

Aubrey Beardsley: Vintage of 1919

A New Picture Game for Tired Art Critics

By OLIVER BRENNING

AUBREY BEARDSLEY was the world's undisputed master of black and white. He not only strongly influenced his contemporaries, but even to-day there are dozens of artists whose work shows that they are under great obligation to him. More than that, he is one of the most "faked" of all masters. That, certainly, is true fame; perhaps the greatest compliment that an artist can receive.

Beardsley died in 1898, at the age of twenty-six, one of the most vital and original artists of his epoch. But his fame was as hotly contested as was Whistler's. That is the story of all creative genius: Keats and Wagner were also praised with faint damns. Beardsley's marvelous sense of decoration, his balancing of white against black, his exquisite "line", so sure, so firm and so wonderfully beautiful and full of grace, have never been equalled by any artist working with pen and ink. He stands alone in his splendid isolation—as Rembrandt did as an etcher until Whistler became amused by scratching on the copper.

The Exhibition of "Hitherto Unknown" Beardsleys

AS it was generally known that practically all of Beardsley's drawings had been carefully recorded, and often reproduced, the announcement made last spring of an exhibition in New York in April of about eighty hitherto unknown examples of Beardsley's work made no little stir in art circles. As the announcement ran, they were to come as "a complete and startling surprise". To students of Beardsley's work, however, they were not a surprise at all: they turned out to be exactly what was expected. Three of New York's great dailies, notwithstanding, appeared with glowing accounts of the exhibition, stating that these drawings were magnificent specimens of Beardsley's art.

It was at this point that Mr. A. E. Gallatin, who is an authority on Beardsley, opened his spring campaign and came to the rescue of a great artist, an artist who was dead and could not defend himself. Enlisting the services of Joseph Pennell, Paul G. Konody (who brought over the Canadian War Memorials), C. Lewis Hind, the well-known English critic; Mr. Derry, who is writing a book on Beardsley; Martin Birnbaum, C. R. W. Nevinson, and half a dozen other Beardsley experts, Mr. Gallatin boldly went right ahead and attacked these eighty alleged Beardsley drawings without quarter.

All of his cohorts agreed that the drawings were not only not by Beardsley, but that they were an insult to the artist's memory. Chief among their weak points, aside from their faulty technique, was the fact that they were twice as large as any known examples, that they were drawn on cardboard, which Beardsley never used, and finally—probably the most telling feature of all—that they were not included in Aymar Vallance's iconography, which was revised by Aubrey Beardsley himself.

The Controversy Spreads

THIS controversy raged in the columns of several metropolitan, as well as provincial



The alleged Beardsley, supposed to be a rejected drawing made for Pope's "The Rape of the Lock." Mr. Gallatin claims that this is a synthesized forgery, made up of details copied from the above genuine Beardsleys

newspapers. It became the most widely discussed incident in the art world of recent years. In fact, one wondered if the American public did not take a far greater interest in artistic matters than it has been generally credited with, after all.

On this page is reproduced one of the alleged rejected drawings for Pope's "Rape of the Lock," supposed to be by Beardsley. Above it four well-known Beardsley drawings to show how this clumsy and uncouth thing was manufactured. It is hardly necessary to say that no artist would make a design by taking parts of four previously executed drawings, making very bad copies of them and throwing them together without any regard whatever for design or composition.

We will leave it to our readers to pick out the various component parts of this drawing; it is a new form of picture puzzle, and making Beardsleys may now become, for all we know, a favorite indoor sport with which to whittle away the long autumn evenings. It has the merit of being a game which any number can play. This particular drawing, by the way, is signed in full, while none of the published designs for illustrations for "The Rape of the Lock" are signed by the artist at all.

I am afraid that the art writers on the New York papers will not find their remarks taken very seriously next winter—that is, if the public is not quick to forget that they swallowed the Great Beardsley Hoax without a murmur. All excepting Henry McBride of the New York Sun, who very politely intimated that the drawings might not be "right", and Royal Cortissoz, the learned and able critic of the New York Tribune. Mr. Cortissoz very wisely did not dignify the exhibition of "hitherto unknown Beardsley drawings" with any mention at all.