



The iconic image of the death of Captain Cook

WEBBER, John.

To the Right Honourable the Lords Commissioners for executing the Office of Lord High Admiral of Great Britain, &c. This Plate representing The Death of Captain Cook is humbly inscribed, by their Lordship's most obedient and devoted Servant, John Webber. Drawn by J. Webber. The Figures Engraved by F. Bartolozzi, R.A. Engraver to His Majesty. The Landscape by W. Byrne.

London: John Webber & William Byrne, 1784. Engraving with etching. Sheet 470 x 595mm.

£5,000

A rare example of this famous scene of the death of Captain James Cook on Hawaii, showing the explorer attempting to restrain his crew, unaware of the dagger about to be plunged into his back. It was published separately about six months before the Official Account of the voyage, which contained many illustrations by John Webber (1751-93) but, strangely, not a 'death'. In the years after his return to England Webber exhibited a number of oils from the voyage at the Royal Academy and, with this print, he attempted to capitalise on his work with a better-quality engraving for the connoisseur market. He and the engraver William Byrne (1743-1805), who also worked on the Official Account, co-financed the publication and employed famed Italian engraver Francesco Bartolozzi (1727- 1815) to add his flair to the figures. Although it is unlikely that Webber was an eye-witness, his version of the events was influential, creating the image of Cook as victim rather than aggressor.



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