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Book Title: Ravilious Wood Engravings

Written By: James Russell

Edited By: Tim Mainstone

ISBN: 9780957666559

Published by: The Mainstone Press

Reviewed by: Andy Robert Davies

Review text:

As one would hope with a publication that showcases such a superb body of work, this book has been made to a very high standard. Each page is dominated by a black and white print, with supporting text that provides a context to its production. The striking pattern on the dust jacket and the tiny icons and shapes that adorn the pages, reflect the intricacy of Ravilious' designs. Most of the illustrations have been faithfully reproduced at the original size, which is very helpful for those studying printmaking and for any visual artist. We are able to observe his use of composition and mark making as a way to describe the landscape whilst showing light delicately falling across a scene made up of numerous shapes and textures.

We start to see how his artistic influences (Thomas Bewick and contemporaries like Edward Bawden), coupled with his love of the English countryside and regular location drawing trips, resulted in such diverse work. When reading about this I couldn't help but want to see more of these drawings, but that may have resulted in a dilution of the content of this particular book.

Russell provides us with a fascinating overview of Ravilious' life; his education, teaching career, work as a war artist and his experience as a commercial artist. Here, many present-day Illustrators and Designers will be able to empathise as we learn of how he applied an entrepreneurial approach to selling objects and the importance of developing good and creatively rewarding relationships with his publishers. Russell also uses numerous quotes to explain and celebrate the craft Ravilious displayed in transforming wood blocks into the most engaging pictures.

One insight into Ravilious' working life is the commission he received from Robert Gibbings, a founder of the Society of Wood Engravers. He sends the artist a detailed description of what he would like, providing some clear art direction, followed by an almost apologetic comment, 'Could you possibly do this for a fiver...?'. Any contemporary Illustrator could surely relate to this! The inclusion of comments like this, makes the book more than just a visual experience, it helps us understand the man behind the illustrations and his professional practice, as well as his craft.

This book will be a great addition to the library of Ravilious fans and for those who are new to his work. It will appeal to practitioners, educators and students, as it gives a glimpse into the working process of a great artist, provides inspiration and it is a masterclass in composition and form.

For us to link images in the review, please include:

Link to the publisher's website page featuring the book: <https://www.themainstonepress.com>

Link to the illustrator's website page: n/a

Link to your website: <http://www.ardillustration.com>