Maarten van Heemskerck in Berlin

***The Allure of Rome: Maarten van Heemskerck Draws the City* (exh. cat. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Kupferstichkabinett), ed. by Tatjana Bartsch and Christien Melzer**

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Reviewed by Carolyn Yerkes

Charles V was coming to town. By the time he arrived in Rome on April 5, 1536, Maarten van Heemskerck had been there for almost four years. In recent months, the painter had watched the city transform around him in preparation for the emperor's triumphal entry. Charles' entrance was an epochal event, marking his first appearance in the city that his own mutinous troops had sacked not ten years earlier. His imperial coronation by Pope Clement VII in Bologna in 1530 had been an uneasy rapprochement, and although the Romans had no choice but to welcome him back, privately no one was pleased about it. Pen in hand, one foreigner in Rome became an acute observer of the changes wrought by another.

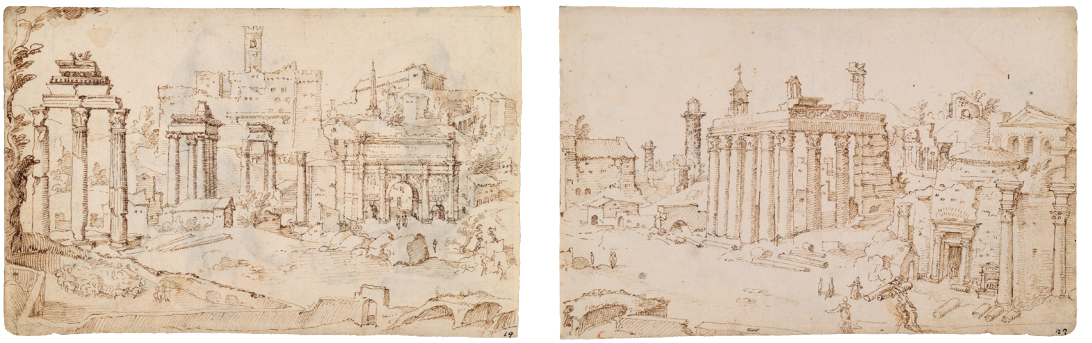
In the spring of 1536, Van Heemskerck sat sketching as workers cleared the path for the emperor. Coordinated by the new, papally-appointed commissioner of antiquities, Charles's entry was an explicitly revivalist urban project that partially followed the route of the ancient triumphs. He would enter Rome from the south and make his way northwest toward the Vatican, cutting straight through the Forum along the Via Sacra. Van Heemskerck drew the scene there before him (fig. 1a – b; cat. nos. 26.39 – 26.40): the Temple of Castor and Pollux, now down to only three columns; the Arch of Septimius Severus, buried up to its knees in the earth; the jagged outline of the old tower of the Capitoline, crumbling in the distance. Among these ruins, Van Heemskerck preserved an open swath of space on the page, marking the road being prepared. He scribbled the outlines of workmen as they hacked at the surrounding stones and rolled away column shafts, dismantling the medieval porch of Santi Cosma e Damiano that stood in the way.

Maarten van Heemskerck's Roman drawings are the most significant body of work he ever produced, and they rank among the most interesting and original drawings of Roman antiquities made in the Renaissance. Understandably, people have been trying to get close to them for almost five hundred years. For that reason, the exhibition *The Allure of Rome: Maarten van Heemskerck Draws the City* (26 April 2024 to 4 August 2024), organized by the Kupferstichkabinett of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin in collaboration with the Bibliotheca Hertziana, Rome, with an accompanying catalog, was an uncommonly special occasion, even for scholars already familiar with the drawings. Since the 1980s, sixty-six pages from one of Van Heemskerck's Roman sketchbooks have been encased in an album binding, where they could be viewed only singly. Released from this housing by a conservation project that coincided with the 450th anniversary of the artist's death, the drawings and their history could be carefully analyzed, a process recounted in the catalog essay "Materials, Techniques, and Reconstruction of the Small Drawing Book" by Georg Josef Dietz, Antje Penz, and Carsten Wintermann (99 – 127). Van Heems-

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1a – b Maarten van Heemskerck, *Roman Forum from the South*, ca. 1536, pen and ink on paper, double page spread, 13.4 × 20.9 and 13.5 × 20.9 cm respectively. Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen, Berlin

kerck's Roman drawings then made their public debut as an entire group for the first time in this exhibition, curated by Christien Melzer, Tatjana Bartsch, and Hans-Ulrich Kessler.[1] Bartsch's magisterial monograph on the drawings provides the essential scholarly underpinnings for the entire project.[2]

Small and double-sided, the sketchbook drawings are tricky to display. The Berlin installation combined so many novel approaches to the problem that it is worth enumerating them, because this aspect of the exhibition turned a beautiful show into a transformational one, allowing new perspectives on Van Heemskerck to emerge. The sketchbook pages were suspended in triple-ply transparent mounts, then set vertically on top of podiums or, most spectacularly, into a ten-sided pavilion that visitors could walk around, inside, and through. In a vitrine, another batch of pages was arranged into a flower-petal shape, simulating a notebook gathering. *The Allure of Rome* featured fifteen paintings—six from the Gemäldegalerie and nine loans—that relate to the drawings in direct and indirect ways. The use of the clear drawing mounts often allowed visitors to see, in one line of vision, a page from Van Heemskerck's sketchbook thoughtfully juxtaposed with one of the paintings, or with a plaster cast of a sculpture that he had studied. The installation encouraged consideration of how the artist studied the past as a forward-facing project: he drew demolition that made way for new architecture, and the drawings he made became the basis for new art.

Two massive construction sites, the Forum and Saint Peter's, both rife with architectural fragments from many eras, provided fodder for Van Heemskerck's sketchbook. In the early 1530s, when the artist arrived at Saint Peter's to make drawings, he encountered not one basilica but two: an older church, begun in the fourth century, was undergoing staged demolition even as construction of the new church continued. Van Heemskerck walked right into the material evidence of this inflection point. Both the construction of new Saint Peter's and the preparations for the emperor's triumphal entry, especially through the Forum, required creative demolition. Old fragments were excavated, dissembled, and taken down, only to be relocated, reassembled, and installed in new places. Under Paul III, the Farnese cardinal who assumed the papacy when Clement VII died in 1534, a new level of concern and care for the ancient ruins became part of the larger project to restore the city. Van Heemskerck had arrived in Rome at a time when renewed focus on the physical remains of the ancient past assumed a political valence.

The Allure of Rome brings into much clearer focus how Van Heemskerck himself studied

those remains, even as the question of his position on current events remains elusive. Given the range of sculptural and architectural fragments that he drew, it is easy to think of the artist as omnivorous and comprehensive. However, his sketchbook suggests that he was selective, and certain subjects held his attention across multiple sites and multiple visits. Saint Peter's was one of those. The Belvedere Torso was another: a leitmotif that comes in and out of view across the sketchbook. In the exhibition, the curators gave the sculpture pride of place in the form of a plaster cast that centered the main display of drawings, a useful intervention not least for the way it lent a sense of relative scale to the tiny drawings.

Both the exhibition and catalog were organized according to the same general outline, with three main sections devoted to Before, During, and After Van Heemskerck's trip to Rome. This conservative approach to the subject treats Rome as a fulcrum in the life of the artist, the point around which everything turns. The questions it prompts are fairly straightforward: how did Van Heemskerck paint before he left the Low Countries, what did he study during his years in Rome, and how did those studies affect what he painted there and after he returned home? Erik Eising's essay, "Maarten van Heemskerck and Late Fifteenth-Century Painting in Haarlem" (25–35), sets up the Before condition, with discussions of paintings by Albert van Ouwater and Geertgen tot Sint Jans. The exhibition featured works by Jan van Scorel and by one of his followers (cat. nos. 7–8) to introduce the northern artist's earlier visit to the city.

A journey to Rome was a serious undertaking, and an essay by Nine Miedema, "Before the Journey: Texts, Images, and Expectations" (37–48), summarizes the guidebooks, published descriptions, and other sources that Van Heemskerck could have reviewed at home. Before setting out, he took care of a more vital task. Nils Büttner explains why the expedition ahead would have prompted the artist to put his affairs well in order before his departure, with attention to the afterlife in mind, when he describes the perils of the route in "Which Way to Rome? Maarten van Heemskerck and the Netherlandish Artist's Journey in the Sixteenth Century" (51–62). Van Heemskerck donated his *Saint Luke Painting the Virgin* to the Guild of Saint Luke, the painter's guild to which Van Heemskerck belonged, an appeal to his patron saint ahead of his departure. The large panel was installed over the guild's altar in the cathedral of St. Bavo in Haarlem, bearing the date of 23 May 1532. Soon after, the artist was on his way.

Once he got to Rome, however, Van Heemskerck turned out to be as interested in dramatic compositions of ruins as he was in what counted as important or famous. He had a particular way of seeing the world, and he liked holes, caves, and other dark places. Any subterranean space, no matter how ominous, held potential. *The Allure of Rome* exhibition and catalog featured several of Van Heemskerck's lesser-known drawings that demonstrate his curiosity about the underground world. Near the Forum, he ventured into the low valley between the Capitoline and Palatine hills known as the Velabrum, and sketched the dark, overgrown terrain (cat. no. 26.97). A little farther to the southeast, he drew the arched substructures of the Circus Maximus (cat. no. 31.1). A view down into an enclosed spiral staircase (cat. no. 39v) and another into a shadowy stone quarry or cave (cat. no. 37v) give the impression that Van Heemskerck was ready to explore any crevice or chasm he came across, natural or artificial.

Ruins themselves offered a route into the underground, too, as did construction sites. Saint Peter's had both, and Van Heemskerck's drawings of the giant works there remain an important documentary source for the history of the building. Vitale Zanchettin, who knows as much as anyone about the construction of the basilica, supplied a catalog essay that surprisingly deals

with an adjacent topic instead. In "Visions of a Metropolis" (129–139), he examines the artist's precise depictions of landscape and provides a new identification for another of Van Heemskerck's architectural studies. On a sheet in the Rijksmuseum that has several drawings, including a landscape with an obelisk and three small architectural sketches (131, fig. 31), Zanchettin has determined that one of the latter shows the façade of the temple in Sandro Botticelli's *Temptations of Christ* (1480–1482), a fresco on the wall of the Sistine Chapel. This orthographic rendering of a fictive building demonstrates an architectural awareness beyond ancient ruins. Zanchettin's discovery offers a new way to consider Van Mander's comment that Van Heemskerck went to Rome to study both antiquity and modern artists like Michelangelo.

Given the evident range of Van Heemskerck's interests, it is useful to consider what the artist did *not* draw. Although he carefully observed the archaeological and infrastructural preparations for Charles V's entry, none of his drawings shows the ephemeral constructions made for the entry itself. That omission is notable given the strong evidence that Van Heemskerck worked on those constructions, as did almost every artist in town. As Tatjana Bartsch points out in her essay, "The Roman Drawings and Paintings" (67–97), Giorgio Vasari says that Van Heemskerck contributed to the triumphal arch erected in the Piazza di San Marco, on the team led by Francesco Salviati. Antonio da Sangallo's drawings of a triumphal arch design survive, and studies by other artists of paintings for the event are extant. Why nothing from Van Heemskerck?

One possible answer is that he filtered the experience of the entry itself through his paintings. There are only three paintings by Van Heemskerck known to be from his time in Rome, and all are oil on canvas—a switch from the panel supports that the artist used in Haarlem before and after the trip. The Berlin exhibition included two of them—one from the National Gallery of Prague, and the other from a private collection in Milan—both dating to 1536 and of the same subject: *Venus and Mars in Vulcan's Forge* (cat. nos. 42, 45). The third canvas, the *Panorama with the Abduction of Helen amidst the Wonders of the Ancient World*, signed and dated twice in 1535 and 1536, now in the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, was not included in the exhibition because it is too large to travel but was featured in the catalog (150–151, fig. 33). The *Panorama* is a vast landscape where real and imagined ruins carpet the rugged seaside terrain. Cecilia Mazzetti di Pietralata situates this important painting during the cultural climate building up to the triumphal entry, in "Maarten van Heemskerck in Rome: Players and Networks" (141–157). The painting seems to allude to its contemporary moment, with a dramatic arrival in the foreground and a sprawling empire in the background: in its scale and horizontal format, it unfolds like a procession.

The question of how many other ruinous landscapes Van Heemskerck made after returning home remains open. One of his contemporaries in Rome, Hermanus Posthumus, painted the ruins capriccio *Tempus Edax Rerum* (1536; cat. no. 47) in a similar mode, layering fragments, sculptures, and architectural structures on top of a hilly ground. Thus a third landscape exhibited in Berlin, entitled *Extensive Landscape* and only recently acquired by the Liechtenstein Collection (fig. 2; cat. no. 46), had been assigned to Posthumus but here is attributed by Bartsch either to him or to Van Heemskerck himself—and she makes a more convincing case for the latter (93–95). It is tempting to read the *Extensive Landscape* against Van Heemskerck's time in Rome awaiting the emperor's entry. A triumphal arch poised at the lower right corner of the painting introduces the scene, a view over a craggy peninsula populated with classical structures. On the arch, an inscription borrowed from Horace's letters reads *NON OMNIBVS*



2 Hermanus Posthumus or Maarten van Heemskerck, *Extensive Landscape*, ca. 1536–1540, oil on canvas, 67×141 cm. Liechtenstein. The Princely Collections, Vaduz – Palais Liechtenstein, Vienna

CŌTĪGIT ADIRE CHORINTVM, which Bartsch translates to: "It is not every man's lot to get to Corinth." As strong winds fill the sails of the ships approaching the harbor, a thunderstorm darkens the turquoise sky, and the waters of the Ionian and Aegean Seas roil.

We can't all get what we want, the painting tells us in so many words—but what else does it say? Which way are those winds blowing? The painting retains an enigmatic quality in addition to the basic question of its attribution. Similarly, we do not know exactly what Van Heemskerck thought of Charles V's entry into Rome as a political event, as opposed to a purely urbanistic or archaeological one. He might have been forced to help pay for it, because Paul III taxed foreigners rather than have Romans resent him anymore than they already did for the emperor's return. Charles did not have a capital city, and he used his imperial entries as means to affirm universal rule throughout his empire. Papal Rome, having lost claim to political rule during the Sack, struggled to re-assert itself as the center of spiritual rule. Van Heemskerck had made the demanding journey there seeking what he could not find in the north. How did his own search for beauty in the ancient past intersect with these other claims on universality?

The Allure of Rome approaches that question in part through close attention to Van Heemskerck's shifting approach to form and color. In the paintings he made after his return to the Low Countries in 1537, the artist developed his studies of Roman sculpture into a new approach to the human figure. Hans-Ulrich Kessler, in "The Experience of Rome in Van Heemskerck's Painted Oeuvre" (161–175), connects the *Saint Lawrence Altarpiece* that the artist made for the Grote Kerk in Alkmaar (162, fig. 36) with his studies of the *Laocoön*, for example. While his upcycling of statues is straightforward, Van Heemskerck's use of grisaille, in which he depicted his subjects as if they were marble statues, took him in more intriguing directions. His painted personification of the virtue of charity (cat. no. 58), from around 1545, teems with children like the *Nile* river god at the Vatican—an ostensibly tender depiction that turns unexpect-

edly sinister in its bloodlessness. More terrifying still is the *Bullfight in an Antique Arena* of 1552 (cat. no. 62), loaned from Lille, in which ghostly hooded figures swarm the Colosseum like ants haunting a desiccated hill.

Other artists who used Van Heemskerck's drawings seem pedestrian by comparison in their fealty to the source material. As Tatjana Bartsch and Christien Melzer elucidate in "The Artistic Reception and Historical Afterlife of the Roman Drawings" (195–213), many artists had access to the sketchbooks, and they mined them for ideas. Most notable among these successors was Pieter Saenredam, who acquired the Roman sketchbook in 1639 and made several paintings after its contents. His *Colosseum in Rome with a Raid on a Carriage*, 1631, exhibited in Berlin (cat. no. 88), is nothing like Van Heemskerck's *Bullfight*: this comparison of Saenredam and Van Heemskerck may be the only instance in which Van Heemskerck comes out ahead at painting architectural space. Saenredam shows the ancient amphitheater as a curiously flat building: he never saw it himself. Drawings by other artists changed hands along with Van Heemskerck's, bound into a second volume along with his graphic work. A useful essay by Francesca Mattei, entitled "The So-Called Mantuaner Skizzenbuch and Anonymus A" (215–227), elucidates how these other drawings differ in both style and approach.

Van Heemskerck drew over 300 individual sculptures in his sketchbook, and one of the exhibition's most illuminating and exciting aspects was how it brought these studies into conversation with the artist's views of sculpture collections in Rome. As he prowled the city looking for material, Van Heemskerck often recorded the courtyards, gardens, and other rooms of the palaces he visited, showing their floors, walls, and terraces littered with ancient fragments. The drawings he made of these places—early modern sculpture exhibitions of a kind, all long ago dismantled—provide an electrifying sense of how fresh and strange they must have been at the time. There is a hard way and an easy way to do almost anything. When it came to finding antiquities, Van Heemskerck was game for both. He sought them out at hot, bustling, expansive sites like the Forum or at Saint Peter's, where one could watch as fragments were uncovered, hoisted, and hauled from the dirt. He also went to cardinals' homes, where the sculptures had been cleaned, arranged, and carefully displayed.

Compared to his architectural and topographical views, and his studies of the fragments he stumbled across in situ, Van Heemskerck's drawings of sculptural collections capture a specific type of sanitization of the ancient past. That sanitization filters into the prints he made on his return—over 500 of them in total. In "The Prints in Relation to the Roman and Post-Roman Drawings" (177–193), Christien Melzer discusses several of Van Heemskerck's print series, including *The Victories of Charles V*, etched and engraved by Dirck Volckertsz. Coornhert in 1569. In *Pope Clement VII Besieged in Castel Sant'Angelo* (cat. no. 76), the fourth print in that series, Charles's troops line up along the riverbank beside the statues of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, their cannons aimed across the bridge. The analogy between soldier and sculpture is made through scale, proximity, and pose. Drained of real drama, the scene has more in common with Van Heemskerck's views into palace courtyards than it does with his stormy ancient landscapes. From the Castel Sant'Angelo, the pope appears as a miniscule figure in the loggia, peering down with a look that expresses more disinterest than fright.

In its dissimulation, Van Heemskerck's print speaks to the real lesson of 1536, when the Romans had to grin and bear it as the emperor came to town. One might think of his response to the siege that had preceded the entry as post-truth: he knew that his depiction did not truly capture the horror of what had occurred. Unlike

the ancient world, which Van Heemskerck drew and painted as a seething present, contemporary events only prompted a certain form of self-denial. In aestheticizing Rome's traumatic recent history, Van Heemskerck had anesthetized it.

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1 The exhibition website (URL: https://heemskerck.smb.museum/web) includes digital images of all the drawings in their proposed order.

2 Tatjana Bartsch, *Maarten van Heemskerck: Römische Studien zwischen Sachlichkeit und Imagination*, Munich 2019.

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