



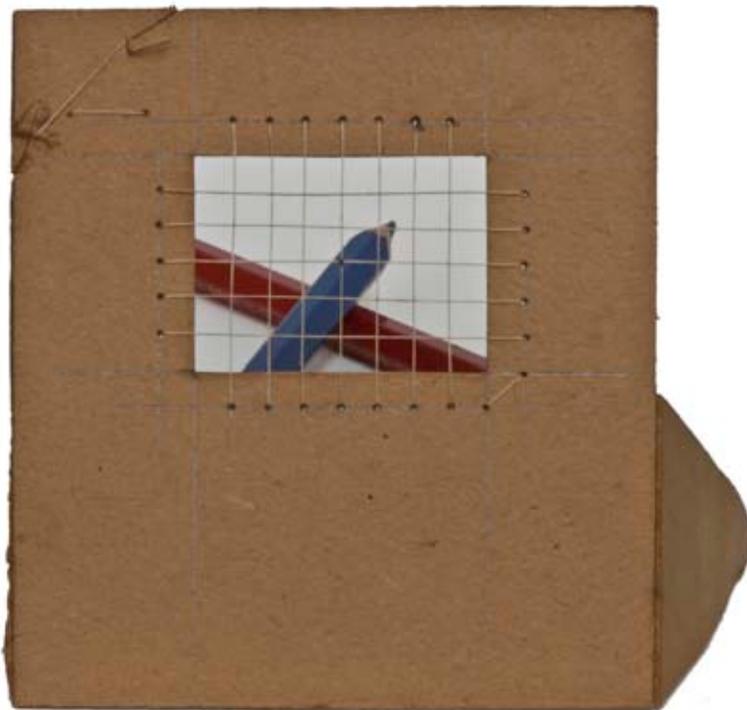
M. C. Escher

Amazing Images

Rare Original Prints and Drawings
Artists' Market • Norwalk, Connecticut

“Those who wonder
discover that this
is in itself a wonder”

M. C. Escher



Small Perspective Grid (3½" X 3½") constructed by M. C. Escher
Used by the artist for visualizing transformations of scale and perspective

Photographed with two of M. C. Escher's pencils
Artists' Market Collection

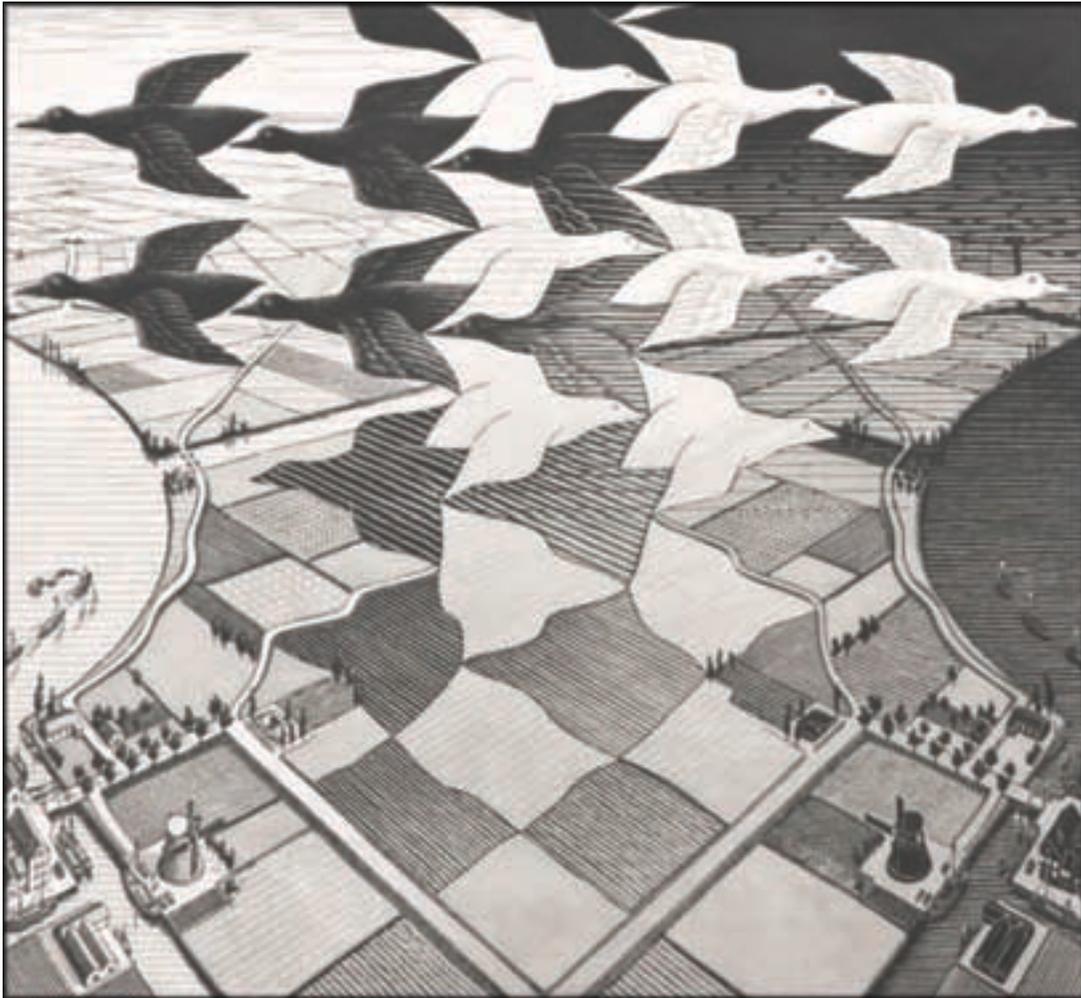
Artists' Market

EXTRAORDINARY ART & FRAMING

M. C. Escher

Amazing Images

Catalog of Rare Original Prints and Drawings



"Day and Night"

Detail of the 1938 woodcut in grey and black

M. C. Escher's artwork continues to resonate in the century after it was created because his pictures illustrate themes that are fundamental to our consciousness. The patterns Escher composed give us a path along which we can discover even more than the artist himself may have been aware of, for the doors he opened ultimately reveal what we find reflected in the mirrors of our own perception.

Jeffrey Price, from his essay that accompanies this exhibition

December 2, 2009

Dear Jeff,

Thank you for sending me your beautiful book. It looks very fine, congratulations!
There are two things I appreciated very much:

The introduction with an interesting and perfect explanation of the techniques Escher used to make his prints. I never read a better explanation of the techniques Escher used and the difference between an original print and a reproduction.

I admire the fine lay out, your choice of details, and the text shows how carefully you observed and meditated on Escher's prints.

And the beautiful and well chosen frames. They add something to the prints in a style that Escher would have admired!!!!

I advise you to send an example of your book to the Escher Palace in The Hague where all his prints are exhibited in simple frames that you can buy in every supermarket.

Greetings and all best wishes: Hans.

NESCIOUS OMNIUM CURIOSUS SUM

Hans deRijk and Bruno Ernst,
authors of "The Magic Mirror of M. C. Escher"

"Very nicely done, and I enjoyed the thoughtful text for each image."

Doris Schattschneider
author of "M. C. Escher: Visions of Symmetry"

March 2, 2010

Dear Mr. Price,

"You provided excellent interpretations of so many of the Escher works in our exhibition [*The Magical World of M. C. Escher, January 20 through April 11, 2010*]. I appreciate your permission to use many of your print descriptions in the exhibition's wall labels. Thank you for making available for our use your research on M. C. Escher works. We are pleased to acknowledge your assistance in the Museum's didactic wall labels, which has enriched immensely our viewer's experience."

Wendy M. Blazier
Senior Curator
Boca Raton Museum of Art, Florida

M. C. Escher: Amazing Images



The connections between Escher's prints are as remarkable as their imagery. Each print, large and small, is part of an interconnected whole that is the artist's life's work. These pictures tell a fascinating story, and every one is a window through which we can see more than we might expect and find paths that inspire our perception. I might add that these extraordinary artworks are in some of the most exquisite frames we have ever designed at Artists' Market. This is a unique opportunity to see and to acquire the very best and rarest of Escher masterworks. We will be happy to provide pricing information on available works. In general, Escher's small and medium-format woodcuts range from \$500 - \$7,500. As you can read in the essay "Escher Editions," it was Escher's practice to seldom sign these works, but to always limit their creation to small editions of original impressions. Escher's entire collection of printing blocks was cancelled following Escher's death in 1972, so we can be quite certain that all vintage works are fine original artworks and will always be of the utmost rarity. Pencil-signed and major prints are generally priced from \$7,500 - \$85,000, whilst Escher's most sought-after prints and drawings can command prices into the six figures. Catalog numbers are from "M. C. Escher: His Life and Complete Graphic Work" and the sizes noted are of the printed images.





M. C. Escher and his family greet Winston Churchill May, 1945, following the liberation of Holland

Churchill and his motorcade cross the Emma Bridge in Baarn, where Escher lived. M. C. Escher and his wife, Jetta, are standing above the motorcyclist, waving.

This original photograph, which may be by a press photographer, was kept by Escher throughout his life and has rarely been published.

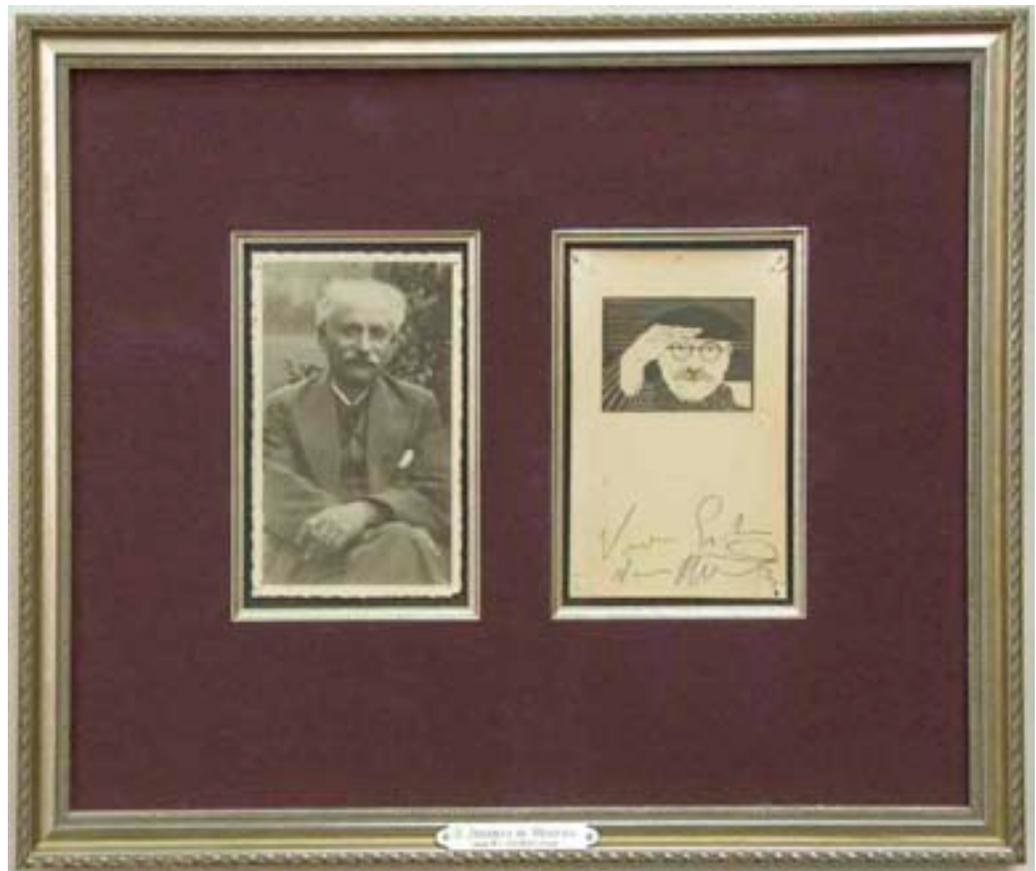
From the Artists' Market permanent collection of Escher artwork and artifacts.



M. C. Escher's home
van Heemstralaan 28, Baarn, Holland
The artist's studio is on the left
Photographed by Jeffrey Price, 1989

Photograph of M. C. Escher's influential teacher, the Dutch printmaker S. Jessurun deMesquita, together with a self-portrait print by deMesquita, inscribed (in Dutch): "To Escher, From Mesquita"

This photograph and print were pinned to Escher's work cabinet throughout his life, and now are part of The Artists' Market permanent collection.



Samuel Jessurun de Mesquita (From Wikipedia)

Samuel Jessurun de Mesquita (Amsterdam, June 6, 1868 - Auschwitz, ca. February 11, 1944) was a graphic artist active in the years before the Second World War. His pupils included the now renowned Maurits Cornelis Escher (1898-1972). In the postwar years, de Mesquita was largely forgotten. Thanks in no small measure to the efforts of Escher, who regarded him as both a mentor and a friend, his name has survived and is currently receiving growing attention.

Samuel Jessurun de Mesquita was born into a Jewish family living in Amsterdam. Though a member of a tightly knit Sephardic community, a minority among Dutch Jews, de Mesquita, like most of his contemporaries, was not religiously observant. His father, a secondary school teacher of Hebrew and German, died when Sam or Sampie, as he was called, was five. At the age of fourteen, the young de Mesquita applied to the Rijksakademie in pursuit of his artistic interests, only to be rejected. Deeply disappointed, he apprenticed himself to an acting city architect, for whom he worked for two years before entering a technical school with the intention of becoming an architect himself. He soon turned, however, to the pedagogy and, in 1889, received a teacher's certificate, which would later enable him to support his family. Over the next years, however, it was to art that de Mesquita principally devoted himself, experimenting with various techniques and mediums. Though known primarily for his woodblock prints, he also produced etchings, lithographs, watercolors, drawings; his applied art consisted mostly of material designs. There are birds, exotic animals, plants and flowers, and fantastical representations, both humorous and grim. Among de Mesquita's most beautiful works are his portraits, particularly his self-portraits.



With Nazi Germany's invasion of the Netherlands in May, 1940, de Mesquita, already in poor health, was forced to lead a secluded life, limiting his work largely to sketches. In the winter of 1944, on either January 31 or February 1, the occupying German forces entered the home of the de Mesquita family in Watergraafsmeer, now part of Amsterdam, and apprehended him, his wife Elisabeth, and their only son Jaap. Transported to Auschwitz, Samuel Jessurun and Elisabeth were sent to the gas chambers within days of their arrival on February 11; Jaap perished in the concentration camp at Theresienstadt on March 20. Escher and some of Jaap's friends were successful in rescuing some of the works that had remained in the de Mesquita home, and eventually established a museum collection of deMesquita's work at the Gemeentemuseum, Holland's national museum, which later also became the home to Escher's personal collection of his life's work.

Kleine Litho's en Houtsneden		XL	150	V
H 72	'35 Droom	25	1	2
H 70	'35 St. Pieter in binnen	75	1	2
L 36	XL - '39 <u>Stilleven met bledspiegel</u>	—	—	—
L 37	I - '35 <u>Hand met spiegelspiegel</u>	—	—	—
L 40	VII - '35 <u>Belton</u>	250	V	6
H 107	IX - '45 <u>Die Bollen I</u>	60	II	8
H 106	VIII - '45 <u>Druisste Zinnen</u>	150	I	5
H 110	I - '47 <u>Andere wereld</u>	75	V	3
H 111	V - '48 <u>Veren in hem</u>	100	—	—
H 112	IX - '45 <u>Sterren</u>	75	III	10
H 110	III - '50 <u>Reisjaling</u>	60	III	21
H 117	VI - '50 <u>Vlinders</u>	60	—	8
L 55	XI - '39 <u>Witte Stappi</u>	—	II	3
H 118	I - '52 <u>Twee wijdenke vlekken</u>	75	III	6
H 119	II - '52 <u>Madde glas</u>	75	II	4
H 120	IX - '52 <u>Wroek</u>	75	III	7
H 121	VI - '52 <u>Koninkrijke in witte verdeling</u>	75	I	6
H 122	XII - '52 <u>Spiralen</u>	75	II	5
H 125	V - '55 <u>Ombalshel</u>	75	II	24
H 126	IX - '55 <u>Dijpte</u>	75	II	14
H 127	II - '56 <u>Witte Zwanen, Zwarte Zwanen</u>	75	II	11

This is M. C. Escher's small print portfolio, with his inventory notes on the cover. Judging from Escher's column headings, we can see that this list must have been created in 1960, and from the erased notes we gather that he had just raised the prices on his artwork. From this rare glimpse inside the artist's studio, we can see the how few examples of each print the artist had available and learn much that is not recorded elsewhere.

From the Artists' Market collection of Escher artifacts

ESCHER'S EDITIONS

by Jeffrey Price

M. C. ESCHER wrote "I am a printmaker, heart and soul." His unique visions were generally not expressed in paintings or drawings – these were but his working models, used to develop ideas which he would then bring to life using the traditional printmaking techniques of woodcut, mezzotint, and lithography.

It is critical to understand the difference between an original print and a reproduction if one is to understand why original Escher prints are so rare and so treasured today. It is relatively easy to understand the nature of a reproduction: it is a copy made by photographing an original artwork and reproducing its image in a book or as a poster. But what is an original? That requires a longer answer. The defining characteristic of an original print is that it must be printed directly from the artist's hand-made printing block or plate. There are many techniques in printmaking, but in every case an original must be printed directly from the block or plate that the artists themselves create. If the artist makes the printing plate, be it by drawing an image on a lithographic stone, cutting into a woodblock, or working directly with a metal plate; and if that plate is then printed, the result is an original print which can have aesthetic and historic significance as well as real value among collectors and in the international art market. A reproduction, no matter how attractive it may be, has no such value, just as a reproduction of currency has no monetary value.

To create a woodblock print Escher carved a smoothed slab of wood with chisels or engraving tools with infinite patience and skills honed over a lifetime of printmaking. Escher's preferred woodblocks were of cherry, pear, or other dense fruitwood, since these could be carved with the detail and precision the artist desired. Once the block was carved, it could then be carefully inked and pressed against special paper, printing it in somewhat the same way one might print with a rubberstamp. To get the ink rich and even is an art in itself: apply too little ink with the ink roller and you will get unevenly printed areas, too much ink will fill in fine lines. Escher placed a sheet of printing paper on a large flat board and pressed his inked woodblock onto the paper. If multiple blocks were being used to create a multi-color print, there were always places at the edge of the design where Escher could align the inked block with a previously-printed woodblock's impression. Once the inked block was in place on the paper, a second flat board was placed on top of the paper and woodblock, creating a kind of sandwich. Escher would then carefully flip the boards with his

block and paper upside down and remove the top board so that the paper was now on top of his inked block. He would then rub the back of the paper either with a roller or an ivory spoon (intended for eating soft-boiled eggs) in order to transfer the ink from the block to the final print. Each example of every M. C. Escher print required separate careful inking, printing and drying before it was ready to be exhibited or sold.

Escher would hand-print a small number of prints from his blocks and keep them in his studio for collectors and exhibitions. If an edition sold out (and if he felt so inclined) he might then print a few more examples of this woodcut. Escher continued to print some of his woodblocks until 1970 when his health deteriorated. This explains why woodcuts were not numbered editions, since Escher could not predict how many examples he would create in the future. Early prints that were very popular such as 'Day and Night' and 'Sky and Water I' would therefore have larger editions than a later more esoteric woodcut such as 'Circle Limit II' Some editions by Escher, such as his 1932 portfolio 'XXIV Emblemata,' were printed in a woodcut press, as were his woodcuts in the books 'Flor de Pascua,' 'The Terrifying Adventures of Scholastica' and 'The Regular Division of the Plane.' The woodcuts 'Grasshopper,' 'Scarabs,' 'The Spinner' and 'Vaulted Stairway' were also printed in this way for a portfolio included within the art journal 'Halcyon' in 1940. Escher remarked of this printing, "how excellent the prints are: I never succeeded to handprint that print so deep black while retaining the very thin white stripes."

Lithography is a more mysterious technique, but there are similarities to woodblock printing. Escher drew his designs onto specially prepared blocks of German limestone using artist's lithographic pencils which are somewhat waxy. Printing these blocks required the assistance of a master lithographer who first wet the stone evenly, then applied ink, and finally printed it slowly under tremendous pressure of a large printmaker's press. The finished lithographs were inspected by Escher, who destroyed any print not meeting his standards. Each successful print would be signed by Escher and the edition number noted. Escher would decide on the number of prints to create with his lithographer, and it is my belief that since some defective prints were destroyed the editions are often odd numbers (for example, "Print Gallery" has an edition of 43 instead of perhaps fifty examples). All except ten of his lithographic stones were destroyed following printing, most likely they were resurfaced and 'erased' in order to create new prints in the

lithographer's workshop. If a print was in great demand and the stone had not been destroyed, Escher would sometimes print additional small editions, usually differentiated by a roman numeral following the edition number.

Escher also created just eight mezzotints, and this complex technique requires a lengthy explanation to fully understand its challenges. Suffice to say that Escher laboriously crafted a copper plate incised with his image and then inked this plate and printed it in his studio on a small roller press. The technique to create and print a mezzotint was extraordinarily demanding, unimaginably tedious, and somewhat magical. Escher's final frustration was that very few prints could be created before the mezzotint plate degraded and could no longer be printed with the shading and details his meticulous images demanded.

Escher's general method was to seldom sign smaller and medium-format woodcuts and to almost always sign larger major prints. Lithographs and mezzotints were usually, but not always, signed and numbered, whereas major woodcuts were generally signed but never numbered. Larger woodcut prints frequently bear Escher's notation 'eigen druk,' which roughly translates as 'printed by myself,' or 'self-printed' though the wording is infinitely more elegant in the original Dutch. Virtually all of Escher's prints have his MCE monogram and the date of the print's completion in Roman numerals drawn within the image.

Every example of an original print is necessarily identical in size to every other print created from the same block, stone, or plate. These originals have frequently been photographed and reproduced in books and posters, just as painters' canvases have been photographically reproduced. As we have seen, in Escher's work only the woodblock prints, lithographs, and mezzotints created directly from the artist's blocks, stones, and plates are considered original prints and of value.

Originality has nothing to do with the size of an edition nor whether each print is autographed by the artist. It is the conceptualizing, crafting and printing of a graphic image that is the heart and soul of the creative process, and indeed there is a long history of printmakers creating their works without autographing them. This was certainly the case with the classic prints of Rembrandt and Dürer, and often with modern printmakers such as Picasso as well. The practice of

artists signing and numbering their editions was virtually unknown before the twentieth century. The creation of signed and numbered graphics sometimes had as much to do with marketing as it did with printmaking, and editions were often produced at the request of galleries and dealers to increase the sales of the work of their favorite artists. Many artists, including Chagall, Dalí, and Picasso also signed and numbered photographic reproductions of their drawings and paintings. These reproductions are clearly not original prints, and Escher never signed reproductions of his work.

Escher held tenaciously to his roots as a traditional printmaker in technique and temperament, though certainly not stylistically. He was the antithesis of a commercial artist and worked for most of his life without a wide audience or gallery network. The marketing of his work was far less important than its creation. Escher preferred to work alone in his studio and generally sold his work directly to the scholars and collectors who discovered his unique creations. For Escher, it was the concept and creation of his images that was of the utmost importance whereas selling his prints could be a unwelcome distraction from his work as an artist. Escher kept close control over his printmaking materials and created comparatively few original prints during his lifetime, a mere fraction of the output of other famous twentieth-century printmakers such as Mirò, Picasso, and Chagall. Virtually all of Escher's printing blocks, lithograph stones, and mezzotint plates were cancelled with a small hole and thus made non-reprintable at The Hague Gemeentemuseum pursuant to M. C. Escher's instructions at the end of his life, so we know with certainty that all original Escher prints are from his small authentic vintage lifetime editions.

It was extraordinarily challenging for Escher to translate his visions into graphic art. During his sixty years of printmaking he created just 448 different prints, each one a part of the interwoven fabric of images which stands as his life's work. Each and every original print that came from his exquisitely-crafted blocks and plates tells part of an extraordinary story that unfolds within the many layers of our consciousness.

As Escher himself once wrote, the story he told is "something that no other graphic artist on earth could tell you. It doesn't sound very modest, but what can I do? That is simply the way it is."

I'd like to offer my special thanks to George Escher for his comments on this essay that gave me first-hand insights into his father's work. And thank you to all the lovers and collectors of Escher's work who have made the past thirty years an extraordinarily rewarding art adventure for me with so many delightfully unexpected discoveries along the way.

– Jeffrey Price



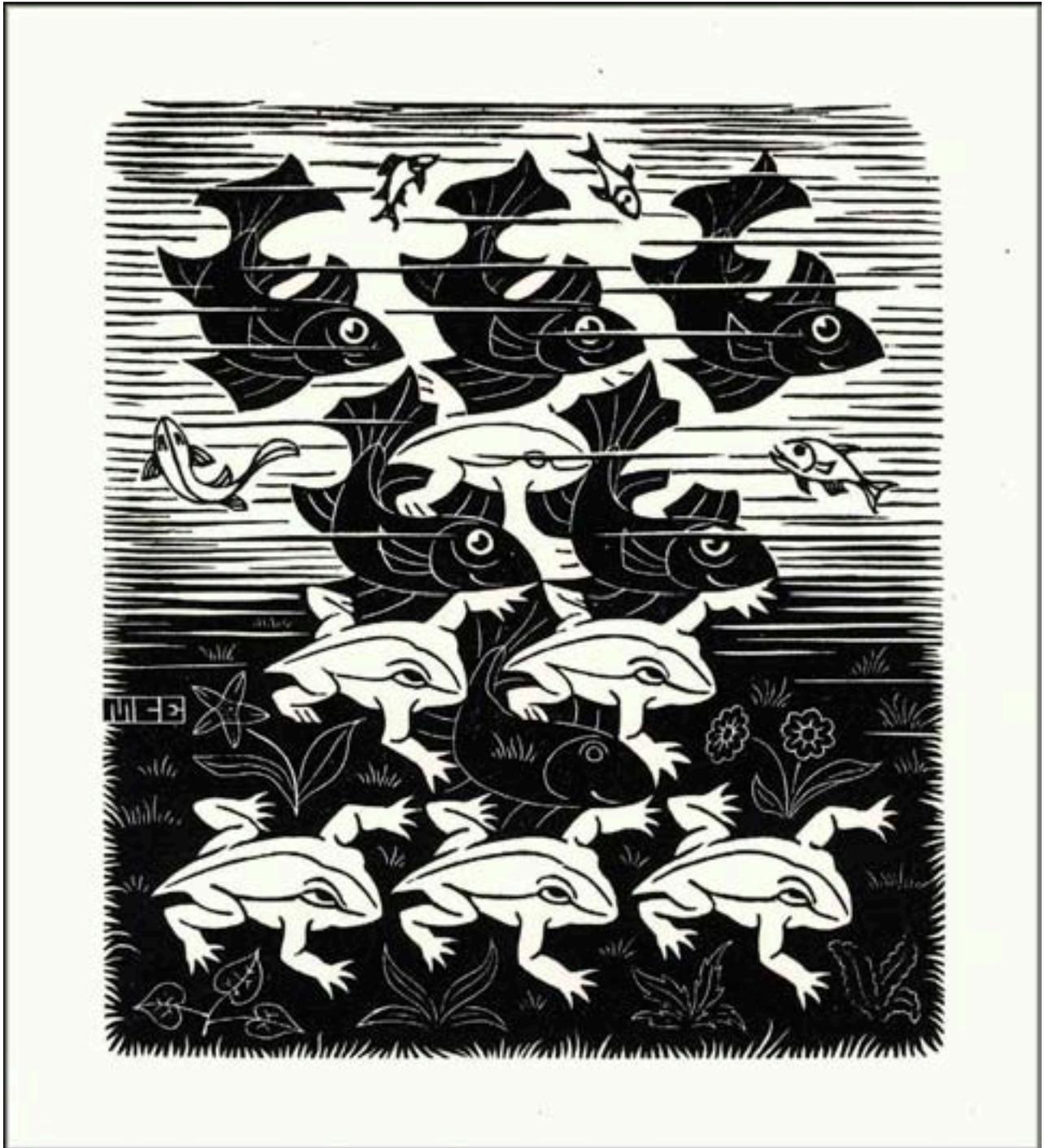
Amazing Images

Drawing, 1959 (5" X 5") ex collection of the M. C. Escher Foundation
Previously on loan to the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, Holland

Doris Schattschneider wrote in her book "M. C. Escher: Visions of Symmetry" that "Escher wanted his graphic works to be not only visual expressions of puzzling concepts, but puzzles themselves, and planned to reveal this in the title of the first book devoted to his graphic work." One of the titles he considered was 'Speelse Verbazing' (Dutch for "Playful Amazement"), which he designed into the interlocking design shown at the right. For the English edition of his book he conceived 'Amazing Images,' which is a far more descriptive and evocative title than the one on which the publishers insisted: "Graphic Work and Drawings!" This elegant word-play is reminiscent of the crossword pattern that begins and ends Escher's masterpiece "Metamorphosis" and is a unique expression of the artist's vision of the perception of his work.

Artists' Market Collection





Fish and Frogs

(B.364) 1949 wood engraving from the edition of only 185 examples (3¼" X 2½")

Related to Escher's masterpiece "Verbum," this rare and charming print is one of only three small-format works that combine interlocking forms in three-dimensional space. Illustrating the interconnections of water and land was central to many of Escher's greatest works and here those themes are played out with an elegance and intimate whimsy that is at once charming and deeply meaningful. The small fish that swim around their interlocking counterparts are especially playful, and these underscore Escher's feeling that designs such as this were 'little games,' although they also touch on the mysterious connections that are fundamental to creation itself.



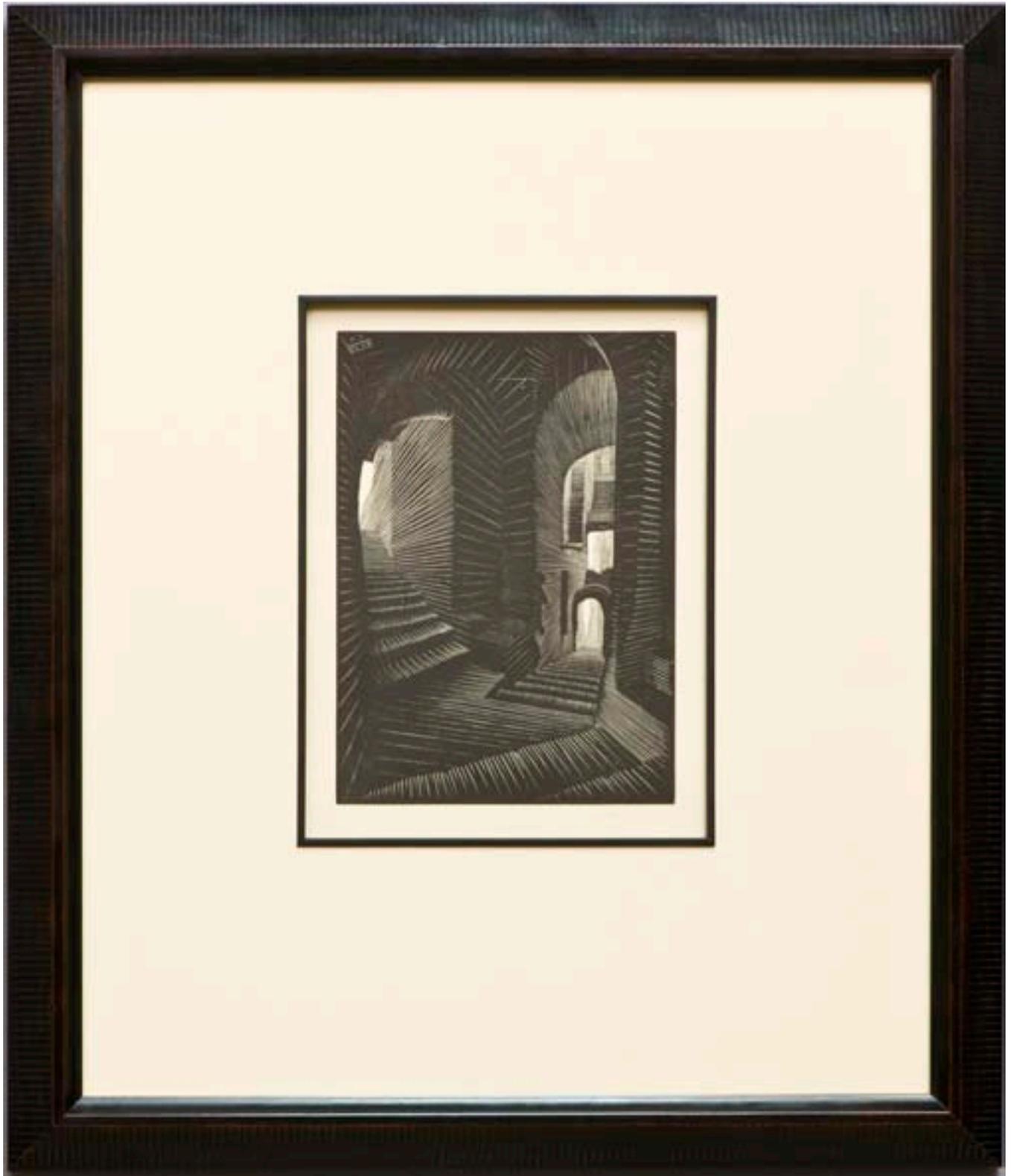


Print Gallery (B.410) 1956 Lithograph

Signed and numbered 30/55 III from the third edition (total edition of 145) (12½" x 12½")

A man gazes at a lovely picture in a print gallery which contains pictures much like Escher's prints. He admires a view of Malta that Escher recreated from his own 1935 woodcut, "Senglea" (B.276). In "Print Gallery" this picture expands to encompass a seaside town in which there is a print gallery arcade... and in this exhibition a man gazes at the very picture that contains him within it! There is profound philosophy at play here: the world we see around us also contains ourselves within it, and in fact, all that we know may well be our own creation. The artist's mathematically spiraling grid resolved into a void where Escher both drew his monogram on the stone block and also signed his name on the finished print. By doing so, he placed himself in the very center of this remarkable universe. This print has been the topic of intense research in the past years, and computer mathematics have finally extended Escher's design into an infinitely spiraling central vortex. Bruno Ernst, the artist's close friend and author of 'The Magic Mirror of M. C. Escher,' considers this to be Escher's greatest print.





Covered Alley in Atrani, Coast of Amalfi

(B.150) 1931 Wood engraving (7"X 5")

This was Escher's first wood engraving, and it is characterized by the complex arrays of white lines on dense black background. Prior to this, all of Escher's woodblock prints were woodcuts in which the artist carved around his design, leaving black lines on a white background. In this unique print, the delicate highlights emphasize the depth of the shadows and peculiar angles of the walls and steps that lead in all directions simultaneously. Our gaze is directed up, down, and to each side; framed by dark spaces so intense that the light radiating from beyond the alleyways is almost blinding. Escher carved this woodblock in 1931, but the edition was not printed until 1940 when the arts journal "Halcyon" created a special portfolio honoring Escher's work. Escher had found this wood engraving especially hard to print due to the delicate white lines surrounded in black, and he wrote of this edition, "how excellent the prints are: I never succeeded to handprint that print so deep black while retaining the very thin white stripes."



Six Symmetry Motifs in Red

(B.416) 1957 woodcut in red (9½" X 7")
from the edition of only 175 examples

At the top of this print we see three tile motifs similar to ones Escher found in the Alhambra Palace in Spain (illustrated at the right). These tile designs are transformed into three bands of interlocking creatures: beetles, dragonflies and flying fish. Each of these is seen as light figures on a dark background, dark on light, and with both dark and light combining in the center. This woodcut was created for Escher's only book, "Regelmatige Vlakverdeling;" or 'The Regular Division of the Plane,' published in 1957. The cover of this exceptionally rare publication is shown at the left, decorated with Escher's classic bird motif (see print B.361).



This woodcut shows Escher at the height of his powers illustrating the foundation of his concepts to a highly educated audience, and this is the only time he used red ink for printing.



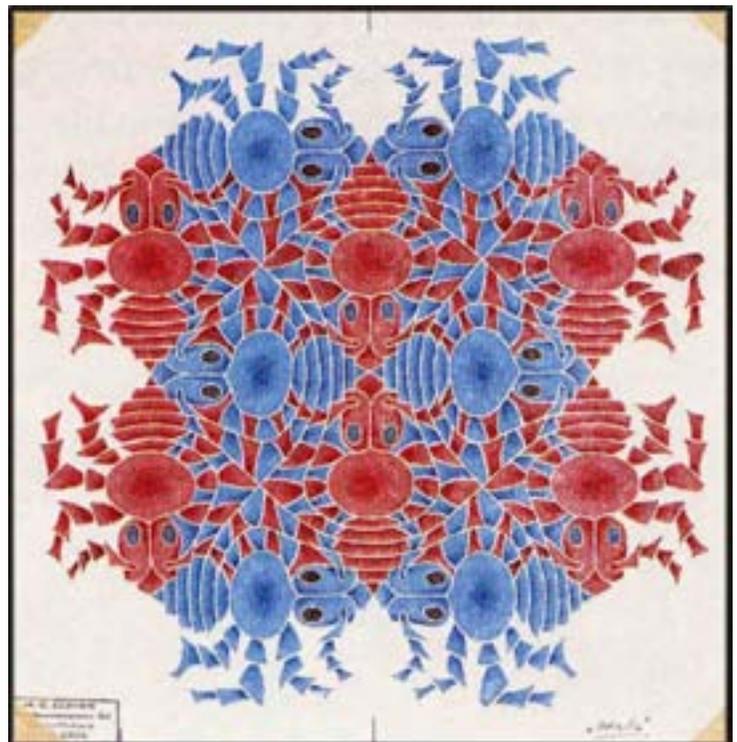
Earth: Ants (6" X 5 1/2")

(B.382) 1953 color print with letterpress

“Earth” is one of only four small-format prints Escher created in color. This is one of the “Four Elements,” created for the noted connoisseurs and patrons, Eugène and Willy Strens. The Strens’ were Dutch print collectors and connoisseurs, and were friends of M. C. Escher. They organized exhibitions of printmaker’s work, and had particular interest in small, personal prints such as ‘ex libris’ library woodcuts. In the early 1950’s they commissioned M. C. Escher to create a special set of prints representing the four elements: earth, air, fire, and water. These were believed to be the building blocks of creation, and had been sacred since ancient times. Escher used the properties of these elements to form the basis of his patterns, and so “Earth” is represented by a tessellation (tiling) of ants in which the pattern jiggles visually like swarming ants on their anthill. We may assume that the Strens family presented these fine editions to their circle of print-collector friends as holiday gifts at the New Year from 1953 through 1956, as is the European tradition. In this way the Strens family was able to have their own ‘personal’ M. C. Escher prints and also share their connoisseurship with their fortunate friends. Escher created ‘Earth’ in two color variations: first using brown and dark blue, and several years later creating a brilliantly contrasting variant edition with orange instead of brown.



“Earth” variant in orange and dark blue (detail)

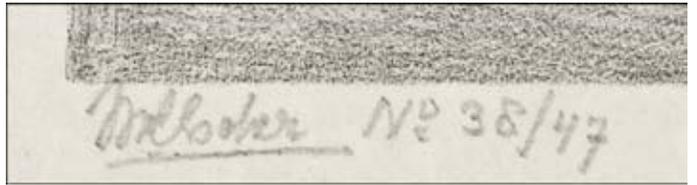


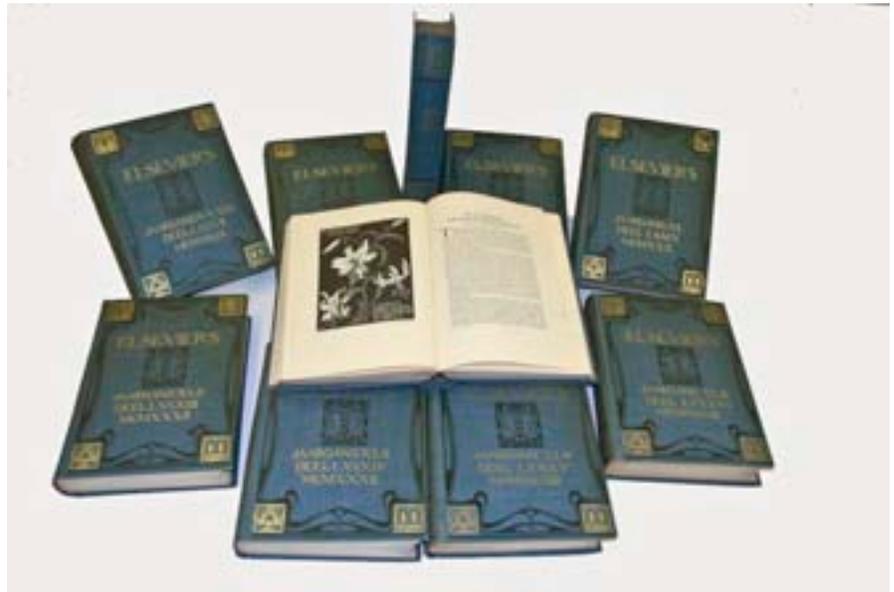
M. C. Escher’s preparatory drawing for “Earth”
© The M. C. Escher Company B.V. Baarn, Holland

Predestination

(B.372) 1951 Lithograph, signed and numbered 38/47

Escher creates a complex drama in a world where patterns are constantly shifting and filling with birds and fish exchanging places. On the graph paper at the center of this design everything works perfectly: white fish can combine with black birds or black fish with white birds. Similarly, at the upper edges we can see black and white birds in perfect symmetry on the left and black and white flying fish fitting together on the right. But Escher's world has the startling ability to shift from the flat space of paper into three-dimensional space, and once the birds and fish leave their organized mathematical grids they become subject to the laws of nature, following rules that are no longer governed by the laws of tessellations. The fish and bird quickly develop character along with their inflated figures, and the dance of nature plays out before us. Both the bird and the fish break through a wall of pattern in the foreground, and once they challenge this flat and symbolic world their fates are predestined. Is it possible that next time the bird will swallow the fish? This is one of the rarest Escher lithographs, created in a single edition of 47 examples.





Lily

(B.156) 1931 woodcut (7" X 5½") printed directly from Escher's woodblock within a ten-volume set of 'Elsevier's'

While living in Rome in the early 1930's Escher collaborated with the scholar G. J Hoogerwerff, who was director of the Dutch Institute in Rome and a specialist in Renaissance art. Hoogerwerff composed a series of Latin mottos and Dutch poems that were unified by Escher's images. The three messages: the Latin, the poem, and the image, were intended to give separate impressions of a unified idea. The Latin can be translated as "People gaze in wonder at another's transience." The Dutch is difficult to translate, but we might capture the essence of the meaning by saying: "Be aware of our frailty, we may not be here long, but oh how we delight your sight." The woodblock print was changed to a much more serious and static version in the final printing of "XXIV Emblemata," and this lyrical lily was only printed in the Elsevier's journal. The print could, of course, be removed from the book and framed separately. I have not seen another bound set of this work, which is a compendium of art and literature of the 1930's and a rich cultural history of the period. The article by Hoogerwerff accompanying Escher's print was one of the first serious art-historical appreciations of his work and reproduces several of the artist's early prints.

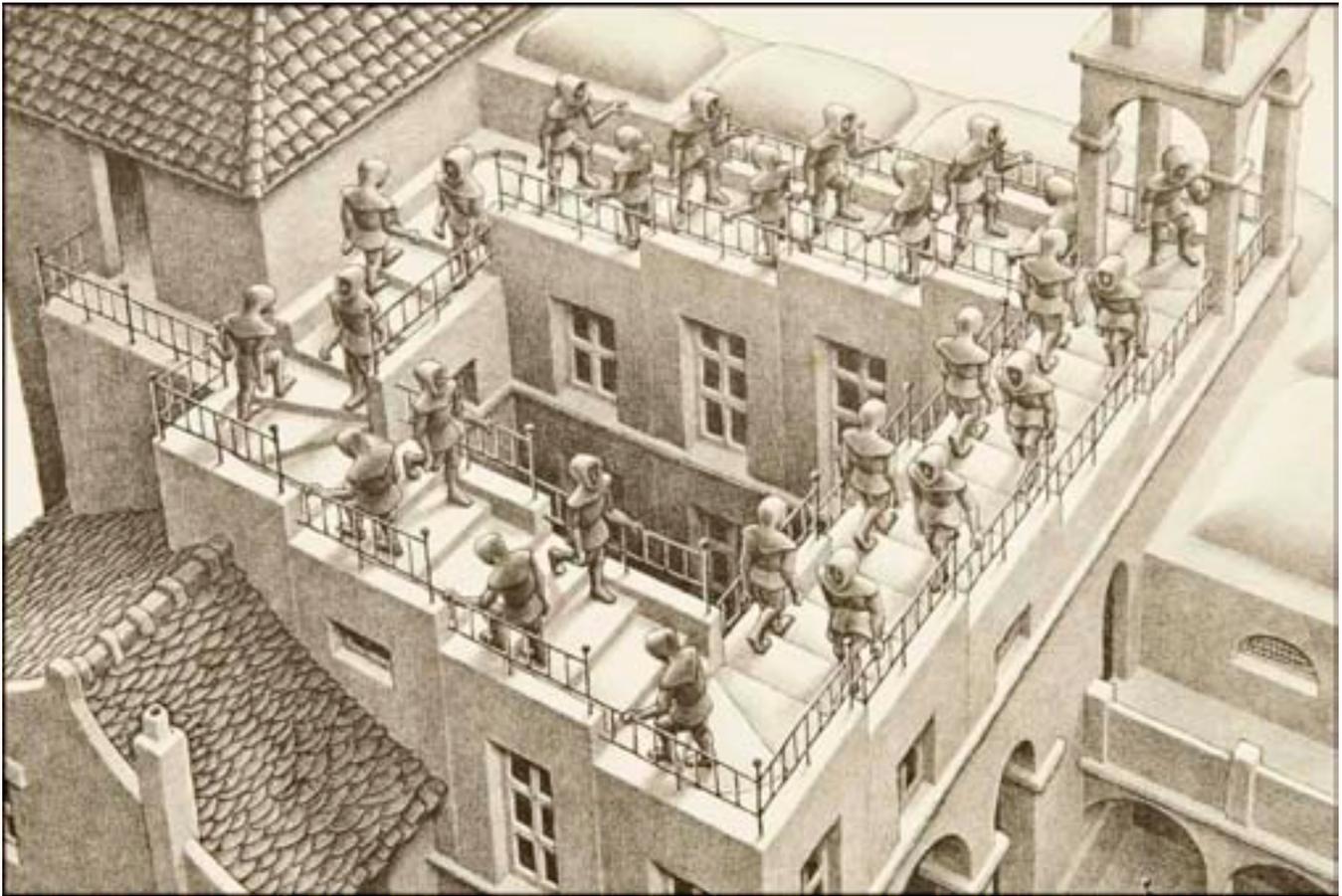


The Vaulted Window (Ex Libris J. C. de Bruyn van Melis en Mariekerke-Mackay)

(B.341) 1946 wood engraving (3" X 2½")

The foreground bursts towards the viewer in the book on the window ledge and we are gradually carried backward past the lily-vase and over the roof-tops of a Dutch town toward the shining sun which crowns this scene with concentric sunbeams.





Ascending and Descending

(B.435) 1960 lithograph (14" X 11 1/4")
Signed and numbered 6/56 IV

Escher enjoyed the company and collaboration of many scientists and mathematicians. The British psychologist Roger Penrose became aware of Escher's prints early on and was intrigued by the fantastic constructions the artist was able to bring to life. Having seen Escher's invention of 'The Impossible Cube' in his print 'Belvedere,' Penrose invented and suggested another impossible object to Escher (seen at the left): a set of endless stairs which one could perpetually ascend and descend. Escher adapted this design and with precision, elegance, and humor, creating a design that today is one of the most recognizable of all Escher's amazing images, one recently featured and discussed in the Hollywood film "Inception."



In Dutch there is an expression 'monk's work,' which describes time-consuming activities, and so here Escher has populated his staircase with processions of men who walk endlessly, perhaps entranced in meditation. Two can leave the group at a time it seems: while one watches the activities from a terrace, another fellow sits and rests on the stairs, perhaps gaining strength to continue his endless journey.

This has always been one of Escher's most popular prints, and during his lifetime four small editions were created totaling 266 signed examples of this lithograph. This example is from the final edition Escher printed and was originally acquired from Vorpal Gallery in the 1970's.



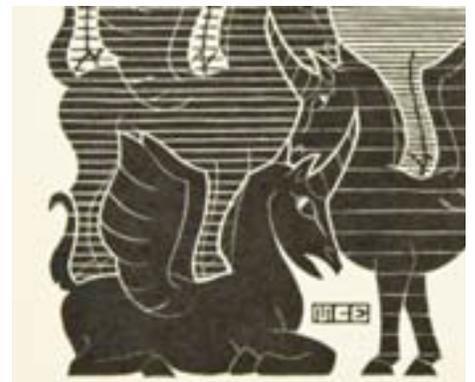


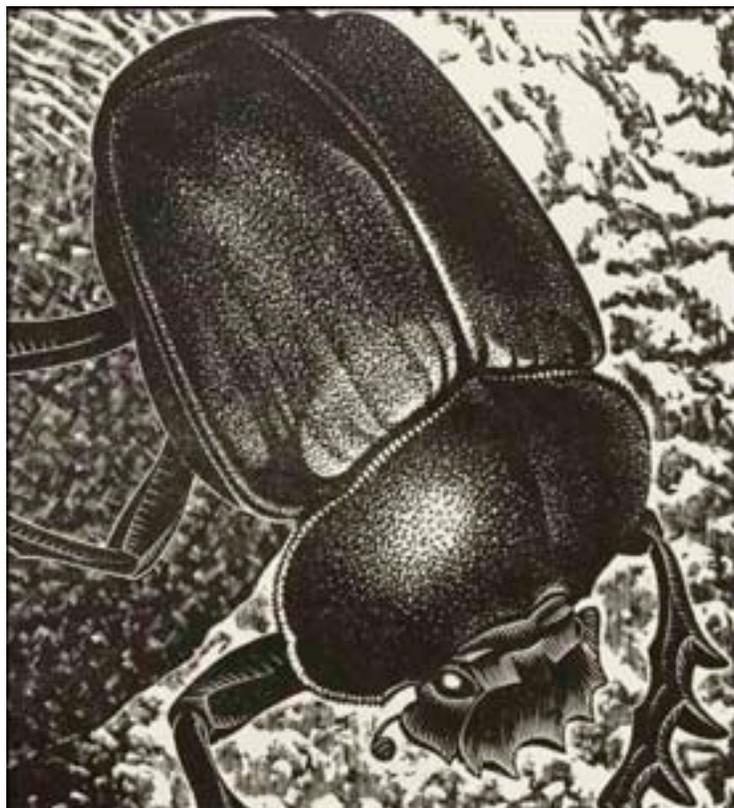
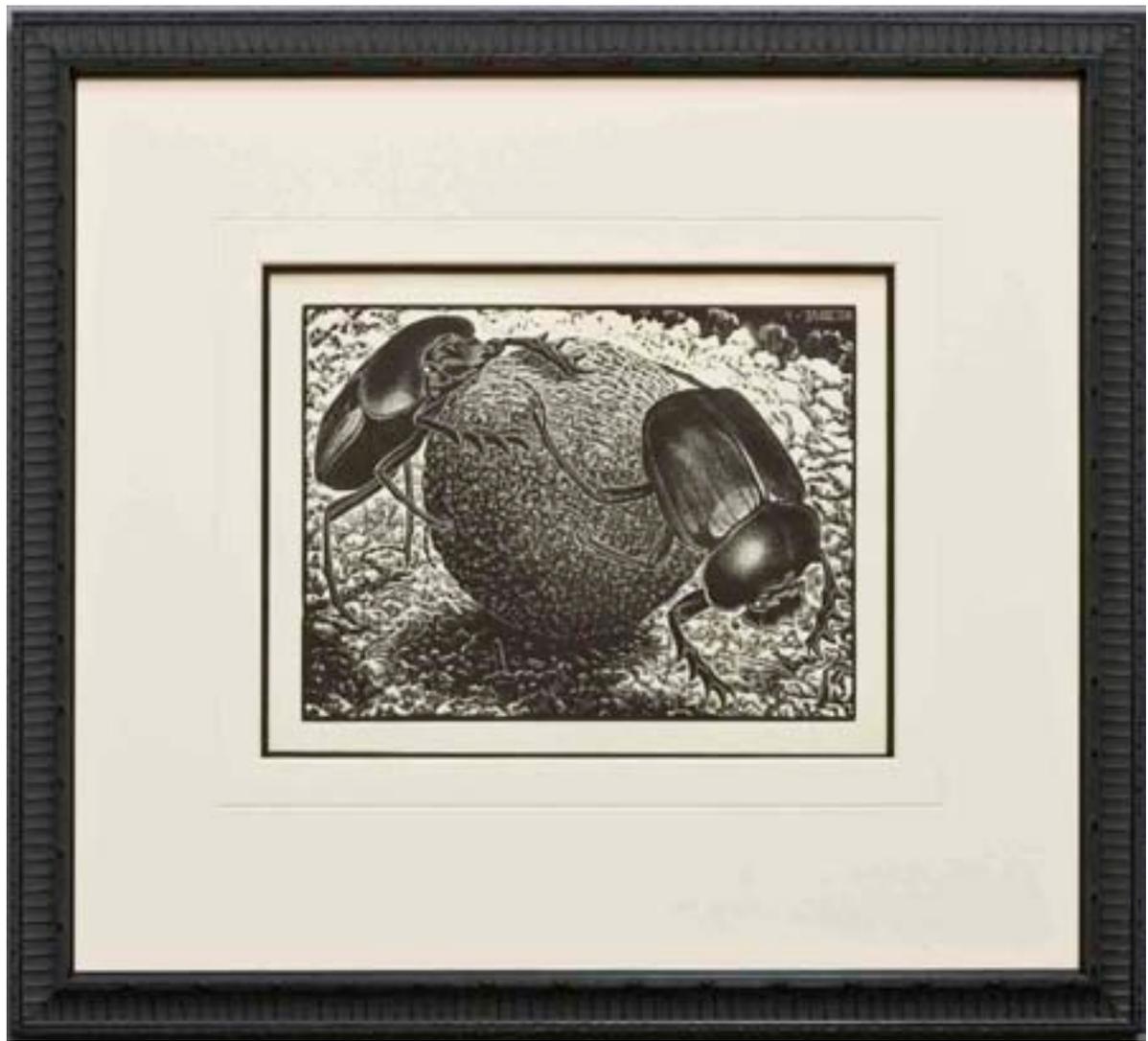
Flying Unicorns

(B.371) 1950 wood engraving (4½" X 3")

Escher's friends and publishers, L. & K. Asselbergs, owners of The Unicorn Press, commissioned this marvelous print from the artist for their personal collection and to present to their friends and colleagues in commemoration of the 1951 New Year. Each flying unicorn exhibits a different degree of shading, creating six different levels of intensity. Breaking away from traditional symmetry, the darkest unicorn kneels in repose and thus fits seamlessly with his companions.

Escher sent an example of this print to his friend Tromp Meesters in 1968 with this note: *"Unicorns...have the reputation of bringing happiness. That's why I offer them to you, a fraction of an infinitely large number to celebrate the coming of the new year."*



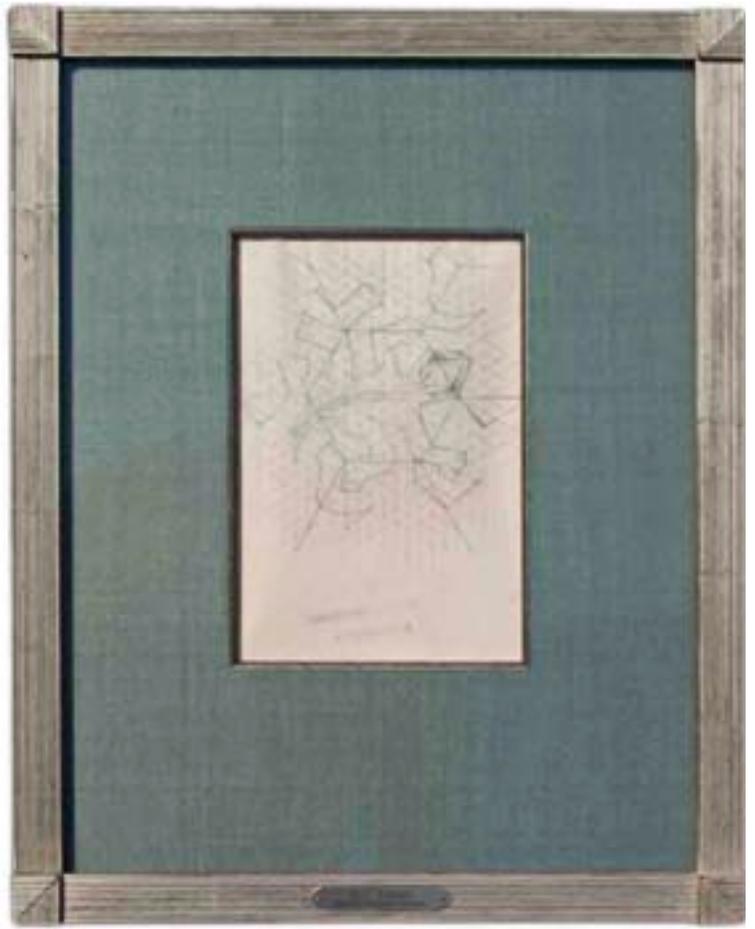


Scarabs (B.273) 1932 Woodcut (7"X 9½")

Escher was fascinated by peculiar creatures, and these charming insects (sometimes called dung beetles) gave the artist the opportunity to bring to life the shiny shells and unique surface of their rolling sphere. Escher conquered many challenges in creating this print: how to describe a sphere using tiny scratches of his engraving tools, how to create the glow of highlight on the scarab surface using only small dots of black that transition to white dots, and how to create a background that is at once realistic and other-worldly. Scarabs have been seen as magical since ancient times. They were mythologized by the Egyptians, and some believed that it was this creature that rolled the sun across the heavens.

When one of the first serious appreciations of Escher's art was published in a small, exclusive arts publication known as *Halcyon* in 1940, *Scarabs* was selected by Escher as one of four woodblock prints to be created in a special portfolio "De Graphicus M. C. Escher," accompanied with an article by G. H. 'sGravesande. Escher was particularly pleased by the vivid blacks and subtle highlights achieved in this printing.



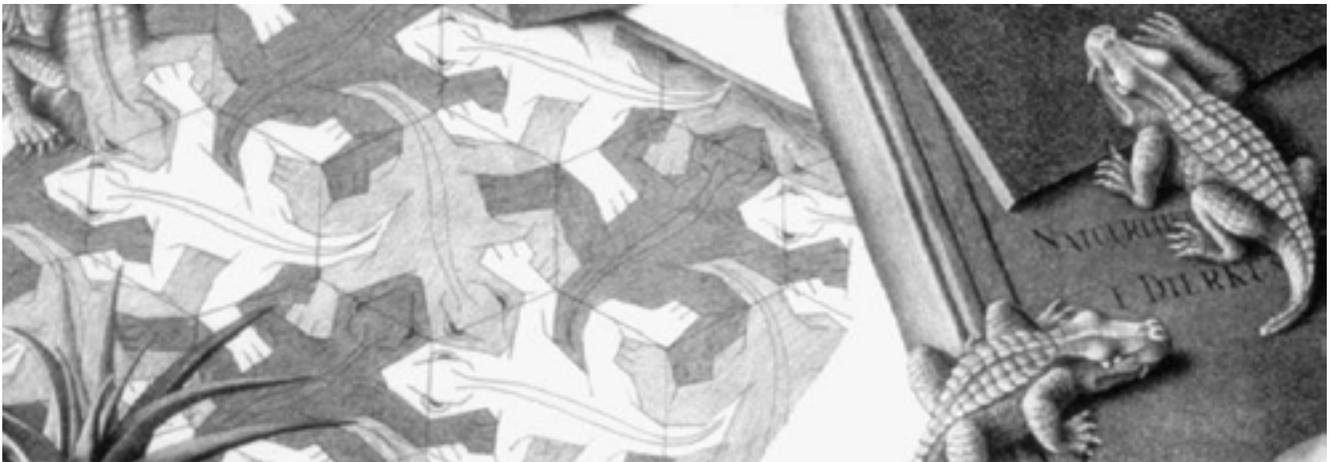


Reptiles

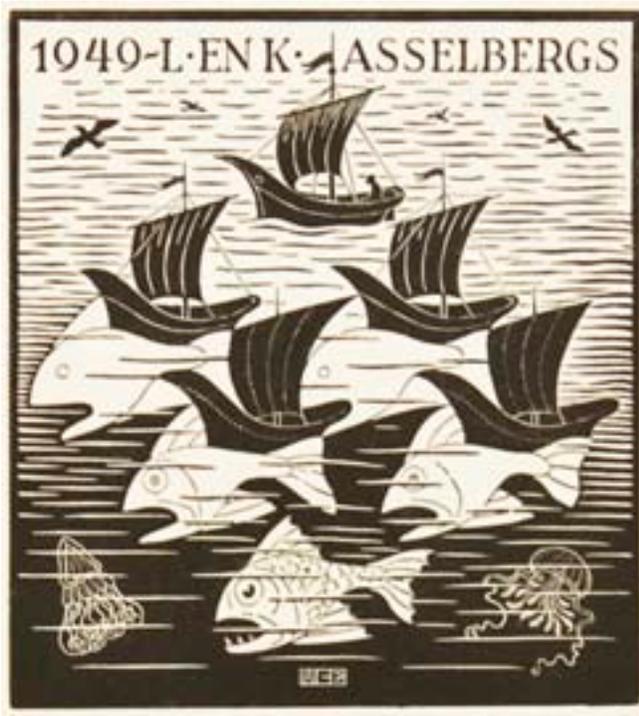
Pencil drawing c.1943 (9" X 6")

Formerly in the collection of the M. C. Escher Foundation (Stichting) and on loan to The Gementemuseum, The Hague, Holland

"Reptiles" is undoubtedly one of Escher's most memorable creations, and we are privileged here to see the underpinnings of this great work. The artist carefully drew his triangular grid for these creatures and overlaid his pattern with a hexagon that was the key to the symmetry of this design. We can see clearly Escher's careful placement of critical points that described the lizard, and he pays great attention to the eyes of the beast. It is the eyes, after all, that give the reptile its character, and these appear dimensional even in the flat notebook drawing Escher was recreating. The lettering at the bottom of this sheet is clearly the same book title found in Escher's final lithograph, so we can make an absolute connection between this drawing and the master print. Additionally testifying to the authenticity of this rare work, the drawing is noted in the margin: "T-129-x-1972," which is the inventory number under which works from Escher's personal collection were cataloged at the Gementemuseum, The Hague, whilst they were on loan from the Escher Foundation. This is believed to be the only drawing on offer and exhibition which is directly related to such an important Escher print.



M. C. Escher: "Reptiles" 1943 lithograph (detail)
© The M. C. Escher Company B.V. Baarn, Holland



Boats and Fish

(L. and K. Asselbergs 1949)

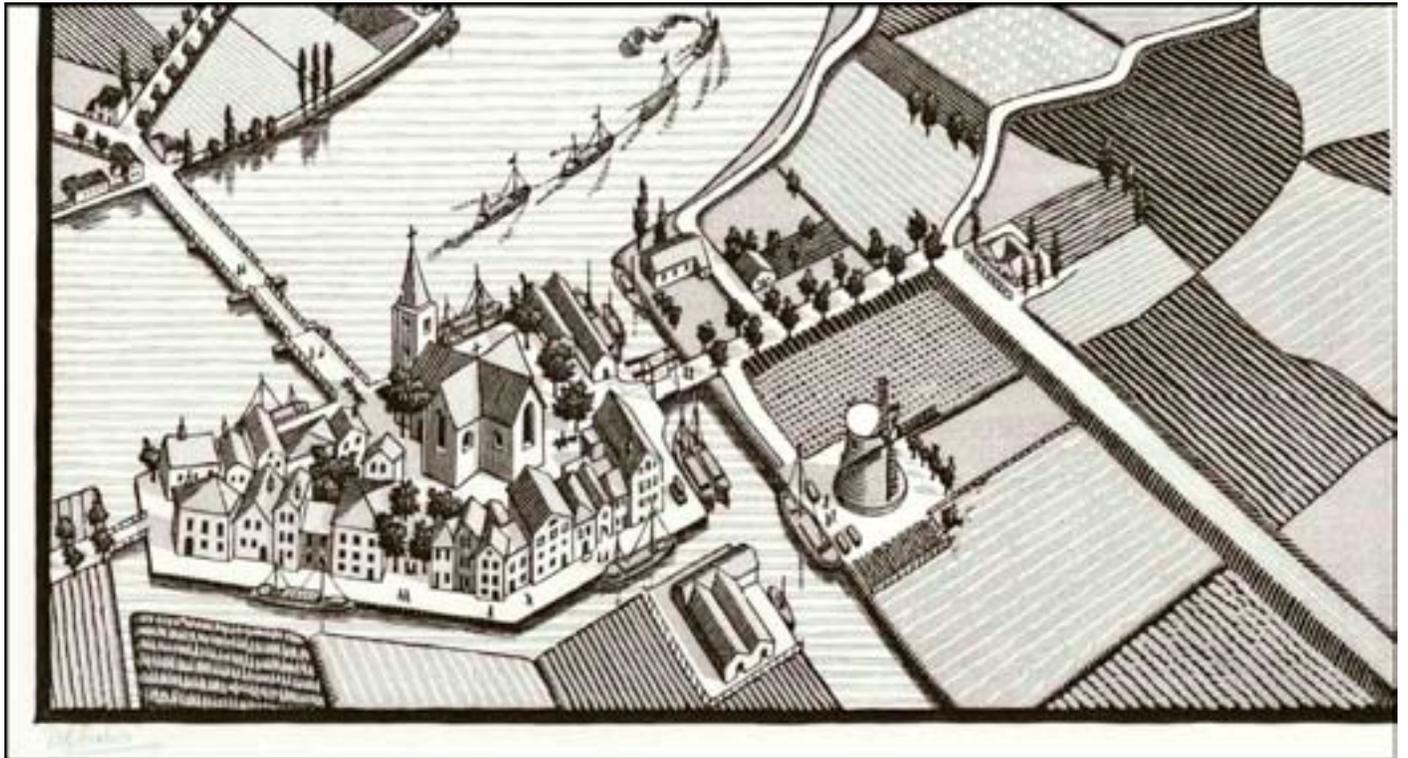
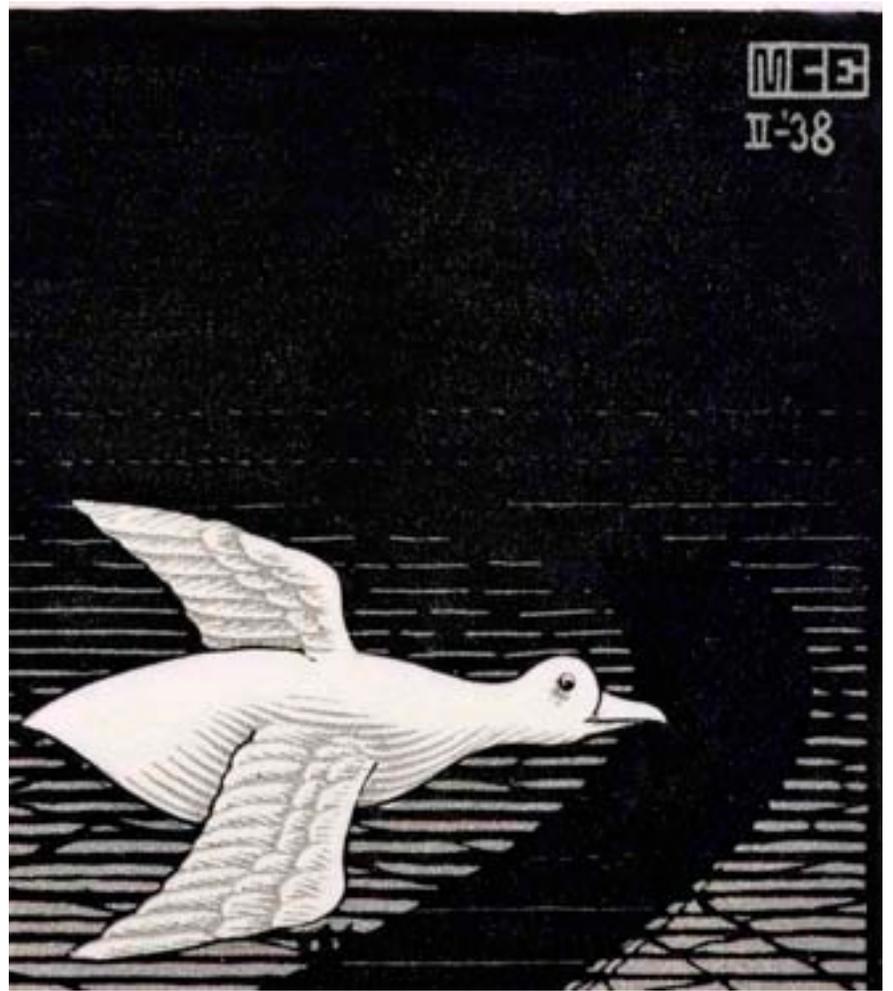
(B.360) 1949 woodcut (6" X 5 1/2")

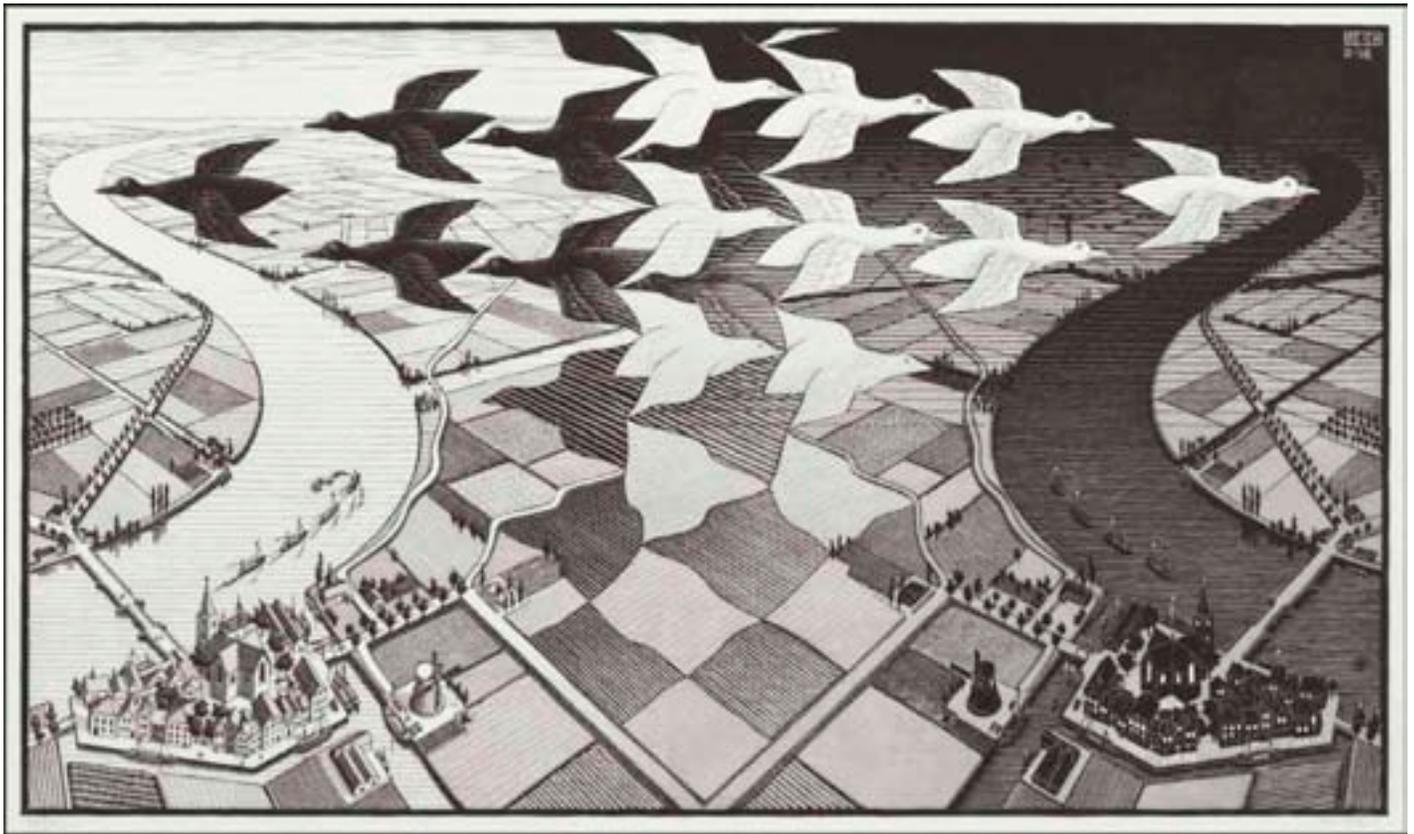
This is Escher's most complete small print where landscape combines with interlocking forms. The sea and the sky connect on many levels, and the perfect figures interact with their surroundings. This rare work was commissioned by noted art patrons L. & K. Asselbergs, who presented it to their friends and colleagues. Karel Asselbergs, whose photograph is reproduced at the right, was commissioner for refugees after World War II in Breda, Holland, and also had a private publishing company known as 'Eenhoorn Pres' (The Unicorn Press). This explains why The Asselbergs commissioned Escher a year later to create the woodcut "Unicorns" which is also featured in our exhibit. When Escher designed one of his last masterpieces, the extended version of Metamorphosis III in 1967, he returned to this wonderful motif of boats and fish and incorporated a similar transformation into this print, illustrated below.



(M. C. Escher, the Boats and Fish section of Metamorphosis III (B446))

© The M. C. Escher Company B.V. Baarn, Holland





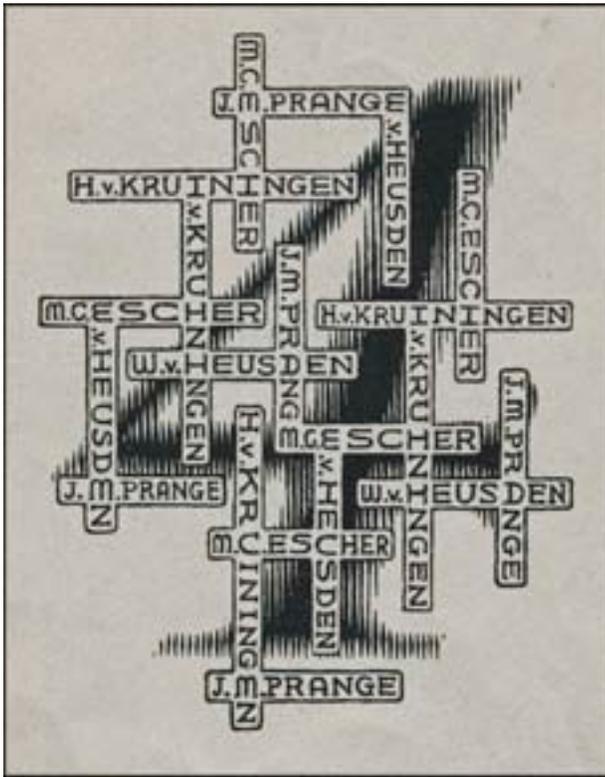
Day and Night

(B.303) 1938 color woodcut in grey & black, printed from two blocks, signed and noted 'eigen druk' ('self-printed') (15½"X 26½")

Often considered Escher's greatest woodcut, here we see two similar Dutch townscapes joined by curious fields that magically transform into flocks of birds soaring into dissimilar skies. Day and night join together as do the sky and the earth, living birds and plowed fields. A closer reveals that subtle changes occur as the town is illuminated at night and birds raise or lower their tails depending on which way they travel. These transformations are magical and yet seem utterly natural. Just and darkness and light are inseparable, so too are the birds above and the fields below. Escher carved two large woodblocks to print first the grey and then the black of this image, and precise alignment of these blocks was required to assure that tiny details, such as the illuminated window in the village at night, would print correctly. This spectacular example of the woodcut has been inscribed along the lower left margin in both Dutch and English as follows: "1 Dag en Nacht / Day and Night." Escher described



'Day and Night' as his 'so-called masterpiece,' and this was always the print that was most requested and acclaimed when Escher exhibited his prints. Since this monumental woodcut was printed on thin tissue paper and often poorly framed, it is remarkable today to find an original of 'Day and Night' in the pristine condition of this example. 'Day and Night' stands as the quintessential statement of Escher's philosophy and craft, and today this woodcut is considered one of the masterpieces in all of twentieth-century printmaking.



Four Graphic Artists

(Escher Crossword)

(B.381) 1952 Woodcut (4"X3")

Escher's art is often based on puzzles or designs that he called 'my little games.' Here Escher has brought together the names of four graphic artists in a crossword pattern similar to the blended words at the beginning of Escher's masterpiece 'Metamorphosis.' This print was used on the cover of an exhibition catalog



for a show featuring Escher's work together with three other Dutch printmakers, with whom, it was said, he had nothing in common. The original English introduction for this exhibit is reproduced below, and it gives an amusing insight into the isolation Escher must have felt as he created his unique artworks.

FOUR GRAPHIC ARTISTS have more or less accidentally arrived at a plan to hold a joint exhibition of their work for a certain length of time. They discovered that accommodation could be found for exhibitions of limited size, which are unsuited for associations with many members. Therefore they are beginning with an exhibition in 1952 in the Museum Boymans in Rotterdam, and in 1953 in the municipal museums in Arnhem, Zwolle and the Hague. A community of interest, composed of graphic artists whose work has absolutely nothing in common? One could put it that way. There is a bond between them however, and a very strong one: their complete devotion to an art and hand-craft which offers them, real graphic artists as they are, unlimited possibilities of expression.

The Lute

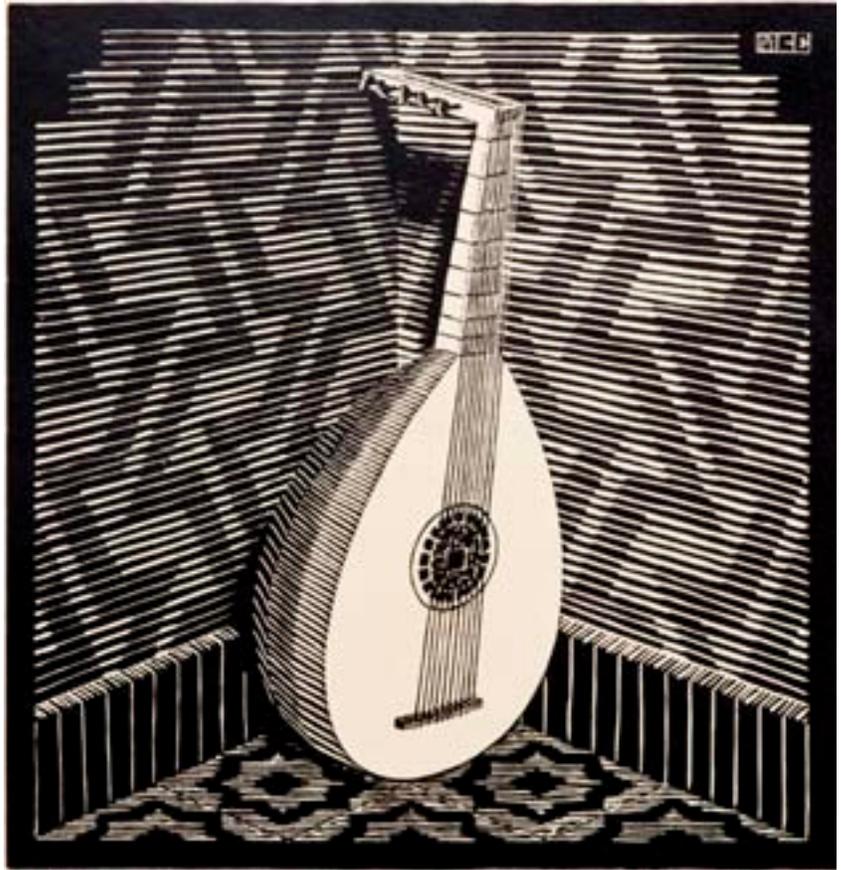
(B.164) 1931 woodcut (7"X 5 1/2")

From the "XXIV Emblemata" edition of 275

There is a close harmony between music and the patterns of Escher's artwork, as we can see here in the tile designs on the floor and the marvelous complexity of the interlocking shapes on the wall. Escher had visited the Alhambra in Grenada in 1922 and became fascinated with the possibilities of tiled designs. Although this woodcut predates his first serious exploration of turning geometric shapes into recognizable figures, the design Escher worked out here is an extremely sophisticated pattern, and is especially extraordinary as one realizes that this variety of black and white shapes can be created only by carving thicker and thinner lines into the artist's woodblock. Here Escher shows his mastery of the carved line in a design both magical and musical.

The Latin motto at the top of the page may be translated as "Muted Sounds Speak the Loudest." In this we find one of the underlying themes in Escher's art: harmony and order are often hidden from us, locked inside unseen atoms and the rhythms of nature, just as they may be present in the lute and in this corner of a room even when the strings are silent. We are given another interpretation of this theme in the Dutch poem carved at the bottom of the print. Translating this into English, we might read "Do you long for happiness and muted song? The chords of your youth will resound for centuries!" And so our very happiness is tied together with 'muted song,' and we may be redeemed by our memories of younger years and perhaps the wisdom of innocence.

This is a complicated interweaving of words, images and philosophical thought. By presenting us with three different approaches to a complex theme the artist helps us understand mysteries that lie beyond our normal sight and see the beauty in the world around us. This is an artwork that can both challenge us and engage us in an exploration that can lead to unexpected insights into Escher's genius. We can only speculate as to how many of the original edition of 275 examples of 'XXIV Emblemata' were lost during the War and in the seventy-five years since this print's creation.





Cycle

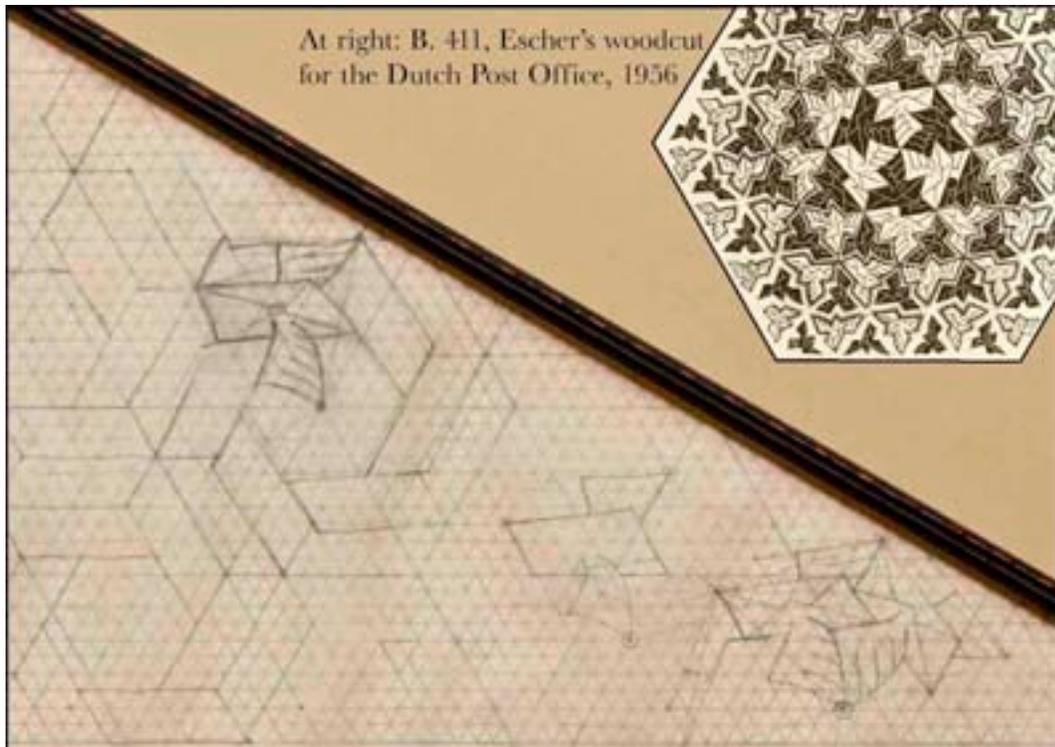
(B.305) 1938 lithograph, signed and numbered 3/12 (18³/₄" X 11")

Escher has transformed stairways similar to those he drew in 'Scanno.' Here we see a boy running from a tower and down some steps. His arms are raised in a somewhat awkward salutation, and he's smiling, perhaps in secret reverie. His journey is short and yet this passage encompasses his entire world. As he descends the stairs a transformation occurs that is as miraculous as any myth. In a few steps he metamorphosizes into marble and what was once an actor becomes his stage. Beyond the tower is a serene landscape, perhaps part of the Tuscan countryside or maybe a small portion of paradise. "Cycle" can be seen as an archetypal image of the universe created from our own being. Is everything our imagining? Where does our interior landscape end and the countryside begin? What is the essential difference between body and stone, and why can we find soul in one and not the other? By raising such fascinating questions, perhaps Escher proposes that everything from the distant hills to our outstretched hands is a part of a complex, ever-changing and often invisible cycle.



Isometric Graph with Interlocking Fish and Flying Envelopes Pencil drawing, ca. 1955-1956 (16" X 9")

ex collection of the M. C. Escher Foundation and previously on loan to the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, Holland #T141-x-1972
Escher brought to life three separate symmetry motifs in this most unusual drawing on triangular graph paper. The six birds appeared as a wood engraving vignette with thirteen fish in 1954 (B.398), the hexagonal fish were the subject of a wood engraving in 1955 (B. 406), and the little flying envelopes appeared both in a small print commissioned by the Dutch Post Office and again in *Metamorphosis III* of 1967 (B.446). This unique frame follows the shape of Escher's drawing.



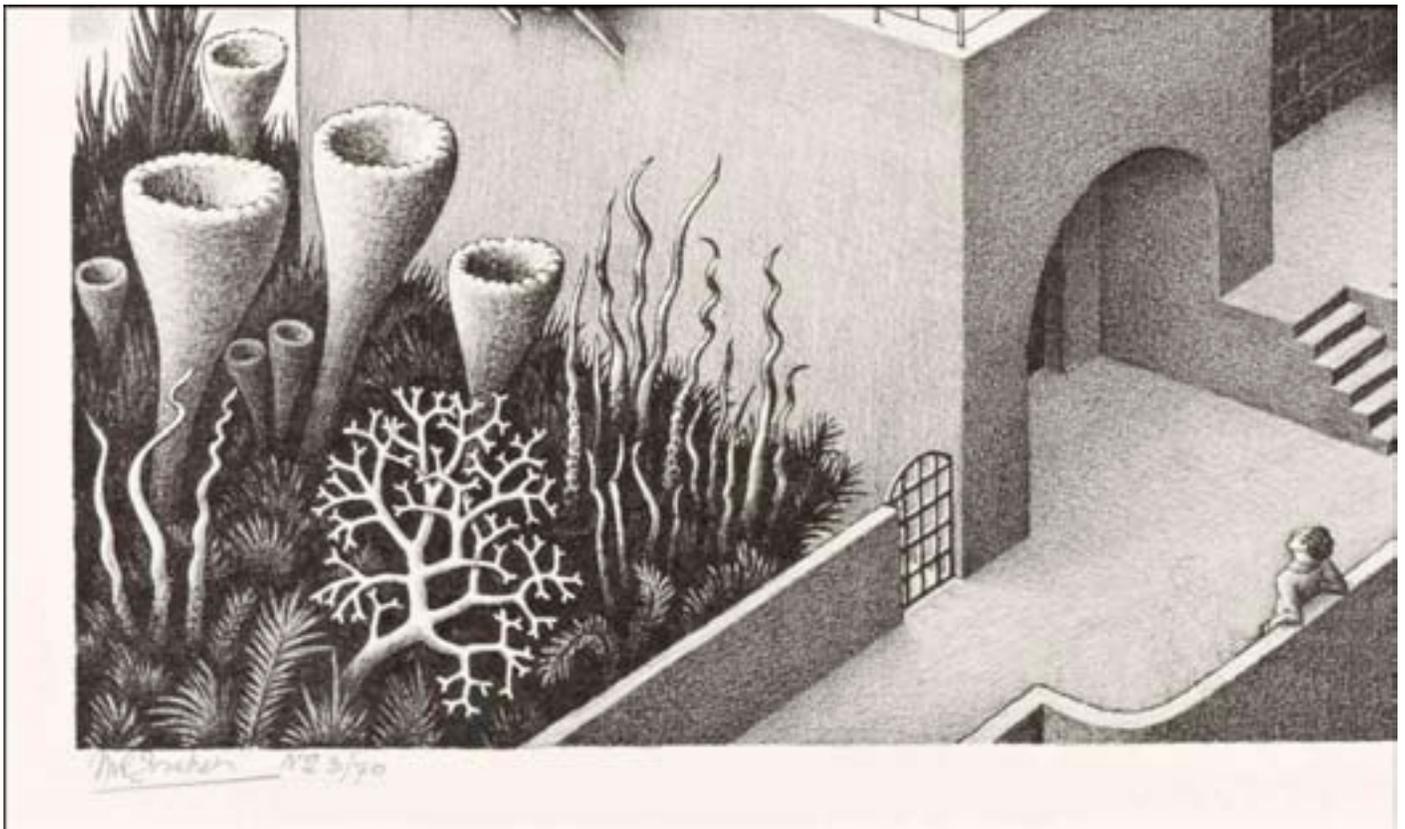
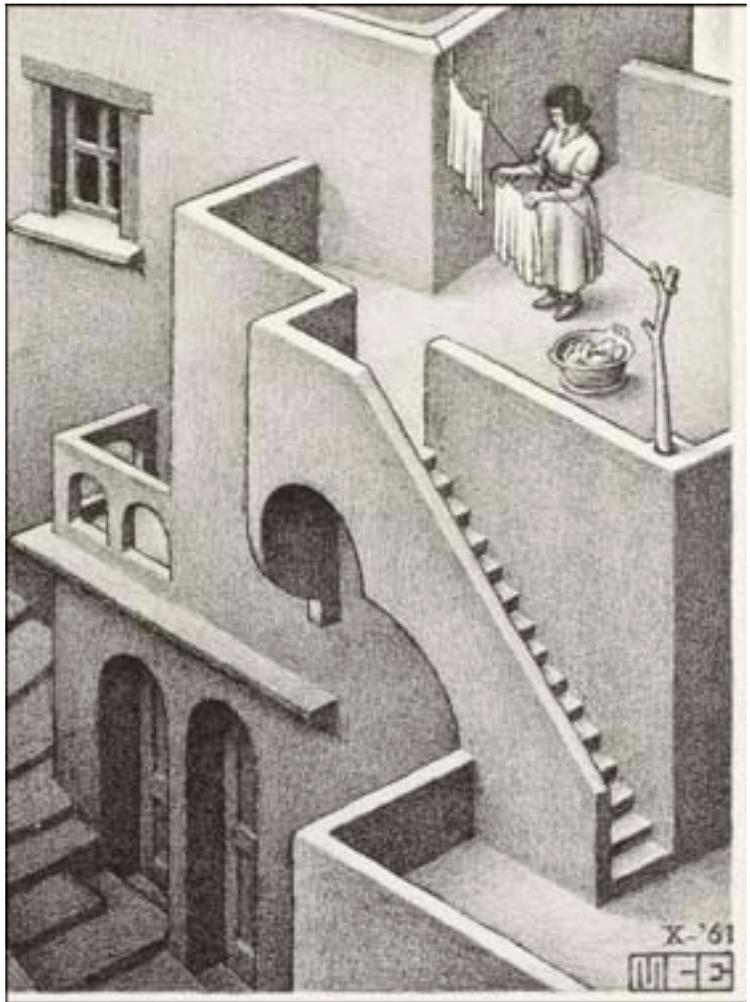
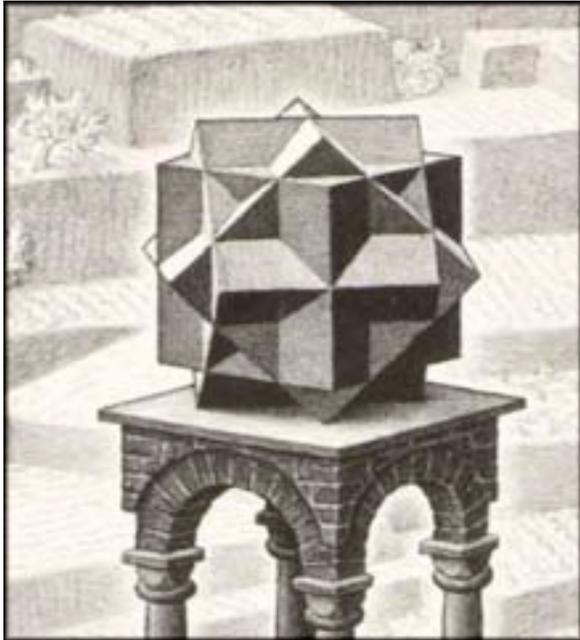


Waterfall

(B.339) 1961 Lithograph, Signed and numbered 3/70 from the rare first edition of this important print (15" X11³/₄")

Somewhere in southern Italy, perhaps near the artist's favorite town of Ravello, Escher created this miraculous mill, powered by a never-ending stream that zig-zags through ever-rising channels and continuously turns a waterwheel. We seem to have discovered the secret of perpetual motion, but for the woman in the courtyard such miracles are as commonplace as hanging her laundry on a line. There is a fantastic garden next to the mill, filled with plants Escher had drawn decades earlier as he traveled in search of remarkable scenes to record in his notebooks and prints.

Waterfall was one of Escher most frequently-requested prints, and he created four small editions totaling just 280 signed examples of this work. This example from the rare first edition of this important print is pristine, with rich tones and a crisp, perfect signature. In this early impression it is possible to see that Escher originally placed a figure facing away from the building, leaning on the railing beside the fellow who now gazes at the scene while he rests on his elbows. This 'ghost' is just one of the remarkable discoveries that become clear as one looks at a gorgeous early impression of this print, and it is a clear example of why an original print holds magic that it is nearly impossible to capture in a reproduction.





Op 1 mei 1963 wordt het feit herdacht dat het dan juist 75 jaar geleden is dat C. Woud in Zaandijk een blikslagerij begon. Uit dit bedrijfje, dat zich voorspoedig ontwikkelde en dat later de N.V. Zaanlandsche Blikfabriek v/h Woud & Schaap heette, ontstond in 1912 door fusie met de N.V. tot Exploitatie van Verwer's fabrieken de N.V. De Vereenigde Blikfabrieken.

De directie van de N.V. De Vereenigde Blikfabrieken heeft het genoegen U een speciaal voor dit jubileum vervaardigd geschenk aan te bieden. Deze trommel van tot dusver zeer ongebruikelijke vorm werd ontworpen door de grafische kunstenaar M. C. Escher te Baarn. Hij heeft uit de reeds in de oudheid bekende vijf regelmatige stereometrische veelvlakken, t.w. het viervlak, de kubus, het achthoek, het twaalfvlak en het twintigvlak, dit laatste, ofwel de icosaeder, gekozen en het decor ontworpen. Wij zijn ons bewust, dat deze klassieke vormgeving van streng mathematische aard, de functie als gebruiksvoorwerp naar de achtergrond dringt. Ten einde hier enigermate aan tegemoet te komen hebben wij het grondvlak van een afwijkende bedrukking voorzien.

The Icosahedral Box

1963 metalwork box (illustrated in "M. C. Escher: His Life and Complete Graphic Work" page 151 (6"X 6"))

Designed by Escher and manufactured to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the company "N. V. De Vereenigde Blikfabrieken"

Escher was asked to design a very special box for the anniversary of this company, and he created the set of paper models with symmetry outlines seen in the photograph above. When he presented the challenging idea of creating a 20-sided box the company agreed, though the complexity of the design was more difficult than anything done before. In the rare workshop photograph at the top of this page we see the box being assembled. Escher's design of starfish and shells appears so natural it is easy to overlook the intricate symmetry of this design, which is particularly brilliant in the way that the five-sided starfish match the structure of the box, surrounding three shells on every side. Originally the box was intended to hold a small amount of chocolate, but since this icosahedron had a surprisingly large interior volume the company had to supply much more chocolate than they had ever intended. Our example is in remarkable condition and includes the exceedingly rare original inserts, one plain and one with commentary about the company and Escher's art. I am pleased to present here the first translation of this important document: "May 1, 1963 commemorates the 75th anniversary of the founding of C. Woud at Zaandijk as a tin manufacturer... later known as the 'N.V. De Vereenigde Blikfabrieken' (United Can Factory)."

“The directors of the United Can Factory are pleased to present you with a specially-crafted anniversary gift. This box has a very unusual shape, rarely utilized before, and is designed by graphic artist M. C. Escher from Baarn. He is familiar with the stereometric five regular polyhedra, which have been known since antiquity. These are namely the tetrahedron, the cube, the octahedron, the dodecahedron and the icosahedron. This last one, the icosahedron, was selected by the artist and is decorated here. A formal design with such rigorous mathematical structure forces the function as a box to become somewhat less obvious. In order to clarify that, here the base is embellished with the distinct decorative design [of the artist’s monogram, dates, and our company's name.]”



Readers Banish Troubles

(B.325) 1942 wood engraving (3"X 2½")

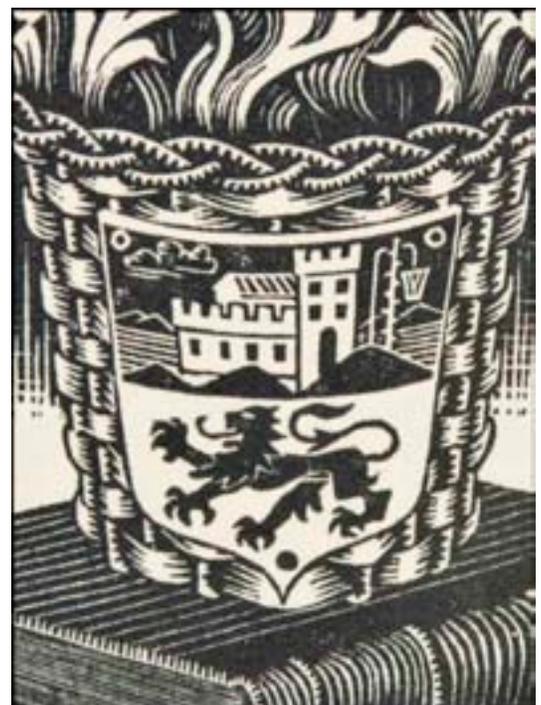
Through a small window we see a charming Dutch landscape, while in a shadowy room a monk concentrates on his book. A windmill is a symbol of constant work, as is reading for this monk. The verse above translates as "Readers Banish Troubles" and on the window frame is inscribed the inspirational motto: "Work and Persistence."



The Book and Burning Basket

(B.329) 1943 wood engraving (3"X 2½")

Van Dishoeck was a Dutch publisher who knew Escher well, and the print that Escher created for him is considered one of the artist's finest small prints. Here we see both personal icons and mysteries: a book and an embellished woven basket mysteriously in flames. The frame is engraved white gold leaf.





Grasshopper

(B.271) 1935 Woodcut (7"X 9½") Escher's son George found a grasshopper on the stairs of their home in Rome, and he recalled years later how his father has taken the creature up to his studio and meticulously copied its complex rhythmic surface patterns. Escher's explanation was insightful and poignant: "In order to see it, I had to draw it!" The wood engraving is a remarkable tour-de-force of patterning. The year this print was created, 1935, was a critical period for Escher: it was to be his last year in Rome, and his return to Holland would mark the transition of his work from representation of the world to explorations of his perceptions. In this print we see the artist's fascination with pattern infusing his work with a magical presence. This small unsigned edition was printed in 1940 by the arts journal 'Halcyon' and Escher himself was astounded by the detail captured in this printing.

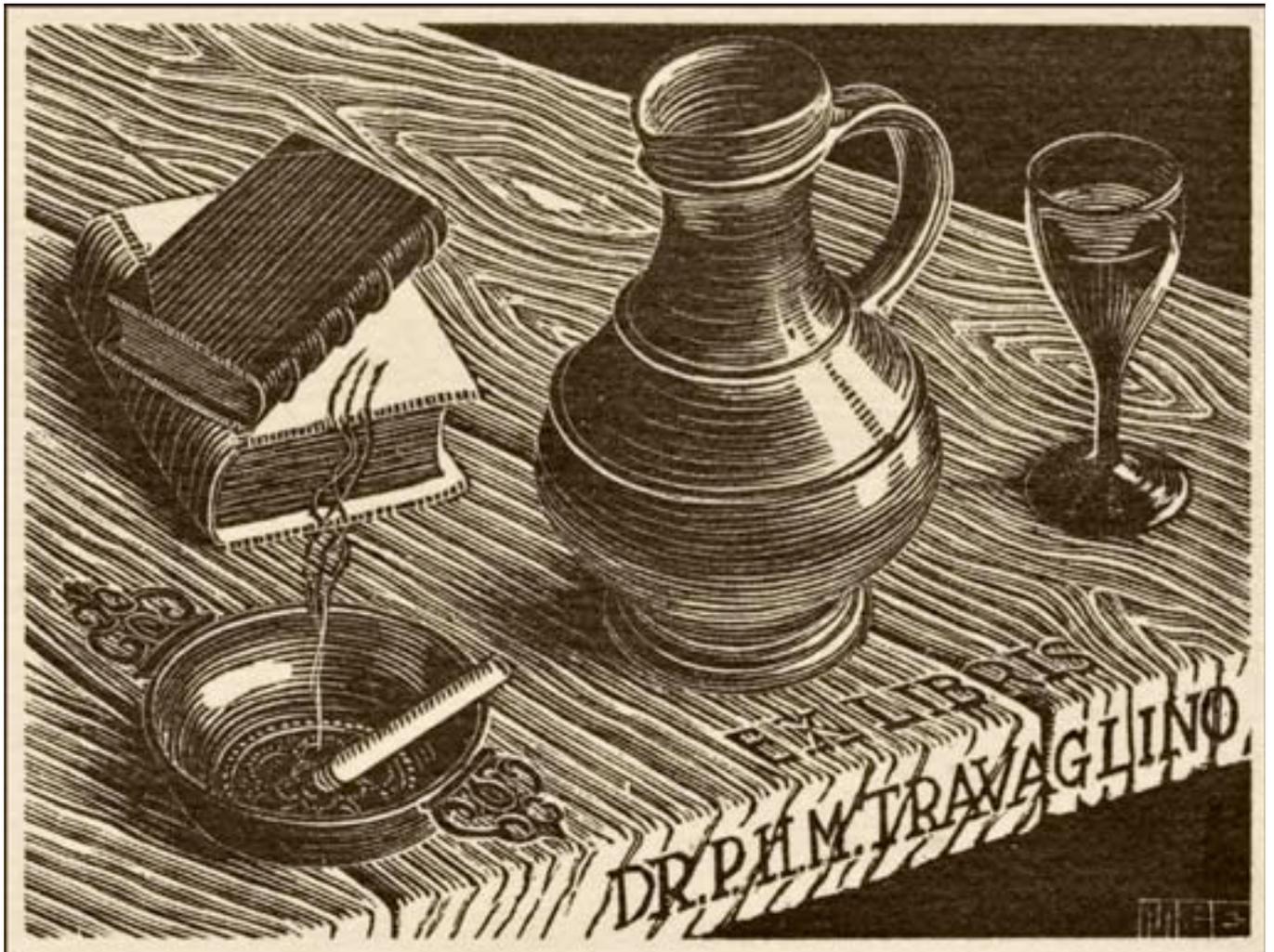
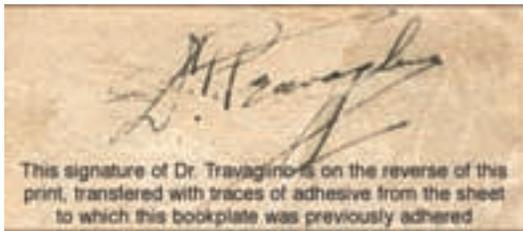


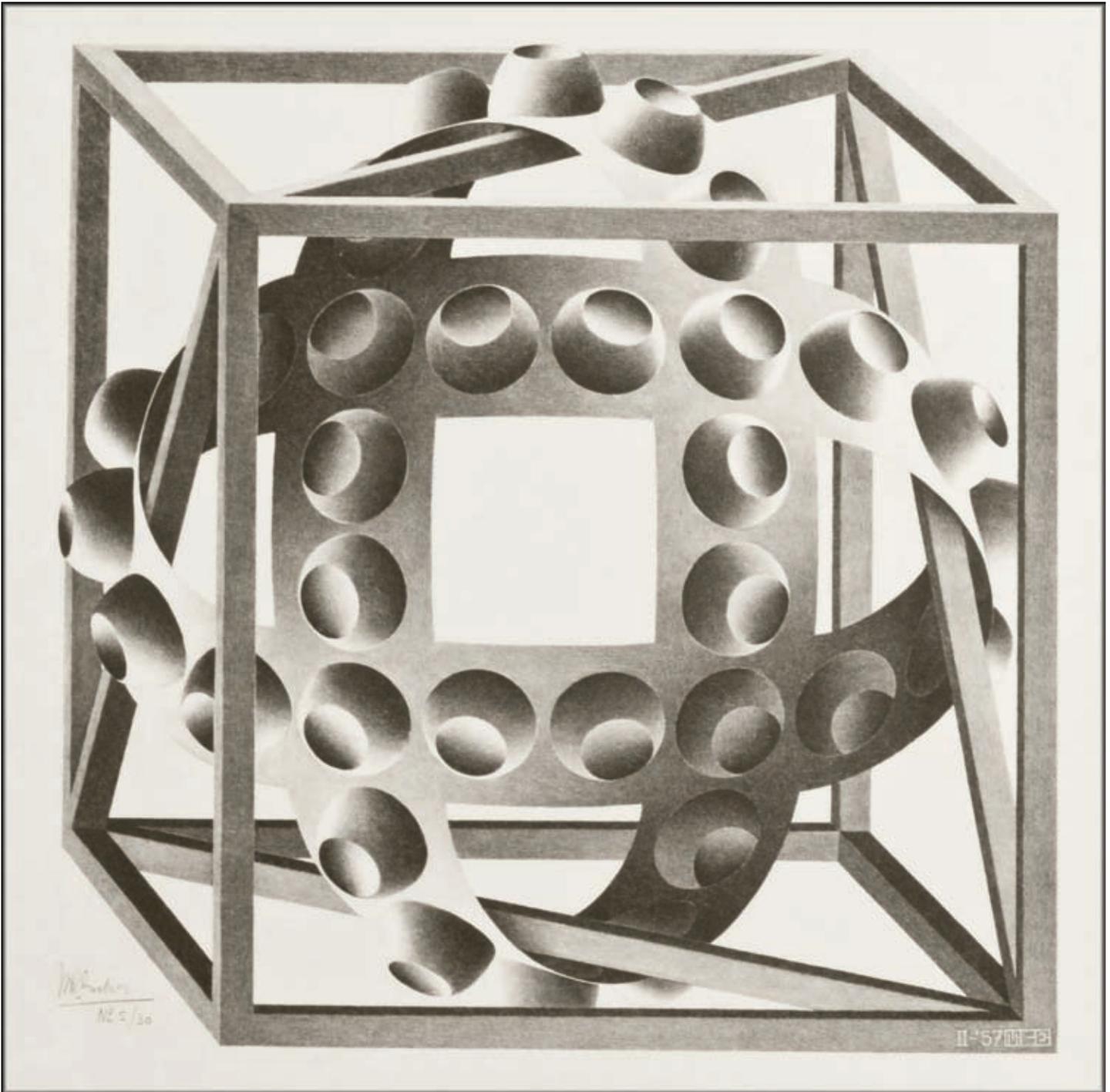
Table Still Life

(Ex Libris Dr. P.H.M. Travaglino)

(B.321) 1940 wood engraving (2½" X 3")

This is Escher's first commissioned woodcut or ex libris print following the transformation of the artist's work that occurred when he moved from Italy back to Holland and began focusing on illusionary and transformative imagery. This is a masterpiece in miniature: here we see Escher's printmaking skill reach new heights in expressive power. The table pushes forward in the picture plane and the objects depicted show an astonishing range of materials and textures. We see glass, metal, wood and paper; even the transparency of liquid and the delicate wisp of smoke rising about the ashtray. Dr. Travaglino was a psychologist, and we can only imagine the impact that Escher's work had on him, since the artist had finished his monumental masterpiece "Metamorphosis II" in the month prior to completing this miniature.

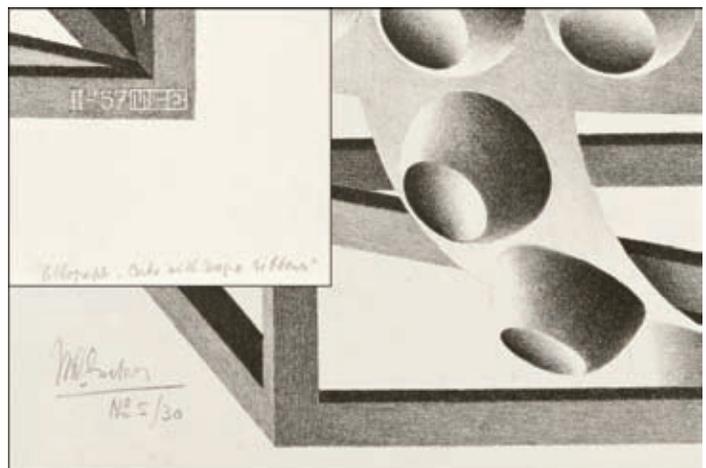
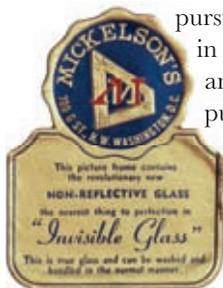


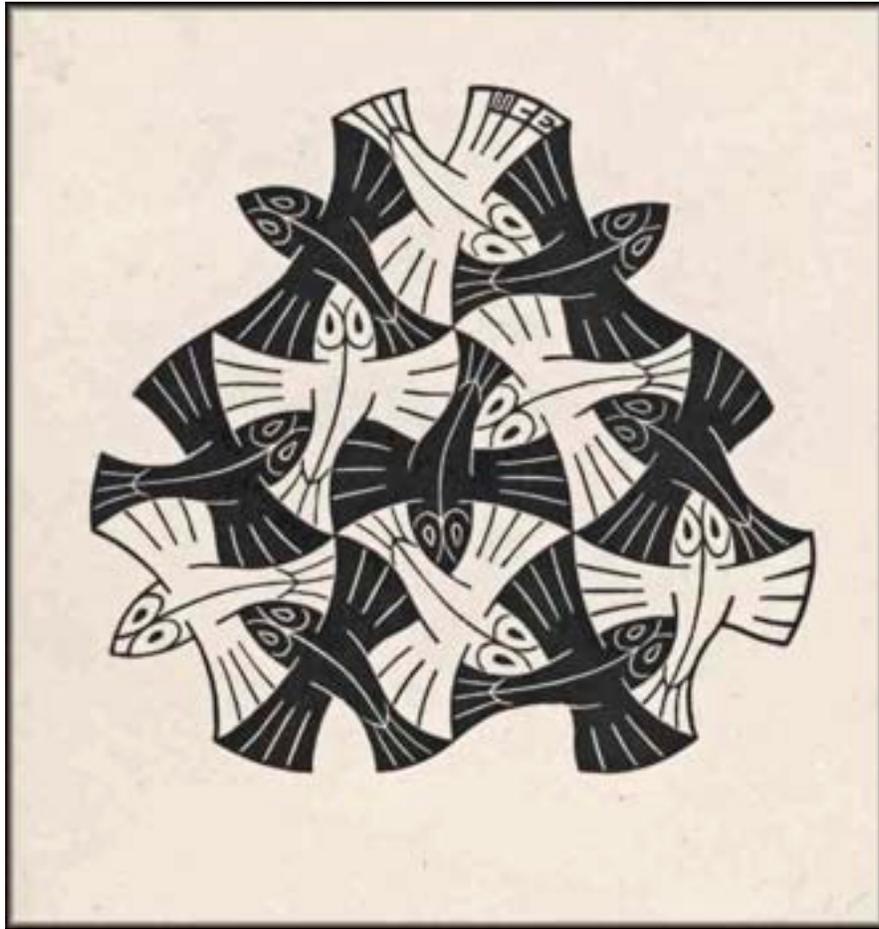


Cube With Magic Ribbons

(B.415) 1957 Lithograph, signed and numbered 5/30 (12" X 12")

This is one of Escher's rarest lithographs, created in an edition of only thirty examples, and it one of his most metaphysical. Magic ribbons exist only in our mind's eye, and one of Escher's most passionate pursuits was to make impossible constructions visible in his prints. As these ribbons circle the cube, front and back change places, and the bands are either punctuated with domes or hollows depending how we choose to see them. This print was originally acquired from Mickelson's in Washington D.C., one of Escher's first agents in America, and their fifty-year-old label with glazing notes still accompanies the artwork.





Thirteen Flying Fish
(Six White Fish & Seven Black Fish)
 (B.398) 1954 wood engraving (3" X 3 1/4")

This is one of the very few small-format graphics by Escher that features a pure interlocking design, and its graceful forms can hide the fact that the mathematical symmetry underlying these creatures is astoundingly complex.

This example was printed on the invitation card for the exhibition of the work of M. C. Escher at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, on the occasion of the International Mathematical Conference, 27 August – 26 September 1954. The noted crystallographer Carolyn McGillavry became aware of Escher's work at this time and was anxious to spread the word about his marvelous prints. McGillavry organized a special exhibition of Escher's work in Cambridge, England, in 1960 for the International Union of Crystallography, where once again Thirteen Flying Fish was the image chosen to be printed on the cover of their exhibition catalog. This exposure, together with Escher's earlier museum exhibitions, brought international recognition to the artist's work and led to further notoriety and exhibitions in the United States. Today we can see this printing of 'Thirteen Flying Fish' during the Mathematical Conference of 1954 as one of the starting points for the wide interdisciplinary enjoyment that Escher's work continues to enjoy today.

These energetic creatures are based on Escher's Symmetry Drawing #99, (red and grey flying fish: reproduced below) which he created the same year as this wood engraving.



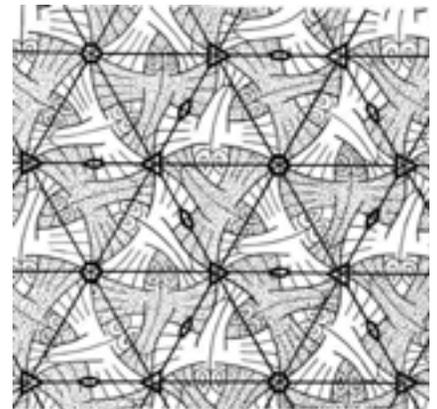
© The M. C. Escher Company B.V.
 Baarn, Holland



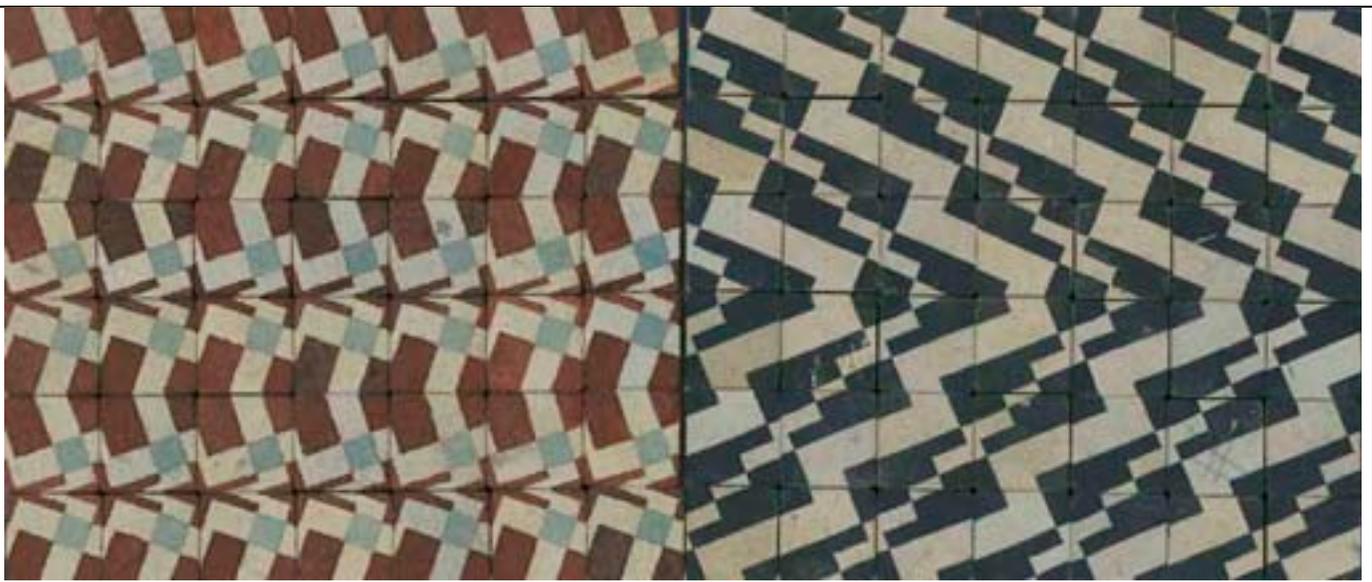
Escher incorporated this tessellation into another woodcut in "The Regular Division of the Plane."



Escher created the illustration below in which he carefully showed the complexity of this design's three rotation points which create two-fold, three-fold and six-fold rotation



© The M. C. Escher Company B.V.
 Baarn, Holland

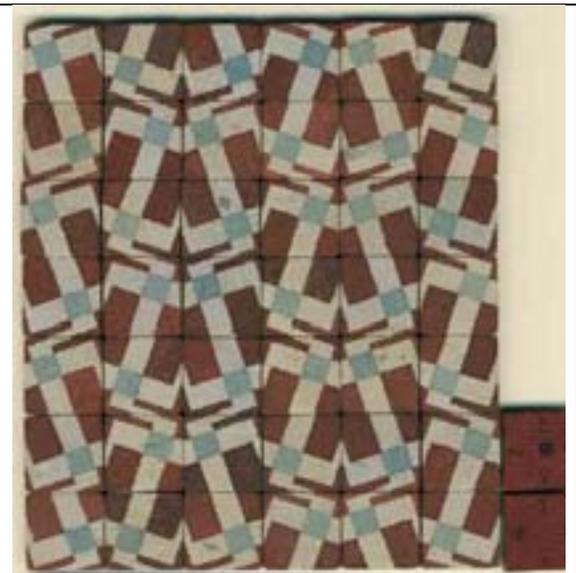


Combinatorial Tiles

42 Unique printed and hand-painted linoleum block tiles, with two linoblock printing blocks, in the artist's original fabric-lined metal box ca. 1940 (presented by M. C. Escher to his friend Bruno Ernst, author of "The Magic Mirror of M. C. Escher")

The black sides stamped from two linoblocks, painted on the reverse in brick orange and blue, numbered on the edges 1-2-3-4 & 1-2-3-4 Illustrated in Doris Schattschneider: *Visions of Symmetry*, page 46, with extensive commentary

The illustration above shows two arrangements of the tiles. The set consists of 42 linoleum tiles, black and ivory on one side and colored on the reverse. The 42 tiles divide into two sets of 21 tiles of a single pattern and 21 tiles that are the mirror reflection of that pattern. The combinations and patterns that these tiles create are astounding, and illustrate Escher's deep love for visual geometry. Related to tessellations, these tiles also explore combinatorial mathematics. Escher kept these tiles in this green cigar box which he lined with decorative fabric. This original box with these unique blocks and tiles is photographed below with several pencils belonging to Jetta and M. C. Escher. (pencils not for sale)





Scholastica (“S”)

(B.189) 1932 woodcut (3”X 2½”)

(from ‘Scholastica,’ a rare pencil signed proof, with date of creation added)

“Scholastica was not as old as she appeared,” wrote Jan Walch in the book “The Terrifying Adventures of Scholastica,” for which Escher created nineteen remarkable woodcuts. It is exceptionally rare to find proof prints separate from the printed edition of the book, and this woodcut portrait of the book’s protagonist is a masterful combination of typography, imagery, and graphic technique. To create such drama – to squeeze so much power within a small constricting space – is a tour de force of Escher’s craft. Note the flowing lines of Scholastica’s hair that add gentle beauty and humanity to her imposing appearance. She has been called a witch, but ultimately it is not for us to judge such things. She was compelled by powers beyond understanding, and so her smile is both comforting and startling. This example was at one time in the collection of Vorpal Gallery, one of the major early exhibitors of Escher’s work in the United States.



This is a translation of the first pages of 'The Terrifying Adventures of Scholastica,' which was published in Holland in 1932 and has never been published in English. The story is by Dutch author Jan Walch (1878-1946), and M. C. Escher (1898-1972) created six full-page woodcut illustrations as well as twelve illuminated initials and a concluding embellishment for the volume.

This translation is printed in a typeface similar to that used in the original book.

Translated from the original Dutch by Bert Groeneveld, edited by Jeffrey Price.

THE TERRIFYING ADVENTURES OF SCHOLASTICA

ANNO DOMINI MDLIV

Scholastica, the housemaid of the pastor of the parish of Saint Michael's church in Oudewater, was very old. At least that was the impression she made on those who saw her. She was also very ugly, which she had been ever since her childhood. One might add that she was quick to find fault in others, she was extraordinarily grumpy, and she spoke in a screeching voice. These were also qualities she had possessed all her life, except that they had grown somewhat worse over the years.

These characteristics were certainly not very nice, but one can at least say that they were compatible and they all fit well together: Scholastica produced a strong and consistent impression: one of unmitigated repulsion. Is it necessary to describe her in greater detail? One might try to describe her crooked back, her flat feet, her halting, shuffling way of walking, the sly look from her grey-green eyes, her pinched mouth in which one could see one greenish, upright tooth and one hanging downward like a stalactite in a gloomy cavern; and this only on the rare occasion when she opened her tightly pressed lips to let out a scathing slanderous remark at some unfortunate neighbor.

Aemilius, the pastor, heard the lamentations of his parishioners for keeping such a woman in his house. But then the pious man smiled his gentle conciliatory smile, a smile that through its radiance swept away all those worldly troubles like the sun does when it strikes rotting tree trunks on the cinder strewn ground around the gallows. Certainly his life in the parsonage, in the shadow of the gloomy old church, was far from joyous, but he was one of those gentle chosen people who consider all earthly discomfort as trials which make one ever more eager to raise one's eyes up to heaven. That is how he calmly endured Scholastica's venomous whims and outbursts; with gentle acceptance, and each sour expression was met with a gentle loving look in return, much as the good Lord might look down on His wayward, tortured flock.



The Terrifying Adventures of Scholastica

(B.188) 1932 woodcut from "De Vreeselijke Avonturen van Scholastica" (4" X 6") (edition of 285, from the cover of the book)

Escher was masterful at combining typography with his images, so here we see Scholastica flying through the air – and through the book’s title! – on a broomstick. One might ask, “is she a witch, or simply a woman led astray by her passions?” Scholastica’s adventures are, indeed, terrifying, but they are also exquisitely exciting and irresistibly passionate. Escher himself was drawn to explore beyond the ordinary veil of reality, and so it is fitting that he wished to illustrate such a story. The text by fellow Dutchman Jan Walch gave Escher much to explore in his graphic imagery that is always full of metaphors, dramatic contrasts and depth.

The Seven-headed Demon (“V”)

(B.198) White Transfer Drawing (3”X 2½”)

M. C. Escher wrote that he was ‘a printmaker, heart and soul,’ and he seldom exhibited and never sold his drawings and preliminary designs. As he visualized and created a woodcut he would sketch his designs in a small notebook, and then finalize his images when he was ready to carve his woodblock. For many of Escher’s works there are no matching, finished drawings, but in order to carve his blocks he would trace a final design onto the wood using tracing paper. This is the drawing that Escher used to transfer his design for this extraordinary miniature onto his woodblock. No drawings such as this have been reproduced in any Escher literature, and only a small number of these drawings survived, all of which are in museum collections of Escher’s work. In keeping with the artist’s frugal nature, he would re-use his pieces of transfer paper, and so we often see overlapping multiple images on a single sheet. This explains the graphic letter ‘S’ near the top of this drawing: we know that Escher had the lettering for another woodcut (“FINIS”) on this same sheet.



“The Seven-headed Demon”
Escher’s 1932 woodcut from
“The Terrifying Adventures
of Scholastica”



Scholastica: The Feast in the Forest

(B.201) 1932 woodcut and wood engraving (9" X 6 5/8")

This may well be considered Escher's most intensely visionary print, its surreal scene surpassing even Bosch in capturing creatures from fantasies, fears, and fables swooping out of the night, crowding across the page with terrifying and tantalizing abandon. The radiant goat-king has gathered his minions before him on midsummer night, and this is the moment when Scholastica, now both a woman and an owl, must choose once and for all time whether she will join with these wild creatures or return to her home in the village parsonage. This conflict between passion and reason is one of the fundamental struggles of humankind, played out here as Europe stood on the threshold of war, by a master printmaker in search of meaning, artistic validation, and an audience for his complex work.





The Well (WE ARE COMING OUT OF IT!)

(B.345) 1946 wood engraving (4½" X 4")

This is considered the most powerful and complex of Escher's small-format prints. The grid-lined walls and dramatic zenith perspective are reminiscent of the woodcut "Other World," which Escher was working on at approximately the same time as this print. We see hands climbing through a twisting octagonal well toward freedom – toward sunlight, birds, a tree in full bloom - and the security of a home. Hope and expectation, as well as the feeling of emerging from a life in a dark pit, were appropriate and monumental themes for the new year as 1946 drew to a close. Perhaps nowhere else in Escher's art did the artist create so much emotional power through the controlled gouging of his woodcutter's chisel. The entirely unsigned edition was commissioned by the Nederlandse Ex Libris Kring (an artists' and print collector's society in the Netherlands) to honor the Dutch underground after the Second World War. The frame echoes the construction of this fantastic and highly improbable eight-sided well.





Other World

(B.348) 1947 wood engraving and woodcut in black, brown, and green (12½" X 10¼")

Signed and noted 'eigen druk' (self-printed)

Certainly one of Escher's greatest prints, "Other World" presents us with three simultaneous realities within a single room. Escher's own description of this print was rather straightforward. He wrote, "Each plane of the building, which unites nadir, horizon and zenith, has a threefold function. For instance, the rear plane in the center serves as a wall in relation to the horizon, a floor in connection with the view through the top opening and a ceiling so far as the view towards the starry sky is concerned." These co-existing realities might also reflect our own changing perspectives and the ambiguity of perception. The precisely patterned walls assure us that the rendering is exact and accurate, so we feel on firm ground as we explore these contradictory views of the universe. The figurine on the ledge adds an element of myth and magic to the scene, and perhaps the hanging horn gives us a chance to cry out or sound a triumphant blast if we can recognize and embrace all we see here. To capture all of this by carving, inking and printing three woodblocks is a triumph of perception and printmaking.

**Water: Interlocking Fish
in Blue and Green**

(B.385) 1952 drawing and color print
(each 6" X 5½")

Drawing ex collection of the M. C. Escher Foundation and previously on loan to the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, Holland, Their drawing number T385⁸-x-1972

This is one of the only Escher drawings in private hands that relates directly to a matching print. In a 1990 letter to Jeffrey Price, Dr. P.H.G.E. Strens, Eugène Strens' son, wrote of the history of these prints: "Escher created for my father the 4 elements. The original drawings and the blocks are in the extensive book-plate collection of my father, who deceased in 1980. The prints were sent in the years 53, 54, 55, and 56 to family and friends and book-plate collectors in West Europe. I think most of them are lost. The exact number (there was only one edition) is not known. Just from the card of 1953 there is a second edition (small number) in different colours for the Boeckier periodical. A very small number is left over in the [Strens family] collection"

Artists' Market Collection

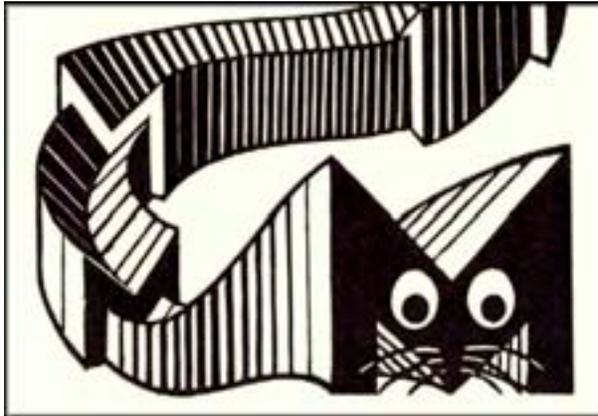




M is for Maurits and Muis (Mouse)

(B.391) 1953 woodcut (4"X 2½")

“The Society for the Promotion of Graphic Arts” (“De Grafisch”) created a small portfolio of prints in which its members crafted prints showcasing a graphic alphabet. The graphic from the cover of the edition is shown at the right. Escher created two original prints for this series, each with an initial from his name and each in a different technique for printmaking: this “M” is a woodcut showing black lines on a white background, whereas the “E” was created primarily in wood engraving with white lines carved into black surface of the block. Maurits Escher was called Mauk as a child and by his closest friends, and this mouse represents both the artist’s name and his retiring yet complex character. We see a virtually infinite number of M’s fitting within one another, growing progressively smaller and then larger again as the little creature’s reticulated body spirals toward its tail, highlighting both light and dark versions of the letter M as it twists and turns.

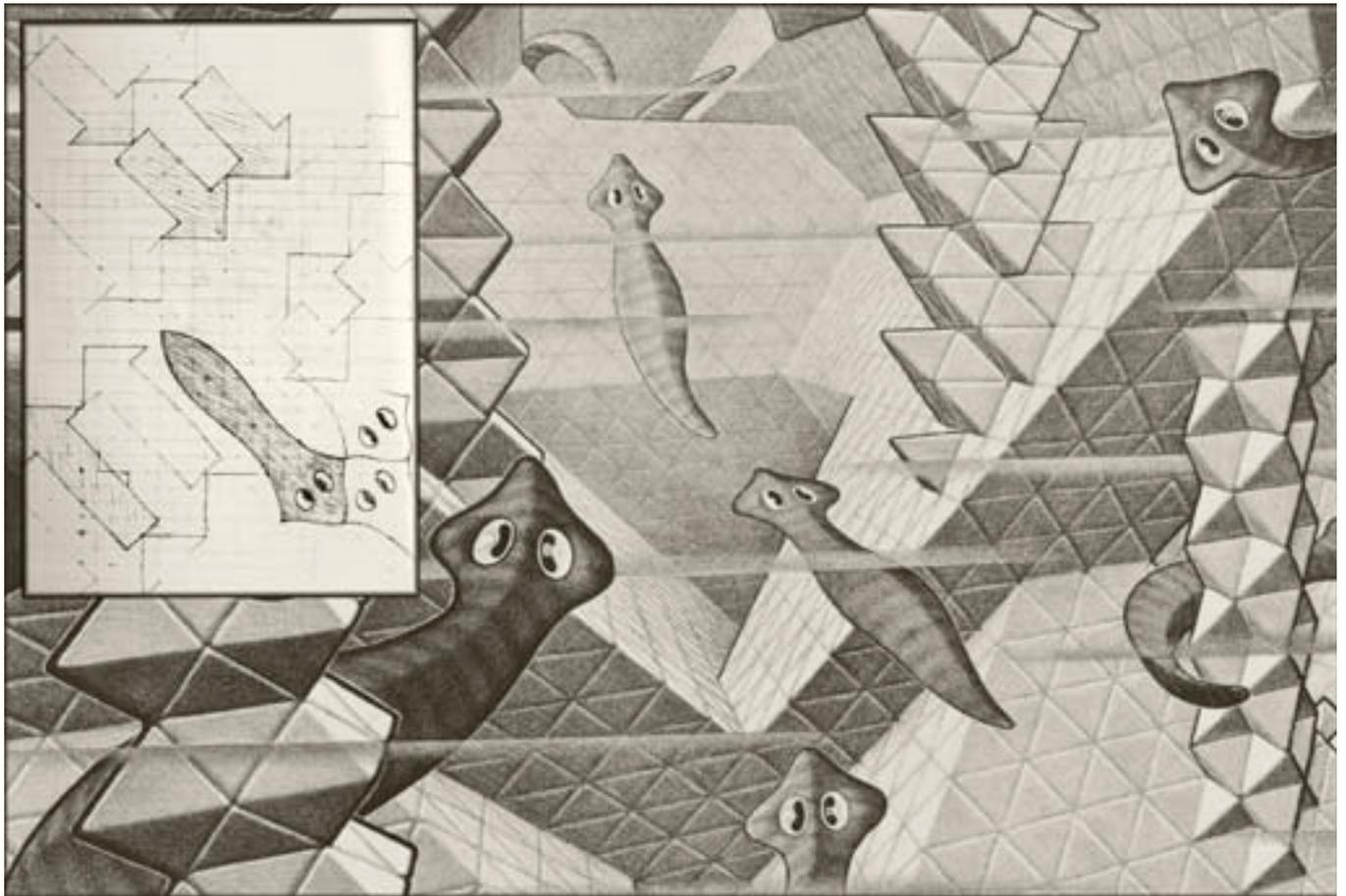


E is for Escher and Ezel (Donkey)

(B.392) 1953 wood engraving (4"X 2½")

Escher created this wonderful print which has more aspects than one might expect, as is common with Escher’s work. When one realizes that in a woodcut all shading, all detail, and all sense of volume can only be created by carving a black line somewhat thicker and thinner than the energy and detail in this print become all the more remarkable. The background is a wall composed of Escher’s initial ‘E,’ which reverses and interlocks in both light and dark shades as it creates a tilted plane in space. Through this wall a donkey – in Dutch, ‘ezel’ – pokes his head and brays, casting a shadow over the E’s. The sound a donkey makes is ‘EEEEEE,’ so we also have here a unusual audio pun in which the sound of the subject is echoed in this print’s composition! Escher’s choice of a donkey to illustrate his name is rather telling, for a donkey is stubborn and somewhat awkward, perhaps he could even be considered an outsider in the animal world... and the sound this creature makes, like Escher’s art, may not be typically picturesque but it certainly demands our full attention and sends us an unmistakable message.





Flatworms (B.364) 1957 Lithograph (12½" X 14½") Signed in pencil, numbered 22/53 II



This was Escher's alternative to gravity and our 'boring' world, as he said, where all walls and floors are at right angles to one another. How interesting it would be, this print postulates, if the basic building blocks of our world were triangles and octahedrons rather than rectangles!

Perhaps this alternate world would not be constrained by gravity, and so Escher's space is aquatic and populated by planaria or flatworms: odd little creatures that seem to contradict the dimensionality we are used to. One of Escher's unpublished notebook drawings (seen in the insert above) reveals the previously unknown fact that these arrow-shaped creatures are not only capable of interlocking seamlessly (perhaps outside the frame of this lithograph), but also closely related to the creatures in Escher's 'Path of Life' woodblock prints.

This is certainly among the most complex of Escher's prints: every centimeter of the block is shaded in a specific and representational way to create the unique space we see. This must have taken almost infinite patience and skill, and I believe this is one reason that Escher kept this lithographic stone in his studio long after he had completed this edition.



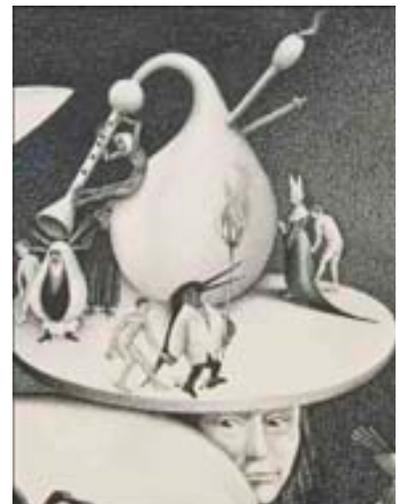
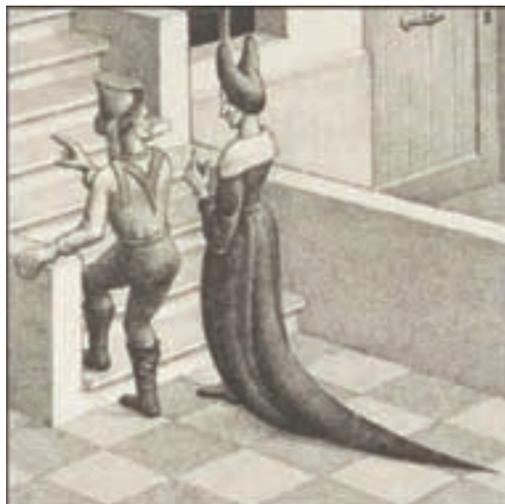
Belvedere

(B.426) 1958 lithograph
Signed in pencil, numbered 41/107 IV
(18 1/4" X 11 1/2")

Impossibilities combine with beauty and history as we watch a regal group ascend a remarkable belvedere, or look-out tower. This is, indeed, an extraordinary building set in one of Escher's most beautiful landscapes created from Escher's memories and sketches of Italy's hills and valleys that he had explored years earlier. The tower is made of mysteries that can be illustrated – but not unlocked – by observing the strange cube held by the man on the bench. Before him is a blueprint of his cube, but like the fellow behind bars, he a prisoner of the physical world that does not allow right-angles to behave in the manner of the object he is holding. What appears real and solid we know cannot exist, and yet we see it clearly and marvel at its beauty! Perhaps time itself has shifted, since the figures in this scene are costumed from another era, and the woman approaching the stairs is, in fact, a figure taken directly from “The Garden of Earthly Delights,” the 16th century painting by Escher's fellow Dutchman, Hieronymous Bosch which was the only painting by another artist that Escher referenced in his own printmaking.

Climbing this tower gives us much more to marvel at than the scenery. On the first level a ladder is planted firmly inside the structure, and though it clearly leans inward, the top rungs rest on the outside of the building. Columns that begin on the front of the lower level are joined firmly to the back of the upper floor, and in fact the whole building is twisting around in space while maintaining its architectural elegance and integrity. Belvedere has always been one of Escher's most sought-after creations.

This beautiful example was originally acquired from one of the first American galleries to exhibit Escher's work: Mickelson's Gallery in Washington D.C. in the early 1960's.



Left: detail from Bosch's 1510 painting "Garden of Delights," center: detail of "Belvedere," right: detail of Escher's 1935 lithograph, "Bosch"



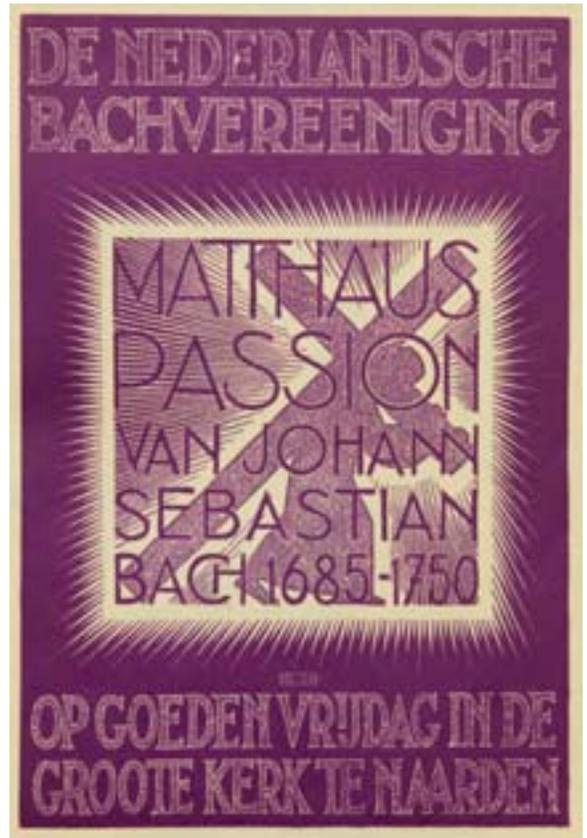
Hieronymus Bosch's "Hell"

(B.278) 1935 signed lithograph #6/20 (10" X 8½")

This is Escher's only work copied from another artist, fellow Dutchman Hieronymus Bosch (1450-1561), whom Escher credits in the lower left of the image. Escher was fascinated by Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights," painted in 1510 (shown at the right, now in the Prado museum). In Bosch's masterpiece, Paradise is on the left, The Earthly Garden in the center, and Hell is at the right, inhabited by allegorical creatures such as the hollow man Escher depicted who is inhabited by drunkards who revel in the pleasures of the senses. Escher has taken some liberties with Bosch's composition, not by changing the subject, but simply by moving various elements slightly in order to make a more unified and picturesque scene.

Artists' Market Collection





St. Matthew's Passion

(B.302) 1938 woodcut (later printing) on cover of the program of the Dutch Bach Society (6" X 4")

(The entire booklet with the libretto of Bach's composition is complete within the frame)

Escher has used several devices to strongly focus the viewer's attention: radiating lines converge at crossed diagonals in the composition, and there is a letter-circle surrounding the head of Christ. The pointillist patterning in the design and the positive/negative radiating lines in ivory and violet are especially interesting elements of this dramatic print. The overlapping letters in Bach's name shows Escher's concern with innovative use of typography. Escher revered the work of Bach for its structure and dramatic balance, and he wrote that he would often play Bach's music while he created his prints. As a young man Escher played the cello, and later in his life he said that his favorite Bach composition was The Twenty-fifth Goldberg Variation. In all of Escher's work, this is only woodcut printed in violet ink, and our unique frame has been engraved in gold leaf with musical notation.



Self Portrait in Reflecting Sphere in Space (The Sphere)

(B.80) 1921 woodcut (4½”X 3½”)

From the “Flor de Pascua” (‘Paschal Flower’), edition of 222

This woodcut is one of Escher’s most important early prints and is unique among his other works of this era. It is absolutely astounding that Escher created this self-portrait in a reflecting sphere in 1921, thus previewing themes that infused his work for decades to come. The sphere floats in space, surrounded by heavenly bodies rendered in their simplest forms. The artist is, indeed, creating his own universe, a world in which right angles become curves and we can be transported out of our place in the world as we know it. At the right is a previously unpublished self-portrait of the artist from the same period as this print, and from this we can see how Escher was able to capture his likeness by carving a few seemingly simple lines and spaces into his woodblock.

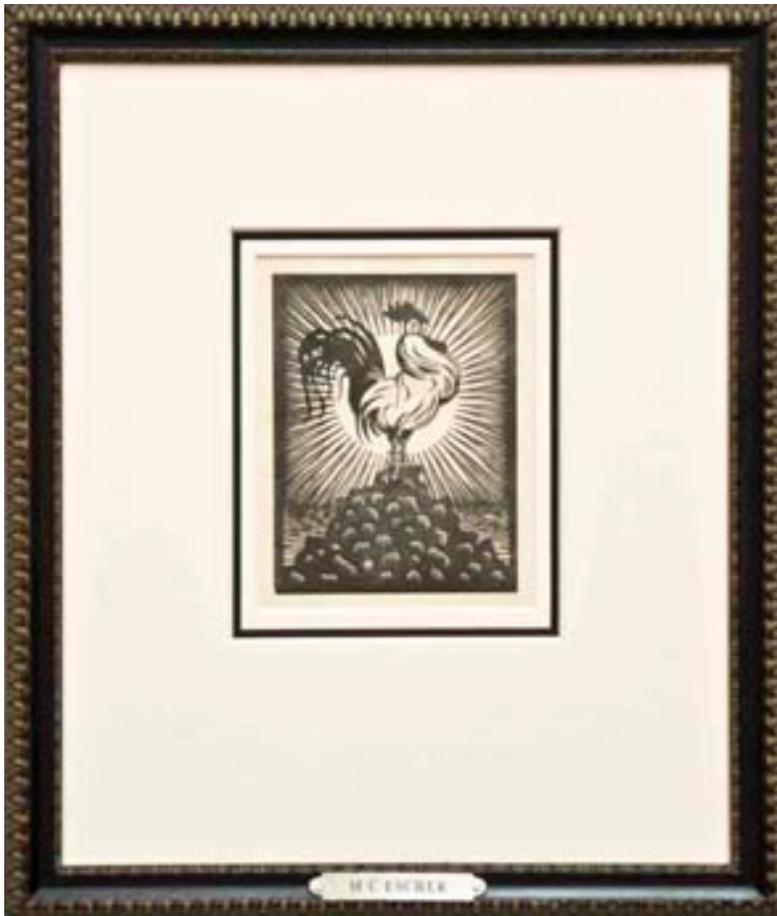
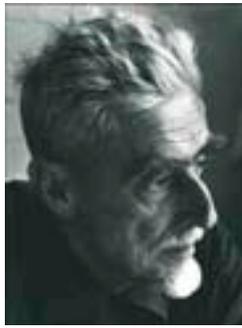


1920 Escher Self-portrait: Private Collection

The Scapegoat

(B.69) 1921 woodcut (4¾"X3½") Edition of 222

This rare early print is from "Flor de Pascua," (The Paschal Flower) a small philosophical publication containing full-page block-printed woodcuts that evoke many of the themes Escher would work with throughout his life. This print is filled with contrasts of black and white, positive and negative, and symbols of good and evil. These are themes Escher revisited often, perhaps most obviously in his 1960 woodcut 'Circle Limit IV: Angels and Devils.' In this early woodcut we are given a startling introduction to his passion for balanced opposites in both designs and ideas. Good and evil all seem to flow from the same central point and create harmony as well as contrast. Most curiously, the portrait in the upper left bears a striking resemblance to Escher at an advanced age (seen in a photograph from 1972 below), though "The Scapegoat" was created some fifty years before this photograph!



Theosophy

(B.76) 1921 woodcut (4¾"X3½") Edition of 222

Theosophy holds that all religions are attempts to help humanity evolve, and that nature does not operate by chance. Every event, past or present, happens because of laws that are part of a universal paradigm. In this early woodcut even the rays of the sun interlock with contrasting harmonious patterns. This rooster, crowing within this radiant sunlight, perhaps is a messenger, revealing truths of the land, oceans, and heavens.



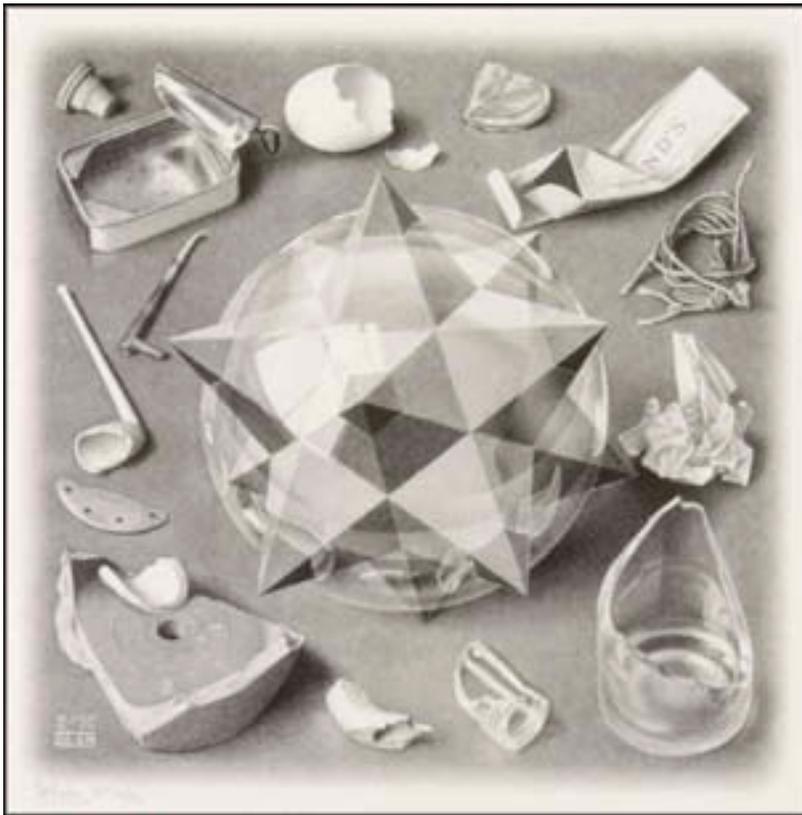
Crystal

(B.353) 1947 mezzotint (5 1/4" X 6 3/4")

Signed and numbered 4/25

Escher hand-printed this rare mezzotint in an edition of only 25 examples, creating a complex study of perfection within the natural world. Escher produced only eight mezzotints, each in very small editions. This technique allowed the artist to create the most subtle shading imaginable, and in 'Crystal' the rounded rock's shapes and the crystal's translucent surfaces are a tour-de-force of the printmaker's consummate skill. The mysteriously floating crystal has flat planes and sharp edges, whilst the rocks show contrasting properties in being rounded, opaque, and irregular. Seen though a microscope, however, these stones may well reveal the crystal's perfection as order hidden within their randomness. Escher ultimately abandoned the mezzotint technique since it proved overwhelmingly laborious and only a small number of prints could be created from a mezzotint plate before it showed signs of wear and could no longer print the subtleties and details seen in this print.





Order and Chaos

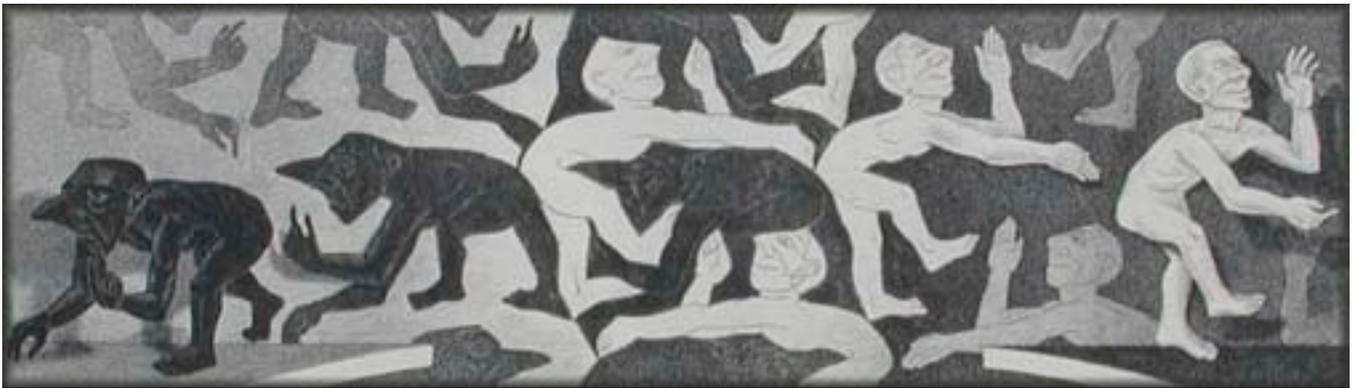
(B.366) 1950 signed lithograph, numbered 32/43 from the rare first edition (11" X 11")

We see here a crystal sphere, or perhaps a soap bubble, that contains geometric star piercing its skin. This shape is a stellated dodecahedron, the same figure Escher populated with dinosaurs in his lithograph 'Gravity.' Surrounding the sphere, and quite literally reflected in it, is an assortment of seemingly chaotic rubble: a broken pipe, an eggshell, a cough-drop package, some pottery, glass, and what we might call a sublime still life of paper and string. But what we often perceive as chaotic is perhaps not so random after all. For example, if you were to take one of these discarded objects and examine it under a powerful microscope, you would see perfect little interlocking crystals, molecules and atoms. We don't see these orderly patterns, but they are there, disguised as chaos! Surprisingly similarly, if we look at Escher's tessellating prints we see perfect birds and fish interlocking, at times even people fit together, and we can find identical horsemen marching along. We never see such creatures in the world showing these perfect forms, but Escher can illustrate their harmony and perfection brilliantly. Is it too far a leap, then, to believe that all of creation, and we as humans, may follow some perfect invisible pattern, and perhaps we fit together in some unknown way like the little men tumbling down the stairs in Escher's lithograph 'Cycle?' Escher himself explained this with a rare philosophical remark: "I try in my prints to testify that we live in a beautiful and orderly world and not in a formless chaos, as it sometimes seems." This comment positions "Order and Chaos" as one of the hidden keys to understanding all of Escher's art.

Fire: Men in Orange and Yellow

From the suite "The Four Elements" (B.384)
1955 color print with letterpress (6" X 5 1/2")

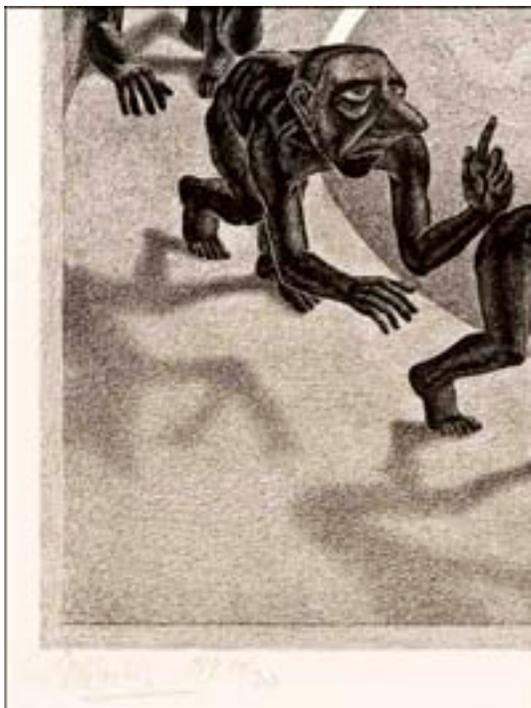
Escher created the "Four Elements" suite for the noted connoisseurs and patrons, Eugène and Willy Strens. Escher chose as his subjects the Platonic elements of earth, air, fire and water; the building blocks of all creation. Each print in the series not only represents a creature from that element, but also is designed with a structure evocative of that force. Here, little devilish men (related to the figures in Escher's masterpiece "Encounter," seen below) interlock with curves that rise like flames. Note how Escher has changed the shapes of the tails on these figures to fill the design in a more pleasing and picturesque manner. Here we see Escher using color symbolism (yellow and orange are such 'hot colors') pattern symbolism (the tails undulate like flames) and the thematic symbolism of devils representing fire to bring together many meanings in a single print. The four prints in this suite were the only time that Escher used color in small-format symmetry prints and there has been much debate recently about exactly what technique Escher employed to create these prints with such vibrant colors. Certainly this exquisite edition is one of the most lyrical and evocative of Escher's intimate works.



Reverse of this print, showing the highlighted (new?) personal address of Eugène Strens and the letterpress notations regarding this edition



Encounter (B.331) (13½" X 18 ¼")
1944 signed lithograph, numbered #10/30
From the rare first edition



White and black figures emerge from a flat gray mist in the background, as if they spring from a magically illuminated wall where light creates life. Tiled figures become realistic forms, and the men that are created become so real that they leave the plane and seem to march forward into the real world. They encircle an opening, an infinite well within which they may even be able to see their own evolution. This is a perfect blending of contrasts and also an intriguing narrative of visual storytelling. Some see optimists and pessimists evolving from common ground, meeting at last and finding their inevitable balance. Others might see the theme of the universal harmony of opposites, or figures dancing as they become unified. Unquestionably this is one of Escher's masterpieces, and one of rather few works that combine both interlocking forms and a transition from flat to dimensional space. Encounter has always been among Escher's most popular creations, and first edition printings such as this are of the utmost rarity.



The Beehive

(B.174) 1931 woodcut (7"X 5½")

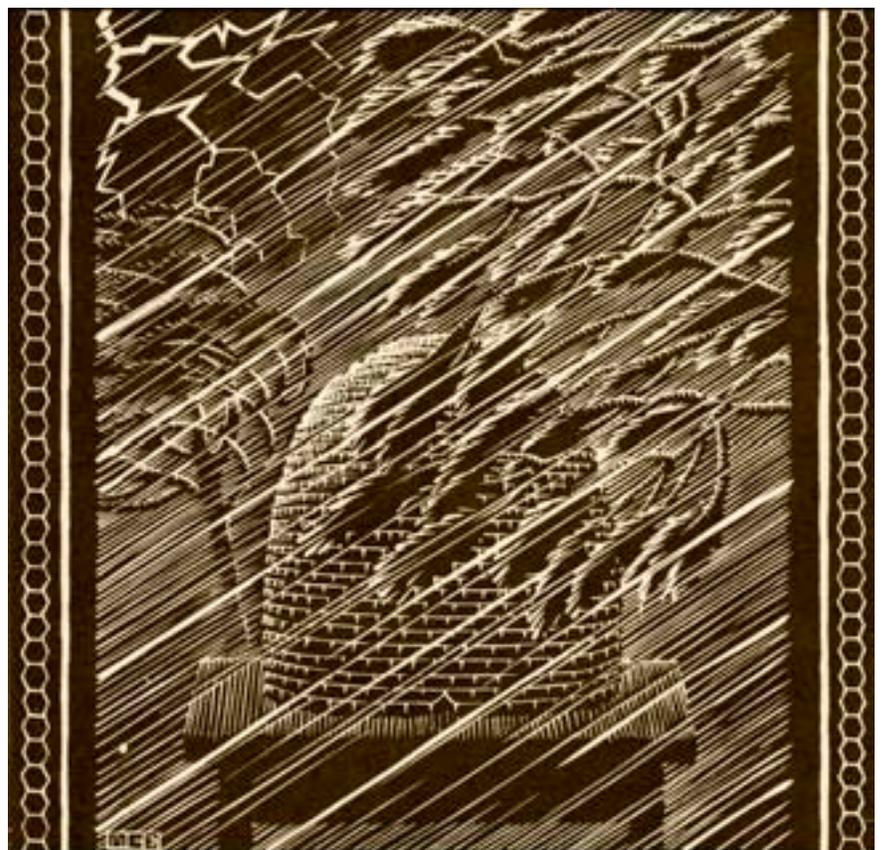
From the edition of 275, this is #177

This remarkable woodcut was created as part of the series "XXIV Emblemata." In these prints Escher combined an evocative image with a Latin motto and a poem in Dutch, using his powers as an artist and graphic designer to convey a complex idea in several languages simultaneously. Each part of the print allows us a different view of the theme. The Latin is concise and classical. A translation might be "In a Storm, Perseverance is Futile." The poem gives us another view, which might be read as "Industry comforts us, hard work with no respite, provided only the elements do not rage while we are at work." With these things in mind, Escher's scene creates added meaning.



The beehive is a traditional 'skep,' woven similar to a basket with a small entrance at the bottom. We can see a pair of these at the left in this 1545 Swiss woodcut from

Münster's *Cosmographia*. Not only does the beehive appear to be constructed of symmetrical basketry 'tiles,' but we know that bees are highly industrious, well-organized, and create marvelous honeycombs of perfect hexagons. Escher has created a pattern of interlocking hexagons for his border design, and this is one of the earliest uses of a symmetry design in the artist's work. This hexagonal beehive pattern appears again in his great scroll "Metamorphosis." In this early print the beautiful order of the bees is being buffeted by nature. Lightning flashes in the upper left, and sheets of rain cascade diagonally across the page, bending branches and an entire tree with their force. The centered beehive, however, remains solid and stable. Though the poetry and the Latin tell us that all our efforts are useless at times like this, we might learn that they are dormant rather than dissolved in the rain. We can sense the bees are at work inside their domed fortress, which unlike the trees doesn't seem to be affected by the chaos all around. It may indeed be useless to fight against the forces of nature, but in a special place, perhaps with bees or with geometry, there may nevertheless be something miraculous created. One of Escher's great themes is that the beauty, the order, and the very nature of things is usually hidden from our ordinary vision, but given enough insight, given enough study and even magic, occasionally we can catch a glimpse of the pattern that weaves creation. The edition of this print was 275 portfolios with each woodcut printed on a single-sided sheet. These sets were bound with raffia and numbered, and the number of this print indicates it was from folio #177.





XXIV Emblemata

(B.161) 1931 woodcut (7" X 5½")

This unique woodcut shows the twenty-four titles of this series of prints in Escher's dramatic art deco hand-cut typography. Additionally, each print is miniaturized and presented as a 'symbol of a symbol.' Within this one woodcut there are, in fact, two dozen of Escher's smallest images (such as this musical scale) that show the essence of his imagery.



The Lock

(B.185) 1931 woodcut (7" X 5½")

This was the final print in Escher's set of twenty-four woodcuts which each captured the essence of an idea and illustrated a motto. This Latin epigram, taken together with the Dutch poem and Escher's dramatic graphic design give the viewer a multi-media approach to understanding his complex idea. The poem translates:

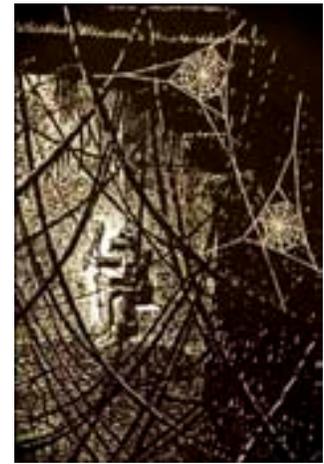
*"This image of impasse,
blocking the way as best it can;
born of doubt, nurtured by worrisome questions."*



The Spinner

(B.154) 1931 woodcut (7" X 5½")

Cobwebs, stones, and beams frame this old woman as she spins thread. Is she thus like the spider who spun the webs in the foreground? We are viewers from a distance, watching this parable, peering through layers of depth, texture, and meaning. The woman in Escher's print is crafting thread from wool. She holds a spinning tool shaped like a cross, and there are many parallels between spinning and religion. We can go back much further than Christianity for these. In Greek mythology there were three women who wove our fate: one spun the thread, one wove it into the patterns of our life, and the third cut the thread to the measure of our fate. They were known as The Moirai: three goddesses, daughters of Zeus, who determined the fate of every human being, the personification of destiny depicted in the illustration at the right. Often they were imagined as aged women; lame to suggest the slow march of fate. Klotho was the spinner, the one who spun the thread of a new life. Atropos would then take the thread and weave it into the "fabric" of one's life. Finally, Lachesis would take up the scissors that she would use to snip the thread to end one's life. They gave each person their share of good and evil, and punished the transgressions of all. As goddesses, the Moirai knew the future and were therefore regarded as prophetesses.





The Hilltown of Pontone, above Atrani on the Coast of Amalfi, Italy

Color drawing, signed with monogram, dated May 24, 1931 (12" X 9")
 ex collection of the M. C. Escher Foundation and previously on loan
 to the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, Holland, and noted with their catalog number, verso

One of the only signed color drawings in all of Escher's work, this landscape can be considered one of the finest unique pieces in private hands today. The terraced hillside above Atrani may have been the inspiration for the landscape behind Escher 'Waterfall', and similar geometric terraces can be seen in the artist's woodcut 'Tetrahedral Planetoid.' The distant hills are dramatic in their majesty, and stand in startling contrast to the lush hills of the town.

Testifying to the authenticity of this rare work, the drawing is noted on the reverse: "T-962-x-1971," which is the inventory number under which this work from Escher's personal collection was cataloged at the Gemeentemuseum, The Hague, whilst it were on loan from the Escher Foundation pursuant to the artist's wishes.

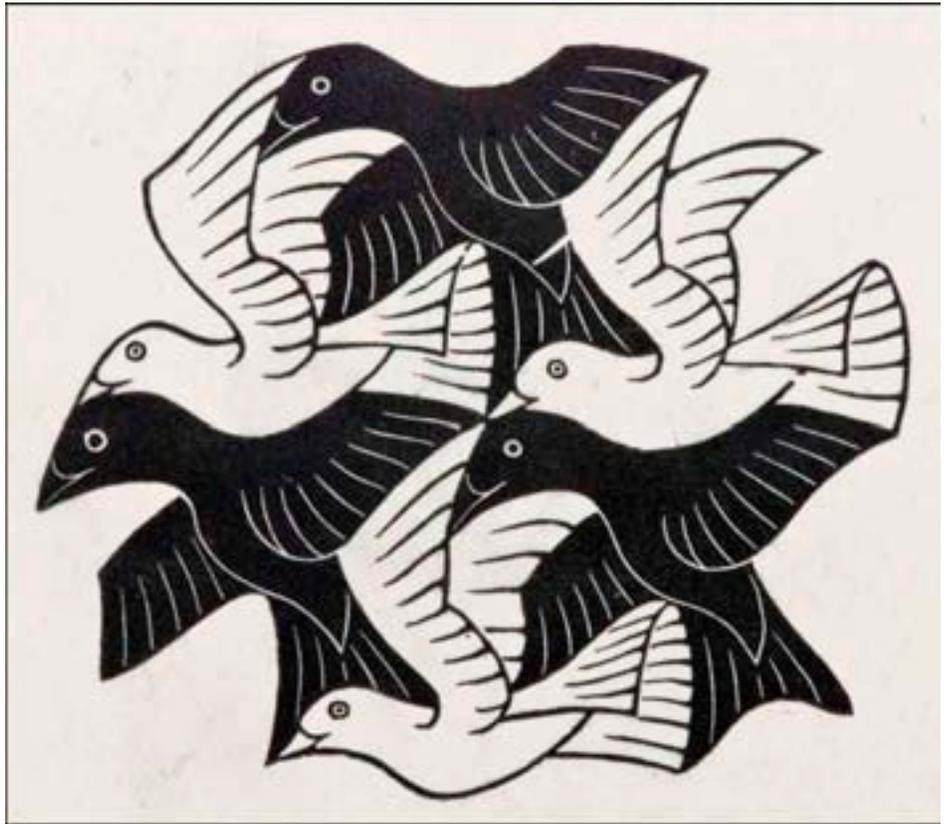
Artists' Market Collection



Six Birds (B.361)

1949 Wood engraving (2"X2")

This miniature wood engraving has been used to represent Escher's art in many places, including being used as the logo for the M. C. Escher Company in Baarn Holland, holder of the Escher copyright. Here it was used on an early exhibiton card for Escher's graphic work in 1949, and this particular card was sent to G. H. 's Gravesande, a well-known Dutch scholar and expert on Escher's work (card front inset below) Sold

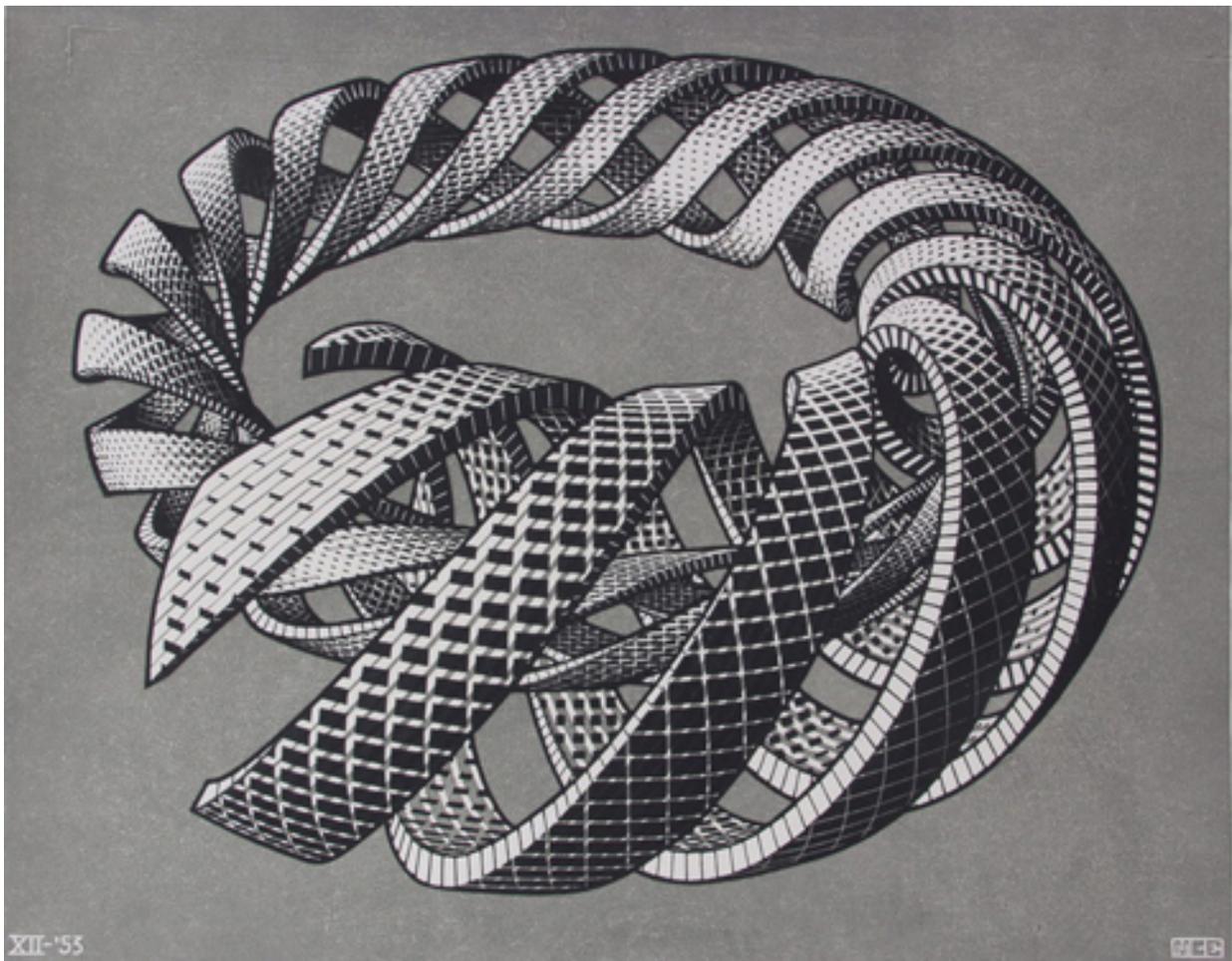


Devils (B.370)

1950 Wood engraving (4"X2 1/2")

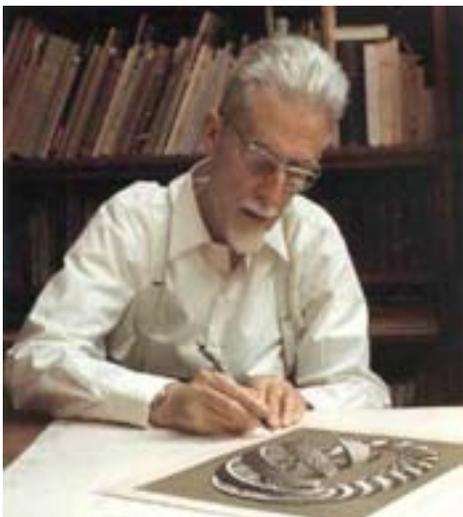
These little devils are certainly related to the men in the 1944 lithograph "Encounter," but here they take on certain unique characteristics which the top figure seems to be enjoying much more than those below him. It is unusual in Escher's tessellations for a figure to change like this within a design, and it is also unusual that only the three lower figures are graduated in their shading so they appear with white hands and heads joined to black tails and feet. This wood engraving was printed on an invitation card for an 1950 exhibition of Escher's graphics and 'handwoven tapestries' (!). This card was sent to G. H. 's Gravesande, a noted Dutch scholar who was one of the first to write important commentaries on Escher's artwork, and for whom Escher created his personal ex Libris woodcut in 1940 (B.322). The front of the card is inset at left.

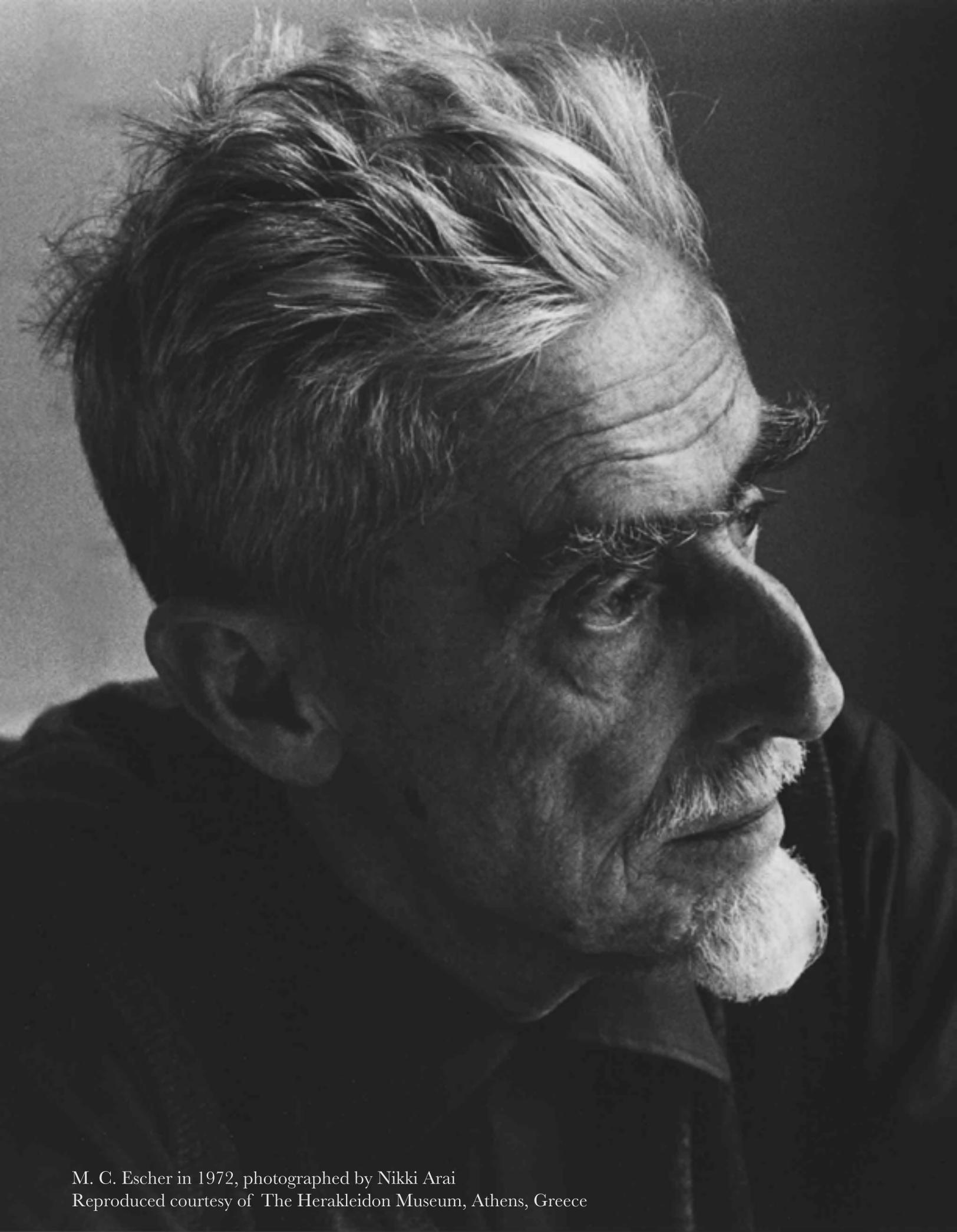




Spirals

(B.390) 1953 wood engraving in black and grey, signed, dated June 7, 1970, and inscribed to Hans deRijk (Bruno Ernst) (10½" X 13") Here Escher has illustrated the evolution of a perfect and complex object, an unwinding banded cone floating against a grey background. Escher's inspiration may well have been his desire simply to make this difficult object exist, and to undertake the task of actualization with his chisels, ink and paper, guided by his imagination, experience, and craftsmanship. Creating such perfection is a sublime art and understanding it fully challenges our senses and our intellect. Escher's spiral cornucopia is constructed of four parallel bands, each shaded with a subtle and systematic arrangement of lines and lozenges. Escher's technique is deceptively simple, since the print is created by pressing two inked woodblocks onto a sheet of paper. How these two blocks create the three shades in the print – black, grey, and white – is a surprisingly complex and highly technical puzzle, as is the precise geometric arrangement of spiraling lines and shapes. Escher's inks make visible simultaneously the inside and the outside of the bands which lead us toward infinity. The curves both wrap around and spring out of loops which we can imagine having no beginning and no end; this is clearly part of a growing and evolving thing, somehow both organic and mechanical, an illustration of a object as well as of a creative idea. The photo below shows Escher inscribing and signing this example of Spirals in June, 1970 for his friend Hans deRijk , author of 'The Magic Mirror of M. C. Escher'.
Artists' Market collection, NFS





M. C. Escher in 1972, photographed by Nikki Arai
Reproduced courtesy of The Herakleidon Museum, Athens, Greece

Paths to Perception

A Search for Meaning in M. C. Escher's Prints

“I think I have never yet done any work with the aim of symbolizing a particular idea, but the fact that a symbol is sometimes discovered or remarked upon is valuable for me because it makes it easier to accept the inexplicable nature of my hobbies, which constantly preoccupy me.”

– M. C. Escher

To express the deepest mysteries or fundamental truths of creation and consciousness is a quest worthy of the highest arts. To understand even a small piece of the puzzle of perception is a task to fill a lifetime. When we begin to see the patterns that underlie the paradoxes of existence, then we catch a glimpse of revelations we may never fully comprehend.

M. C. Escher said little about the meaning of his artwork and the attraction of his images was a great mystery to him. Nevertheless, he was compelled by what he described as ‘a hopeless mania’ to create pictures of objects both perfect and impossible, of scenes quite fantastic and yet completely believable, and to describe in great detail things we might not otherwise be aware of. I believe that Escher’s artwork continues to resonate in the century after it was created because his pictures illustrate themes that are fundamental to our consciousness. This essay will explore several of Escher’s prints that hold keys to understanding why the artist was intrigued by such unusual imagery and why his creations continue to fascinate such a wide audience today.

In M. C. Escher’s first great illusionary lithograph, “Cycle” from 1938, we see a boy running from a tower and down some steps. His arms are rather awkwardly waving and he’s smiling, perhaps in secret reverie. Where is he coming from and going to? His journey is short and yet this passage encompasses his entire world. As he descends the stairs a transformation occurs that is as miraculous as any myth. In a few steps he metamorphoses into marble and what was once an actor becomes his stage. Beyond the tower is a serene landscape, perhaps part of the Tuscan countryside or maybe a small portion of paradise. This is the setting for Escher’s story: an extraordinary adventure in a miraculous world.

“Cycle” can be seen as an archetypal image of the universe created from our own being. Is everything our imagining? Where does our interior landscape end and the countryside begin? What is the essential difference between body and stone, and why can we find soul in one and not the other? By illustrating such fascinating questions, perhaps Escher proposes that everything from the distant hills to our outstretched hands is a part of a complex, ever-changing and often invisible cycle.

One might ask whether Escher actually intended for his pictures to have such plots and for philosophical connections to be drawn from artworks that are complex, often rather technical, and only occasionally overtly picturesque. I propose that such mysteries are the essence of great art, and are inherent in the nature of revelation. The artist can be a messenger bringing each viewer a looking glass through which one may discover things unknown to either the author or his audience.



M. C. Escher “Cycle” 1938 Lithograph

M. C. Escher created his first print in 1916 while World War I was ravaging and re-ordering Europe, and his final woodcut, "Ringsnakes," was completed in 1969, in the month of the Apollo moon landing and the summer of Woodstock. It would be hard to underestimate the cultural and sociological changes that occurred during that half-century, and while I doubt that it was Escher's intent to create commentary on these events by making pictures unlike any that had been seen before, it can be said that his images reflect the complexity, ambiguity, and restructuring of twentieth-century society.

While philosophers wrote of existentialism and surrealism, printmaking gave Escher a vocabulary that enabled him to express ideas that he could articulate in no other way. Even though Escher did not write extensively about the meanings of his prints, and even though he himself may not have been fully aware of the implications of his imagery, still his prints gain power by having been created during a particularly dramatic era of transition by an exquisitely gifted artist who searched beyond the outward appearance of his subjects in an effort to illustrate the miraculous patterns that unify and bring order to a complex and incomprehensible universe.

Just as no single description can fully explain history, no one viewpoint can show the entirety of a subject. Cubist painters combined profiles and perspectives within a single image in order to present a more comprehensive view of their subject, however the result frequently obscured the original portrait. Escher's visions are grounded in the strict mechanical rules of architecture and engineering, and his fantasies are as real as the world he saw around him while still capturing the unexpected consequences of changing realities. Escher masterfully illustrated these themes in his 1947 woodblock print "Other World," a triumph of both technical craftsmanship and visionary imagery.



M. C. Escher "Other World"
1947 woodcut and engraving
in brown, green, and black

Three similar figures perch within three windows. This is a simorgh, a creature that came to us through Middle Eastern mythology as the embodiment of human form within the figure of a bird. The legendary simorgh was believed to be so old that it had seen the destruction of the world three times over. Escher actually owned this figurine; it had been a gift from his father-in-law, who acquired it in Azerbaijan and gave it to his daughter and Escher when the newlyweds lived in Italy. Escher kept this small treasure in his home throughout his life and featured it in several important artworks. In this print we see three views of the same creature within three windows that are reflections of one another, connected within a fantastic room constructed with the lines and grids of a mechanical world drawn on graph paper. This precision reinforces the reality of the scene and sets the stage for our voyage beyond this world and into another.

Through the windows we see three scenes that each makes perfect sense and yet is disconnected from the others. In mid-century, when Escher created this print, so many cities had been made unrecognizable by war, and so many people looked out their windows and saw once-familiar scenes that had become alien and unknown. Perhaps Escher felt that his world had been transformed into another world, or many worlds only unified by ambiguity.

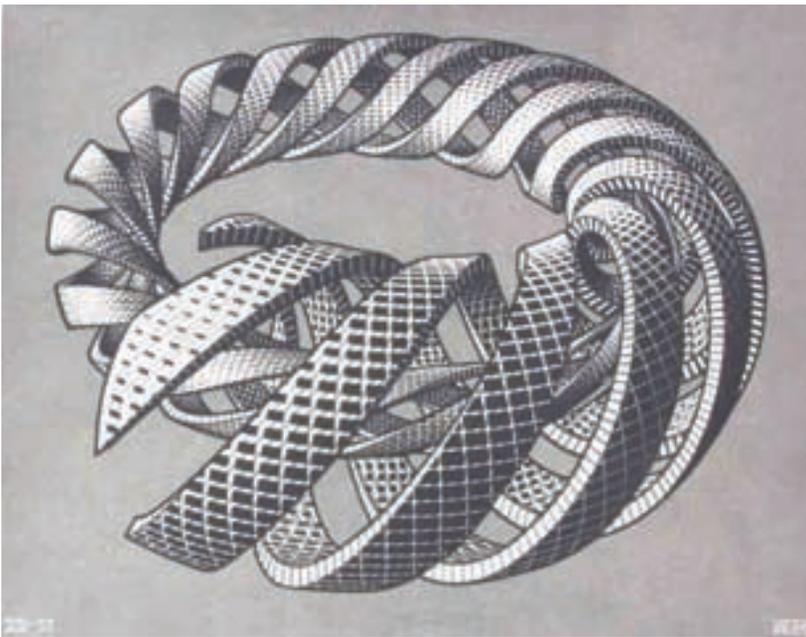
From the top of the picture we can look down on the creature and view a cratered moonscape from above, as if we were floating in the heavens. Gazing straight ahead we can look out toward the horizon over the pockmarked landscape and into the dark sky beyond. A comet flashes across the blackness leaving a spray of stars in its wake. The Earth hovers above the horizon, near the center of the picture, commanding our focus. Our planet is distant, far removed, and the magical creature has turned away and looks at



M. C. Escher's Simorgh figurine

us, the viewer, instead of out towards the planets. This messenger confronts us, and it may be our destiny to make sense of these worlds if we dare venture beyond these walls.

And now look up from the bottom of this strange and wonderful picture. We are staring out into the infinite cosmos, where we can see the rings of Saturn and the spiral arms of a distant nebula. Just what is out there we don't know, but we know we are part of this greater universe part of this cosmic adventure. We have come a long way, yet there are deep mysteries before us. Three horns hang in archways, rather like shofars, should we be ready to sound them and go forth. Perhaps the trumpet-player is the simorgh, but there is ambiguity in that since two creatures face towards horns but one – the one nearest earth - faces away. The world might change in the blink of an eye and strange sights might be seen through familiar windows. We envision journeys that fill us with excitement as well as trepidation. We have discovered something that is difficult to know or to express, and I believe we have heard the artist's voice.



M. C. Escher "Spirals" 1953 two-color wood engraving printed in grey and black

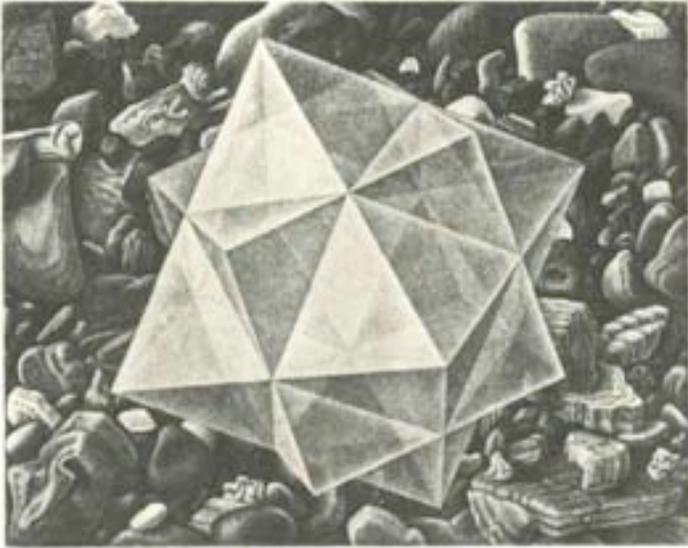
The artist can give substance to that which is visible to him alone. To express the complex beauty of a perfect shape might be seen as the function of mathematics more readily than the task of a printmaker. An equation, after all, is a way of understanding the relationship between things, and geometry is the most precise way to describe the fundamental structure of forms. In his 1953 wood engraving "Spirals" Escher has illustrated the evolution of a perfect and complex object, an unwinding banded cone floating against a grey background.

We see similar shapes within a nautilus shell and in the spirals of distant galaxies, but it is a difficult task indeed to make all of this visible by carving channels in a block of wood. Undoubtedly, these spirals are a somewhat surprising subject for an artwork, requiring months of planning and tedious exacting woodcarving and printing. This is a design intensely challenging in both concept and execution, and it is this complexity which may be at the heart of "Spirals" beauty. Escher's inspiration may well have been his desire simply to make this difficult object exist, and to undertake the task of actualization with his chisels, ink and paper, guided by his imagination, experience, and craftsmanship. Creating such perfection is a sublime art and understanding it fully challenges our senses and our intellect.

Escher's spiral cornucopia is constructed of four parallel bands, each shaded with a subtle and systematic arrangement of lines and lozenges. Escher's technique is deceptively simple, since the print is created by pressing two inked woodblocks onto a sheet of paper. How these two blocks create the three shades in the print – black, grey, and white – is a surprisingly complex and highly technical puzzle, as is the precise geometric arrangement of spiraling lines and shapes.

Escher's inks make visible simultaneously the inside and the outside of the bands which lead us toward infinity. If we search for the very beginning of this growing form, we can find the tip of the spiral placed precisely between two bands at the right, its extreme apex exquisitely visible just before our view is blocked by the circling outer rind. The curves both wrap around and spring out of loops which we can imagine having no beginning and no end; this is clearly part of a growing and evolving thing, somehow

both organic and mechanical, an illustration of a object as well as of a creative idea. It is as if an ever-evolving spiral has been frozen for a moment so that we may observe it close-up. We witness here a small piece of the infinite created from two blocks of wood, cut with chisels, covered with ink and pressed to paper by Escher in his studio. Lines and spaces of black, grey and white create something impossibly perfect and fantastically dimensioned on a white sheet of paper within a picture frame.



M. C. Escher “Crystal” 1947 mezzotint, signed and numbered 4/25

and appear lighter in the final printing. To create an image such as Escher’s ‘Crystal,’ is triumph of both vision and technique as well as a complex symbolic act.

Escher himself was perhaps unaware of what compelled him to create this image, but considering the effort involved in bringing these shapes out of the inky darkness, he must have felt strong urges to see his vision appear on paper. The central image is a cube-octahedron; that is, a double four-faced pyramid perfectly intersecting a cube. It is a wonderfully complex structure, difficult to realize in its solid form and almost impossible to create with transparency in mezzotint the way Escher has done.



Cube Octahedron

Where do we find such perfect crystal forms? One answer lies in the background of this print, in the smooth and irregular rocks that are strewn at random as if they were washed up on some imaginary shore by the tide. If we were to look closely at these rocks, perhaps examine them with a high-powered microscope, we would indeed see atoms and molecules arranged with the complexity of a cube-octahedron and more. These miraculous forms are hidden from our sight, yet always present if only we can look closely enough. There are wonderful contrasts here as well as harmonies: the crystal is translucent, reflective, and made up of perfect lines and planes; the rocks behind are solid opaque, irregular lumps that hide their inner structures. The fact that crystalline perfection is part of the rocks is as much a mystery as the fact that fish can sometimes fit together with birds, a boy can become a building, and three worlds can be made visible within a single room. Escher wrote of this: “The laws of the phenomena around us – order, regularity, cyclical repetitions and renewals – have assumed greater and greater importance for me. The awareness of their presence gives me peace and provides me with support. I try in my prints to testify that we live in a beautiful and orderly world, and not in a formless chaos, as it sometimes seems.” So there we have it: the essence of Escher’s philosophy in his own words.

Fundamental forms such as crystals and atoms are known to us and yet often lie beyond our sight. The search for harmony, logic, and the universal rules of order is both alluring and terrifying. As Faust found, there are some secrets that are better left unknown, and some mysteries best left behind the shadows. And so we find serpents weaving through perfect interlocking rings in Escher’s final creation, his 1969 woodcut “Ringsnakes.” After a lifetime spent making things visible that we see with our minds

as well as our eyes, Escher faced a monumental struggle to bring his last artwork to completion. His health failing, he feared he would not live long enough to carve and print the three woodblocks that were required to create this masterpiece. “Ringsnakes” is complex in structure, execution, and meaning; expressing the duality of natural and perfect forms, the unity of all creation, and a sublime realization of the infinite.



M. C. Escher “Ringsnakes” 1969 three-color woodcut

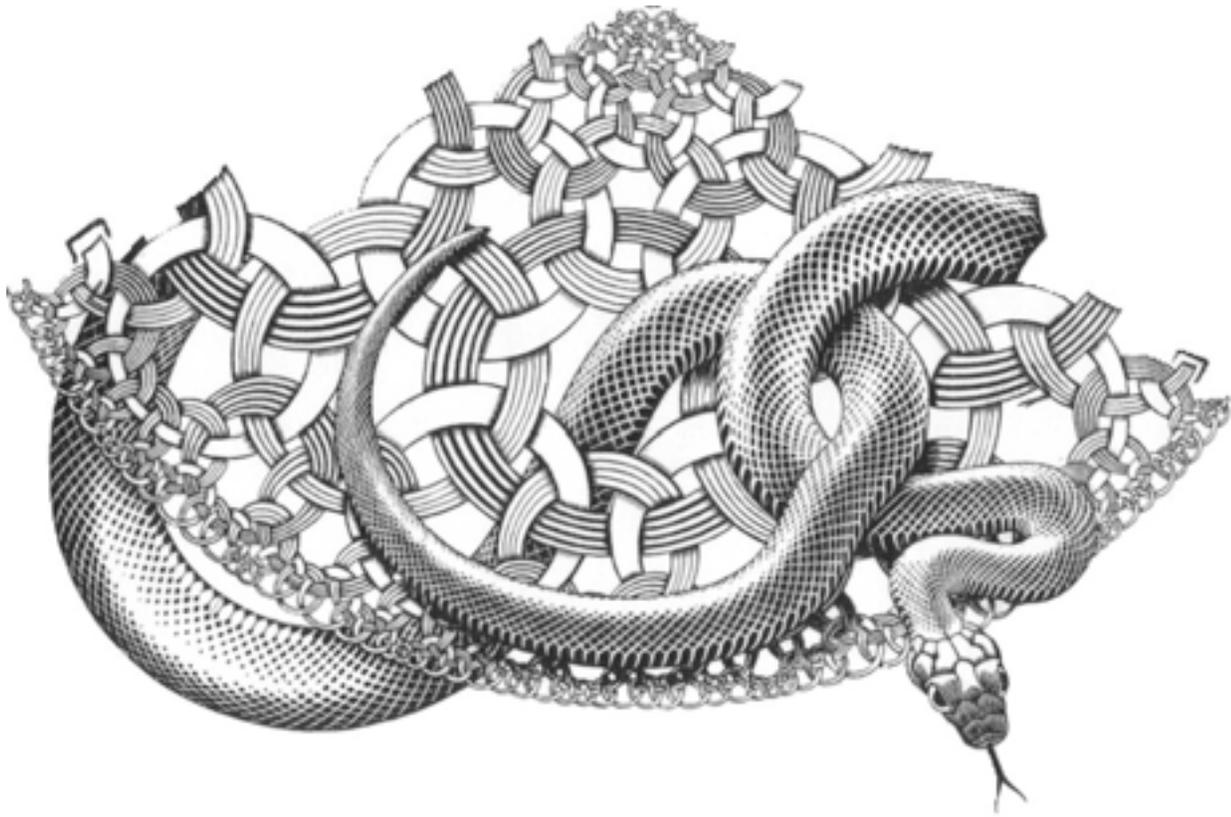
Escher frequently expressed the infinite in his art. His woodcut ‘Smaller and Smaller,’ for example, presents us with ever-diminishing lizards as we approach the center of the design. Traveling in the other direction, the figures in Escher’s series of ‘Circle Limit’ woodcuts reduce in size towards their edges. “Ringsnakes” combines and completes these transformations, creating a cycle that is unified and universal. Whether we begin at the center of the figure or approach from its outer edge, first we find the smallest rings. These may be seen as the seeds of creation. Escher, empowered with the wisdom of experience, did not have to carve impossibly tiny rings to give us the sense of the infinite; the smallest circles serve as symbolic links of a never-ending chain. Each ring intertwines with others, both larger and smaller. It is the nature of many things to be both growing and shrinking simultaneously. As we advance in wisdom and age, so also we may decline in innocence and lose the possibilities of youth. Mists rise from the seas and fall as rain. In mythology, a phoenix can be reborn from its ashes and a serpent might swallow its own tail and regenerate.

In the universe of rings that Escher creates we can watch evolution unfold. We might see this as an allegory of creation from the first dust of atoms at the edge of space to the complexities of a living planet. As it happens, only where Escher’s rings reach their largest size can they be inhabited by living creatures. And so, when the world is ripe, when nature’s web is fully grown, there we find snakes.

From the serpent in the Garden of Eden to the cobra on Cleopatra’s crown, the snake has always been a powerful symbol of temptation, wisdom and duality. It is said that Moses turned his staff into a snake to overpower Pharaoh, and the Egyptian replicated his magic, producing snakes on both sides of their epic struggle. Snakes can have wondrous powers. Related to the phoenix, the mythological ouroboros was a serpent that swallowed its tail to be continually reborn from its own essence. The shape of the ouroboros is closely related to the never-ending patterns Escher describes in many of his prints. Escher’s snakes circle endlessly, seeming to carry with them the gift and burden of wisdom as well as the contradictory powers of our desires. If the snake can be seen as a symbol for all that is conscious and alive, both wonderful and terrifying, then it is appropriate that in this print they weave in and out of such perfect and conceptualized rings. We can see the universe as composed of both the essential formulas that govern molecules and of our cryptic consciousness that struggles to understand itself. We are rather chaotic humans within a universe where perfection is invisible yet pervasive. The linked chains of “Ringsnakes” illustrate a pathway to and from infinity, interwoven with serpentine creatures whose writhing undulations unite them as they circumnavigate the cosmos and weave together perfection with the ever-changing power of life.



The Ouroboros



The 120° segment of M. C. Escher's woodcut 'Ringsnakes' which he printed three times around to create the final image

To create this circular woodcut with maximum symmetry and a minimum of woodcarving, Escher carved wedge-shaped printing blocks that completed the print with three impressions. Since "Ringsnakes" is printed with three colors, each color required three printings covering one-third of the image at a time. The edges of each block were fashioned irregularly so that their seams are hidden by the image's borderlines. Escher pressed three impressions from each wood block – three times around this wheel of creation – printing nine inked segments making three layers of color into one unified picture telling a story that Escher worked a lifetime to create.

We can never know how much of this message Escher consciously intended, but we do know that this final woodcut inspired him to continue work as the frailties of age crept over him. "Ringsnakes" stands as the triumphant legacy of an artist who labored tirelessly in solitude and with endless diligence to express the wonders our eyes perceive and our mind struggles to comprehend. The patterns Escher composed give us paths along which we can discover even more than the artist himself may have been aware of, for the doors he opened ultimately reveal what we find reflected in the mirrors of our own perception.

Jeffrey Price

May 2009

jp@artistsmarket.com

This essay is dedicated to Hans deRijk, who has shared Escher's magic with the world through his prose and has shared his friendship so very generously with me. Special thanks always to my wife, Esta, who stayed awake while I wrote the first draft of this essay and has been my constant companion on this journey.

Filatelie

2011 3



blad voor POSTZEGELVERZAMELERS, website: www.postzegelvereniging.nl, e-mail: postzegelvereniging@postzegelvereniging.nl

**M.C. ESCHER
IN POSTZEGELS**

This article originally appeared in the Dutch philatelic magazine 'Filatelie' and has been edited and revised with the kind permission of its author, Jan Vogel.



Eerste Dag†

16-10-35



M. C. Escher and Philately Trials and Triumphs of an Acclaimed Graphic Artist

by Jan Vogel

Translated from the Dutch by Bert Groeneveld
Edited with additional material by Jeffrey Price

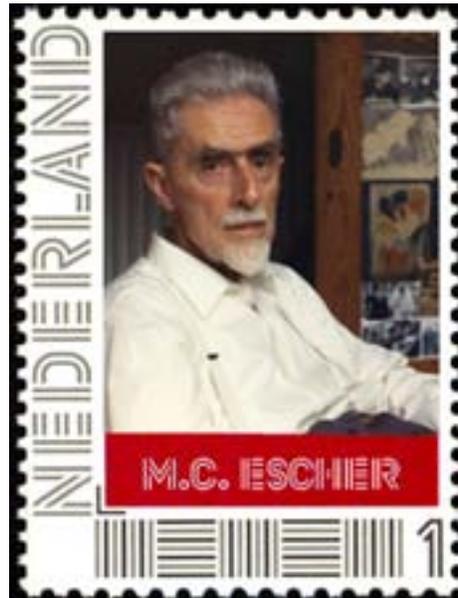
M.C. Escher and Philately

Trials and Triumphs of an Acclaimed Graphic Artist

While reading the book “The Life and Work of M.C. Escher,” the Dutch philatelist Jan Vogel was intrigued by a postage stamp design by Escher that had not been produced. His curiosity led him to explore three Dutch museums: The Museum for Communication and the Escher in The Palace Museum, both in The Hague, the Joh. Enschedé Museum in Haarlem, and finally to Escher’s great friend and biographer Bruno Ernst. This search led to many surprising discoveries and finally to the creation of this article.

Maurits Cornelis Escher (1898-1972)

M. C. Escher is undoubtedly the most famous Dutch graphic artist. The stamp at the right features a photograph of Escher by Bruno Ernst on a stamp Ernst himself designed as a private production for the Escher in The Palace Museum. This museum, which opened in 2002 on the Lange Voorhout in The Hague, is located in the former palace of Queen Emma of the



Netherlands. Here you can experience one of the world’s greatest collections of Escher’s work and discover why Escher is regarded as one of the most creative and unusual artists of the twentieth century. Escher’s inimitable work is universally admired and is a triumph of imagination brought to life.

Escher’s early prints and drawings from the nineteen-twenties and thirties concentrate on beautiful landscapes of Italy, where the artist lived from 1922 - 1936. After Escher’s return to Holland in 1938 the focus of his work shifted from views of the world around him to more cerebral explorations. For the rest of his life Escher would focus on the interlocking figures of regular tessellations, the creation of impossible buildings and constructions that inspire fantasy.

Though Escher was not a mathematician and was adamant about his lack of knowledge in the subject, he was in contact with numerous mathematicians and crystallographers throughout his career. In 1981, on the occasion of the 10th International Congress of Mathematicians in Innsbruck, Austria published a stamp based on a design by M.C. Escher. The official brochure commemorating this release (Below, with a strip of the issued stamps in blue added) features a proof of the stamp in black and white. This documents states that the stamp was created as a tribute to Escher and that the impossible cube was adapted from his famous 1958 lithograph, “Belvedere,” (B.426) which is prominently illustrated. In this print the man on the bench holds a little cube like the one on the stamp whose front and back are interchangeable, and this peculiar model is actually the pattern for the construction of the twisting tower in Escher’s print.



Escher has been especially popular in the United States and Canada since scientists and mathematicians discovered his work in the 1950’s. Their interest led to articles about Escher being published in magazines such as LIFE and Time, and Escher’s graphics were a favorite decoration in scientists studies and academics’ homes in Europe and the United States. Escher had many contacts with academics and collectors throughout the world and he presented several lectures about his work in the USA in the 1960’s.



A recent American privately-issued stamp underscores Escher's popularity in America (Above). This stamp was created by The Artists' Market of Norwalk, Connecticut, and features a photograph of Escher by Bruno Ernst. In this photo Escher is holding a polyhedron he decorated with bats, lizards, and fish: creatures that represent the air, land, and the sea, which we can see more clearly in the enlargement below.



Escher's Philately

In 1935 Escher designed a Dutch stamp for The National Aviation Fund (Below, an example with the overprint 'SPECIMEN.')



Founded in 1934, the objective of the Fund was "to promote Dutch aviation wherever possible and in all its aspects and applications as well as taking measures to promote Dutch aviation" This is the rarest of the stamps Escher designed, and to find a block of four on a first day cover, such as is reproduced as the cover image for this article, is of the utmost scarcity. It is unusual to find a stamp from any nation that credits its designer; yet on this issue Escher was permitted to include his classic

MCE monogram in the lower left corner of the design. Here we see shadows of airplanes and text cast on the map of the Netherlands below. The latitude and longitude lines over this countryside reminds one of grids Escher used much later in prints such as 'Sphere Surface with Fish' (B.427).



In 1949 Escher created two stamp designs for The Netherlands, Suriname, and Netherlands Antillies in the so-called Kingdom Series on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Postal Union. On the design used by The Netherlands (Below), the intertwining mail horns on the surface of a globe are an interesting realization of Escher's desire to cover a



sphere with interlocking figures, such as he did in his remarkable 1959 woodcut, 'Circle Limit III' (B.434). Escher's original drawing for the Netherlands stamp (Below) features the design that was used for the stamps of both Suriname and the



Netherlands Antillies (Below). This drawing shows that a map was originally intended to be outlined on the globe under the ribbons.



In 1988 Escher's colonial 'globe with horns and ribbons' stamp design was commemorated as a 'stamp on stamp' special issue by Suriname on the occasion of the International Stamp Exhibition FILACEPT 88 in The Hague. A single stamp was issued, as well as a souvenir sheet featured three stamps from the Kingdom series including Escher's design in blue.



Unrealized Designs

Several museums, such as Escher in the Palace and The Heralkeidon Museum in Athens, Greece have exhibited and published unexecuted stamp designs by Escher, and in fact, these outnumber the stamps designed by Escher that were actually produced. In 1932 Escher participated in a design competition for a peace stamp to be issued by the Dutch Post Office.



Of the 807 entries, the design by Escher (above) was in the top 15, but finally a design by P. A. H. Hofman (right) was selected.

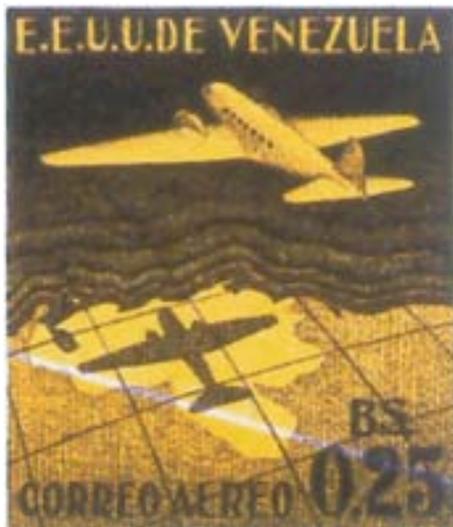


Escher was asked by the well-known printing firm of Joh. Enschedé to submit a design for the first postage stamps to be issued by the United Nations in 1951. 150 designs were submitted, and Escher's is believed to

have been one of the finalists. Escher's stamps bear a striking resemblance to his unrealized design for the Netherlands. In the collection of the Joh. Enschedé Museum are eight color proofs that, although uncredited, are clearly designed by Escher (see two below). These designs are reproduced courtesy of the Joh. Enschedé Museum and have not been published prior to their appearance in this article.



Bruno Ernst's book 'The Magic Mirror of M. C. Escher,' which he wrote together with the artist, mentions that in 1939 Escher created two designs for an unrealized Venezuelan airmail stamp.



These compositions, especially the second wonderful design with the shadow of the aircraft over the map of Venezuela, brings to mind Escher's 1935 Aviation Fund stamp. These designs very possibly evolved from Escher's 1934 woodcut 'Airplane Over a Snowy Landscape' (B. 264) designed for the cover of the magazine 'Timotheus.' A similar aereal landscape is seen in Escher's

masterpiece, 'Day and Night' (B.303). Bruno Ernst also mentions that in 1956 Escher created several designs for a 'Europa' stamp. (Below, left) Once again, however, Escher's design was not used, and six countries adopted a design by the French artist Daniel Gonzague (Below, right).



XII^{ME} Congres Postal Universel

The catalog "M. C. Escher: His Life and Complete Graphic Work" reproduces two prints, B.349 and B.350 created for the International Postal Conference held in Paris in May and June, 1947. We now know that these prints were created for a special commemorative booklet as a gift for the members of the conference. This is a virtually unknown publication that in fact deserves a prominent place in Escher's work. An example of this rare booklet is in the Museum for Communication in The Hague. It is a small stamp album with a light brown cover and pages tied together with an orange cord (the Dutch national color,) using a technique similar to the binding of Escher's 1931 woodcut portfolio, 'XXIV

Emblemata.' The cover is embellished with a commemorative vignette cut by Escher featuring a postal horn with a philatelic cancellation reading 'PARIS 1947 MAI - JUIN.'

The booklet contains 16 pages displaying 131 Dutch stamps from 1939 – 1946, each carefully tipped onto the pages. The stamps from the years of German occupation of 1942 – 1945 were omitted.



Escher created a beautiful engraving as a frontispiece for this album: a map of Holland showing the country dramatically embossed, rising above the surrounding sea. (Right) If it were not for the MCE monogram in the lower right corner of this print, there would be no way of knowing that Escher was involved in the production of these prints or this booklet, for it is presented virtually without text. The recent discovery of an separate explanatory addendum in the collection of the Communications Museum now can bring this history to light.





A letter was sent in September 1947 by the head of the Dutch delegation to the Postal Conference to participants of the congress explaining that “the preparation time for compiling the booklet was too short to write an explanatory text” and so both the letter and an explanatory leaflet were sent to the participants after the close of the conference. This leaflet is reproduced for the first time below, and its contents are critically important. The text begins “This booklet was composed under the direction of the Aesthetics Department of the Postal Service. One of our best-known graphic artists M. C. Escher was in charge of the design, in collaboration with the famous printer Joh. Enschedé of Haarlem.” After discussing the use of the Romanée typeface, it continues “Mr. Escher arranged the stamps

on the tinted sheets and in addition to the vignette on the cover, he also created the frontispiece. This engraving represents the Netherlands, the character of this country and its engineers in their defense against the sea. Escher utilized shading to in order to express the difference between the areas under and above sea level. A distinctive technique of interest to connoisseurs of graphic art is that Mr. Escher engraved the image in type foundry metal due to the shortage of palm wood for engraving. At the bottom of this image is an ancient aphorism in Latin ‘DEUS MARE FECIT, BATAVUS LITTORA’ - ‘God created the sea, Dutchmen made the shore.’”

Presented with this documentation, we now know with certainty that not only did Escher create the two original engravings in this booklet, but that the print of the map is the only metal-plate engraving in all of Escher’s work, and therefore it has been miscataloged as a woodcut in ‘Life and Work!’ Additionally, we know that Escher himself was responsible for the design of the booklet as well as the artistic layouts of the stamps presented on the many pages. These facts may be considered among the most important discoveries regarding Escher’s work in recent years and have added greatly to our understanding of Escher as a working artist and designer.

XII^{ME} CONGRES POSTAL UNIVERSEL
PARIS MAI-JUIN MCMXLVII
OFFERT PAR LA DELEGATION NEERLANDAISE

Ce livret a été composé sous la direction du Service esthétique de la Direction des Postes, Télégraphes et Téléphones des Pays-Bas (PTT). Un de nos meilleurs artistes graphiques M. C. Escher a été chargé de la composition, en collaboration avec l'imprimerie connue de Joh. Enschedé de Haarlem.

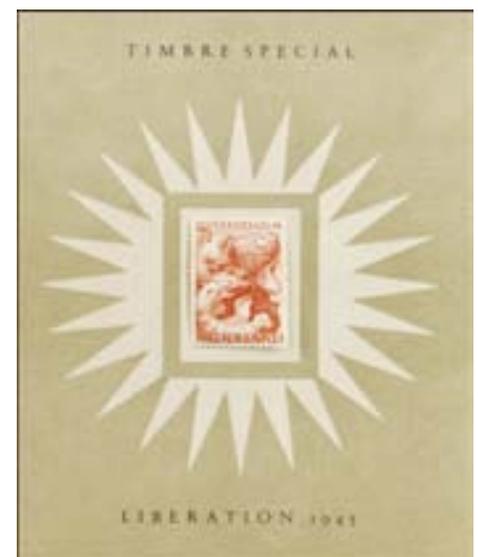
Pour les titres le 'Romanée' a été choisi, une lettre de notre dessinateur bien connu J. van Krimpen dont les types sont exécutés par la fonderie de caractères d'Enschedé. Monsieur Escher a arrangé les timbres sur les feuilles teintées et, outre la vignette sur la couverture, la gravure figurant à la page de garde est de sa main.

Cette gravure représente une image des Pays-Bas qui est suggestive pour l'étranger par rapport au caractère de notre sol et à sa défense contre l'eau. On voit la haute partie orientale de notre pays en relief au dessus du niveau de la mer; à l'Ouest par contre les parties à niveau bas, approfondies, ainsi que les rivières entourées de digues. Le célèbre barrage (Afsluitdijk) qui reliant la Hollande septentrionale à la Frise a transformé le "Zuiderzee" (une mer intérieure) en le "IJsselmeer" (le lac d'IJssel), symbolise la lutte acharnée pour arracher à la mer des terres fertiles. Sa construction est un spécimen magnifique des talents de nos ingénieurs.

On voit le nouveau polder du Nord-Est à droite du 'IJsselmeer' et au Sud de la Frise; les parties destinées au dessèchement sont indiquées par une hachure plus claire. Une particularité technique, intéressante pour les connaisseurs de l'art graphique, c'est que Monsieur Escher a gravé l'image dans le métal à lettres, parce que la pénurie des matériaux l'empêchait de graver dans du bois de palmier.

A cette image montrant sous une forme très confuse l'histoire de notre sol correspond un aphorisme latin se trouvant dans nos vieilles chroniques.

DEUS MARE FECIT, BATAVUS LITTORA
DIEU A CREE LA MER, LES BATAVUS LES LITTORAUX



Perhaps the most beautiful of Escher’s page designs for this booklet is shown above, featuring the special stamp issued celebrating the liberation of the Netherlands in 1945. John Friedrichs, a Dutch collector, notes “The booklet as a whole breathes a sense of national pride and is very much akin in spirit to Escher’s 1946 wood engraving ‘We Are Coming Out of It!’ (‘The Well’ B.345).

The Post Office ‘Metamorphosis’

In 1967, five years before his death, Escher received a request from the Dutch Post Office to extend his 1940 woodcut ‘Metamorphosis II’ (B.320, printed from twenty woodblocks) to decorate the new post office in Kerkplein Square in The Hague. Escher wrote about this project, “I’m thinking about a very attractive commission which the Post Office might offer me... A new and enormous post office in The Hague has an empty wall above the counter, about a hundred and fifty feet long. This is to be decorated with a sort of frieze about five feet high. The aesthetic consultant of the Post Office would like to use my old ‘Metamorphosis,’ photographically enlarged and then painted onto the wall (not by me! – by a skilled craftsman.) However, my ‘Metamorphosis’ is eight inches high and thirteen feet long. Thus, for a height of five feet, the length is only a hundred feet. I therefore have to add an extra fifty feet - that is, add or insert six feet of new metamorphoses to the original woodcut strip. That is perfectly possible, but it is quite a job. I’m curious to see whether it’ll turn out as I can visualize it now, vaguely, in my mind’s eye.”

Escher cut thirteen additional woodblocks for the enlarged ‘Metamorphosis III’ (B.446), adding sections with bees, boats, horses and most appropriately: interlocking flying envelopes. The official unveiling of the mural took place on February 20, 1969. In the photograph below, Escher is second from the left, admiring his creation at the inauguration of the new post office lobby.



An American postage stamp created by Artists’ Market features a photograph of Escher unrolling an example of ‘Metamorphosis’ in his studio.



To celebrate M. C. Escher’s 100th birthday in 1998, the Dutch Postal Service issued a stamp honoring the artist. The design by Felix Janssens shows Escher looking up at his huge ‘Metamorphosis III’ where lizards are transformed into a honeycomb.



The image on the stamp is an adaptation of the photograph reproduced below.

In 1990 the painting of Escher’s ‘Metamorphosis’ was removed from the post office wall and mounted on panels that were re-hung in a cascading ribbon. In 2008 this mural was reinstalled in terminal 4 of Schiphol airport, seen below.



Philatelists have a special opportunity to see a virtually unknown work by Escher, a design that has seldom been reproduced in the books of his graphic art. In 1953 Escher was asked by the director of the philatelic publishing house DAVO to design their company’s logo. Today, over fifty years later, this design (below) is unchanged and can be found on DAVO stamp albums.



Interestingly, this is not a true interlocking symmetry design, and birds of this pattern were never used in a graphic print by Escher. They do, however, fit beautifully together, and the tails are certainly reminiscent of stamps joined by perforations as well as the fins of fish in Escher’s 1964 woodcut ‘Square Limit’ (B.443).

In Conclusion

This article can only touch on Escher’s work as it relates to philately. To understand more about the ingenious and magical world of Escher one must see his prints in galleries or museums and explore the many catalogs and books that focus on all the aspects of Escher’s creative life. There are many wonders to be found in his work, for as Escher said, “Those who wonder, discover that this is, in itself a wonder.”

SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN

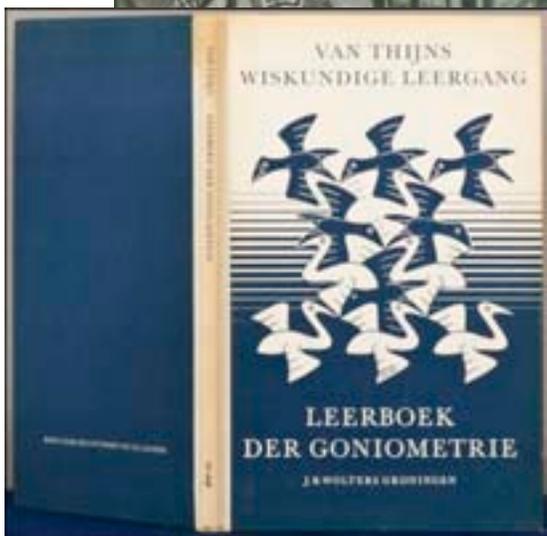
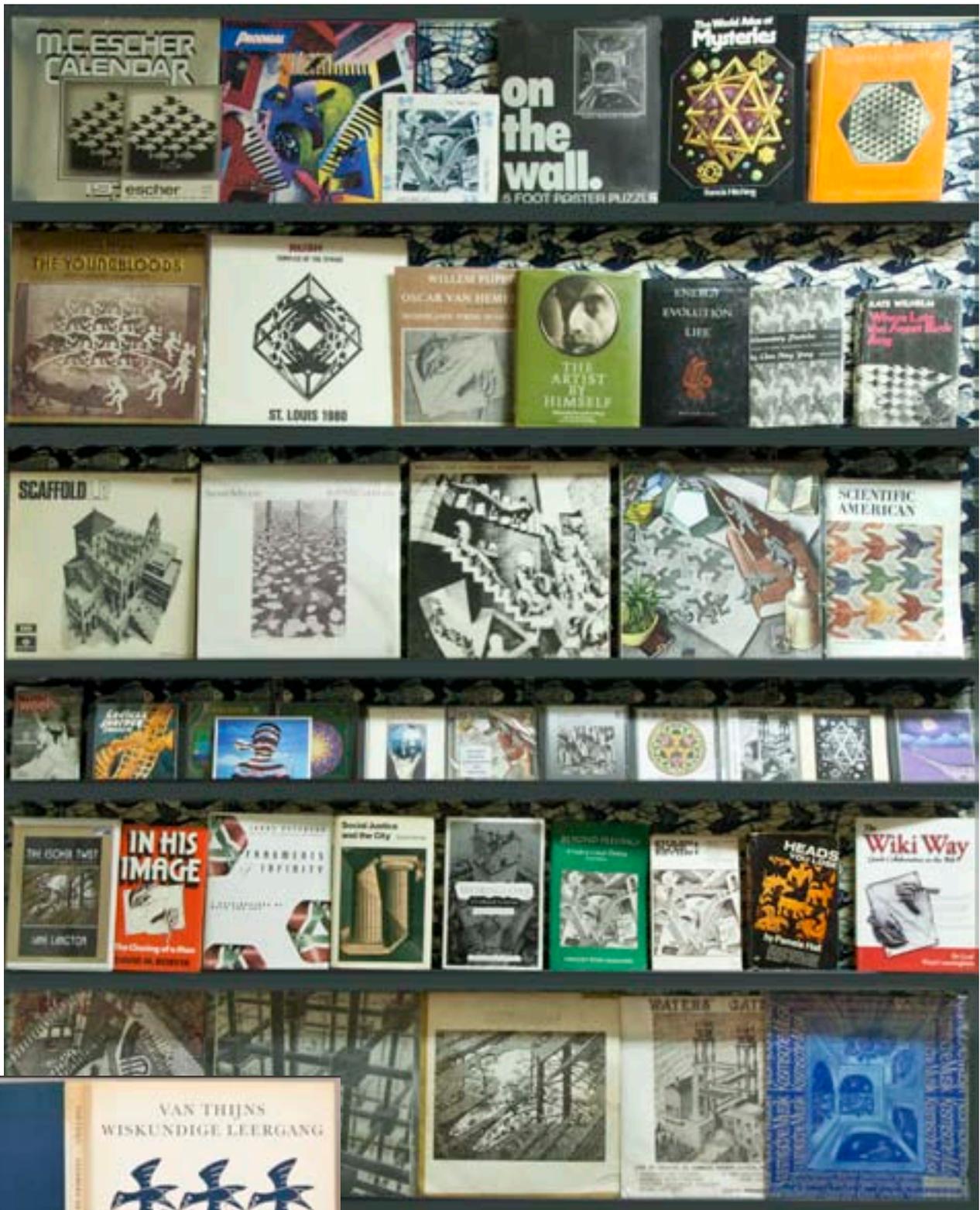


MATHEMATICAL MOSAIC

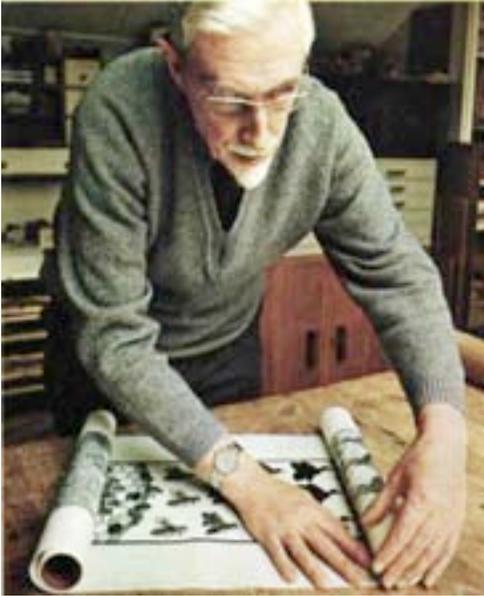
FIFTY CENTS

April 1961

Scientific American featured this delightful adaptation of M. C. Escher's symmetry drawing of the geese utilized in his woodcut 'Day and Night' on the cover of their magazine in 1961, contributing greatly to the international recognition of Escher's artwork. It is said that Escher was pleased with the colorization of these birds, though such multi-color fantasies were not in keeping his formal style. This pristine copy of the magazine is from the Artists' Market collection of Escher Ephemera.



Selections from The Artists' Market collection of M. C. Escher ephemera, including a presentation copy of a rare Dutch geometry book from 1960 (shown at the left) which is one of the only publications featuring a design by Escher that never appeared as a graphic print.



M. C. Escher (1898 – 1972)

“Those who wonder,” M. C. Escher once wrote, “discover that this is, in itself a wonder.” And indeed, we are confronted by wonders whenever we enter the world of his extraordinary artwork. His pictures frequently depict things that are at once ordinary and yet impossible to find in our everyday experiences. In Escher’s universe, creatures fit seamlessly together like a puzzle extending into infinity and space itself can be turned inside out to be seen from many directions simultaneously. Today, his artwork is some of the most recognizable in the world, and his original prints are among the most sought-after and valuable treasures in the art world.

Maurits Cornelis Escher was born in The Netherlands in 1898, the youngest son of an engineer. He was an indifferent student who especially disliked mathematics and barely graduated from high school. At the urging of his parents he pursued studies in architecture, but he soon gravitated to the arts and devoted the rest of his life to making lithographs and woodcuts. “I am a printmaker, heart and soul,” he said.

Escher moved to Italy as a young man and married Jetta Umiker, the Swiss daughter of an aristocrat. He had his first one-man shows in both Italy and Holland in 1924, and the Gemeentemuseum, the state museum of Holland, purchased 27 of his prints in 1933. The next year Escher won a prize for printmaking in Chicago and the Art Institute of Chicago became the first American museum to purchase his work. Escher returned to Holland in 1941 and focused on his passion for creating interlocking patterns of creatures inspired by Islamic tile designs he had seen at the 14th century Alhambra Palace in Spain. In 1961 the magazine *Scientific American* featured an Escher design on the cover, and that article about his artwork reached a wide audience of scientists, mathematicians, and other academics. A completely different kind of popularity was achieved in the late 1960’s when Escher’s extraordinary images appeared on day-glow posters in the avant-garde community, on posters in college rooms, and even on record album covers. Although for much of his life Escher worked in relative isolation in his home print-making studio, by the end of his life he had achieved international fame and prices for his original work sky-rocketed along with sale of books and reproductions of his prints. Escher created his last print, the masterpiece ‘Ringsnakes,’ in 1969, and died on March 27, 1972.

After his death Escher’s popularity continued to grow, and in 1998 a museum devoted to his work opened in the Hague. That same year a record-breaking exhibit of Escher’s art was featured at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. In 2003 Artists’ Market was instrumental in acquiring one of the largest collections of Escher’s work for a new museum, ‘Herakleidon: Experience in Visual Arts’ in Athens Greece.

Artists’ Market gallerist Jeffrey Price explains his own fascination with Escher’s art: “There is always more to Escher’s pictures than first meets the eye. His is an artist’s universe, one where our rational ideas may be suspended and yet logic prevails. Escher’s vision enables us to see the invisible patterns of nature and catch a glimpse of wonders that exist just beyond our grasp.”



Artists' Market

VENU SENIOR ARTS EDITOR PHILIP ELIASOPH TOURED THE GALLERY WITH PRICE AND THEN SAT DOWN FOR AN ANIMATED TOUR INSIDE THIS GALLERY OWNER'S FERTILE MIND.

The magic and mystery of Dutch master M.C. Escher [1898–1972] captured the imagination of gallery owner Jeffrey Price of the Artists' Market. In 40 years of successful management, he has expanded his passion into an internationally respected source for all things Escher-related. Escher once said: "I believe that producing pictures, as I do, is almost entirely a question of wanting so very much to do it well." Price has surpassed himself; he goes beyond presenting Escher "well"—by doing it "unbelievably well."

Jeffrey, thanks for taking time from your busy schedule as you are multi-tasking here at Artists' Market. Let's jump right in. Tell us a little bit about your journey. What is your arts background and how did you focus on a career as a gallery entrepreneur?

I always enjoyed the combination of art and entrepreneurship. While I was studying history of art at UConn in the early 1970s I started my own business selling bagels to folks studying late in the dorms at night. That was much more exciting to me than getting a "real" job, and I still feel that way today. I assure you, running an art gallery and designing fine framing is more fun than most people have when they go to work! Artists' Market started as a small art center in 1970. That was back in the day when we sold macramé cord and paint along with pictures, pottery, and frames. I was always more interested in talking about art and

selling beautiful things than in teaching people to draw or selling heavy boxes of clay, so the focus of Artists' Market naturally evolved toward a sort of hybrid of a museum and a museum gift shop. I have to admit, I often find a museum's gift shop more enjoyable than some of the exhibits. So I present art in the same way I arrange it in my home: an Ansel Adams photograph can be next to a remarkable mirror, and M. C. Escher's work can hang beside a beautiful print by someone you have never heard of.

As a pioneer in the Connecticut art community—opening the gallery in 1970—you have truly talked the talk and walked the walk. In creating a remarkably respected source for original fine art, what would you say were the ingredients for your long-term sustainability?

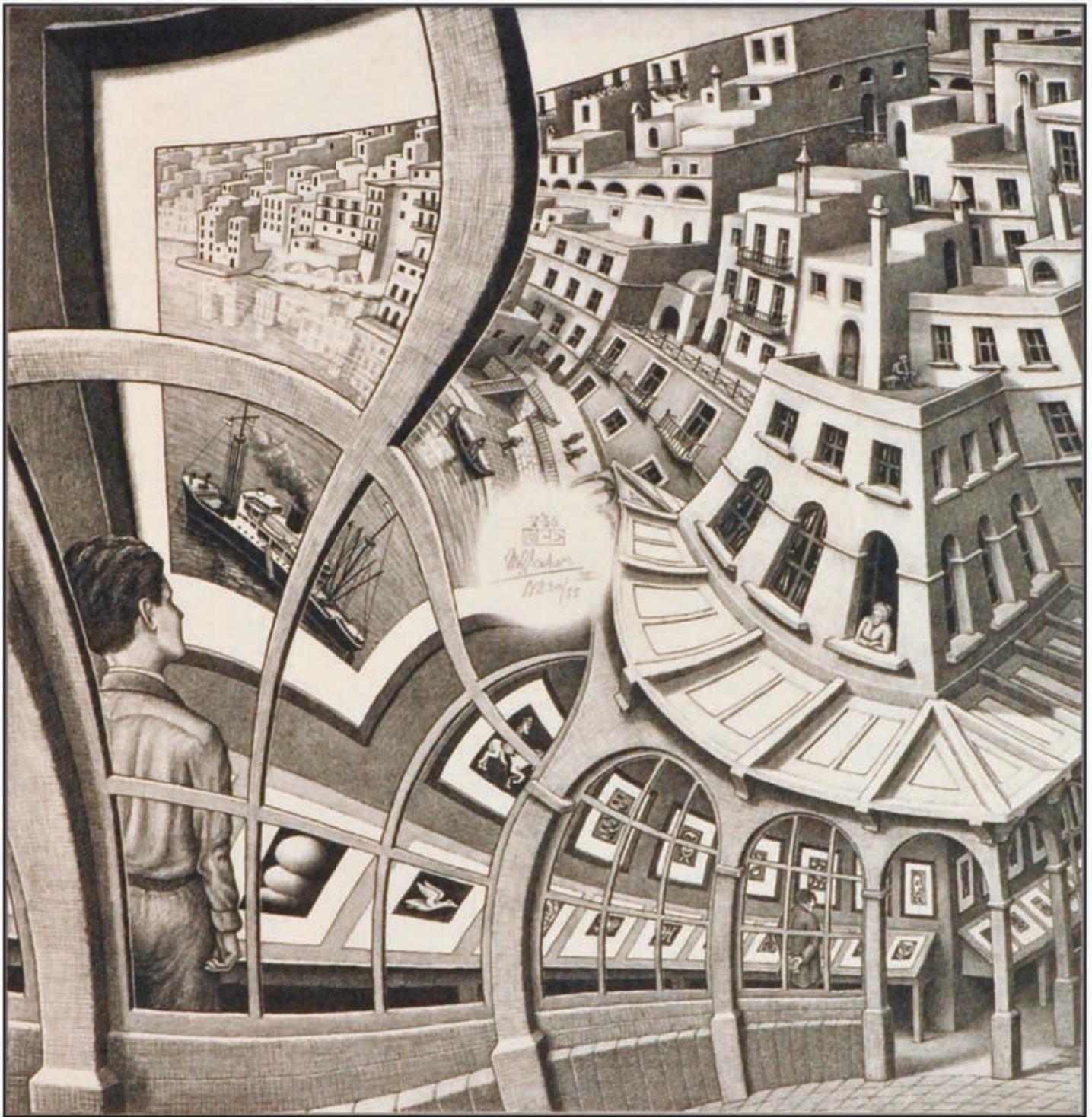
It seems today that the Internet, malls, and megastores dominate shopping. Artists' Market is quite the opposite: We're a single store, a brick-and-mortar (and wood!) business where you can come in and talk to knowledgeable people who enjoy human interaction. How often do you find that, let alone in a business that's open seven days a week? I'm lucky to have a good staff here, and all of them have been with me for years and years. Most days you are still likely to find me behind the counter gift-wrapping some blown glass goblets for a wedding gift or talking about Escher

in our Masterworks Gallery, and I think that sort of owner-operated personal business is really appreciated these days. I like being that kind of dinosaur. Every year, I think we're treasured a little more by our clients because there are so few businesses like ours left.

Let's zoom in on your lifelong passion: the art of M.C. Escher. How did that passion begin? Many of us remember having those hallucinatory Escher posters on the walls of our dorm rooms in college back in the sixties. How have we all matured from those early mind-bending images to a more sophisticated appreciation for Escher's truly magical imagery?

I think every generation has to discover great art for itself. I'm passionate about jazz, and Ben Webster's sax from half a century ago can be as enjoyable for me as whatever Bruce Springsteen is playing right now. Shakespeare and The Beatles will probably be playing forever, and *The Odyssey* is still one of the best adventure stories of all time. Great art is like that: timeless. Escher himself was a rather straight-laced and serious Dutchman. He studied architecture and his dad was an engineer, but he was one of those students who always hung out in the art room. He barely passed his graduation exams, but he was lucky to have a great printmaker as a teacher. For most of his life he was known only in Holland and in Italy, places where he lived and could exhibit regularly. Then in the 1950s and '60s his work started to be seen by mathematicians and scientists, and that's what really brought him international fame. My father taught history of science at Yale, and that's where I first saw Escher's work: on the walls of academic's studies. But just about that time (that would be about 1967) I also saw Escher's





M. C. Escher: "Print Gallery"
 1956 sig red and numb red lithog ap hon exhib ti at Artists' Market

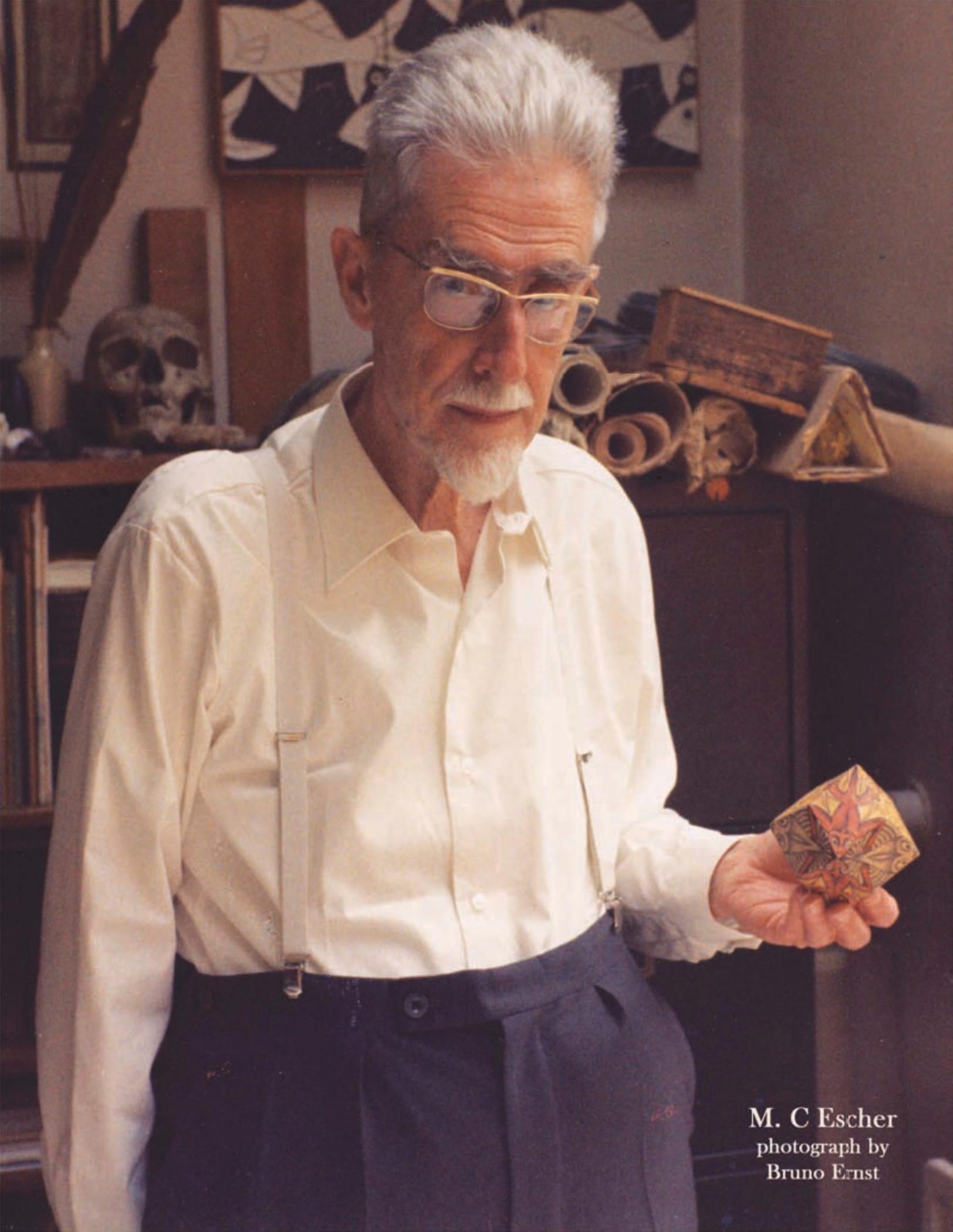
work in San Francisco in the poster shops of Haight-Ashbury and under black lights at the Fillmore Concert Hall. The Escher prints I saw there were large and colorful, and I was a bit surprised when I discovered that most of Escher's original woodcuts were smaller and printed in black and white. I actually enjoy both kinds of images, and I keep a collection of the black-light posters here at Artists' Market. It is the fact that Escher's imagery is both scientifically precise and wildly imaginative that gives his pictures lasting appeal. It's also incredibly important

that Escher hand-printed his works in small editions in his home workshop. And there are so many different themes in Escher's work. Sometimes I'm in the mood for a quiet philosophical print like "Three Worlds," and sometimes the complexity of "Ringsnakes" carries me away. Now there's a print that, for me, captures the nature of the universe on a sheet of tissue paper: infinity, life and death printed with hand-carved woodblocks. That's something of a miracle, if you ask me, but there are many different ways in which Escher prints intrigue people, and they con-

tinue to do so generation after generation. That's the key to lasting value, both as truly fine art and also as an investment.

Speaking of knock-off posters or cheaply reproduced but fake prints, can you offer our VENÜ readers some do's and don'ts on what to look for when acquiring an original print?

Reality and originality can both be surprisingly difficult to define, and Escher certainly enjoyed exploring that type of thing in his pictures. Often, you can't quite be certain



M. C Escher
photograph by
Bruno Ernst

what is real and what slipped in from another dimension, and that's the fun of it. But originality in artwork is a serious and complicated question, especially in these days of digital reproductions and virtual reality. All original Escher prints are valuable, and though some can be bought for a few hundred dollars, it is not unusual for an original Escher print to cost as much as an automobile. That difference between an original and a reprint is easy to understand when we think of what's in our wallets. We know that a photocopy of a dollar bill has no value, no matter how good a copy you make of it. In fact, it is illegal to make really good copies of our paper money, yet today we find paintings are often copied as prints and we've become a bit desensitized and even confused about the value and impor-

forgeries. Escher wrote in his will that all his woodblocks and printing plates should be destroyed; he really didn't want anyone else printing his pictures! And that was back when good prints were a few hundred dollars. Today the finest Escher artwork can be measured in fractions of millions, and I still think they are undervalued! These days, unfortunately, I see forgeries pop up all too often on eBay, which I consider sort of a wild-west tag sale and the sheriff sure is out of town. People can get fooled pretty easily since most folks cannot compare what they are buying to an authentic example of Escher's work. I'm contacted every week by someone who's bought an Escher print at a thrift shop or online and they want to know if they hit the jackpot, but of course that almost never happens. For 30 years I've

Haven in a house crowded with books... so many books that they were piled in rows on the floor after they filled all the bookcases. Old books were hanging on a clothesline strung over the couch, airing out to get rid of their musty smell. And from under that couch Christopher brought out a cardboard folder, and when he opened that folder I saw my first major Escher prints. There were the beautiful lithographs "Waterfall" and "Belvedere," and another woodcut of a strange planet, and an Italian landscape, all signed by Escher and as fresh as they were when Christopher had visited Escher in Holland many years before. Escher prints have always gone up in value, and by the time I saw them, those prints had gone from being a few hundred dollars to being in the thousands, and I was thrilled that I was able

IT IS THE FACT THAT ESCHER'S IMAGERY IS BOTH SCIENTIFICALLY PRECISE AND WILDLY IMAGINATIVE THAT GIVES HIS PICTURES LASTING APPEAL.

tance of original, hand-made art. History has a way of sorting these things out, and original Escher graphic prints are the only ones with lasting value. But just what is an original print? Prints are multiples, after all; so how do we know if something is an original or a copy? It may be easiest to understand if we back into the question and answer by simply saying if a picture is a copy of something, then it's not an original. Escher's prints were made by putting ink on a woodblock or a lithographic stone block and then carefully printing the image. You wouldn't call the piece of wood or stone the original artwork, would you? It's true that Escher's carved woodblocks—which are all in museums—are fascinating, and so is van Gogh's paint brush, but people travel across the world to see "Starry Night" by van Gogh or an original Escher print at Artists' Market. Woodblocks and paintbrushes are simply different ways for artists to create their pictures.

Considering you are one of the world's most respected authorities on Escher's breathtaking artistic oeuvre, let's learn from you about what you have seen in that very specialized field. I can remember decades ago seeing wonderful Escher prints available for less than \$1,000, but now I understand they can reach as high as \$50,000. Now that they are highly valued, that brings on the fakes and forgeries. Tell us about the numerous counterfeits you have spotted. Can you give us an idea of your connoisseurship methods for validating authentic Escher works?
For many years there weren't many Escher

looked at Escher originals. I've seen more or less everything Escher created during his lifetime, and I can tell you that every print has a personality and a particular look. Escher stopped creating his work in 1970 and died in 1972, so all original Escher prints are at least 40 years old, and to me they each have their own personality. Escher drew in a very precise manner. He used certain paper and certain ink, and if you print from a woodblock every print must be exactly the same size as that carved block. So measuring a print is a good starting point for determining authenticity, and then we check ink and paper as well. You develop a second sense about such things. Fortunately, Escher was very consistent in the way he signed prints and I keep a reference library of dozens of authentic Escher signatures. With all that, it's easy to make a bad forgery, but just about impossible to make a perfect one.

And what about your greatest purchases? Did you ever come across a treasure trove of Escher prints that you alone recognized and came to acquire?

Very early on, back in the 1970s, I'd been able to find some of Escher's small woodcuts and I was searching for the famous ones I'd seen in books. My father, the Yale professor, suggested I call a teaching buddy of his. "I think Christopher visited Escher in Holland," he remembered, "and I think he has some prints." I called Christopher and, sure enough, he had bought some woodcuts and lithographs from Escher, and I will never forget visiting him in New

to buy a few and mount an exhibition of Escher's work at Artists' Market, and in time I was able to buy most of Christopher's collection. That was really the start of the Escher gallery at Artists' Market, and I still have a small print Escher signed for Christopher hanging in my office.

Beyond the "over the transom" counter process of buying and selling fine art, as a true art lover and expert, can you explain to our readers your extraordinary abilities in understanding the intrinsic value of art?

That's quite a compliment. Art is visual communication. Like poetry, which says more than the words themselves describe, timeless art must open up viewers' intuitions and convey a message that is instinctively meaningful, personal, and resonant. While this sounds complicated, what good art does is very simple indeed: It engages you, it makes you want to look at it some more, and it is satisfying in way that might be hard to describe. I believe that if you asked Escher what his art was all about, he might say, "Look at my pictures, that is how I explain those things." He was a true artist and so he communicated in pictures, and I suppose he left it up to people like us, Philip, to try to match up words with his extraordinary images. Sometimes I think I come close to doing just that, and if that happens, then I've really achieved something worthwhile since not only can I understand these amazing pictures better, but I've found a way to share that magic with others. To me, that's really extraordinary. □



M. C. Escher with his newly-printed woodcut 'Ringsnakes'
in his studio at home in Baarn, Holland, June, 1970.

Escher is surrounded by his books, prints, and collected artifacts.
This is one of the last photographs of Escher in his home studio before his move to
The Rosa Speir House in Laren, where he spent his final years.
There, the artist wrote, "all the artists-inhabitants live individually;
there is no need to see other people if you don't want to."

Photograph by Michael Halldorson, reprinted with permission



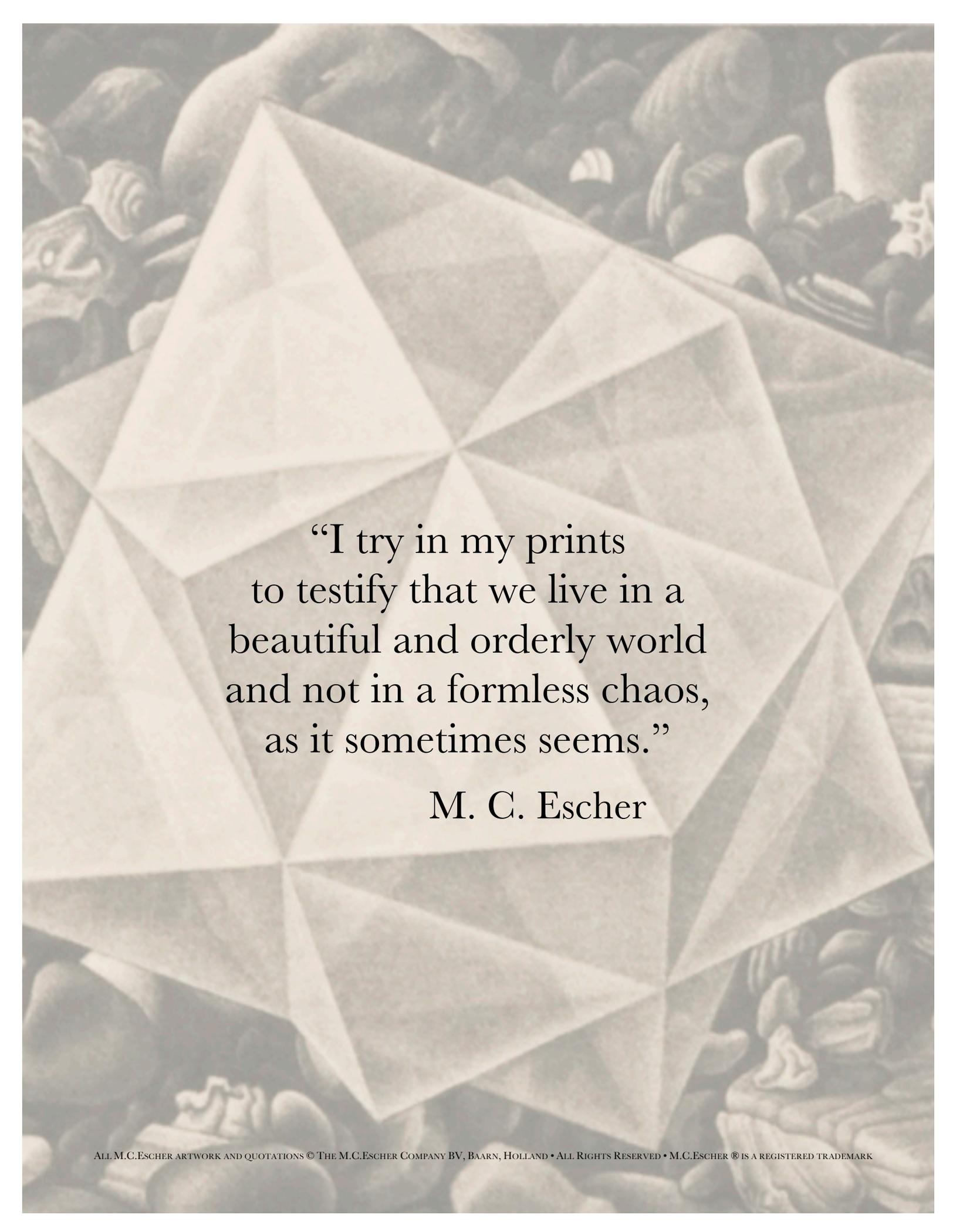
M. C. ESCHER AND HIS CHEESE SANDWICH

Ceramic sculpture by Brigit Beemster of County Sligo, Ireland
Permanent collection of Artists' Market,
photographed by Jeffrey Price with Escher's final print, 'Ringsnakes'

"M. C. Escher, as a little boy, selected the quantity, shape, and sizes of his slices of cheese so that, fitted one against the other, they would cover as exactly as possible the entire slice of bread.

This particular trait never left him."

As told by George Escher, the Artist's Eldest Son



“I try in my prints
to testify that we live in a
beautiful and orderly world
and not in a formless chaos,
as it sometimes seems.”

M. C. Escher