

The Artist and His Wife by Israhel van Meckenem
Original Lithographic Bookplate - Main Subject: Portrait



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Dimensions (As Shown)
7W x 5H Inches
17.78W x 12.7H cm

Medium
Original Lithographic Bookplate

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About Israhel van Meckenem

Israhel van Meckenem (also known as Israhel van Meckenem the Younger) was a German printmaker and goldsmith. He was the most prolific engraver of the fifteenth century and an important figure in the early history of old master prints. He was active from 1465 until his death in 1503.

His birth date is merely an estimate. Recent guesses range from the early 1430s to 1450. His father arrived in Bocholt, Germany, near the border with the Netherlands, in 1457, so his place of birth is unknown. He was the son of Israhel van Meckenem the Elder, also a goldsmith, who settled in Bocholt. Attempts have been made to identify the father as the Master of the Berlin

Passion, an early engraver, but this remains uncertain. Some writers also assign to the father works traditionally given to the son. The very unusual name "Israhel" suggests the family may have had Jewish origins, but Israhel the Younger was buried in a church, and it might not have been possible for Jews to work as goldsmiths. The "van" suggests a Dutch origin for the family, various places in Germany and the Netherlands have been suggested as "Meckenem", as no place generally called exactly that existed at the time. The Master of the Berlin Passion probably worked mainly in the Netherlands, so his identification with Israhel Senior would have implications for the issue of the family origin.

Israhel van Meckenem probably trained initially as a goldsmith and engraver with his father, before travelling to work with Master E. S., the leading Northern European engraver of the day. His earliest dated print comes from 1465, and indicates that he created it in Cleves, where the family had moved. In 1470 he is documented as working in Bamberg; he returned to Bocholt by about 1480, where he remained for the rest of his life. He continued to work at goldsmithing. Some surviving pieces are widely accepted as his and many commissions from the Bocholt council are documented between 1480 and 1498. He was evidently a prosperous and established figure in the town. One of his prints is a double portrait of himself and his wife, Ida, whom he married in the late 1480s, another print is believed by some to show his father. He is documented in various lawsuits against neighbours, and Ida was fined for "unseemly speech" as well as for "mocking and scolding public officials".

He probably trained with Master E. S. in South Germany, and may well have been with him at his death c. 1467, since he acquired and reworked forty-one of the master's plates. Another two hundred of van Meckenem's "own" prints also were copies of ones by Master E. S. In total, he produced over six hundred plates, most of which were copies of other prints; they represent about 20% of print production by all Northern European artists in the period of his working life. His career lasted long enough for him to copy Dürer prints.

His early works were fairly crude, but in the 1480s he developed an effective personal style and made increasingly large and finished works. His own compositions are often very lively, and take a great interest in the secular life of his day. One famous print, supposed to illustrate the story of St John the Baptist and Salome, pushes the specific incidents of the story far in the background to allow space for a scene of court dancers, dressed in the height of contemporary fashion, which takes up most of the plate. He was sophisticated in self-presentation, signing later prints with his name and town, and producing the first self-portrait print of himself and his wife, which was also the first portrait print of an identifiable person. Some plates seem to have been reworked more than once by his workshop, or produced in more than one version, and many impressions have survived, so his ability to distribute and sell his prints was evidently equally well developed.

Original Lithographic Bookplate

Sorry. No information about this medium is available.

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