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Art from Industry: James McNeill Whistler and the Revival of Lithography

DOUGLAS W. DRUICK *Prince Trust Curator of Prints and Drawings
and Searle Curator of European Painting, The Art Institute of Chicago*



FIGURE 1
Henri Fantin-Latour
(French; 1836–1904).
*Homage to Eugène
Delacroix*, 1863–64.
Oil on canvas;
160 x 250 cm. Musée
d'Orsay, Paris.

Standing figures, left
to right: Louis
Cordier, Alphonse
Legros, Whistler,
Édouard Manet, Félix
Braquemonnd, Albert
de Balleroy; seated
figures, left to right:
Edmond Duranty,
Henri Fantin-Latour,
Jules Champfleury,
Charles Baudelaire.

When James McNeill Whistler referred to the delicate lithographs that he created in the early 1890s as “Songs on Stone,” he was making a point: that the aim of his pictorial imagery went beyond its descriptive capacity. Like many Symbolist artists of the *fin de siècle*, Whistler aspired to create a visual equivalent to music; he had in fact been experimenting with musical titles for paintings, such as “Nocturne” and “Harmony,” since 1867. In choosing to describe his lithographs as “Songs on Stone,” he displayed his characteristic subtlety: these works are not full-scale symphonies, grand and chromatic, directed toward a large audience—they are intimate, rather quiet compositions, destined for the few.

Whistler thought of lithography in quite different terms when he first became involved with the medium. In 1858 he made a design for a sheet-music cover that was duplicated on a

lithographic stone and published by a large, commercial printing firm. At that time printed imagery was largely produced as it had been for centuries—by the hand of the professional printmaker—and, like Whistler, most artists relied upon these trained craftsmen to translate their paintings and drawings into print so that they could be multiplied and reach a wide public. By the 1890s this task had been largely taken over by new photomechanical imaging technologies. Now the traditional print media (engraving, etching, and lithography) found primary justification in their use not by professionals but by artists—the painters and sculptors whose “original” contributions in these media had hitherto been as numerically insignificant as they were aesthetically important. Whistler was not alone among the leading artists of the second half of the nineteenth century in taking up printmaking at different stages of this industrial development and at different points in his career; in so doing he actively helped to redefine prints and their purposes.

Responsive to the constantly shifting dialogue between industry and art, the history of original printmaking from 1850 to 1900 is dominated by two distinct “revivals” of interest by artists in print media. The Etching Revival was launched in France during the late 1850s, spread to England and the rest of Europe in the 1860s, and continued through the 1890s; and the revival of lithography began—again in France—to gather momentum during the 1880s and became a major artistic force in avant-garde circles in the following decade.¹ Whistler was one of the few major artists to play a formative role in both these histories.

Born in America, Whistler forged his early style in France, but later spent many years in

England. Any attempt to associate his work with a particular school is inevitably problematic. But if his mature artistic production and the influences that fed it cannot be tied to a single culture, it does seem to be the case that, in both etching and lithography, Whistler drew upon trends in France, with different results in each medium. His etching practice, grounded in his early French experience, would be both continuous and consistent over the next decades. The story of his work in lithography, which is less frequently examined by art historians, follows a more episodic narrative and thus seems to reveal more clearly the transitional moments in the artist’s practice and ambitions. At no point is this more clear than in the late 1880s and 1890s, when Whistler relied upon lithography to realize his aesthetic aims as no other medium could.

*The Etching Revival and the Failed
Lithography Revival of the 1860s*

Whistler’s commitment to printmaking first took root and was shaped within the French avant-garde. His early connections there are strikingly represented in the painting *Homage to Eugène Delacroix*, the large group portrait conceived in 1863–64 by his close friend Henri Fantin-Latour (fig. 1). Whistler’s links to the nine other young painters and critics in the portrait went beyond shared reverence for the recently deceased French Romantic artist. Just months before Delacroix’s death in August 1863, Whistler—like his fellow sitters Fantin, Félix Bracquemond, Édouard Manet, and Alphonse Legros—had exhibited paintings that had been rejected by the official Salon jury in the so-called Salon des Refusés (Salon

of Rejected Works). Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* (1862; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.) was, along with Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass* (1863; Musée d'Orsay, Paris), at the heart of the intense controversy generated by this watershed event. At issue was the aesthetic of Realism, as it would be when Fantin's *Homage* was exhibited at the Salon of 1864. To the majority of critics, Fantin's group portrait represented a gathering of Realists, whom they deemed inappropriate celebrants of the painter who was the very symbol of Romanticism in the visual arts. This essentially reductive view overlooked an important link connecting the Realist sitters to the precepts of Romanticism: the use of black-and-white media such as etching and lithography, and the related belief that drawing—the direct mark of the artist's hand—is expressive of his or her unique personality.

The artists and critics whom Fantin depicted had all been instrumental in the Etching Revival, which had been formalized in 1862 with the founding of the Société des aquafortistes (Society of Etchers). Critics Charles Baudelaire, Jules Champfleury, and Edmond Duranty encouraged painters to adopt the medium of etching, arguing its suitability for the multiplication and dissemination of their compositions. Photography, invented in 1839, was technically not yet capable of duplicating the surfaces and contrasts of paintings, and reproductions made by professional printmakers necessarily interposed a hand other than the artist's. The critics charged the painter-printmaker—the artist—with the task of interpreting his or her own works in print. Etching (as opposed to woodcut or engraving) was seen as the print medium most naturally suited to the painter because it allows for “spontaneity” and “immediacy,” draftsmanly virtues associated with Rembrandt, who was revered as the greatest painter-etcher in the history of art.²

An artist can use the etching needle with virtually the same freedom as a pen or pencil; thus proponents of the Etching Revival concluded that painters' etchings could be regarded as multiple drawings. Artists, young and old, who responded to the new potential of this time-honored medium began to assume for themselves the responsibility of producing printed translations of their painted compositions, making “direct” contact with a large audience.

By the early 1860s, Whistler had already produced a significant etched oeuvre; yet he alone of the painters grouped in Fantin's *Homage to Eugène Delacroix* was not among the Société's founding members. This, in turn, may account for the fact that Whistler did not join Fantin, Manet, Legros, and Bracquemond in 1862 when, at the behest of the Société's director, Alfred Cadart, they experimented with bringing the Etching Revival's aesthetic of graphic spontaneity—the notion of the print as drawing—to bear on the surface of the lithographic stone. Delacroix, himself a founder of the Société des aquafortistes, had in practice preferred lithography to etching and indeed established the link between Romanticism and lithography. When his lithographs, and those of other painter-lithographers of the first half of the century, were republished in the early 1860s, they played a paramount role in stimulating the Realist nostalgia for the Romantic past, and they directly influenced the practice of the painter-printmakers of the Realist avant-garde whom Fantin's portrait depicts. The lithographs produced by Fantin, Manet, Legros, and Bracquemond for Cadart are notable for the unorthodox boldness of the graphic handling; they were, however, without issue. Despite the precedent provided earlier by Delacroix, at mid-century lithography was compromised by its almost exclusive use for banal imagery and commercial advertisements.

In vain the Etching Revival's leading spokesman, Philippe Burty, called upon painters to do for lithography what they were demonstrably achieving for etching: to revive a dying medium by realizing "delicate improvisations" through its unique properties.³

*Renewed Interest in Lithography
in the 1870s*

While the Etching Revival took hold in both France and England during the 1860s and into the 1870s, artists' attitudes toward lithography also began to change, in part due to dramatic advances in printmaking technology that occurred during the same few years. In 1872 veteran landscape painter and erstwhile etcher Camille Corot published a portfolio of twelve lithographs. Its title—*Douze croquis et dessins originaux (Twelve Original Sketches and Drawings)*—advanced lithography as a vehicle for spontaneous drawing, a means rather than an end in itself; the graphic resources specific to the medium were not considered. Among the younger members of the avant-garde, Corot's stature was considerable, and his example was apparently sufficient to pique the interest of the painter-etchers with whom Whistler had posed a decade earlier. Manet, having recently taken up the medium, published three lithographs in 1874, and the following year produced seven more for a renowned illustrated edition of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven*, translated into French by the poet Stéphane Mallarmé. Bracquemond and Legros also produced lithographs in the mid-1870s. Then, in 1876, Fantin began to work seriously in lithography; he would henceforth use it as one of the primary vehicles for his imaginative compositions inspired by music, ultimately producing a large and highly significant body of prints. Other avant-garde painters took up the medium, including

the Impressionist Camille Pissarro. Edgar Degas began to explore lithography in the late 1870s, while simultaneously experimenting with various etching techniques in his search for different ways to nuance the textures and moods of his modern-life scenes.

What most of the lithographs by painters such as Corot, Fantin, and Degas had in common was the fact that they were not drawn with crayon directly on stone. Instead they were produced by means of transfer lithography, a technique that, although it had been known since the invention of lithography in 1795, had recently been perfected as a result of developments in the printing industry. Transfer lithographs are made with tusche (a liquid lithographic medium) or crayon on specially coated paper; the resulting image is transferred to the lithographic stone, which is, in turn, prepared and printed following normal procedures. The attractions of transfer lithography over all other traditional print media for artists of the 1870s were twofold: it required no special technical knowledge; and the artist's composition, reversed when transferred to the stone, printed in the same orientation as drawn. This gave rise to the view, advanced in the preface to Corot's *Douze croquis et dessins originaux*, that transfer lithography is the ideal means of multiplying artists' drawings.

London printer Thomas Way, who made notable efforts in the late 1870s to attract leading British artists to lithography, deserves credit for Whistler's decision to take up the medium for the first time in 1878 and for encouraging him to resume it in 1887. But equally important was creative stimulus from France. Degas's practice was particularly compelling, suggesting as it did the benefits of concurrently exploring etching and lithography in order to extract a variety of pictorial possibilities from similar themes. Indeed the parallels and differences between the printmaking activities of Degas



FIGURE 2
Edgar Degas (French;
1834–1917). *Singer at a
Café-Concert*, 1876/77.
Lithograph on
off-white wove paper;
259 x 199 mm (image);
310 x 230 mm (sheet).
The Art Institute
of Chicago, Charles
Deering Collection
(1927.2685).

and Whistler at the end of the 1870s are instructive. At issue is a certain sensitivity to the appropriate usages of each medium—an understanding of what one might call media “protocol.” With regard to etching, Whistler was well aware of contemporary French activity but disinclined to follow suit; in lithography, which he had not yet made his own, he was more responsive and open-minded.

Whistler conceived his first lithographs (see cat. nos. 1–2), as did Degas his *Singer at a Café-Concert* (fig. 2), simply as images that thematically echo current drawings and etchings (see cat. nos. 11 and 16). His sole engagement with the unique properties of the medium occurred in his use of a scraper to scratch out highlights on the stone’s resistant surface. In subsequent prints, Whistler became more adventurous, exploring with Way’s technical aid the resources of wash lithography (lithotint) to achieve increasingly complex and evocative tonal results (see cat. nos. 21–24). Degas’s work, beginning around 1877, is similarly marked by an investigation of tonal effects—not, however,

in lithography, but rather in etching, specifically aquatint (see fig. 3).

Whistler’s achievement in lithotint in 1878 would indeed have a profound impact on the way he would print his Venice etchings two years later, leaving veils of ink on the copper plate that printed as tone (see cat. nos. 29 and 39). Significantly, however, in his etchings Whistler would never follow Degas’s example of actually creating tonal passages *in* the copper printing surface by means of aquatint. To do so was expressly against Whistler’s aesthetic of the intaglio technique. As an etcher he dismissed tonal methods such as aquatint as “little tricks,” continuing to conceive of etching as an essentially linear medium.⁴ While Degas and his other French contemporaries took the expressive potential of etching in new, experimental directions during the 1870s, Whistler remained true to the practices he and other early proponents of the Etching Revival had adopted in France a decade earlier. This was the view of etching that he effectively transplanted to England.

Since lithography lacked a set of artistic conventions, both in the art world in general and in Whistler’s own experience, the medium allowed him to experiment in a way that his long practice—and position—as a painter-etcher disallowed. With his artistic identity less invested in lithography than in etching or painting, Whistler in a sense could risk more, pursuing different techniques and possibilities. Having essayed lithography and lithotint on the stone, he proceeded in the fall of 1878 to work on transfer paper. Here he followed the precedent of Corot and Degas, using the medium quite simply to create multiple “drawings”—rendering his imagery in a sketchy, abbreviated graphic handling and completing each subject in a single procedure (see cat. no. 45).

If the lithotints had a notable influence on how Whistler *printed* the etchings that followed, his methods of creating the etched images themselves remained unchanged. Whistler's concentration, at this time, on etching is also evident in the first transfer lithographs of 1879, which can be seen merely to reiterate the etchings that had preceded them; both appear crisp and graphically restrained.

It is difficult to assess the significance of Whistler's first lithographs in simple, evolutionary terms, in part because his attention to them faltered. Whether this was because he had lost interest in the medium or because he was preoccupied with the printing of his Venice etchings remains unclear. But by 1880 Whistler and most of his French colleagues had abandoned, at least for the moment, their experiments with lithography.

*Lithography Renewed in the
1880s and 1890s*

Eight years later, when Whistler resumed his work in lithography, he did so in a very different climate, one in which advances in new imaging technologies, emerging forces and structures in the art market, and changes in his own aesthetic priorities encouraged the artist to explore the potential of lithography once again.

The industrial printmaking techniques whose applications were nascent in the 1870s had expanded still further, so that mass-produced visual imagery was a part of everyday life as never before. Artists were discovering that original printmaking provided new creative outlets. One important reason for their shifting attitudes was the recent perfection and proliferation of photomechanical printing techniques. Those who cared about fine art greeted with ambivalence the burgeoning illustrated press that these processes spawned.

In 1882 Vincent van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo that he was thinking of doing some lithographs, because, although he liked the "drawings" reproduced in the illustrated periodicals, a lithograph retained the touch of the artist's hand and had a charm of "originality" that could not be achieved by any mechanical means.⁵ Soon a majority of artists and critics came to share this opinion.

At the same time, lithography was beginning to assume an ideological significance in France. The French had long considered lithography, though invented in Germany, to be their own—naturalized, as it were, through the practice of such luminaries as Delacroix. The defeat of the French in the war of 1870–71 resulted in a heightened desire to protect the cultural property and heritage of France against further threats. By the early 1880s, critics feared that French preeminence in the art of lithography was in jeopardy, and in 1884 the Société des artistes lithographes français (Society of French Lithographic Artists) was



FIGURE 3
Edgar Degas. *Dancers
in the Wings*, 1879/80.
Etching and aquatint
on ivory wove China
paper; 141 x 104 mm
(plate); 246 x 169 mm
(sheet). The Art
Institute of Chicago,
Joseph Brooks Fair
Collection (1955.1009).

formed. Its goal—to perpetuate the art of lithography—was hailed as a concrete response to the challenge of preserving one of the “branches” of France’s “national art.”⁶

The majority of the Société’s members were professional lithographers, masters of the various techniques of working on stone and largely involved in reproducing works of art made in other media. While their efforts to improve the official status of their medium produced significant results, it was the minority members—the painter-printmakers in their midst—who played the critical role in gaining popularity and respect for lithography. Fantin was a leader in this effort. Since 1876 he had consistently promoted lithography through the example of his own prints, shown at the Paris Salon as well as in specialized “Black and White” exhibitions held in Britain. But a turning point in the fortunes of lithography came in 1886, when Fantin’s transfer lithographs for Adolphe Jullien’s book *Richard Wagner* (see fig. 4) were shown at the Salon and hailed there as the most important event in the history of lithography since the publication, over forty years earlier, of Delacroix’s portfolio of lithographs inspired by *Hamlet*. Critics now proclaimed that an “unexpected renaissance” of lithography was under way, characterizing the medium as a worthy rival of etching for the attentions of painter and collector.⁷ These developments, along with a series of shifts in the ways that art was presented to a growing middle-class public, ensured that now—after two false starts, in the 1860s and 1870s—a revival of lithography could begin in earnest.

Whistler took up lithography again in 1887, the year after Fantin exhibited his *Wagner* illustrations, initiating what would be a decade’s worth of serious lithographic production by resuming work with Way and his son, T. R. Way, in London. There Whistler’s energetic involvement in the medium paralleled

contemporary developments in Paris. In 1889 the French art dealers and publishers Boussod, Valadon et Cie marketed a portfolio of lithographs by George William Thornley after works by Degas; the same year, the firm’s London branch offered for sale six of Whistler’s early lithographs in a portfolio entitled *Notes* (see cat. nos. 21, 23, and 45). The French enthusiasm for lithography’s “revival” was echoed by a reviewer for the British journal *The Academy*, who affirmed the medium’s artistic viability by stating that Whistler’s lithographs were “as autographic as his etchings.”⁸

To bolster lithography by comparing it favorably with etching was not a foolproof strategy. Much of the original vitality of the Etching Revival was on the wane. Moreover the perceived status of the original print had become confused by the marketing of photo-mechanical reproductions as independent works of art on the one hand, and, on the other, by the promotion of handcrafted “original” reproductive prints made by professionals after Old Master and contemporary paintings. This problem was addressed in 1888 by the Société de l’estampe originale (Society of the Original Print), established by Bracquemond and five colleagues. More important than the album of ten original prints by founding members published that year was its preface by Roger Marx, in which the critic advanced two significant concepts: that the artist’s original print had a unique value not shared by the reproductive print, and that methods other than etching—notably, lithography—were suitable artistic vehicles for the painter-printmaker.

Also indicative of the shift in taste away from etching and toward lithography is the invitation extended in 1888 by the poet Stéphane Mallarmé to his artist friends—Degas, Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, and John Lewis Brown—for prints to illustrate a book of his poetry. Though Brown

was an accomplished etcher, Mallarmé asked him to work in color lithography, which Brown had practiced occasionally since the early 1880s. In the works he produced in this medium, Brown took a selective and restrained approach to color, employing a muted palette and achieving effects not unlike those of delicate watercolors. It is no coincidence that Whistler adopted a similar manner when in 1890–91 he first attempted to make color lithographs (see cat. nos. 71 and 79–80). Mallarmé was now a friend and supporter, his admiration for Whistler's lithographs demonstrated both privately and publicly; in the fall of 1890 a sonnet by the poet and a lithograph by the artist appeared side by side in the English periodical *The Whirlwind*.

The publication of lithographs in periodicals contributed to the promotion of the medium in England and France, and also fulfilled one of the ideological aims of the Lithography Revival: the dissemination of—and popularization of the taste for—“original” art. Over the years, Whistler allowed several periodicals to publish his prints, and his correspondence leaves no doubt that he was aware of the belief that affordable lithographs would stimulate and improve public taste. This hope for the democratization of art through lithography had gained currency in 1889, when the colorful and spirited posters of Jules Chéret were shown at the Paris Exposition Universelle. Critics proclaimed Chéret's posters to be exemplary of what the French printmaking movement should be striving to create—a true art for the masses (see fig. 5). The significance of lithography as a means of educating the expanding middle classes in questions of taste and art became one of the rallying cries of the medium's revival. But Whistler's letters ring with his skeptical view that putting his lithographs “before the people . . . at an absurdly small price” would not

in fact produce meaningful results. Increasingly, and against the advice of his dealers, he insisted on raising the prices for his lithographs to the level he was able to charge for his etchings, thereby ensuring that they were unaffordable to the “crowd.”

The elitist stance that Whistler adopted with regard to his lithographs was but another facet of that complex and sometimes contradictory market for artists' prints during the 1890s.¹⁰ In 1889, the same year that Chéret's posters earned high praise for their accessibility, an Exposition de peintres-graveurs (Exhibition of Painter-Printmakers) was held at the gallery of the senior Impressionist dealer, Paul Durand-Ruel. The first in what would become a series of annual events, the exhibition was organized to demonstrate the principles that had informed the short-lived Société de l'estampe originale, displaying printmaking as a natural extension of the painter's art and



FIGURE 4
Henri Fantin-Latour.
*The Rhinegold, Scene I:
“The Rhinemaidens,”*
1886. Lithograph
on grayish ivory China
paper; 227 x 150 mm
(image); 227 x 150 mm
(sheet). The Art
Institute of Chicago,
Gift of Mrs. Chauncey
McCormick and
Mrs. E. Danielson, the
Charles Deering
Collection (1927.2958).

distinguishing between the “original” print of the artist and the “reproductive” print of the professional translator. Burty, in the catalogue’s preface, introduced another necessary distinction when he described the “photographic processes” as no more than a means of “popularizing information.” But he also noted that it was because of these mechanical processes that artists no longer had to produce original prints “to make their genius known throughout the world,” as had been the case only three decades earlier; now that photomechanical processes were taking over the task of reproduction, artistic printmaking ceased to be primarily defined by the need for multiplicity. Thus an artist might choose to work in lithography—a printmaking medium capable, in principle, of yielding many thousands of prints from a single stone—and, to ensure quality control, deliberately print only a small, or limited, “edition.” As Burty explained, the painter-printmakers who participated in the exhibition were committed to the belief “that final states [of a print] can be appreciated only through choice proofs either pulled by the artist . . . or printed under his direct supervision.” The intent was “to create an audience of amateurs who seek only the *belle épreuve* for their portfolios, a select public exclusively devoted to original and honest painting [*sic*].”¹¹ This notion of the “*belle épreuve*”—implying as it did a beautiful, special, and therefore necessarily rare and prized impression—was not new, but given the great strides in photomechanical reproduction, the art-buying public was now more sensitive to notions of originality and ready to equate desirability with exclusivity.

Whistler’s methods of making and marketing his lithographs were informed by virtually identical beliefs. He maintained that the “difference between a *proof* [printed by hand]—on old Dutch paper—and a print [from a

large, mechanically printed edition]” justified charging one hundred times more for the former.¹² Certainly the artist was correct when he later asserted that large, machine-printed editions of his lithographs could not adequately express the true essence of his work. For unlike younger artists in France, such as Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Whistler was not interested in adopting the bold design and chromatic effects derived from the popular poster tradition; rather, he sought delicacy.

Instead of “prints for the people,” Whistler wanted to create prints that had the appearance of “the most delicate *drawings* out of a Museum.”¹³ Mallarmé understood and responded to what Whistler intended. In 1890 he praised the artist’s lithographs for their refinement, elegance, and charm, complimenting Whistler’s achievement by placing the lithographs on a par with both etching and drawing. This was the response of a connoisseur; indeed, by this time, Whistler conceived his lithographs for such a discerning audience. Although democratization was one important aspect of the Lithography Revival, the art-lovers who attended the Exhibitions of Painter-Printmakers was already possessed of sufficient sophistication to understand that they were being invited not to a public spectacle, like the annual Salon, but rather to a private gathering where they could quietly savor intimate works. Whistler himself said of his lithographs that they reveal “the most personal and the very best proof of the qualities of the man who did them.”¹⁴ In other words, if paintings (and their reproductions) were for everyone, artists’ prints were for the select few.

Mallarmé’s friendship, as well as his appreciation for Whistler’s lithographs, served, in a sense, to both affirm and define the Symbolist aesthetic they embodied. Indeed the portrait Whistler made of the poet in 1892 (cat. no. 157), which was used as the frontispiece for the

French edition of Mallarmé's *Vers et Prose* in 1893, was among the lithographs that Whistler most frequently selected for exhibition in the following years—and he also consistently priced it higher than most of his other lithographs. That the sitter found the portrait “a marvel, the best thing that has ever been done of me”¹⁵ was high praise, in view of earlier portraits in oil by Manet and in etching by Paul Gauguin. Whistler strove not to produce a physical likeness but rather to express something of the inner life of the poet. The resulting image hovers between resolution and dissolution, as if on the threshold between materiality and intangibility. One can surmise that the reason for Mallarmé's notable enthusiasm was that he saw in Whistler's lithographs the visual realization of qualities akin to those he pursued in his verse. Like Mallarmé's poetry, Whistler's lithographs of the early 1890s are spare and refined, purified of all that is extraneous or that speaks to the labor of their creation. And, importantly, the lithographs seem to embody the Mallarmean aesthetic of suggestion over description. The artist's subjects—notably the series of lightly draped females (see cat. nos. 80, 82, and 86–87)—seem equally remote from naturalist interest and narrative intent. Though formally concise, they appear evanescent and almost dreamlike, as if the forms derive as much from the realm of the artist's imagination as the reality of his studio; they seem to exist as metaphors for—symbols of—the artist's inventive powers.

Lithography offered Whistler the means to perfect this aesthetic as no other medium had. Interestingly, while he referred to his lithographs as “drawings”—and indeed gave them the summary appearance suggestive of private thoughts or sketches committed to paper—Whistler in fact made few actual drawings in this traditional sense.¹⁶ The small number of extant studies related to lithographs

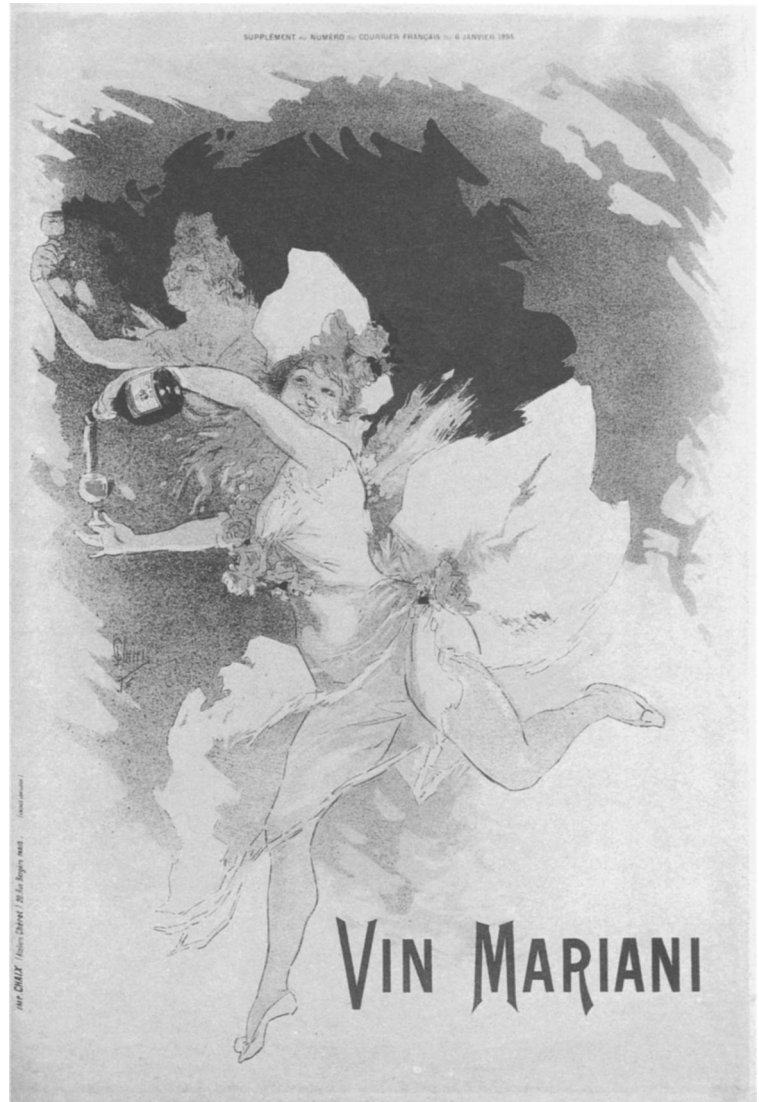


FIGURE 5
Jules Chéret (French;
1836–1932). *Vin
Mariani*, 1895. Color
lithograph on tan
wove poster paper;
573 x 372 mm. The Art
Institute of Chicago,
Gift of Jim Cuca
(1987.374).

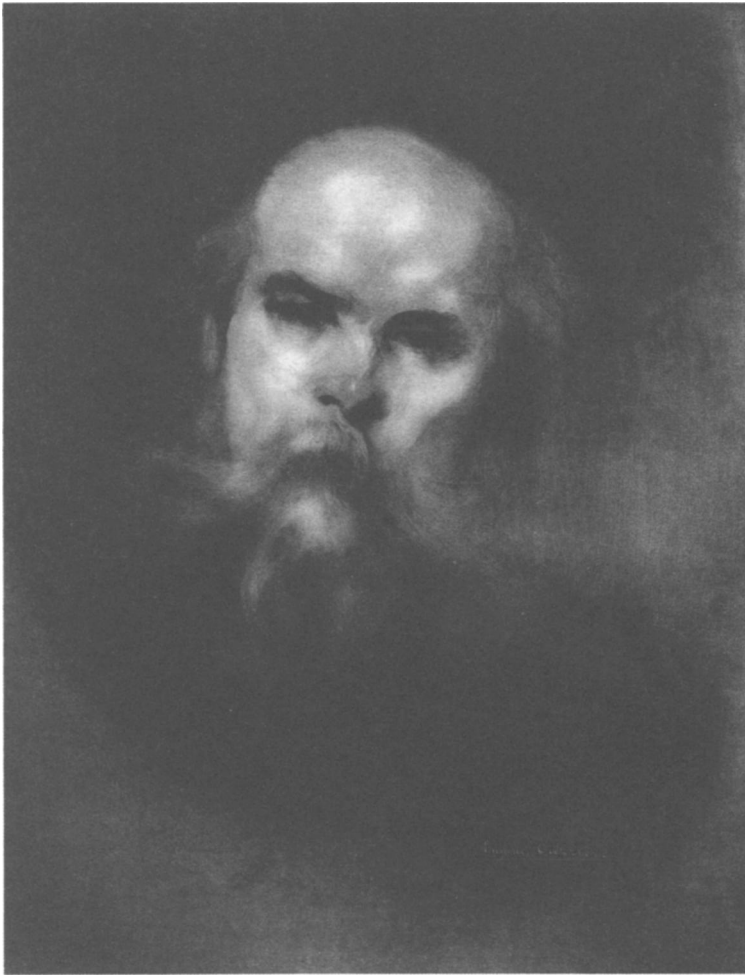


FIGURE 6
Eugène Carrière.
(French; 1849–1906).
*Portrait of Paul
Verlaine*, 1896. Litho-
tint on paper;
519 x 403 mm (image);
631 x 439 mm (sheet).
The Art Institute of
Chicago, anonymous
gift (1938.1259).

suggest the reasons why. These sketches, in recording the disruptive pressure of the artist's hand, as well as the marks of various adjustments and pentimenti, bear witness to his creative exertions. They are working documents produced in the search for an image of exquisite, effortless perfection. Etching—which divorces the act of drawing from the realized image through printing—provides the means to distance, control, and refine the original, spontaneous act of inspiration. However, the intaglio technique is such that etchings literally bear the imprint of the pressure imposed during the printing process. That Whistler removed from his etchings the most obvious sign of this by trimming away the blank paper around the mark left by the plate suggests his dislike of the material evidence of labor.

Lithography provided Whistler with an alternative, especially after he discovered, on a visit to Fantin's Paris studio in 1891, *papier végétal*, a transfer paper without the regular, mechanical-looking surface pattern so evident in the transfer lithographs he had been making on grained *papier viennois*. On the smooth surface of this new paper, Whistler made drawings that, when transferred to the stone, shed the traces of effort. They convey a sense of immanence, in part due to the way the artist worked on the transfer paper: according to T. R. Way, Whistler moved his hand *over* the sheet "again and again . . . until suddenly a firm line appeared" on its surface.¹⁷ When printed by hand, the stone did not disturb the surface of the fine antique and Japanese papers carefully chosen to receive the images, as the etching plate inevitably must. Nor did the artist trim the impressions, instead using sheets of different sizes and types and varying the placement of the images upon them. As a result, the drawn forms appear to float above—rather than sink into—the expansive, creamy surface.

Whistler was an acknowledged originator of the revival of lithography's fortunes in England, where indeed he was one of only a few artists to produce a significant body of work in the medium (another was Alphonse Legros, a former friend from Whistler's youth who had settled in London). France, as English critics freely acknowledged, was the true center of the Lithography Revival, where artists such as Pierre Bonnard, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Édouard Vuillard wrote a new chapter in the history of graphic art and created a lasting testimony to the artistic potential of lithography. In Paris, where Whistler had resettled in 1892, he involved himself in the most significant manifestations of the revival. His works appeared both in a number of major promotional exhibitions and in the albums of the revival's most significant print publications: *The Draped Figure, Seated* (cat. no. 82) was included in André Marty's *L'Estampe originale* in 1893, and Ambroise Vollard included *Afternoon Tea* (cat. no. 199) in his *Album d'estampes originales de la Galerie Vollard* four years later. Moreover Whistler remained attentive to new developments. For example his decision in spring 1896 to create *The Thames* (cat. no. 197) in lithotint, which he had not used since 1878, parallels Eugène Carrière's work on the celebrated lithotint portrait of poet Paul Verlaine (fig. 6), published by Marty in 1896.

Whistler stopped making lithographs in 1897. This decision no doubt had personal motivations, but was nonetheless symptomatic of a larger dynamic. For the Lithography Revival was to be as short-lived as it was brilliant; by the late 1890s, the enthusiasm of both artists and collectors was on the wane. Throughout his career as a printmaker, Whistler had displayed an extraordinary sense of timing, intuitively recognizing the artistic potential of the moment while simultaneously setting

the course for future developments. Beginning in the late 1880s, his practice exemplified a new attitude toward printmaking: prized by the artist for its inherent expressive potential. The modernity of Whistler's achievement in lithography lies in the fact that he used it not solely, or even primarily, as a vehicle for the multiplication of his images; instead he discovered that it offered him the means to embody aspects of his individual aesthetic in a way no other medium could.

Notes

DRUICK, pp. 8–19.

1. For more on the printmaking revivals, see Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers, *La Pierre parle: Lithography in France, 1848–1900*, exh. cat. (Ottawa, 1981); and Kemille S. Moore, “The Revival of Artistic Lithography in England, 1890–1913” (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1990).
2. See Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers, “Degas and the Printed Image, 1856–1914,” in Sue Welsh Reed and Barbara Stern Shapiro, *Edgar Degas: The Painter as Printmaker*, exh. cat. (Boston, 1984), p. xx.
3. Quoted in Douglas W. Druick and Michael Hoog, *Fantini-Latour*, exh. cat. (Ottawa, 1983), p. 138.
4. Letter from James McNeill Whistler to Joseph Pennell, Nov. 8, 1894, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Pennell Collection; quoted in The Art Institute of Chicago, *The Lithographs of James McNeill Whistler*, vol. 2, *Correspondence and Technical Studies*, ed. Martha Tedeschi (Chicago, 1998), p. 258.
5. Druick and Zegers (note 1), p. 91.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. F. W., “Mr. Whistler’s Lithographs,” *Academy*, no. 818 (Jan. 7, 1888), p. 16. For information about lifetime exhibitions of Whistler’s lithographs and critical responses to them, see Kevin Sharp, comp., “Marketing the Lithographs: A Selective Chronology of Exhibitions, Publications, and Sales,” in *The Lithographs of James McNeill Whistler*, vol. 2 (note 4), pp. 232–77.
9. Letter from James McNeill Whistler to D. C. Thomson, Aug. 30, 1894, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Pennell Collection; and letter from James McNeill Whistler to Ernest Brown, Sept. 3, 1894, Glasgow University Library, Department of Special Collections, LB9/25. Both quoted in *The Lithographs of James McNeill Whistler*, vol. 2 (note 4), pp. 253–54.
10. For more on the market for artists’ prints, see Martha Tedeschi, “Whistler and the English Print Market,” *Print Quarterly* 14, 1 (1997), pp. 15–41.
11. Philippe Burty, preface to *Exposition de peintres-graveurs*, exh. cat. (Paris, 1889).
12. Letter from James McNeill Whistler to Marcus Huish, Nov. 17, 1895, Glasgow University Library, Department of Special Collections, LB3/38; quoted in *The Lithographs of James McNeill Whistler*, vol. 2 (note 4), p. 262.
13. Letter from James McNeill Whistler to Edward G. Kennedy, Sept. 22, 1894, Edward Guthrie Kennedy Papers, The New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations; quoted in *The Lithographs of James McNeill Whistler*, vol. 2 (note 4), p. 255.
14. Letter from James McNeill Whistler to Edward G. Kennedy, Mar. 14, 1895, Edward Guthrie Kennedy Papers, The New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations; quoted in *The Lithographs of James McNeill Whistler*, vol. 2 (note 4), p. 266.
15. Letter from Stéphane Mallarmé to James McNeill Whistler, [Nov. 5, 1892], in Carl Paul Barbier, ed., *Correspondance Mallarmé-Whistler* (Paris, 1964), p. 88, no. 107.
16. Whistler seems to have felt, as did Fantin, that “my drawings are my lithographs”; see Druick and Zegers (note 1), p. 92.
17. T. R. Way, *Memories of James McNeill Whistler, the Artist* (London, 1912), p. 125.

TEDESCHI and SALVESEN, pp. 22–124.

1. James McNeill Whistler, quoted in Margaret F. MacDonald, “Maud Franklin,” in *James McNeill Whistler: A Reexamination*, Studies in the History of Art, vol. 19, ed. Ruth Fine (Washington, D.C., 1987), p. 25.
2. John White Alexander, quoted in Elizabeth Robins Pennell and Joseph Pennell, *The Whistler Journal* (Philadelphia, 1921), pp. 164–65; see also MacDonald (note 1), p. 16.
3. MacDonald (note 1), pp. 20–21.
4. Nathaniel Hawthorne, quoted in Katharine A. Lochnan, *The Etchings of James McNeill Whistler* (New Haven, Conn., and London, 1984), pp. 79–80.
5. James McNeill Whistler, letter published in the *World*, May 22, 1878.
6. John Ruskin, “Letter 79: Life Guards of New Life,” *Fors Clavigera* 7 (July 1877), in *The Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, vol. 29 (London, 1907), p. 160.
7. T. R. Way, *Mr. Whistler’s Lithographs: The Catalogue*, 2d ed. (London and New York, 1905), p. 23, no. 7.
8. James McNeill Whistler, under cross-examination in *Whistler v. Ruskin*, quoted in Linda Merrill, *A Pot of Paint: Aesthetics on Trial in Whistler v. Ruskin* (Washington, D.C., and London, 1992), p. 148.
9. James McNeill Whistler, *Mr. Whistler’s Ten O’Clock* (London, 1885), pp. 13–14.
10. T. R. Way, *Memories of James McNeill Whistler: The Artist* (London and New York, 1912), p. 19.
11. James McNeill Whistler, quoted in Lochnan (note 4), p. 222.
12. Way (note 10), p. 88.
13. Mortimer Menpes, *World Pictures* (London, 1902), p. 7.
14. Margaret F. MacDonald, *James McNeill Whistler: Drawings, Pastels, and Watercolours. A Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, Conn., and London, 1995), pp. 584–86, nos. 1624–27.
15. Eadweard Muybridge, *Animal Locomotion*, 16 vols. (Philadelphia, 1877). These volumes contain 781 plates. Whistler’s name and the names of other subscribers were published by Muybridge in the 1891 printing of the *Prospectus and Catalogue of Prints*. For further information on subscribers, see Robert Bartlett Haas, *Muybridge: Man in Motion* (Berkeley, Calif., and Los Angeles, 1976), pp. 157–58.
16. Marcus B. Huish, *Greek Terra-Cotta Statuettes* (London, 1900).
17. Whistler (note 9), p. 6.
18. In a letter to collector George Lucas, Cassatt herself mentioned her amusing encounter with Whistler at the gallery. Letter from Mary Cassatt to George A. Lucas, [July] 1891, George A.