ARTICLES
An "Effaced Itinerary": Joanna de Silve
by William Wood
Adam Eaker
After a Long Cruise by John Carlin:
Mutiny and Maritime New York
David Finamore
The 1865 Regensburg Silberfund: A Seventeenth-Century Hoard of Silver
Allison Stielau
Souvenirs in Silver: Daguerrean Constructions by Joseph Cornell
Virginia McBride
RESEARCH NOTES
A Byzantine Center and the "Flaming Womb" of the Virgin
Evan Freeman
Drawings of Parade Carriages for Cardinal Francesco Maria de’ Medici
Romina Ortuño
Persimmon and Peonies: Orange-Colored Glass and Enamels from the Qing Imperial Workshops
Julie Bellemare, Federico Carò, Karen Stamm
An Early Etching by William Welles Bosworth
Andrea S. Schulte
Contents

ARTICLES
An “Effaced Itinerary”: Joanna de Silva by William Wood
ADAM EAKER, 9

DANIEL FINAMORE, 23

The 1869 Regensburger Silberfund: A Seventeenth-Century Hoard of Silver
ALLISON STIELAU, 33

Souvenirs in Silver: Daguerrean Constructions by Joseph Cornell
VIRGINIA MCBRIDE, 59

RESEARCH NOTES
A Byzantine Censer and the “Flaming Womb” of the Virgin
EVAN FREEMAN, 75

Drawings of Parade Carriages for Cardinal Francesco Maria de’ Medici
ROMINA ORIGLIA, 86

Persimmon and Peonies: Orange-Colored Glass and Enamels from the Qing Imperial Workshops
JULIE BELLEMARE, FEDERICO CARÒ, KAREN STAMM, 96

An Early Etching by William Welles Bosworth
ANDREA M. ORTUÑO, 107
Founded in 1968, the Metropolitan Museum Journal is a double-anonymous, peer-reviewed scholarly journal published annually that features original research on the history, interpretation, conservation, and scientific examination of works of art in the Museum’s collection. Its range encompasses the diversity of artistic practice from antiquity to the present day. The Journal encourages contributions offering critical and innovative approaches that will further our understanding of works of art.

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ABBREVIATIONS
MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art
MMAB The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin
MMJ Metropolitan Museum Journal

Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.
The Metropolitan Museum of Art possesses an etching of a street market scene in Ghent, signed by American architect William Welles Bosworth (fig. 1). Depicted in the print are stalls brimming with produce, vendors arranging their wares, casual passersby, and sketchier figures engaged in conversation, all against a backdrop of charming, though deteriorating, storefronts and stepped gable houses. Trained at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts (hereafter Ecole), Bosworth is better known for his major architectural commissions in the United States, such as the AT&T Building in New York (1913) and the campus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge (1913–16; hereafter MIT), as well as for several notable projects carried out in the United States and abroad for his friend and patron John D. Rockefeller Jr.¹
Less studied, however, are Bosworth’s early works and artistic interests from the late 1880s and early 1890s, before his admission to the Ecole, when the young architect and gifted draftsman embraced a style distinct from the refined classicism of his mature work. This article will situate the etching in The Met within the earlier phase of Bosworth’s career, during which his affinity for medieval aesthetics and picturesque decay was prominent.

Born in Marietta, Ohio, William Welles Bosworth moved to Boston in 1885 to study architecture at MIT, then located in the city’s Back Bay neighborhood. In an essay written in 1951, the eighty-two-year-old Bosworth recalled his student years there. He recounted how his profound admiration of Henry Hobson Richardson’s newly completed Trinity Church and his resistance to the classicism taught by his professor Eugène Létang resulted in another professor, Theodore Minot Clark, recommending him for a position in Richardson’s Brookline, Massachusetts, office. His work for Richardson and, after the latter’s death in April 1886, for the firm of Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge, started with the tracing of working drawings and progressed to making studies for large-scale projects. For instance, Bosworth produced full-size charcoal drawings of Romanesque and Byzantine column capitals to serve as guides for the carvers of the Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce Building. So much of what the youthful Bosworth observed in the offices of Richardson and his successors, from the plans for the Albany Cathedral to photographs of the abbey of Saint-Leu-d’Esserent in northern France, seems to have instilled in him a pronounced appreciation of Richardson’s Romanesque revivalism and of medieval architecture in general.

Upon his graduation from MIT, Bosworth was able to see in person the centuries-old European architecture that he had studied and admired as a student. William Rotch Ware, editor-in-chief of American Architect and Building News (AABN), the first professional architectural journal in the United States, established a drawing office for the publication in 1886. Ware hired Bosworth in 1888 and shortly afterward took the recent graduate to Europe. Bosworth described the trip as an “extended tour of architectural and artistic research, through England, Belgium, Germany, Austria, Italy, and France.”

It was during this journey with Ware that Bosworth captured the subject of the etching in The Met. This can be determined not only by the date on the plate but also by the row of buildings Bosworth so meticulously documented. He included the year, alongside his name, in two places: In the lower right corner “W. W. Bosworth · 90”—with the letter s and number nine both backward—is easily discernible. The second, less apparent signature and date can be found in minute script on a small sign that hangs over the door of a stepped gable.

house in the left center of the etching. The sign reads “W. W. Bosworth • Etcher Ghent 90,” with the number nine also backward. Perhaps Bosworth, likely new to the craft of etching, fumbled with the process of scratching numbers and letters in reverse on the plate. This resulted in the inverted characters being transferred to subsequent prints.8

Any minor errors that Bosworth may have made are overshadowed by the impressive specificity of the buildings he depicted. The details of each structure are so precise that the exact location in Ghent can be identified: the vegetable market at Sint-Veerleplein, a square bordered on its north side by the medieval Castle of the Counts, also known as the Gravensteen. The central features of Bosworth’s composition—a trio of stepped gable houses and the taller buildings that flank them—correspond with late nineteenth-century photographs of the area (fig. 2). These structures, which over the years included several houses, workshops, and cafés, were built against the outer walls of the old castle. A cotton mill had also been erected within the castle walls in the early 1800s (the mill’s smokestacks are visible in figure 2). The Gravensteen was so obscured by these buildings, both inside and out, that by the second half of the nineteenth century only the castle’s arched entryway and crenellated towers were visible. Long considered an aesthetic scourge, the structures that clung to the castle were demolished by 1894. By the time of Bosworth’s next documented trip to Belgium, in 1900, after he had completed his course of study at the Ecole, the buildings around the Gravensteen were gone—further evidence that he captured the subject of the etching on his previous European tour with Ware.9

The buildings that Bosworth so faithfully depicted were razed as part of an ongoing campaign of city planning and renovation in Ghent, similar, in some respects, to the modernization program of Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann in Paris. The previous decade had seen the implementation of the Zollikofer-De Vigne Plan, in which wide boulevards were cut through Ghent between 1880 and 1888 to connect the railroad station with the city center.10 Throughout the 1890s the tearing down of slums and other ramshackle buildings continued; however, in Ghent, these demolitions were accompanied by efforts to reveal, restore, and celebrate the city’s medieval monuments. As Steven Jacobs and

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fig. 2 Sint-Veerleplein, Rekelingstraat, and the Gravensteen. Photograph, before 1894. Ghent City Archive
Bruno Notteboom note in their study on the role of photography in Ghent’s urban transformation, the renewed interest in, and preservation of, historic buildings amid the effort to modernize signaled a “return to regionalism and picturesque sensibility.” In other words, Ghent’s modernization program did not aim to reorder the city to the point of erasing its regional character and history, but rather sought to provide residents and visitors with a well-ordered urban space and unobstructed vistas of medieval architectural treasures such as Saint Bavo’s Cathedral, Saint Nicholas’s Church, and, of course, the Gravensteen. A photograph of the castle taken about 1895 illustrates a final outcome of the campaign: the vegetable market at Sint-Veerleplein became an open and airy square complete with a view of the newly revealed castle, a cherished relic of Ghent’s medieval past (fig. 3).

Nineteenth-century guidebooks and architectural publications that predate these changes to Ghent’s urban fabric had long lamented the earlier condition of the Gravensteen. Thomas Roscoe’s 1841 *Belgium: In a Picturesque Tour*, for example, said of the castle, “It is to be regretted that the grand entrance should now be almost hidden from view by the erection of some wretched workshops and walls.” The mid-nineteenth-century *Handbook for Travellers on the Continent* likewise pointed out the shabbiness of the structures built around the Gravensteen, noting, “The small portion that remains of the building, consisting of an old archway and turret, is now incorporated in a cotton factory. The area within is occupied by houses of the meanest kind.” When *American Architect and Building News* covered the ongoing restoration of the castle in 1892, the journal celebrated the Belgian government’s effort “to deliver the building from the parasitical constructions that overlaid it.”

Throughout the nineteenth century, those “wretched workshops” and “parasitical constructions” were nevertheless an appealing subject to several photographers and printmakers. While visiting Ghent in 1847, Scottish photographers John Muir Wood and George Moir made early calotypes of the Gravensteen and the humble buildings that surrounded it. Sir Ernest George rendered a similar view of the area for the collection *Etchings in Belgium*, first published in 1878. Even in an 1894 publication that celebrated the restoration of the Gravensteen, the Belgian artist and writer Armand Heins included a rather pretty illustration of the medieval castle’s “maisons parasites” (parasitical houses).

Bosworth, however, in 1890, was arguably more fascinated by these dilapidated structures than other illustrators and photographers. Whereas his predecessors captured the one visible portion of the castle—the imposing towers at its entrance—Bosworth chose to exclude any trace of the Gravensteen from his etching. He shifted his focus away from the medieval landmark and instead reveled in what, for many, were unfortunate eyesores clinging to a once-majestic building. The demolition and large-scale restructuring that had already taken place in Ghent throughout the 1880s likely contributed to this decision; Bosworth may have sensed these structures would soon be gone. As a result, the etching presents a fading, Romantic view of the haphazard nature in which medieval cities like Ghent developed and the way in which quaint, local types functioned amid picturesque deterioration. In the foreground of the composition, produce is piled onto stalls as a market woman stacks baskets of various sizes. Behind her is a derelict property with its right entry and ground-floor windows boarded up. Despite the condition of the building, two figures converse in one of its darkened doorways. In front of the three adjacent, soot-stained houses, a man carrying wooden slats for a market stand crosses paths with a pair of monks. Strolling through Sint-Veerleplein, the two robed figures move toward a dingy row of houses and workshops, the chimneys of which emit hazy plumes of smoke.

A similar preference for targeting the battered peripheries of medieval monuments can be observed in two other works on paper that Bosworth produced during his European tour with Ware. In an 1889 pen
drawing made in northern France while visiting the Château de Josselin, Bosworth depicted not the medi-

eval castle itself, but rather a side street leading to it (fig. 4). Reproduced in an article for the publication Pencil Points, the drawing’s subject was described as an “‘insignificant,’ but picturesque street of ‘tumble-
down buildings’ possessing architectural qualities more rare and fascinating than the great chateau for which, almost alone, the town is noted.”19 Likewise, in his 1890 sketch of the Bethlehem Portal in Huy, Belgium (fig. 5), Bosworth omitted the soaring apse of the adjacent Collegiate Church of Notre-Dame, a feature often included in earlier representations of the subject made by printmakers such as Ernest George and Axel Herman Haig.20 Bosworth instead concentrated on the fourteenth-century Gothic entryway and its imme-
diate, rather run-down surroundings. Consequently, his

sketch provides a glimpse of the Bethlehem Portal before several modern alterations, including the addi-
tion of a Neo-Gothic canopy.21 The Virgin and Child on the trumeau at center as well as the two sculptures of bishops that flank them on the jamb—all later removed—are still in their original locations in Bosworth’s drawing. On the other hand, much of the relief sculpture from the tympanum, apart from two magi figures at upper right, is absent from the depic-
tion. Underneath the mostly bare portal, a man with a cane rests against the jamb, his head turned toward a pile of rubble on the ground. Bosworth may have cap-
tured the portal in the midst of a late nineteenth-
century restoration effort, but the sketch itself seems more like a Romantic rendering of a medieval ruin destined for further decay.

However marginal these subjects may seem, Bosworth’s early works on paper reflect common prac-
tice among students of architecture. Traveling abroad to make sketches of various buildings and monuments was, as he wrote in 1901, “research.”22 In Bosworth’s case, many of the drawings he made between 1888 and 1890 also served the specific purpose of illustrating the pages of American Architect and Building News.23 Though AABN editors like Ware favored American Colonial and Federal buildings as well as the classical principles advocated by the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, he, like the French institution, believed architects should be knowl-
dgeable about all historical styles. This approach to architectural education on the part of AABN’s editors—who, as Mary N. Woods writes, “stood for academic training and professional practices, not the revival of any one style”—applied to the diversity of illustrations that appeared in the journal.24 In a 1917 obituary for Ware, Bosworth described what was required of the draftsmen employed in AABN’s drawing office, noting the different modes in which they were asked to work. They could be “called upon to make rendered perspec-
tives in pen and ink or color,” or to depict “the pictur-
esque architecture then in vogue requiring that form of presentation.”25 Above all, Bosworth recalled, “Ware loved a good drawing, especially one well calculated for reproduc-
tion.”26 All of this considered, Ware no doubt encouraged Bosworth to depict a variety of subjects during their travels, including medieval architecture, buildings in disrepair, and quaint street scenes.

After touring Europe with Ware, Bosworth returned to the United States, where he exhibited designs and took on commissions that were noticeably shaped by his admiration for Richardson and the pictur-
esque mode in which he often worked for AABN. At the
1891 exhibition for the Boston Society of Architects, he exhibited his sketch of the Bethlehem Portal alongside a neo-medieval design for a Magdalen Asylum, a reformatory for “wayward” women that was to be built in New York.27 He exhibited the same two renderings again in January of 1893, this time at the New York Architectural League’s exhibition; later that year, construction was completed on the Magdalen Asylum (fig. 6).28 This building, which once stood at West 139th Street and the Hudson River, had an ornate exterior with turrets; Neo-Gothic traceries; elaborate dormer windows; a Romanesque-style arch at its entrance; and a projecting nave and apse, part of the institution’s chapel. The Magdalen Asylum was Bosworth’s only large-scale architectural commission realized in this early style—a highly decorative, eclectic neo-medievalism inspired by his recent travels in Europe and his work for Richardson and Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge.29

Even before the completion of the Magdalen Asylum, however, Bosworth must have felt the demise of the Richardsonian aesthetic and, consequently, the need for a stylistic shift. By 1891 the Romanesque Revival associated with Richardson—a style that had been embraced across the country—began to decline in popularity, most notably with the rejection that year of Neo-Romanesque designs for the upcoming 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago.30 Bosworth’s practice reflected these changing tastes. In 1892, he teamed up with Jarvis Hunt, nephew of architect Richard Morris Hunt, on the classically inspired Vermont State Building for the Columbian Exposition.31

By early 1893, the need for further training also became abundantly clear to him. After viewing his hybrid Romanesque-Gothic design for the Magdalen Asylum at the Architectural League’s exhibition that year, a critic from the New-York Tribune described Bosworth’s work as “bric-a-brac” and a “pastiche of sketch-book ideas.”32 Fellow architects Thomas Hastings and John Galen Howard must have thought Bosworth’s architectural concepts in need of further refinement, too. In a 1958 autobiographical essay composed in the third person, Bosworth recounted that, upon showing his sketches at the exhibition, “he was so urged by Hastings and Howard to go to Paris to study in the Ecole des Beaux [Arts] before getting too old to be admitted, that he closed his office and followed their advice.”33

After designing several other works, some built, others not, Bosworth departed for Europe in 1896, training first in London with Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, a painter of subjects rooted in classical antiquity.34 In 1897, he began his course of study at the Ecole, where he remained for the next three years. Bosworth returned to New York thoroughly prepared to work in a refined, classical mode, which he first brought to the firm of Carrère and Hastings. He would later work for high-profile clients such as AT&T president Theodore Newton Vail, National City Bank of New York president Frank A. Vanderlip, and John D. Rockefeller Jr., who, as Mark Jarzombek notes, found Bosworth’s “neoclassical aesthetic” appealing as it “spoke of control, restraint, and timeless validity.”35

In his 1958 autobiographical essay, Bosworth claimed that, after having witnessed the construction of the Boston Public Library Building in the early 1890s,
he “liked that style of architecture so much that he decided to stick to the ‘Greek’s [sic] concept of beauty’ for life,” but that is not entirely accurate.\textsuperscript{36} Given his training—first at MIT, then with Ware at AABN, and, most importantly, at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts—he was a true professional conversant in all historical styles; therefore his knowledge of, and appreciation for, medieval art and architecture, while undeniably pronounced in the early 1890s, never disappeared over the course of his career. Under the auspices of John D. Rockefeller Jr., Bosworth took up residence in France and, beginning in 1924, oversaw the restoration of Reims Cathedral (in addition to restorations for the Châteaux of Versailles and Fontainebleau).\textsuperscript{37} In 1933 he designed, in the Romanesque style, the American Student Center for the American Cathedral in Paris.\textsuperscript{38} Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Bosworth also played an instrumental role in the realization of The Met Cloisters, facilitating negotiations between Rockefeller and the sculptor George Grey Barnard, who procured much of the medieval collection for the enterprise.\textsuperscript{39}

Because of his involvement with the Cloisters, Bosworth probably made the acquaintance of Edward Robinson, director of The Met from 1910 to 1931, and his wife, Elizabeth, sometime in the 1920s, if not before. The Robinsons and Bosworth shared many friends, including Rockefeller and the sculptor Paul Manship.\textsuperscript{40} Throughout the 1920s, Bosworth also donated several works of art to The Met, including an ancient Greek alabastron, or perfume vase, which would have been of great interest to Edward Robinson, a specialist in classical antiquities.\textsuperscript{41} It was from the Robinsons’ personal collection that Bosworth’s etching of Sint-Veerleplein in Ghent came to The Met, having been donated, along with several other works of art in 1952, upon the passing of Elizabeth Robinson. It is likely that Bosworth—described by Rockefeller as “a man of un failing courtesy”—gave the etching to the couple as a gift.\textsuperscript{42}

For its former owners, we can presume the etching would have been a picturesque record of a Ghent that no longer existed, as well as a charming, yet unassuming, addition to their notable collection of works on paper.\textsuperscript{43} The present examination of the etching, however, sheds light on the early period of an exemplary American architect’s long and prestigious career. Bosworth wrote of his excitement during the late 1880s as “those days of youth, when everything in life seemed like looking through a magnifying glass.”\textsuperscript{44} This enthusiasm for the inspection of a given subject, no matter how marginal or seemingly insignificant, is evident in his etching of Ghent. As a young draftsman, guided by Ware, Bosworth turned a sensitive eye to a dilapidated periphery, uninterested at that moment in the state of major monuments or in the classical aesthetics that would later come to define his life’s work.

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NOTES

1 For Bosworth’s major commissions in the United States and abroad, see Bosworth 1922; Q. Jacobs 1988; Abt 1996; Jarzombek 2004; and Pasquier 2017a and 2017b.
2 Prescott 1954, 94; Q. Jacobs 1988, 2–3. Bosworth was admitted into MIT’s intensive two-year program, which he began in September 1885.
3 Bosworth 1951, 116. Bosworth wrote that Létang, a Beaux- Arts trained architect, was “outspokenly disgusted” by some of his early renderings.
4 Ibid., 124. Bosworth worked for Richardson for only two weeks in early 1886. He wrote that the architect died “a few weeks later,” after which Bosworth was employed by Richardson’s successors, Shepley, Rutan, and Coolidge.
7 Bosworth 1901, 1.
8 From whom Bosworth learned the art of etching is unclear. One possibility is American etcher Joseph Pennell, who Bosworth wrote was “his old friend and master.” See Bosworth 1951, 125.
9 Bosworth 1901, 3.
10 S. Jacobs and Notteboom 2018, 207.
11 Ibid., 203.
12 Ibid., 210.
13 Roscoe 1841, 107.
14 Handbook for Travellers on the Continent 1856, 132.
16 S. Jacobs and Notteboom 2018, 205.
17 George 1878, pl. 8.
18 Heins 1894, 30, 100. Another picturesque illustration of the Gravensteen before 1894 can be found in Heins 1907, 22. For a much earlier depiction of the buildings constructed against the castle, many of which appear in Bosworth’s etching, see Sanderus 1735, 1:168, first published in 1641.
19 Pencil Points 1925, 59. This drawing first appeared in 1889 in AABN 26, no. 730 (June 1889): 11. The AABN drawing office supervisor, David A. Gregg, was also present on this trip. Gregg’s rendering of the Château de Josselin appears in the same issue.
21 See, for example, the alterations made to the portal by the 1960s in Forsyth 1968, 46, fig. 7.
22 Bosworth 1901, 1.
23 Throughout 1889 many of Bosworth’s drawings from this tour appeared in the journal. Some seem to have been formally assigned illustrations to accompany an ongoing series on equestrian monuments. See, for example, AABN 26, no. 709 (July 1889): 23, 26. Others appeared as small insets, including sketches of medieval subjects such as the tower of the Collegiate Church, Le Folgoët, Brittany, AABN 26, no. 709 (July 1889): x; the portal of the Burgos Cathedral, Spain, AABN 26, no. 719 (September 1889): 151; and less notable buildings in disrepair, including an old mill in Florence, Italy, AABN 26, no. 708 (July 1889): 28; and a fifteenth-century shop in Thiers, France, AABN 26, no. 714 (August 1889): 101.
24 Woods 1990, 84.
26 Ibid., 273–74.
27 Boston Society of Architects 1891, 27, 33. Notorious for their often-inhumane treatment, Magdalen Asylums sought to reform women and girls deemed delinquent by courts and/or family members. Rehabilitation efforts at these institutions, which, in New York, could be Catholic, Episcopal, or nondenominational, consisted of strict religious instruction and hard labor in laundr y facilities.
29 Ortúñ 2022.
30 Jeffery Ochsner and Dennis Andersen (2003, 293–94) link the end of the Romanesque Revival with the depression caused by the Panic of 1893, which halted construction across the country. They write that when building projects resumed in the late 1890s, the Romanesque Revival was an “outmoded form” in most major cities. Quentin Jacobs (1988, 12) believes the economic downturn played a role in Bosworth’s decision to leave the United States and continue his education in Europe.
33 Bosworth 1958, 3. Q. Jacobs (1988, 8) believes that Bosworth meant his exhibited sketches impressed Howard and Hastings to the extent that they encouraged him to attend the Ecole, but Bosworth’s 1958 essay does not support that assumption. In it he makes no mention of what the two architects thought of his work.
34 For Bosworth’s works during this period, both realized and unrealized, see Q. Jacobs 1988, 160–68. On his time with Alma-Tadema, see ibid., 13–16, and Jarzombek 2004, 59.
35 Jarzombek 2004, 60, 71.
36 Bosworth 1958, 3.
37 Rockefeller, concerned over the state of these monuments, established a fund to restore them. See Q. Jacobs 1988, 169–70, and Jarzombek 2004, 140.
38 Jarzombek 2004, 140. The American Student Center once stood at 261, boulevard Raspail.
39 Husband 2013, 5–6, 15–16.
40 Bosworth worked with Manship on the AT&T Building and refers to his friendship with the sculptor. See Bosworth 1951, 126. Manship, who produced a pair of portrait medals of Edward and Elizabeth Robinson (MMA 55.19.1, .2.), was present at the 1931 funeral of Edward Robinson, as was John D. Rockefeller Jr. See New York Times 1928, 52.
42 See John D. Rockefeller Jr.’s recommendation for Bosworth to receive the AT&T commission in Husband 2013, 5. It seems Bosworth presented at least two other versions of the etching to acquaintances. He gave one to artist Eugenia S. Paul (correspondence with Paul’s daughter, Gerry Shattler, May 20, 2021). Another version of the print, formerly for sale online in 2021 (current location unknown), contains the following handwritten inscription under the plate mark: “My first etching. The Marketplace in Ghent in 1890. Now destroyed. To my dear friend Maria——.”
43 The works on paper that formed part of this gift from the estate of Mrs. Edward Robinson included drawings by Jerome Myers, watercolors by Maurice Brazil Prendergast and Roger Fry, and etchings by Max Klinger. See MMAB 1953, 15, 18.
44 Bosworth 1951, 115.
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AABN: American Architect and Building News

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Annual Report of the Trustees of The Metropolitan Museum of Art

Architectural League of New York

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Jacobs, Steven, and Bruno Notteboom

Jarzombek, Mark

McC[lees], H[e]len
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ARTICLES

An “Effaced Itinerary”: Joanna de São
by William Wood
Adam Eaker

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A Seventeenth-Century Hoard of Silver
Allison Stielau

Souvenirs in Silver: Daguerrean
Constructions by Joseph Cornell
Virginia McBride

RESEARCH NOTES

A Byzantine Center and the
“Flaming Womb” of the Virgin
Evan Freeman

Drawings of Parade Carriages for
Cardinal Francesco Maria de’ Medici
Romita Grigoli

Persimmons and Peonies: Orange-Colored
Glass and Enamels from the Qing
Imperial Workshops
Julia Bellmore, Federico Carò,
Karen Stamm

An Early Etching by William
Welles Bosworth
Andrea M. Orlando