jacques VILLON / his graphic art
PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Since 1948 the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Print Room of the Museum of Modern Art has assembled more than 100 prints by Jacques Villon. This exhibition partially reveals the extent of the Museum’s collection of his prints.

Mr. Ludwig Charell in New York and the Public Library in Boston have also assembled large representations of Villon’s graphic work. The Albert H. Wiggin Collection of the Boston Public Library was exhibited in 1951. A selection from Mr. Charell’s collection is shown here for the first time.

In Paris and New York Mr. Charell has been an invaluable aid in the preparation of the exhibition and has generously lent 36 of the 96 prints included.

I wish also to thank: Miss Dorothy L. Lytle, Assistant Curator of Prints at the Museum of Modern Art; Mr. George Heard Hamilton of the Yale University Art Gallery; Mr. Arthur W. Heintzelman of the Boston Public Library; and M. Bernard Gheerbrant of the Bibliothèque La Hune in Paris.

WILLIAM S. LIEBERMAN
JACQUES VILLON: HIS GRAPHIC ART

When the first prize at the Carnegie International exhibition of paintings in Pittsburgh was awarded to Jacques Villon in 1950, he was to most Americans the least familiar of the masters of the School of Paris. The present exhibition, although limited exclusively to his graphic work, offers the New York public its first retrospective of his art.

Like his contemporary Georges Rouault, Villon’s reputation will rest as firmly upon his accomplishment as a printmaker as upon his achievement as a painter. The extent of his graphic oeuvre, more than 600 engravings and lithographs, exceeds in number that of Braque, Matisse, Picasso or Rouault. Today, six decades after his first etchings of 1891, Villon can look upon a production of printed work which in variety and technique is surpassed by no other living artist.

Villon was born in Normandy (Damville, Eure) in 1875. His grandfather, Emile Nicolle, an etcher of architectural views, encouraged his ambitions as an artist. “At an early age,” Villon remembers, “I was accustomed to handling copper plates, to the smell of etching acid and the sound of melting varnish.” But his father, a notary, insisted that he study for the law.

Villon was apprenticed to a law office in Rouen, but at the age of nineteen he definitely decided to become an artist and went to Paris. At the same time he renounced his family name — he had been christened Gaston Duchamp — and adopted the name Jacques Villon.

Raymond Duchamp, a younger brother already sent to Paris to study medicine, also decided to change professions and became the sculptor Duchamp-Villon. Usually called the first cubist sculptor, he contracted typhoid fever at the end of the Great War and died in 1918. Another younger brother, Marcel, an innovator in cubism and the father of dada, has lived permanently in New York since 1942.

The work of all three brothers was first seen in America at the Armory show of 1913, an exhibition organized with the help of their close friend, the American painter Walter Pach. The succès scandale, of the show was Marcel Duchamp’s Nude Descending a Staircase which so startled the public that even today it remains the most famous of cubist paintings.

Villon himself has described his initial attempts at printmaking at the age of sixteen. “In 1891 I made my first print. We were in the country and I had neither ground nor mordant for biting the copper. I prepared my plate with melted candle wax and purchased acid at the pharmacist’s. I used the acid undiluted and the result was catastrophic. I was obliged to begin all over again. After some reflection I diluted the turbulent solution with water. The result, a portrait of my father (no. 1), was my first etching — signed and dated G. Duchamp 1891. My second print done in the same year was a portrait of my grandfather (no. 2). After that I did no more etching until 1899.”

Villon arrived in Paris in January 1895. He attended Fernand Cormon’s studio on the Boulevard Clichy but was able to find, almost immediately, employment as an illustrator and cartoonist. He worked for several revues, in particular Le Courrier Français, a weekly newspaper to which he contributed a regular feature until 1910.

The art of lithography, drawing on and printing from stones, was developed at the beginning of the 19th century. Its first brilliant exponents were French painters such as Géricault, Delacroix and Daumier but by 1860 lithography was almost completely dominated by commercial printers. Toward the end of the century, however, many artists in France returned to lithography as an original and creative medium. An inexpensive method of printing pictures in color, it was admirably suited to advertising and commercial exploitation. Among the earliest, and certainly the most prolific, practitioners of the lithographed poster was Jules Chéret. During the 90’s striking posters by Bonnard, Grasset, Guillaume, Mucha,
Steinlen, Toulouse-Lautrec and Willette could be seen everywhere on the walls and kiosks of Paris. This marked the first appearance of posters on a mass produced scale and they were discussed, reproduced and not seldom collected as works of art. For the more particular collector, that always fastidious amateur devoted to fine prints, Toulouse-Lautrec and Bonnard and painters such as Cézanne, Denis, Renoir, Signac and Vuillard also produced many single color lithographs as well as numerous portfolios and illustrated books.

To a great extent these painter lithographers initiated the extraordinary revival of interest in printmaking that has continued through the 20th century. To an artist beginning to make prints, lithography seems easily the most painterly of all the graphic media. The chemistry of etching appears more complicated and requires specific training and experience. And lithography, as it was practiced in France in 1900 (and again today), often necessitates less work from the artist than it does from the printer.

Between 1895 and 1907 Villon drew over thirty lithographs, most of which are in color (nos. 3, 27, 28). He worked in close collaboration with a printer and also composed seven posters which were lithographed in color. Several of Villon's posters are film advertisements but the most arresting is an announcement for a bar, another form of entertainment developed during the 1890's. Le Grillon: American Bar (no. 7) is dated 1899, eight years after the first affiche of Toulouse-Lautrec. With its bold and sinuous letters, this poster is a brilliant example of the art nouveau.

Although color lithography was at its heyday, not many painters were working in color in intaglio—etching, aquatint, drypoint and engraving in metal. Indeed in France since the 18th century color printing from intaglio plates had been largely neglected. The American painter Mary Cassatt, however, had developed a highly personal method of color printing and a few painters, under the direction of the master printer Eugène Delâtre, began to explore the possibilities of the medium. In 1899 they were joined by Villon.

When he came to Delâtre's the lessons of his grandfather, the etcher Nicolle, were of course invaluable. Villon's first published plates (nos. 4-6) reveal an accomplished etcher and between 1899 and 1910 he produced about 175 intaglio plates, many of which are in color. These prints offer a vivid and engaging portrait of Paris at the turn of the century—ladies of society and the demi-monde, the bohemia of Montmartre and the Quartier Latin, dance halls and street fairs, children in the park, holidays at the seaside and, frequently, his own family in the intimacy of their everyday life.

By 1910 he had completed a body of printed work such as few painters achieve in a lifetime. At their best his color etchings and aquatints suggest the boldness and brilliance of Toulouse-Lautrec touched with the elegance and charm of Paul Helleu. The popularity of his work can be measured by the success at the same time of the novels of Colette, to which his prints might so often serve as illustrations. Villon had found a style and established a formula. However, this first period of his graphic art gives little indication of the direction of his art during the next forty years.
The full impact of the cubist detonation struck Villon in 1911. The change in his art was quick and between 1911 and 1914 he devoted most of his energies to painting. The illustrative and genre aspect of his art disappeared and he concentrated upon the analysis and simplification of form. The redirection of his art was so abrupt that his publisher Edmond Sagot refused to continue to edit his prints.

With his brothers, Duchamp-Villon and Marcel Duchamp, he contributed to the first cubist group exhibition at the Salon des Indépendants of 1911. The next year he was instrumental in organizing those cubist painters who exhibited as the Section d'Or. Although painting occupied most of his time, a constellation of a dozen prints (nos. 43-49) mirrors the climax of his development as a cubist painter. His architectonic, even monumental, treatment of form is enlivened by an interest in movement that parallels the Futurists. While the most ambitious of his previous prints had been in color, his graphic production as a cubist is entirely printed in black and white—a reflection, certainly, of the sobriety and neutralization of color characteristic of cubist paintings by himself and by Braque and Picasso.

When Villon returned to Paris in 1920, a year after his demobilization, it was as a printmaker rather than as a painter that he resumed work. He needed money and undertook two arduous projects which consumed most of his time during the next decade. These projects consisted of reproductive rather than original engraving. For Architectures published by the Nouvelle Revue Fran-

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Marcel Duchamp (the artist’s brother). 1904. Drypoint, 143/4 x 113/8". Collection Ludwig Charell, New York

caise he engraved about thirty architectural renderings in black and white. In 1922, for the dealers and publisher Bernheim-Jeune, he began a series of some forty intaglio plates in color after paintings by modern artists (nos. 92-96). No photomechanical processes were used in these renderings and they are miracles of the engraver’s art. The copper plates for the engravings, like those for his grandfather’s etchings, are now preserved by the Chalcographie du Louvre. Unfortunately only one was after a painting by Villon himself (no. 55).

During the 1920’s Villon devoted so much of his energies to the reproduction of paintings by other artists that he had little time for his own graphic work. He etched less than twenty plates, all printed in black and white (nos. 50-54, 56-60).

After 1930 Villon’s finances improved and he abandoned reproductive engraving. Once again he was able to concentrate on painting and also continued to produce several prints each year. His etchings and engravings of the 1920’s and 30’s are remarkably consistent in style. They lack the austerity of his cubist prints and he concentrates upon the interplay of light and shade. His line is restrained and controlled, sometimes vibrant, sometimes mathematical in its precision. Space flows easily through gossamer webs of cross hatching; movement is suggested by contrasting and parallel planes of lines. Although conceived on a smaller scale than much of his earlier work, these prints after 1920 exploit a variety of methods of drawing on the copper plate. Villon’s interest in experimentation is constant but always controlled by balance and reserve.

Villon had seldom been a painter of the out-of-doors but in 1934 he undertook for the first time a series of landscapes (nos. 70-71) and the next year, during a visit to America, he drew two lithographs of the New York skyline (nos. 75, 76).

Today, as for many years he lives in a garden studio in Puteaux, once a suburb of Paris but now almost engulfed by the city. The spacious working room contains drawings and notes from his first days in Paris, his current paintings, selections of his prints and sculptures by his brother Duchamp-Villon (no. 65). He is a gracious host and his closest friends are neighbors: Frank Kupka, one of the earliest pioneers of abstract painting, and Camille Renault, chef and proprietor of the excellent restaurant in Puteaux (no. 85).

In 1940 he and his wife fled Paris before the Germans and spent several months near Toulouse. As has happened to so many painters, the sun drenched landscape of the south heightened the brilliancy of his palette. This was reflected in his graphic art and, after many years of printing in black and white, he resumed working in color (nos. 86, 88-91).

More than Braque or Picasso, Villon remains faithful to the cubist tradition especially in his painting. In his prints, with only two exceptions in the 1920’s (no. 55), he has never directed his art toward complete abstraction. Since 1940 his treatment of form recalls an architectonic analysis of structure, first revealed in his work between 1911 and 1914. Although his approach sometimes appears schematic, Villon never loses a sense of classic refinement and decoration that is particularly French. To his accustomed subjects — seated figures, still lifes and interiors, buildings and land-
Only in our time have so many of the foremost painters and sculptors of any period devoted so much of their best energies to the creation of original prints. Villon's sixty years as a printmaker exactly parallel this renascence. Indeed, as the British engraver and teacher Stanley William Hayter has said, Villon is "an unacknowledged father of modern printmaking."

William S. Lieberman
Curator of Prints

Child in a Tub. 1907. Drypoint, 9 x 7\(\frac{1}{2}\)". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, given anonymously.
Ball at the Moulin Rouge. 1910. Etching, 15\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 11\(\frac{3}{4}\)\". Collection Ludwig Charell, New York
Renee, the Young Mulatto. 1911. Drypoint, 21\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 16\(\frac{1}{8}\)”. The Museum of Modern Art, New York

Portrait of a Young Woman. 1913. Drypoint, 21 1/2 x 16". Yale University Art Gallery, Société Anonyme Collection
The Chess Board. 1920. Etching, 7 3/4 x 6 1/4". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Ludwig Charell
Girl's Head. 1929. Drypoint and etching, 10 1/2 x 8 1/8". Private collection, New York

The Tour de France at Chevreuse. 1935. Etching, 8 1/4 x 10 1/2". Private collection, New York
Interior, 1943. Etching, 10 1/4 x 8 1/2". The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Curt Valentin
The Adventure. 1935. Etching. 12\(\frac{3}{4}\) x 8\(\frac{1}{4}\)". Collection Fred Grunwald, Los Angeles
CATALOGUE OF THE EXHIBITION

donors of prints by villon to the museum of modern art

Mr. Larry L. Aldrich; M. Heinz Berggruen; Mr. Ludwig Charell; M. Jean Deniau; Katherine S. Dreier Bequest; M. Hubert de Givenchy; Mr. Edgar Kaufmann, Jr.; Mrs. Bertha Slattery Lieberman; Mr. James Lord; Mr. Victor S. Riesenfeld; Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.; Mrs. Muriel Stokes; Mr. Curt Valentin.

lenders to the exhibition

The Boston Public Library, Albert H. Wiggin Collection; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Yale University Art Gallery, Société Anonyme Collection.

Mr. Ludwig Charell, New York

Dates of exhibition: September 9 — November 15, 1953

Items marked with an asterisk are illustrated. The definitive catalogue of Villon's prints referred to as AP is Jacques Villon: catalogue de son œuvre gravé by Jacqueline Auberry and Charles Perussaux published by Paul Prouté, Paris, 1950.

1 The Artist's Father. 1891. Etching with touches of pen and ink (AP 1). Private Collection, New York


3 The Old Folk's Bench. 1899. Lithograph printed in color (AP 395). Collection Peter H. Deitsch, New York


6 Supervielle the Violinist. 1899. Aquatint printed in sanguine (AP 8). Collection Ludwig Charell, New York


8 Delly Mo. 1900. Poster lithographed in color (AP 450). Collection Ludwig Charell, New York


15 Old Noret Killing a Rooster. 1902. Aquatint printed in color (AP 36). Boston Public Library, Albert H. Wiggin Collection


26 Concert on the Beach. 1907. Etching and aquatint (AP 138). Collection Ludwig Charell, New York


33 The Masterpiece. 1907. Etching and aquatint, printed with touches of color (AP 159). Collection Ludwig Charell, New York


*38 Reneé, the Young Mulatto. 1911. Drypoint (AP 181). The Museum of Modern Art, New York


41 Push Cart Vendor, no. 1. 1912. Aquatint and etching, printed in color (AP 187). Collection Mr. and Mrs. Peter Bernard, New York

42 Push Cart Vendor, no. 2. 1913. Aquatint and etching (AP 188). Collection Ludwig Charell, New York


*44 Portrait of a Young Woman. 1913. Drypoint (AP 193). Yale University Art Gallery, Société Anonyme Collection, New Haven


*46 The Dinner Table. 1913. Drypoint (AP 196). The Museum of Modern Art, New York


The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Ludwig Charell
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Purchase Fund
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.
J. P. Dubray, no. 2. 1933. Etching and engraving (AP 232).
Collection Ludwig Charell, New York
J. P. Dubray, no. 1. 1933. Etching and engraving (AP 215).
Collection Ludwig Charell, New York
Collection Ludwig Charell, New York
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Mrs. Bertha Slattery Lieberman
Still Life with Globes. 1930. Etching (AP 225).
Collection Ludwig Charell, New York
Collection Ludwig Charell, New York
Woman's Head. 1928. Lithograph (AP 430). Boston Public Library, Albert H. Wiggin Collection
Girl's Head (second state). 1929. Drypoint and etching (AP 217b).
Collection Ludwig Charell, New York
Collection Ludwig Charell, New York
Student Reading. 1929. Etching (AP 218). The Museum of Modern Art, New York
The Haulers (second version). 1930. Drypoint and etching (AP 222).
Collection Ludwig Charell, New York
Collection Ludwig Charell, New York
Collection Ludwig Charell, New York
J. P. Dubray, no. 1. 1933. Etching and engraving (AP 254).
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
J. P. Dubray, no. 2. 1933. Etching (not listed, related to AP 254).
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Between Cannes and Mougins. 1934. Etching (AP 258).
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Mrs. Bertha Slattery Lieberman
The Tour de France at Chevreuse. 1935. Etching (AP 272). Private Collection, New York
New York. no. 1. 1933. Lithograph (AP 338). Boston Public Library, Albert H. Wiggin Collection
New York. no. 2. 1933. Lithograph (AP 439). Boston Public Library, Albert H. Wiggin Collection
A Grandmother. 1943. Drypoint and etching (AP 341).
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Jane Lord
Rouen Cathedral. 1948. Etching and drypoint (AP 376).
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Lamps. 1951. Etching, aquatint, roulette printed in color (not listed by AP). Collection Ludwig Charell, New York
Lamps. 1951. Aquatint and etching, printed in color (not listed by AP). Collection Ludwig Charell, New York
Horseback Rider in the Ring. 1951. Lithograph printed in color (not listed by AP). The Museum of Modern Art, New York, gift of Mrs. Hubert de Givenchy

Renditions by Jacques Villon after paintings by other artists