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## Historical prints demonstrate artistry of printmaking

A rare print of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* fresco from the Sistine Chapel, made before clothing was painted on the nudes, features in a new exhibition at Victoria University's Adam Art Gallery.

Curated by David Maskill—a senior lecturer in Art History at Victoria University of Wellington—with his Honours students, the upcoming Adam Art Gallery exhibition 'State of the art: Reproductive prints from the Renaissance to now' explores a history of reproductive prints.

"Our exhibition addresses the issue of what is original and what is reproduction—for instance, you could argue that the Michelangelo print is more original than the fresco because it shows what it would have looked like before the Pope ordered the addition of clothing to the nude figures," says Mr Maskill.

In the pre-digital age, engravers copied artworks by working from detailed drawings via a reflection in the mirror. Lines were chiselled onto a copper plate, and then paper was placed on the inked plate and put through a press.

"The engravers were artists and the whole notion we have today of original and copy didn't exist back then," says Mr Maskill.

Another piece in the exhibition is by Webber, an artist on Captain Cook's third voyage, and depicts a Māori settlement in Queen Charlotte Sound in 1777. A hand-coloured aquatint from a deluxe illustrated book will be exhibited alongside the original oil painting.

Mr Maskill says the print was produced about 10 years after the painting—most likely from drawings made before the painting. While the general composition is the same, the print includes details not seen in the painting, such as the moko on the Māori warriors in the foreground.

"It's a fascinating example of what happens when you translate from one medium to another—you can be more detailed in a print than you can in an oil painting.

"It's not a copy in that sense—it's an interpretive work. You'll be able to see that clearly in the exhibition."

To put together the exhibition, a wide range of prints have been borrowed from Te Papa, the National Library, Auckland Art Gallery and private collectors, with each student assigned a group of prints to research.

Each student has spent many hours researching their prints and writing a 1500-word essay about it for the exhibition's catalogue.

“A lot of people don't realise how much work goes into preparing an exhibition—they think you just get something and put in on a wall, but a good exhibition appears seamless,” says Mr Maskill.

A number of Mr Maskill's Honours graduates have gone on to find employment in museums and art galleries.

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