



Wood Engraving: The Art of Wood Engraving And Relief Engraving

Barry Moser

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From the artist whom Nicholas Basbanes calls the most important book illustrator working in America today comes a primer on the art of wood engraving, a pursuit which one can learn in less than an hour but which one can master only through years of persistence, dedication, and indefatigable energy.

Learning to engrave a block, says Barry Moser, is like learning to play the piano: it is all practice, practice, practice, all teaching the muscles how to perform the basics. At first your every gesture will be halting, labored, and self-conscious; then at last will come the moment when, like Ashkenazy at the keyboard, you can forget about process, about technique, and focus all your mental energy on making art. There are no shortcuts, warns Moser. Mastery comes only with time, work, and repetition. A great number of bad wood engravings must be made before one can expect to make a good one. Once your muscles know how to do their work, once they know how to carve thin white lines into boxwood, your mind will be free to invent.

There is a lifetime of knowledge in this book: how to prepare a printing block; how to think in the medium's properties of line, shape, and ink; how to transfer a drawing onto a block. There is advice, too, on tools: not only on gravers (burins, scorpers, stipplers, and spitzstickers) but also on lights (you'll need a good strong one) and engraving bags (the leather pillows that cradle the blocks as you carve). Here is how to ink, how to choose paper, and how to print. Here is how to fail, how to move on, and how to acquire the habit of work that leads to real achievement.

Wood Engraving is an art lesson and a life lesson. And because it's a book by Barry Moser, it is also a gallery of prints and beautiful to behold.

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