

Jacques Callot

French, 1592-1635

Les grandes misères de la guerre. No. 11. (The Gallows Tree)

1633, etching, 8.2 x 18.6 cm
Purchased 1986



About the work

This is an early 17th century etching by Jacques Callot, who is credited with the development and refinement of the etching technique. In 1633 France, under King Louis XIII, invaded the Dukedom of Lorraine and attacked its capital city, Nancy. The countryside was over-run, pillaged and burned by marauding French soldiers and *The Gallows Tree* shows the fate of some of those who had tried to defend their land.

The etching has an inscription beneath it that reads: 'Finally these infamous and abandoned thieves hanging from this tree like wretched fruit show that crime (horrible and black species) is itself the instrument of shame and vengeance and that is the fate of corrupt men to experience the justice of heaven sooner or later.'

Callot is commenting on the effects of the invasion and the violence. The soldiers are depicted as either ruthless perpetrators, or themselves victims. The images are deliberately brutal and their potential to shock is not diminished by their tiny scale nor by the intricacy and minutiae of the detail.

Callot's personal protest was a set of 18 small illustrations, published in France in 1633 as 'The Miseries of War'. They combined rhyming couplets, written by the great print

collector Abbé Michel de Marolles, with these tiny images of brutality. A smaller version followed three years later and it is from this edition that this plate comes. *The Gallows Tree* is plate 11 in the series.

Callot's detailed and intricate technique was developed and influenced during his apprenticeship as a gold engraver under Demege Crocq, in Nancy, and his period under the engraver Philippe Thomassin, while in Rome.

Callot is recognised for the technical developments he made to the etching process. One was in replacing the old hard wax ground with an improved hard ground varnish. This was made from the varnish used by lute makers and was applied to the copper plate into which the design was scratched. Callot's other innovation was the invention of the etching échoppe, a specially-designed cylindrical, steel etching tool with an angled point that can be twisted to make thick or thin lines. Callot also achieved lines of different strengths by multiple biting i.e. the plate is immersed in the acid several times, with only the areas requiring stronger lines remaining exposed.

During his career, Callot made over 2000 drawings and 1400 prints.

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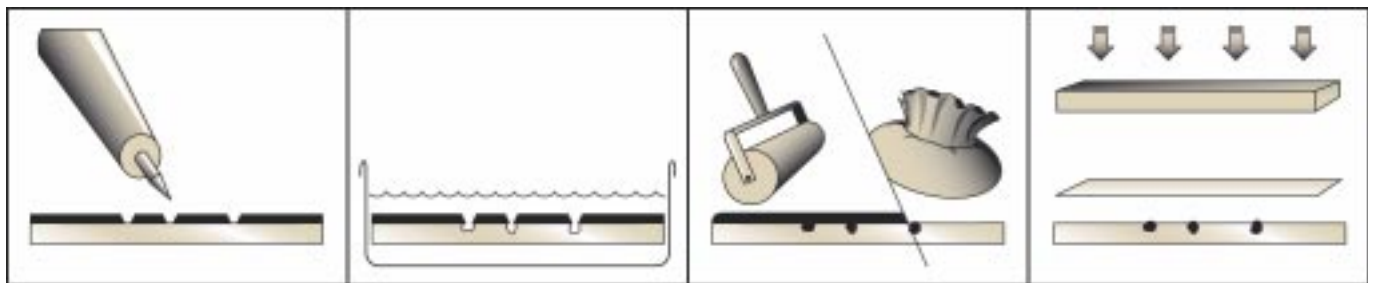
Jacques Callot was born in Nancy, France, in 1592. His father was a landowner who held an important role as the Master of Ceremonies to the Duke of Lorraine in Nancy. In 1607 Callot was apprenticed to a Nancy goldsmith by the name of Demenge Crocq. The next year he travelled to Rome and served an apprenticeship under the French engraver Philippe Thomassin.

Callot moved to Florence in 1612 and contributed etchings to the book *Essequie della Sacra, cattolica e Real Maestà di Margherita d'Austria, Regina di Spagna (The Funeral Book of the Queen of Spain)*. Callot became employed by Cosimo II de Medici, Grand-Duke of Tuscany. He produced many etchings concerned with theatrical themes during this period in Florence and was highly influenced by the designer Giulio Parigi, who designed and directed many theatrical events. Callot contributed etchings to two publications in 1616, *Guerra d'Amore, (The War of Love)* and *Guerra di Bellezza, (The War of Beauty)*. He also provided etchings for two publications in 1620, *Il Solimano, Tragedia, (Solomon, a Tragedy)* and a guide book to buildings in the Holy Land.

Callot returned to Nancy in 1621 when his employment ended with the death of Cosimo. He married Catherine Kuttinger in 1623. He continued to illustrate publications, including *Combat à la Barrière (The Combat at the Barrier)*. Callot also found work in Nancy illustrating religious subjects and in 1633 he published a set of 18 etchings titled the 'Misfortunes and Miseries of War', which he based on the French invasion of Lorraine. He died in Nancy in 1635.

Etching

Developed in the early 17th century, etching uses lines which are scratched into an acid-resist ground on a metal plate. Acid eats into these lines to create pits in the surface to hold the ink.



A layer of acid-resist varnish or 'ground' is applied to the metal plate and is then darkened so the artist can see the marks scratched in the surface.

The plate is immersed in an acid bath where acid eats into the metal exposed by the scratched lines creating U shaped depressions in the plate.

The ground is removed, with solvents, and the plate inked and then cleaned so that the ink remains only in the depressions.

Dampened paper is then pressed, by the printing press, into the depressions to collect the ink.

Other works by the artist in the Collection

There are 21 works by the artist in the Collection, including:

Masked Noble Woman

c. 1620-1623, etching
Purchased 1993

Noble Man with Felt Hat Bowing

c. 1620-1623, etching
Purchased 1993

No. 6 The Devastation of a Monastery

1633, etching
Purchased 1986

No. 14 The Wheel

1633, etching
Gifted to the gallery by Mr Gordon Brown 1999

Further reading

Jacques Callot, Prints and Related Drawings, H. Diane Russell, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1975.

