

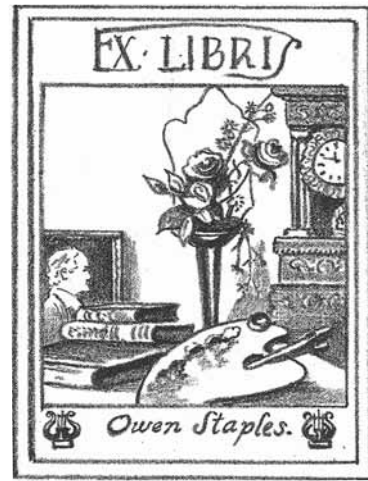
An intimate self-portrait

TO UNDERSTAND THE DEPTH of artistry exhibited in the work of Canadian illustrator and painter Owen Staples (1866–1949), one would benefit from knowing something of his life. A difficult childhood gave way to a string of fortuitous and serendipitous encounters that allowed him to launch a lifelong career as an artist. His bookplate is a succinct representation of the things that influenced him most.

A few books, flowers in a vase, and a painter's palette and brush set on a table; on the left is a portrait of a man. Given Staples's identity as a prominent painter, the presence of the palette and brush is hardly surprising. The portrait is a reminder of his propensity to sketch portraits of those with whom he worked while he was still a budding artist. These are but tokens of the much wider scope of art with which he was familiar, however.

Staples lived for a brief time in Rochester, New York, as an adolescent. Working at the Rochester Art Club, he learned techniques in wood engraving, anatomical sketching and etching from several distinguished artists. Upon returning to Toronto, he worked for many years as a cartoonist, illustrator and artist-reporter for the *Telegram*. He also produced a series of engravings of Toronto churches; painted a number of historic sites and buildings; became skilled in sketching and pen drawing; and, when a stroke paralyzed his right arm in the 1940s, promptly learned to paint with his left.

Staples was very much inspired by nature, achieving great acclaim as a painter of Ontario landscapes. A life of travel yielded numerous sketches, pen drawings and paintings of natural scenes. A member of the Toronto Field Naturalists in addition to being an artist, Staples wrote articles for the *Telegram* on the natural world, subjects ranging from insect behaviour to landscape architecture. He had a particular fondness for roses and joined the Rose Society of Ontario; a vase of roses sits at the centre of his bookplate.



The stack of books next to these roses emphasizes Staples's love of literature. A voracious reader from a young age, he was a member of both the Arts and Letters Club of Toronto and the Toronto branch of the Canadian Authors Association, and also president of the Society of Canadian Painter-Etchers and Engravers. Appointed to the council of the Ontario College of Art, he visited many schools and exhibitions as an examiner, critic, adjudicator and speaker. An educator and theorist, he addressed many societies and clubs on various aspects of art and other related subjects. One unique area of interest was the interrelation between colour and music—for Staples was a talented musician as well. Two lyres framing his name reflect his love of music.

An anonymous note on the verso of this lithographed bookplate identifies Staples as the creator. As a young man working at an engravers and designers firm prior to his employment at the *Telegram*, Staples was introduced to lithography. He eventually learned enough of lithography to put his skills to create an intimate self-portrait for a bookplate.

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The Rare Books and Special Collections Bookplate Collection can be accessed from the UBC Library Digital Collections and Services site, <http://digitalcollections.library.ubc.ca>.