

92 Carl Wilhelm Kolbe (1759–1835)

*Youth Playing a Lyre to a Maiden
by a Fountain*, 1803

Etching. 412 × 530 mm

Martens 95

Kolbe was the most remarkable printmaker of all the German Romantic artists. He drew his inspiration from the oak forests surrounding Dessau, where he spent most of his career, the idyllic poetry and pictures by the Swiss author Salomon Gessner (1730–88), and the work of the seventeenth-century Dutch landscape etchers, such as Anthonie Waterloo (1609–90) and Paul Potter (1625–54). His compositions, however, far surpassed those of his artistic mentors in originality, the most extraordinary works being the twenty-eight etchings of giant vegetation, or *Kräuterblätter* (vegetable sheets) as he termed them, which he made between 1800 and the end of his life (see Antony Griffiths and Frances Carey, *German Printmaking in the Age of Goethe*, British Museum Press 1994, cat. 72). The loveliest of these were the Arcadian scenes executed around the turn of the century, including this example and the elegiac *Auch ich war in Arkadien* (I too was in Arcadia) of nearly identical size.

The British Museum's impression was one of a number of prints by Kolbe purchased from an exhibition organised by the London dealer Christopher Mendez in 1978, which played an important role in establishing the artist's current reputation.

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