

# HENRI RIVIÈRE

L'INTÉGRALE DES ESTAMPES



DOUARNENEZ 2024  
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## HENRI RIVIÈRE [1864-1951]

### THE COMPLETE COLLECTION OF PRINTS

#### INTRODUCTION

Dear visitor, you are about to discover an exceptional exhibition. For the first time, all of Henri Rivière's series of decorative lithographs are presented together in one place.

Created between 1897 and 1917, they were published by Eugène Verneau<sup>1</sup> and form 5 series : *Les Aspects de la nature* ("Aspects of Nature"), *Paysages parisiens* ("Parisian Landscapes"), *La Féerie des Heures* (The Enchanted Hours), *Le beau pays de Bretagne* ("Beautiful Brittany") and *Au Vent de Noroît* ("In the Northwesterly Wind").

This exhibition, developed by the Douarnenez Cultural Affairs Department (Direction des affaires culturelles de la Ville de Douarnenez) owes its existence to the dedicated work of two Henri Rivière experts : Yann Le Bohec<sup>2</sup> and Yannick Cornec<sup>3</sup>.

Whether or not you are familiar with this artist's work, we hope that you will find this exhibition of all of Henri Rivière's prints enchanting.

**Enjoy your visit !**

## A "DEMOCRATIC" ART

These lithographic prints form the most accessible and widespread part of Henri Rivière's work. While his etchings and woodcuts were, by their very nature, printed in more limited numbers, and while his watercolours were unique by definition, these lithographs were intended to reach as wide an audience as possible.

## AN ARTIST STRONGLY INFLUENCED BY JAPANESE ART

During the 1890s, Henri Rivière discovered Japanese art and built up an impressive collection of prints, including works by Hokusai and Hiroshige. We can observe many similarities between this Parisian artist's woodcuts and lithographs and the works of the Japanese masters. He studied their art at length to understand and master the printing techniques. However, it was not just processes that he borrowed from them, but also a repertoire of motifs and themes, such as the changing weather with the passing of the hours and seasons. He used similar stylistic features: simplified shapes, the range of colours, and above all typically Japanese compositions with off-centring, asymmetrical framing that cuts off the subject, diagonal constructions, close-ups, bird's eye views, and horizon lines that were absent or placed very high up.

He clearly expressed this connection by asking his typographer friend, George Auriol, to create a series of red monograms inspired by the cartouches and seals seen in Japanese woodblock prints.

However, far from copying the Japanese masters, Henri Rivière drew inspiration from them to create his own style, building a bridge between East and West.

## HENRI RIVIÈRE AND EUGÈNE VERNEAU : FAITHFUL FRIENDS

Henri Rivière's lithographic work arose out of his meeting with Eugène Verneau. This printer had two lines of business: commercial printing (catalogues for department stores and businesses, and wallpaper production), but also work in the artistic world (printing theatre programmes for the Théâtre Antoine and publishing illustrated books). He also printed lithographs for many artists, let them use his printing works for free for their tests, and provided stones and printing presses. Entirely altruistic, Verneau believed that these artists would succeed, and they transformed his printing house into a centre for lithographic art.

1 - Eugène Verneau 1853-1913, Henri Rivière's printer and faithful friend.

2 - Yann Le Bohec, gallery owner since 1998 specialising in Breton artistic schools in the 19th and 20th centuries, member of the CNES (Chambre nationale des experts spécialisés / National Chamber of Specialist Experts). Co-author with Olivier Levasseur of *Henri Rivière, Estampes, a critical catalogue of the artist's lithographs* prefaced by Erik Orsenna (Locus Solus, 2022). His gallery, Armel Brittany, is located in Paimpol.

3 - Yannick Cornec, artisan framer with a shop, Cadr'Ys, in Douarnenez.

## SPACE N°1 - LITHOGRAPHIC WORK

Before printing his lithographs, Henri Rivière did many studies and sketches during his stays in Brittany. Back in Paris, he would produce a model for his work by starting with a pencil drawing, then adding gouache, watercolour or pastel.

Lithographic stones are heavy limestones, chosen for their fine grain and sanded using a mixture of water and silica. The picture can be traced onto the stone, but the artist can also draw directly on the stone using inks of different thicknesses or pencils, depending on the desired effect.

The stone is then prepared using gum arabic and an acid, allowing it to retain ink only where required for the design, so that the colour can be correctly transferred onto the paper. In the case of chromolithography, this procedure must be repeated for each of the colours in the final work.

Some of Rivière's lithographs have up to 20 colours, so would have required up to 20 stones to be prepared! The stones had to be precisely aligned in the press, so that each colour would fit perfectly within the lines. This meticulous process required numerous attempts. Henri Rivière spent his days working on it, whereas other artists would have left it to the printing workers.

In order to capture his desired colours as faithfully as possible, he would experiment again and again, even making up his own inks.

One of the reasons why his lithographs are unanimously considered to be outstanding is because the artist successfully created previously little-used nuances and subtle gradations. These were particularly difficult to achieve on such large print runs (the ink had to be refilled regularly). The final product was the result of many hours of experimentation, of precise measures, and of careful fine-tuning, the significance of which is not apparent at first glance. After printing, the stones were systematically destroyed, which explains why there were never any later or posthumous reprints of Rivière's lithographs.

*"Rivière has managed to master the lithographic press to the point where he can do incredible things with it. With a single print run, he obtains the finest, deepest skies, with the most delicate gradations. No less surprising are the purity of the printing and the perfect precision of the alignment, considering that Rivière's lithographs are printed in twelve colours. Looking at the different stages in the printing of these lithographs, we are left truly amazed by how Rivière ensures that, one after another, they come together to form a whole. Such astonishing results! Such balance! Such harmony! Never has chromolithography produced such works of art. There can be no doubt as to the artistic value of these prints, in which Rivière, with subtle watercolour shades, has expressed the different aspects of nature just as well as he would have done with a paintbrush, giving each its true character, and always with a superb flair for decoration and colour."*

Edouard Sarradin, "Henri Rivière et son œuvre", *Art et Décoration*, February 1898, p. 44.

## SPACE N°2 - ASPECTS OF NATURE

The lithograph printing technique allowed works of art to be produced in large numbers, meaning that they could be sold to the public at affordable prices. Henri Rivière saw this distribution at a "democratic price" as a way of enabling everyone, including children, to access works of art. The works in this series were widespread in schools to aid education.

The titles do not refer to specific sites, but certain views in the Bay of Douarnenez and near to the Trieux river feel easily recognisable. To create these scenes, Henri Rivière composed his images in his Parisian studio, based on studies and sketches made on site.

This series is unusual, because it was released in three parts. The first six lithographs came in 1897, and the next six a year later, in 1898. It was not until 1908 that the last four works came to complete the series, although they were probably designed at the same time as the others. The first twelve works in this series were presented for the first time in the Salle des Dépêches at the Théâtre Antoine (14 Boulevard de Strasbourg in Paris), from 15 January to 15 February 1898.

At the time, the English magazine *The Studio* was enthusiastic : "I do not believe it is possible to attain a higher degree of perfection in the printing of lithographs in colour" ("The Studio Talk", *The Studio*, vol. 13, 1898, p. 116).

Each lithograph, measuring around 54 x 84 cm, was printed in twelve colours on a sheet of vellum paper measuring 64 x 90 cm, with 1000 copies printed. 25 copies of the first twelve works in the series were also printed on China paper, which was more expensive, and were signed and numbered by Rivière.

## SPACE N°3 - PARISIAN LANDSCAPES

Henri Rivière devoted two series to Paris, the city where he was born. The first was *Paysages Parisiens* ("Parisian Landscapes"), published by Verneau in 1900. Then came the collection *Les trente-six vues de la tour Eiffel* ("36 Views of the Eiffel Tower") in 1902.

*Paysages Parisiens* received glowing reviews. In the June 1900 edition of the journal *L'Art décoratif*, Henri Frantz praised the images of the River Seine and Henri Rivière's skill in creating light and transparency effects (N°21, p. 85) "the colourist's art is shown here in all its power; he excels in giving the impression of transparency or opacity when depicting water, in hinting at the slight shadow left behind each boat [...]. Mr Rivière is also fond of snowy days, and in this regard, his "Paris vu de Notre-Dame" ("Paris seen from Notre-Dame") is a masterpiece. Here, an entire symphony is contained in a single shade, like in Whistler's paintings, and the artist has taken pleasure in capturing all the whiteness (or rather the whitenesses, because the shades are infinitely nuanced) of Paris stretched out before him [...]. These new lithographs mark a new chapter in Rivière's already varied approach and abundant work."

The dimensions were the same as for *Les Aspects de la Nature* ("Aspects of Nature"): 64 x 90 cm, and the print run was also the same: 1000 copies on vellum paper and 25 on China paper.

## SPACE N°4 - THE ENCHANTED HOURS

*La Féerie des heures* ("The Enchanted Hours") marked a change in the prints published by Verneau, because Henri Rivière adopted a much smaller format, inspired by the Japanese kakemono: 20 x 64 cm for the lithographs in landscape format and 64 x 20 cm for those in portrait format.

Once again, the names of the works in this series do not specify a location, even though they represent Brittany's landscapes, for example showing the sardine boats of Douarnenez or Tréboul and the landscapes of Loguivy.

Raymond Bouyer praised the change in format, declaring : "[...] how interesting it is to encounter again the harmonious confluence of contemporary influences: Japanese prints and Impressionist light on the one hand, Puvis de Chavannes and our Poussin on the other, that is to say an absolutely original coming together of East and West, traditional form and a new aspect, permanent beauty and a fleeting sensation."

The series was printed in 1901 to 1902, and according to sources, 1000 or 2000 copies were made. 25 copies were printed on China paper, and numbered and signed by Rivière.

"La féerie des heures d'Henri Rivière", L'Art décoratif, January 1902

## SPACE N°5 - GEORGE AURIOL, THE THIRD MAN

The creations of graphic designer and type designer George Auriol contributed greatly to the success of Henri Rivière's prints.

The collaboration between Auriol, Rivière and Verneau began with the publication of the music score books published by Enoch from 1895, and with that of L'Enfant prodigue ("The Prodigal Son"). For this score book, George Auriol used arabesques and initials to embellish the endpapers and the titles. He designed a new typeface and the monograms for the different participants.

For the Peignot type foundry, he created several typefaces in the early years of the 20th century.

These typefaces are still used today.

He also created the cover and did the calligraphy for all the texts in the 1902 collection *Les Trente-six vues de la Tour Eiffel* ("36 Views of the Eiffel Tower").

The trio came together again to work on Georges Toudouze's book *Henri Rivière, peintre et imagier*, published by Floury in 1907.

## SPACE N°6 - BEAUTIFUL BRITTANY

This is the most atypical of the lithograph series, and also the largest in numerical terms. It contains 20 lithographs in twelve or fourteen colours. One lithograph was released per year from 1897 to 1917 (continuing despite the death of Eugène Verneau in 1913). It is also the only series in which the scenes shown are so clearly located around two main places: Loguivy and the Trieux estuary (ten works, plus one in Ploumanac'h), but also the Douarnenez/Tréboul region (nine works).

The works in this series were also used in the annual calendars published by Eugène Verneau : the 1900 calendar was illustrated with that year's lithograph, *Clair de lune à Landmélus* ("Moonlight in Landmélus").

In 1903 in *Le Magasin pittoresque*, Ernest Beaugitte accurately described *Bateaux au mouillage à Tréboul* ("Boats at Anchor in Treboul"), "in which Japanese art, simple and great, is closely intertwined with Rivière's emotional style and his distinctive skill with colour" (p. 100).

For this series, the sizing changed again, with the dimensions of the images matching those of his woodcuts: around 23 x 35 cm, on paper measuring 45 x 54 cm.

500 copies of each lithograph were printed, and 100 calendars were printed each year.

## SPACE N°7 - IN THE NORTHWESTERLY WIND

Created in 1906, this short series was the last collaboration between Henri Rivière and Eugène Verneau. It differs from the others, due to its size (38 x 50 cm) and the importance of the human presence, with people becoming the central subject.

Of the eight works initially planned, for reasons that are still not known, the series contains just four. Three of these depict Douarnenez and the Crozon Peninsula.

For each lithograph, 1000 copies were printed on vellum paper, and 25 were printed on China paper, then signed and numbered by the artist.