

# FROM THE VAULT: LEARNING WITH THE MARTIN MUSEUM PERMANENT COLLECTION

## Educator Materials | Pre Visit Background Reading

**Collection Spotlight:** Hogarth's Modern Morals

**Featured Artist:** William Hogarth (1697-1764)

**Time Period:** 18th Century

**Medium:** Engraving and Etching

**Audience:** Grades 9–12, College-level

The English painter, printmaker, and social critic William Hogarth was one of the most influential artists of the eighteenth century. In the 1730s, Hogarth invented a new kind of art called "Modern Moral Subjects," images organized into series that tell a complete story of contemporary life.

Hogarth was an artist of the Enlightenment, the eighteenth-century philosophical movement that believed reason could solve society's ills. In his series, Hogarth used harsh comic satire to ridicule illogical and immoral aspects of society. First, he painted each scene and then made engraved prints, which he sold by subscription to spread the message to a wider audience.

His engravings most commonly hung in pubs for large groups of people to see and discuss. In 1731 Hogarth painted his first Modern Moral Subject: *A Harlot's Progress*. The next year he made engravings after the paintings. This series is a six-part satirical narrative cycle about the consequences of an immoral life. Each picture tells its own tale, yet they link together to form a larger story. Each scene of *A Harlot's Progress* represents a loss: of virtue, of status, of liberty, of health, and finally of life.

Hogarth's immensely popular engravings were so plagiarized that he lobbied in Parliament for the Copyright Act of 1735 (known as "Hogarth's Act"), the first copyright law to deal with visual works and the first to recognize the authorial rights of an individual artist. The original paintings of *A Harlot's Progress* were destroyed in a fire in 1755.