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Selections of Graphic Works
by Gavarni (French, 1804-1866)

La Salle College Art Gallery
February 1 -- March 17, 1978
"Gavarni, the wittiest, the most literary and most acutely profane of all mockers with the pencil. The feeling of the pessimist abides in all these things, the expression of the spirit for which humanity is definable primarily by its weaknesses. For Daumier these weaknesses are hugely ugly and grotesque, while for Gavarni they are either rather basely graceful or touchingly miserable; but the vision of them in both cases is close and direct."

From Henry James,
Daumier, Caricaturist
Miniature Books, Rodale Press,
This small exhibition of Gavarni's prints from the La Salle College Collection represents a mere sampling of the artist's prolific output; some 2,700 lithographs, over 500 watercolors, roughly 2,000 drawings and numerous wood-engraving illustrations for books and journals. It does, however, serve as an introduction to the works of one of the foremost, 19th century delineators of character types immersed in day to day activities and thoughts.

More specifically, Gavarni's works provide a satirical but sympathetic identification of the fashions, manners, morals, hypocracies and foibles, primarily of the rising bourgeois society in mid 19th century Paris. However, while living in London from 1847-1851, Gavarni became captivated with rendering the lower class inhabitants of the slums and their colorful but poverty stricken existence. The extent of this disregard for the middle and upper class segments of society during these years was fully realized when he failed to keep an appointment to paint Queen Victoria's portrait.1

Gavarni's works, often based on a theme and published in various magazines, newspapers, journals and/or as separate albums, may be considered journalistic. With his ability to select the quintessential gesture, stance, or fleeting expression of a character he had previously seen, along with the essence of dialogue he had previously heard, an illuminating image was recorded. It should be noted, however, that Gavarni's use of colloquialisms, puns, and slang in the dialogue makes it very difficult to translate and in so doing much of the bite is, unfortunately, lost. Although offering a vivid description of contemporary personalities and situations, one should discover that his works often convey a timeless message. In fact, many may be easily recognized and applied to human nature and its resulting behavior today.

Born Guillaume-Sulpice Chevallier, his somewhat eccentric character was made manifest early in his career when he first chose the pseudonym 'Hippolyte Chevalier', and later, 'Gavarni', after the name of a small town in the Pyrénées. Here he made sketches of the surrounding countryside and local inhabitants, between 1824 and 1828, while employed in the office of a local inspector-geometrician.

Before devoting the major part of his artistic career to the medium of lithography in 1838, Gavarni studied calculus and mathematics working for an architect and maker of precision instruments. His work and interest in this area declined at the height of his career but resurfaced later on, becoming almost an obsession towards the end of his life.

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Gavarni's principal period of creativity spans the years, 1830-1859, when France wavered between a republican form of government and despotism; a turbulent period politically, filled with corruption and social unrest. Such times witnessed the downfall of the Bourbon king, Charles X, the reign of the Orleans monarch, Louis-Philippe, the July Revolution of 1848 and the rise to power of Napoleon III and the second empire. Nevertheless, Gavarni chose, unlike his colleague and better known artist, Honoré Daumier, to remain outside the political arena. In the true sense of the word, Gavarni can not be considered a caricaturist for he did not, with the exception of a handful of political works, distort the human form and face. His aim was not, as was Daumier's, to politically convert or reform and thus, most likely he felt no need to exaggerate in order to get his point across. Providing numerous illustrations for the weekly political newspaper, Le Charivari, between 1837 and 1846, Gavarni's rendition of real people with physical exactitude might indeed be said to involve politics but on a domestic scale—for example, the conveyance of emotion and the indirect and subtle routes which the child, parent, lover, student, or female will take to achieve his or her wants.

As a writer of prose, verse and light criticism, Gavarni preferred to draw his inspiration and companionship from men of letters, novelists, poets, art critics and connoisseurs. Such notable personalities as Victor Hugo, Honoré de Balzac, Alfred de Musset, Alexandre Dumas, and René de Chateaubriand were amongst his friends and clients. The associations developed within this group, made up of those working in both the romantic and realist tradition, led him to provide illustrations for a number of literary review periodicals such as L'Artiste, in 1821, L'Eclair, in 1851, and Paris, from 1852-1853.

In addition to a general discussion of essential elements in Gavarni's works, mention of his fanatical interest in high fashion, costume, liaisons with ladies, and the elegant social circles in which he moved, should not be overlooked. A dandy of the first order, Gavarni attracted a host of women as lovers. With them he attended numerous balls, carnivals, and the theater, and from these he drew much inspiration for his works. He not only dressed the part but often designed clothes and costumes as well, providing, between 1830 and 1832, an illustration every day for the fashion magazine, La Mode.

The exact and comprehensive rendition of Gavarni's figures is perhaps all the more remarkable when one considers the method of this largely self-taught artist. He felt no need for preliminary sketches, studies or models but was able to rely on his visual-memory, enabling him to recall personalities and events he had witnessed up to two years in the past. Employing supple, spontaneous and fluid lines he would carefully execute the modeling of his figures, at the same time giving attention to details.

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Perhaps the words of the de Goncourt brothers, (as paraphrased by Robert J. Wickenden), who wrote the definite biography of Gavarni in 1873, based on his diaries, memoires and letters, best explains his working method:

"Setting up his lithographic stone on an easel, he would first proceed to indicate masses lightly in geometric forms of various values with due regard for the composition he had in mind. Having placed various tones and shapes carefully by all sorts of zig zag strokes, he would draw them in with more and more precision, till features, hands, draperies, and accessories would steadily develop up to the finest details."  

In conclusion, when viewing these images on exhibit the only obvious anachronistic elements one finds are the dress and costumes, all else can perhaps relate in some degree to personalities and situations one might confront at present. His works may be considered the literature of light but poignant criticism of aspects of our daily existence, executed with humorous overtones, but in an artistic manner. It is therefore, criticism and ridicule made all the more easier to recognize, accept, and certainly enjoy.

Caroline P. Wistar
Assistant Curator

Bibliography


Wickenden, R.J., "Gavarni", The Print Collector's Quarterly, 1915, vol. V, No. 1, pp. 59-83-
Lithography

Invented in 1798, this process employs a grease-based crayon, pencil or ink called touche, the artist drawing his design directly on a polished limestone or zinc plate. The parts of the stone surface that have been touched with the grease will resist the water that is then applied to the stone. The water is unable to cover the greasy design and greasy ink rolled over the surface is rejected by the moist parts. As grease and water do not mix, the greasy ink adheres only to the greasy areas of the design leaving the damp areas of the stone surface untouched. These are the background or white areas of the print. The printing paper will only pick up the areas which hold the ink so that the artist's design is then transferred to the paper in reverse. Thus, Gavarni's signature and the numbers of the series appears in reverse on his lithographs.

State

State is the term generally used from the 15th through the 19th century indicating how many times the printed surface (plate, woodblock, stone) has been changed by the artist in the course of its life. Such alterations may be considered the artist's working records or trial proofs, the last state producing the image in its completed and final form. The information regarding the state is so designated in catalogues by the following example: ii/iv = signifies that this impression is the second state out of a total of four. Today the term "trial proof" is generally used in place of the word "state".
Catalogue

All of the works are lithographs by Gavarni unless otherwise mentioned.

1. Emile Boilvin (French, 1845-1899)

   Portrait of Gavarni, c. 1873
   After a self-portrait done in 1835.

   Etching with drypoint. 77-G-768

2. On the terrace by the edge of the water—
   "I am meeting here, my dear, with a charming woman!—And me,--also,—A blonde!!--And me, also!!"

   Proof before letters on mounted China paper.
   From the series of 64 lithographs, "Fourberies de Femmes" (The Tricks or Cheats of Women), published by Caboche as an album, then published in 1837 for the Parisian, political weekly newspaper, Le Charivari.

   i/ii 77-G-770

3. Le Cambrioleur (The Burglar), 1841

   Signed at lower right in pencil.

   Pencil and watercolor with slight touches of gouache.

   72-0-24

   The fastidious dress of this trim figure was most likely very similar to that often worn and perhaps even designed by Gavarni. The burglar is well disguised as a dandy as he contemplates his plan of attack.
Le Carnaval A Paris (The Carnival in Paris)

This series consists of 40 lithographs published in Le Charivari, between 1841-1843 and some later in other journals. The addresses in the lower margin indicate the series was printed by Aubert and Cie, at Pl. de la Bourse, 29, and published by Pannier, at R. du Croissant, 16, Paris. These colored lithographs and all others in the exhibition were hand colored at a later date probably as an inducement to purchase them as individual works of art.

4. pl. 27--

--"Look here!..... I think Amédée lives higher. This is where that nasty old spinster with the dog lives!.... Do you hear that cursed bow-wow?--What does it matter?"

77-G-696

5. pl. 30--

--"Get away, Coquardeau, you're very wrong to be always wearing that nose! You know how that displeases madame."

77-G-697

6. pl. 31--

--"Go child! Go devote yourself to the naive pleasures of your age!"

77-G-699

7. pl. 35--

--"It's useless for you to say that it's for a charity ball.... I see you have a very charitable bearing there!"

77-G-700
8. "To the guardians of commerce: Good God, go to hell!" (1840)

Printer's proof with printer's annotation in pen of the number of the stone and date. Gavarni generally pulled 12 proofs, 6 on mounted China paper and 6 on wove paper, before the captions were added.

From the series of 21 lithographs, "Clichy", 19 were published in La Caricature, a satirical Parisian weekly paper, in 1840 and later all were published in Le Charivari, between 1840 and 1842. The series is based on Gavarni's experiences in debtor's prison, 'Clichy', in 1835, when he sketched the anecdotes of his fellow inmates. His confinement was due to the debt incurred by the failure of his own publication, Journal des Gens du Monde, 1833-1834.

77-G-769

9. "We're going to catch his little story, but gently... we must not let down the government."

pl. 6--From Les Debardeurs (The Stevedores)

72-G-398

This ensemble of black velvet pantaloons, a fringed tassled belt, open neck shirt, policeman's hat, powdered wig, and black mask was designed by Gavarni to be worn by women; later becoming the uniform of the Stevedores, and finally popular as an outfit for the dandy's of Paris.

10. --"It's me, It's me--She makes eyes at me--She winks in my direction.
--You're wrong, my little one,
--You make a mistake, my elder one (both together)--well, well, well we're both right.... She's cross-eyed."

pl. 28 from a total of 60 for the series, Les Etudians De Paris (The Students of Paris), c. 1839.

72-G-407

Masques et Visages (Masks and Faces)

One lithograph, printed by Lemercier in Paris, was produced for this series daily throughout the year, 1852-1853 and published in Paris, a daily literary review, and also as a separate album.

11. "Truly, Monsieur le Baron, it's not because he's my son, but as a tiny tot, Tata, (we used to call him Tata.); well, he was already doing amusing things!"

   pl. 2 from the subsection, Les Parens Terribles (Terrible Parents).

   ii/ii  73-G-448

12. "Oswald"

   pl. 27 from the subsection, Les Invalides Du Sentiment (Invalids of Sentiment)

   iii/iii  77-G-716

13. "The new lord of the land, ....not proud of the vilain, ...and would not fool around with the young girls at all... he's pretty nice to his tenant farmers but they better not miss any payments--or watch out for the cows."

   pl. 17 out of a total of 20, from the subsection Les Propos De Thomas Virelogue, concerning a fictitious vagabond-philosopher and his words of wisdom and advise.

   ii/ii  73-G-450

14. "Louis Enault" (a prominent art-critic)

   pl. 9 out of a total of 9 from the subsection, Messieurs Du Feuilleton, containing portraits of contemporary artistic and literary figures.

   iii/iii  77-G-723

15. "Gare les poches!" (Guard your Pockets)

   pl. 9 from the subsection, Bohèmes.

   ii/ii  77-G-720
16. "Tell me Papa: it's for the discussion of the budget that you get together at the notary, it is midnight."

pl. 15 out of a total of 20 from the subsection, Les Maris Me Font Toujours Rire (Husbands Always Make Me Laugh).

17. "The king's attorney! What is he mixed up in?"

pl. 19 from the subsection, Bohèmes.

ii/ii

18. "Sevigne and his wife take children in for weaning."

pl. 6 from the subsection, Bohèmes.

ii/ii 77-G-721

Physionomies Parisiennes (Parisian Physiognomy)

This series consists of 50 lithographs published as an album and in sets of 12 under the general title, Oeuvres Nouvelles, along with the series "Par-ci, Par-la".

19. "Never mind, my squadron was a pretty squadron."

pl. 3 from the subsection, L'Amateur Des Jardins (Amateur Gardener)

ii/ii 77-G-713

20. "I had five horses."

pl. 50 from the subsection, Déclassés.

ii/ii 77-G-712

pl. 46 from the subsection, En Voyage.

ii/ii 77-G-711

22. "Not a coquette."

pl. 18 from the subsection, A la Halle (At the Market-place).

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23. "This man is loved, not for his beauty, nor for his position in the world, neither for his wealth; no, he is a man who is loved for himself."

pl. 2 from the series, Nuances Du Sentiment.

72-G-406

24. (Gonzales)--"Pour, young page, pour to the brim a full glass of sweet Spanish wine... (The Page) ....well, well, well, here's the stuff,... be careful that it doesn't go to your head."

pl. 31 from the series, Les Coulisses (Back Stage) c. 1838. These prints and the series, Les Actrices are based on Gavarni's observations of the theatrical world.

72-G-399

25. Jean Baptiste Adolphe La Fosse (French, 1810-1879)

Portrait of Gavarni, 1867

Lithograph 77-G-775

This rather somber portrait reveals Gavarni as a mere shadow of the former gay blade he once was. An unhappy marriage, the loss of his son, and his exposure to the down-trodden existence in the London slums, all contributed to his withdrawal from the elegant and high brow society. For the last seven years of his career he gave up lithography, becoming misanthropic and introspective, concentrating most of his energy on mathematical theories.
26. pl. 8 from Douze Nouveaux Travestissements
(Twelve new costumes) by Gavarni, Paris, 1856.

Steel engravings by Antoine Julien Portier
(French, 1796-1865). After Gavarni's pen
drawings colored with flat tints.

77-G-757 (3)

The early part of Gavarni's career (1824-1838)
was primarily devoted to the study of costume
design, executed in a very refined
style such as we see here.

27. "Why deprive oneself of the superflous when one can
dispense of a necessity? With all that it costs
a woman of the house, one has two stalls at the Opera."

from the series, Paris Le Matin

Wood engraving by Budzilowich.
After a drawing by Gavarni.

From Oeuvres Choisies De Gavarni

Revues, corrigées et nouvellement classées
par l'Auteur
Etudes De Moeurs Contemporaines.

Le Carneval A Paris
Paris Le Matin
Les Etudiants de Paris

J. Hetzel, Warnod et cie, Paris, 1847.

Also bound into this volume are wood engravings by
various artists after Gavarni's drawings for the

77-B-25
28. **Le Diable A Paris** (The Devil in Paris)

Illustrated with wood engravings by Gavarni, Grandville, Bertall, and Clerget. Text by Balzac, George Sand, Stendahl, Musset, Nodier and many others.

pi. 17--"Is not mother, the little piece of moustache that Cornelie found in your room this morning for me?"

pi. 18--"Oh! It's true you have eyes like charcoal laterns... Ah, well! Clemence you have a jolly good reason, for example."

Wood engraving by Gavarni for the series,

"Les Enfants Terribles" (The Terrible Children)

Other prints in the collection by Gavarni may be seen by appointment when the Gallery is open.

Dr. Rita S. Mall and Denise Baraniecki, Class of 1978, ably assisted with the translations of the captions.