

**ABOUT ETCHING. PART I. NOTES BY MR.
SEYMOUR HADEN ON A COLLECTION
OF ETCHINGS BY THE GREAT MASTERS;
PART II. AN ANNOTATED CATALOGUE
OF THE ETCHINGS EXHIBITED**

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About Etching. Part I. Notes by Mr. Seymour Haden on a collection of etchings by the Great Masters; Part II. An annotated catalogue of the Etchings exhibited by Mr. Seymour Haden

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MR. SEYMOUR HADEN

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ABOUT ETCHING.

PART I.

NOTES BY MR. SEYMOUR HADEN

ON

A COLLECTION OF ETCHINGS BY
THE GREAT MASTERS

LENT BY HIM TO THE FINE ART SOCIETY'S GALLERIES
TO ILLUSTRATE THE SUBJECT OF ETCHING.

PART II.

AN ANNOTATED CATALOGUE OF THE
ETCHINGS EXHIBITED.

148 NEW BOND STREET.

1878-9.

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PREFACE.

AN impulsion has of late years been given to the subject of Etching in this country, for which I cannot but hold myself in some measure responsible, and which I am aware has done both good and harm : good, inasmuch as it has taught us to be dissatisfied with the colourless platitudes of modern steel engraving ; harm, as it has led many, uninformed as to its processes and the principles which should govern it, to misapprehend the true aim and end of Etching as a painter's art.

The time, therefore, would seem to have come when I should do what is in me to put this right. Hence the present Exhibition. If it prove as interesting to others as the Collection of which it is a part has been through long years of more engrossing work a rest and a lesson to me, I shall be repaid for the little trouble I have had in its arrangement.

The Notes which have been written to accompany the Exhibition are mainly explanatory. If Etching is a mystery, their aim is to solve it ; if

its capabilities have been overrated, to define their limits ; if underrated, to plead for their extension ; if it is an art worthy of revival, to revive it. They endeavour to effect this end by such a cursory estimate as their disjointed nature permits of the part played by the old Etchers in the history of Art, and especially by the chief of them, Rembrandt ; by a comparison of Etching and Engraving, of the etching line and the burin line, and of the special qualities of each ; by a glance at the theory that Etching implies imperfect drawing and the loose treatment which belongs to the sketch ; and finally by a consideration of what good drawing is and of the part which it plays in the production of expression ; and of the kind of previous knowledge and skill which is required by the Etcher.

F. S. H.

38 HERTFORD ST., MAYFAIR,
Nov. 21st, 1878.

ABOUT ETCHING.

PART I.

NOTE I.

EXPLANATORY.

SOME months ago I undertook, at the instance of the Fine-Art Society, to do two etchings,—‘Windsor’ and ‘Greenwich,’ and at the same time to say something general on the subject of Etching and to illustrate what I had to say by reference to such of my own etchings as were then in course of publication, and which were to be transferred to the galleries of the Society for the purpose. I at once felt, however, that in this I had made a rash promise, and that however useful such a reference might be to the elucidation of my own practice it would do nothing towards the illustration of the whole subject, which, after all, was what I understood to be the aim of the Society. Hence, at the eleventh hour, I proposed the amendment that I should lend to the Society such a portion of my collection of Etchings by the Old Masters as would properly satisfy this end; and hence it is that, though now too late to withdraw my own work, the Society’s main gallery has come to be filled with the nobler work we see.

NOTE II.

OWN REASONS FOR ETCHING.

Meanwhile, as these notes would be of no interest if made up of the opinions of others, I shall not be misunderstood if I first account for the preference which for many

years I myself have had for drawing as a pursuit, and for the point as a medium of expression.

Sixteen years ago, while reporting on the educational and instrumental appliances of modern surgery in the International Exhibition of 1862, I wrote as follows: 'It is surprising that while so much is being done to prepare the student of medicine and surgery for the difficulties of his career, nothing is done to educate his eye and hand. Such an item in his education is essential, and nothing in my judgment would more directly and pleasantly conduce to it than the practice of drawing and modelling from Nature. How much sooner would the eye accustomed to observe and estimate closely differences of colour, aspect, weight, and symmetry, learn to gauge their aberrations as the signs which make up the *facies* of disease; how much better the hand, trained to pourtray them accurately, be able to direct with precision and safety the course of the knife?' Nothing came, however, of the suggestion; and it has perhaps not even yet occurred to those of my distinguished *confrères* who delight to spend their short holidays in the practice of art, how serious a matter of skilled training lies at the bottom of their practice.

NOTE III.

OWN VIEWS OF ART.

As a ready way of explaining these I have, also, not thought it undesirable to reprint the following letter, which was written to M. Philippe Burty, and published in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, in 1864. I apologise for its not being in English:—

' . . . a mon avis les facultés artistiques sont innées; elles ne s'acquièrent point. L'art est une émanation morale & intellectuelle que l'étude peut développer, mais qu'elle ne saurait faire naître.

‘Ce qui prouve que l’art procède toujours d’un sentiment inné, c’est que l’œuvre de chaque maître a son caractère tout spécial & qu’il ne ressemble en rien à l’œuvre de tel autre maître de force égale. Voyez Velasquez, le Titien, Raphaël, Rembrandt, Dürer. Que peut-il y avoir de plus divers que la manière dont chacun de ces maîtres aurait interprété la même chose? N’est-il pas évident que cette conception individuelle était innée & qu’aucun précepte, aucun exemple n’auraient pu la produire? La doctrine académique (& en disant ceci je n’entends point parler de l’enseignement toujours indispensable des premiers principes de l’art), peut fournir les disciples d’une école établie, école basée sur les données d’un goût plus ou moins éphémère, mais elle ne saurait produire un artiste original. Au contraire, elle entravera son développement. Je suis donc ennemi déclaré des Académies comme étant des écoles trop spéciales d’éducation. Je m’oppose “aux préceptes & à la pratique de l’art,” tels qu’elles les enseignent. Je redoute surtout l’influence des distinctions qu’elles décernent autant que celle des exhibitions qu’elles ouvrent. Je crois que toute originalité doit succomber sous le poids de cette influence; qu’elle arrive nécessairement à assimiler un artiste à l’autre; & que, avec des éléments ainsi réunis, les Académies ne peuvent former que ce détestable ensemble qu’on appelle communément “Ecole.” C’est l’artiste, au contraire, qui doit se créer son école; il ne lui reste qu’à chercher les moyens d’interpréter ses impressions.

‘Je crois aussi que le *vrai* sentiment artistique n’est donné qu’aux natures élevées; que l’esprit vulgaire ne saurait produire le beau, de même que l’esprit déloyal ne saurait trouver la vérité. Les productions artistiques reflètent l’âme de l’artiste; vous y voyez tour à tour toutes les passions humaines. Ce sont des hommes qui défilent devant vous dans leurs œuvres.

‘Quant à la pratique de l’art, je n’accorde qu’une place relativement secondaire à la supériorité technique, & à toutes ces qualités qui se communiquent par la tradition, & qui sont, par conséquent, à la portée de tout le monde. L’artiste doit se rendre maître du procédé au point de donner une belle forme à sa pensée. Qu’il aille trop loin, & les moyens deviendraient le but; les sentiments & la pensée, au lieu de dominer, seraient emportés par la facilité. Je ne fais aucun cas non plus d’un travail trop minutieux. L’élaboration d’un détail absorbe du temps. Dépenser trop de temps sur un tableau, c’est affaiblir sa conception,