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## “The Prints of Félix Buhot: Impressions of City and Sea” Presents a Master of Atmospheric Effects



### **Félix-Hilaire Buhot**

#### ***The Cliff: Saint-Malo Bay, 1886/1890***

heliogravure, etching, drypoint, roulette, spit bite, aquatint, and burnishing in brown-black (central plate) and black (margin plate), plate: 29.9 x 39.6 cm (11 3/4 x 15 9/16)  
National Gallery of Art, Washington, Helena Gunnarsson Buhot Collection, Gift (Partial and Promised) in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art

Among the most original prints made in France in the late 19th century are those created by artist Félix-Hilaire Buhot (1847–1898), who became famous for reproducing the impressionistic effects of rain, snow, mist, and fog. Along with Edgar Degas and Camille Pissarro, Félix Buhot numbers among the most experimental printmakers of his day. **The Prints of Félix Buhot: Impressions of City and Sea** presents more than 65 prints and drawings of the artist’s two favorite subjects, urban and seaside scenes.

Organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, the exhibition is on view September 4, 2005, through February 20, 2006, in the West Building, ground floor galleries.

The National Gallery of Art's outstanding collection of over 100 Buhot prints and drawings—which is featured in this exhibition—is distinguished by its quality and the number of variant and rare impressions of major Buhot subjects. Nearly two-thirds of the works in the exhibition are gifts or promised gifts to the Gallery from Helena Gunnarsson, one of the most important collectors of Buhot's work today. Also included are gifts from Washington artist Jacob Kainen (1909–2001) and promised gifts from his wife Ruth Cole Kainen, as well as selections from the Gallery's Rosenwald collection and other donors.

“There is much to be learned from Buhot about the printmaker's art,” said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. “We are indebted to our donors, in particular Helena Gunnarsson, for their generosity in making a gift to the nation of the best of Buhot's work.”

## **The Exhibition**

**The Prints of Félix Buhot: Impressions of City and Sea** is the largest exhibition in the United States of Buhot's prints since the Baltimore Museum of Art's exhibition of 1983 and the first major exhibition since the 1998 French exhibition marking the centenary of Buhot's death.

Buhot's approach to printmaking, in which he explored the unique aspects of etching, was very painterly: he called his prints “paintings on copper.” In the exhibition, multiple impressions of the same print are shown side by side—some in pairs, but many with three, four, or five in a group—in order to demonstrate Buhot's variations in technique.

A true printmaker's printmaker, Buhot delighted in all the technical variables, and regularly combined multiple processes to produce a single print. He employed the more traditional techniques of etching, drypoint, and aquatint with several less familiar methods that gave even greater tonal variation. Buhot also deliberately used different inks and papers for varied effects.

The first half of the exhibition presents Buhot's "city" prints, and the second, his sea and seaside prints, each section in chronological order. Buhot turned to his immediate neighborhood in and around the boulevard de Clichy in Montmartre, Paris, for inspiration for his prints of everyday city life. He portrayed the varied street life not only in different seasons, such as *Winter in Paris* (1879), but also in moments of public display, from *National Holiday on the Boulevard de Clichy* (1878) to *Funeral Procession on the Boulevard de Clichy* (1887). The exhibition includes many rare and unique prints, such as the one-of-a-kind print *Place Pigalle in 1878* (1878), inscribed as unique by the artist, or a rare impression of *National Holiday on the Boulevard de Clichy* (1878) printed in color with gold margins. Buhot's city views also include London scenes such as *Westminster Palace* and *Westminster Bridge* (both 1884).

Buhot's love for the sea is revealed by the many prints in which he explored its ever-changing atmospheric conditions and moods. His boat trips to England inspired two of his most characteristic prints, *A Pier in England* and *Landing in England*, both from 1879. The exhibition includes what Buhot considered his best impression of *Landing in England*; he wrote he would only sell it to a true print connoisseur who would appreciate its beauty.

The exhibition also includes several striking drawings by Buhot, such as his preliminary drawing for the Frontispiece for "*L'illustration Nouvelle*": *The Burial of the Burin* (1877), shown with the resulting print. *Fan with Wildflowers and Butterflies against the Norman Coast* (c. 1875), a colorful watercolor on silk, is an early example of Buhot's painterly approach. Unlike many contemporary printmakers who disliked photography, Buhot heartily embraced the medium and used it as a creative aid. The lithograph *Victoria Clock Tower, London* (1892) was based on a series of photographs Buhot commissioned from a friend.

Buhot's most original contribution to the formal aspects of printmaking is what he termed *marges symphoniques* (symphonic margins). These illustrations became an integral element that amplifies the main subject of the print. *National Holiday on the Boulevard de Clichy* (1878) was Buhot's first major print to have a symphonic margin. He created two different margins for *The Cliff: Saint-Malo Bay* (1886/1890) both versions of which can be seen in the exhibition. The major lithograph *Fisherman's*

*Cottage* (1892) also has this distinctive feature.

## **The Artist**

Born in 1847 in the small Normandy town of Valognes, in northern France, Buhot moved to Paris in 1865, where he enrolled in the École des Beaux-Arts to study painting and drawing under various artists. The young artist initially made his living by decorating fans and illustrating lithographic sheet music. He learned to etch by 1873 and quickly established himself as a successful printmaker. Buhot lived and worked most of his life in Paris, with frequent visits back to northern France. He also made extended trips to England, where he met Henrietta Johnston, whom he married in 1881.

Buhot achieved success for his prints at the annual Salons between 1875 and 1886, and a number of his works were published in leading periodicals and books. Buhot also found critical acclaim and support for his prints in the United States, particularly after his first one-man exhibition was organized by the New York print dealer Frederick Keppel in 1888. By 1892 Buhot had ceased making prints, and in 1898 he died prematurely at the age of 51 after suffering prolonged bouts of deep depression.

## **Curator and Related Activities**

The exhibition curator is Gregory Jecmen, assistant curator of old master prints, National Gallery of Art.

Jecmen and Marian Dirda, paper conservator, National Gallery of Art, will present a "Behind the Scenes" lecture, "Being Buhot: Discovering a Master Printmaker's Process," on October 27 and 29 at 12:00 noon in the West Building Lecture Hall. In a dialogue with the audience the curator and conservator will explain some of Buhot's experimental printing techniques, including the use of different inks and papers.

A 60-minute gallery talk, "The Prints of Félix Buhot: Impressions of City and Sea," will be presented by National Gallery of Art lecturer Eric Denker on September 18, 19, and 20 at 12:00 noon; and on September 21 at 1:00 p.m.

As part of a special lecture series, *Printmaking in the West: History and Technique*, presented by Eric Denker, a session on "Engraving, Etching, and the Associated

Intaglio Techniques” will be presented on September 21 at 2:30 p.m. in the East Building Auditorium and September 24 at 10:30 a.m. in the West Building Lecture Hall.

### **Permanent Collection**

Buhot prints in the National Gallery of Art’s collection that are not part of the exhibition can be seen by appointment in the Print Study Room, East Building, Monday–Friday, 10 a.m.–12:00 noon, and 2–4 p.m.; call 202-842-6380 to schedule an appointment.

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## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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