

Altered States: Etching in Late 19th-Century Paris, June 30, 2017-December 3, 2017

In late 19th-century Paris, the printmaking process of etching underwent a revolutionary transformation. Although the technique had existed for centuries and had been practiced by well-known historical artists such as Rembrandt and Jacques Callot, etching had dramatically waned in popularity by 1800.

The status of etching changed in the 1860s, when the French publisher Alfred Cadart and printer Auguste Delâtre co-founded the Société des Aquafortistes (Society of Etchers). This organization used etching to inspire a new interest in prints among artists and the general public alike by providing instruction, equipment, and space for working, exhibiting, and socializing. Their efforts led to what is known as the etching revival, a movement that spread across Europe and the United States.

This exhibition examines the decades that followed the etching revival, when the availability of new technical information about etching allowed artists to experiment more than ever before. Their creative use of process and subject matter—from developing new tools and materials to editing their compositions by producing variations known as “states”—inspired artists for decades to come.

Britany Salisbury
Former Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow
Department of Prints, Drawings, and Photographs

CHECKLIST OF THE EXHIBITION

Théodore Roussel
French, active England, 1847-1926
The Port of Fowey, 1911
Etching printed in black ink on cream-colored, smooth wove paper
Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1987.013.1

This group of etchings, printed from the same plate, depicts a small British coastal town. Breaking from the convention of printing in black and white, Roussel began to experiment avidly with color printing in the 1890s. He acquired his own press and worked independently to test various means of printing color. Roussel also mixed his own inks, including the unusual metallic tones seen in some of the prints here. This group of impressions may have been made to test these inks on different types of paper.



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Théodore Roussel

French, active England, 1847-1926

The Port of Fowey, 1911

Etching printed in metallic gold ink on black-colored, slightly textured wove paper

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1987.013.2

This group of etchings, printed from the same plate, depicts a small British coastal town. Breaking from the convention of printing in black and white, Roussel began to experiment avidly with color printing in the 1890s. He acquired his own press and worked independently to test various means of printing color. Roussel also mixed his own inks, including the unusual metallic tones seen in some of the prints here. This group of impressions may have been made to test these inks on different types of paper.



Théodore Roussel

French, active England, 1847-1926

The Port of Fowey, 1911

Etching printed in metallic gold ink on cream-colored, slightly textured laid paper

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1987.013.3

This group of etchings, printed from the same plate, depicts a small British coastal town. Breaking from the convention of printing in black and white, Roussel began to experiment avidly with color printing in the 1890s. He acquired his own press and worked independently to test various means of printing color. Roussel also mixed his own inks, including the unusual metallic tones seen in some of the prints here. This group of impressions may have been made to test these inks on different types of paper.



Théodore Roussel

French, active England, 1847-1926

The Port of Fowey, 1911

Etching printed in red-orange ink on cream-colored, slightly textured wove paper

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1987.013.4

This group of etchings, printed from the same plate, depicts a small British coastal town. Breaking from the convention of printing in black and white, Roussel began to experiment avidly with color printing in the 1890s. He acquired his own press and worked independently to test various means of printing color. Roussel also mixed his own inks, including the unusual metallic tones seen in some of the prints here. This group of impressions may have been made to test these inks on different types of paper.



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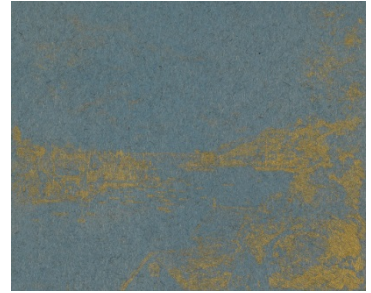
Théodore Roussel

French, active England, 1847-1926

The Port of Fowey, 1911

Etching printed in metallic gold ink on blue-colored, moderately textured wove paper; mounted on sheet with border toned with bronzing powders and printed in white by the artist

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1987.013.5



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Théodore Roussel

French, active England, 1847-1926

The Port of Fowey, 1911

Copper plate

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 1987.013.6



Théodore Roussel created the prints seen nearby using this plate and some tools like these.

The copper plate's surface was first coated in a thin layer of ground (usually asphaltum, wax, and rosin), into which Roussel drew with a needle, marking the surface of the plate. The ground's malleability allowed Roussel to make lines as easily as if he were sketching on paper with a pen. Once the drawn image was complete, Roussel placed the plate into a basin filled with acid, allowing the solution to "bite" into the drawn lines, incising them into the plate.

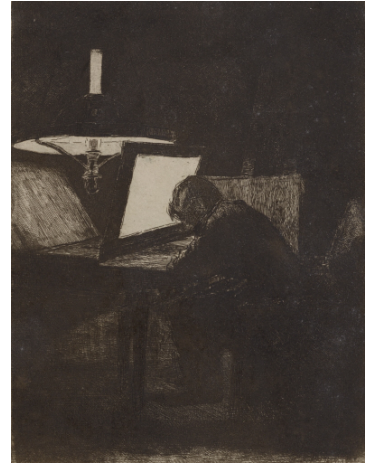
Artists can further modify their images using other tools. A roulette can be rolled over the plate's surface, creating a regular dotted pattern. A burnisher is rubbed onto the plate's surface, smoothing it and creating areas that usually print as white. A scraper can remove areas where the plate has been marked, erasing them from the image. The artist can continue changing the plate by marking it with the needle, or with the burin, which digs more deeply into the plate's surface

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François Bonvin
French, 1817-1887
The Etcher, 1861
Etching and drypoint on vellum
Gift of Donato Esposito 2016.111.2

Focused on the introspection and privacy of etching, this self-portrait shows the artist alone in a darkened interior. A screen, used to evenly diffuse light, separates him from the room's only lamp. His forward posture and intense focus suggest that etching is a solitary and meditative practice.

Bonvin often enhanced the subject matter of his drawings and prints through a careful choice of paper. This impression is on vellum, a luxury material made from animal skin. Its smooth surface emphasized the dense layers of inky lines, encouraging the same sort of close study in which the artist himself was engaged.



Mary Cassatt
American, 1844-1926
Telling Fortunes, ca. 1881
Soft-ground etching and aquatint on beige-colored, smooth wove paper
Esther Mauran Acquisitions Fund and Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2017.13.1

Like much of Cassatt's work, this scene focuses on domestic life—here, a young woman uses a deck of cards to tell a friend's fortune. During the 1880s, Cassatt experimented widely with soft-ground etching, a technique that allowed artists to make prints from drawings. Cassatt placed a sheet on top of a copper plate coated with a softer material, such as wax mixed with tallow. The lines she drew pressed into this material, transferring the image onto the plate. Evidence of this translation can be seen on the back of the sheet, where the material adhered.



Mary Cassatt
American, 1844-1926
Telling Fortunes, ca. 1881
Graphite and soft-ground transfer drawing on beige-colored, slightly textured wove paper
Esther Mauran Acquisitions Fund and Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2017.13.2

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RISD MUSEUM

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Édouard Manet

French, 1832-1883

Mlle. Victorine in the Costume of an Espada (Victorine Meurent), 1862

Graphite, pen and ink, watercolor on tracing paper; incised for transfer

Gift of Mrs. Gustav Radeke 21.483

Although many printmakers worked directly on copper plates, Manet used this drawing to help translate an oil painting he made that same year into an etching. All three works depict the artist's favorite model in the costume of a Spanish bullfighter. Rendered on transparent paper, the drawing may have been directly traced from a photograph of the painting. On the woman's face, incised marks from the tool that was used to transfer the image are still faintly visible. Manet's signature at bottom left indicates that he considered this tracing an independent work of art.



Abraham Bosse

French, 1604 - ca. 1676

On the Manner of Etching with Acid and with a Burin, and of Dark-Manner Engraving, (De la Manière de graver à l'eau-forte et au burin, et de la gravure en manière noire) Paris 1645

Etching, drypoint, and roulette on cream-colored, moderately textured laid paper

Gift of Mrs. Herbert N. Straus 51.004

This book, the first technical manual on etching, remained the primary resource available to artists from 1645 through the 1800s. Here, Bosse explains how to place a plate on a printing press. A printmaker himself, he strongly favored engraving—a technique that involves carving into, rather than drawing upon, a copper plate. He advocated the extreme regularity and linearity characteristic of that technique, even when working in etching. By the late 1800s, many etchers no longer were interested in this style, and found Bosse's language overly technical and formal.



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Adolphe Martial Potémont

French, 1828-1883

Beillet et Forestier, printer

A. Cadart & Luquet, publisher

Letter on the Elements of Etching (page one), 1864

Etchings on beige-colored, slightly textured laid paper

Gift of the Fazzano Brothers 84.198.796

This series provided instruction on etching in the form of an open letter from “an experienced etcher” to a beginner. Throughout, Potémont described where to purchase tools and materials, and how to prepare and print a plate. His text was supplemented by technical illustrations and marginal images that demonstrated their visual effects. The artist emphasized the freedom offered by etching, describing it as “draw[ing] . . . just as you would with a pen on paper.”



Adolphe Martial Potémont

French, 1828-1883

Beillet et Forestier, printer

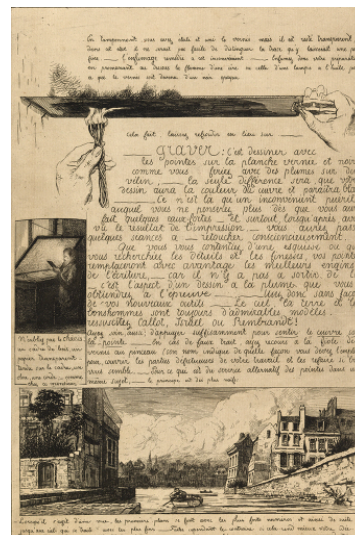
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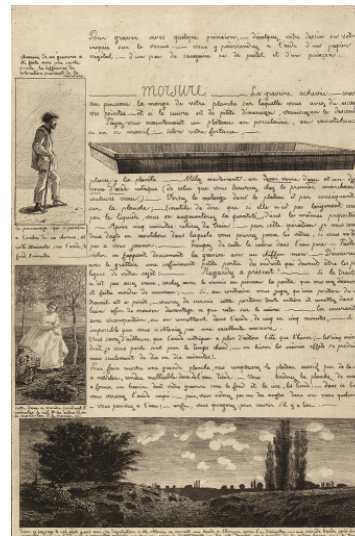
A. Cadart & Luquet, publisher

Letter on the Elements of Etching (page three), 1864

Etchings on beige-colored, slightly textured laid paper

Gift of the Fazzano Brothers 84.198.798

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Adolphe Martial Potémont

French, 1828-1883

Beillet et Forestier, printer

A. Cadart & Luquet, publisher

Letter on the Elements of Etching (page four), 1860

Etchings on beige-colored, slightly textured laid paper

Gift of the Fazzano Brothers 84.198.799

This series provided instruction on etching in the form of an open letter from “an experienced etcher” to a beginner. Throughout, Potémont described where to purchase tools and materials, and how to prepare and print a plate. His text was supplemented by technical illustrations and marginal images that demonstrated their visual effects. The artist emphasized the freedom offered by etching, describing it as “draw[ing] . . . just as you would with a pen on paper.”



Maxime Lalanne

French, 1827-1886

A Treatise on Etching, 1880

Bound book with etchings

Courtesy of Special Collections, Fleet Library At RISD, Providence, RI
TL24.2017

Intended for use by both amateurs and experienced printmakers, Lalanne’s enormously popular manual made etching more accessible than ever before. Presented as an informal conversation between the author and a student, the text explained various etching processes and offered illustrations that demonstrated their outcomes. In a dramatic break from Bosse’s 17th-century technical manual, Lalanne emphasized the connection between technique and subject.



Lalanne’s book circulated widely, helping reignite an interest in etching by spreading technical information throughout Europe and around the world.

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Edgar Degas

French, 1834-1917

The Engraver Joseph Tourny, 1857 (restrike)

Drypoint on beige-colored, moderately textured wove paper

Courtesy of the David Winton Bell Gallery, Brown University

TL41.2017

The subject of this print, depicted with a plate, before a window, is the artist credited with teaching Degas how to etch while both were living in Rome during the 1850s. Degas experimented avidly with the medium over the next several decades. The beginnings of this practice can be seen in this print's sketchy lines and its inclusion along the lower margin of a small *remarque*; marginal sketches like this were made to test tools or materials, but later became a marker of rarity because they were usually effaced before printing.

Tourny's direct gaze may refer to a similarly composed self-portrait by Rembrandt, an artist who experimented actively with etching.



Ludovic Lepic

French, 1839-1889

Trunk of a Chestnut Tree, from the series "Views from the Banks of the Scheldt", ca. 1870 - 1876

Etching on paper

The Baltimore Museum of Art: Garrett Collection TL60.2017.1

This print is from a large series, made from the same etched plate, depicting a river in northern France in widely varying weather conditions. Each print shows windmills and ships in the distant background and, in the foreground, a grassy riverbank where a man approaches a small boat. Lepic made each impression unique by painting and wiping ink on the plate's surface—a technique he termed "variable etching" and claimed to have invented. This process was used for the large tree and snowbank in this image, which were painted on the plate's surface. Lepic sprinkled rosin on the plate before printing, embossing into the paper to suggest falling snow.



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Édouard Manet

French, 1832-1883

Victorine in the Costume of an Espada, 1862

Etching and aquatint on cream-colored, moderately textured laid paper

The Baltimore Museum of Art: The George A. Lucas Collection

TL60.2017.2

Although many printmakers worked directly on copper plates, Manet used this drawing to help translate an oil painting he made that same year into an etching. All three works depict the artist's favorite model in the costume of a Spanish bullfighter. Rendered on transparent paper, the drawing may have been directly traced from a photograph of the painting. On the woman's face, incised marks from the tool that was used to transfer the image are still faintly visible. Manet's faint signature at bottom left indicates that he considered this tracing an independent work of art.



Albert Besnard

French, 1849-1934

In the Ashes, 1887

Etching, drypoint, and roulette on cream-colored slightly textured laid paper
Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift from the Collection of Professor and Mrs. Daniel Bell in honor of Marjorie B. Cohn
TL62.2017

Besnard used the intimacy of etching to explore larger social issues, as seen in this image of an impoverished young woman crouched before a diminishing fire. In the original print, seen at left, the figure was contrasted visually and thematically with the finely dressed woman looking upward into the night sky.

After printing several impressions, Besnard dramatically altered the composition by physically cutting off the top and left side of the copper plate, creating a realistic, rather than symbolic, image of poverty.



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Rembrandt van Rijn

Dutch, 1606-1669

St. Jerome beside a Pollard Willow, 1648

Etching and drypoint on beige-colored, slightly textured laid paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund 47.034

For his use of sketchy lines and imaginative compositions, as seen in this print, Rembrandt was a hero to many 19th-century French printmakers who emulated his work and saw him as a source of inspiration. He was among the earliest artists to consider etching as important as his work in other media. The unfinished appearance of this image, in which the central tree is highly detailed but the saint and his pet lion remain unresolved, in particular encouraged many artists to explore a similar aesthetic in their work.



Charles Meryon

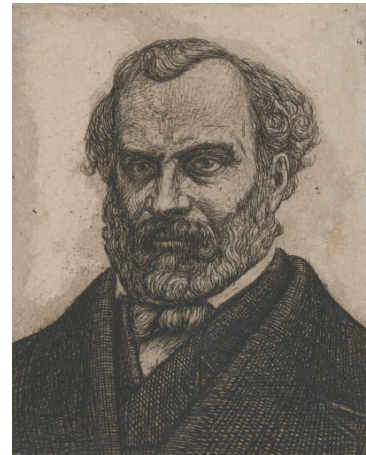
French, 1821-1868

Armand Guéraud of Nantes, Printer and Man of Letters (Armand Guéraud, imprimeur et littérateur, de Nantes), 1861

Tin etching on cream-colored, smooth laid paper

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 66.100

Although Meryon often worked on a minute scale, he found making the tiny portrait at right of the bookseller Guéraud especially challenging. Rather than etching on copper, he used a plate made of tin—a material that printmakers rarely used because it reacted unpredictably to acid. The plate was accidentally destroyed while the artist was still working on it, and after printing only a few trial proofs.



Now extremely rare, the print was intended to fit in the frame at left, designed with symbols celebrating the history of printing. Another artist later filled the image's empty center space with a sketch of the printer Auguste Delâtre.

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Charles Meryon

French, 1821-1868

Frame for Portrait of Guéraud (with drawn portrait of Auguste Delâtre), 1862

Etching and drypoint on cream-colored, slightly textured laid paper

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 66.121

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Jacques Callot

French, 1592-1635

Turk Seen from the Front, Right Hand on Hip (Le Turc Vu de Face, Levant le Bras Droit), from the series "Various Figures" (Varie Figure di Iacopo Callot) ca. 1621-1624

Etchings on cream-colored, slightly textured laid paper

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 78.015.1

Historic works by Rembrandt and Callot inspired etchers in 19th-century Paris to experiment with working in states. Callot revised and reprinted images such as this pair, in which he transformed a portrait, above, into a battle scene, below, by adding a background showing violent pillaging.



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Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 78.015.2

Historic works by Rembrandt and Callot inspired etchers in 19th-century Paris to experiment with working in states. Callot revised and reprinted images such as this pair, in which he transformed a portrait, above, into a battle scene, below, by adding a background showing violent pillaging.



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Edgar Degas

French, 1834-1917

On Stage III, 1876-1877

Soft-ground etching, drypoint, and roulette on cream-colored, slightly textured laid paper

Gift of the Fazzano Brothers 84.198.1083

This image of a ballet performance was created by applying softened ground on the plate, into which Degas imprinted textured materials and drew, through paper, with a variety of pointed and broad-tipped tools, leaving crayon-like markings. Afterward, he used a roulette—a textured wheel—to make the patterns of regular dots seen throughout the background.



Degas used nontraditional materials not only for printing plates but as etching tools. Around the time this print was made, he experimented with a double-pointed pen used by accountants, a wire brush, an emery stone, and the carbon rod used in electric arc lamps, among other tools.

Henri Guérard

French, 1846-1897

Invitation for the Second Diner Dentu (Diner Dentu, deuxième invitation), ca. 1880

Etching and roulette on cream-colored, slightly textured laid paper

Helen M. Danforth Acquisition Fund 2016.77

Guérard was commissioned to etch this invitation for the Diner Dentu, a party held regularly for the literary and artistic elite of 19th-century Paris. His design includes trompe l'oeil fragments of the artist's calling card, one of his own prints depicting boats, letterhead of the hosting restaurant, and a guest list. Because the invitations had limited distribution, they were highly sought after at the time by collectors, who could only find them through personal connections.



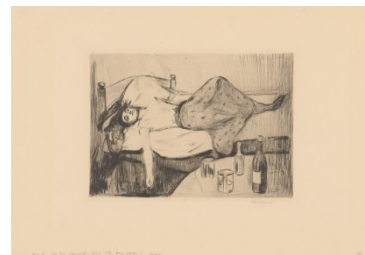
Edvard Munch

Norwegian, 1863-1944

The Day After, 1894

Drypoint and open bite on beige-colored, slightly textured wove paper

Museum Works of Art Fund 50.035



A young woman sprawls across a bed, two glasses suggesting she has entertained a visitor. The image was first executed as a painting that caused a scandal when it was acquired in 1909 by Norway's National Gallery, prompting one critic to write, "Th[is] drunken girl should long ago have slept it off, and . . . [the museum] is not the right place for

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her to do it.”

This print was better received by collectors sympathetic to Munch’s interest in bohemian subculture. The artist emphasized the image’s drama by gouging deeply with a drypoint needle and wiping acid directly onto the plate (known as “open biting”), leaving irregular, mottled areas of tone.

Félix Bracquemond

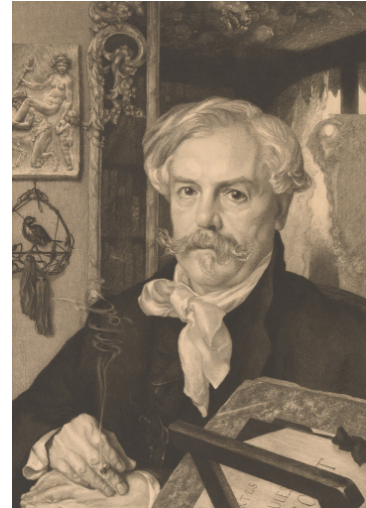
French, 1833-1914

Portrait of Edmond de Goncourt, 1881-1882

Etching on beige-colored, smooth, moderately thick paper, most likely a type of Japanese vellum

Gift of Murray S. Danforth, Jr. 50.318

This portrait shows one of the most famous collectors of contemporary prints in his private study. Goncourt and his brother Jules authored a multi-volume journal detailing their daily lives and friendships with artists. He built his collection through direct connections, seeking out works by living artists at a time when most others bought historical prints. His etchings—which he once described as “the happiness of my life”—were housed in portfolios like the one on the stand at lower right, allowing Goncourt to flip through them at his leisure.



Albert Besnard

French, 1849-1934

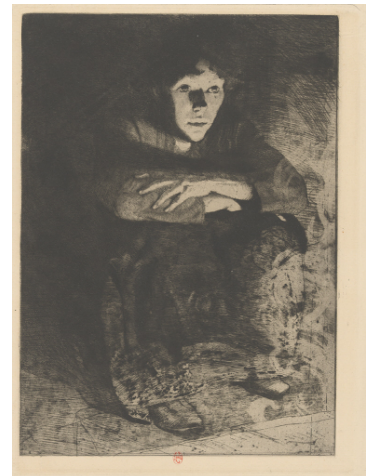
In the Ashes (Dans les Cendres), 1887

Etching, drypoint, and roulette on paper

Museum purchase: gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 53.328

Besnard used the intimacy of etching to explore larger social issues, as seen in this image of an impoverished young woman crouched before a diminishing fire. In the original print, seen at left, the figure was contrasted visually and thematically with the finely dressed woman looking upward into the night sky.

After printing several impressions, Besnard dramatically altered the composition by physically cutting off the top and left side of the copper plate, creating a realistic, rather than symbolic, image of poverty.



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Albert Besnard

French, 1849-1934

Morphine Addicts (Morphinomanes), 1887

Etching and drypoint on cream-colored, smooth wove paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund 81.206

In this refined vision of drug use, two young women stare blankly at the viewer, surrounded by morphine paraphernalia. A highly addictive drug, morphine was so popular in late 19th-century Paris that one contemporary critic described it as “high-society alcoholism.” Besnard’s image was alternatively titled *The Plume*, referring both to the feather one woman uses to fan away the drug’s odor and the dramatic wisp of smoke that encircles the pair. Here the trail of smoke and other highlighted areas were created by applying an acid-resistant varnish to the plate (called “stopping out”), allowing the lines to appear as a striking negative space.



Charles Meryon

French, 1821-1868

The Mortuary, Paris, from the series "Eaux-fortes sur Paris" 1854

Etching and drypoint on beige-colored, moderately textured laid paper

Gift of the Fazzano Brothers 84.198.786

Here a corpse recovered from the Seine is taken to the Paris morgue. In the 19th century, this facility was open to the public, who gathered before its large viewing window to see the recently deceased.



Meryon focused on the details of urban life as Paris shifted from a city of cramped, medieval streets to the open boulevards seen today. His prints were characterized by profuse detail facilitated by his distinctive use of the etching needle; according to historian Henri Beraldi, he reportedly held the tool “in his extended hand like a sword, draw[ing on the plate] . . . from the bottom upwards,” reversing the standard top-down technique.

Félix Bracquemond

French, 1833-1914

Auguste Delâtre, publisher

French, 1822 - 1907

The Top of a Door (Le Haut d'un battant de porte), 1852

Etching on cream-colored, slightly textured laid paper

Anonymous gift in memory of Patricia C. Mandel 1998.14



Bracquemond based these prints on a scene he observed on a farm in the French village of Villers-Cotterêts. The earlier state, above, carefully represented birds and a bat nailed to a barn door, capturing

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details such as feathers and the door's wood grain with exacting accuracy.

In later states, Bracquemond added a moralizing tone through the addition of a small wooden plaque below the birds. It contained a verse that played upon the French word voler—meaning both “to fly” and “to steal”—suggesting that, like humans, birds must pay the price for taking what is not theirs.

Noël Masson

French, 1854-1889

After Ludovic Lepic

French, 1839-1889

The Flood (Le Déluge), 1875

Etching, drypoint, and roulette on beige-colored, moderately textured laid paper

Gift of Eric G. Carlson in honor of Andrew Raftery 2005.138.1



Depicting the torrent and aftermath of the biblical flood, this etching reinterprets a triptych by Ludovic Lepic. Masson translated the painting's separate panels with a bold border around each image, probably using a straightedge and drypoint needle.

The large scale and profuse detail of the print are remarkable, especially given that Masson lost both arms as a teenager during the Commune, a civil war that broke out in Paris in 1870. He learned to use artificial hands to etch, working in the medium for almost two decades. Lepic signed this impression, suggesting that the print may have been a collaboration between the two artists.

Mary Cassatt

American, 1844-1926

Standing Nude with a Towel, ca. 1879

Soft-ground etching and aquatint on cream-colored, moderately textured laid paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund 2008.88.2



Cassatt printed states, or variations on the same plate, primarily as a means of technical experimentation. Rather than developing the composition or working toward a resolved appearance, as most artists did with states, this image of a nude model—an unusual subject for a female artist at this time—was gradually abstracted in later states. Edgar Degas, an artist keenly interested in process, was the original owner of these two impressions, and described such works by Cassatt as “delightful graphic experiments.” Cassatt herself later remarked to her biographer, “[Etching] is what teaches you to draw.”

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Mary Cassatt

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Henri Guérard

French, 1846-1897

An African Woman, after Eva Gonzalès, ca. 1888

Zinc etching and aquatint on gray-colored, slightly textured wove paper

Esther Mauran Acquisitions Fund 2016.107

Rather than using a copper plate to make this print, Guérard etched on a piece of recycled zinc that was probably a flattened watering can. The embossed mark of the can's manufacturer at lower right—the place where older prints and drawings traditionally featured the stamps of illustrious former owners—suggests a humorous nod to the work's humble origins.



Guérard's print reinterprets a now-lost painting by his wife, the artist Eva Gonzalès. That painting, related to a work made by her teacher, Edouard Manet, illustrated the interest many French artists had in France's subjects in African colonies.

Charles Meryon

French, 1821-1868

San Francisco, 1855 - 1856

Steel etching and drypoint on cream-colored, moderately textured wove paper

Gift of Henry D. Sharpe 47.690



Although Meryon, a Parisian, never visited San Francisco, he was commissioned to make this panoramic portrait of the city, working only from a set of five photographs. Because the images did not

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match up in perspective or scope, Meryon was forced to invent portions of the view—a process that he described as “tiresome labor.” The central plaque was likely intended to help resolve this issue by obscuring details of the buildings in the foreground. Figures symbolizing abundance and labor lean against the city’s name, accompanied by small round portraits of the men who commissioned the work.

Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot

French, 1796-1875

Maurice le Garrec, publisher

French, d. 1937

Horace's Gardens (Les Jardins d'Horace), from the portfolio “Forty Clichés-Verres” (*Quarante Clichés-Glaces*) ca. 1855 (printed in 1921)

Cliché-verre on paper

Museum purchase: anonymous gift 47.719.14

Both of these landscapes were made by drawing onto glass plates placed over photosensitive paper. When the plates were complete, they were exposed to sunlight, allowing marks on the glass to slowly print onto the sheet.



Daubigny and Corot both often worked outdoors, sketching directly from nature. While Corot drew with an etching needle, using sketchy lines that translated directly to his print, Daubigny held his plate over a candle, creating a layer of soot that he could etch into or wipe. This technique allowed him to work from dark to light in loose, painterly marks.

Charles François Daubigny

French, 1817-1878

Maurice le Garrec, publisher

French, d. 1937

Cows at a Watering Place (Vaches à l'abreuvoir), from the portfolio “Forty Clichés-Verres” (*Quarante Clichés-Glaces*) 1862 (printed 1921)

Cliché-verre on paper

Museum purchase: anonymous gift 47.719.33

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Honoré Daumier
French, 1808-1879

Alfred Taiee

French, b. 1820

Henri-Joseph Harpignies

French, 1819-1916

Félicien Rops

Belgian, 1833-1898

Etching Study by Four Artists, 1872

Etching on beige-colored, slightly textured wove paper

Gift of Mrs. Murray S. Danforth 48.362



One evening in 1872, during a party held at the home of a friend, four artists passed around a prepared copper plate and took turns sketching into it with a needle. Each contributed one or more of the plate's sections with a subject of their choice. The casual, social context of this print's creation indicates the ease with which artists could sketch on a plate, as if using a pen on paper.

The print was the only etching ever made by Daumier—a prolific artist in other printmaking techniques—suggesting how quickly etching techniques could be learned.

Édouard Manet

French, 1832-1883

The Cats (Les Chats), 1868 - 1869 (probably printed later)

Etching and aquatint on cream-colored, moderately textured laid paper

Museum Works of Art Fund 58.031



Manet used the plate for this print the same way he would have used a page in one of his many sketchbooks: to record images to incorporate into his paintings and drawings. Cats—especially his own—were among Manet's favorite subjects to sketch, and this print may well have been produced as a private exercise for his own enjoyment. The composition here is unusual, as Manet's prints often had a finished appearance. This aesthetic may help explain why only a few impressions were made of the plate during the artist's lifetime, with formal editions printed only after his death.

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Félix Bracquemond

French, 1833-1914

The Top of a Door (Le Haut d'un battant de porte), 1852

Etching and chine collé on cream-colored, slightly textured wove paper

Museum Works of Art Fund 58.037

Bracquemond based these prints on a scene he observed on a farm in the French village of Villers-Cotterêts. The earlier state carefully represented birds and a bat nailed to a barn door, capturing details such as feathers and the door's wood grain with exacting accuracy.

In later states, Bracquemond added a moralizing tone through the addition of a small wooden plaque below the birds. It contained a verse that played upon the French word voler—meaning both “to fly” and “to steal”—suggesting that, like humans, birds must pay the price for taking what is not theirs.



Félicien Rops

Belgian, 1833-1898

Farewell at the Parc d'Auteuil (Les Adieux d'Auteuil), 1869

Etching, drypoint, and aquatint on white-colored, slightly textured laid paper

Mary B. Jackson Fund 75.049

Rops's etchings were actively sought after by collectors—probably due, in part, to the sexual suggestiveness of images such as this pair. Two fashionable women are seen kissing in a wooded area of the Bois de Boulogne, a Parisian park, hinting at a secret meeting. Rops often made prints in many states with varied tonalities, such as the near reversal in coloration seen here. He accomplished this shift by leaving ink on the surface of the plate while reprinting. In addition to formal experimentation, such variation was a savvy marketing strategy, and enthusiasts of Rops's work often worked to obtain many or all existing states of his prints.



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Georgianna Sayles Aldrich Fund 78.137

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Félix Hilaire Buhot

French, 1847-1898

Westminster Bridge, 1884

Etching, drypoint, aquatint, roulette, and spit bite on cream-colored, slightly textured laid paper

Gift of the Charles Z. Offin Fund 83.020

Buhot's "symphonic margins" featured evocative designs, as in the lower print, a scene the artist likely saw in London. A bustling street view is surrounded by decorative images that fade in and out of recognition—an effect enhanced by the artist's practice of wiping the ink on his plates by hand to achieve painterly effects.



Louis Legrand

French, 1863-1951

Gustave Pellet, publisher

French, 1859 - 1919

The Remains of a Family (Épaves de famille), 1884

Etching and drypoint on beige-colored, smooth wove paper

Gift of Alan S. Trueblood 83.225.34

Legrand used the improvisatory quality of etching to emphasize his subject matter. These satirical vignettes of three almost-identical women suggest the tedium and conformity the artist saw as characteristic of middle-class life. The trio appears near a portrait, presumably of their father, implying their familial ties, and one dangles a garish mask of the artist's own face.



Here, as in most of his prints, Legrand used drypoint, a technique that

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involved drawing directly onto a copper plate with a needle. He favored this tool for the velvety black line it produced in early impressions. Legrand experimented avidly with the drypoint process, sometimes drawing on his plates with such unusual tools as a dentist's drill.

Auguste Rodin

French, 1840-1917

Portrait of Henry Becque, 1883-1887

Drypoint on beige-colored, slightly textured wove paper

Gift of the Fazzano Brothers 84.198.1311

Rodin primarily used etching to plan and rethink his sculpture. This portrait shows the playwright Henry Becque, controversial in 19th-century Paris for his unsentimentalized portrayal of contemporary social issues. Rodin first depicted Becque in a bronze sculpture several years before this print, then again two decades later in a marble bust. The etching medium allowed the artist to rethink details of the work from varied perspectives. As he would work a sculpture from different angles and make adjustments, Rodin printed and continued to edit this plate, creating a total of four variations (or "states").



Charles François Daubigny

French, 1817-1878

Auguste Delâtre, printer

French, 1822 - 1907

Alfred Cadart, publisher

French, 1828-1875

Searching for an Inn (La Recherche d'une Auberge), from the portfolio "Voyage by Boat" (Voyage en Bateau) 1862

Etchings and chine collé on white-colored, slightly textured wove paper

Gift of the Fazzano Brothers 84.198.787.8

From a series of etchings devoted to Daubigny's own travels, these two prints show the darkness of night broken by a lantern. On the left, diagonal lines and crosshatching suggest the light's spread as two figures search for a place to stay. At right, their lantern illuminates an inn's dim interior.



To suggest rays of light, Daubigny etched a dense network of lines deeply into the plate and printed it with high pressure, creating an embossed effect. In some areas, such as the shadow at lower right, he pressed fabric into the ground, creating grainy areas where ink would pool, resulting in an underlying gray tone.

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Charles François Daubigny

French, 1817-1878

Auguste Delâtre, printer

French, 1822 - 1907

Alfred Cadart, publisher

French, 1828-1875

Interior of an Inn (Intérieur d'une Auberge), from the portfolio

"Voyage by Boat" (Voyage en Bateau) 1862

Etchings and chine collé on white-colored, slightly textured wove paper

Gift of the Fazzano Brothers 84.198.787.9



From a series of etchings devoted to Daubigny's own travels, these two prints show the darkness of night broken by a lantern. On the left, diagonal lines and crosshatching suggest the light's spread as two figures search for a place to stay. At right, their lantern illuminates an inn's dim interior.

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Félix Hilaire Buhot

French, 1847-1898

Winter in Paris or Paris in the Snow (L'Hiver à Paris ou La Neige à Paris), 1879

Etching, aquatint, drypoint, and roulette on beige-colored, slightly textured laid

Gift of the Fazzano Brothers 84.198.825



Buhot was known for creating unusual borders, usually around cityscapes such as these. In what he called "anecdotal margins," figures or events connect to the main image, as in the upper print: Parisian pedestrians and shoppers appear inconvenienced by winter weather, while the border paints a harsher picture, with horses frozen to death and men standing around a burning barrel to stay warm.

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Edgar Degas

French, 1834-1917

Two Dancers in a Rehearsal Room, 1877 - 1878

Aquatint, drypoint, and scraping on beige-colored, moderately textured laid paper

Lent by James A. Bergquist, Boston TL46.2017

This image of two young ballerinas is one of several Degas made using daguerreotype plates—sheets of copper coated with silver and used for printing unique photographic images. Mass produced, each plate featured the crimped corners seen in this print, and the embossed stamp with the manufacturer's name, as seen at upper right.

Degas covered the plate's surface with liquid aquatint, a grainy substance that printed as gray. Working from dark to light, he scraped away the material to create white lines, highlighting them in black by drawing more deeply, through the aquatint and into the plate, with a drypoint needle.

