

Quiet Pleasures

SINCLAIR HITCHINGS

BRUCE CHANDLER is a designer, draftsman, watercolorist, etcher, lithographer, wood engraver, and letterpress printer—a versatile artist and craftsman who from time to time chooses texts, and designs, sets type, illustrates, and prints those texts as limited-edition books of his Heron Press.

When he engraves on wood, he works in a medium easily accessible to all of us. Many years ago, Mark McCorison and I made a pilgrimage to Northampton to visit Leonard Baskin. The three of us sat and talked around the Baskin's kitchen table. In his left hand, Baskin held a small woodblock; cradled in his right hand, with the curved end of the wooden handle backed against his palm, he held a burin. From time to time, he would pause in his talk, survey the surface of the block, and engrave another line or two. He would tilt the block until the engraved surface caught the light and he could see how his intended design was coming along. There was a relaxed, intimate, domestic feeling to this kitchen-table session of conversation and wood engraving. The medium of wood engraving lends itself to such scenes.

My own initiation into the medium came in Ray Nash's Graphic Arts Workshop at Dartmouth College. Professor Nash liked woodcuts and wood engravings not only for the opportunities they offer for simple, bold designs in black and white, but also for the fact that woodblocks can be type-high and can be locked up with handset type to produce a broadside or folder or small pamphlet—an ideal experience for students learning about book de-

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sign, illustration, and printing. I am not an artist, and after my first lessons in wood engraving, I chose for my subjects several birds; some of the outlines I traced from Roger Tory Peterson's illustrations of American birds in his field guides. I went to a couple of lumber yards and inquired about woods which might be suitable. I asked for waste pieces, leftovers from cuttings; I inquired for apple, pear, and cherry, and ended up with several pieces of mahogany. My occasional student efforts as a wood engraver continued probably for a year and left me with a lasting sense of the attractions of this medium of picture-making.

Tonight, Bruce Chandler has brought woodblocks and tools for wood engraving. He will talk to us about this skill.

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