Sir Francis Seymour Haden, M.D.
PRINTS FROM THE SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY ART COLLECTIONS

21. Hands Etching—O Laborum, 1865
COVER ILLUSTRATION (Illustration numbers correspond to checklist numbers.)

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SCHOOL OF ART, COLLEGE OF VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

12. Portrait of Francis Seymour Haden (No. 2), 1862
Sir Francis Seymour Haden, M.D.  1818-1910

We associate the origin of too many modernisms with France. Late nineteenth-century artists working in England, as well as Germany and Holland, also evince a new infatuation with purely formal problems and with personal expression freed from Romantic iconography. Invention is as much a Victorian notion as is hard work.

Still it is surprising that the art of Sir Francis Seymour Haden contains so much avant-garde experimentation with form and moments of poignant self-revelation. The range of Haden's work is unexpected. Amateurs are not supposed to be forerunners.

If we were to make an account of him in twentieth-century terms, Seymour Haden would be listed as a physician, diagnostician, and surgeon. Secondarily we might call him an artist and a pamphleteer. (He crusaded for natural interment and invented the papier mache coffin.) But contemporary categories assume a narrow professionalism belied by many Victorian lives. Trollope was a post-office clerk by day, and a novelist when he could be. He claimed to have written his early novels at the rate of 1,000 words per hour—all before breakfast! Dickens worked full-time as an editor of a newspaper. Like Haden, he possessed Herculean energy. He may have been an amateur, but he was not a dilettante.

Haden acquired the skill and reputation of a professional artist, an accomplishment unusual for a person whose work was confined to etching, save for a few youthful watercolors and some late-in-life mezzotints. His etchings sold to the public for top prices. He not only kept a full-size press at home, he hired well-known printers to pull his etchings. Among his compatriots, Haden was known for an exhibition of Rembrandt etchings as well as for his journal articles on the artist and on the art of etching. Throughout his life he kept up his contacts with the French art world and enjoyed greater popularity there than in England. He received his knighthood for his contributions to art, not medicine.

Haden's oft-quoted remarks about art sometimes mystify his own practice. He recommended that medical and surgical students learn to draw, thereby training the eye in observation and the hand in steadiness. Yet his etchings betray no special talent for close rendering, and his attempts at figures are often disappointing. Haden's strength is the economy and suggestiveness of line, a characteristic he called "the art of omission." In works like Windmill Hill (No. 1), daringly large sections of the plate are void, and forms, like the wind-blown clouds, are given in rapid, deft strokes.

We would know more of Haden if it were not for his quixotic brother-in-law, James McNeill Whistler. The two had a falling out in 1867, when Whistler sought social acceptance in the Haden household for his doe-eyed "popsy." Push came literally to shove, and each accused the other of physical violence. Posthumously, at least, Whistler has overshadowed the doctor. Haden is a footnote in art history; Whistler, to continue the analogy, is a chapter.

We shall probably never know the truth of the Haden-Whistler encounter, nor the interplay of ideas, techniques, and influences shared by these disputatious men.
unfortunate, because both artists helped to create an Etching Revival in England. But there is sufficient visual evidence to suggest that the root vision and goal of each artist was essentially different.

For all of his dandyism, bohemianism, and French affectation, Whistler’s art is sweet. Haden, like Dickens and Landseer, has a dark, other side. His English sense of place—most of his etchings are landscapes—is often cheerless, sometimes chilling. Mytton Hall (no. 2) appears like an unwelcome apparition behind an avenue of unaccountably agitated trees. Some fancy

It is time to reassess the work of Seymour Haden, not as Whistler’s brother-in-law, nor as an upholder of stolid Victorian values in art, but in the language of his best works. That language, one suspects, includes the vocabulary of the psychiatrist’s consulting room.

Not all of Seymour Haden’s etchings have a private, ulterior dimension. Some merely record a journey; others test the dimensions of dry point, or capture an incidental family scene. But there are enough etchings in which gloom and cold light lead us to a most modern sense of anomie, anxiety, and dread.

Mary Warner Marien

Battersea Reach (no. 15), an etching drawn “out of Whistler’s window,” as Haden recorded in the upper left of the plate, engulfs the foreground workmen in shadow. The artist’s interest, like that of his host, was with the properties of light and the dynamics of weather.

The argument Whistler and Haden ought to have had was about light and atmosphere. For Whistler, an artist’s genius lay in manipulating light, or more particularly its absence, to create self-sufficient, lyrical images: art for art’s sake. Haden used light and dark for their primordial significance. His startling self-portrait (no. 12), enlists Romantic techniques kept alive by the Pre-Raphaelites. Half the face is plunged in darkness, like that of an ill-fated maiden born of Rossetti’s laudanum visions. This is not “the art of omission,” but a portrayal of that all too familiar Victorian bugbear, self-doubt. Whether or not one finds the image melodramatic, one must admit that it engenders a psychological realism anathema to Whistler’s aesthetic.

Sometimes, in his attempt to capture the broadest range of tones, Haden relied too heavily on the smudge of the dry point burr. Occasionally he over-inked the plate. Ironically, his amateur status is partially derived from these failed experiments. But when the tones are controlled, as they are in Windmill

Hill (No. 1) (no. 24), the effect is enviable. Light scorches the hilltop pasture but does not relieve the pool of stagnant water. The subject, a fettid ridge-top swale, is remarkable in itself. In this etching, dark and light become visual equivalents for a state of soul.

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Checklist of Exhibition

All prints in this exhibition are from the Syracuse University Art Collections. Check­list entries are arranged in the order of H. Nazeeb Harrington (indicated H) in his En­graved Work of Sir Francis Seymour Haden, P.R.E. Dimensions are given in millimeters; height precedes width.

1. Kensington Gardens (the small plate), 1859
Etching and drypoint
160 x 118, laid Japanese paper
H. 12, State III
Signed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collections: Cloud Wampler, Knoedler Gallery
SU 63.593

2. Mytton Hall, 1859
Drypoint
122 x 264, laid paper
H. 14, State III
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.613

3. Egham, 1859
Etching
124 x 200, wove paper
H. 15, State III
Signed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.614

4. Egham Lock, 1859
Etching
149 x 225, laid paper
H. 16, three published states—trial proof C
Signed, in drypoint, LL
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.606

5. Out of Study Window, 1859
Etching
196 x 237, laid paper
H. 16, State III
Ex Collections: C. Wampler, Sir W. R. Drake
SU 63.596

6. A Water Meadow, 1859
Etching
190 x 225, wove paper
H. 21, State III
Signed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.615

7. A By-Road in Tipperary, 1860
Etching and drypoint
188 x 286, laid Japanese paper
H. 30, State III
Signed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.609

8. Combe Bottom, 1860
Etching and drypoint
114 x 152, laid Japanese paper
H. 32, three published states, trial proof C
Signed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.599

9. The Holly Field, 1860
Etching
175 x 136, laid paper
H. 23, State III
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.610

10. Shere Mill Pond (a small study), 1860
Etching
134 x 186, laid paper
H. 37, State III
Signed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.591

11. Shere Mill Pond (the larger plate), 1860
Etching
175 x 332, laid paper
H. 36, State III
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.596

12. Portrait of Francis Seymour Haden (No. 2), 1862
Etching
195 x 286, laid paper
H. 41, one published state, trial proof B
Ex Collections: C. Wampler; Max Blach, Vienna
SU 63.611

13. Amstelodamum, 1863
Etching, two colors
180 x 120, Chine colle on laid paper
H. 43, State III
Signed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.604
14. Dundrum River, 1863
Etching
150 x 140, Chine colle on wove paper
H. 49, State III
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.607

15. Battersea Reach, 1863
Etching
190 x 234, laid paper
H. 52, State III
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.599

16. House of the Smith, (House of Benjamin Davis, Smith), 1864
Etching
112 x 149, laid paper
H. 63, State III
Initialed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.215

17. Brentford Ferry, 1864
Etching
137 x 214, laid paper
H. 75, State III
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.605

18. The Towing Path, 1864
Drypoint
139 x 208, laid Japanese paper
H. 147, State I
Signed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.590

19. Evening, 1864
Etching
146 x 93, parchment
H. 77, State VI
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.596

20. Shepperton, 1864
Etching
137 x 118, laid paper
H. 80, State I
Signed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.600

21. Hands Etching—O Laborum, 1865
Etching and drypoint
138 x 208, wove paper
H. 94, State III
Signed, in pencil, LL
Ex Collection: G. Arents Research Library
SU 63.612

22. Horsley's Cottages, 1865
Etching and drypoint
136 x 209, laid paper
H. 101, two published states, trial proof C
Signed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.601

23. A Brig at Anchor, 1870
Etching and drypoint
138 x 209, laid Japanese paper
H. 147, State III
Signed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.590

24. Windmill Hill (No. 1), 1877
Drypoint
149 x 224, laid paper
H. 163, State III
Signed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.603

25. Nine Barrow Down, 1877
Drypoint
145 x 223, laid paper
H. 167, State II
Signed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.602

26. Grim Spain, 1877
Etching
148 x 224, laid Japanese paper
H. 168, State II
Signed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.601

27. Village Ford, 1881
Etching and drypoint
177 x 251, laid paper
H. 216, State III
Signed, in pencil, LR
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.592

28. Portrait of Francis Seymour Haden, 1886
Etching
212 x 138, laid paper
Not in Harrington
Ex Collection: C. Wampler
SU 63.612

CREDITS

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