

Double folio etched broadside, cut-outs of coloured silk pasted onto the verso, black ink painted onto the verso, text in German and French.

THE GREAT FIRE OF NEW YORK

Representation du Feu Terrible a Nouvelle Yorck.

Author
HABERMANN, Franz Xaver

Publication date
[c1778].

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Publication place
Augsburg,

Physical description
Double folio etched broadside, cut-outs of coloured silk pasted onto the verso, black ink painted onto the verso, text in German and French.

Dimensions
290 by 400mm. (11.5 by 15.75 inches).

Notes
The scene is an imagined reconstruction of the fire that ravaged the West Side of Manhattan during the American Revolutionary War.

“On September 19 and 20, 1776, four days after Washington had withdrawn the colonial troops from Manhattan Island, a furious fire swept New York, destroying nearly 500 buildings in the area between Broadway and the Hudson River. General Howe and his British troops had occupied the city following Washington’s withdrawal, and were preparing to use it as a winter base. John Jay, Nathanael Greene, and others had advised Washington to put the city to the torch rather than to leave it to the enemy; but the Continental Congress voted ‘no’ to the idea when Washington queried them by letter. To this day, the origin of the fire, which leveled one-fourth of the city, remains a mystery” (Nebenzahl).

Flames are shown spreading from doors, windows and roofs, with a dense smoke flying above them; figures on the street flee carrying their belongings; British troops are seen beating suspected arsonists. The title is engraved backwards as the print was intended to be shown on a wall or screen using a magic lantern, an optical device that projected the image by means of candles and mirrors.

Franz Xavier Habermann (1721-1796) was a German engraver of views and ornamental motifs.

Bibliography
Nebenzahl, pp.22-23; Stokes I, p.217.

Provenance

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