



*Victor Hugo*

# HUGO

VISIONS OF EXILE

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE









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## VISIONS OF EXILE

Victor Hugo's creative genius encompassed art as well as literature; expressing his inner visions through drawings. Hugo would create these drawings mostly in ink. They could be detailed and precise as well as experimental, welcoming accidental marks.

This experimentation could involve applying ink blots and imprints from lace and stencils.

Occasionally he would add unconventional drawing mediums such as coffee, soot, burned onion and cigar ash.

This journey into the graphic arts made a significant leap forward when Hugo's literary output almost stopped during the period just before his exile from France. Hugo's creative outlet then manifested itself visually.

The interrelation between Hugo's graphic arts and his writing can be seen throughout his life. Art at times replaced writing, especially in the early years of his exile. The two activities also occurred simultaneously, with drawing enriching his literary concepts.

Although Hugo allowed a small number of drawings to be reproduced as engravings they were mostly reserved for his friends and family. They could be included in a letter or drawn within the margin of a written script.

During Hugo's exile his visual expressions developed experimentally and psychologically. In Jersey, séances and the new and exciting development of photography seeped into Hugo's creative consciousness. In Guernsey, the people, landscape and sea fed a Romantic need to express visions deeper than the purely objective and literal.

Hugo had been an eye-witness to France's revolutions, uprisings and massacres which resulted in a growing political and social consciousness. This consciousness acknowledged problems such as the injustices inflicted upon the poor and the restraints on free speech. In exile Hugo was able to reflect on these events and responded artistically as well as politically. Hugo's legacy continues to this day because of this humanity as much as for his skill as a writer and artist.



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# INHABITED LANDSCAPES

Many of Hugo's drawings contain structures ranging from Classical architecture to Gothic and medieval towers. These inhabited landscapes often have an ethereal ghostlike quality, alluding to sensations and moods rather than topographical facts. The buildings depicted are often ruins. Their skeletal forms emerging like spirits from the past.



## The mouse (Velmich), 1840

Ink wash, crayon on wove paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.74)

### (Pre-Exile)

Charles Hugo was fourteen when he received this letter from his father. In the letter Hugo praises Charles for being “a good, hardworking boy”. The inclusion of the medieval ruin in Velmich, known as La Souris (the Mouse) is symbolic.

Near La Souris was another castle called die Katze (the Cat), but La Souris was a much stronger castle, swapping the normal power ratio of cat and mouse. This symbolised the strength Hugo could see in his own son, although still just a boy. The use of symbolism is found throughout Hugo’s writing as well as his art.

## Lucerne, what I see from my window, September 13, 1839

Pen and brown ink wash, graphite pencil on wove paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.74)

### (Pre-Exile)

Hugo drew this sketch for his wife Adèle, while travelling through the Swiss Alps and Pyrenees.

Hugo wrote;

*“I arrived in Lucerne at night as in Zurich, but Lucerne is as calm as Zurich is agitated.*

*I stayed at Pension Lichman, an excellent hotel in a beautiful old tower, machicolated, my faith! I had supper, I asked for a room, I opened my window, and I write to you.*

*When the landscape, viewed from my open casement, justifies it, I shall make a sketch and send it to you.”*

*Although Hugo goes on to describe the view in detail his instinct to capture the view through his drawing illustrates how closely linked his desire to draw is with his writing.*

*The drawing is detailed and accurate, not yet experimental. It simply communicates; “what I see from my hotel window”.*



## Port of Flanders, 1847

Ink and crayon on paper

### (Pre-Exile)

This drawing titled Port of Flanders, possibly depicts the canalled city of Bruges. Hugo visited the city several times, and on one occasion received an official reception and tour of the city.

The thin layers of wash upon wash create a dreamlike transparency to the work. Small ghostly sailing boats make their way past delicately painted architecture with one sail placed almost centrally in a pool of moonlight, echoing the spires of the buildings in the distance.



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.916)

## The gay castle

Stencils on carton

### (Pre-Exile)

The architecture of this group of medieval buildings is similar to the many hill castles found nestling along the Rhine. Hugo knew the Rhine well, publishing the travel diary, "The Rhine" in 1845.

The drawing portrays a whimsical airiness that differs from many of Hugo's drawings of castles that communicate a dark gothic horror.

There is a pictorial depth and complexity created by a layering of artistic techniques, such as the use of wet and dry pigments, the blocking off of areas in the sky and overlapping silhouettes. These techniques were developed further during Hugo's exile.



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.37)



## Town on the edge of a wide body of water

Ink, gouache, scratch marks on wove paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.807)

In this drawing a watery sky merges into still waters which reflect the spires and towers of the skyline. This merging of skyline and reflection gives the appearance of a single rooted entity.

The sky and water are applied with loose energetic brushstrokes, contrasting with the solidity of the buildings. There is a sense of layering of streets upon streets and building upon building. Some marks appear accidental while others are intricate and clearly placed.

This dramatic use of silhouetted structures, particularly of the gothic and medieval type was used by Hugo in many of his drawings. Such structures presented Hugo with an opportunity to experiment with form and light and shade.

## Ruins of a Renaissance portico, 1850

Ink wash, pencil, gouache, rubbing and stencil on paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.180)

This drawing, created using a mixture of techniques, such as stencils and cut-outs, has resulted in a many-layered and textured work. This experimentation with stencils was developed by Hugo around 1850 and continued throughout his exile.

The hard lines of Classical features such as arches and roundels have been softened and dissolved by the use of washes and rubbing and scraping away of pigment. This gives the final image an unearthly luminosity, as if glimpsing a vision of the past.

Architectural ruins were an attractive subject matter for Romantic artists and writers. Ruins not only provided an aesthetic irregularity, loved by Romantic artists but also held strong 'Memento mori' symbolism. These symbols reminding us of death offered the Romantics an emotional cue, stirring the senses, confronting us with our own mortality.



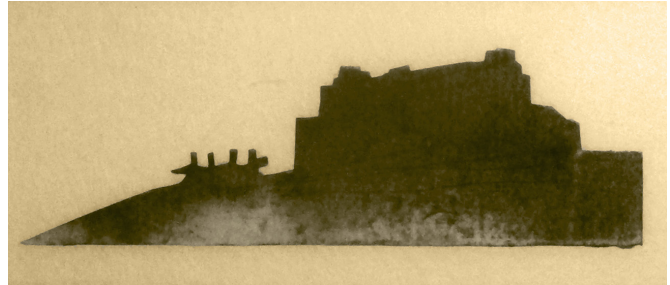
## Silhouette of a castle, perhaps Castle Cornet, Guernsey

Silhouette

Hugo's stencils were not discovered until long after he died. The stencils and cut-outs had been hidden away and were not widely known of until the 1960s.

The use of stencils can be found in Hugo's drawings dating from around 1850 and continued to develop throughout the early years of his exile. The actual cut-outs from the stencils would also be incorporated into drawings.

The simplicity of the silhouette could celebrate a building's form, as well as allowing experimentation with positive and negative forms, not dissimilar to photographic negatives. Hugo had started experimenting with photography while in exile in Jersey.



La Bibliothèque nationale de France collection (N.a.fr. 13351, f34)

## Tree blown down by the wind

Ink on wove paper

Looking at this drawing we can sense the power of the wind. Its ferocity has forced the tree to uproot, its branches and leaves appearing to have no more strength than a feather against the wind's might.

The ground cracks open as the maze of roots rips away from its base and are left exposed, no longer protected by the nurturing soil.

Hugo rarely puts pen to paper, whether to write or to draw, and not have a layering of meaning and emotion intertwined within what is initially understood. Can we therefore surmise that this uprooted tree, forced from its base, represents Hugo and fellow exiles, as they themselves have been uprooted and driven from what was secure, their homeland, France?

In the preface to Hugo's *La Légende des siècles* he had made this very analogy, to his state of exile.

*"Book, which a wind carries to you  
In France, where I was born!  
The uprooted tree  
Gives its dead leaf."*



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.177)



## Vianden in the moonlight, 1871

Ink wash on wove paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.9)

This drawing of Vianden in the moonlight assumes a lyrical dreamlike quality. The details of the houses quickly blur into a fluid landscape below. The watery moon is dissolving what was clear and crisp in daylight, into an otherworldly night-time vision.

When Hugo drew this moonlit scene of this picturesque Luxembourgian city, he was not 'on tour' but was once again in exile.

Hugo had not long returned to France after the fall of Napoléon III when he was impelled to leave once more. The cause was the Paris Commune, the rebellion against the French government, which followed defeat in the Franco-Prussian War and the collapse of the Empire. Paris once again experienced bloodshed.

The distortion and blurring of the background created by the use of 'wet-on-wet' technique allows the ink medium to find its own way across the paper. This freedom introduces an element of chance into the mark making process. Accidental marks were used extensively in Hugo's work but this should not be confused for lack of control as Hugo's genius lies in balancing constraint and freedom.



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# THE SEA

Hugo's exile drawings contain an intense emotional focus, the vehicle of which was often the sea. This ever-changing natural force provided Hugo with the opportunity to depict an archetypal Romantic subject.

The expansive vistas Hugo would have experienced while wandering the coastline of the island, by both day and night were portrayed with energy, experimentation and a dark subconscious.

The impact the sea has on human emotion is timeless. Our awe at either its tranquil serenity or its terrible destructive power is instinctive and continual. Hugo draws from this natural emotion producing artworks that transcended time, speaking to a universal human subconscious.



## Two boats in a storm, 1854

Ink on wove paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.143)

## Russian galleys, 1855-1856

Ink on wove paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.142)

These two ink drawings show the skill and simplicity also found within much Eastern art. With just the minimal number of brushstrokes Hugo suggests movement and form.

## Les Casquets, 1870

Ink on wove paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.93)

The Casquets are a group of rocks around 12 km west of Alderney. Since 1724 there has been a lighthouse on the Casquets, warning ships of the nearby rocks and those looming under the water's surface.

The dark swirls of ink in this drawing are darkened further by the ethereal shapes of the rocks and lighthouse tower. They emerge ghostlike from a cloud of darkness. Their outline is indistinctive, as if they could disappear and dissolve in front of our eyes. We, the viewers, are placed in a pool of light, distancing us from the dark swirling waters and rocks.

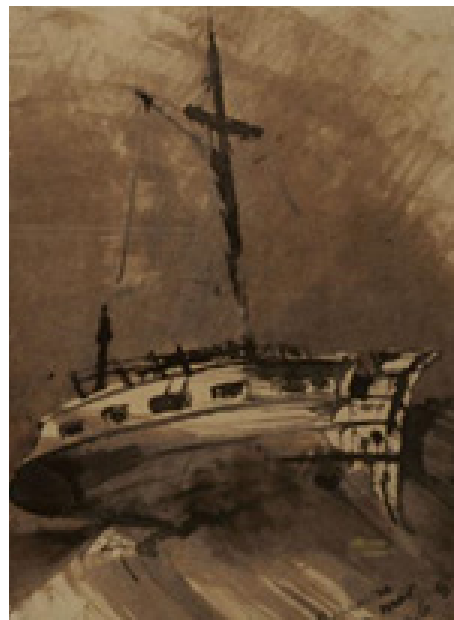


## Meeting at sea, 1864

Ink wash on wove paper

The variations of surface texture in this drawing demonstrate Hugo's skill at describing different textures through the simple use of the ink and brush.

Here we see the moment when a small boat is perched on top of a wave, about to be plunged down as the wave ebbs back into the ocean. The torrential driving rain and monstrous dark clouds appear through the use of a scumbling ink on dry paper. This is in contrast to the fluid ink wash which follows the movement of the surging wave.



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.140)

## Boat in the Mist (Marine), 1866

Ink and gouache on laid paper

What is most noticeable about this drawing is the low horizon. The sky is looming dominantly over the sea and boat below.

The sweeping expressive marks describing the clouds above are made by applying ink with a partly dry brush. Dense areas of ink bursting up from the horizon gradually disperse and fade, much like the icy wisps of the cirrus cloud they depict.

Hugo's sensibilities were stirred by the forces of nature that surrounded him. What would have naturally engaged the Romantic spirit would have been intensified by the vacuum created by living on a small isolated island.



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.2007.11.1)



## Seagull on the Sea, 1868

Inscribed, AM. F Chiffart, Victor Hugo, H.H. 9 février 1868

Ink wash on paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.2007.15.1)

Victor Hugo dedicated this drawing to the French artist and illustrator François Chiffart. Chiffart is now relatively unknown, but during his lifetime was highly praised, Victor Hugo perceiving him as “the pulse of great nineteenth century art.”

Chiffart was awarded first prize in the Rome Grand Prix of historical painting in 1851, but his continued revolt against the Academy meant that he was eventually shunned by the establishment. This rebellion was fuelled very much by his Romantic spirit.

His friendship with Victor Hugo, who he visited in Guernsey, provided illustration as a new opportunity for his artistic expression. He revelled in being able to visually expound the Romantic vision conjured up in the text of writers such as Hugo.

Considering Chiffart’s free spirit, it is apt that this drawing depicts a gull soaring upon the breeze.

## Sinking vessel, 1867

Ink on paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.915)

The drama within this drawing does not come from depicting a powerful storm. Instead it is created by describing the still and silent moment when the last part of the ship’s bow is enveloped by a dark oppressive sea.

The inky darkness suggests unimaginable depths that permit no return.



## Broken yet undefeated, 1866

Ink on wove paper

This drawing was sent to the writer and fellow exile, Auguste Vacquerie on December 29, 1866. Hugo sent it with seven other drawings, writing: "one is for you, that goes without saying, 'fracta, sed invicta'."

This Latin motto translates as 'broken yet undefeated'.

Hugo had applied this motto to the second French republic which in his own words had been destroyed by Napoléon III, or as Hugo had named him 'Napoléon the Little'.

Vacquerie had great admiration for Victor Hugo. He was also related to Hugo through his brother Charles, who married Hugo's daughter Léopoldine. Charles and Léopoldine would both tragically drown in a boating accident on the Seine.

Vacquerie joined the exiled Hugo family during their time in Jersey where he participated in photography alongside Hugo's son, Charles. Here Vacquerie made a series of photographs documenting the family and the local landscape.



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.917)



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# LES TRAVAILLEURS DE LA MER

*Les Travaillleurs de la Mer* was written in Guernsey between 1864 and 1865, published the following year in Brussels and then Paris. It was the one work created during Hugo's exile wholly inspired by the island and its people.

As Hugo worked on the novel he produced illustrations that not only added a visual dimension to the story, but also helped mould and influence the process of writing. The process of drawing and writing became simultaneous.

Thirty-six illustrations made their way into the final bound volume, showing clearly the synergy between the two creative mediums. During exile on Guernsey, the island's remote wildness entered Hugo's senses and imagination. He would take long walks alone, his solitude intensified by his exiled state. The illustrations produced for the novel not only depict the terrible power of nature but also goes deeper into an abyss that can only be experienced through personal anguish.



## La Durande, 1864/1866

Ink and gouache on wove paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.88)

La Durande is a steamboat, owned by Mess Lethierry, one of the main characters in Hugo's novel, *Les Travaillleurs de la Mer*.

In the story Hugo writes, "*Mess Lethierry had two special objects of affection only. Their names were Durande and Déruchette.*" Déruchette was Lethierry's niece and godchild. He also took on the role of her father when she was orphaned.

Hugo explains that "*Durande and Déruchette are the same name. Déruchette is the diminutive.*"

This love Lethierry has for the Durande transforms this inanimate object into something living. Hugo writes that in Lethierry's eyes La Durande was almost a person.

The drawing on the left depicts La Durande battling against the storm, finally to be betrayed by its captain Clubin, who is planning to ground it on rocks. Clubin intends to be presumed dead so he can disappear undetected with Lethierry's fortune after safely swimming ashore. In the book, this plan goes horribly wrong.

## La Durande, 1864/1866

Ink and gouache on wove paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.934)

Hugo writes on the back of another drawing of La Durande,

*"... with the reverse of this cardboard, I smeared my destiny: the boat beaten by the storm in the middle of the monstrous ocean, almost helpless, assaulted by the hurricanes and by all the foam and having only a little smoke that is called glory."*

Clubin's betrayal could therefore be seen as symbolising the events that lead to Hugo's own exile within the Channel, battling against the tyranny and betrayal of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte.

The drawing on the right contains an unnerving stillness. The sails are down and the energetic brushstrokes seen in the other drawing have been replaced by pools of dark watery ink, with small areas of light dissolving its way through the dark.



## The King of the Auxcriniers, 1864-1865

Ink on wove paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.93)

## The King of the Auxcriniers, 1864-1865

Ink on wove paper



La Bibliothèque nationale de France collection (NAF, 24745 – 1, f.57)

These two drawings depict the Roi des Auxcriniers, a character described by Hugo in *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* as: “... the greatest danger of the coasts of the Channel Islands ... No inhabitant of the seas is more redoubtable. Whoever has seen him is certain to be wrecked between one St. Michel and the other.”

The drawing on the left has an ephemeral quality. There is no light, all is in shadow. The forms are less defined than the drawing on the right, and in some ways more unsettling. Perhaps alluding to Hugo's other vision of Auxcriniers as creatures from the Middle World.

The drawing on the right depicts Le Roi des Auxcriniers rising triumphant from the waves, as a ship on the horizon fights against the storm. He thrives in the storm, this is his kingdom and those that venture into it do so at their peril.

## Gilliatt, c.1865

Ink on paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.94)

Gilliatt arrives on Guernsey as a small boy with his mother. On arriving, the mother and son move into a house which is said to be haunted. The local people believe Gilliatt to be a magician because of his reclusive nature and strange ways.

Gilliatt falls in love with Déruchette, the niece of Mess Lethierry, when he sees her writing his name in the snow. The love he has for Déruchette causes him to risk his life rescuing the engine of her uncle's steamship.

Hugo described Gilliatt as having “a face darkened by wind and sea”. This drawing communicates this darkness, as well as the characteristics of a magician.



## Fantasy Seascape, 1866

Ink wash on paper

This drawing is unsettling in its ambiguity. We are not quite sure what we are looking at, although there are elements that are familiar.

Is that a wave looming up before us? Its solidity of form also gives the impression of a strange animal in battle, twisting and turning as it defeats its enemy.

In the distance there are dark shapes, possibly coastal towers, or are they tall rock formations? We cannot make out the true horizon. At one point it disappears into a mass of light and shade.

The drawing presents more questions than answers. In the end, we accept this uncertainty and enjoy its form, rhythm, light and shade.



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.9819)



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# CELEBRATING THE INDIVIDUAL

During the Romantic period the 'individual' was celebrated and the concept of the solitary creative genius was truly embraced. Hugo acknowledged this notion but was also critical of it.

Hugo was recognised as a genius during his lifetime and utilised his identity as another creative tool. He used his name and initials as the main subject in many of his drawings, as well as carving them on objects and furniture within his Guernsey home, Hauteville House.



## Exile

Ink, charcoal, black chalk, gouache on wove paper

The details of this drawing are confined to the initials of Victor Hugo and the letters 'EXIL'.

The letters float in pairs against a background that appears to have no solidity or form. These letters symbolise the state of limbo many exiles experience: this feeling of having no base or home. The exiled have been uprooted and set adrift; what was familiar and secure has gone.



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.805)

## The Orient, 1855

Brown-ink wash, charcoal, red, green and gold ink, lace impressions and stencil resistances

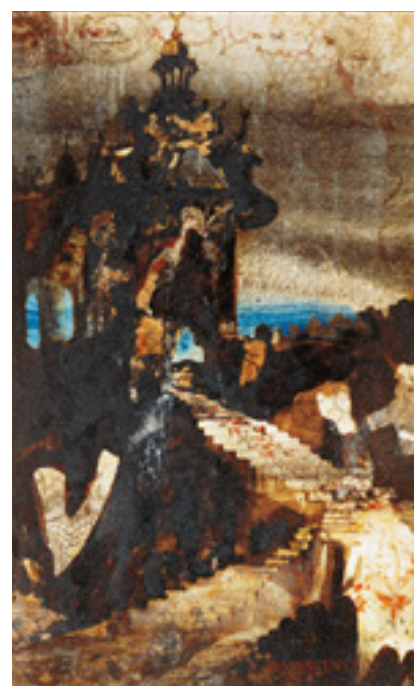
Les Orientales is the frontispiece to Hugo's collection of forty-one poems of the same name published previously in 1829.

During the nineteenth century there was a growing interest in culture and art from Greece and the East. Many of the poems reflect this influence and the later frontispiece contains elements of exoticism.

This multilayered image is created using lace impressions and stencils, giving it great depth and texture, through which Hugo's initials shine through. This use of stencils and cutouts developed throughout the 1850s, one of Hugo's most experimental periods.

Lace marks in the sky echo the details within the spire of the Oriental tower. The blue pigment suggests the landscape beyond, expanding the horizon and setting the architecture in a larger space.

The steps leading up to an Oriental style tower create a visual journey for our eyes, the rhythmic nature echoing the poems within. Such winding steps, present in many of Hugo's drawings, allude to one of Hugo's artistic influences, the artist and engraver Giovanni Battista Piranesi (1720-1778).



La Bibliothèque nationale de France collection (N.a.fr. 13351, f34)



## Ruins of a Burg, 1854-55

Ink, charcoal, gouache, crayon and stencil



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.131)

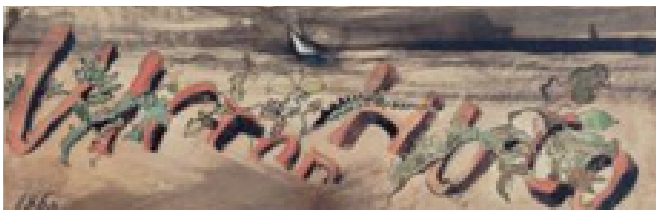
A Burg is a medieval fortress or walled town often perched upon rocky peaks. These rugged isolated ruins can be used to convey the solitude of the individual, as well as the passing of time through their decay.

Burgs appear again and again in Hugo's drawings. He would have observed these ancient structures on his travels throughout Europe, particularly along the Rhine.

The dark turrets of the Burg rise up from what could be clouds, its foundations hidden. The most solid aspect within the drawing is Hugo's own name. This is in contrast to the ephemeral background. A winding, organic form is intertwined with Hugo's name acting as a road travelling through the letters up to the fortress.

## At the feet of Madame Duverdier, 1861

Pen, wash and watercolour on paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.3092)

The letters of Victor Hugo's name lie on the beach as if washed ashore. Partly covered by sand and foliage the letters become part of the landscape. Similarly the exiled poet landed on Guernsey's shores and became part of its landscape.

The drawing is an example of one of Hugo's 'visiting cards', which he would send to close friends. They would usually include letters from his name set against a landscape. This particular 'visiting card' with the inscription "At the feet of Madame Duverdier, V. H. January 1, 1861", was meant for the wife of the republican and fellow exile Édouard Bonnet-Duverdier.



## Castle in the Twilight, 1866

Ink and gouache on wove paper

Hugo can express a gothic darkness through his drawings but when he chooses to bring light into his artworks it can be dazzling. The darkness in this drawing makes the light appear more brilliant.

The skill of balancing light and shade he so admired in the work of Rembrandt has been exuded and reincarnated in Hugo's own work.

The name of Victor Hugo is woven into the foreground. It settles itself underneath the castle above, as if giving support, the initials H. H. possibly referring to his home in Guernsey, Hauteville House.

As one of France's most famous exiles, the name of Hugo represented hope and defiance, particularly as Hugo chose not to go back to France when Napoléon III proclaimed a general amnesty in 1859. Hugo could have safely returned to France, but chose to return only once Napoléon III was forced from power, as a result of the French defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870.



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.923)

## Heraldic Crest, 1859

Ink and wash on wove paper

Heraldic crests and coats of arms were carved, painted and drawn throughout the interior of Hauteville House, Hugo's home while in exile in Guernsey. Hugo said of heraldry:

*"For those who can decipher it, heraldry is an algebra, a language. The whole history of the second half of the Middle Ages is written in heraldry."*

This ability to include hidden meanings within a single design would have appealed to Hugo's love of narrative and symbolism.



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.905)



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# ABSTRACTION BEFORE 'ABSTRACT ART'

We think of abstraction as a twentieth century artistic development. However, this form of visual expression was used by artists much earlier. The first experiments in abstraction involved elements of chance, rather than consciously placed marks.

One of the most well-known artists to use these accidental marks was the English landscape artist Alexander Cozens (1717–1786), turning random ink marks into landscapes containing ruins, mountains and dramatic skies.

The poet Justinus Kerner (1786-1862) also used accidental marks to inspire his work. He used a technique where he would fold ink stained paper to create a symmetrical print. Within these ink stains he would see images he believed came from 'the other world'.

Hugo would use similar paper folding techniques to Kerner, creating ink marked mirror images, as well as applying random ink marks (taches) using various unconventional methods. Hugo used these blots and accidental marks within many of his landscapes from the 1840s, but it was during his exile that he allowed many of the marks to remain unaltered.

Hugo did not feel the need to incorporate these taches and stains into recognisable forms but allowed them just to 'be', creating abstraction in its purest form.

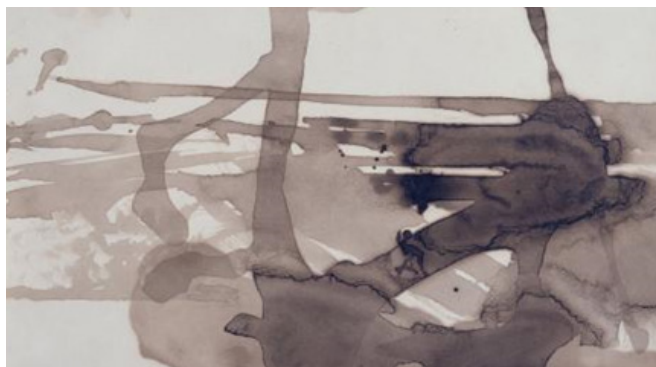


## Abstract Composition

Ink on paper

In this drawing Hugo allows the ink to flow, finding its own path across the paper, tilting it now and again to assist the ink along its journey.

The shapes, patterns and layering present us with an artwork so perfectly balanced and rhythmically poetic that it is hard to believe that these accidental marks in anyone else's hands would produce such a complete celestial vision



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.2428)

## Lace imprint

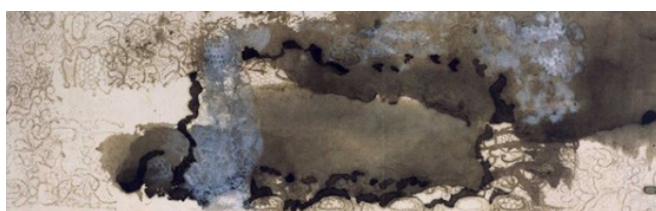
Brown ink and wash, heightened with white gouache, lace print on beige paper

A technique that Hugo developed while in exile was the use of lace impressions. He used the intricate patterns present in lace to create complex ink marks.

As with Hugo's tache drawings, these marks also introduced an element of chance. The lace could add texture and patterning as in the drawing, *Les Orientales*. Or be the main inspiration for the design, as in this example

The lace impressions surround a dark wash, containing details that echo the lace marks. A further layering of texture is added through the application of additional lace impressions in white gouache.

Hugo would use metallic lace, soaked in ink. The lace would be laid on paper, applying different levels of pressure and different quantities of ink. This created an image that consisted of strong defined marks as well as wispy echoes of the lace's patterning. The motifs that were created would vary from ghostly distorted visions, to natural horizons that could suggest both land and sea.



La Bibliothèque nationale de France collection (N.a.fr. 13351, f37)



## Ink stain retouched on beige folded paper

Pen and brown ink



Collection of Bibliothèque nationale de France NAF 13351, fol. 28

During the early years of exile Victor Hugo dabbled in seances and spiritualism. This led to an increased interest and awareness of the subconscious and how it could be reflected through writing and art.

Allowing accidental marks to appear through paper folding was one method of attempting to understand the subconscious mind.

At first the marks in this drawing look accidental, but as with many of Hugo's drawings, once you look closer, miniature details, subtlety and skillfully executed suddenly appear. To look at a drawing by Hugo is to go on a journey into another world, with its many layers of meaning and graphic complexity.



# ZEITGEIST – SPIRIT OF A TIME

There is a shared spirit, also known as 'zeitgeist', which inexplicably creates simultaneous similarities and sensibilities within the work of artists. Political and cultural influences both play a part in creating the spirit of a time. Often there is a reaction against what went before, as with the Romantic Movement's reaction against Classicism.

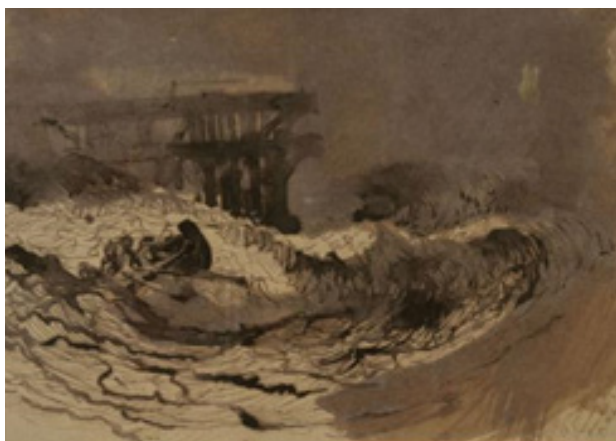
Romantic artists such as Hugo were instinctively attracted to depicting the sea, being one of the most unpredictable and terrifying of all nature's forces. In these dramatic dark drawings Hugo uses detailed linear patterns that emphasise the movement and motion of the waves, following their natural flow and form. This use of linear design can also be seen in many Japanese woodblock prints that made their way to Europe in the 1850s when Japan eased its isolationist policies.

Zeitgeist can also create a common symbolism. Revolution, which was woven through the Romantic period created its own symbolism. A small ship fighting against the might of the storm with its mast still held high above the waves, as depicted in the drawing 'The vision of ships', could be compared to Liberty holding the French flag high above her head in Eugène Delacroix's 'Liberty Leading the People'.



## The end of the temporary breakwater in Guernsey, seen from my look-out, 1865

Ink, wash on wove paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.129)

## The visions of ships

Ink on paper



La Bibliothèque nationale de France collection (N.a.fr. 247445-1 f11)



# CARICATURES

Hugo had used caricature drawings to amuse himself and family since a boy.

Instinctively spotting the pretentious and hypocritical, he would doodle scathing caricatures, shining a light on the ridiculous.

## Mr. Bignan receiving the award of poetry at the Academy

Ink on wove paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.119)

Hugo was a writer of the Romantic Movement which celebrated individualism, the natural world, idealism, passion, revolution and explored the mystical and supernatural. It was a reaction against the rationality of Classical artists and writers such as M. Bignan.

Bignan was a contemporary of Hugo's from the classical tradition who was recognised through numerous prizes awarded by the establishment, namely the French Academy. This made Bignan a prime target for one of Hugo's caricature sketches.

Hugo understood that caricatures could expose and ridicule those exploiting their position of power. He wrote of the caricaturist Alfred Le Petit that he created laughter, and laughter lead to thought. This power to communicate political and social thinking resulted in almost complete censorship of critical political caricature in France between 1852 and 1866.



## English shouting: long live the Emperor! But keeping, being English, his hat on his head

Ink on wove paper

On the 19th April 1855, Napoléon III made a State visit to London where crowds lined the streets to welcome the Emperor and Empress Eugénie. These caricatures may allude to this event.

There was some criticism at the time regarding Queen Victoria's cordiality towards the Emperor, particularly from French exiles. This changed Guernsey's history, as Hugo was expelled from Jersey and moved to Guernsey as a result of the controversy which followed.

Hugo's son François-Victor, describes the scene as they left Jersey:

*"The steamer was heating up, and we could see above it in the sky the column of smoke that was going to lead us to another promised land. Friends whom the rain had not frightened off were waiting for us on the jetty, comrades in exile, brothers in arms . . . . The others were inhabitants of the country that we left, these were simple hearts that we had known during our three years of residence, who had loved us, they had attached themselves to us . . . ."*



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.948)

## Working class Parisian looking at the Englishman crying long live the Emperor

Ink on wove paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection



# JERSEY

## Jersey Marine Terrace, 1854-1855

Ink, crayon, charcoal and gouache on wove paper



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection (MVHP.D.97)

The Hugo family lived at No 3 Marine Terrace in Jersey from 1852 to 1855. It was their first home in the Channel Islands, following their exile.

Marine Terrace was a large white angular building, which Hugo described as “a hut”, “a shed”, “a heavy white cube shaped like a tomb, the smallness of the windows aggravated the crepuscular sadness of the house”.

However, its appeal was that it was close to the sea. At low tide a nearby rock Le Rocher des Proscrits was made accessible and from here Hugo could see his beloved France.

This temporary home played an important role in Hugo’s creative development and new psychological explorations. It contained a photographic studio that gave Hugo another creative outlet. Hugo’s son Charles would often take the photographs with Hugo very much directing the artistic vision.

A common theme would be a solitary Hugo standing upon a rock looking out to sea, in the direction of France, an exile yearning to return. It is not difficult to make a link between this image of Hugo and his final vision for Gilliatt, the hero of his novel, *Les Travailleurs de la Mer*.

## Spiritus Malus

Spirit sketchbook- Spring 1854



Maisons de Victor Hugo Collection

*Spiritus Malus* is part of a spirit drawing sketchbook. The drawing’s spasmodic disjointed journey around the page reveals a nightmarish scene, reminiscent of Goya’s *Los Caprichos* and *Disasters of War*.

While in Jersey, Hugo was introduced to spiritualism by Mme. de Girardin, a visiting author. Hugo believed he was able to summon up the ghost of his daughter Léopoldine who had died six years earlier in a boating accident, as well as others such as Dante, Voltaire, Jesus Christ and abstract characters such as Death and the Ocean.

The spirits would also make their presence felt through continuous line drawings, channelled through Hugo and the planchette, a spiritualist drawing device comprising of a flat piece of wood on castors.

Eventually his participation in these sessions became more infrequent, and stopped completely shortly before leaving for Guernsey.



