



Piranesi, 2 Vol.

Luigi Ficacci

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Piranesi's fantastic worlds: The great 18th century architectural artist and master engraver

“Piranesi was as savage as Salvator Rosa, fierce as Michelangelo, and exuberant as Rubens... he has imagined scenes that would startle geometry and exhaust the Indies to realize.” —Horace Walpole

One of the greatest architectural artists of all time, and certainly the most famous copper engraver of the 18th century, **Giovanni Battista Piranesi** (1720-1778) is best known for his terrifyingly original series of etchings of labyrinthine and megalomaniac prisons, *Carceri d'Invenzione*. In his own day, he was most celebrated for his *Vedute*, 137 etchings of ancient and modern Rome; so renowned were these startling and dramatic chiaroscuro images, imbued with Piranesi's romantic feeling for archaeological ruins, that they formed the mental picture of Rome for generations after. Indeed, Piranesi could be said to have shaped a whole strain of contemporary architecture, as well as the wider visualization of antiquity itself. In our time, he has had a direct influence on writers such as **Borges** and **Kafka** and on filmmakers such as **Terry Gilliam** and **Peter Greenaway**. Anyone who contemplates Piranesi's etchings will confront the existential nightmare of human existence and its infinite mysteries.

Text in English, French, and German

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