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March 27, 2024

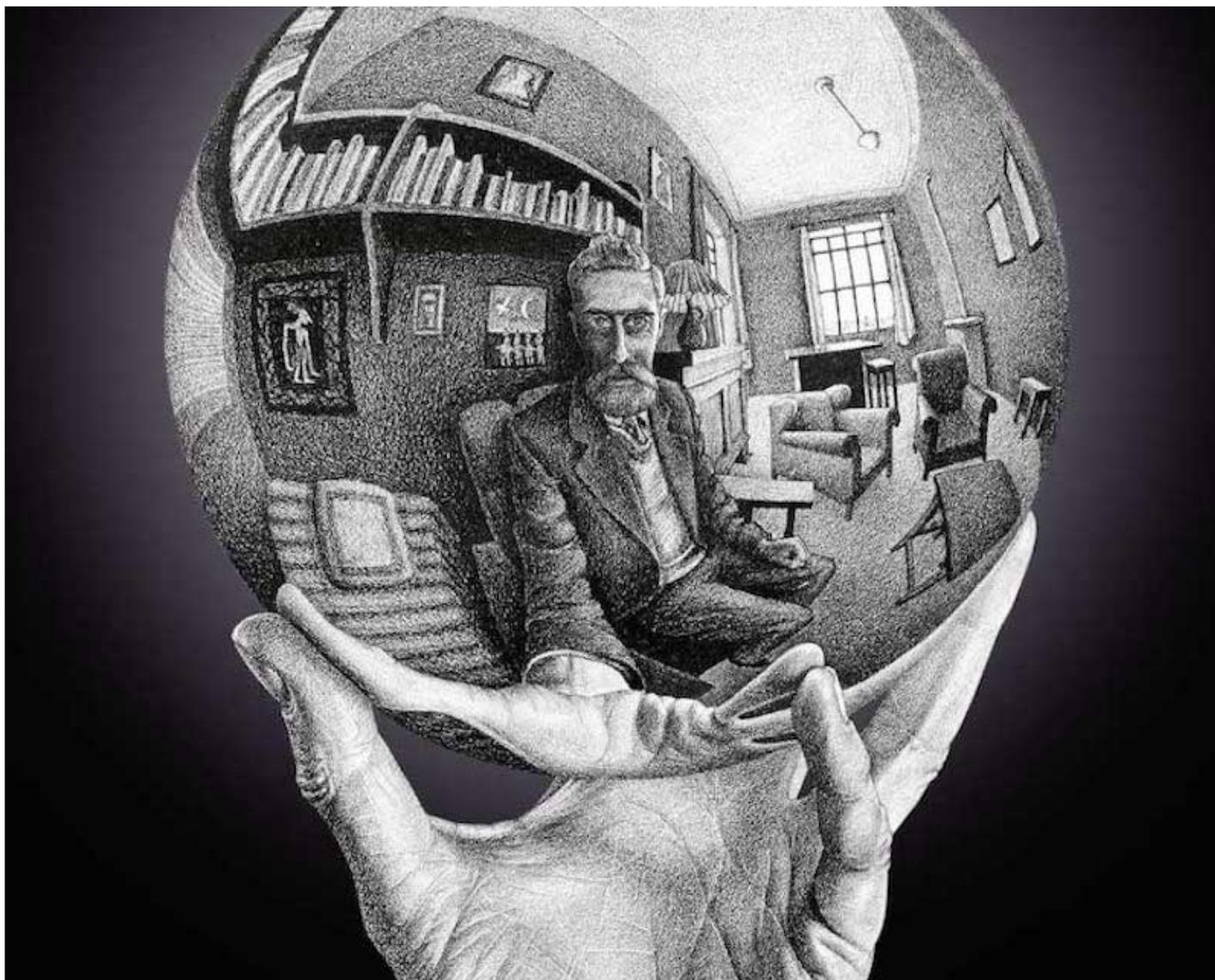
# A Full Immersion in Escher's Enigmatic Universe on View at Palazzo Bonaparte

A comprehensive exhibition of the ingenious left-handed Dutch graphic artist's works



*Italian Hours*

Lucy Gordan



*Hand with Reflecting Sphere.* (lithograph, 1935). The lithograph is of Escher in his studio in his home in Rome. The catalog says: "The work can be seen as a creative metaphor for artistic creation: the hand of the artist holding up himself and his entire world." All photos: The M.C. Escher Company.

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Rome's *Palazzo Bonaparte*, is featuring "Escher", the most comprehensive exhibition ever dedicated to this ingenious left-handed Dutch graphic artist (1898-1972). On view through May 5, the exhibit, a love story between Escher and southern Italy, was timed to mark the centenary of his first trip to Rome in 1923.

The more than 300 objects on display—many of which have never been displayed before—chart his work from art school, to Italy, and back to The Netherlands, ending with *Eschermania* featuring his influence on film producer Alfred Hitchcock and fashion designer Issay Miyake.

Maurits Cornelis Escher's broad genius is evident through its diverse art forms and commercial objects: from lithographs, woodcuts and mezzotints to book jackets and illustrations, comics, bank notes, Dutch stamps, record covers, even IKEA furniture and clothing.

Escher made his first trip to Italy with his parents in 1921 visiting Florence only to return the next year traveling solo to San Gimignano, Siena, Assisi, and Genoa. In 1923 he traveled to Ravello, where he met his Swiss wife, Jetta Umiker, whom he

married in Viareggio in 1924.

One gallery documents these travels outside Rome via a biographical video, narrated at times by Escher himself, as well as several lithographs. Admiring these is a visual travelog: San Gimignano in Tuscany; Rosanno and Tropea in Calabria; Scilla in Sicily; *borghi* in Abruzzi; and Atrani and Ravello on the Amalfi Coast, Escher's favorite place in Italy outside Rome.



*San Michele dei Frisoni and St. Peter's Square* (lithograph, 1932). All photos: The M.C. Escher Company.

The next gallery, devoted to the Vatican and the Eternal City, is a partial reconstruction of Escher's Rome studio with his desk, his engraving tools, portable easel as well as geometric tiles he designed for his apartment's floors, and interviews with his sons. On a nearby wall is perhaps his most famous work, the lithograph "Hand With Reflecting Sphere" (1935), literally reflecting Escher posing in his studio as well as his 12 woodcuts "Rome By Night" (1934), obvious inspirations for "In Escher's Footsteps" night walks.

In a letter to his friend Hein's-Gravezande Escher wrote: "In the evening from 8 PM to 11 or 12 at night, I sketched in Rome, in this amazing, beautiful, night-time Rome, whose architecture I love much more than I do during the day. All the excessive Baroque elements...fade at night...The modern indirect lighting with large spotlights...helps to increase the fantastic effect."

According to his diary entries, Escher was happiest during his Rome years experiencing his first big success ever in May 1926 at Palazzo Venezia. He, Jetta, and their three sons, Giorgio, Arthur, and Jan, all born in Rome, lived at Via Alessandro Poerio 122 in Monteverde Vecchio on the Janiculum hill, a short walk from the American Academy. Sadly, the Eschers' love affair with Rome ended abruptly, when Giorgio, aged nine, was required to wear the Fascist Balilla uniform to school. However, before leaving Italy forever in 1936, Escher persuaded the Adria shipping company to invite the family on a Mediterranean cruise in

exchange for his artworks to illustrate its publicity brochure.



*Bond of Union* (lithograph, 1956)

They boarded in Trieste and made many stops, a few of which were Fiume, Bari, Naples, Messina and Savona. During the four-week cruise Escher drew nine prints; the one of Savona is on display.

Although Escher never returned to Italy, many of his later works show the influence of Italian flora, fauna, and architecture. Noteworthy examples of his post-Italian works on view are "Day and Night" (1938), "Metamorphosis II" (1939), "The Print Gallery" (1956), and "Bond of Union" (1956).

While "Escher" will remain on display in Rome through May 5, another "Escher" is in Ferrara's Renaissance "Palazzo Diamante" through July 21. These vast exhibitions were culled from several sources: the M.C. Escher Foundation in the Hague; the Maurits Collection in Bolzano; Rock. J. Walker Fine Art in New York City; as well as dozens of private collections.

The magnificently illustrated, 280-page catalog in English and Italian editions, published by Skira, costs 40 euros.

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*Italian Hours*

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