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Spotlight on newly identified drawings in albums: Piranesi and his studio at the Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe

Abstract

A collection of close to 300 drawings in the Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe were newly attributed to Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778) and his immediate Roman workshop in 2014. Many of them record Roman antiquities or preparatory stages of Piranesi's printed works. The discovery was followed by a still ongoing funded research project (started in January 2017) that addresses, among many other issues, the future preservation of the drawings. Their material situation is noteworthy because all of them are adhered in two albums dating from the early nineteenth century that were owned and likely also filled in this fashion by the well-known Karlsruhe architect Friedrich Weinbrenner (1766–1826). It appears that they were transferred in this state to the forerunner of today's museum. One distinctive quality of the Karlsruhe find lies in its material intactness both as concerns the album assembly and the drawings themselves. The still undisturbed historical evidence must be factored into decisions concerning the preservation of the albums. This may conflict with demand for access to the drawings, which have become the focus of intensive scholarly interest. The key concern is whether the drawings can remain attached in the album.

Keywords

Album, architectural drawings, historic use, damage, value

Albums are one of the classical formats for collecting and keeping drawings, not only for connoisseurs, but also for professions that historically traded with or otherwise made use of drawings, among them archaeologists, architects and natural scientists. Oftentimes, the slumber of these personal pictorial libraries was disturbed at some point, leading to the dissemination of an intact collection and thus to the loss of information of its origin, function and early history. Intact albums containing untouched collections of drawings are therefore a rare and valuable occurrence.

The Karlsruhe find

A sensational reattribution happened in 2014 at the Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe: Georg Kabierske, then a recent secondary school graduate, spent an internship at the museum where he viewed two large landscape-format albums from the estate of the architect Friedrich Weinbrenner (1766–1826). The albums contain about 300 drawings of Roman antiquities, patterns and designs previously attributed to Weinbrenner (Fig. 1), an important neoclassical architect who was due for a retrospective exhibition curated by Kabierske's father (Kabierske and Kleinmanns).¹ There were reasons why this attribution had not been questioned before. Both albums had been in the architect's possession; they were documented to come from his estate, and had not seen recent scrutiny. New examinations by the research team had confirmed that the albums were locally produced, as the album papers were made in Ettlingen,² a small town near Karlsruhe. Also, it was known from his autobiography that Weinbrenner had stayed in Rome between 1792 and 1797, explaining that he had brought the drawings back with him from the Eternal City. It was therefore assumed that Weinbrenner had produced the drawings himself during his stay. However, Kabierske soon noticed that the drawings, mostly drawn in red and black chalk, often reworked and complex in execution, have little similarity with other works by Weinbrenner, who typically drew in a clear and determined style with pen and ink. Instead, because Georg Kabierske had previously encountered drawings and the printed work of eighteenth-century Venetian-Roman architect Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720–1778), he not only noticed similarities to his style, but also strangely pragmatic paper use, such as a drawing executed on the verso of a Piranesi print.³ Luckily, his discovery fell on sympathetic ears: he was supported by the head of the Kupferstichkabinett, Dorit Schäfer, and museum director Pia Müller-Tamm, as well as art historian Christoph Frank, a specialist of eighteenth-century Roman art, who agreed that the find needed scholarly investigation. A research project with funding from the German Research Foundation (DFG) and the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) is ongoing (2016–2021), bringing together conservators and art historians from the Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, the Stuttgart Academy of Art and Design and the Università della Svizzera italiana at Mendrisio.⁴ The study aims to rediscover

1 Georg Kabierske, 'Weinbrenner und Piranesi. Zur Neubewertung von zwei Grafikalbumen aus dem Besitz Friedrich Weinbrenners in der Staatlichen Kunsthalle Karlsruhe', in *Friedrich Weinbrenner 1766–1826. Architektur und Städtebau des Klassizismus*, eds. Gerhard Kabierske and Joachim Kleinmanns (Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2015), 75–87.

2 The wove paper is watermarked 'F Buhl', name of the paper maker Franz Albert Buhl and sons, who started production in 1793. See: Frieder Schmidt, 'Ettlingen als Standort der deutschen Papierfabrikation', in *Ettlinger Hefte, Sonderheft 3*, ed. Stadtgeschichtliche Kommission Ettlingen, (Marxzell: Verlag Rita M. Schallmayer, 1992), 120.

3 <https://www.faz.net/-gsa-83wfk> (accessed May 31, 2019). First publication: Georg Kabierske, 'A cache of newly identified drawings by Piranesi and his studio at the Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe', in *Master Drawings* 53 (2015): 147–178.

4 The project chief investigators are (DFG): Pia Müller-Tamm, director at the Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, Irene Brückle, head of the programme Conservation of Works of Art on Paper, Archives and Library Materials, Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design; (SNF): Christoph Frank, Director of the Institute of History and Theory of Art and Architecture at the Università della Svizzera Italiana at Mendrisio. Project members: Dorit Schäfer, head curator at the Prints and Drawings Department at the Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, Astrid Reuter, curator there; art historian Stefan Morét and paper conservator Maria Krämer, who is also a project-based doctoral candidate at Stuttgart Academy (both DFG funded); SNF-co-funded art history doctoral candidate Bénédicte Maronnie; Georg Kabierske, MA candidate, art history, Ludwig Maximilian Universität München; paper conservator Ute Henniges and digital conservation specialist Mario Röhrle at Stuttgart Academy. Tiziana Cavaleri at the Fondazione Centro Conservazione e Restauro 'La Venaria Reale' (province of Turin, Italy).



Fig. 1 Karlsruhe Piranesi Album Vol. I, fol. 10: Drawings of antique reliefs mounted on one page; top: arabesque relief from the Villa Medici in Rome, red chalk reworked in black chalk, right edge folded to fit the album page (ID: IX 5159-35-10-1); bottom: two griffins facing urn in red chalk (ID: IX 5159-35-10-2), Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe. Credit: A.Fischer/H.Kohler, Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe.

the context of the drawings, their purpose and function in the Piranesi workshop, and the light they can shed on Piranesi's workshop practice.

Rediscovering the Piranesi workshop

Piranesi was not only a great Roman antiquarian and architect, but also a prolific draughtsman, printmaker and publisher. He settled in Rome in the 1740s, where he produced well over 1000 etchings on the printing press he set up in his house. There was a continuous stream of visitors and a constant presence of collaborators and artist assistants, a diversity we also find mirrored in the drawings, which is why the question of whether to attribute to Piranesi or his studio has become a point of importance in researching the albums. A number of drawings also show close relation to some of Piranesi's printed works,⁵ mostly connected to his archaeological activities and work as a designer and restorer of antiquities. In both cases, he could count on earlier material as well as what we now assume to be helping hands to create precise drawings after the antique originals, which were scattered around the city of Rome in various collections and also integrated in the 'modern' city structure.

The drawing of one of four arabesque reliefs⁶ at the Villa Medici was carefully delineated in red chalk before corrections were added, initially in red chalk but then mostly in black chalk. While the elaborate red chalk drawing almost certainly stems from the French artist Nicolas-François-Daniel Lhuillier (ca. 1737–1793), the black chalk additions were drawn in a much more energetic manner that matches Piranesi's known style, as suggested by Christoph Frank, who has made this and many other collaborative artistic connections. The additions show the historic damage of the relief and were done by Piranesi in preparation for the etching that appeared in his *Vasi, Candelabri, Cippi, Sarcofagi, Tripodi, Lucerne ed Ornamenti Antichi* of 1778 (Volume I, plate 40), the year of his death. While Piranesi left the meticulous documentation of the antique to an associate, he took the time to add the ancient cracks in the stone to depict it authentically. This way, the drawing gained a dramatic and romantic aura, suited to the image of Rome as the Eternal City full of 'speaking ruins'⁷—in contrast to other antiques Piranesi had inventively 'restored' in his workshop from marble fragments that he presented as whole immaculate pieces in his publication.

5 Drawings in the same size as their printed counterparts in the publications *Della Magnificenza ed Architettura de' Romani* (1761), *Diverse Maniere d'adornare I Cammini ...* (1769), *Trofeo o sia Magnifica Colonna Coelide* (1774–79), *Vasi, Candelabri, Cippi, Sarcofagi, Tripodi, Lucerne ed Ornamenti Antichi ...* (1778) could be identified so far. The drawings also show signs of being copied for a transfer to the copperplate, supporting their classification as preliminary drawings for the prints. One preparatory drawing for a later plate of the *Vedute di Roma* (Wilton-Ely No. 210, identified by Georg Kabierske) on a drawing is awaiting its comparison to the print, as well as a verso with a drawing for plate VI in the publication *Antichità di Cora* (1764, also identified by Kabierske), with handwritten text in accord to the text in the print scribbled beneath the sketch.

6 Karlsruhe IX-5159-35-10-1.

7 John Pinto, *Speaking Ruins. Piranesi, Architects and Antiquity in Eighteenth-Century Rome* (Ann Arbor: U. of Michigan Press, 2012).



Fig. 2 Karlsruhe Piranesi Album Vol. I, fol. 40, No. 1: Ancient vase, the so-called Stowe vase: black chalk with details in light red chalk, worked over with black chalk (ID: IX 5159-35-40-1); details showing identical transfers of the red chalk ornamental band, the one at the top left likely a test or an accident, Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe. Credit: A.Fischer/H. Kohler/M. Krämer.

The different approaches are not surprising considering the antiques were restored to be sold to wealthy—often English—collectors abroad, while the etchings, sold throughout Europe, depicted the quality and the ‘splendid’ condition of the antiques and raised the public esteem of their owners. This is illustrated by another Karlsruhe drawing, this one connected with the antique Stowe vase (Fig. 2) now at the LA County Museum of Art.⁸ It was excavated in 1769, restored under Piranesi’s supervision and sold by him in 1774 to the Temple-Grenville family for Stowe House in Oxfordshire, while the etching of the restored vase also entered *Vasi, Candelabri* four years later. The drawing, the authorship of which is yet to be determined, was carefully constructed using compass and ruler, resulting in pin pricks associated with construction lines and scale indications. Other scattered pin pricks may be related to the fixation of tracings—it was probably traced more than once using an oiled paper. What is most striking is the accidental contact transfer of red chalk on oiled paper used to trace the ornamental band along the neck of the vase. It appears as faint red chalk lines at the top left of the sheet. Observations on other album drawings suggest that this copying technique was also used to transfer preliminary drawings to the copper plate in preparation for the dimensionally identical print. As suggested by literature,⁹ the serpent handles are a Piranesi workshop addition. This is also reflected in the drawing, where they were given more attention than the antique body of the vase.

The drawings—many of which may be executed by Lhuillier¹⁰—were not only preparatory for the etchings in Piranesi’s own publication, they were also disseminated across Europe during and after his lifetime. They were bought by architects for their own collections, for example by visiting Scottish architects Robert and James Adam,¹¹ and served as models for printed ornament source books. In Piranesi’s context, the established technique of counterproofing became a favoured method for distributing or selling mirror-imaged motifs without having to part with the original drawing. Evidence of such copying activities links some Karlsruhe drawings directly to counterproofs at Sir John Soane’s Museum and the estate of Thomas Hardwick (1752–1829) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, as first suggested by Georg Kabierske and confirmed by Maria Krämer. Other drawings, closely related by subject, style, composition and paper can be found in the estate of Thomas Hardwick at

⁸ Stowe Vase, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, William Randolph Hearst Collection (51.18.8), 119.38 height × 101.6 width (handles) × 76.2 (depth) cm, accessed June 12, 2019, <https://collections.lacma.org/node/230091>.

⁹ Pierluigi Panza, *Museo Piranesi* (Milano: Skira, 2017), 547–548.

¹⁰ Frank is preparing a publication on Lhuillier’s versatile role in the Piranesi workshop and that may be relevant to the Karlsruhe find.

¹¹ The drawings were purchased by Sir John Soane in 1833 and are today part of the museum’s collection. The connection between the ‘Adam travel drawings’ and the Karlsruhe drawings was first detected by Georg Kabierske in 2014 soon after the find. The drawings are investigated by the research partners Frank, Morét, Krämer, and Kabierske.

12 Maria Krämer, 'Study and analysis of red chalk drawings newly attributed to Giovanni Battista Piranesi and his workshop at the Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe', talk given at the Interim Meeting of the ICOM-CC Graphic Documents Working Group, Basel, Schaulager, 30 January 2019.

13 The technique has been used in the past to differentiate pigments, see for example Maurizio Aceto, Angelo Agostino, Gaia Fenoglio Ambra Idone, Monica Gulmini, Picollo Marcello, Paola Ricciardi and John Delaney, 'Characterisation of colourants on illuminated manuscripts by portable fibre optic UV-visible-NIR reflectance spectrophotometry', *Anal. Methods* 6 (2014): 1488–1500; Antonio Cosentino, 'FORS Spectral Database of Historical Pigments in Different Binders', *e-conservation Journal* 2 (2014): 53–65; Guillaume Dupuis, Mady Elias and Lionel Simonot, 'Pigment identification by fiber-optics diffuse reflectance spectroscopy', *Applied Spectroscopy* 56 (2002): 1329–1336; Tiziana Cavaleri, Annamaria Giovagnoli and Marco Nervo, 'Pigments and mixtures identification by visible reflectance spectroscopy', *Porcedia Chemistry* 8 (2013): 45–54.

14 The frame was engineered and built by Johannes Gfeller, professor and head of New Media and Digital Information Conservation Programme, Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design. Its functionality was subject of a term paper by Natascha Wichmann, graduate student at the paper conservation programme, Stuttgart Academy, 2018.

15 Watermarks are featured by 119 of the 297 drawings, as first collated by Judith Becker, 'Piranesi discovered: two albums at the Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe. Art-technological examination and concepts for storage and exhibition' (unpublished MA thesis [in German], Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design, 2015).

16 Andrew Robison, *Piranesi: Early Architectural Fantasies. A Catalogue Raisonné of the Etchings* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press,

the Royal Institute of British Architects in London as first suggested by Stefan Morét and at the Metropolitan Museum. Very few of the Karlsruhe drawings are themselves reworked counterproofs.

Media identified in the drawings include black chalk (some with an added oily binder), graphite, iron gall inks and carbon-based drawing inks. Traces of a black drawing ink (Chinese ink) found on the drawings possibly stem from the use of the drawings in Weinbrenner's architecture school. Red chalks, found in plentiful variants in the drawings, are one focus area of this project.¹² Red chalk was used as a transfer medium in the construction of a drawing (as demonstrated with the Stowe vase), for copying drawings via counterproofing and for reworking drawings, sometimes including combinations of different chalk tonalities. Because of the large range of hues associated with red chalk—ranging from bright orange to dull purple—colour is important for characterising the use of red chalk in the drawing process and for comparing drawings in different collections. Differentiation of red chalk by material-specific diffuse visible reflection was performed via fibre optic reflectance spectroscopy (FORS)¹³ employed in a contactless mode with the aid of a custom-built portable, collapsible frame.¹⁴ As the colour and reflectivity of red chalk is influenced by multiple factors—composition, grain size and surface structure—all of these must be taken into account. The analysis of differences between spectra was enhanced by principal component analysis (PCA) supported by Ute Henniges (Stuttgart Academy) and Tiziana Cavaleri at the Fondazione Centro Conservazione e Restauro 'La Venaria Reale' who conducted additional complementary analysis. Work on FORS data collected from the Karlsruhe drawings, as well as from other drawings at the Morgan Library and Museum in New York, the National Gallery of Art in Washington and the Kunstbibliothek, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, is ongoing.

As for the paper stock, most of the Karlsruhe sheets could be identified as being of Italian origin, and many share similar characteristics with the high-quality intaglio printing paper found in Piranesi's prints.¹⁵ Watermarks are shared by the Karlsruhe drawings and those in collections of Piranesi drawings across Europe, as well as in New York and Washington. While the stocks of eighteenth-century paper are vast and their watermarks are sparsely documented, we found variants of and, so far, a few identical watermarks that connect paper sheets from the studied group of drawings with Piranesi's printed oeuvre, which was published in bound volumes. Our documentation of watermarks in selected prints has enlarged the watermark motifs compiled by Andrew Robison in 1986,¹⁶ thereby increasing the number of watermarks connected to prints, which can at least narrow the dating of watermarks, and, perhaps, the associated drawings. For example, a copy of Piranesi's *Antichità* publication at the Württembergische Landesbibliothek (ID: 472.1.2) reveals a twin to a watermark dated by Robison to 1750s–1770s, and is shared identically by a drawing in Karlsruhe (ID: IX 5159-35-23-3) and another one at the Morgan Library (ID: 1966.11:63).



Fig. 3 Karlsruhe Piranesi Album Vol. I, opened in a book rest system originally developed by Christopher Clarkson, Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe. Credit: M. Krämer.

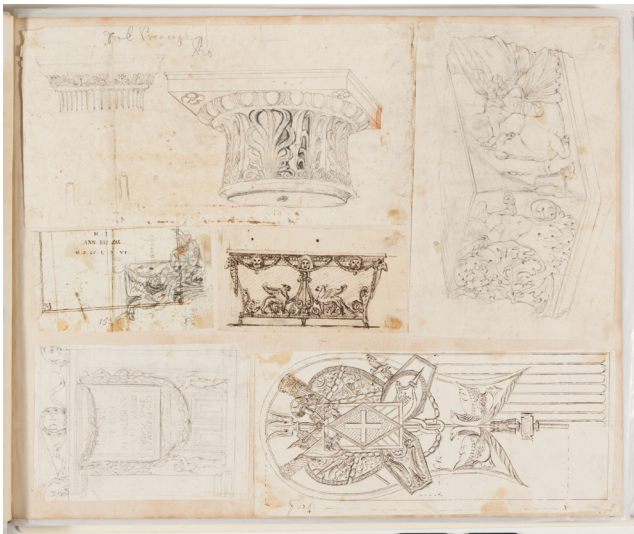


Fig. 4 Karlsruhe Piranesi Album Vol. I, fol. 34, (ID: IX 5159-35-34), Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe. Credit: A.Fischer/H.Kohler, Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe.



Fig. 5 Karlsruhe Piranesi Album Vol. I, fol. 33, verso (ID: IX 5159-35-33), Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe. Credit: A.Fischer/H.Kohler, Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe.

Preserving the albums: processual decision-making

While each single drawing deserves attention, the two albums are also captivating as composite objects (Fig. 3), and not merely because they uniquely contain four attributed Piranesi pen-and-ink drawings.¹⁷ Among the known eighteenth-century architectural source books that amass ornamental and other design drawings after the antique, the Karlsruhe albums are also striking for the unkempt appearance of many of the drawings. There are paper fragments from a previous (likely contemporary) mount, glue spots, tears, creases, soiling, pin pricks and oil stains that add to the technical complexity of the drawings. Contextual and material evidence suggest that, beyond documenting and disseminating antiquities, the drawings were a much-used source of creative inspiration before becoming purely archival. The albums themselves are characteristic of their time. Their bindings feature half sheepskin leather and marbled paper covers. They contain close to 100 leaves of handmade wove paper of a thin, relatively poor quality with guards made of double-folded paper strips. The drawings fill only one half of the first and one third of the second album because they are adhered in a space-saving manner, usually several on one sheet (Fig. 4), leaving the rest of the albums empty. The drawings were probably mounted towards the end of Weinbrenner's life, after they ceased to be used in his architectural school, where students would copy them on tracing paper.¹⁸ The blank versos of the album sheets show discolouration patterns caused by their long-term direct contact with the drawings, in many cases silhouetting the drawing papers, glue spots or media as either dark or light areas (Fig. 5). The drawings' supports, however, show no evidence of associated damage, which is largely explained by their high-quality, mostly gelatine-sized nature. The album mounting format blocks access to the drawings' versos, several of which bear relevant drawings—for example, an ink sketch of a seated man, possibly a workshop assistant (Fig. 6). The drawing closely resembles one by Piranesi, *Two Workmen at Tables*, at the National Gallery of Art in Washington (The Ahmanson Foundation, ID: 2014.2.1a).

Access became a concern as soon as the albums were brought into the limelight, because the thin album leaves in combination with the attached heavy and stiff drawing papers were vulnerable to slippage and creasing when pages were turned. To enable safe handling, we inserted glassine paper and established guidelines including the use of a book rest system (Fig. 3). However, developing a long-term preservation strategy requires broader considerations. The key concern revolves around the question of whether the drawings can remain attached in the albums to preserve their historical state or whether this is outweighed by the advantag-



Fig. 6 Karlsruhe Piranesi Album Vol. II, fol. 31, No. 1, seen from recto in transmitted light, acanthus leaf ornament in red chalk (recto) and workman in pen and ink (verso) (ID: IX 5159-36-31-1), Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe. Credit: A.Fischer/H. Kohler, Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe.

1986). He recorded 95 watermarks, among them many fleur de lis motifs, dated by the examined works between the 1740s to the 1790s.

¹⁷ See footnote 3, Kabierske, 2014.

¹⁸ See footnote 1, Kabierske, 'Weinbrenner und Piranesi,' 2015, 84.

es of removing them from the albums. Preservation and access are never trivial issues when dealing with albums because they are functional structures that must be more directly handled for viewing the originals than is the case with singly mounted works. For the Karlsruhe album collection, preservation decisions assume decided significance because, among the many similar drawings of rank that are connected with the hotbed of production surrounding Piranesi, they are unique in that they relate original drawings by Piranesi with drawings by workshop associates and preserve many tell-tale signs of their use in Rome and beyond.

At an early stage of research, when there were still many unanswered questions about the nature of this spectacular find, exhibition of the originals became a high priority. We took this into account when we drew up a list of ideas (Table 1) that included extremely interventive ‘outlier’ suggestions (5–7) which were intended to bring the more viable options (especially 1–3) into focus.

Table 1. Treatment options for the albums listed by increasing levels of intervention.

Option	Description
1	Preserve the drawings in the albums with interleaving and appropriate handling guidelines for risk-minimized future access
2	Detach selected drawings that are of interest for DFG-related research/exhibition; return the drawings to the albums following research/exhibition (note: standard conservation hinging methods may not be suitable for large drawings, their potential destabilization impact on the albums depends on the number of drawings removed)
3	As 2, but preserve detached drawings separately from albums
4	Detach all of the drawings for DFG-related exhibition; this entails mounting for framed or case display; return the drawings to the albums following exhibition (note: standard conservation hinging methods will alter the dimensional configuration of the album leaves, see 2)
5	As 4, but preserve detached drawings separate from albums
6	Detach album leaves with drawings attached by destructively undoing the book block sewing for DFG-related exhibition; return the leaves to the albums (using attachment method differing from the original sewing) following exhibition
7	As 6, but preserve detached leaves separate from album covers

Expert dialogue included a workshop in April 2018 with 17 invited specialists—12 art historians and 5 conservators.¹⁹ The albums were viewed, talks were given, and we ended with a lively, diverse discussion concerning the future of the albums. At that stage, we presented one test case of a drawing removed from its album to demonstrate this option for discussion (Fig. 7), which so far has remained the only intervention.

Today it is clear that the albums should remain intact to the greatest extent possible, which is the result of a process that has gradually resolved uncertainties about the albums. The most important arguments made concerning the Karlsruhe albums and the drawings, summarized below, reflect an advanced stage of decision-making most likely leading towards highly selective intervention. All of the participants external to the museum functioned as advisors rather than deciders for the final decisions.

Preserving the albums: current arguments

1. Album values: Most importantly, we have gained a better understanding of the historical, aesthetic and research values²⁰ associated with the drawing assembly in the albums, which depend on the preservation of the album structure. We are looking at a still growing group of albums that are directly connected with the Karlsruhe ones and with Piranesi’s activities. Frank has drawn many network connections between Piranesi and visiting architects and artists who were omnivorous collectors of architectural and ornamental drawings that would serve them in future projects, for example an album belonging to French artist and Piranesi associate Charles-Louis Clérisseau, who assembled his own and some earlier drawings with two albums of drawings acquired by the British architect Richard Norris. Norris had visited Rome and met Piranesi in the early 1770s. In addition to Frank’s contribution, Kabierske noted the British architects Robert and James Adam, who also avidly collected drawings for their Roman travel albums preserved at Sir John Soane’s Museum, while Stefan Morét pointed out albums by the British architect Thomas Hardwick at the Royal Institute of British Architects and an album at the Metropolitan Museum with drawings by the Italian artist Giuseppe Manocchi, another Roman network member. The ongoing survey allows us to profile these eighteenth-century albums as an architectural and design source book rich in ornamental

¹⁹ Conservators included Margaret Holben Ellis from New York University, Kimberly Schenk from the National Gallery of Art in Washington, Arianne de la Chapelle from the Louvre Museum in Paris, Elisabeth Thobois from the Albertina Museum in Vienna, and Georg J. Dietz from the Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

²⁰ See Barbara Appelbaum, *Conservation Treatment Methodology* (Amsterdam: Butterworth-Heinemann, 2007) for her lucid discussion of values associated with cultural heritage.



Fig. 7 Karlsruhe Piranesi Album Vol. I, fol. 44, No. 1, recto and verso after the sheet was temporarily detached from the album (ID: IX 5159-35-44-1), Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe. Credit: A.Fischer/H.Kohler, Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe.

drawings. The albums contain drawings of different authorship; they accumulate similar motifs; they are connected geographically; there is a pragmatic and efficient use of the album space that may overrule the systematics of content; and there is a willingness to cope with unwieldy formats and handling. Most of all, there is no concern for display—the albums were primarily working and not presentation tools. None of the albums we viewed are disassembled and most of them are accessible, which may be thanks to a historically beneficial neglect that has protected at least the Karlsruhe albums from earlier intervention.²¹ The Karlsruhe albums—though unique because of their Piranesi content—must be understood as members of this sizeable group of similar albums, which allows us to see their values in terms of a group profile. Even if we acknowledge that some drawings have singular art-historical significance that might lift them out of their group existence, the drawings have research, artistic, historical and aesthetic value associated with their undisturbed album existence.

2. *Album mounting*: The album sheets are of low and thin quality, and on their versos they show discolouration patterns resulting from contact with the drawings. Aside from a few cases of minor pre-existing chalk transfer, the album mounting and recently increased access has not extended observable mechanical damage of the drawings. Overall, preservation therefore requires no intervention at present, with the possible exception of the iron gall ink drawings, which are also the drawings attributed to Piranesi. In the future, the albums will be monitored to ensure timely measures in the case of newly developing risks caused by access.

3. *Evidence of historic use*: It is universally agreed that any meaningful evidence of historical use should be preserved. Within the known oeuvre of Piranesi and his circle, there are very few drawings that show so many significant tell-tale signs of production, use and dissemination—by comparison, drawings at the Pierpont Morgan Library & Museum that are closely related to those at Karlsruhe may have been cleansed of historical use features at an early collection stage.²² Other Piranesi drawings, for example at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (ID: 1919.594) and at the National Gallery of Art in Washington (ID: 2014.2.1.a, 2014.2.1.b), show similar adhesive marks on the verso that may indicate shared provenance.

4. *Access to folded drawings*: Seventeen drawings must be unfolded to be viewed, several of them are large and complex, for example the preparatory drawing for the monumental candelabrum constructed by Piranesi that was sold to Sir Roger Newdigate (today at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford). Not at present but in the future, some of these drawings might become sufficiently important to be considered for permanent separation, providing their art-historical, research and use values are supported also by a preservation decision that is agreed upon.

5. *Access to versos*: Thirty sheets carry verso drawings or inscriptions. Some drawings appear to be in Piranesi's own hand (Fig. 6), including the verso of the Stowe vase, which

21 Peter Fuhring, *Design into Art: Drawings for Architecture and Ornament—The Lodewijk Houthakker Collection* (London: Wilson, 1989).

22 As indicated, for example, by trimmed margins; these early interventions are not documented (documentation was discussed with Reba Synder, paper conservator at the Pierpont Morgan Library & Museum).

23 A local removal method was tested by Maria Krämer (poultice moistening with Sympatex membrane from album page verso). This will make the framed display of the removed drawings possible. Remounting could be achieved with a looped hinge attachment to secure the drawings to the original glue spots.

24 Illustrated in Kabierske, 2015, Figures 1, 2, 4, 5 (see note 1).

25 See for example the contextualization of Cézanne's sketchbooks at the exhibition *The Hidden Cézanne*, Kunstmuseum Basel, 2017, realized by iart.ch; see their video [here](#).

26 Almuth Corbach, 'Brüche in der Biographie. Eine Spurensicherung', in *Biographien des Buches*, eds. Ulrike Gleixner, Constanze Baum, Jörn Münkner, and Hole Rößler (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2017), 412–430, 469–473.

27 See the project blog <https://www.themorgan.org/blog/conservation> and embedded video <https://vimeo.com/88351160> (accessed 12 June 2019).

28 Tatjana Bartsch and Maarten van Heemskerck, *Römische Studien zwischen Sachlichkeit und Imagination* (München: Hirmer, 2019).

carries another version of the vase in a vivid black chalk sketch that is more akin to Piranesi's own hand. In addition to technical imaging options, including digitally mastered transmitted light photography, interest in viewing the originals remains, so it is conceivable that the most research-relevant drawings will be detached at least temporarily for study and documentation, providing this intervention poses no unacceptable risk and options for remounting are clarified. So far, the temporary separation of one drawing was achieved using a highly local moisture poultice (Fig. 7),²³ which leaves the adhesive residues undiminished. The drawing will be remounted into the album after it is documented.

6. *Iron gall drawings*: The Karlsruhe albums contain several drawings largely done in iron gall ink, four of them attributed to Piranesi²⁴ and some of them showing ink corrosion. While their current album situation does not seem to have had an added negative effect, these drawings are the most acute preservation concern, especially as it is conceivable that they will continue to receive more viewing requests than other parts of the albums. It is yet to be decided which local stabilization method is most appropriate for these drawings or whether they should be detached. If so, separation from the albums would be permanent and would have to avoid moisture impact on the iron gall ink. As to the original Piranesi drawings in particular, the consideration of possible separation from the albums is conscious of, though not driven by, their singularity within the collection.

7. *Exhibition*: There is a keen interest in showing a selection of the drawings in at least one exhibition. If most of the drawings remain inside the albums, this will require consideration of (a) repeated page turning during exhibit (meaning viewers will not see all of the drawings or must return to see more than the selection accessible at one time) and (b) extensive digital support of the exhibition design. However, an exhibition can make decided and innovative use of digital media to allow page turning and zoom functions associated with additional information avenues (e.g. reflectance transformation imaging, or RTI) to which they may lead the visitor.²⁵

8. *Comparison with other album conservation cases*: We looked at past and present cases of albums where the challenges either of dealing with a previous intervention or with a clearly harmful historic condition is a concern. At the Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel, conservators re-contextualised disassembled albums by matching sewing features of extant bindings and prints.²⁶ In a related case involving a sketchbook at the Pierpont Morgan Library & Museum in New York, the binding of a mechanically damaged sketchbook with drawings by Jean-Joseph Chamant discovered at and owned by New York University's Villa La Pietra in Florence was treated to reinstate its original functionality.²⁷ At the Cabinet des Estampes at the Louvre, Arianne de la Chapelle and colleagues designed new album leaves for the seventeenth-century drawings of an album *Costumes des Fêtes, Mascarades, Théâtres, etc. de Louis XIV*, Vol. I, that also allow their individual removal. This was done to replace nineteenth-century album leaves that were self-destructing due to their high iron content. At the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin, drawings by Maarten van Heemskerck entered the collection in two eighteenth-century albums. One of these had its sixteenth-century drawings removed about 40 years ago because the old album pages seemed to be too fragile to hold the drawings. They were remounted in a modern binding²⁸ that has proved both technically and aesthetically problematic, and therefore may be considered for replacement in the future.

Aesthetic value in the broader scheme

Aesthetic value related to an aged state of objects requires special attention. With the Karlsruhe albums, it concerns the visible elements of wear (creases, stains, tears) that make the drawings appear neglected in their damaged state, a state that is less perfect and untypical for such artworks shown in museums. Of course, there are the connoisseurs who have developed quite a strong, and perhaps still increasing, acceptance of the unrestored appearances of objects—one perhaps mirrored by the craze for ruinous antiquities in Piranesi's own time. But this is a highly trained, specialist form of appreciation of age and damage which is not usually shared by the uninitiated. Our contemporary urban environments in which many museum visitors live do not offer equivalencies from which one can naturally learn to read imperfection as something that is valuable. Where poverty reigns, damage is evidence of ugly neglect; where wealth builds, the visible infrastructures tend towards a cleansed uniformity that is unimaginatively free of variation. In our museums, we offer visitors a viewing experience that is aesthetically highly controlled, but works in two directions: the building impresses us with designed, orderly and clean spaces, in which we present objects with their appearance controlled, but where we accept by professional decision a look of age. Signs of age can be

misread as neglect by modern conservators. Quite clearly, damage draws attention, and can send the wrong message.

Damage can also run the risk of becoming a design statement. For example, the New Museum in Berlin, built in the nineteenth century and severely damaged during World War II, was rebuilt by David Chipperfield Architects and reopened in 2009.²⁹ At least three approaches were combined: the new monumental staircase constitutes a strong architectural statement that is markedly different from the historic staircase; other parts preserve evidence of damage, but in a consolidated state; a few parts are kept unrestored—for example, the shrapnel pockmarks at some windows. The building has a unique appearance that is a result of preserved damage, partial restoration and modernization. One might argue that making damage part of a design concept also relativises its meaning and impact.

With the Karlsruhe drawings, we are dealing with historical evidence that can be misread as damage but occurred as part of or linked to original workshop use. We do not want it to be misread as bad care and we want to explain that it is now important to us, as it allows us to understand the historical use and reception of these drawings much better than before. This matters for the way we explain such objects to the public. While we hope to increase their appreciation of an artist's work, of cultural heritage, of history and preservation, we can also stimulate reflection about damage and imperfection, and the values associated with them. There is a social relevance to this beyond a museum visit.

Displaying the Karlsruhe drawings in separate mounts would make them look curiously isolated (Fig. 8). We can foresee that this might raise questions concerning the quality of each drawing and the adequacy of care given to it by the museum. From there, it would be a short step to think of tears, soiling etc. as damages that should be diminished. It is much easier to understand evidence of historic use when seen in context and easier to accept this as aesthetically appropriate. Historical and research values here merge with aesthetic value.

Fame works like a trend indicator in the stock market. For the Karlsruhe albums, their unexpected fame affixed new—initially mostly Piranesian values—to them. Through this research project we have achieved a sort of level plane, where Piranesi is embedded in larger issues of antiquity reception and dissemination involving many players and locations. Fame is fickle, changing with each attributional turn. In the words of art historian Lawrence Kanter, 'Attributions are not stand-alone pronouncements with an absolute value; they are conditioned by the knowledge and biases of their age.'³⁰ Not only are each of our individual perspectives limited within one generation depending on our profession and interests, each new generation will find fresh 'interaction potentialities' with cultural heritage as a result of changing socialisations and customs.³¹ For the Karlsruhe albums, future value shifts might impact their handling physically. Perhaps it will be Weinbrenner who will one day receive peak attention, making the post-Roman history of the albums a focus of research; facsimiles might find greater acceptance in exhibition display; the desire for simultaneous viewing will overwhelm any interest in preserving the drawings in their current setting. For now, fame has benefits as it inspires action, but by itself it is no sound guide for planning the object's material

29 'Neues Museum, Museum Island, Berlin 2003–2009,' David Chipperfield Architects, accessed 2 October 2018, https://davidchipperfield.com/project/neues_museum.

30 Laurence Kanter, 'Some early Sieneese paintings: Cleaned, uncleaned, restored, unrestored. What have we learned?', *Yale University Art Gallery Bulletin* (2010): 46–65.

31 Ioannis Xenakis and Argyris Arnellos, 'Aesthetic perception and its minimal content: a naturalistic perspective,' *Frontiers in Psychology* 5 (2014): 1–15.



Fig. 8 Drawings attached to album, Vol. II, fol. 27 (ID: IX 5159-36-27) and single drawing digitally isolated in a simulated window mat, Vol. II, fol. 27, No. 3 (ID: IX 5159-36-27-3), Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe. Credit: A.Fischer/H. Kohler, digital preparation Irene Brückle.

32 Carl Dennis, 'Bottle of wine', *The New Yorker*, 6–13 August 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/08/06/bottle-of-wine>.

33 Jan Assmann, 'Communicative and cultural memory', in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. Astrid Erll, Ansgar Nünning, in collaboration with Sara B. Young, (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2008), 109–118.

future. It is a humbling thought that the object that exists through time will always remain the most concrete manifestation of some historical event, while we are transient factors that, in the words of the poet Carl Dennis, 'vanish into the realm of shadow.'³²

Finally, there is a lot we can do even if we decide against intervention. We can explain what it means to deal with damage, the ambiguities of which add to the ambiguities inherent in all artworks, and how caring for damage can bring vision to small matters. We can make thinking about these issues explicit—protecting our profession from being misunderstood as a mere craft—whilst at the same time not devaluing the importance of manual skills. And we can set this kind of conservation rationale down in writing so it can be understood later, beyond the next 100 years, the point in time where verbally communicated memory fades away.³³

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Biography

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Maria Krämer earned a Master's Degree at the programme Conservation of Works of Art on Paper, Archives and Library Materials at the Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design in 2015. She specializes in the conservation of works of art on paper. She has worked in different public institutions and private conservation studios, and also developed a research focus on red chalk drawing media, which first included a co-authored research paper on Daniel Chodowiecki's counterproofing that was incorporated into an exhibition by the Academy of Arts Berlin in 2015. Since 2017 she is a research team member in the DFG-funded Piranesi project at the Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe, where she studies the red chalk drawings of the Piranesi Workshop as the part on of her doctoral thesis on the material aspects of the Karlsruhe Piranesi Albums.

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