

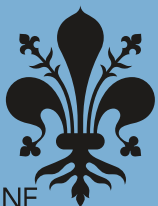
Beyond the Renaissance

between Dürer and Parmigianino

In-depth texts for the visit



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The reasons behind the exhibition

The exhibition **Oltre il Rinascimento. Tra Dürer e Parmigianino (Beyond the Renaissance: Between Dürer and Parmigianino)** takes its starting point from the perspective of **Georg Baselitz** (1938–2026), a major contemporary artist and passionate collector, who for more than fifty years collected works by the masters of European printmaking in the early modern period. The more than 130 prints from his collection, together with works from the Museum of Fine Arts of Budapest, offer a journey into a restless and experimental age, in which artists explored new forms and possibilities beyond the stylistic conventions of the Renaissance.

The exhibition explores the research and inventions that emerged in artists' workshops across Europe during the sixteenth century, as printmaking techniques became increasingly widespread and familiar. Taking **Albrecht Dürer**, a pivotal figure in the history of printmaking, as its symbolic starting point, the exhibition presents works by leading Italian, French, Dutch and German artists, who mastered a range of tech-

niques – from multi-block woodcut to engraving and etching – to express their individual sensibilities and inclinations.

The exhibition journey moves from sacred to mythological imagery, from genre figures to figures in meditation, bringing together works by different artists to reveal the wealth of compositional, stylistic and technical solutions they devised. Masterpieces by **Andrea Mantegna, Domenico Beccafumi** and **Parmigianino**, as well as by **Lucas Cranach the Elder, Hendrick Goltzius, Bartholomeus Spranger** and the **School of Fontainebleau**, invite visitors to explore the kaleidoscopic character of the Late Renaissance and European Mannerism: a constellation of artistic visions and ideas that is as refined as it is surprising, and which continued to fascinate artists and audiences in the centuries that followed. Baselitz himself, both artist and collector, honoured here through a selection of his own works, is a striking example of this enduring fascination.

Room 1

Albrecht Dürer, master of printmaking

A fundamental figure in sixteenth-century German printmaking, **Albrecht Dürer** (1471–1528) brought engraving to a level of extraordinary complexity. In his prints, the line does not merely outline figures, but constructs volumes, surfaces and depth through variations in the stroke and the dense modulation of marks. Dürer never used colour in his prints: the contrast between ink and paper was sufficient to define the image. His work achieved immense success, and his models continued to be taken up long after his death.

In the 1620s, some of his woodcuts were printed in colour by the Amsterdam publisher **Willem Jansz Blaeu**, through the addition of new tone blocks. ***The Rhinoceros*** and the ***Portrait of Ulrich Varnbüler***, displayed here, show how the same invention could take on a new character through colour.

Room 1

Pairs of figures

The success of **Albrecht Dürer's** work can also be measured by the number of artists who took up and reinterpreted his inventions. Among them was **Sebald Beham** (1500–1550), the author of a woodcut of ***Adam and Eve***, from which the anonymous version displayed here derives. The comparison with Dürer's celebrated 1504 engraving is revealing: Beham retains the arrangement of the scene, but translates it into a sharper and more strongly contrasted language, emphasising its symbolic component at the expense of its naturalistic one.

While the exchange of glances and the contact between the hands of the first parents highlight the reciprocity of their relationship, a different and contrasting relationship between the figures emerges in ***Unequal Lovers*** by **Jakob Lucius** (c. 1530–1597), where the protagonists' proximity becomes an occasion for contrast. The elderly man, marked by grotesque features and desire, is set against the young woman, impassive and distant: gestures, expressions and physiognomies emphasise the satirical and moral qualities inherent in the work, which interprets an iconographic theme widely popular in Northern Europe at the time.

Room 1

Lucas Cranach the Elder

Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472–1553) was, together with **Hans Burgkmair**, among the first German artists to experiment, as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century, with multi-block woodcut, adding one or more tone blocks to the key block, thereby introducing areas of colour and chiaroscuro effects into the print.

In ***Christ on the Cross between the Virgin and Saint John*** – which belongs to an edition of the *Missale pataviense* printed in Vienna in 1503 – the colours were applied by hand to the print. Cranach's use of multiple blocks is particularly well represented by the two versions of ***The Sermon of Saint John the Baptist*** of 1516: the addition of orange significantly alters the appearance of the image and enlivens its impact.

Equally noteworthy are the two versions of ***Agonies in the Garden***, from the *Passion* series: alongside the impression on paper there is one printed on pig's bladder, intended to achieve the softer and more delicate effects of parchment.

Room 1

Jacques Bellange

Painter and printmaker at the court of Nancy from 1602 to 1616, **Jacques Bellange** (1575?–1616) worked in an environment open to artistic exchanges between France, Germany and Italy and is regarded as one of the most original artists of Late European Mannerism.

His compositions, predominantly religious in subject, are animated by elegant, elongated figures, slender necks, elaborate hairstyles and draperies that are sometimes close-fitting, sometimes sumptuous. Unusual viewpoints and compositional cuts heighten the theatrical character of the scenes, while the interplay of light and shadow helps create particularly intense atmospheres. Through his masterful use of hatching and stippling, combined with skilfully controlled biting, Bellange achieved extraordinarily refined effects, conveying the softness of flesh, the texture of fabrics and the depth of space, as clearly demonstrated by the etchings on display.

Room 1

Rendering chiaroscuro

In the sixteenth century, printmaking became a field of experimentation in which artists explored the possibilities offered by combining techniques and blocks.

Ugo da Carpi (c. 1470–1532) was a pioneer in rendering chiaroscuro through woodcut: his ***Diogenes***, inspired by **Parmigianino**, and the group of ***Aeneas and Anchises***, inspired by Raphael, were made from four blocks and are among his absolute masterpieces. Another artist who pursued this line of research was **Domenico Beccafumi** (1486–1551). The works displayed here include engravings made with burin and drypoint, such as ***Noah Drunk after the Flood with Two of His Sons***, alongside multi-block woodcuts from the series of ***Apostles and Saints***, in which the artist demonstrates his technical mastery in rendering tonal transitions. The different blocks, printed successively, construct figures and settings through transitions of light and shadow, without the use of an outline, modelling volumes and suggesting depth.

Room 2

The model and its variations

The three prints depicting ***Agriculture*** derive from a lost work by **Giuseppe Arcimboldo** (1526–1593), court painter to the emperors in Vienna and Prague, famous for his bizarre allegories assembled from plants, animals and objects—in this case, agricultural tools. Their particular interest, however, lies precisely in their differences: although they derive from the same model, they offer different interpretations. The etching and engraving follow the original composition more closely; the woodcut, by contrast, departs from it more freely, emphasising the outlines to create an image of strong expressive impact and introducing new details, such as the sausage hanging from the hat. The copy thus becomes a form of reinterpretation.

Room 2

Geometries and perspectives

In the sixteenth century, the possibility of multiplying images greatly expanded the uses of printmaking. The colour woodcuts by **Erasmus Loy**, active in Regensburg between the 1550s and 1570s, depict idealised and imaginary buildings and squares, constructed using two blocks. Their intended use was unusual: they were not conceived merely to be viewed as independent images, but to be applied to furniture, especially cabinets and chests, imitating the perspectival and illusionistic effects of marquetry. Through printmaking, this practice made a type of decoration otherwise reserved for wealthy patrons accessible to a wider public. They are accompanied by loose sheets from **Lorenz Stöer's** (1537–1621) visionary treatise ***Geometria et Perspectiva*** (1567), conceived as a guide for the design of wood inlays.

Room 2

Parmigianino: variations on a theme

Parmigianino's work depicting ***Saint Peter and Saint John Healing the Lame Man at the Temple*** is one of the boldest experiments in Mannerist printmaking. For the first time, the artist combined etching and woodcut, bringing the free, synthetic lines on the copper plate into dialogue with the tonal surfaces of the woodblock. Numerous variants of the work are known (five states), showing significant changes to the etched plate as well as the use of different colour blocks to achieve the desired painterly effects.

The blocks survived the artist and continued to be used afterwards. Several versions are displayed here: one obtained from the copper plate alone (etching and engraving or drypoint), the woodcut (here attributed to **Ugo da Carpi or Antonio da Trento**), and a print combining the different techniques. The comparison shows how each block constitutes only one part of the image and how the final result depends on the interaction of lines, tones and colours.

Room 3

Parmigianino and the Entombment of Christ

Parmigianino (1503–1540) is considered the first Italian master of the etching technique, which he learned to control with particularly soft and innovative results; among his masterpieces is the ***Entombment of Christ***. The work was preceded by a careful design phase: the artist studied the interpretations of the great masters and produced numerous drawings and sketches. Displayed here is an exceptional impression of the first version (with the figures facing left), printed on yellow paper and distinguished by particular delicacy and lyricism.

Because the plate was damaged while biting the second state, Parmigianino developed a new composition in reverse (that is, inverted in relation to the first), with a more structured arrangement and sharper lines. It became one of the most refined prints of its time and one of the most frequently copied. **Andrea Schiavone** (1522–1563), a creative follower of Parmigianino, produced numerous variations on the theme, several of which are well represented here. The Budapest impression, on yellow paper and heightened with white bodycolour, stands out for its graphic quality and the intensity of its lines, achieved through skilful work on the plate.

Room 4

Antonio Fantuzzi and printing in red

In the sixteenth century, most prints were made with black or brown ink on light-coloured paper. Printing in red was therefore a particularly bold choice, especially among the circle of artists active in Fontainebleau in the 1540s in the service of Francis I. The colour could evoke red chalk, giving figures softness and an almost painterly quality. **Antonio Fantuzzi** (c.1510–1550), of Bolognese origin and documented at Fontainebleau between 1537 and 1550 in the circle of Francesco Primaticcio, was one of the foremost experimenters in this practice. The two versions of ***Satyr Attacking a Nymph*** displayed here, one in red and one in black, show how the same subject can take on a radically different character through the use of a different ink. In the red print, the forms appear softer, the contrasts less sharp and the overall effect more delicate. Also displayed are several particularly significant etchings by the same artist, such as *The Sacrifice*—the first print purchased by Baselitz, after a painting by Rosso Fiorentino for the gallery of Francis I—and others inspired by now-lost paintings: ***The Cremation of a Corpse***, ***The Muses around Mount Parnassus***, and ***Artemis, Athena and Aphrodite Leave Olympus***, the latter also printed in red.

Room 4

The art of relationships

In figurative tradition, pairs of figures acquire meaning not only through what they represent, but above all through the way they establish a relationship in space. Position, gestures, gazes and movements can suggest harmony, desire, tension or opposition. In the sixteenth century, printmaking also became a privileged tool for exploring these dynamics. In **Parmigianino's *The Lovers***, displayed here, the embrace and sensuality of the gestures transform the model of **Marcantonio Raimondi's *I Modi*** into a more intimate and tender image, in which the two lovers, softly rendered, seem to sublimate their harmony within a landscape that appears complicit. The interpretations of ***Mars and Venus*** by **Master IQV** and **Léon Davent** have a different character, decidedly more delineated and less atmospheric, while several decades later the divine couple -statuary, modelled by light- displays its unity through the interweaving of bodies and movements, emphasised by Mars's hand, beneath Cupid's benevolent gaze.

Room 5

The female nude

In the sixteenth century, the female nude acquired an increasingly important presence in artistic production, often taking on an explicitly sensual character. Its representation, however, rarely arose from direct study from life: artists looked above all to works of the past and to contemporary models, which could circulate through prints and reach an ever wider public.

The works displayed here show how these models were interpreted in different ways. In ***Lucretia*** by **Sebald Beham**, the female body takes on classicising forms combined with evident sensuality.

In ***The Three Fates*** by **Pierre Milan**, after a drawing by Rosso Fiorentino, the three figures—almost distorted in their proportions and physiognomies, and very different from the costumed version by the same Milan presented in the second room—appear to be the results of observation from three different viewpoints, in keeping with the refined and unconventional taste of the **School of Fontainebleau**.

Between the classical ideal and Mannerist freedom, the body thus becomes one of the principal fields of artistic invention.

Room 5

The Body in Motion

Antonio Pollaiuolo's *Battle of the Nudes*, executed in engraving in the 1470s, is in fact one of the key works for understanding the Renaissance interest in the human figure. The ten male figures, represented in different poses and seen from multiple angles, demonstrate close study of anatomy and movement. The print became a starting point for a broad repertory of models that influenced artists in the following decades. In this room, Pollaiuolo's figures engage in dialogue with the inventions of **Juste de Juste**, a virtuoso sixteenth-century artist working at Fontainebleau, who took the study of the body in radically different directions. In his human pyramids, arms, legs and torsos intertwine in twisting poses to form acrobatic compositions, while his flayed figures seem to push anatomical investigation to extremes. From Renaissance rigour to Mannerist eccentricity, these works therefore reveal two opposing yet extraordinarily inventive ways of rendering and interpreting the aesthetics of the human figure.