



**SMART MUSEUM OF ART**  
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

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**Expanding Narratives: Theme and Variations—The Multiple Sorceries of Félix Buhot**

April 24 to July 22, 2018 | Public opening reception: Monday, May 7, 7–8:30 pm

*Smart Museum of Art features in-depth selection of experimental, atmospheric works on paper by  
19th-century French printmaker Félix Buhot*

*Presentation drawn from the collection of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust  
includes related works from the Smart collection*

*Part of larger 2018 Smart Museum presentation “Expanding Narratives: The Figure and the Ground”*

The University of Chicago’s Smart Museum of Art announces a special exhibition of works on paper by French printmaker Félix Buhot (1847–1898) from the collection of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust, with several Smart examples included. Titled *Theme and Variations—The Multiple Sorceries of Félix Buhot*, the exhibition is part of a larger project called *Expanding Narratives: The Figure and the Ground*, and it will extend the thematics of the figure and the ground through an intensive look at Buhot’s relentlessly experimental, atmospheric works on paper. On view from April 24 to July 22, 2018, it includes approximately sixty etchings and other works on paper organized in small groupings that show the evolution of individual compositions across multiple printings.

During the nineteenth century, etching enjoyed a revival as a highly collected and connoisseurial art form, seen as an authentic and intimate expression of the artist’s own personality. With a marked emphasis on process, many leading practitioners sought to highlight the development of an etching over

a succession of states—from initial sketch to fully realized composition. Collectors came to discern and appreciate subtle differences between impressions of the same print, prizing their distinctive features.

“Although one advantage of etching was its reproducibility, Buhot and other etchers of this period went out of their way to make each impression a unique object. From a single composition, across multiple states, Buhot used a ‘devil’s brew’ of techniques to produce countless variants and stunning atmospheric effects,” said Anne Leonard, Smart Museum Senior Curator of European Art and Director of Publications and Research. “The exhibition provides an intimate space to study how Buhot’s innovations dissolve the classic distinctions between figure and ground in ways that challenge the limits of the etching medium.”

A critic of the period called Buhot “truly one of the moderns ... [with] one of the most important places in the history of etching.” As *Theme and Variations* shows, he would alter the inking and wiping of the copperplate, vary papers and ink colors, print a single impression in two colors, or even treat the paper with turpentine. Buhot was especially known for his “symphonic margins,” or whimsical sidebar sketches that framed and enhanced the main composition, several examples of which are included in the exhibition.

The exhibition includes approximately fifty works from the collection of Charles Hack and the Hearn Family Trust, combined with several related examples from the Smart Museum collection. They will be displayed serially, to show multiple states and variations of the same composition. The subject matter encompasses stormy piers, coastal views, and urban streetscapes; literary illustrations and book frontispieces; and favored motifs such as owls, geese, and swans. Weather and atmosphere play a significant role: figures crouch under umbrellas to flee a downpour, sun glistens on a rain-soaked plaza, and a sky may appear bright or overcast depending on the printing of a given impression.

In order to protect these works from damage caused by long-term exposure to light, the *Theme and Variations* section will close on July 22 while the overarching project *Expanding Narratives: The Figure and the Ground* will run through December 30, 2018.

### **Related programs**

The opening of *Theme and Variations: The Multiple Sorceries of Félix Buhot* will be celebrated as part of *Expanding Narratives: The Figure and the Ground* and alongside *Tang Chang: The Painting that is Painted with Poetry is Profoundly Beautiful* during a public reception on Monday, May 7, 7–8:30 pm. Additional programs will be posted to the Smart Museum’s website at [smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/calendar](http://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/calendar).

### **About**

This exhibition is curated by Anne Leonard, Senior Curator of European Art and Director of Publications and Research, with University of Chicago students in her *Nineteenth-Century Prints* class taught in winter 2018.

## **Support**

Support for *Expanding Narratives: The Figure and the Ground* has been provided by Mary Smart and the Smart Family Foundation of New York and by the Smart Museum's Pamela and R. Christopher Hoehn-Saric Exhibition Fund. Additional support has been provided by the Museum's SmartPartners.

The exhibition is presented in the Janis Kanter and Thomas McCormick Gallery.

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## **Images**

Félix Hilaire Buhot, *A Landing in England (Une Jetée en Angleterre)*, 1879, Etching on paper, Left to right: B 132, I; B 132, II; and B 132, III. Collection of Hearn Family Trust.

## **About the Smart Museum of Art**

As the fine arts museum of the University of Chicago, the Smart Museum of Art is home to thought-provoking exhibitions and an exquisite collection of more than 15,000 objects, including modern masterpieces, millennia-old Chinese artworks, rich examples of Renaissance painting, and provocative works of contemporary art. The Museum offers distinctive programs that inspire visitors of all ages to experience the dynamic role of the visual arts in our world. The Smart first opened in 1974.

## **Mission**

The Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago opens the world through art and ideas.

### **Smart Museum of Art**

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### **Hours**

Tuesday–Sunday, 10 am–5 pm

Thursday evenings until 8 pm

Galleries are closed Mondays and holidays.

Admission is always free. All are welcome.