

# **THE ETCHING OF LANDSCAPES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649012565

The Etching of Landscapes by Henry Winslow

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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**HENRY WINSLOW**

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OF LANDSCAPES**



# The Etching of Landscapes

*by*

Henry Winslow

With Two Original Etchings

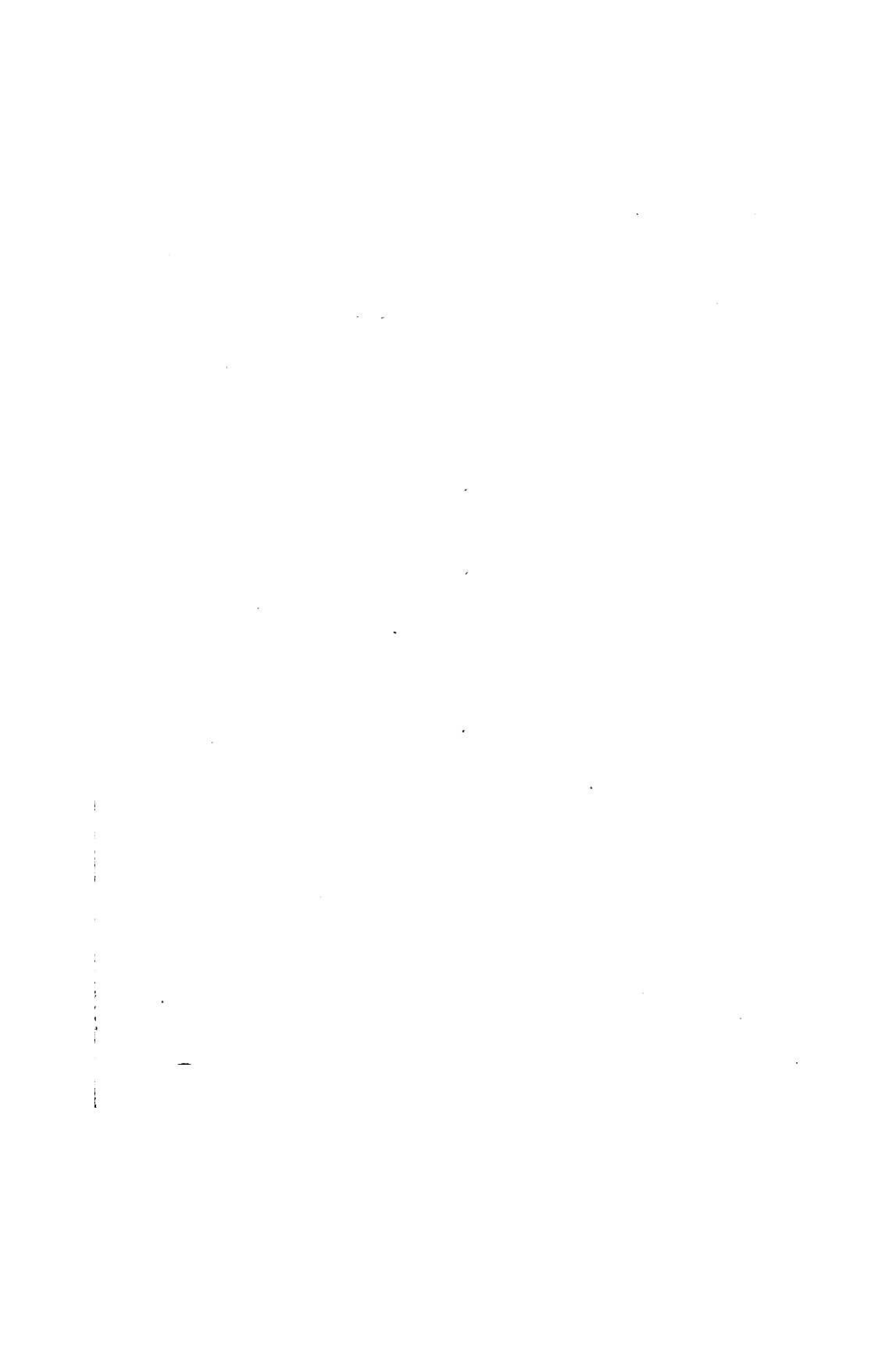
*by*

Franklin T. Wood

Allen Lewis



*This book is issued by the Chicago Society of Etchers for its associate members. It encloses two signed etchings: one entitled "The Dry Brook," by Franklin T. Wood, of Boston; and "The Dead Oak," by Allen Lewis, of Brooklyn. These plates were selected by the Executive Board from ten etched by members and submitted for this purpose. After two hundred and fifty copies were printed the two plates were destroyed, and no copies are for sale. The book is limited to two hundred and fifty copies and type distributed.*





**E**NTHRONED in the Far East, landscape painting has always been considered by the Chinese to be a higher form of art than figure painting. In Europe the reverse is true, and it is perhaps not too fanciful, to regard this as owing to the difference between the Eastern and Western idea of man's place in the world. The European regards himself as the center of the universe, the inheritor of the earth—not, as he is regarded in the East, merely one of the myriad manifestations of the Creator. Viewing this idea pictorially, we have on the one hand, the central human figure posed against the world as a background, on the other, a vast landscape filled with small figures.

Turning now to our Western art, we find that it is, in its beginnings, a kind of graphic description of life, which represents the various activities of man, fighting, hunting, dancing, feasting, with perhaps the most summary portrayal of his surroundings. The suggestion of landscape, where it occurs in this early work, depicts the setting, as it were, of the primitive stage where the actors played their parts. From this crude beginning, a long series of inventions and discoveries, of conquered difficulties and acquired experiences, bring us to those rare and jewel-like landscapes which form the back-



grounds of the Biblical scenes portrayed by the Flemish and Italian Primitives.

This takes us to the close of the Fifteenth Century and to Titian, who may fairly be considered the inventor of modern landscape. In his work we find all the elements with which we have since become so familiar—the varied foregrounds and the balanced masses of trees, the broken skies and illuminated distances. A century later, in the line and wash landscape drawings by Rembrandt, in which the Chatsworth collection is so rich, which reveal a quite different outlook, we have another fertile source of inspiration. Certainly to these no less beautiful, if more humble works, the debt of the landscape etcher is great.

Turning now to etching, we note that its birth, about 1500, was contemporaneous with an already highly developed landscape art, so that the history of landscape etching becomes the study of the rendering, in terms of etching, of ideas and conventions, conceived and invented by landscape painters. Just as the essentials of landscape painting were discovered by figure painters, so were the elements of landscape etching originated by figure etchers whose landscape backgrounds derive in turn from the contemporary landscape painters. Most of the great etchers, noted in this miniature monograph, were great painters and often, as in the plates of Claude

and Corot, we shall see the tendency of the artist to think in terms of paint, even with needle in hand.

It is important, at this point, to indicate the most characteristic quality of etching and the one which makes it so suitable a medium for the rendering of landscape. This is the fluency of line of a needle passing through the film of wax and over the smooth surface of the plate as easily as a finger writing on the wet window-pane. To realize the fitness of such a line, one has but to consider the forms of which landscape is composed, and how free and varied are the shapes of trees and clouds, compared to the geometrical patterns architecture presents or to the relative exactness of contour exhibited by the human figure. The very waver of this delicate and even line is suggestive of far spreading horizons, of the folds of distant hills and wind-swept skies.

Let us now look at some of the most distinguished examples of our art that the past has bequeathed to us. In the first quarter of the Sixteenth Century, working in Germany and following close upon Dürer, a group of men, which included Beham, Lautensack, Altdorfer and Hirschvogel, may be considered the pioneers of etching.

A landscape by Hirschvogel, which is in the British Museum, may be taken as typical of the school. It represents a river, wooded hills in the distance and on

the right a road winding through a mediaeval city gate, while on the left a tree passes out of the plate. Simple in treatment, being little more than outline, it is yet full of charm and suggestive in spite of its mannerisms. In style, it suggests pen drawing, which may be partly owing to the use of an iron plate, common at this time, since the surface may well have been rather rough.

In general, it may be said that the etched work of this group has little to distinguish it from their drawings. Its claim to our affections lies principally in its possession of qualities common to all the art of that time.

In Italy, Parmigiano was etching at this period, but his work and that done by his followers was from the figure. Indeed, Italy has contributed but indirectly to the development of landscape etching, her great masters of the craft having devoted themselves to architecture.

In the Netherlands, the Brueghels, Hans Bol and Paul Brill etched some landscapes which have been described by Mr. Hind as "bizarre in character and meagre in line."

In France, as the century draws to a close, we have to notice Jacques Callot and Claude. The former scarcely comes within the scope of this article, since his landscape was secondary in interest, his most important work consisting of plates crowded with figures. Technically, he is noteworthy for his use of engraving mixed with etch-