



Horatius Cocles Defending the Bridgehead of Rome against the Army of Lars Porsena, title plate of Carceri d'invenzioni (Imaginary Prisons)

Date

1761

Primary Maker

Giovanni Battista Piranesi

Medium

Etching on laid paper

Description

This is the title plate in a series of etchings in which Piranesi explores inventive forms of architecture, and represents an interesting and brief turn in his career away

from the classical forms of Rome to the haunting and fantastic scenes in this series. These etchings were published originally as a set of fourteen images under the title *Invenzioni capric di carceri*, which the artist later revisited and reworked. This plate comes from the 1761 reworking, published as *Carceri d'invenzioni*. As evidenced by the original title, these views are “capricci,” or architectural whims, and not necessarily realistic. Vaults and staircases seem to extend forever or lead to undefined places, often in the style of a theatrical setup or stage design, while mysterious figures and instruments of torture lurk in the shadows. The inscription identifies Piranesi as “architetto veneziano” alluding to his image of himself as an architect, though etching was his primary source of livelihood. —C-AJ

Dimensions

Image: 21 3/4 x 16 1/4 inches (55.2 x 41.3 cm); Sheet: 27 1/2 x 21 1/8 inches (69.9 x 53.7 cm)