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Staging Diplomacy in Eighteenth-Century Rome: The Festival of the China

Kristin A. Triff
Trinity College

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Staging Diplomacy in Eighteenth-Century Rome:

The Festival of the China

**Prints from the Vincent J. Buonanno Collection
January 24 - February 28, 2005**

Exhibition curated by Professor Kristin A. Triff
Department of Fine Arts, Trinity College



These prints, which were on loan from the extraordinary private collection of Vincent Buonanno, document the China, a famous festival hosted in Renaissance and Baroque Rome annually by the ambassador to the ruler of Naples and Sicily to pay tribute to the Pope. In the eighteenth century, these prints were distributed in advance to entice invited guests of the China, and detailed depictions of the festival decorations were eagerly scrutinized by an extensive audience in Rome and throughout Europe.

At the center of the festival stood the macchine, elaborate ephemeral architectural constructions, some over one hundred feet high, created especially for the China and then blown up in spectacular fireworks displays. Most of the China macchine were constructed of polychromed papier-mâché and stucco mounted to a wood frame, and often included elaborate painted canvas backgrounds. Elaborate wine fountains at the base of these macchine no doubt contributed to the public enjoyment of the pyrotechnic displays that accompanied their demolition.

The prints on display in the Watkinson Library also document the highly political background of artistic patronage during this period. Both the macchine and the prints of the China celebrations served as political propaganda for the Habsburg and Bourbon monarchies contending for the throne of Naples and Sicily, and contained inventive allegorical allusions to the greatness of the ruler who commissioned the festival and its architecture.

The exhibit will run from January 24 through February 28 and is open to the public at no charge. The hours for the exhibition are: 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, and on Saturday from 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m., while College is in session.