

Marco Luccio Introductory Lecture
Australian Consulate General, New York City
Opening Reception: March 4, 2010
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New-York Historical Society, New York

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Australia has a right to be *very* proud of its adopted son. Marco Luccio was born in Naples but moved to Australia in 1974 when he was five years old. He studied art at Warnambool Institute of Advanced Education and in 1992 graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Art and an Honours Degree with High Distinction in Printmaking from RMIT in Melbourne. Luccio is a printmaker's printmaker. He is not just a painter who makes prints, nor is he a sculptor who occasionally turns to the sister discipline of printmaking. He is a printmaker.

Printmaking is a very expressive medium – from the delicate lines that can be achieved in a wispy eighteenth-century etching to an emotive twentieth-century German Expressionist woodcut. Like others before him, Marco Luccio has proven to us that these expressive qualities need not always be associated with the human figure but rather, can define cities and the structures in them. “I respond to buildings because they have a power and presence that can be both inspiring and intimidating,” he said. Like Giovanni Battista Piranesi before him (Piranesi was a printmaker from Luccio's native Italy), or the French printmaker Charles Meryon, Marco creates urban environments that are based in reality but that reach out to us in a completely expressive manner that sometimes borders on fantasy. That expressionism echoes the artist's surroundings and creates an *aura* that one feels when experiencing the actual spaces.

I mentioned, previously, that Marco Luccio is not a sculptor who has decided to make prints. But, in one way he *is* indeed a sculptor. He gouges so deeply into his plates that they *become* sculptures. Granted, Luccio is working off of the flat surface of a metal plate but when he is finished, the valleys formed by his intaglio tools have formed three-dimensional objects that can be considered a type of sculpture. He cuts like a sculptor. And why should this be so surprising for someone who is captivated by the three-dimensional spaces of a bustling city? “It can take just the one plate to wreck my hands if it is a particularly deeply scratched plate,” he once remarked. The gashes in his plates, the gashes in his hands, the deep spaces in his cities all speak to the unconscious energy which Luccio captures in his work, often without representing any figures.

One can almost smell the asphalt in a print like *New York, Gotham City*. The drypoint is so thick and the black so intense that one immediately *feels* the heat and power emanating from the pavement up to the roof tops. I found it interesting that Marco chose to do two of his Parisian prints in a brown ink rather than the deep black of the New York City images. The choice of a plush brown sets the stage for a city that is a bit softer, more elegant, not as brash and loud. This is a Paris full of nostalgia, yes with energy, but a more controlled spirit. Luccio was able to finesse the distinct personalities of each urban space not only with his mark making but also his choice of inks and papers.

The energy of the city, the frenzy of the people who inhabit that city, in a way, are all duplicated in the way in which Luccio works. The sight of Marco transporting his metal plates with him (and *traveling* internationally with them) brings to mind all of the people who walk our streets, burdened with their wares and even their thoughts. Because he likes to work en plein air he carries many of his supplies with him. When those supplies are large etching plates and the paraphernalia associated with the *creation* of a print plate, the sight of Luccio focusing on the place he is going, perhaps the rooftop he seeks, paints its own picture. That is one where he, spiritually, becomes *part of* the scene he depicts. But when he goes up to his rooftops, he looks *down* on our cities and he is separated from them. This time Luccio sees our world from a distance and he becomes the scribe, *describing* the city he sees below. We know that this city must be filled with people scurrying one way and another, but we do not see them. In a Breughel painting, we see the many people in these created worlds. And yet, here we are kept out. We look down in Luccio's work, and we must imagine a sea of Breughel figures all together and yet all alone. Actually, he did represent these people – all together – in the drypoint, *Workerglyphic*, done in 2009.

As a curator at the New-York Historical Society, I look at images of New York City daily – photographs, prints, drawings, architectural renderings which include floor plans, frontal elevations—the list becomes

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endless. Marco Luccio may be relatively new to New York but he has exactly the right take on our city. And he is able to render that understanding of our metropolis onto paper in an exquisite fashion. Luccio captures the energy of New York, he feels the individuality (and sometimes isolation) of its denizens, and he is able to translate the *sheer power* of its aura into his prints. Marco Luccio does not need to *photograph* the nuances of his cities—whether it is the *dynamism* of New York or the *gentility* of Paris that sensitizes him. In Italy he chooses to depict *Il Duomo* or the *View from the Uffizi* – two images which force us think about Italy as a guardian of a glorious culture.

Sadly, I have never been to Australia but I can begin to sense its personality through Marco's work. Speaking about Melbourne, he once remarked that "the noise of the city thumping in the background keeps me working to its beat." I think of the city humming loudly, the people intently going about their business, the new tall structures being built, commerce bustling. And Marco, in the midst of all of this, intensely leaning over his copper plate creating. I certainly hope that we will have many more years of that.