



Contact: Katrina Carl
(805) 884-6430
kcarl@sbma.net



Henri Rivière, *Moonlight* 1896. Lithograph. SBMA, Gift of Sara and Armond Fields.

Edves of Japan at SBMA Showcasing the Career of Henri Rivière

On View October 1, 2011 – January 1, 2012

September 16, 2011 – Admiration for Japanese art was a defining characteristic of the Parisian artistic avant-garde in the late 19th century. While most European artists were content to incorporate typically Japanese compositional techniques into their work, the printmaker **Henri Rivière** took his appreciation further than most: he taught himself the labor-intensive woodblock technique used by Japanese printmakers and used it (and later color lithography) to produce print albums that deliberately emulated theirs. Drawn entirely from the Santa Barbara Museum of Art's extensive holdings of Rivière's prints and drawings—many of which were donated by collectors Sara and Armond Fields—***Edves of Japan: The Prints of Henri Rivière (1864 – 1951)*** represents the first exhibition at SBMA to showcase nearly 45 works that represent the full range of the artist's oeuvre.

The presentation traces Rivière's career from his early days as a designer of shadow plays for Montmartre's bohemian Cabaret du Chat Noir to the albums of Parisian cityscapes and Breton landscapes with which he made his name. In 1886, Rivière created a form of shadow theatre at the Chat Noir under the name "ombres chinoises." This was a notable success, lasting for a decade until the cafe closed in 1897. He used back-lit zinc cut-out figures which appeared as silhouettes, emulating the ancient form of storytelling and entertainment that originated during the Han Dynasty in China.



Left image: Henri Rivière *The Last Ray* 1902. Lithograph. SBMA, Gift of Sara and Armond Fields.

Right image: Henri Rivière *The Institute and the Ile de la Cité* 1900. Lithograph. SBMA, Gift of Sara and Armond Fields.

In the late 1880s, Rivière experimented with color woodcuts and chromolithography, the method for making multi-color prints. He first visited Brittany in 1884, spending most of his summers there until 1916. Together with bustling Parisian life, rural Brittany constituted the majority of the subjects of his landscape works. These prints

vividly illustrate the way he overlaid one type of exoticism—the landscape and Celtic culture of Brittany—with another: in the words of critic Claude Roger-Marx, he treated Brittany “as an extension of the Japanese archipelago.”



Henri Rivière, *The Tower under Construction (La Tour en construction)* from *36 Views of the Eiffel Tower*, 1902. Lithograph. SBMA, Gift of Sara and Armond Fields.

The artist's prints were intended to be published as collections. These include 40 images for the album *Breton Landscapes* created between 1890 and 1894. He also prepared other sequences of woodcuts that remained unfinished, including *36 Views of the Eiffel Tower*, modernizing the famous prints by Utagawa Hiroshige and Katsushika Hokusai's *36 Views of Mount Fuji*, and which were eventually published as lithographs.



Katsushika Hokusai, *Pilgrims at the Summit of Mt. Fuji*, 1823-1829. Color woodcut. SBMA, Gift of Mary Louise Way in memory of Dr. Roland A. Way.

This exhibition includes print examples from all but two of Rivière's albums, including a handful of independent etchings and drawings, supplemented by a selection of the Japanese landscape prints by Hiroshige and Hokusai; and a set of woodblocks carved by his contemporary, Frank Morley Fletcher (1866-1949). Just as Rivière introduced the art of woodcut printing to France, Fletcher did the same to America. Native of England, Fletcher eventually became the school director of the Santa Barbara School of the Arts in 1924, and settled in Ojai at the end of his life.

Rivière ceased making prints in 1917, effectively retiring as a professional artist, but continued to work on watercolors in his later years until his death in 1951.

The Santa Barbara Museum of Art is a privately funded, not-for-profit institution that presents internationally recognized collections and exhibitions and a broad array of cultural and educational activities as well as travel opportunities around the world.

Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 1130 State Street, Santa Barbara, CA.

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