Print - The Twenty Views of the European Palaces of the Yuanmingyuan

Object: Print
Place of origin: Beijing (made)
Date: 1783-1786 (made)
Artist/Maker: Yi, Lantai (designed by)
Materials and Techniques: copperplate engraving on paper
Museum number: 29452:17

Public access description
The European Pavilions (Xiyanglou) located in the Yuanmingyuan or Old Summer Palace in Beijing were the grandest expressions of the Qing rulers' interest in the arts of Europe. Most of the buildings were completed between 1756 to 1766. In 1783, the Qianlong emperor commissioned a set of copperplate engravings depicting twenty views of the European Pavilions and these was printed by 1786. Copies were kept in the palace and an additional 200 sets were given to imperial relatives, high officials, and other guests. The album in the V&A would have been one of the 200 sets. It is missing the first image - the south view of the Xieqiqu (Pavilion Harmonizing Surprise and Delight). The prints were designed and probably produced by a Manchu court artist Yi Lantai (fl. 1749-86) who was trained by Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), the Italian Jesuit artist who worked at the Qing court. This album provides an important visual record of the European Pavilions of the Yuanmingyuan that was destroyed by English and French troops in 1860 during the Second Opium War.

Descriptive line
Album, 19 views of the European Palaces of the Yuanmingyuan, copperplate engraving on paper, China, Qing dynasty, Qianlong period, 1783-1786

Physical description
Engraving on paper, mounted in album, depicting the front view of the Xianfashen (Perspective Hill). Inscription on top right. Seals in red on the border.

Dimensions
Height: 20.25 in, Width: 34.75 in

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Object history note
In 1783, the Qianlong emperor commissioned a set of copperplate engravings depicting twenty views of the European pavilions in the Yuanmingyuan or Old Summer Palace. Copies of the engravings were kept in the palace, and an additional 200 sets were given to imperial relatives, high officials, and other guests. This album, which is missing the first scene, would have been one of the 200 sets. The seal marks on the album suggest that it was in China but not in the Yuanmingyuan around 1860. It was acquired by the V&A on 2 February 1883, described as 'Chinese engravings. Nineteen views of palaces and gardens, folio-folded plates', purchased from E. Parsons.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O398680/the-twenty-views-of-the-print-yi-lantai/