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JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY



PETER  
MILTON  
ETCHING  
ENIGMAS

**PETER MILTON: ETCHING ENIGMAS**

Trudi Ludwig Johnson and Ann Shafer

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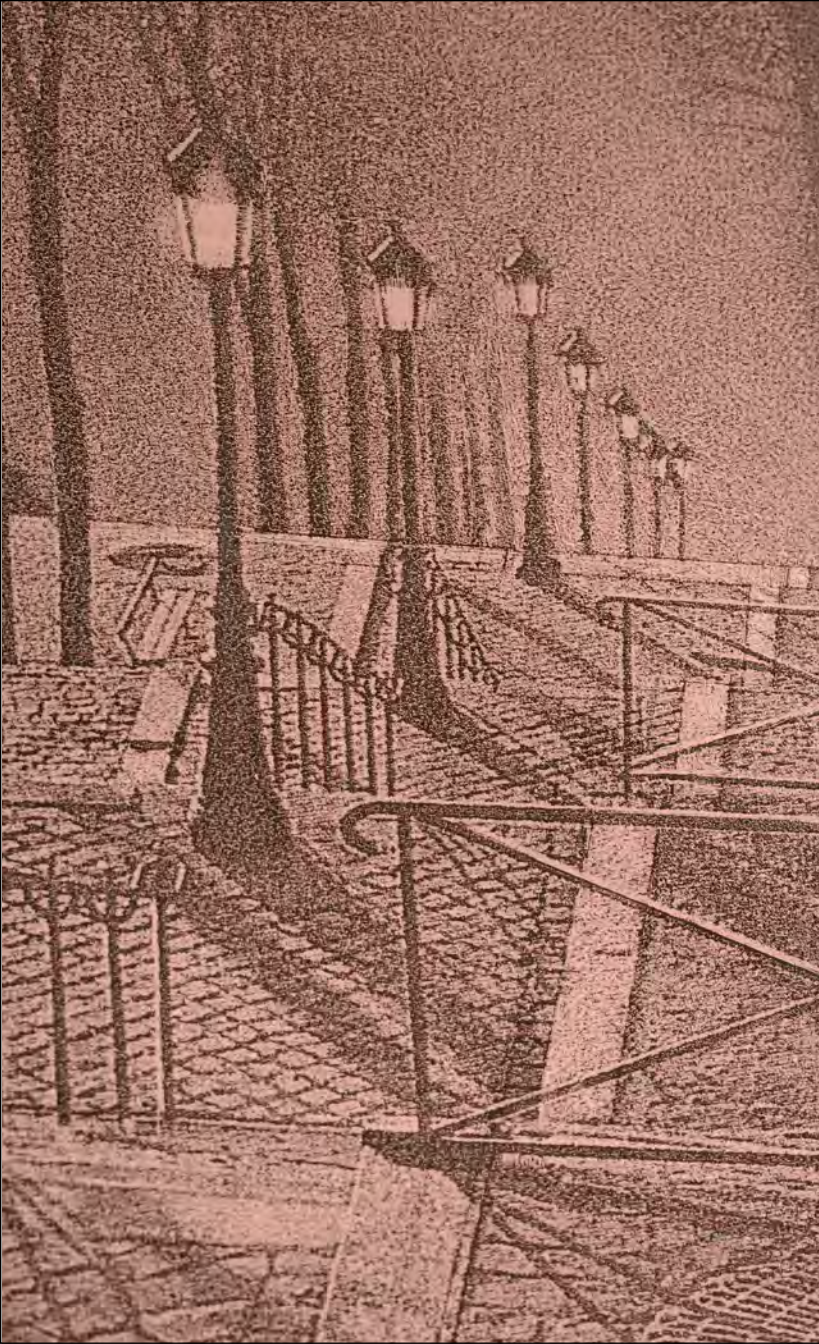


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Design by Lisa Pupa

COVER: Detail from *Interiors VII: The Train from  
Munich*. Etching and engraving on paper.

ADJACENT PAGE: Detail from *Hidden Cities II: Embarka-  
tion for Cythera*. Etched and engraved copper plate.



## FOREWORD

Dear Friends,

I am pleased to welcome you to Evergreen Museum & Library's special exhibition, *Peter Milton: Etching Enigmas*. This exciting installation celebrates the career of one of America's most prolific contemporary printmakers, best known for his melding of photographic realism with an ethereal, dreamlike narrative. Mr. Milton's work seems particularly appropriate as a subject of celebration here, for not only do his beautifully delineated environments nicely reference aspects of the museum's eclectic interiors, but the artist's genre itself, with all of its rich historical connotations, also reflects the first great collection associated with Evergreen — the Garrett Print Collection, which is now at the Baltimore Museum of Art.

*Peter Milton: Etching Enigmas* serves as another stellar example of Evergreen's commitment to partnering with other Baltimore institutions. Indeed, this Johns Hopkins University-organized exhibition represents an ongoing Evergreen-initiated dialogue among artists, scholars, and curators of the region for the benefit of the larger community. We are most pleased to count as Evergreen's guest curators printmaker Trudi Ludwig Johnson, adjunct faculty member in the art history, foundation, and art education departments at the Maryland Institute College of Art, and Ann Shafer, associate curator of prints, drawings, and photographs at the Baltimore Museum of Art. Their passion for the work of Peter Milton is clearly evident throughout the installation and their shared written words.

It is my hope that you enjoy this thoughtful examination of the work of one of America's great printmakers — and your visit to Evergreen.

**WINSTON TABB**

*Sheridan Dean of University Libraries and Museums*

# PETER MILTON ETCHING ENIGMAS

By Trudi Ludwig Johnson  
and Ann Shafer



Milton in his Francestown, New Hampshire studio.

## — INTRODUCTION —

Peter Milton is an internationally respected titan of etching who has enjoyed a long and fruitful career in printmaking. His large-scale, multilayered images defy visual logic while telling fantastic stories about life, loss, music, and art. In this exhibition, his copper plates, along with preparatory materials and final prints, shed light on the innovative techniques Milton devised to give visual life to his enigmatic tableaux. The copper plates are, according to the artist, “by far the most beautiful things I make.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, they hold a preeminent place in his mind: “The creation part is the joy; the printing is merely the completion of the process.”<sup>2</sup>

Milton was born in Lower Merion, Pennsylvania, in 1930, and moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, at age eight. Following two years at the Virginia Military Institute, he completed his BFA in 1954 at Yale University under Josef Albers and Gabor Peterdi. An MFA, also from Yale, followed in 1961. From 1961 to 1968, Milton and his wife, Edith, lived in Baltimore where he taught at the Maryland Institute College of Art. Confirmation of his color blindness at Johns Hopkins Hospital in 1962 led the artist to focus on work in black and white; printmaking was inevitable. Over the course of more than fifty years, Milton has created intricate visual worlds in more than 130 prints, many of which took well over a year to make.

Working in layers, Milton begins with drawings based on people and places, with nods to Western art history and culture. He is a master of the appropriated image, a term that may conjure Andy Warhol and his Pop Art comrades. But Milton steps further back in history, avoiding the Pop sense of cool advertising and popular culture references. Instead, a broader cultural past is tapped through historical photographs of key players, architecture, and locales, which he reinvents by hand. He adds content drawn from his life as an avid reader — always with multiple possible interpretations — thus incorporating deeper meaning in his cinematic worlds. Elements of Greek mythology, classical music, art history, and history coalesce in his images, which embrace the messiness, sorrow, and elation that is life. One is hard-pressed to imagine a more erudite, skilled, passionate, and cheeky soul.

In addition to a storied career in printmaking, since 2007 Milton has fearlessly produced artwork digitally. He now creates images using Adobe

Photoshop in files consisting of more than two thousand layers, which are printed both as digital prints on paper and, for display on LED lightboxes, on translucent, white-coated film called Duratrans. These intricate pictures are the logical next step; they carry his method of layered visual elements in etching forward to the digital realm. He continues to explore and always looks to the next thing: "I feel it is the trajectory of a never-ending adventure."

### — TEXTURE, TENSION, TIME —

In the early days of his artistic journey, and after conclusive diagnosis of the severity of his red-green color blindness, Milton began to focus on texture in his art rather than color. The diagnosis "kind of took a weight off of [my] shoulders." Milton has said that his prints are "really an examination ... of not having color anymore, of using tone and texture as the medium. Black and white is almost more elegant; maybe it's fully more elegant than color, unless color is used ... with great elegance in itself."<sup>3</sup> When asked about his garden during a recent visit, it was pointed out that it looks just like one of his prints. Milton replied, "That was the idea. You'll notice there's not much color and few flowers. It's more of a park, really. It's more about texture. That's me. I'm all about texture." The same is true in his art: texture, tonalities, light, and shadow are his color, deftly employed to evoke mystery and mood. Although the artist knew he saw color differently in kindergarten, he had no idea how compromised his vision was. At eight years old, Milton got his first set of glasses. "I looked out the window at Mount Greylock. The day before it was a blob, and suddenly *there it was!* It was from that moment on my lifetime obsession started its intrigue with searches for that same intensity of revelation through the richest measure of detail I could handle."<sup>4</sup> Thus, for over half a century, Milton has been consumed with drawing extraordinarily intricate photorealistic images worthy of scrutiny with a magnifying glass, wonderment, and abundant intellectual curiosity.

In Milton's etchings, textures give dimensionality and even transparency to objects. While he worked directly on copper plates in the early stages of his career, once he discovered that by drawing on Mylar and exposing it to a light-sensitive copper plate not only could the drawings be preserved, but also they could be reused in various combinations with others in later itera-

tions. This collaging effect remains in his work today. The technical aspects of collage have enabled Milton to investigate what he calls the fourth dimension, in which different moments in time are portrayed simultaneously. While it may at first seem that Milton's prints are narrative, in fact they are representational but not narrative. Milton claims an early love of Cubism in which artists such as Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque portrayed objects from multiple vantage points simultaneously. The same can be said for Milton's work in terms of time.<sup>5</sup> Images frequently include characters and settings that span years, decades, or centuries.

While determining the players and their action is primary, composition is equally important. Milton's plates and prints demonstrate his uncanny ability to create scenes that read just as well in one direction as the other. (It should be remembered that images in copper are in reverse when printed on paper; the inclusion of both copper plates and prints in this exhibition enables viewers to compare them.) He credits his close study of Paul Cézanne in helping him develop this skill:

That's my Cézanne heritage, the way everything is set in this kind of asymmetric set-up of tensions that resolve into a completely stable piece. That's what I'm always after.... It's all about everything not being symmetric — being off balance and then somehow working out all the tensions so that the total balance is there. That's the beauty of Cézanne — active and dynamic but stable. I have no patience with symmetry. That's such an easy way out for composition. You can meditate to it, but you can't grow through it.

This may sound as if it all comes easily to the artist, and he is the first to admit that since youth "I had a draftsman's ease." But the number of changes each image undergoes indicates a long and vexing process of development. For him, it is about the journey to conclusion, replete with incessant revisions as he strives for improvement and perfection: "If I am 'happy,' it is only because of being totally absorbed. There is also equal misery over all the humiliating stumbles." Milton says he "learns the most in the middle of a failure." He is fond of Samuel Beckett's ironic aphorism, which he frequently invokes: "Try again. Fail again. Fail better."<sup>6</sup>

## — TECHNIQUES —

Because a combination of drawings, copper plates, and prints are presented in this exhibition, an explanation of technique is essential. Crafting an image into a copper plate and then printing it is a long and arduous process that has stymied many a lesser mind. Early in his career, Milton adopted the basic lift-ground technique first developed by William Blake, using it in his landscape period (1960–70) to draw directly on the metal plate. Later on, Milton further refined Blake’s method with his own invention to bring his larger, much more elaborate compositions to life. Mixing India ink with sugar and glycol, he transfers the substance to a clear, plastic sheet of Mylar, which produces a randomized stipple effect. Unlike the uniform patterns achieved with traditional aquatint, Milton responds to the resulting erratic patterns of texture to which he adds or subtracts density by hand. “Stipple dots are removed [flaked off] with a polished, tungsten drypoint needle or added with crow quill pen and ink,” he says. The opposite side of the Mylar is used for the linear elements and details.<sup>7</sup> These sugar-ink drawings on Mylar are alarmingly delicate and as easily damaged as dust on a butterfly’s wing. When Milton is satisfied with the



Milton manipulates textures and values by flaking sugar ink from Mylar with a stylus.

composition, the Mylar sheet is exposed to a copper plate that has been coated with a light-sensitive ground. After the image is etched into the copper plate in an acid bath, Milton continues to refine the image (now incised in copper), using a variety of tools to augment, embellish, or fully remove elements. Once the final touches are made, Milton turns the copper plate over to master printer Robert Townsend. Milton says Townsend is “the only one who can print my plates.... He is the only one who has the sensitivity to pull good prints.”<sup>8</sup>

Townsend begins the printing process by spreading black ink over the plate. The ink is worked into every groove in the plate with a leather dauber, and the excess ink is cleaned off the surface. Using a balled-up cheesecloth tarlatan, the printer wipes with a gentle whisking motion, so that the ink only remains in the crevices below the surface of the plate. Once the plate is properly inked, it is placed face up on the press bed. Dampened paper is laid over the plate. Three etching felts are placed on top to protect the press and the plate. This stack of plate, paper, and felts is rolled through an etching press under extreme pressure, which pulls the ink out of the plate onto the moistened paper. The resulting print is the mirror image of the plate.

Milton regards the print as a final object. However, “the plate — the matrix — is the playing field and a looking glass.” He has stated many times that the copper plates, for him, trump the prints: “Once it’s printed on a piece of paper, so much is lost.”<sup>9</sup> It was during one such conversation about the plates as objects that this exhibition was conceived. Print curators debate whether the matrices should be considered art objects in themselves or merely as tools in the process. For the number of museums that collect matrices, an equal number of museums won’t. The same is true for artists — some think of the plates as art objects, and some don’t. Two examples of plate-as-art come to mind, both at the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA). In its print collection, the museum has a group of twenty-nine copper plates by Henri Matisse (a gift from sisters Claribel and Etta Cone) that were used to produce his artist’s book, *Poésies de Stéphane Mallarmé* (1932). They are part of a maquette that Matisse assembled after the book was printed that includes the published book, a *bon-à-tirer* version of the book, a group of drawings on page proofs, and two extra suites of etchings, along with the plates. In another case, American artist Ian Hugo loved his own copper plates so much that he created a Japanese



*Interiors VII: The Train from Munich.*  
Pen and black sugar ink on Mylar.



*Interiors VII: The Train from Munich.*  
Etched and engraved copper plate (above).  
Etching and engraving on paper (page 9).





screen in his dining room using a mosaic of plates. (The BMA owns a group of Hugo's 1940s copper plates, a gift from the artist's estate.) That Milton has resisted canceling most of his plates (often done by scratching through the image or by drilling a hole in the plate to prevent further printings after the edition is published) is clear evidence that he agrees with Matisse, Hugo, and others: copper plates are just too beautiful to ruin.

Since the process of creating the plates is the ultimate for Milton, he is less concerned about printing and publishing editions. By the time the last step occurs, he has already moved on to the next image because "every print I do is an attempt to take care of what I thought was a deficiency of the last print." Milton is now eighty-six and continues to work daily: It's "not a decision. It just happens. It's just a fact. That's who I am. If I'm not working, who am I?"

### — LANDSCAPE, ARCHITECTURE, POPULATION —

Milton approaches the conception of an image without a concrete, linear plan. Over the course of its creation, elements come and go until the final image emerges. He believes visual elements materialize from his subconscious, and he has never forgotten the teachings of his Yale mentor, Albers, who spoke of there being only one correct answer to any problem — it just takes time to find it. Milton says:

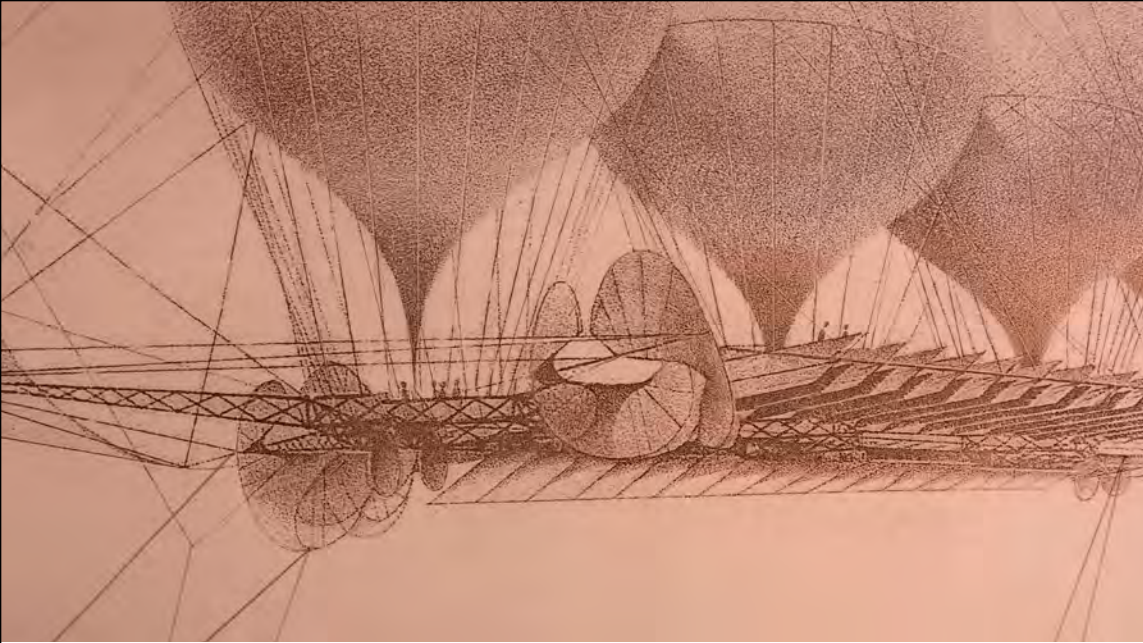
One's unconscious is really tied into these things. There's all kinds of seething going on, and something emerges out it. And it will seem to have a connection, but it has to be thematic. Sometimes I wonder if the unconscious already has a plan for me, but I haven't discovered what that is, and then it begins to eke its way through. I'd like to use that analogy because I think that's what happens. I think our subconscious is really at work at all times and wants something there, but I don't know that yet. Our systems of association have set it in that ultimately liberate this thing, and then there it is, and I use it.

Recognizing the solution took time while developing *Points of Departure II: Nijinsky Variations* (1996). The architecture of a great opera house would be the setting, but Milton was unsure who the characters would be.

Vaslav Nijinsky, of the print's title, was, in fact, the last character to be added. Initially the focus was to be on opera librettist Ludovic Halévy, the third character from the print *Mary's Turn* (also on view in this exhibition). Unsatisfied, the artist removed Halévy and continued his exploration. Milton then determined to portray Mary Cassatt and Edgar Degas as both their younger and older selves. Seated next to Cassatt is the grande dame of Parisian ballet, Marie Rambert, hired by Sergei Diaghilev to assist Nijinsky in choreographing *The Rite of Spring*. At this point, with Nijinsky leaping in the center of the composition, the first version of the plate was published. However, Milton wasn't satisfied and aggressively reworked the plate, eradicating Nijinsky and other dancers in the center of the composition, ultimately replacing them with crows and a white dove. Finally, after many changes, the players fell into place.

Cultural icons such as Nijinsky appear, but even more so do art historical references. Twentieth-century art history is the subject of *Points of Departure III: Twentieth Century Limited* (1998), which, in Milton's scenario, takes place in New York City's Pennsylvania Station, circa 1910.<sup>10</sup> In its day, "The Most Famous Train in the World" carried well-heeled passengers receiving red-carpet treatment at record speeds between Chicago and New York. In





Milton's image, the express train of the sophisticated set has crashed while transporting monuments of twentieth-century art. Across the foreground, famous artists carry their works to safety. Among the artists and their artworks to look for are Marcel Duchamp, Pablo Picasso, Piet Mondrian, Georgia O'Keeffe, Jackson Pollock, Robert Rauschenberg, and Roy Lichtenstein. And though Milton lavished months and months on rendering, by hand, every individual work of art and architectural element, he ironically seems to beg the question, how relevant will any art prove to be in the end?

While *Points of Departure III: Twentieth Century Limited* teems with people and action, *Hidden Cities II: Embarkation for Cythera* (2004) celebrates the quiet beauty and immensity of cities. This architectural folly blends Paris and Rome: the stairs coming up to the foreground are loosely based on the Montmartre district of Paris, while the stairs leading up to the airship are based on Rome's Spanish Steps. A fanciful airship floats in a clear sky across the top. This extraordinary expanse of sky — gleaming, polished copper — is unique in Milton's oeuvre. Free of human presence as a main character, this image is also a rare instance of having no foregrounded central figure. This quiet scene seems to point out that while cities are centers of culture crowded with people, it is equally easy to become invisible and utterly alone in them. Milton reports that the title springs obliquely from Italo Calvino's fantastical novel *Invisible Cities*.

TOP TO BOTTOM: Details from *Hidden Cities II: Embarkation for Cythera* and *Points of Departure II: Nijinsky Variations*. Etched and engraved copper plates.

PREVIOUS PAGE: Detail from *Points of Departure III: Twentieth Century Limited*. Etched and engraved copper plate.

## — THE SERIES *INTERIORS* —

All of Milton's early prints laid the groundwork for the series of seven prints, *Interiors*, created from 1984 to 1995, which are set on the eve of World War II. Throughout the suite, myriad visual references to history, art history, dreams, and fantasy appear and are set in the tragic zeitgeist of humanity's darkest moments. As Milton writes, the prints that make up *Interiors* "not only evoke the historical past, which has by now assumed mythic dimensions, but point toward any time in which we allow darkness to prevail through our own free choice to be blind."<sup>11</sup>

The fourth plate in *Interiors*, *Hotel Paradise Café* (1987), was initially meant to be the conclusion of the series. In it the airiness and caprice of the 1920s and 1930s hang in precarious balance; darkness is about to come to Europe in the form of World War II. The woman at center, who will appear in the final print, *The Train from Munich* (1995), sits and stares toward the viewer in wistful contemplation or mindless ennui. Around her, characters fade away: a pilot of the romantic age of flying or an age of coming loss, a woman tangled up and spinning with the pulling dogs in the doorway, and dancers who seem unaware of impending doom. Meanwhile, in an ambiguous reflection an airship cruises by, conjuring the romance of flying just as much as it brings to mind the 1937 *Hindenburg* disaster, air raids, or bombings.

The fifth and sixth prints in *Interiors* are *Water Music* (1988) and *Soundings* (1989), which provide some relief between the seriousness of *Hotel Paradise Café* and *The Train from Munich*. In these two images, the central character is the artist himself, portrayed at different ages. Music is the focus of both works, which is something Milton is as passionate about as art. Care-free and innocent, the artist grins at the viewer in *Water Music* as Jascha Heifetz serenades with the violin. Two framed portraits of Franz Schubert and Richard Wagner look on. Opposite them is a tiny version of a Mississippi Delta blues band in front of a polyhedron derived from Albrecht Dürer's *Melencolia I* (a clever visual pun on the blues and melancholy). Inexplicably, a great whale looms above, its eye fixed upon us in an invitation to plumb our own mysterious world of associations.

In *Soundings*, the artist appears in the foreground distracted by the fish in the tank or perhaps by the viewer. About to place his pencil on the paper, he

hesitates. One of the pencils has erasers at both ends. Even the artist is transparent, reflecting the act of creation as a struggle. Behind the central figure sits the French novelist Colette, oblivious to the artist, and behind her choir boys exit the scene to places unknown. The chamber orchestra, led by Gustav Mahler, seems disjointed and scattered. Deep in the space, whales swim by as gondolas and bicycles hover and dancers waltz before them. *Soundings* is as rich in sensuous atmosphere as it is in the intentionally unfathomable questions it invites.

*Interiors* is arguably Milton's most important and personal series of etchings. Mirroring the surreality of an unstable world between the wars, *Interiors* culminates with *The Train from Munich*. Milton made this print for his wife, Edith, who as a child escaped Germany on the last of the *Kindertransport* trains, in which young German Jews were conveyed to Great Britain from 1938 to 1940. Young Edith peers out of the window in the center of the composition. French artist Marcel Duchamp is cast as the ironically obsequious maître d' of the Café Dante and watches as menace descends the staircase. The female figure from *Hotel Paradise Café* is coming up the stairs from a lower platform, while the artist (in the same pose as in *Interiors I: Family Reunion* [1984]) engages us from the back of the café. Raoul Wallenberg, who saved more than ten thousand Hungarian Jews during the war, stands by the window watching the commotion on the stairs. To the side of the station, people sleep on benches as if blind to what is happening across Europe; only the three children watch as trains depart for points unknown. Finally, the ghostly apparition of Otto Frank, father of diarist Anne Frank, gazes at Edith within the café. Milton states, "For many of us the blackness that fell during the Third Reich has redefined the boundaries of humanity."<sup>12</sup>

The original drawing on Mylar for *The Train from Munich* shows how the image began. But as Milton points out, "you lose so much when Mylar is etched in; acid is the destroyer getting it in the plate. [Then,] engraving it back is restoration.... The acid is a destructive instrument. It destroys. The more you use it, you lose finesse." In stark contrast to the delicate drawing, moving and removing copper is a demanding and forceful act not without its risks and rewards. Milton says that "a little savagery is a beautiful thing." Once the information has been scraped out, the area must be smoothed with a burnisher

so as to not hold ink. In *The Train from Munich*, “you can see the burnisher at work in the lights. The burnisher has been scrubbing at that, followed by a lot of polishing paper.” After this, the edges of the burnished area need to be flawlessly reintegrated into the plate with an electric engraver. He adds, “Now you see the compulsive mind at work, ... and it shows how profoundly physical printmaking is.” In addition to burnishing highlights, Milton also enhances the darkest lines and shadows by directly engraving into the plate with a burin.

The gleaming, nearly blinding whites are often the last to arrive. In *The Train from Munich*, according to the artist, “the birds were the very last thing because it was too heavy and just too dark. I had to start scraping the plate away. It was all the scraper. The scraper and burnisher are my tools for correcting the plate. Had to get to light in there; I had to get some life in it!” The physicality of wrangling the plates is, at its core, sculptural: “It’s not a calling — it’s an affliction, an addiction. When you’re actually creating something you sink into it. You lose yourself in it.” While demonstrating the necessity of working under indirect light because it shows the image in the plates just as it was when he was making them, he says, “It’s magic. How did I do that?! Look at the edges. Who burnished those edges?” Of a certain spot on a plate, he points out, “Look at that. There I’m torturing the plate.”



RIGHT: Peter Milton (top) and Edith Milton as a child, from *Interiors VII: The Train from Munich*. Etched and engraved copper plate.



TOP LEFT: Scraping and burnishing were required to excavate the doves in the copper plate for *Interiors VII: The Train from Munich*. BOTTOM LEFT: After burnishing the doves, integrating them into the plate required stippling to create smooth transitions. RIGHT: The same plate's tonalities are reversed when viewed in raking light revealing the sculptural qualities of the copper; engraving by hand accentuates shadows and edges.



## — MUSIC AS MUSE —

Even as Milton has been long obsessed with making art, music is essential to his life, as well. In Paris on a Yale fellowship in 1954–55, Milton studied piano with Nadia Boulanger, and he continues to immerse himself in music ranging from classical to bluegrass to jazz to tango. Consequently, musical references frequently emerge in his prints, as seen in *Points of Departure I: Pavane* (1999). Just as Gabriel Fauré’s gently gorgeous *Pavane* and Maurice Ravel’s haunting orchestral piece *Pavane for a Dead Princess* revisit a stately dance originating in sixteenth-century Europe, Milton refers to a photograph by André Kertesz of a lone cellist as the centerpiece in his own *Pavane*. As a tableau created at the end of the twentieth century, the passage of time is certainly one of its subjects. But Milton also references the war in Sarajevo during the 1990s, when a lone cellist was photographed playing in a deserted street as his gift of solace to the hiding residents. Milton’s image becomes a mournful elegy for a lost city, a passing century, and a terrible war. In this pastoral park setting, our cellist could be savoring the peace and quiet of the moment, or could be playing defiantly in full view of snipers.

## — MOVING ON —

A printmaker is an enigma, both artist and craftsman. Milton comments, “How are those words useful? I have to own up. I am both. It’s much more rewarding to say I’m a printmaker. But the artist must analyze and push what the material is doing to a higher plane.” Despite being keenly enamored of the mystique of etching in copper, Milton turned to the computer to construct his images in 2007. Tempting as it might be to ascribe relinquishing one medium for another to the increasing limitations imposed by age, Milton clarifies, “I had pushed the copper as far as it would go. To me, it was always the imagery; for most people, it was the process.” Even as this master printmaker has shifted technologies, Milton’s sense of dramatic storytelling set in imaginative landscapes has not lost its potency. He’ll use any tool at his disposal to create his inscrutable fantasies and has turned to Adobe Photoshop to create large-scale digital images that can be either printed on paper or on Duratrans film

and exhibited lit from behind on LED light boxes. The digital files contain more than two thousand layers and take the artist many months to years to create.

One of these virtuosic digital images, *Sight Lines VI: Shootout in Verona* (2015), is set in a Miltonian architectural extravaganza. Leon Battista Alberti’s Sant’ Andrea basilica in Mantua, Italy, is the model, although the fan-vaulted ceiling is from a church in Bath, England. As with all of Milton’s images, this cinematic enigma starts in one place and ends in another. *Shootout* began with the architecture and ended with a classic shootout from a Western movie, though with modern cameras as the weapons. Milton has stated that over the course of creating these images, many elements come and go; it’s a matter of wading through numerous iterations until the inescapable solution comes to light. In this case, the characters didn’t find their way into the image until the connection of Mantua to *Romeo and Juliet* emerged: Romeo is exiled there during William Shakespeare’s play. Milton gleefully summarizes:

In *Shootout in Verona*, paparazzi have arrived into the wrong place at the wrong time for a masked ball, here being thrown by the feuding families of a famously fated pair of lovers. In the ensuing disarray, the shutterbugs are catching the contagious “feuding bug” and the newly quasi-gunslung photo-istas start aiming their 35 mm weapons at each other, turning the scene into shades of John Sturges’s *Gunfight at the OK Corral* and Henry King’s *The Gunfighter*.<sup>13</sup>

Another digital image, *Sight Lines III: Eclipse* (2011), is a self-referential reflection on transition, time, and a life of art making. Set in Paris during the solar eclipse of 1912, just two days after the *Titanic* sank, *Eclipse* records the city of light and the center of the art world at the very moment photography was becoming recognized as fine art. Sitting at the center is Eugène Atget, who photographed Paris as redesigned by Baron Haussmann beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. Through trial and error and numerous versions, in its final state Milton added himself photographing the child with the deflated balloon, echoing the waning of the Belle Époque. A parallel can also be made to the artist’s own move from hand-drawn, hand-pulled etchings to the less physical reality of the computer.

## — CONCLUSION —

Milton's prints are at once terribly serious, wickedly clever, and even whimsical. Viewers often find themselves reflected within these enigmatic images and are bound to relate to and contemplate their place in a complicated world. Reflecting on his lengthy career, Milton says, "I had huge aspirations for myself, but picking prints was a pretty peripheral thing to choose. Prints are rarely in the public discourse and all too often ghettoized into the corridors." His goal was "to achieve something ultimate. What is that? I haven't found it yet. But I'm so lucky. I'm still surprised at where I'm going. I don't know where that trajectory is going, but it's really still going." Milton's turn toward embracing Adobe Photoshop links him to the inexorable trajectory of technology. His digital drawings, presented as images on LED displays, are at the transitional nexus of three disciplines: drawing, printmaking, and photography. Perhaps photography and digital technology have eclipsed the hand-drawn, but they have not negated the essential need for the artist's primacy of touch. As Milton stated of his copper plates, "floating in that sea of luminosity is the image."<sup>14</sup> In truth, the same can be said of the enigmatic tableaux the artist has created in the digital realm.



Detail from *Daylilies*. Etched and engraved copper plate.

## — ENDNOTES —

Unless otherwise noted, all quotations by the artist derive from an interview conducted by Trudi Ludwig Johnson and Ann Shafer at his Frankestown, New Hampshire home on July 19, 2014.

1. From a talk Milton gave at the Jane Haslem Gallery, Washington, D.C., September 22, 2013.
2. Ibid.
3. "For One Artist, Colorblindness Opened Up a World of Black and White," NPR, November 17, 2014, [www.npr.org/2014/11/16/364092778/for-one-artist-colorblindness-opened-up-a-world-of-black-and-white](http://www.npr.org/2014/11/16/364092778/for-one-artist-colorblindness-opened-up-a-world-of-black-and-white).
4. Interviewed by Trudi Ludwig Johnson, Frankestown, New Hampshire, July 18, 2015.
5. Robert Flynn Johnson, *Peter Milton: Complete Prints 1960–1996* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1996), 22.
6. Milton's relentless pursuit of perfection is further explored in the unpublished manuscript "The Ocular Vision and Aesthetic Visions of Peter Milton," by Michael F. Marmor and Peter Milton.
7. Milton demonstrated his method with Trudi Ludwig Johnson on July 18, 2015.
8. Many artists work with a single printer, although an equal number work with multiple printers. Most printers become known for a certain specialty.
9. Jane Haslem Gallery talk.
10. Milton's website ([petermilton.com](http://petermilton.com)) includes a diagram of this print, identifying the artworks and artists (<http://www.petermilton.com/20thcent.asp>). The website also includes many notes by the artist on the individual prints, and acts as a catalogue raisonné.
11. [petermilton.com/documents/cat113.htm](http://petermilton.com/documents/cat113.htm).
12. Ibid.
13. [petermilton.com/documents/cat139d.htm](http://petermilton.com/documents/cat139d.htm).
14. Jane Haslem Gallery talk.

PHOTO CREDITS: Images of all copper plates and the drawing and print of *The Train from Munich* by Will Kirk/HomewoodPhoto.jhu.edu. Portrait of Peter Milton by Angela Evancie/Vermont Public Radio. Image of Milton's hands with drawing tool by Trudi Ludwig Johnson. All other photographs credited to [petermilton.com](http://petermilton.com).



# CHECKLIST

ALL OF THE COPPER PLATES, prints, and drawings are from the artist's collection. We are profoundly grateful to Peter Milton and thank him for generously sharing these treasures. We also thank Milton's dealers, Jane Haslem of the Jane Haslem Gallery and Robert Newman of the Old Print Shop, along with master printer Robert Townsend, for their help and advice.

Milton numbers refer to the catalogue raisonné of the prints available at [petermilton.com](http://petermilton.com).

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*Daylilies*, 1975  
(Milton 96)  
Etched and engraved copper plate

*A Sky-Blue Life*, 1976  
(Milton 97)  
Four etched and engraved copper plates  
Etching and engraving on paper

*Les Belles et La Bête I: The Rehearsal*, 1977  
(Milton 98)  
Graphite on drafting film  
Pen and black sugar ink on Mylar  
Etching and engraving on paper



*Interiors I: Family Reunion*, 1984  
(Milton 107)  
Etched and engraved copper plate

*Interiors IV: Hotel Paradise Café*, 1987  
(Milton 110)  
Etched and engraved copper plate  
Etching and engraving on paper

*Interiors V: Water Music*, 1988  
(Milton 111)  
Etched and engraved copper plate

*Interiors VI: Soundings*, 1989  
(Milton 112)  
Etched and engraved copper plate

*Interiors VII: The Train from Munich*, 1995  
(Milton 113)  
Pen and black sugar ink on Mylar  
Etched and engraved copper plate  
Etching and engraving on paper



*Points of Departure I: Mary's Turn*, 1994  
(Milton 116)  
Etched and engraved copper plate  
Etching and engraving on paper

*Points of Departure II: Nijinsky Variations*, 1996  
(Milton 119)  
Etched and engraved copper plate

*Points of Departure III: Twentieth Century Limited*, 1998  
(Milton 120)  
Etched and engraved copper plate

*Points of Departure IV: Pavane*, 1999  
(Milton 122)  
Pen and black ink on Mylar  
Etched and engraved copper plate

*Hidden Cities II: Embarkation for Cythera*, 2004  
(Milton 126)  
Etched and engraved copper plate

*Hidden Cities III: Continuum*, 2006  
(Milton 128)  
Etched and engraved copper plate

*In Search of Lost Time*, 2006  
(Milton 129)  
Etched and engraved copper plate

*Sight Lines III: Eclipse*, 2011  
(Milton 134d)  
Digital image on LED light box

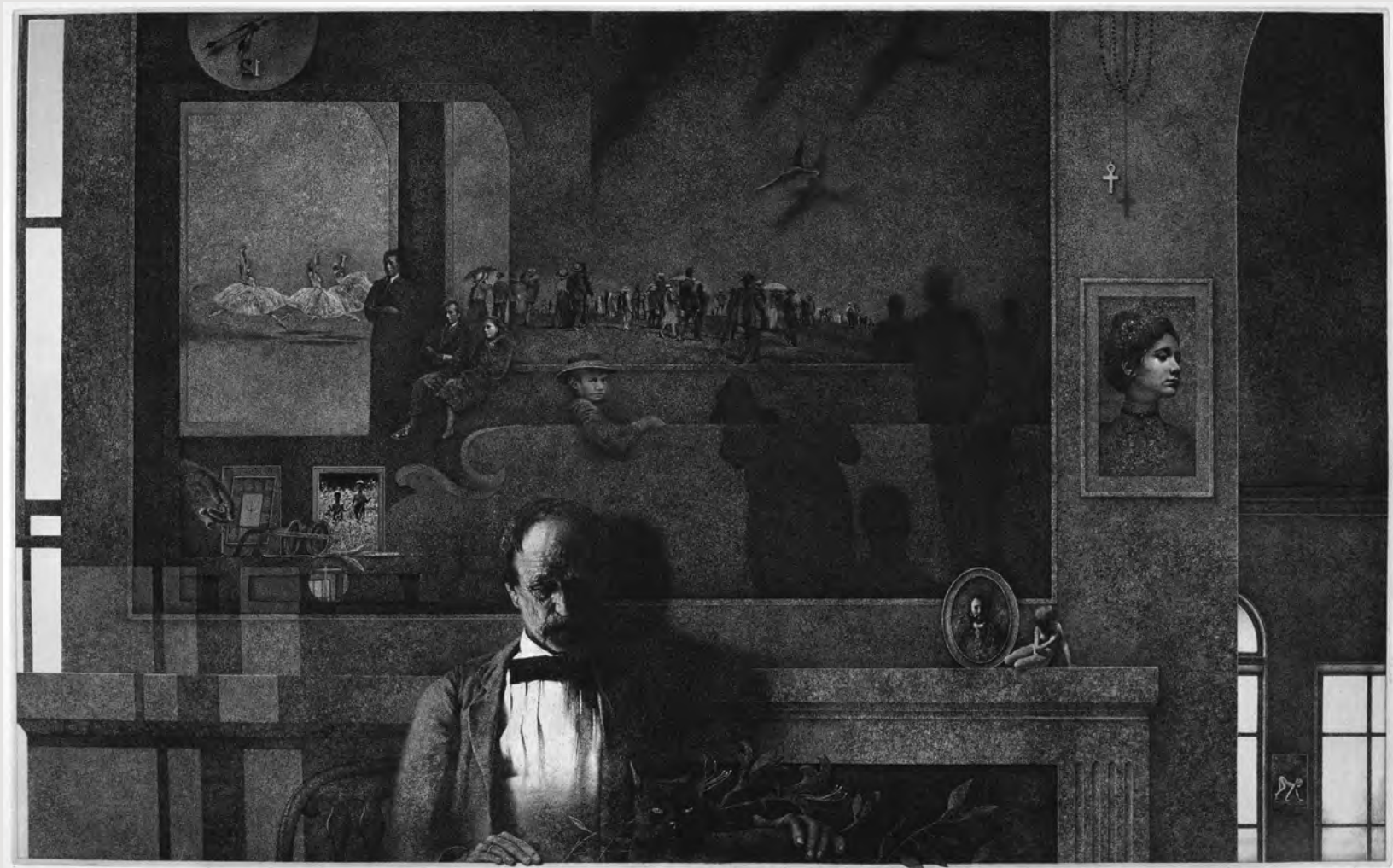
*Sight Lines VI: Shootout in Verona*, 2015  
(Milton 139d)  
Digital image on LED light box

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ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: Details from *Interiors VII: The Train from Munich*. Pen and black sugar ink on Mylar. Etched and engraved copper plate.



*Daylilies*. Etched and engraved copper plate (above).  
Etching and engraving on paper (page 19).





*Points of Departure II: Nijinsky Variations.* Etched and engraved copper plate (above).  
Etching and engraving on paper (page 21).





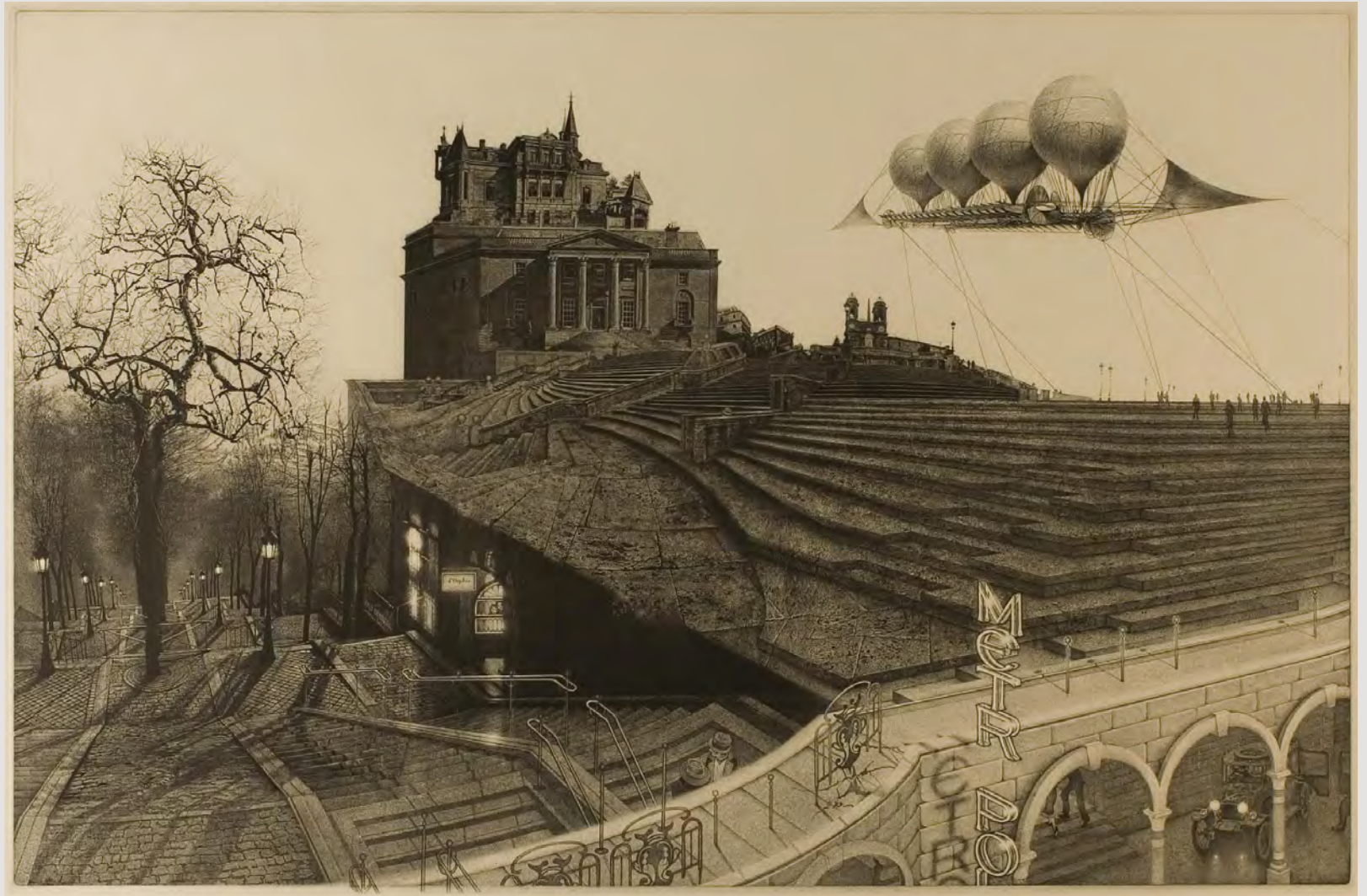
*Points of Departure III: Twentieth Century Limited.* Etched and engraved copper plate (above).  
Etching and engraving on paper (page 23).





*Hidden Cities II: Embarkation for Cythera.* Etched and engraved copper plate (above).  
Etching and engraving on paper (page 25).





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**P**eter Milton: *Etching Enigmas* is an exhibition born of both the history of Evergreen and the museum's later assigned mission to enlighten others through the celebration of the talents of contemporary artists. Of the historical, though Evergreen is recognized today for varied holdings of fine, decorative, and literary artworks, the first collection to secure for this Garrett family-owned mansion the classification of museum — albeit *private* museum — was one of works on paper and specifically prints. In 1885, Evergreen's new master, T. Harrison Garrett (1849–88), acquired the renowned collection of nearly twenty thousand fifteenth-century to present-day prints that had been assembled by the late James L. Claghorn, president of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Immediately Garrett began altering the interiors of Evergreen to accommodate the display and proper storage of this important collection. And he began to add to it, expanding upon certain themes, thus ensuring its necessary renaming as the Garrett Collection. In 1930, the much larger collection was placed on deposit at the Baltimore Museum of Art and made an actual addition to that institution's already well recognized works-on-paper holdings just over a decade and a half later. Though prints are not a physical feature of today's Evergreen, their importance to the earliest years of the institution remain visible through still existing, specially designed print rooms and galleries throughout the mansion. A no-longer-extant archetype of Garrett connoisseurship here, they remain a kind of lingering touchstone.

And when Ambassador John Work Garrett (1872–1942) and his wife, Alice Warder Garrett (1877–1952), established Evergreen as a

museum of Johns Hopkins University, they intended for the house to be an encourager of contemporary artists and their work as much as a preserver of things from the past. Here we have the more vital and energized purpose behind this current exhibition. Peter Milton's melding of modern camera-like precision with engaging layers of historical and literary poeticism relates on so many levels with the Garretts' evolving vision as museum founders. We could not resist such appropriate match-making between like appreciators of past, present, and future.

It is with the above noted that I express sincere appreciation of friends and colleagues Trudi Ludwig Johnson and Ann Shafer for bringing this wonderful idea to Evergreen and seeing it through to such perfection. Of course, the museum is equally indebted to master printmaker Peter Milton and his wife, Edith, for allowing Evergreen to serve as celebrator of his great talent — and for being so encouraging of each step of the exhibition's planning and development.

This exhibition is supported in part by the Evergreen House Foundation and the Maryland State Arts Council, as well as the generosity of museum supporters Sara Levi, Jane Worth Daniels, Charlotte Bunting Floyd, and other donors. I wish to also acknowledge the efforts of the following for assistance with the installation and publication: designer Rick Barbehenn and Barbehenn Studio; framer Kyle Bauer; graphic designer Lisa Pupa; photographer Will Kirk; copy editor Don McKeon; Heather Egan Stalfort, associate director of communications and marketing for the Sheridan Libraries and University Museums; and the very talented staff of Evergreen Museum & Library.

**JAMES ARCHER ABBOTT**

*Director and Curator*

BACK COVER: Detail from *Interiors VII: The Train from Munich*. Etched and engraved copper plate.



## EVERGREEN MUSEUM & LIBRARY

Housed in a former Gilded Age mansion surrounded by Italian-style gardens, Evergreen Museum & Library is at once an intimate collection of fine and decorative art, rare books, and manuscripts assembled by two generations of Baltimore's philanthropic Garrett family, and a vibrant, inspirational venue for contemporary art. As a teaching museum of Johns Hopkins University, Evergreen contributes to the advancement of scholarship and museum practice by helping to train future art historians, historic preservationists, and museum professionals.

For information about tours, hours, exhibitions, and special programs, please visit [museums.jhu.edu](http://museums.jhu.edu).

