Print - Liber Studiorum

Object: Print

Place of origin: Britain (engraved)

Date: 1807-1819 (made)
1856-1869 (made)

Artist/Maker: Turner, Joseph Mallord William, born 1775 - died 1851 (artist)

Materials and Techniques: Print

Credit Line: Bequeathed by Horace Mummery

Museum number: E.5479-1946

Gallery location: Prints & Drawings Study Room, level D, case EL, shelf 145

Descriptive line

Physical description
Print from the 'Liber Studiorum'.

Museum number
E.5479-1946

Object history note
Turner’s Liber Studiorum first appeared in 1807 and over the next twelve years, 71 of an intended 100 prints were irregularly printed and sold. It was planned that Turner would make the preliminary etchings and the mezzotint would be added under his direction by Charles Turner, one of the eminent mezzotinters of the day. Unfortunately a difference of opinion after only 20 plates meant that to complete the remaining 51 prints, Turner had to employ eight more engravers as well as mezzotinting 11 plates himself. They are of the greatest significance being, apart from eleven works for the 'Little Liber', the only finished prints totally by Turner. They show the artist’s absolute mastery of the medium and stand amongst the most innovative mezzotints in the history of printmaking. Such experience was invaluable when it came to Turner’s supervision over his engravers. His involvement was fully appreciated by W.G. Rawlinson who wrote, ‘Turner was in the habit of constantly visiting Lahees’ printing office to watch the effects of new plates, and the results of his alterations and repairs of old ones. Standing by the press he would examine each impression as it came off, and with a needle, scraper or burnisher make such changes or retouches on the coopper as thought desirable, sometimes, indeed, getting the plate in such a condition that it had to be entirely reworked’.

Thus the format of a preliminary etched design by Turner with mezzotint added under his guidance came into being, and the prints were issued under the following classifications: Architectural, Pastoral, Marine, Historical and Mountains. The corresponding initial letters, A., P., E.P., M., H., Ms or M appear on each plate above the subject.

Ignoring its financial failure and its untimely end, the Liber Studiorum was a complete success in displaying, as intended, the artist’s full powers of expression and richly deserves the accolade bestowed upon it by W.G Rawlinson, “For all time it will be regarded as a monumental work of art, and it will take rank with the highest productions of the greatest landscape painter which the world has yet seen”.

URL
http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O602693/liber-studiorum-print-turner-joseph-mallord/