

Basic Detail Report



Civic Insomnia

Date

1932

Primary Maker

Gerald Geerlings

Medium

color aquatint on paper

Description

Subtle gradations of tone with brilliant pops of yellow and white highlight this striking scene of New York City as seen from the Hudson River at night. Situated far back along a pier, a sweeping view of the New York City skyline aglow under a dark sky. The image is built up from green paper, allowing for the rich and velvety color produced by multiple acid bitings from the aquatint process. Only blocked from the view on the right by machinery, Geerlings deploys the classic painting tradition of the "rückenfigur", where figures in the foreground have their backs turned to the viewer to allow for self-insertion of the viewer into the scene. These two figures, men standing on a wooden dock, holding a small lamp and looking towards the city across the river, add a sense of scale to the skyscrapers of the cityscape. Across the deep lapping water, small dots of light -- reflections from the buildings of Manhattan -- lightly illuminate the waves. From the dark, nearly black, strip of land, giant structures rise, almost like trees, decorated by regular rectangles of yellow pigment. The gentle gradations of color, made possible by the aquatint technique, also expose a modern phenomenon -- light pollution. A soft haze seems to linger around the tops of the buildings, a result of the power of electric light interrupting the night sky.

Dimensions

image: 10 3/4 x 14 1/8 in. (27.3 x 35.9 cm)