

LE CLAIRE

KUNST SEIT 1982



Victor Hugo



Charles Hugo (1826 PARIS - BORDEAUX 1871),
Victor Hugo seated on the Cliffs in Jersey,
photograph, 1853.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.
© bpk / RMN - Grand Palais / Charles Hugo





Charles Hugo (1826 Paris - Bordeaux 1871), *Victor Hugo outside the Conservatory at Marine Terrace in Jersey*, photograph, 1853. Musée d'Orsay Paris. © bpk / RMN - Grand Palais / Charles Hugo

VICTOR HUGO

1802 Besançon - Paris 1885

Visions of a Poet-Draughtsman

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GIANNA LE CLAIRE

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Victor Hugo the artist is now almost as well-known as Victor Hugo the poet and writer. Important exhibitions of his drawings were staged at the Petit Palais and the Maison de Victor Hugo in Paris to mark the centenary of his death in 1985. A series of major retrospectives followed – in New York (The Drawing Center) in 1998, in Ixelles (Musée d’Ixelles) in 1999, in Venice (Ca’ Pesaro, Galleria Internazionale d’Arte Moderna) in 1993, in Madrid (Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza) and in Paris (Maison de Victor Hugo) in 2000 – these last three thanks to the scholarly commitment of Jean-Jacques Lebel. Fine-tuned analytical work by Pierre Georgel has [...] furthered awareness of the relationship between Hugo’s drawings and his writings and led to a better understanding of his visual sources. This analytical work has, in addition, provided insights into the deep significance of works that have come to attract increasing public interest.¹

Victor Hugo’s drawings have rarely appeared on the international art market in recent years. It has been difficult for museums and private collectors to acquire his major works because they were frequently outbid at auction by Jan Krugier (d. 2008), the dealer and collector. Krugier’s all-consuming interest in art encouraged him to open a gallery in Geneva in 1962 – Galerie Jan Krugier & Cie. The opening of a gallery in New York quickly followed. Krugier and his wife, Marie-Anne Krugier-Poniatowski, were ardent collectors and their principled commitment to the understanding of the arts was remarkable. One of their great achievements was to assemble an outstanding private collection of works on paper by artists of many different periods, which they put together with single-minded determination and professionalism over a very lengthy period.

It is a great pleasure to be offering four drawings by Victor Hugo from a highly important private collection such as this. The Krugiers were enthusiastic collectors of Hugo’s work and owned a large corpus of his drawings. The four drawings now offered featured in major museum exhibitions in Venice, Madrid, Frankfurt and Paris in the years 1993 to 2013.²

We are extremely grateful to Gerhard Kehlenbeck for his research and his perceptive and wonderful readable catalogue entries. Pierre Georgel has kindly confirmed the authenticity of the drawings. He will include them into his forthcoming catalogue raisonné.

Thomas and Gianna le Claire

VICTOR HUGO - LIFE AND WORK

Victor Hugo was born in Besançon on 26 February 1802. He was the third son of Joseph-Léopold Hugo and Sophie Françoise Trébuchet. Joseph-Léopold, an officer in Napoleon's Grande Armée, later advanced to the rank of general. The family was based in Paris but moved frequently as Joseph-Léopold was stationed in Corsica, Italy and Spain. Victor was educated privately by a tutor and attended the Pension Cordier boarding school in Paris in the years 1815-18. He showed precocious artistic talent but also excelled at writing poetry – he submitted a poem to an Académie Française poetry competition at the age of fifteen in 1817. An exercise book dating from the same year documents his early sketches. His parents separated in 1818.

In 1819, Victor and his brothers Eugène and Abel launched a journal titled *Le Conservateur littéraire*. The journal was modelled on the writings of Chateaubriand, a conservative and religious precursor of Romanticism. In 1822, Hugo was awarded life pension of 1,000 francs by Louis XVIII for his *Odes et poésies diverses*. In the same year he married Adèle Foucher. The marriage was to produce five children. He published his first book, *Han d'Islande*, a work in the idiom of the English Gothic novel, in 1823. He founded a new journal titled *La Muse française* in the same year. In 1825 he was commissioned to compose an ode on the coronation of Charles X. He moved to Reims to write the piece in the shadow of the Cathedral. The poem's pomp and pathos was well received by the new king and Hugo was appointed a Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur.

In the late 1820s, Hugo's political loyalties underwent a change in the direction of liberalism and he was increasingly critical of the restoration of the monarchy. His verse drama *Cromwell* was published in 1827. The preface to the drama – a manifesto for the Romantic movement – was enthusiastically received by young audiences. In 1829 he published *Le Dernier jour d'un condamné*, a short story in which he first openly voiced his criticism of capital punishment. He also published *Hernani*, a play which triggered a dispute between Classicists and Romantics. In the July Revolution of 1830 leading members of the bourgeoisie replaced aristocrats at the centre of power and Louis Philippe – the *roi bourgeois* – was crowned king of France. Hugo committed himself to the Revolution. In 1831 he published his highly successful novel, *Notre-Dame de Paris* [*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*]. The work has retained its popularity to this day, not least because of the film versions based on it.

Hugo began to give more time to drawing around 1825. He moved his family to a property on the Place Royale, today's Place des Vosges, in 1832. In the same year he wrote three plays – *Le Roi s'amuse*, *Marie Tudor* and *Lucrece Borgia*. At a performance of *Lucrece Borgia* in 1833 he met the actress Juliette Drouet, who would be his official mistress. He published two volumes of poetry in quick succession – *Les Chants du crépuscule* in 1835 and *Les Voix intérieures* in 1837. He began to travel regularly in the summer months and produced travel sketchbooks. He visited Germany on three occasions between 1838 and 1840 and recorded his travels along the Rhine in numerous sketches of the river and its many castles. He also published a book titled *Le Rhin*. This was designed to familiarize the French reading public with German *Kultur*. Contrary to the mood of the time, Hugo supported a Franco-German alliance in which he envisaged the Rhine playing a convergent rather than a divisive role.

Hugo twice failed to be elected to the Académie Française but was successful at the third attempt in 1841. He became increasingly active politically. In 1845 he was appointed a *Pair de France* and entered the Upper House. This provoked a sarcastic reaction in the Republican press.

He was a close observer of the February Revolution of 1848 but distanced himself from events. Although he was a strong believer in democracy, which he saw as the political system of the future, he doubted whether the populace was sufficiently educated for it to function effectively.

In 1848 he began to spend more time on his drawings and these, like his literary works, gained increasing public recognition. In 1850 he set up a studio at the house of Juliette Drouet and took to offering his friends drawings of castles and ruined buildings, presenting them in self-designed frames.

Hugo was elected to the National Assembly in 1849 and also elected president of the Congrès de la Paix. He gave lectures on the freedom of the educational system, the theatre, the press and on universal suffrage. The socialists lauded him for this but rejected him as one of their own. The conservatives, treating him like a traitor, spurned and insulted him. When Louis Napoléon Bonaparte seized power in a coup d'état on 2 December 1851 – proclaiming himself Napoleon III and going on to establish the Second Empire in early 1852 – Hugo openly attempted to organize opposition, correctly anticipating that parliament would be neutered. Shortly afterwards, he was forced to leave France for Brussels, travelling with a false passport. This was the beginning of a lengthy exile. It would last until 1870.

In August 1852, he was also obliged to leave Brussels. He moved to the Channel Islands and settled in Jersey. His family and Juliette Drouet followed. From his house, Marine Terrace, he could see the French coast. In 1853 he published a volume of satirical verse titled *Châtiments*. Delphine de Girardin, a Paris friend, began to hold seances at the house. Sceptical at first, Hugo gradually warmed to the idea, particularly when the ghosts of the dead were induced to speak. These spiritualist sessions inspired a series of drawings. By now, Hugo was concentrating on ink and began to incorporate random, spontaneous effects in his drawings. He also used stencils and a variety of transfer processes, rubbings, blots and *pliages*. In 1856 he published a book of religious poems, *Contemplations*, and at about this time began work on two theological works – *La Fin de Satan* and *Dieu*.

Hugo was expelled from Jersey in 1855 after siding with a protest against the visit of Queen Victoria to France. Conveniently, he was able to move to Guernsey and bought Hauteville House in St. Peter Port. Here, he busied himself producing designs for the furnishings of the house. In terms of his artistic output, this was to be a particularly productive period in which he produced some of his best work.

In 1859, Hugo chose to reject Napoleon III's offer of an amnesty. He completed the first part of *La Légende des siècles* and in 1862, after a lengthy period of preparation, *Les Misérables*. This too has been much filmed and turned into a musical. In 1863, Adèle Hugo published a biography of her husband titled *Victor Hugo raconté par un témoin de sa vie*. She moved with her two sons to Brussels in 1865, where she died in 1868.

In 1864-5, prompted by the view of the sea from his lookout at Hauteville House, Hugo wrote *Les Travailleurs de la mer*, a novel which he dedicated to the island of Guernsey and its inhabitants: *à ce coin de vieille terre normande où vit le noble petit peuple de la mer, l'île de Guernesey, sévère et douce*. In July 1870, under the impression of the looming war between Prussia and France, Hugo planted what he called 'the oak of the United States of Europe' in the garden of his house in Guernsey.

The Second Empire collapsed on 4 September 1870 following the Battle of Sedan and the capture of Napoleon III. On the very next day, Hugo, then sixty-eight years old, returned to Paris to a hero's welcome. He published two novels, *L'Homme qui rit* – which dealt with the political history of England after 1688 – and *Quatrevingt-treize*, offering a view of the aftermath of the French Revolution. Hugo was re-elected to the National Assembly, only to resign a short time later. In 1872 he returned to Guernsey for a year, where he wrote a volume of poetry titled *L'Année terrible*. He was elected and re-elected to the Senate in the years 1876 and 1882. Juliette Drouet died in 1883. Hugo died on 22 May 1885. His catafalque was placed in state under the Arc de Triomphe. On 1 June a vast crowd followed his coffin to the Panthéon, where he was interred in the crypt between the tombs of Voltaire and Rousseau.³



Auguste Edmond Vacquerie (1819 - 1895), *Victor Hugo reading*, photograph, Jersey 1853.
Musée d'Orsay, Paris. © bpk / RMN - Grand Palais / Auguste Edmond Vacquerie

VICTOR HUGO AS A DRAUGHTSMAN

Hugo's literary output was vast but he was also a prolific and accomplished draughtsman. He produced around three thousand six hundred drawings over a period of fifty years. The two principal groups of these drawings – constituting about two thirds of his *oeuvre* – are today in two public collections in Paris – the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Maison de Victor Hugo.⁴

Substantial as his output of drawings was, for Hugo the act of drawing remained a largely private, cloistered activity. He saw himself first and foremost as a writer addressing a broad public. His drawings were neither exhibited nor sold during his lifetime. Pierre Georgel has examined Hugo's ambivalent approach to his drawings in some detail.⁵ Hugo comments on them self-disparagingly: *I would never have imagined that my drawings [...] would attract attention. [...] these trial attempts at drawing [...], these things people insist on calling my drawings [...], these mediocre pen-and-ink lines put down on paper more or less awkwardly and any old how by a man who has other things to do [...].* However the importance of his drawings did not escape his contemporaries. Théophile Gautier had been touting their qualities since 1838: *If Victor Hugo were not a poet, he would be a first-class painter: in fierce and sombre fantasies he excels in blending the chiaroscuro effects of Goya with the architectural terror of Piranesi.* And Baudelaire was also to praise Hugo's drawings, noting in a review of the 1859 Salon: *[...] the magnificent imagination that flows through Victor Hugo's drawings [is] like a mystery in the sky.*⁶ Hugo, flattered by Baudelaire's remarks, wrote to him later: *I am quite happy and very proud to hear of your kind opinion about what I call my pen-and-ink drawings. I've ended up mixing in pencil, charcoal, sepia, coal dust, soot and all kinds of bizarre substances which manage more or less to render what I have in view and especially in mind. This is how I entertain myself between two verses.* Despite the self-disparagement, Hugo was to take very great care of his drawings and guarded them carefully. He framed some of them and hung them on his own walls, and he gave them only to friends, and to painters and art critics. But he did allow a few dozen of them to be reproduced as engravings.

Hugo began to give more time to drawing around 1825. He produced architectural and furniture designs, caricatures for his children, and graphic vignettes related to his plays. He also produced his first travel sketches. Relatively little of this early work has survived. It was not until his journey to the Rhine in 1840 that he developed his own pictorial vocabulary and style. Georgel describes this: *He finally passed from the picturesque to contemplative vision [...]. At the same time, his most obsessive themes began to crystallize around the memorable image of the 'Burg', in depictions using a black-and-white technique deeply rooted in both his temperament and the style of the period.*⁷ And indeed some of Hugo's landscape drawings of the 1840s are reminiscent of contemporary work by members of the Barbizon school.

Although Hugo's work shows a penchant for ruined castles and waterfront towns he drew strongly on memory and imagination. His themes, formats and techniques became richer as he responded to the creative challenges he had set himself. As Georgel notes: *Although his taste for the picturesque and search for dramatic effects show an affinity with Romantic imagery, his drawings go further in their energy, freedom of technique and exceptionally intense sense of mystery. From about 1845 these were the dominant characteristics of his work which would endure without major change for thirty years.*⁸

Hugo appears to have been particularly productive as a draughtsman in periods when he was less active as a writer, around 1850 for example. Conversely, there are very few extant drawings dating from the years 1852-3 – a period of intense literary activity. Georgel explains: *In the space of a few months Hugo transferred to drawing the creativity that had hitherto found its expression in literature. While his life was taken up with political activity and love affairs, drawing took over from poetry the task of expressing his deepest personal feelings.*⁹ He usually worked on a small scale but in the twelve months of 1850 alone, he was to produce some fifteen large-scale works, among them allegorical compositions and vast landscapes depicting ruins, marshlands and deserts. Two of the drawings published in this catalogue – *A Stoneware Jug* [No. 1] and *Landscape with Ruins* [No. 2] – were executed at about this time and represent a high point in Hugo's career as a draughtsman.

During Hugo's years as a political exile in the Channel Islands his visual world was enriched by dramatic seascapes. In the early years of his exile he produced a group of sketches which draw directly on rambles around the island of Jersey. Few of these sketches are actually based on observed nature. They are remarkable for their economy of means, concentration and use of dramatically frozen chiaroscuro. The majority of them depart from observed reality where they attempt to depict the kaleidoscope of sea, rock and cloud. A group of ink and wash drawings relating to the novel *Les Travailleurs de la mer*, written in 1864-5, are stylistically and thematically comparable. The drawings were not composed as direct illustrations for the novel although they are thematically linked to it. They were executed on different types and sizes of paper. When the original manuscript came back from the publisher in May 1866 thirty-six of the ink and wash drawings were selected to be pasted onto single sheets and bound in with the manuscript. Hugo's decision to bind the drawings in with the original manuscript suggests that he viewed his activities as a writer and a draughtsman as very closely allied.¹⁰

As a draughtsman, Hugo relied primarily on brown or black ink and wash. He applied his washes with a fluidity and transparency that produced remarkable tonal and atmospheric effects. This is a conventional technique, however his other working methods were highly original. Hugo's son Charles notes: *Once paper, pen and inkwell have been brought to the table, Victor Hugo sits down and without making a preliminary sketch, without any apparent preconception, sets about drawing with an extraordinarily sure hand, not the landscape as a whole but any old detail. He begins his forest with the branch of a tree, his town with a gable, his gable with a weather vane, and, little by little, the entire composition will emerge from the blank paper with the precision and clarity of a photographic negative subjected to the chemical preparation that brings out the picture. That done, the draughtsman will call for a cup of black coffee and will finish off his landscape with a light dousing of coffee. The result is an unexpected and powerful drawing that is often strange, always personal, and recalls the etchings of Rembrandt and Piranesi.*¹¹

Another of Hugo's preferred techniques was the *tache* – the use of ink blots and stains to develop a drawing. This technique occurs chiefly in his notebooks of 1856-7. *Taches* could also be created by folding the paper they were on to produce symmetrical patterns. He would also use cut-outs and stencils, and make impressions from lacework. These highly unusual, experimental techniques had no precedent in graphic tradition. Today, they seem surprisingly modern and can be seen as precursors of abstraction. Georgel describes them: *There is a fluid, formless mass, susceptible to exploration and to chance effects. Here, one finds drawings 'dictated' by [spiritualist] table-turning, albums full of fantastic scribbles, cut-outs, impressions and blots which sometimes make us wonder whether they are figurative or not, whether they are finished works or rough sketches, or a form of creation on an ambiguous frontier between art and non-art.* Georgel also points out similarities and analogies between Hugo's literary and graphic work of the period: *They appear when Hugo submerged 'Les Contemplations' beneath a flood of metaphysical poetry, and pursued the grand, never-to-be-finished projects titled 'Dieu' and 'La Fin de Satan'.*¹²

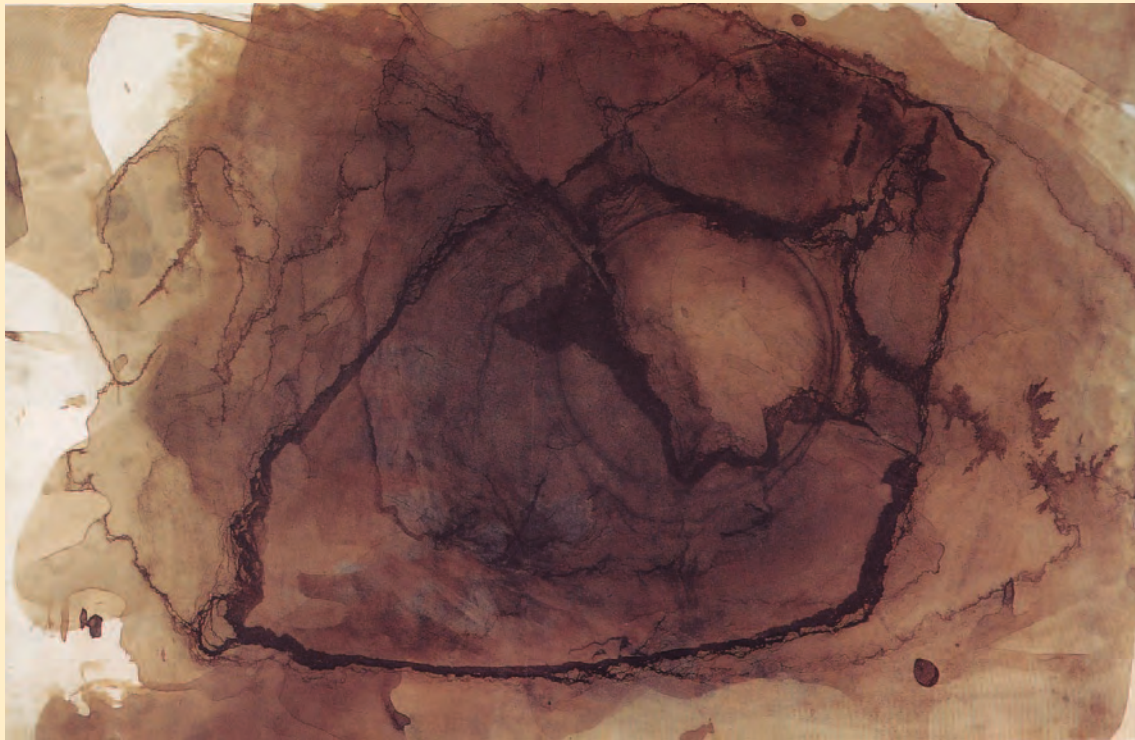
In the 1860s, Hugo continued his blottesque experiments with new application and achieved fresh painterly effects. He also returned to the satirical tendencies of his youth and made a large number of caricatures which he organized in two groups, one titled *Théâtre de la gaieté* (1870) and the other *Poème de la sorcière* (1873). He produced far fewer drawings in the last ten years of his life and a similar decline occurred in his literary output.

Critical acclaim for Hugo's literary achievements long overshadowed public recognition of his work as a draughtsman. His prodigious reputation as France's national poet took precedence. Public interest in his drawings has developed only gradually. In 1862, Paul Chenay, Hugo's brother-in-law, published an album of engravings after twenty-three of his drawings with a preface by Théophile Gautier. In 1882, a portfolio

of 64 plates was published containing wood-engravings by Louis-Fortuné Méaulle after drawings by Hugo. The first exhibition of Hugo's drawings was not to be staged until 1888, three years after his death. Organized by Paul Meurice it showcased 156 drawings at Galerie Georges Petit in Paris. It was there that the Symbolists discovered Hugo's drawings. Joris-Karl Huysmanns and Émile Verhaeren were to publish important essays on them, and two years later Van Gogh referred to them as 'astonishing things'.

In the twentieth century, the Surrealists were to be the first to discover Hugo's drawings. They identified a forerunner of their aesthetic in his dark, menacing fantasies with their emphasis on bizarre juxtaposition, free association and irrationality. André Breton, who owned one of Hugo's drawings, was strongly attracted to their unrivalled suggestive powers. Hugo, with his formidable repertory of working methods – formal experimentation, *pliajes*, frottages, fingerprints, papercuts, blots and stains – came to be seen as prefiguring Surrealism, Tachisme, Art Brut and the monochrome painting of the second half of the twentieth century.

Although recognition of Hugo's literary achievement appears to have waned – with the exception of *Notre-Dame de Paris* [*The Hunchback of Notre Dame*] and *Les Misérables* – his drawings are attracting increasing attention. He is finally being recognized as a first-generation modernist, ranking beside Turner and Moreau. At a major exhibition staged in Frankfurt in 2007-8, Hugo's drawings provided hard evidence that even abstract art has its roots in romanticism.



La planète, brown ink and wash, 285 x 445 mm, c.1850.
Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon

SELECTED LITERATURE AND EXHIBITION CATALOGUES

Philippe Burty, *Les dessins de Victor Hugo*, in *L'Art*, 12 September 1875, pp. 32-8

Henri Focillon, *Les dessins de Victor Hugo*, in *Bulletin des Amis de l'Université de Lyon*, March-April 1914, pp. 72-86

Jean Sergent, *Dessins de Victor Hugo*, Paris and Geneva, 1955

Roger Cornaille and Georges Herscher, *Victor Hugo dessinateur*, Paris 1963

Jean Massin (ed.), *Dessins et lavis I*, in *Victor Hugo: Œuvres complètes*, XVII, Paris 1967

Jean Massin (ed.), *Dessins et lavis II*, in *Victor Hugo: Œuvres complètes*, XVIII, Paris 1969

Pierre Georgel, *Le Romantisme des années 1860. Correspondance Victor Hugo – Philippe Burty*, in *Revue de l'Art*, 20, 1973, pp. 8-64

Pierre Georgel, *Drawings by Victor Hugo*, exhib. cat., Victoria and Albert Museum, London 1974

Dessins de Victor Hugo, Maison de Victor Hugo, Paris 1985

Pierre Georgel, *La Gloire de Victor Hugo*, exhib. cat., Galeries nationales du Grand Palais, Paris 1985

Victor Hugo and the Romantic Vision, Drawings and Watercolors, exhib. cat., Jan Krugier Gallery, New York and Galerie Jan Krugier, Geneva 1990-1

Jean-Jacques Lebel and Marie-Laure Prévost *Victor Hugo pittore*, exhib. cat., Venice, Ca' Pesaro, Galleria d'arte moderna, Venice 1993

Shadows of a Hand. The Drawings of Victor Hugo, exhib. cat., The Drawing Center, New York 1998

Victor Hugo dessinateur, exhib. cat., Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels 1999

The Timeless Eye. Master Drawings from the Jan and Marie-Anne Krugier-Poniatowski Collection, exhib. cat., Berlin 1999

Linie, Licht und Schatten, Meisterzeichnungen und Skulpturen der Sammlung Jan und Marie-Anne Krugier-Poniatowski, exhib. cat., Berlin 1999

Du chaos dans le pinceau: Victor Hugo, dessins, exhib. cat., Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid and Maison de Victor Hugo, Paris 2000

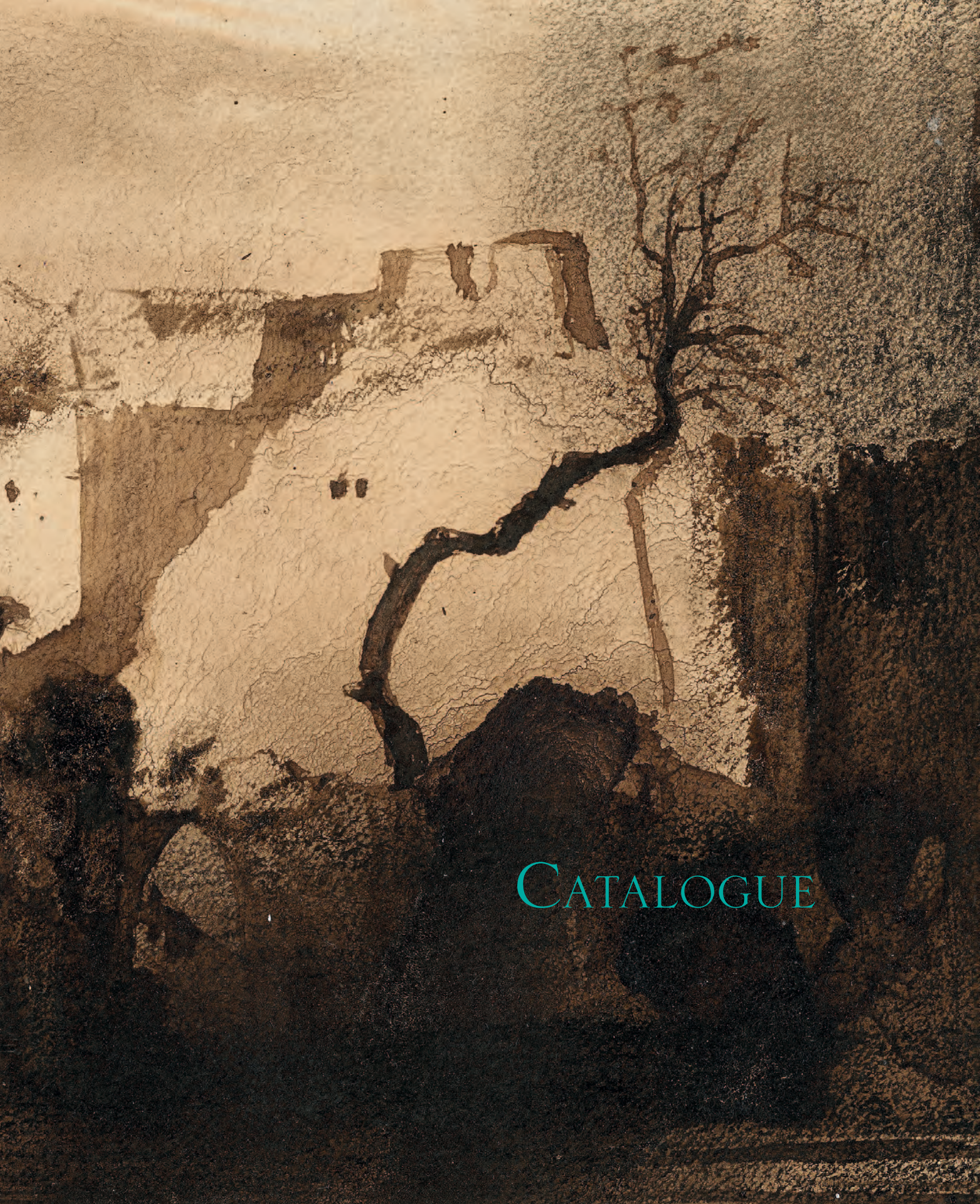
Ralph Rosenberg and Max Hollein (eds.), *Turner - Hugo - Moreau. Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, exhib. cat., Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main 2007-8

Ernst-Gerhard Güse (ed.), *Victor Hugo – Visionen eines Schriftstellers*, exhib. cat., Klassik Stiftung Weimar, Schiller Museum, Weimar 2008

Florian Rodari (ed.), *Victor Hugo. Dessins visionnaires*, exhib. cat., Fondation de l'Hermitage, Lausanne 2008

Felix Krämer (ed.), *Schwarze Romantik. Von Goya bis Max Ernst*, exhib. cat., Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main 2012-3

L'ange du bizarre. Le romantisme noir de Goya à Max Ernst, exhib. cat., Musée d'Orsay, Paris 2013



CATALOGUE

A STONEWARE JUG

Pen and brush and brown ink on laid paper with watermark fragment: *J Wha[tman]*; executed c.1850.
329 x 248 mm

PROVENANCE: Estate of the artist (with the Gâtine inventory stamp and number 106/536) – By descent to the artist's grandson, Georges Hugo; by descent to his son, François Hugo; by inheritance to his step-sister, Marguerite Hugo (by 1963); by inheritance to her brother, Jean Hugo – Private collection, Geneva – Jan Krugier and Marie-Anne Poniatowski, Geneva (acquired in December 1981) – Thence by descent

LITERATURE: Roger Cornaille and Georges Herscher, *Victor Hugo dessinateur*, Lausanne 1963, p. 94, no. 210, repr. p. 156 – Jean Massin (ed.), *Victor Hugo: œuvres complètes*, Paris 1969, II, no. 840, repr.

EXHIBITIONS: *Victor Hugo and The Romantic Vision, Drawings and Watercolors*, exhib. cat., Jan Krugier Gallery, New York and Galerie Jan Krugier, Geneva 1990-1, no. 28, repr. – *Victor Hugo dessinateur*, exhib. cat., Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels 1999, no. 20, repr. – *Linie, Licht und Schatten, Meisterzeichnungen und Skulpturen der Sammlung Jan und Marie-Anne Krugier-Poniatowski*, exhib. cat., Berlin 1999, p. 406, repr. – *Victor Hugo et les siens. Deux siècles d'art et d'artistes*, exhib. cat., Galerie d'Art du Conseil Général des Bouches-du-Rhône, Aix-en-Provence 2002, repr. – Pierre Georgel, *1850, Le Burg à la croix*, exhib. cat., Paris-Musées, 2007, p. 93, no. 59, repr.

The model for this drawing by Victor Hugo was a Rhenish stoneware jug. It was probably made in Siegburg c.1575. A comparable jug from the workshop of Anno Knütgen bearing the same coat of arms and also dating from around 1575 is preserved in the Museum August Kestner, Hanover [fig. 1]. Like other German stoneware of the period, it carries moulded relief decoration. The jug bears the coat of arms of William, Duke of Jülich-Cleve-Berg (1516-92), supported by two lions rampant. It is also decorated with the depiction of a saint in a cartouche and a number of portrait heads in medallions. At the neck of the jug is a small, bearded face mask. The face mask is one of the characteristic ornaments applied to Rhenish stoneware of the period. Jugs of this variety had been exported from Germany to markets in Northern Europe and the British Isles since the late Middle Ages. It is not known when Hugo made this drawing. The jug may have been in his possession – a decorative item at Hauteville House, his home in Guernsey, which was furnished with different types of Asian and European pottery [fig. 2] The motif is unique in Hugo's *oeuvre*. He dispenses entirely with preparatory drawing and the dexterity of his brushwork and skilful application of contrasting areas of brown wash – using a darker tone to heighten the luminosity of the sheet – testify to his remarkable talents as a draughtsman.



Fig. 1: Marcus Cyron, *Siegburg stoneware jug*, c.1575. Museum August Kestner, Hanover [inv. no. 1913.23]



Fig. 2: Anonymous photographer, *Hauteville House, dining room*, c.1857. Maison de Victor Hugo, Paris



2

LANDSCAPE WITH RUINS

Brown ink and brown wash on envelope paper; executed c.1847-51. Inscribed on the verso by another hand: *Pair de France / Membre de l'académie française / 6 Place Royale* [Fig. 1].

97 x 262 mm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, France – Sale, Tajan, Paris, 26 November 1998, lot 98 – Sale, Christie's, New York, 22 January 2004, lot 141 (bt. Krugier) – Jan Krugier and Marie-Anne Poniatowski, Geneva – Thence by descent

EXHIBITIONS: *Turner - Hugo - Moreau. Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main, 2007-8, no. 126, repr. – *Victor Hugo. Dessins visionnaires*, Fondation de l'Hermitage, Lausanne, 2008, no. 15, repr. – *Schwarze Romantik. Von Goya bis Max Ernst*, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main 2012-3, no. 63, repr. – *L'ange du bizarre. Le romantisme noir de Goya à Max Ernst*, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 2013, no. 46, repr.

This drawing was executed on the back of a large envelope sent to Victor Hugo at some point between April 1845, when he was nominated *Pair de France*, and July 1848, when he moved out of his property on the Place Royale, where he had lived since 8 October 1832. The drawing is a highly characteristic example of Hugo's style in the years between 1847 and 1851. Pierre Georgel comments on his stylistic development in these years: *A deeper experience of nature appears in the depiction of space. Supple trees interpose curtains of foliage between the light of the air and the light of the water. Even buildings lose their solidity and become delicate screens reminiscent of a shadow theatre. The naturalistic motifs, the sensitivity to atmosphere conveyed by subtly contrasting values relate the drawings of this period to a whole range of dreamlike Romantic landscapes.*¹³

The drawing was developed from a series of seemingly random blots of diluted brown ink. As the ink dried it left a delicate web of ghostly lines at the edge of each blot. Hugo then worked over this, wiping it in downward sweeps with a dry brush to create broad, tonally graded areas of shadow. These appear as dark verticals that conjure up a mysterious backdrop pierced by patches of light – suggesting spatial depth. Fluid horizontal washes in the foreground – perhaps applied with a feather – create the impression of water. Hugo's imaginative skills are sparked by this randomly generated, raw configuration. He sees in his mind's eye a landscape with ruins, to which he then gives more concrete form, defining details with a brush and brown ink. But he leaves the metamorphosis half-finished for the viewer to resolve. At the left of the image architectural elements and open space meld and the border between them is undefined. The dark verticals can be interpreted as shadow from a high wall and as driving rain veiling a landscape.

Visual ambiguity and interplay between illusion and reality are the defining features of Hugo's drawings in the years around 1850. Georgel notes: *The majority of these compositions isolate familiar landscapes and objects in empty space where confused illusionary appearances seem to float. This metamorphosis of familiar things, this intermix of reality and illusion relates to the dream state, and ranks a number of the drawings of 1850 among the masterpieces of fantasy in art.*¹⁴

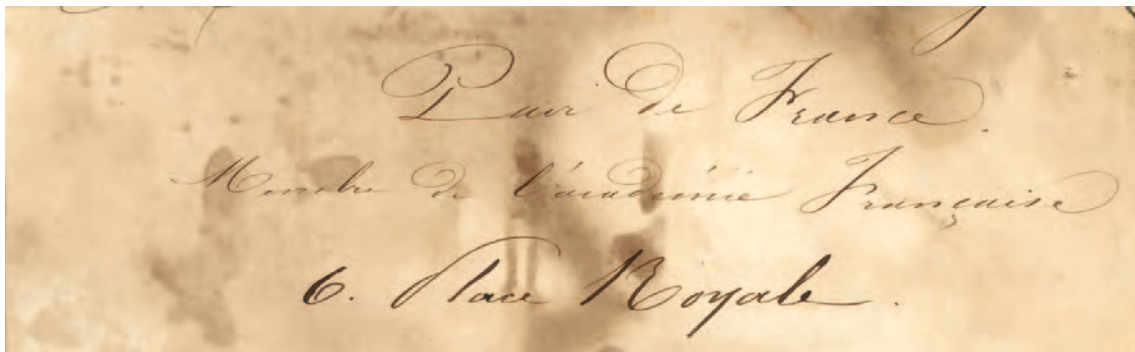


Fig. 1: Inscription on the verso.



Actual size

3

LANDSCAPE WITH A BRIDGE, GUERNSEY

Brown ink, pencil, brown and grey wash on laid paper from a sketchbook; executed in 1856.
86 x 147 mm

PROVENANCE: Private collection, France — Jan Krugier and Marie-Anne Poniatowski, Geneva (acquired from the above in 2001) — Thence by descent

EXHIBITIONS: Victor Hugo Peintre, Ca' Pesaro, Galleria Internazionale d'Arte Moderna, Venice 1993, no. 25, repr. — *Caos en el pincel: Victor Hugo, dibujos*, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, 2000, no. 167, repr. — *Du chaos dans le pinceau: Victor Hugo, dessins*, Maison de Victor Hugo, Paris, 2000, no. 167, repr. — *Turner, Hugo, Moreau: Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main, 2007-8, no. 125, repr. — *Schwarze Romantik. Von Goya bis Max Ernst*, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main 2012-3, no. 59, repr. — *L'ange du bizarre. Le romantisme noir de Goya à Max Ernst*, Musée d'Orsay, Paris 2013, no. 47, repr.

This landscape drawing, like the previous sheet, is also the product of free association and chance configurations of colour and pattern. Here, Hugo used a slim cylindrical object or tool to roll brown ink onto a sheet of paper. The ink covered the paper unevenly, forming bizarre shapes, and once dry, differences in the density of the ink left a roughened surface. To Hugo, this raw configuration of shapes suggested a wooden bridge on stone piers above jagged pinnacles. He went on to outline these features in pencil. Grey wash gives form to the individual piers but at the same time suggests surging rapids and billowing foam. The ochre wash adds an ominous touch — perhaps signalling an imminent storm or the oncoming, murky light of dusk.

Imaginary as this view may be, it nevertheless almost certainly draws on observation of the coastal landscapes of Guernsey. Hugo would often walk the island's coastal paths and pose for photographs on the cliffs and rocky outcrops. [See the photograph on the inside of the front cover of this catalogue.] There are any number of similar rock formations on the island and he may well have had one of these in mind. But the narrow, rickety footbridge in the present sheet is very probably a product of his imagination. In its grim visualisation of nightmarish danger it can be compared with his ink drawing of 1850 titled *Chaussée* [Fig. 1] — a perilous path exposed to the elements, with no secure hold, swaying at a precarious height above hazardous terrain.



Fig. 1: *Chaussée*, brush and brown ink, 156 x 365 mm, 1850.
Maison de Victor Hugo, Paris [inv. no. MVHP D 943]



Actual size

4

SEASCAPE WITH SHIPS IN FOG

Pen, brush and brown ink, brown wash, with touches of white gouache. Executed c.1856.
56 x 247 mm

PROVENANCE: Paul Meurice, Paris – By descent to his adopted daughter, Mme. Marie Ozenne Meurice – Henri Guillemin, Paris and Neuchâtel – Anonymous sale, Hôtel Drouot [Piasa], Paris, 13 June 2001, lot 150 (bt. Krugier) – Jan Krugier and Marie-Anne Poniatowski, Geneva – Thence by descent

LITERATURE: Jean Massin, *Victor Hugo: œuvres complètes*, I, Paris 1967, no. 876

EXHIBITIONS: *Turner, Hugo, Moreau: Entdeckung der Abstraktion*, exhib. cat., Raphael Rosenberg and Max Hollein, (eds.), Frankfurt am Main 2007-8, no. 100, repr. p.174 – Florian Rodari (ed.) et al., *Victor Hugo: Dessins visionnaires*, exhib. cat., Lausanne, 2008, no. 26, repr. p. 41 (a dating of c.1856 is given) – *Schwarze Romantik. Von Goya bis Max Ernst*, Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main 2012-3, no. 62, repr. – *L'ange du bizarre. Le romantisme noir de Goya à Max Ernst*, Musée d'Orsay, Paris 2013, no. 45, repr.

This seascape was very probably executed during Hugo's fifteen-year exile in Guernsey. Here, he came to be stimulated as an artist by the island's majestic vistas of sea and sky. Writing to a friend in 1859, he noted: *In my solitude I sometimes need periods of rest, facing the ocean, amid this sombre scenery which has such a supreme attraction for me and which entices me toward dazzling apparitions of the infinite.* The rugged coastline and rock formations of Guernsey provided Hugo with a variety of dramatic motifs for his drawings. He would spend considerable time exploring the island at all times of the day and night. He took a large number of photographs of the local scenery, intending to publish them in a book in collaboration with his son, Charles.

Pierre Georgel writes of the drawings Hugo made during his stay in the Channel Islands: *His visual world became enriched almost to the point of obsession by the spectacle of the sea. But the grandiose, monotonous horizon never changed. As a result, the graphic work moved further and further away from the real in an attempt to depict the kaleidoscope of sea, rock and cloud, or to reflect the ebb and flow of an imaginary world in which shapes could form and dissolve in an instant.*¹⁵ Even after his return to Paris in 1870, Hugo continued to visit Guernsey and to produce drawings based on its dramatic landscapes.

Paul Meurice was a novelist and playwright and known for his life-long friendship with Victor Hugo. During the twenty years of Hugo's exile he looked after the financial and literary interests of the writer. On Hugo's death in 1885, Meurice was made executor of his estate. In 1888, he had initiated the first exhibition of Hugo's drawings, and in 1902 he established the Maison de Victor Hugo in Paris. Meurice possessed some of the most important drawings of the artist, amongst them *Le Burg à la Croix*. The present drawing was once part of this collection.



Actual size

FOOTNOTES

FOREWORD

- ¹ Cited after Louis-Antoine Prat, in *Dessins romantiques français provenant de collections privées parisiennes*, exhib. cat., Musée de la Vie romantique, Paris 2001, p. 114.
- ² See: *Selected Literature and Exhibition Catalogues*.

VICTOR HUGO - LIFE AND WORK

- ³ The principal source for this chronology is Ernst-Gerhard Güse, *Leben und Werk*, in *Victor Hugo – Visionen eines Schriftstellers*, exhib. cat., Weimar 2008, pp. 193-215.

VICTOR HUGO AS A DRAUGHTSMAN

- ⁴ Pierre Georgel is currently working on a catalogue raisonné of Victor Hugo's drawings. The drawings in the collection of the Maison de Victor Hugo were published in 1985 (see *Dessins de Victor Hugo*, Maison de Victor Hugo, Paris 1985). The majority of the drawings in the Bibliothèque Nationale are unpublished.
- ⁵ Pierre Georgel, *Les Avatars du « peintre malgré lui »*, in *La Gloire de Victor Hugo*, exhib. cat., Paris 1985.
- ⁶ [...] *la magnifique imagination qui coule dans les dessins de Victor Hugo comme le mystère dans le ciel*. Charles Baudelaire, *Le Salon de 1859*, in *La Revue Française*, Paris 1859.
- ⁷ Pierre Georgel, *Victor Hugo*, in Jane Turner (ed.), *The Dictionary of Art*, New York 1996, XIV, p. 852.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Cited after Pierre Georgel, *Drawings by Victor Hugo*, exhib. cat., London 1974, unpag., between nos. 22 and 25.
- ¹⁰ Florian Rodari and Marie-Laure Prévost, *Les Travailleurs de la mer*, in *Shadows of a Hand. The drawings of Victor Hugo*, exhib. cat., New York 1998, p. 132.
- ¹¹ Cited after Charles Hugo (trans.), in Marie-Laure Prévost, *The Techniques of a Poet-Draftsman*, in Florian Rodari et al., *Shadows of a Hand: The Drawings of Victor Hugo*, exhib. cat., New York 1998, p. 31.
- ¹² Cited after Pierre Georgel, *Drawings by Victor Hugo*, exhib. cat., London 1974, unpag., between nos. 22 and 25.

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- ¹³ Cited after Pierre Georgel, *Drawings by Victor Hugo*, exhib. cat., London 1974, unpag. between nos. 11 and 12.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., between nos. 11 and 12.
- ¹⁵ Ibid., between nos. 22 and 25.

Catalogue:

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Translation, Editing:

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Photographs:

Gerhard Kehlenbeck

© Michael Holz

Inside covers and frontispiece © bpk / RMN - Grand Palais / Charles Hugo

Page 8 © bpk / RMN - Grand Palais / Auguste Edmond Vacquerie

Cover design:

Gianna le Claire

Printed by:

Heigener Europrint GmbH

Hamburg 2015

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KUNST SEIT 1982



André (active 1860-70), *Victor Hugo on the Terrace in Guernsey*, photograph, 1868.
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