

*Industry and Idleness:**Selections from the Print Collection of
The Museum of the City of New York*

Morally didactic and financially expedient, William Hogarth's (1747) *Industry and Idleness* series, from which this exhibition borrows its title, traces the worldly successes and failures respectively awaiting a diligent apprentice and his slothful counterpart. The prints on display here, made over 125 years later and an ocean away, similarly unite the subjects of work and play, the functions of commerce and expression.

The duality of business and pleasure characterizes both printmaking and one of its greatest inspirations—New York City. In 1865, the United States emerged from the Civil War as a unified power, and New York was its undisputed economic capital. The construction of Central Park, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Brooklyn Bridge, Carnegie Hall, and the New York

Public Library in a brief thirty-five years meant that by 1900 the City's financial prowess was matched only by its cultural dominance. Come the late 1920s, New York was the unofficial financial and cultural leader of the United States. While the domestic and international affairs of the next 50 years were strongly felt in the City, the reputation it began garnering in the 1880s not only persisted, but thrived through the decadent 1980s.

The maps and advertisements, newspapers and Works Progress Administration projects, among others, made during this 100-year period and on display here look at New York—its people, places, and the activities therein—as a site where the commercial and cultural converge as inevitably as the practical and personal do in prints of all kinds. *Industry and Idleness* brings together a sampling of the tens of thousands of prints from The Museum of the City of New York's vast collection, some seen here for the first time.

The exhibit is arranged in thematic groupings that evoke the interrelatedness of what have historically been perceived as the opposing motivations characterizing New York and perhaps its most apt medium. People at work and play, or places of work and play, coexist in a single image. Places of play are perceived as sites of work, and people of work are seen at play. Perhaps most ubiquitously, activities appear as work for some and play for others. Presented in these categories, the works elicit the complexity of social dynamics in the City and the nuanced artistic impulses informing images of them.

While Hogarth's series considers labor and leisure at either end of a moral spectrum, the works in *Industry and Idleness* posit them to be complementary aspects of an economic system. At turns explicit and implicit, this system has informed the development of both New York City and printmaking within it. As Walt Whitman suggests in his extended love letter to New York, *Leaves of Grass*, this industriousness does not detract from the City's beauty, but rather enables it:

The main shapes arise!
Shapes of Democracy, total—result of centuries;
Shapes, ever projecting other shapes;
Shapes of turbulent, manly cities;
Shapes of the friends and home-givers of the whole earth,
Shapes bracing the earth, and braced with the whole earth.
(12.250-255)



Image credits: (top) Advertisement for Prof. S. Berendsohn's Rat, Roach & Bug-Killer, 1864, Lithograph, 12 1/8 x 15 in., Gift of Dr. Arthur Hunter; (bottom) Frederick Mershimer, *Rebuilding 8th Avenue*, 1988, Mezzotint, 13 7/8 x 16 3/4 inches, Gift of the artist