
CHARLES CONDER

the lithographs



EDUCATION KIT A Maitland Regional Art Gallery Touring Exhibition

CHARLES CONDER

the lithographs

ABOUT THIS EDUCATION RESOURCE

This Education Kit is designed to present some different ways of looking at and investigating *CHARLES CONDER: The Lithographs* with your students while you view the exhibition and later on back in the classroom.

In the following pages you will find a variety of information, activities and discussion threads that can be used by you and your students in conjunction with this exhibition. These resources can be easily adapted to the age and entry point of your students as you choose.

By drawing on the substance of this exhibition, the lithographs themselves, it is hoped that you and your students can gain on-going insights and interest in Charles Conder and his contribution as an artist.

ANNE MCLAUGHLIN, EDUCATION CURATOR, MRAG



[cover] *Harlequin S'Amuse, c.1905, (Harlequin amusing himself), lithograph on paper, 29 x 35.3cm*

INTRODUCTION

This exhibition comprises twenty eight lithographs by Charles Conder, the English-born artist, who lived and worked in Australia from 1884 – 1890 and who was a key member of the Heidelberg School of Australian Impressionism.

The lithographs in this exhibition were produced in England from 1899 to 1906 and include the Balzac set, invitation cards and allegorical bohemian scenes as well as a collection of books.

The work of Charles Conder is widely collected and held in national collections around the world.

In 2003 a survey exhibition of Charles Conder was held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales curated by Barry Pearce and Ann Galbally which coincided with Galbally's book, *Charles Conder: The Last Bohemian* (2002).

Conder first studied lithography as an apprentice in Sydney during the six years he spent in Australia in his early years as an artist. Interestingly the lithographs in this exhibition were created in the last period of Conder's career and came after a significant output of work that had established his reputation which included landscape painting, drawing, etching and romanticized genre scenes painted on silk and fans.

The subject matter of these lithographs reflect Conder's interests - idealised memories, allegorical scenes, tales from Balzac - and they are all characterised by the personal panache and style that he was known by in the salons and drawing rooms of London and Paris around the turn of the century.

The lithographs of Charles Conder provide a valuable insight into the life and legacy of this artist who is known foremost for his contribution to Australian Impressionism over a few short years; being able to study and appreciate this little known aspect of his artistic output extends our knowledge and appreciation of his overall contribution as an artist. It should be acknowledged the opportunity to view these prints together is the result of the perspicacity and foresight of the collector Richard King who carefully amassed them over many years ensuring that Charles Conder's lithographs could be seen as a discrete body of work.

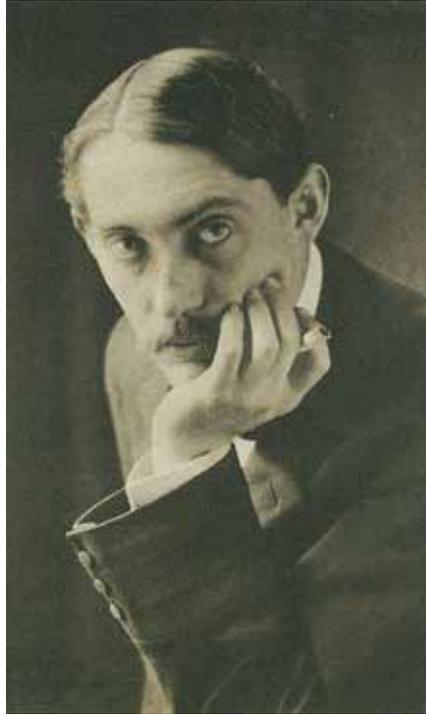
ANNE MCLAUGHLIN, EDUCATION CURATOR, MRAG

ABOUT CHARLES CONDER

Charles Conder lived from 1868 to 1909. He was born in London and as a young man wanted to become an artist; however his father disapproved of this idea and sent Charles away to Australia in 1884 when he was 17 where he was to live with his uncle in Sydney and work with him as a surveyor's assistant.

Conder loved to sketch and draw and with his uncle's permission after a couple of years surveying he became a lithographic apprentice. Lithography is a way of printing by drawing with an oil-based crayon onto a hard surface, metal or stone, and then making a print by applying oil-based ink that adheres to the drawing only. So Conder was drawing and printing in his job and he started taking art classes in his spare time; he used to go out drawing and painting with other artists on the weekend and in this way met Tom Roberts. Conder quickly became a skilled and precocious painter who took to the new plein air way of painting directly outside in the landscape with some success. In 1888 his painting *The Departure of the SS Orient* was bought for the Art Gallery of NSW.

Tom Roberts encouraged Conder to move to Melbourne and join the group of artists he worked with which included Arthur Streeton and Frederick McCubbin. This group, named the Heidelberg School, were painting the Australian bush with fresh eyes based around an artist's camp near Heidelberg, then a rural area just outside Melbourne. Over the summers of 1888 and 1889 Charles further developed his own style of plein air landscape, romantic yet infused with light,



colour and bravura. In the resulting 9 x 5 *Impressions* Exhibition held in August 1889 in Melbourne Conder contributed forty six of the one hundred and eighty two works, many painted on wooden cigar box lids measuring 9 x 5 inches. He quickly established a reputation of some standing and his friendship with Roberts and Streeton continued for many years.

In 1890 Conder left Australia to study art in a Paris studio with funds provided by another uncle. In the then bohemian Paris full of the energy of the pre Modernist period he met and worked with Henri Toulouse-Lautrec and other artists of the time as they pursued their interest in art. Later while based in London he made many trips across to France to paint garden and coastal scenes in the Impressionist style that he had learnt in Australia. By the late 1890s Conder was primarily in London and mixing with fashionable artists and writers of the time including Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley, and painting dreamy colourful paintings on silk, later on silk fans, synthesising the Symbolist style then current. Encouraged by one of his friends he embarked on lithography in 1899 beginning with the 'Balzac Set' of six lithographs seen in this exhibition.

The lithographs in this exhibition came from this last period of his life as an artist. They were of various subjects – some were illustrated scenes taken from stories by the famous early nineteenth French writer Honoré de Balzac, others were allegorical scenes of the past; some were snippets of life as an artist and bohemian and a few were invitations for parties. Handsome people and characters wearing eighteenth century clothes inhabiting dream-like fantasy tableaux formed the unifying style of Conder's lithographs. It was as though he was intent on creating his own world peopled with beautifully costumed characters removed from ordinary day-to-day life.

Conder became increasingly unwell in his late thirties and died in England in 1909 at age 41. His achievements as an artist were many and he is today regarded as one of Australia's key Impressionist painters. This exhibition of his lithographs shows us a significant aspect of Charles Conder's legacy as an artist and extends our familiar knowledge of him as an Australian Impressionist artist.

ANNE MCLAUGHLIN, EDUCATION CURATOR, MRAG

THEMES AND IDEAS TO EXPLORE IN CHARLES CONDER'S LITHOGRAPHS

Telling a story: a picture paints a thousand words



In this exhibition there are six lithographs that are known as The Balzac Set that feature characters from Honoré de Balzac's famous collection of over ninety novels, *La Comédie Humaine* written in the 1830s and 1840s in France. The six lithographs are:

1. *Esther (no 1) death of Esther*
2. *Coralie*
3. *L'Alcade Dans L'Embarras (The embarrassment of Alcade)*
4. *Chez Camille Maupin (At Camille Maupin's home)*
5. *Beatrix et Calyste*
6. *La Fille Aux Yeux D'or (The Girl with the Golden Eyes)*

^[above] *L'Alcade Dans L'Embarras* (from the Balzac set No. 6 in the series, *The Embarrassment of Alcade*) 1899, lithograph on paper, 21.56 x 27.3 cm

THEMES AND IDEAS TO EXPLORE IN CHARLES CONDER'S LITHOGRAPHS

Conder was familiar with Balzac's stories. In his first lithographs in 1899 he selected certain scenes and characters from these to illustrate. These lithographs are his interpretation of what he has read and imagined from the written word.

LOOK AT EACH OF THESE LITHOGRAPHS.

1. Can you see what is happening?
2. What do you think each person is doing or saying?
3. Who are the main characters in each print?
4. How has the artist made the main characters stand out?
5. Where do you think each story is set?

CREATE YOUR OWN NARRATIVE

by choosing one of these lithographs, writing down the title, looking at the lithograph closely and then writing your own story to fit what you see. You could include what each character is saying or doing.

WRITE A SHORT PLAY:

CHOOSE another one of these lithographs, select the characters and write a script that includes the scene in the lithograph. **DECIDE** where and when your play is set. Give it a title.

NOTES: _____

THEMES AND IDEAS TO EXPLORE IN CHARLES CONDER'S LITHOGRAPHS

Past imaginings



Another group of Conder's lithographs feature people and characters from the past. The past for Conder, alive in the early 1900s, was before then, perhaps the 1800s. Some of Conder's lithographs were about when he lived but about people and their imagined pastimes that happened many years before. You can tell by looking at the clothes people have on and what they are doing.

*What can you find out about maypoles, pastorals and harlequins?
When were they around?*

LOOK AT

DESCRIBE what you think is happening in each of these three lithographs. **CHOOSE** an activity or pastime from the past that you know about. **WRITE** about it and describe how people got involved in this past time.

1. *The Maypole*
2. *Pastoral Fantasy*
3. *Harlequin S'Amuse*

Why don't we still enjoy some of these past times now?

^[above] *Harlequin S'Amuse*, c.1905, (*Harlequin amusing himself*), lithograph on paper, 29 x 35.3cm

THEMES AND IDEAS TO EXPLORE IN CHARLES CONDER'S LITHOGRAPHS

Creating your own images



LOOK AT THE LEANING TREE. CAN YOU SEE THE FOUR FIGURES?

Conder was an experienced artist when he embarked on lithography in 1899. His early training had been to demonstrate how lithographs were made into illustrations for paper and magazines. He brought all his artistic skills and sense of beauty to this technique of making prints.

Below are some of the main elements that were expertly used by Conder to create his lithographs:

LINE

thick, thin, curved, delicate, strong, feeling around forms, short, sharp, smooth, flowing

COMPOSITION

To arrange forms so that there is balance and interest, to look at the spaces that are created between shapes, to lead the viewer's eye into the work by arranging large shapes at the front and smaller shapes at the back.

TEXTURE

describing different surfaces; hair, distant skies, fabric in dresses, smooth materials, grasses, by using different sorts of lines, dashes, shading, dots and marks in different combinations

STONE

shading from light to dark gradually, making the deepest shadows, leaving white highlights, to make forms

DRAW some of the different types of line used on the tree. **DRAW** the grass as Conder has – notice the length and directions of the lines and how dark or light they are and how close together. **DRAW** one of the hats and carefully **SHADE** it, looking carefully at the different directions of lines. **USING A SINGLE LINE**, draw outlines of the main shapes and how they fit together – the four figures and the tree and the grass. Look at this – this a plan of the composition. What do you notice about it?

^[above] *The Leaning Tree*, c. 1899, lithograph on paper, 32 x 25cm

THEMES AND IDEAS TO EXPLORE IN CHARLES CONDER'S LITHOGRAPHS

Snippets of contemporary life



When looking at the work of an artist it is necessary to remember that he or she is from their own particular time. When we look at these lithographs we need to remember that they were created by Charles Conder in a completely different world from today, over one hundred years ago. And they were created in his own style – that is, his own way of drawing.

Some of Conder's lithographs were about ordinary snippets of life. Conder loved beauty and beautiful things so he naturally wanted to create artworks which featured handsome, good-looking people and charming rooms, buildings, gardens and skies. Conder uses a smooth and romantic style for these ordinary events.

LOOK AT

1. *Gossip*
2. *The Fairy Tale*
3. *Schaunard's Studio*

These lithographs reflect parts of Conder's life: going to other artists' studios, hanging out with friends, telling stories, swapping gossip...

DESCRIBE what you can see in these lithographs.

Why do you think Conder has chosen those particular clothes, hats and furniture to put in these lithographs? **FIND** out what people wore in 1905. Are Conder's figures from the early 1900s? **WRITE** down what you think Conder's style is (his way of doing things) when he creates lithographs?

^[above] *Schaunard's Studio*, 1906, lithograph on paper, 29 x 37.7cm

THEMES AND IDEAS TO EXPLORE IN CHARLES CONDER'S LITHOGRAPHS

Framing a view



Composing a picture, print, painting or drawing involves arranging shapes and the spaces between them to present an image that communicates to the viewer. Conder uses real objects in real spaces in his artworks.

How you arrange shapes together can create space. Large shapes at the front and smaller behind create depth.

LOOK at *Un Prince De La Boheme* • What shapes do you look at first? Why?

SKETCH AN OUTLINE OF THE SHAPES IN THE FOREGROUND.
(the front space)

Now **DRAW** outlines of objects in the middleground space

- What shapes are furthest away from the viewer?
- What shapes link the top of the work to the rest of it?

DRAW in the outlines of the building in the background.

- Are those shapes smaller?

FIND some more of Conder's lithographs that take your eye through into a framed view. **SKETCH** the outlines of their shapes. **LOOK** at how buildings and architecture, trees and walls are used to link shapes. **MAKE** a view finder by cutting a rectangle out of a larger rectangle – making a frame about 3 cms thick with a open rectangle about 10 cms wide by 8 cms high inside. **HOLD** this up in front of you and move around until you frame an interesting composition. **DRAW** the shapes inside your viewfinder.

LOOK AT ESTHER (NO2).

What can you see in the far distance ?

LOOK at the larger shapes in the foreground. Are they light or dark ? What makes them stand out ?

CREATE your own composition:

- Larger shapes in front,
- Smaller shapes in background,
- Include an opening or framed shape (branches, windows, columns) that the viewer can look into, this should be in the middleground.

^[above] *Un Prince De La Boheme*, 1901-1904, (A prince of the artistic set), lithograph on paper, 29 x 37.7cm

THEMES AND IDEAS TO EXPLORE IN CHARLES CONDER'S LITHOGRAPHS

Style and characters



LOOK FOR THESE FIGURES:

WOMAN

FARMER

HARLEQUIN

MAN

front left
La Mi - Careme

in middle of
A Pastoral Fantasy

in middle of *L'Alcade*
Dans L'Embarrass

front left of
Fantaisie Espagnol

1. What century or year do you think they are from ?
2. What sort of clothes are they dressed in and what are they doing?
3. Try drawing one of these characters by looking at them closely. Notice the types of lines that Conder uses.
4. Now **DRAW** one character of the same period that you make up yourself.
5. Can you now **DRAW** some background around the figure – look at some of Conder's backgrounds for ideas.
6. Give your new character a **NAME** and describe she or he.

NOTES: _____

^[above] *Harlequin's Courtship*, c.1905, lithograph on paper, 28.2 x 46.5cm

THEMES AND IDEAS TO EXPLORE IN CHARLES CONDER'S LITHOGRAPHS

Characters today.

1. Can you think of current characters that we all know?
 2. What makes them different and individual?
 3. Look at their clothes and the shapes of their bodies, their faces.
 4. Choose three characters from today and draw them.
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Art and life



Artists often make their own books, write letters, design invitations and clothes as part of being creative. Conder loved parties, dressing up in costumes and staging events.

1. **LOOK** at *Invitation Card to a Fancy Dress Party*.
2. Can you **SEE** how this lithograph is similar to Conder's other works?
3. How has he designed it?
4. What has he had to add because it is an invitation card and why did he make it a lithograph?
5. **DESIGN** an invitation for your next birthday party using drawing. Decide the theme of your party and add shapes and objects that reflect it. Remember to include all the information that you need about your party.

^[above] *Invitation to a fancy dress party at the artist's house, c.1905, lithograph on paper, 17.5 x 26.5cm*

A BIT ABOUT LITHOGRAPHY

Lithography is a method of printing from a limestone or metal plate that has been drawn on with a wax or oil based crayon or pencil. It became very popular with artists in the early nineteenth century as it a way of making many prints of the one drawing which the artist draws directly onto the stone or metal surface. Lithography works on the basis that oil and water repel each other.

What is a lithograph?

It is a print on paper that has been made by inking up and printing a drawing that has been drawn onto a smooth limestone block with an oil-based or waxy crayon or pencil. Once the drawing is complete, the stone is covered with gum Arabic which is water based and blocks out all areas that are not drawn on and causes a chemical reaction that sets the drawing onto the stone. When dry the stone is rolled with an oil-based ink that only stays on the drawn parts of the plate. The plate is then printed onto paper by rolling the stone and paper through a printing press.

How do you print a lithograph?

By inking up the plate, placing paper on top and rolling through the printing press. You can repeat the process many times and produce an 'edition' of prints that you then number in order.

Do artists still make lithographs?

Yes some do as lithographs have their own unique qualities of line, texture and tone. It takes time though and you need particular materials and equipment – the most important being a printing press and the limestone blocks. Some artists do the drawing first and get a printmaker to make the print.

Did Charles Conder draw and print his lithographs himself?

He certainly drew the plates. He began lithography encouraged by Will Rothensein, an artist friend of his, in 1899, in London. Previously, like many artists of the time, Conder had trained as an illustrator at the same time as taking art lessons and developing as a painter. His illustrations were lithographs printed into papers and magazines. When years later he came to make lithographs as an artist, this tendency to illustrate persisted as he tackled subjects mainly drawn from characters and scenes from stories by Balzac.

Q & A

QUESTION:

HOW DID THIS EXHIBITION CHARLES CONDER THE LITHOGRAPHS COME ABOUT?

ANSWER:

Maitland Regional Art Gallery (MRAG) has a permanent collection of artworks owned by the gallery with the main focus of this collection being works on paper. In 2009 Richard King, an art collector, met MRAG's Cultural Director Joe Eisenberg. Richard King had in his own collection a number of lithographs by Charles Conder and the idea of exhibiting this collection at MRAG, with its focus on works on paper, soon eventuated. *CHARLES CONDER: The Lithographs* comprising thirty seven lithographs and four books was exhibited from 15 January – 6 March 2011 at MRAG. It was accompanied by a comprehensive exhibition catalogue that included essays by Barry Humphries and Richard King.

Following this initial exhibition at MRAG Richard King decided to gift to the permanent collection of the art gallery twenty eight lithographs and eight books and other Conder ephemera from the MRAG exhibition. MRAG then prepared to present their new Conder acquisitions as a touring exhibition to regional and other public galleries. Bookings from six public galleries across NSW and Queensland were secured and the touring exhibition is to be viewed at six venues from June 2013 until late March 2015.

QUESTION:

WHO OWNS THESE WORKS NOW?

ANSWER:

The twenty eight lithographs, one photograph and eight books on exhibition as well as other ephemera are now in the permanent collection of Maitland Regional Art Gallery in Maitland NSW.

QUESTION:

WHO WAS CHARLES CONDER?

ANSWER:

Charles Conder (1868 – 1909) is lastingly significant in Australian art as a key Heidelberg School artist – one of a small group of artists including Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts and Frederick McCubbin. These artists brought a new artistic vision of the Australian bush in the

Q & A

late nineteenth century through their plein air landscape paintings infused with optimism, freshness, and light infused colour. In their landmark *9 x 5 Impression* Exhibition in 1889 Conder contributed 46 of the 182 Impressions painted mainly on wooden cigar box lids. Conder, born in England, spent six years in Australia in Sydney and Melbourne from age 17 to 22 before returning to Paris, London and Europe for the remainder of his short life. His natural talent and appealing nature led to him making significant friendships with many artists and writers of bohemian Paris and fin-de-siecle London including Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley. His fifteen years as an artist in Australia, France and England produced a significant body of work including landscape painting, drawing, watercolour paintings on silk and silk fans and finally lithography before his premature death at 41 in 1909.

QUESTION:

HOW CAN I USE THIS SHOW WITH MY STUDENTS?

ANSWER:

While initially these lithographs may seem obscure and enigmatic, on closer study there are many links and concepts that can be explored by school students. The dynamism of Conder's drawing, his use of lithography to visualise characters and scenes from texts, his dreamlike fantastical compositions peopled by romanticised characters, the position of lithography in his career - all these strands and perspectives can be extended for appropriate art-making and studying activities. Conder's life as an artist and the related art periods in Melbourne, London and Paris provides numerous opportunities for looking at Impressionism, Symbolism and early Modernism.

QUESTION:

HOW DID BARRY HUMPHRIES COME TO WRITE THE INTRODUCTION IN THE CATALOGUE?

ANSWER:

Barry Humphries is an accomplished artist, art collector and intellectual as well as being the alter ego of Dame Edna Everage and other well-known characters. Over many years he has collected artworks by Charles Conder. Fascinated by Conder's life and journey from 1890 post goldrush Melbourne to the salons and ateliers of fin-de-siecle Paris and London Humphries' has considerable knowledge of the artist and his life. This was demonstrated in the catalogue essay he wrote entitled *Confessions of a Collector* that accompanied the 2003 exhibition *Charles Conder, a retrospective* at the Art Gallery of NSW in 2003.

Q & A

QUESTION:

WHERE IS THIS EXHIBITION GOING AND WHAT HAPPENS TO ALL THE ARTWORKS AND BOOKS?

ANSWER:

This exhibition is going to public galleries in Brisbane, Toowoomba, Murwillumbah, Warwick, Moree and Grafton between June 2013 and April 2015. It is packed up carefully with instructions on how to unpack, install in each gallery and send on to the next venue. The touring show includes other information and resources including this Education Kit so that the exhibition can be fully presented to the public wherever it is exhibited. The entire exhibition will then be returned to Maitland Regional Art Gallery's Permanent Collection.

QUESTION:

HOW DO YOU BECOME AN ART COLLECTOR?

ANSWER:

Very simply, you buy and collect artworks that you like. Collectors tend to specialise in one or a few areas. Richard King, the collector whose works make up this exhibition, began to collect etchings and woodcuts by Australian artists in the 1960s. A gift of a book on Charles Conder received by Richard King in the early 1970s sparked his particular focus on the artist's lithographs. Collectors also become immersed in a specific area and usually will research the artist or period, looking for letters, old books, catalogues, reviews of the time even people to interview to expand their knowledge and understanding. Collecting is a labour of love and some collections become very valuable resources to the public when held and maintained by public art galleries, museums and libraries.

QUESTION:

HOW DO WE KNOW ABOUT ARTISTS FROM THE PAST?

ANSWER:

The artist leaves in perpetuity a body of work, an archive. Catalogues, reviews, books, articles in the press, letters and the artworks can all give an extensive picture and context for understanding the contribution and legacy of an artist. We also have research into artists that takes place, perhaps many years after that artist has lived, as waves of opinion about them change and develop. In this way some artists are re-discovered and their relevance to the present becomes apparent. Art collectors play a role in this constantly evolving body of knowledge and public art galleries also do as they can become the site for a renewed interest in past artists through curated exhibitions.

GLOSSARY

ATELIER:

an artist's workshop with an artist and a number of assistants all engaged in artmaking

BOHEMIAN:

a word used to describe people, often artists and writers who do not live conventional lives and who follow their own creative paths with little interest in materialism; a common term in 19th century France.

COLLECTOR:

a person that collects particular articles or objects of a specific type or from a specific period.

FIN DE SIECLE:

(French: 'end of the century')
a term to describe a late 19th-century literary and artistic climate of sophistication, escapism, extreme aestheticism, world-weariness, and fashionable despair.

HARLEQUIN:

a character in performance with a long history, traditionally wears a tight fitting costume and is masked or with blackened face. Derives from Arlecchino, a stock character of Italian comedy. Always comical, mischievous and acrobatic, often cast as a servant or the fool but remains a key character.

HEIDELBERG SCHOOL:

a group of artists that included Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, Frederick McCubbin and Charles Conder who painted 'in plein air' outside directly in the landscape in a rural area outside Melbourne, Heidelberg, around the early 1890s. The Heidelberg School championed a fresh new way of looking at the Australian landscape, using light filled colours, as something unique and beautiful in its own way.

HONORÉ DE BALZAC:

an important French novelist and playwright (1799 – 1850) whose writing portrayed real people of all classes in stories that demonstrated were

commentaries on contemporary French life in the first half of the nineteenth century. Balzac was well-known for his *Comédie Humaine*, a collection of over ninety different novels in which characters re-appeared across different inter-connecting stories.

IMPRESSIONISM:

a style of painting that originated in France during the 1870s. Impressionist artists focussed on the immediate visual impression produced by a scene usually outside by using bright colours and small strokes to simulate actual reflected light on different surfaces.

INVITATION CARD:

a hand drawn or printed card inviting a guest to a social occasion at a specific date and time.

LITHOGRAPHY:

a method of printmaking whereby an image is drawn directly onto a flat stone or metal plate with an oil based crayon and then inked up using oil based ink and printed after an oil resistant liquid (gum arabic) blocks out the rest of the plate. A lithographic print transfers the positive drawn image to the printed paper.

PROOF:

a trial print to test the plate and the image.

PASTORAL:

in art portraying an idyllic peaceful rural life of simplicity and charm.

STYLE:

a distinctive way in which an artist or group of artists work; certain features that are common across artworks by the same artist/s

SYMBOLISM:

a late 19th century art movement that elevated the spiritual in imagery through the use of symbols, references to mythology and dreams to convey meaning. The use of personal symbols often made meaning hidden and enigmatic.



CHARLES CONDER

