

## An Exhibition of Water Colour and Etchings... "The Age of Romance and Innocence"

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Recently (on 18 April'08) an exhibition of water colour and etchings 'The Age of Romance and Innocence' by eminent British Artist Graham Clarke was organised by Studio Vasant. The exhibition will continue till 25th April at Studio Vasant, Vasant Vihar. Before commencing the exhibition here a special preview (on 12 April) at Studio Vasant and a four day exhibition (from 14 - 17 April) at newly build cultural hub, Epicentre at Gurgaon was also there.

During opening ceremony Dr. Alka Raghuvanshi, Vinod Nagpal, Victor Vijay Kumar, Baljit Chadha, Pankaj Mohan Agarwal, Dr. Gautam Vohra, Vinod Sharma, Madhumita Puri and P.K. Roy were also present there.

According to Graham Clarke all my etchings are produced entirely by hand using techniques dating back several hundreds years. I use copper plates which have to be shaped, bevelled and polished, then meticulously cleaned with ammonia and whiting.

The plate is "grounded" on a hot place using a mixture of bitumen and beeswax and this acid-proof layer is smoked with tapers to darken it before drawing with the needle on the plate. I prefer not to have too exact an idea of the completed image, but to allow it to grow as I work from the brief drawings and notes in my sketchbooks, and ideas in my head. Small blemishes and errors can be corrected with "stopping out varnish".

To etch the initial 'line' stage of the image, I use "Dutch Mordant" (hydrochloric acid with additions) and usually commit the plate to the acid three or four times, adding or subtracting areas and details as required between each stage. The plate can then be cleaned off and the first proof taken.

Aquatint is employed to achieve areas of tone. Powdered resin is applied in an "aquatint box", the plate gently heated, the resin particles melt and adhere to the copper. Each stage is "stopped out" and etched in nitric acid - usually in about twelve separate stages - sometimes going beyond the expiry of the minute resin particles back to bare metal, and so to "open bite". On occasion, I use open bite in the more direct way. The plate can then be cleaned off and proofed again.

It is likely, and this is normally deliberate, that parts of the image will be far too dark, and four or five stages of scraping, burnishing, and proofing are required before the image is considered finished. Half a dozen more proofs are printed then the plate is "steel faced" to preserve its surface qualities. This in no way affects the image.

The edition can then be printed by Lawrence Jenkins who for many years printed at The Royal Academy. Following the hand printing, I plan, and mix in large quantities, the dozen or so hand applied colours that are used on each image or set of plates. When one example is ready my hand colourist Barbara Thirkell diligently works through the whole edition, taking the utmost care over a

period of several months. As soon as the work is ready, I check, title, number, and sign each print, usually in batches of 20 or 30, until the edition is complete. The plate can then be "cancelled" in such a way that further printing would be impossible, thus ensuring the limitation of the edition forever.

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