

## BERNARD BUFFET, PRINTMAKER

By Mathilde Gubanski



NATURE-MORTE AU COMPOTIER, 1980

Lithograph in colours on paper - 56 x 76 cm / 22.1 x 29.9 in.  
Numbered "82/150" lower left - Signed "Bernard Buffet" lower left  
Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris

A painter known for his black lines, it was natural for Bernard Buffet to turn to printmaking. A tireless worker, he explored the different techniques of printmaking to give his graphic works the same force as his paintings.

## DRYPOINT

Bernard Buffet used the drypoint technique where a pointed tool makes incisions on a metal plaque. This incision creates a metal burr along the incised line. The artist can then choose to remove these metal residues to obtain a clear and precise line, or to keep them to give the line a more nervous and irregular appearance. The drypoint needle is handled like a pencil and the artist draws directly on the plaque. This technique requires great skill in drawing and was thus perfectly suited to Bernard Buffet. He carved the metal like a sculptor, without the possibility of making corrections.

Albrecht Dürer was one of the first artists to use the drypoint technique and Bernard Buffet followed in his footsteps. "we have to credit Bernard Buffet with having retrieved the ambition of this famous predecessor: adopting a craft technique, appropriating drypoint and furrowing the metal, the needle simply replacing the paintbrush, and recording live the creative process",<sup>1</sup> explained Gerhard Reinz. He added "Bernard Buffet the engraver has retrieved the inspiration of the great masters and deserves to be recognized as their successor for having, like them, elevated printmaking to the ranks of Art."

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1 - Gerhard F. Reinz, Bernard Buffet gravures 1948-1967, Orangerie, Cologne, 1967



LE LAPIN, 1955

Drypoint on paper - 56 x 76 cm / 22.1 x 29.9 in.

Numbered "70/125" lower left

Signed "Bernard Buffet" lower right

Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris



TORÉRO 1, 1961

Drypoint on paper - 76 x 57 cm / 29.9 x 22.4 in.

Signed "Bernard Buffet" lower right

Numbered "51/75" lower left

Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris

## LITHOGRAPHY

Bernard Buffet also made lithographs. This technique is based on the reciprocal repulsion of water and grease. The artist draws with an oily crayon on a limestone which retains its grease. A solution of nitric acid is then passed over the stone to fix the design and a layer of gum arabic is applied on the areas that are to remain blank. The stone is then dampened and inked. Only the greased parts retain the ink. A sheet of paper is placed on the stone and this is all passed under a press.

To create a coloured lithograph, a different stone is used for each colour. The artist defines in advance the various coloured areas. Each stone is inked with the relevant colour and the same sheet of paper is passed through the press with a different stone for each colour. It is a complex technique that requires great precision.



LE LYS, 1970  
Lithograph in colours on paper - 76 x 56 cm / 29.9 x 22.1 in.  
Numbered "69/150" lower left  
Signed "Bernard Buffet" lower right  
Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris

## ALBUMS

Bernard Buffet was always creating and worked on several plates at the same time, sometimes assembling them in albums.

We could mention *Herbier*, published in 1966 by AC Mazo. This album comprises 16 colour lithographs accompanying poems by Louise de Vilmorin. He illustrated 16 different types of flower, each one in a vase placed on a table against a neutral background. The name of the plant is inscribed on each plate with Bernard Buffet's name. The print *Le Chrysanthème du Japon* shown here is part of this group.



LE CHRYSANTHÈME DU JAPON, c. 1965  
Lithograph in colours on paper - 44 x 32 cm / 17.3 x 12.6 in.  
Signed "Bernard Buffet" lower right  
Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris

In 1968, Bernard Buffet created *Mon Cirque*, an album of 44 colour lithographs published by Fernand Mourlot. This publication, which was finished in the middle of a general strike, shows Bernard Buffet's willingness to work in all circumstances. Driven by his untiring creativity, he travelled across Paris and through the demonstrations to get to the print studio.



AUGUSTE, 1968  
Lithograph in colours on paper - 72 x 51 cm / 28.3 x 20.1 in.  
Numbered "29/120" lower left  
Signed "Bernard Buffet" lower center  
Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris



MON CIRQUE, 1968  
Lithograph in colours on paper - 72 x 51 cm / 28.3 x 20.1 in.  
Signed "Bernard Buffet" lower center  
Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris



## THE PERFORMING ARTS

Printmaking also allowed Bernard Buffet to enter the world of the performing arts. He designed sets and costumes for several ballets: *La Chambre* in 1955 (argument by Georges Simenon, music by Georges Auric), *Le Rendez-vous manqué* in 1958 (argument by Françoise Sagan, directed by Roger Vadim) and *Patron* in 1959 (argument by Marcel Aymé, music by Guy Béart).

In 1962, the Mayor of Marseille, Gaston Defferre and the theatre director Louis Ducreux, commissioned the set and costume designs for the opera *Carmen* (livret by H. Meihag and L. Halévy, music by Georges Bizet) from Bernard Buffet. This setting was performed for the first time at the Opéra de Marseille on 26 October 1962. It was for this commission that Bernard Buffet created the lithographs *The Matador* and *Carmen* shown here.



LE MATADOR, 1962  
Lithograph in colours on paper - 76 x 56 cm / 29.9 x 22.1 in.  
Numbered "19/180" lower left  
Signed "Bernard Buffet" lower right  
Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris



CARMEN, 1962  
Lithograph in colours on paper - 76 x 56 cm / 29.9 x 22.1 in.  
Numbered "72/180" lower left  
Signed "Bernard Buffet" lower right  
Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris



NEW YORK, 1959  
Dry point on paper - 56 x 76 cm / 22.1 x 29.9 in.  
Diane de Polignac Gallery, Paris

**The expressive black line that is the essence of Bernard Buffet's work is translated perfectly by the art of printmaking. By using these techniques, "Bernard Buffet has reconnected through the centuries with a graphic tradition that was favoured by Schongauer, Pol de Limbourg, and Grünewald, and makes these artists feel contemporary to us."**<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Charles Sorlier, *Bernard Buffet lithographe*, Trinckvel - Draeger / André Sauret, 1979