Venetian views became coveted mementoes for English gentlemen to bring home from the Grand Tour. Due to this widespread popularity, his paintings entered aristocratic collections by the hundreds, and subsequently he had a far-reaching influence on European landscape painting in the eighteenth century. Most importantly, Canaletto’s paintings provided timeless documents of a transitory moment of glory—a façade of elegance that was quickly fading away.

Given Canaletto’s fame as a landscape painter and the demand for his trademark Venetian scenes, it is remarkable that he turned, albeit very briefly, to a new medium and format for his art. In the early 1740s, at the peak of his career, Canaletto embarked on a project to create a series of etchings dedicated to (and most likely financed by) Joseph Smith, the British Consul to the Venetian Republic. Thanks to Smith, who acted as his agent on behalf of foreign collectors, Canaletto was known as *the* artist for painted views of Venice’s most famous sites, yet the *vedute* prints present an unexpected side of the artist and offer an alternate window into eighteenth-century Venetian life. The scenes are intimate and creative, often pastiches of real places and imaginary

views, a departure from the formula for Venetian views for which Canaletto was known. With few exceptions, the etchings are not of the expected landmarks, but show the more humble, everyday aspects of the city, such as the modest dwellings, little byways, and banks of the Brenta River towards Padua; others are fantasies, ranging from elaborate caprices to intimate backyard scenes and wild landscapes. Only eleven of the thirty-four prints reference actual sites in Venice, and perhaps most surprisingly, the iconic view of the Grand Canal, Canaletto’s hallmark image, is completely absent. The *vedute* prints, thus, reveal an unknown artist and a hidden city, beyond the vision packaged for tourists and outsiders.

Canaletto would eventually make thirty-one etchings in the series, a few of which were later cut into sections to add up to thirty-four separate prints. Two of these are unique impressions, and one exists in only two impressions.¹ This exhibition of thirty etchings thus represents a nearly complete set of Canaletto’s *vedute*, assembled by Adolph “Bucks” Weil Jr., Dartmouth Class of 1935, an astute and prescient collector of Old Master prints. The Hood Museum of Art and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts are honored to highlight this important facet of Mr. Weil’s distinguished collection, which he eventually donated to these two museums.

Known as Canaletto to distinguish himself from his father, Bernardo, Giovanni Antonio Canal was born in Venice in 1697. The young Antonio began his career in his father’s studio,

collaborating on theatrical designs for stage sets, a lucrative profession in eighteenth-century Venice. As a young artist, Antonio was credited alongside his father on libretti for operas by Vivaldi, Chelleri, and Pollaro. Despite this early promise of success, he apparently had disavowed the theater for landscape painting by 1719, when he embarked on his first trip to Rome. His stay was brief, and he seems to have returned home to Venice by 1720, when his name first appears in the Venetian Painters Guild. In 1722, Canaletto had a small role in a commission from an English opera agent to paint views of tombs for English celebrities. This project might have been his first contact with Joseph Smith, then an apprentice to the banker and merchant Thomas Williams, the British Consul in Venice, a position eventually held by Smith.² This relationship would prove lucrative for both painter and patron, as Smith would become the principal agent for selling

Canaletto's Venetian views to an English clientele. The elaborate frontispiece for the *vedute* is a testament to the close relationship between artist and patron, and the gratitude that Canaletto felt for his most ardent supporter (fig. 1). The dedication, which also provides insight into the scope of Canaletto's project, reads: "Views, some taken from nature, some invented, by Antonio Canal, and by him set in perspective, engraved, and dedicated to the most illustrious Giuseppe Smith, Consul of His Britannic Majesty to the Most Serene Venetian Republic, as sign of homage and esteem." The inscription allows for the approximate dating of the project,³ as it can be safely assumed that Canaletto completed and published them soon after Smith's appointment to the office on June 6, 1744. The imaginative composition of the dedication also introduces the *vedute* as a departure from Canaletto's previous work. The artist etched the words on what appears to be



Fig. 1. Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), *Title Plate*, about 1744, etching on laid paper. Plate: 11 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (29.8 x 43 cm); sheet: 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 19 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (34.9 x 48.5 cm). Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College; Gift of Jean K. Weil in memory of Adolph Weil Jr., Class of 1935; PR.997.5.22.



Fig. 2. Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), *Imaginary View of San Giacomo di Rialto*, 1735–44, etching on laid paper. Plate: 5 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (14.4 x 21.6 cm); sheet: 7 $\frac{7}{16}$ x 10 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (18.9 x 25.5 cm). Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College: Gift of Jean K. Weil in memory of Adolph Weil Jr., Class of 1935; PR.997.5.49.

a tombstone or a memorial, slightly aged and creeping with vines and vegetation. Beyond a wall, the monument is framed on either side by a Venetian urban skyline—statue-topped columns, a duomo and a campanile on the right, and more humble, domestic architecture on the left. Although these structures seem typically Venetian in character, they cannot be identified as a particular site in Venice. In the foreground, figures and a small dog seated at the bank of a canal marvel at the inscription, and an architectural fragment occupies the right corner. This page brilliantly announces the themes we will encounter in the suite of prints—creative combinations of fantasy and reality, inventive confluents of the romantic past with a precarious present, and a peek at unknown sides of Venice.

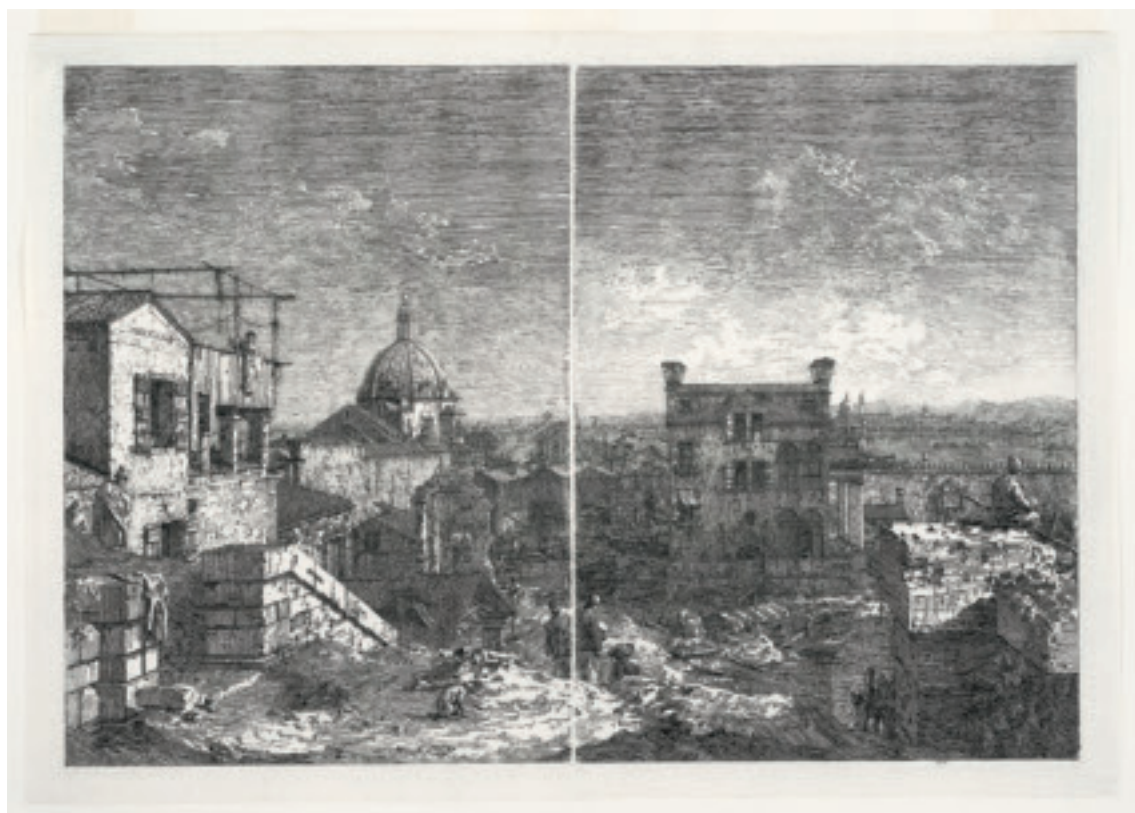
In the frontispiece, Canaletto described his scenes as “some taken from nature, some

invented,” but if it were not for the titles, it would often be difficult to know the difference. In one print, *Imaginary View of San Giacomo di Rialto* (fig. 2), Canaletto took as his subject an actual landmark—one of the oldest churches in Venice—but made significant alterations to the architecture and context of the building, reworking the real monument with an imaginary façade and setting. Although he retained the basic structure and replicated the fifteenth-century portico, Canaletto embellished the upper elevation significantly, replacing three semicircular windows and two cartouches with columns and a pediment, shrinking the clock face, and adding two small towers on each side. The artist also modified the surrounding area: although the arcaded palazzo to the right of the church is faithfully replicated, the left side is invented, substituting a statue, three Corinthian columns, and a lagoon for the palazzo that actually abuts the church’s piazza. A drawing

by Canaletto shows that he studied the actual site, but opted for a creative capriccio of the church in the final state, effectively updating the eleventh-century Byzantine church for eighteenth-century tastes.

The invented Venetian urban view constitutes a large category in the *vedute* prints. In one instance, Canaletto created a completely imaginary scene, probably derived from partial studies of more humble domestic architecture on the outskirts of the Brenta River, rather than the grand palazzos or churches of Venice's most famous *piazze*. In the early 1740s, the artist made a journey outside of Venice along the Brenta canal towards Padua with his nephew and pupil, Bernardo Bellotto. On this trip he executed a number of drawings that would become the source material for later compositions. His *Imaginary View of Venice* (fig. 3, detail at right) depicts a less glamorous side of Venetian life—disjointed vernacular architecture and dilapidated houses, a muddy, unpaved street, a clogged lagoon, and citizens in the midst of mundane daily activities. Yet

Fig. 3. Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), *Imaginary View of Venice* (*The House with the Inscription* and *The House with the Peristyle*), 1741, etching on laid paper. Image: 11¾ x 17 in. (29.8 x 43.2 cm); plate: 11⅞ x 8½ in. (30.1 x 21.6 cm); sheet: 12⅛ x 18⅜ in. (32.8 x 46.6 cm). Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College: Gift of Jean K. Weil in memory of Adolph Weil Jr., Class of 1935; PR.997.5.34 (etching bottom; detail below).



the print is considered one of the finest and most ambitious of Canaletto's *vedute*. The artist used an extraordinary variety of line and shading to create an abundance of unexpected details: a choppy sky and low mountains in the distance behind a variegated urban roofline. An assortment of engaged figures enlivens the foreground—a man in a cape and turban seems to confront the viewer, while a woman airing her laundry on the terrace seems poised to look up and notice her audience.

The complete composition of *Imaginary View of Venice* is known in only six impressions. For unknown reasons, Canaletto subsequently divided the composition into two plates of equal size, titled separately *The House with the Inscription* and *The House with the Peristyle*, but often printed and mounted together,

as seen here, with the division line running down the middle between the backs of the two central figures. In this complete invention, Canaletto exercised total freedom in the forms, and the composition is rich with detail. Planes gracefully transition into one another, resulting in a complex recession into the central space. The façade of the house on the left bears the inscription MDCCXLI A.C., making it the only dated etching apart from the title plate.

If any print summarizes Canaletto's creative imagination in the *vedute*, it might be *The Portico with the Lantern* (fig. 4). The composition is separated into two distinct planes by a portico, which provides cool shade in the foreground, as a brilliant sun illuminates the structures beyond. The center arch frames a large yet unassuming house, focusing our



Fig. 4. Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), *The Portico with the Lantern*, about 1735–44, etching on laid paper. Plate: 11 ¹⁵/₁₆ x 17 ¹/₄ in. (30.3 x 43.8 cm); sheet: 16 ⁷/₁₆ x 20 ⁹/₁₆ in. (41.7 x 52.3 cm). Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College: Gift of Jean K. Weil in memory of Adolph Weil Jr., Class of 1935; PR.997.5.31.



Fig. 5. Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), *Landscape with Ruined Monuments*, about 1735–44, etching on laid paper. Plate: 5 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 8 $\frac{5}{16}$ in. (14.4 x 21.8 cm); sheet: 7 $\frac{1}{16}$ x 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (18 x 24.8 cm). Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College: Gift of Jean K. Weil in memory of Adolph Weil Jr., Class of 1935; PR.997.5.50.

attention on its awkward and charming architecture, which includes an *altana*, a timber roof terrace used for drying laundry and a characteristic feature of Venetian vernacular architecture. Canaletto's coat of arms appears over the side door, an allusion to the nobility to which he aspired. The domestic architecture is balanced by a classical temple and triumphal arch on the left. The portico through which we view this scene appears aged and overgrown with vines, littered with architectural ruins of the past. A neglected lantern hangs ajar against a blank white sky, a brilliant device that at once provides a transition from foreground to the distance, and also serves to contrast the dark shade of the portico with the luminescent sunlight beyond. Canaletto, after years of precisely transcribing the glory of Venetian tourist sites, clearly delighted in the creative freedom of this project, combining disparate elements to create a romantic portrait of the Venice he knew so well.

Several of the *vedute* include fragments of real or imaginary ancient ruins or decaying structures. Canaletto, like many artists of the eighteenth century, was deeply under the spell of ancient Roman civilization. The *vedute* prints presented him with ample opportunity to creatively incorporate the studies of ruins he had made during his trip to Rome into fantastic, romantic settings. In *Landscape with Ruined Monuments* (fig. 5), three partially visible male figures on the left dig with poles near an architectural fragment. In the center, we see a square column and a fountain enclosed by a triumphal arch, while a pyramid and a column surmounted by a statue rise behind the hill on the left. On the far right, the house and campanile provide a modern contrast with the vestiges of the ancient. Although the substantial architectural elements provide structure and rigid balance in the geometric forms, Canaletto's rendering of the figures, trees, and landscape is remarkably spontaneous. The



Fig. 6. Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), *Mountain Landscape with Five Bridges*, about 1735–44, etching on laid paper. Plate: 5 $\frac{11}{16}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (14.4 x 21 cm); sheet: 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 24 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (46.3 x 63.2 cm). Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College: Gift of Jean K. Weil in memory of Adolph Weil Jr., Class of 1935; PR.997.5.41 (etching top; detail above).

artist deftly employed short hooked marks for the branches to create the effect of leaves caught in a breeze, and overlapping curved lines to imply a hill of muddy soil built up around the column. The figures, especially the two occupying the left-hand corner, are formed with extraordinary economy, rendered with just a few confident flourishes of line. The medium of etching allowed for a display of Canaletto's talents as a draftsman, and throughout the *vedute*, he took advantage of this opportunity for spontaneous improvisation.

The last of the *vedute* were a group of nine imaginary country landscapes.⁴ In these, Canaletto almost completely abandoned the depiction of architecture or monuments to create landscapes steeped in a romantic and mysterious mood. *Mountain Landscape with Five Bridges* (fig. 6, detail at left), with its treacherous gorges and precarious wooden bridges, contains nothing to indicate proximity to the Venetian countryside; in fact, it seems closer to the rugged terrain of the Alps. As small coaches traverse the landscape, tiny,

almost imperceptible figures provide clues as to the hazards of the environment. On the right edge, we can barely make out an overturned carriage and small figure hanging from a make-shift gallows. The space of the composition seems improvised and purposefully ambiguous, with indeterminate distances, planes overlapping arbitrarily, and subjective proportions. His graphic technique is also spontaneous, with quick parallel marks making up the structure of the landscape, and looser, hooked lines for the windswept foliage. The result is a radical contrast with the minute, meticulously delineated topographical detail of his painted *vedute*.

This contrast is evident in the few recognizable Venetian scenes that Canaletto included in the series. In *La Libreria* (fig. 7), for example, Canaletto gives a familiar glimpse of Saint Mark's Square, the façade by architect Jacopo Sansovino, surmounted by statues and obelisks,

adjoined by the partially visible campanile and Loggetta. The scene is further grounded by the column of S. Teodoro at the far end of the Piazzetta, and a mere slice of the column of St. Mark on the left. Canaletto's omission of the bronze gates, which were completed by the sculptor Antonio Gai but not installed in the Loggetta until 1742, suggests that he executed the print before this date.⁵ Although the scene is familiar, Canaletto denies his viewer the expected sweeping panorama of the piazza from the Grand Canal or a comprehensive view of the piazza featuring the basilica. Instead, the artist cropped and truncated the scene, downplaying the soaring architecture and giving more attention to the activities of everyday Venetian life in the square, such as children playing, nuns promenading, and merchants haggling in the foreground, and figures crowded around a puppet theater near the column in the background. Canaletto may have struggled to portray this window into Venetian



Fig. 7. Giovanni Antonio Canal (Canaletto), *La Libreria. V. (The Library; Venice)*, about 1735–41, etching on laid paper. Overall: 5 7/8 x 4 5/8 in. (15 x 11.7 cm). Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College: Gift of Jean K. Weil in memory of Adolph Weil Jr., Class of 1935; PR.997.5.37.

daily life in his large-scale paintings, in which the actions of hundreds of minute figures are dwarfed by the magnificent backdrop of the city's famous landmarks, but the smaller, more intimate scale of the prints allowed the artist to focus on such details.

The majority the images are surprisingly spontaneous, exhibiting Canaletto's deft hand as a draftsman. The etching process allowed Canaletto to approach the images as drawings, as artists without training as printers could sketch directly onto plates, in a process that, at least superficially, can be compared to drawing with ink on paper. The metal plate, usually copper or zinc, would be coated with a ground resistant to acid, typically wax, and the artist could create a drawing using an etching tool on the coated surface. Deeper grooves in the surface would result in darker lines, while shallow lines would appear faint. The plate would be immersed into an acid bath until lines or marks revealed by the drawing were "bitten," or etched, into the plate, while the areas covered by the wax would be protected. When the plate was inked and wiped clean, it would be run through a printing press. The ink held by the etched lines would reveal a reversed image of the sketch on the plate. The plate could be printed several times, and often an artist could make slight changes on the plate between print runs.⁶ Like many painter-etchers, Canaletto's style was thus that of a draftsman and a painter rather than a professional printmaker. As art historian Ruth Bromberg has noted, his goal was to transform the spontaneous nature of drawing into the medium of etching, and his technique reflects the eighteenth century's fascination with artistic process as a direct record of inspired genius. Most importantly, the medium, with its capacity for improvisation and freedom from constraint, provided Canaletto with a welcome change from the painstaking detail expected of his oil paintings, and became the perfect outlet for his negotiation between actual views and improvised fantasy.

The reason for Canaletto's shift to printmaking at the peak of his fame as a landscape painter remains unclear. Perhaps Smith's commission offered a welcome break from the pressure of the unrelenting demand for his oil paintings. Canaletto's experiment with etching also coincided with a revival of printmaking in Venice. As Bromberg has noted, views of Venice were in great demand, and prints could be sold to those who could not afford to acquire his paintings. Portfolios of engraved *vedute*, such as the set of 104 views *Le Fabbriche e Vedute di Venezia* (1703) by Canaletto's teacher Luca Carlevaris, were well received, and it seemed the appropriate moment for Canaletto to experiment with the medium.⁷ At least five printing firms were established by this time in Venice, making the city a new hub for print publishing, and providing him with the technical resources to implement his project. Also, the War of Austrian Succession (1740–1748) made travel to Italy difficult for his English patrons, and shipments of large paintings could be complicated. Prints were easier to transport to patrons not able to travel abroad, and could potentially represent a new source of revenue at a time when Canaletto and Smith saw a drop in the number of visits to Venice by English patrons. Finally, the *vedute* prints may have been an answer to his critics and detractors. As Richard Rand has noted, the uncanny fidelity to nature that made Canaletto's paintings most attractive to contemporary collectors condemned him in the eyes of the critics. Despite his renown, Canaletto's admittance to the Venetian Academy was on the basis of his capriccios (invented views) rather than his topographical paintings, which were rejected. Perhaps Canaletto, after achieving fame from transcriptions of reality, began this exercise out of a desire to finally earn the respect of the academicians. His imaginative approach to the views in the prints seemed to carry over to his paintings after the 1740s, when Canaletto began to rearrange his painted *vedute*, frequently incorporating romantic ancient ruins and vernacular structures into Venetian scenes.⁸

After completing the *vedute* series, Canaletto would never again return to the medium of etching. The reason why he abandoned printmaking is unknown. Evidently, the prints were not a commercial or critical success, and his paintings were still in high demand.⁹ Perhaps they were not meant for a general public—the series as a whole has an improvisational character, as though they were meant for personal amusement or to be shared only with the sympathetic eye of his friend Joseph Smith. Canaletto also created them at a moment when he was most likely experiencing frustration as a painter, searching for a creative outlet that offered relief from the rote transcription of views. And, as noted above, they might be seen as a public exercise in the formation of a new approach to his work, prompting the shift in Canaletto's painting style in the years following the *vedute* prints. But despite the ambivalent reception the prints received in their time, or the effect the project may have had on his later paintings, for all of their inventiveness and skillful yet spontaneous execution, they are now considered some of the finest examples of etching of the eighteenth century.

NOTES

1. Ruth Bromberg has determined that “thirty-one etchings were published either singly or bound in books, and three additional etchings exist. In the Windsor [Castle collection], [are] the only known impressions of *Fragment of a Bishops Tomb*, *Landscape with a Church, houses and a Mill*, and the artist's first state of *Alpine Landscape with a Church, Houses and two Pillars*. Of the latter, the only known impression of the second state is preserved at Berlin-Dahlem.” Ruth Bromberg, *Canaletto's Etchings: A Catalogue and Study Illustrating and Describing the Known States, Including Those Hitherto Unrecorded* (London and New York: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1974), 37, n1.

2. *Ibid.*, 2.

3. Bromberg's study suggests that although we cannot know when the series was begun, an approximate publication date can be established by Smith's appointment on June 6, 1744. Bromberg speculates that Canaletto executed the prints intermittently over a number of years and began the series sometime after 1735. The sequence of the prints is also unclear, although Bromberg has assigned numbers based on the order in which they are bound in the Molin album, in the Correr Museum, Venice. *Ibid.*, 22–29.

4. Carl J. Weinhardt Jr. “Canaletto: Master Etcher,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series Vol. 17, no. 3 (November 1958), 84.

5. Bromberg, *Canaletto's Etchings*, 109.

6. For more on etching and printmaking techniques, see Antony Griffiths, *Prints and Printmaking: An Introduction to the History and Techniques* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996).

7. Bromberg, *Canaletto's Etchings*, 1.

8. Richard Rand, “Canaletto and Piranesi: An Introduction,” from *Two Views of Italy: Master Prints by Canaletto and Piranesi* (Hanover, N.H.: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 1995), 19.

9. John Varriano, “Venice and Rome: Canaletto, Piranesi, and the Italian *Vedute*,” from *Two Views of Italy: Master Prints by Canaletto and Piranesi* (Hanover, N.H.: Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 1995), 37.

PATRIARCH OF AUTHENTICITY: THE PATRIMONY OF ADOLPH “BUCKS” WEIL JR. (1915–1995)

Margaret Lynne Ausfeld, Curator of Collections,
Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts

In today's world we place a premium on authenticity. Our culture surrounds us with replicas—digital, analog, material, and immaterial—these are the common fare of life in the twenty-first century. If we appreciate the intrinsic value of a physical object, handmade, unique, or just distinctive, it may be because these characteristics are increasingly rare, increasingly something that we associate with the past. One of the reasons we seek out art in museums is to make a connection with the authentic, discerning those qualities that distinguish the highest accomplishments and creativity of mankind from the mundane processing of yet more virtual stimuli and data. Not all art, nor all people, are authentic, but when we find that quality in either it sounds deep chords in our human experience and can impact one's life forever.

Adolph “Bucks” Weil Jr. embodied authenticity. The word most often used to describe him was “gentleman,” and he was indeed that. However, contemporary ears hear the term and think “old-fashioned” or bound up in convention, when those terms don't begin to fit a man who treasured learning and respect for human dignity as much as he valued the successful practice of business. Those who knew Bucks Weil were schooled by example—in compassion, in integrity, and in the appreciation of artistic achievements that truly transcend the ages. He was born in 1915 into a family and a culture whose Jewish ancestry was rooted in a close practice of cooperative achievement and nurturing of community as a way to first

survive and then flourish. He respectfully followed those traditions, but as the prescient child of a particularly violent twentieth century, he recognized that the legacy that truly mattered was a patrimony of excellence. And he chose to bestow that patrimony not just on his descendants, but also on his “homes”—one a place he loved living, and another where he loved learning.



Jean and Adolph “Bucks” Weil Jr. attend the grand opening of the new Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts at 1 Museum Drive, The Blount Cultural Park, on September 17, 1988, to view the exhibition *The Grand Tour: The Tradition of Patronage in Southern Art Museums*.

In the twentieth century Weil Brothers—Cotton, Inc. was one of largest and most successful cotton merchant companies in the world.¹ Its origins were in a small country store founded during the Reconstruction period in Opelika, Alabama, where two teenage immigrant brothers, Isidor and Herman Weil, who had arrived from the Bavarian Palatinate in 1869, began buying and selling cotton in 1878. The business and its management, eventually relocated about fifty miles west to Alabama's capital city of Montgomery, were passed down through Isidor's sons, Adolph Weil Sr. and Leonel Weil. When Leonel retired in 1951, his two nephews, Adolph Weil Jr. and Robert Weil Sr., were the third generation to take the management of the now multi-national, family-held company, which as of 1980 included Weil Enterprises and Investments.

If his father's family was the bedrock of his training as a businessman, it was Bucks Weil's mother Rossie (Rosina) Schoenhof Weil who engendered a love of art and culture in her son. Regularly traveling with his father, mother, and uncles on business to Europe, he came to eagerly anticipate visiting art galleries with his mother, who was originally from the cultured environs of Boston and encouraged him to study and read about the works they saw. By the time he entered Dartmouth College in 1931, he had acquired some knowledge of the French language and the heart-felt love of art that became his life-long avocation. Upon graduation, at his father's insistence he attended Harvard Law School (his father wanted to ensure his son's future if the always volatile cotton market should prove the family company's undoing) and graduated 1938. Despite his father's pessimism, the cotton business was Bucks Weil's life, and the family he built with his wife, Jean, and his relationship with his brother and business partner, Robert Weil Sr., were at the center of his life for more than forty years. His business required hard and consistent work for the early years of his adulthood. His father and uncle's careful and prudent management philosophies colored his

approach to this work, and later played a large role in his avocation of collecting art, an activity that he began to take increasingly seriously when he entered his mid-fifties.²

Bucks Weil relied on professional dealers, conservators, and academics, seeking out their advice and informed opinions. He purchased works at auctions in Berlin, London, and New York, but also from the most respected twentieth-century private dealers in Old Master prints—among them Nicholas Stogden, David Tunick, R. H. Johnson, and, perhaps his favorite, William Schab. Building personal relationships with print experts in New York and Europe meant that he was able to identify works of rarity, quality, and fine condition with confidence, even at the significant geographic remove of his office in a small building on Montgomery Street in downtown Montgomery. (He was known to stash in the drawers of the large partners desk that he shared with his brother not only catalogues of upcoming sales, but also an occasional master print or two that hadn't yet made it to his home.)

Another paternal uncle, Lucien Loeb (married to Bucks's aunt Helen Weil), was one of the earliest members of the extended Weil family group to become a patron and trustee of the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts. His nephew Bucks joined him on the Acquisitions Committee in 1970, was elected to the Board of Trustees in 1974, and in that same year became the Chairman of the Acquisitions Committee. In 1985, Mr. Weil was invited to join the Board of Overseers for the Hopkins Center and Hood Museum of Art at his alma mater, Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. Realizing their teaching and research value to that institution where he had learned so much of what led him to his appreciation of art and of Old Master prints, he and his wife, Jean, made significant loans and later gave substantial gifts of works from his collection to the Hood.

As Mr. Weil took up his role as a patron and trustee of Montgomery's art museum, he

simultaneously bought his first print. In 1970, the year he began to serve on the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts' Acquisitions Committee, he made that first purchase (a Camille Pissarro lithograph titled *La Charrue*, 1901). In 1980, the year of the MMFA's fiftieth anniversary, he and Jean established an endowment fund dedicated to the purchase of European works on paper created before 1900, designated to honor his father, Adolph Weil Sr., and his mother, Rossie Schoenhof Weil.³

As a member of the MMFA Acquisitions Committee (and periodically chairman), Mr. Weil consistently demonstrated the full repertoire of his personality—he was unfailingly soft-spoken, modest, and courteous, but there was never any question where he stood on the art that was presented for potential acquisition. One of his favorite tactics was to appear to doze at the end of the table, awaiting the opportunity to skewer the unsuspecting curator or director with a pointed question about the relative merits of a candidate object, the object almost invariably being something created after 1950, and probably abstract. Mr. Weil was equally skilled at playing the devil's advocate, taking issue with something that he would eventually acknowledge was an appropriate addition to the museum's holdings, apparently in an effort to make sure that the professional staff was sufficiently committed to the work in question. In most cases curators dread such encounters; however, the twinkle in the eye that always accompanied Mr. Weil's debates of an object's merits softened any blow that might have landed on target. It also became customary for the staff to forgo making any calculations with regard to the price of objects, museum discounts, transport costs, or other variables. Such figures were read out for the committee and discussed, with Mr. Weil doing the math in his head to produce a final sum. He was never wrong. When it came to the institutional "big picture," his father's counsel of prudence and sound management ensured that an expenditure of funds was always carefully considered and debated by his committee.

Interacting with art professionals, however, was clearly an activity that brought Mr. Weil more pleasure than distress. Always a responsible businessman and community board member for many not-for-profit organizations, he would turn his attention to art with great relish once that other work was done. Studying auction catalogues, reading scholarly articles in journals or exhibition catalogues, or talking with museum curators or print dealers became a regular part of his day later in life. It was exciting to get a call from Mr. Weil, with a friendly hello, followed by, "Do you want to come by the office? I have something I'd like you to see." Always a dignified man, Mr. Weil would unveil the latest impression by Rembrandt or Dürer or Whistler to arrive (usually via U.S. Mail and wrapped in rather shabby, plain brown paper) with a look of excitement and pride that was magical, his enthusiasm infectious.

Many collectors are focused on the pursuit of objects—locating, acquiring, and then possessing them—yet Mr. Weil's reaction upon unwrapping a newcomer to his collection conveyed fondness, a sense that he was "adopting" this work and taking it to care for as if it were a treasured child. Once it was welcomed, introduced, and its various merits enumerated and discussed, the work was transferred to his storage system of solander boxes that were located in his home study. When insurance professionals convinced him that the value contained in his cupboards was substantial enough to make everyone very nervous, he commissioned a special wooden storage cabinet to secure them. Rarely did he hang prints in his home. He occasionally took out the boxes to look at the works himself or show them to others, but primarily he followed conservation guidelines and, like print collectors for many centuries, allowed them to rest in the modern equivalent of portfolios. It was a great joy to him when they were to be exhibited. He once observed that exhibiting them in galleries in Montgomery or at the Hood Museum of Art allowed him to see them all together and others a chance to

Master Printmakers Dürer, Rembrandt and Beyond

from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Adolph Weil, Jr.



Members Preview for *Master Printmakers: Dürer, Rembrandt and Beyond* from the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Adolph Weil Jr., Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, June 30, 1994. Left to right: Jan Weil Avgar, Jean Kaufman Weil, Adolph “Bucks” Weil Jr., Dr. Laurie Jean Weil, Adolph “Andy” Weil III, Lisa Blach Weil.

enjoy them too, an event that gave him a great deal of happiness.⁴

Bucks Weil passed away in 1995 at the age of eighty. In 1997, Jean Weil made significant gifts to the Hood Museum of Art and the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, each institution receiving prints from Mr. Weil’s private collection. To the Montgomery Museum, she donated 204 prints, which joined the 267 prints that had entered the collection earlier, by gift and through purchase using the Weil Print Fund. Adding to a gift of 134 works during Mr. Weil’s

lifetime, Jean Weil subsequently gifted another 121 Old Master prints to the Hood. This gift included magnificent examples by Mantegna, Dürer, Lucas van Leyden, and Rembrandt, among them proof impressions of Dürer’s *Great Passion* (about 1497–1511) and one of the finest impressions known of *St. Jerome in His Study* (1514). She also donated unparalleled impressions of Rembrandt’s *Three Trees* (1643), *Christ Presented to the People* (1655), and *Abraham’s Sacrifice* (1655), among the thirty works by that artist she gave to the Hood from her husband’s holdings.

Since Mr. Weil's death, and to honor his legacy, both the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts and the Hood Museum of Art have mounted exhibitions of his prints that are now held by the institutions.⁵ The MMFA dedicated the Weil Graphic Arts Study Center in 1998 as a resource for the exhibition and study of works on paper in the museum's collection. As appropriate and proper as these memorials are, they remain formal expressions that can only dimly reflect the legacy of such a man. His true patrimony lays in the rapt attention of a group of students who gather in the print room to immerse themselves in the genius of an artist like Rembrandt, whose portrayals of mankind's deepest emotions are perfectly preserved and perfectly relevant even after three hundred years. Or in scholars who find the connections among disparate civilizations that have existed thousands of years apart, but which still speak to us through the authentic voices of the objects they leave behind. When visitors walk into the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts or the Hood Museum of Art to see and experience these remnants of a distant past, still communicating basic human values as they ever did, they are in the presence of Bucks Weil's true memorial, his patrimony of authenticity.

NOTES

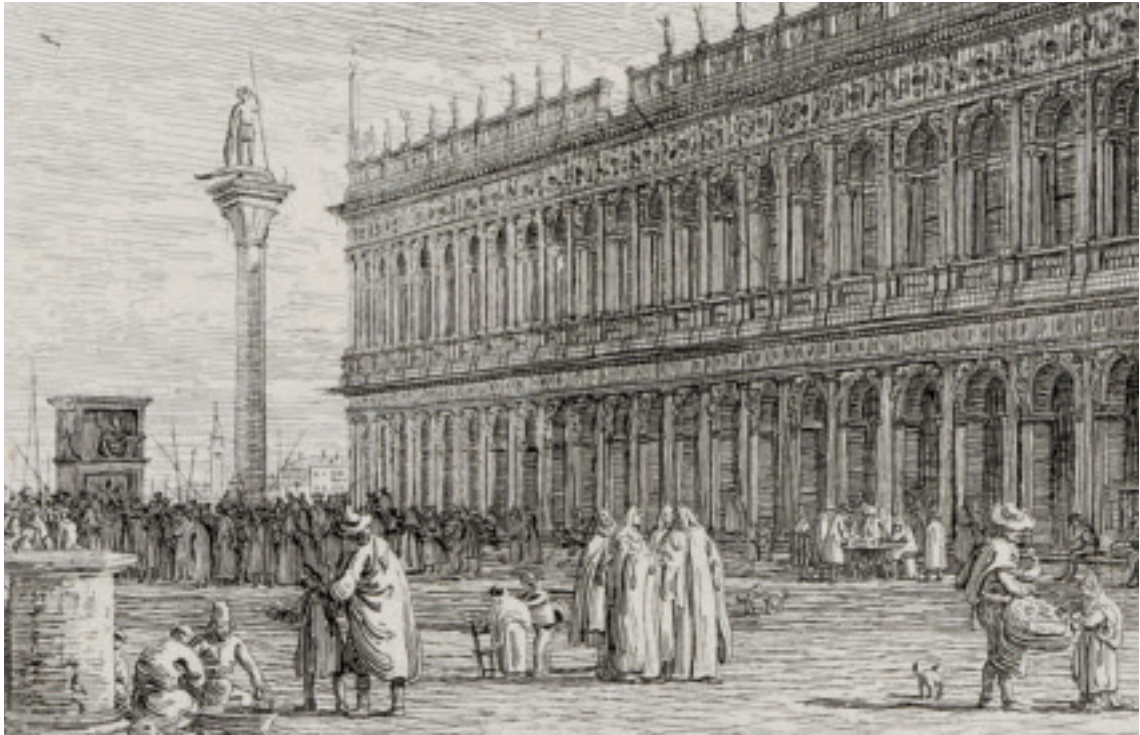
1. A history of Weil Brothers–Cotton, Inc. was published in 1982. See George S. Bush, *An American Harvest: The Story of Weil Brothers–Cotton* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1982).

2. Bucks Weil and his brother, Robert Weil, began to form a corporate collection of art when they took over the management of the firm from their uncle, Leonel. They purchased works cooperatively, and acquired primarily French and American paintings, including some fine French Impressionist works by Pierre Auguste Renoir and Camille Pissarro. They also owned works by Maurice Prendergast, Winslow Homer, and Thomas Hart Benton. There was never much ceremony associated with these works' installation in the business offices. In the case of a Thomas Hart Benton gouache painting that typically hung in the brothers' office, the hat and coat rack had to be moved out of the way if someone wanted to look at it. Mr. Weil describes their cooperative collecting in the video presentation *Reflections of a Collector*, prepared by the Montgomery Museum of Fine Art, WSFA Television, and Pat Gallagher of Southern Stories Foundation for the exhibition *Master Printmakers: Dürer, Rembrandt and Beyond* in 1994.

3. Both works purchased with the Weil Print Fund prior to 1995, and works that were given by Mr. and Mrs. Weil during his lifetime, carry the credit line "Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Adolph Weil, Jr., in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Adolph Weil, Sr." After Mr. Weil's death in 1995 and as of January 1, 1996, Jean Weil changed the credit line for the fund to read "Gift of the Weil Print Endowment in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Adolph Weil, Sr."

4. "I'm happy to lend them . . . it's like seeing a friend again." *Reflections of a Collector*, 1994.

5. These include *A Gift to the College: The Mr. and Mrs. Adolph Weil Jr. Collection of Master Prints* (Hanover, N.H.: Abaris Books and Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, 1998), *Rembrandt: Beyond the Brush* (Montgomery, Ala.: Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, 1999), *Faith and Humanism: Engravings and Woodcuts by Albrecht Dürer* (Montgomery, Ala.: Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, 2002), and *Fleeting Impressions: Prints by James McNeill Whistler* (Montgomery, Ala.: Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, 2006).



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Front cover: detail of fig. 7.

Back cover: detail of fig. 4.

Above: detail of fig. 7.

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