

### **Max Schweidler's *The Restoration of Engravings, Drawings, Books, and Other Works on Paper*, translated by Roy Perkinson**

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"Anyone who has only a small amount of time available and thinks he might be able to finish my book on a streetcar, or somewhere else in between other activities is better off leaving my book alone" wrote Max Schweidler, Swiss restorer, in 1938. Schweidler's book *The Restoration of Engravings, Drawings, Books, and Other Works on Paper* is a work revered by paper and book conservators. Fortunately, it has now become available to English readers in a recent publication by the Getty Conservation Institute, researched and translated by Roy Perkinson, Head of Paper Conservation at the Virginia Herrick Deknatel Paper Conservation Laboratory of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston from Schweidler's second German edition.

Like reading Cennino Cennini or Mary Merrifield, Schweidler should be read with an understanding of the historical context. Few contemporary conservators will wish to use some of Schweidler's techniques, but the core concepts are useful to contemplate. Knowing what techniques were employed in the past is also useful during assessment and identification in the present.

Writing a review of a translated book is writing two reviews: one of the original author's work, one of the translation. Dedicated to equally distinguished colleagues, Francis W. Dolloff and Christa M. Gaehde, the book is primarily organized into four sections: editor's introduction, Schweidler's translated text complete with annotations, eleven case studies in an appendix, and glossary of Schweidler's terms. Distinct separation between Perkinson's text and Schweidler's text is accomplished by using different fonts, page layout, and paper stock. Perkinson's introduction reviews and provides an overview of Schweidler's book. Schweidler's text is thorough, encompassing historical and technical information on a wide range of materials including books, paper, prints including chine collé, and parchment. Specialized topics include instruction concerning Japanese prints (aka *Ukiyo-é*), "rice paper" (aka *Tetrapanax* papyrifer), and postage stamps. Schweidler's original diagrams and photographic illustrations were reproduced also. A glossary is provided to explain vernacular with which the contemporary reader may not be familiar, such as Sorrel salt (potassium binoxalate), crible (relief printmaking technique), and stone board (papier-mâché method that imitates stone) among others.

For the translation, Perkinson obtained access to a first edition with commentary by master restorer, Carl Schweidler, Max's elder brother and mentor. "It is unfortunate that Carl's annotations are so brief and that he did not publish his own version of methods," Perkinson wrote, as some of Carl's comments correct and contradict Max's statements. The

historical context provided enhances the younger brother's text. Max Schweidler's writing is very dense in spots, repetitious in others, maddeningly demonstrative in one moment, and vague the next. Many sections are redundant, but if read like a textbook, the redundancy is sometimes justified. It is laborious to read through some of the sections (e.g. the extensive chlorine and bleaching discussions), and Schweidler's admonishing tone is occasionally wearing, but it is to Perkinson's credit that the original spirit of the writing is maintained. Readers who persevere to the end will be rewarded with details of masterly techniques, such as the technique of a split print or drawing illustrated in the case study appendix with photographs and commentary.

Much in Schweidler's book is surprisingly familiar to contemporary practitioners, such as mention of light bleaching, resizing, and creating wire lines and false watermarks in fill papers. Other techniques are out of date, such as washing a print overnight in an acid (vinegar) bath, spreading camphor on the floor, rubbing kerosene on the interior of a cabinet, filling a small bowl of kerosene to kill insects, or shaving the entire back of a print (postage stamp) to treat a tear repair. Schweidler's techniques are most relevant when applied to fine quality pre-industrial age European papers prevalent in his world.

Beyond the techniques, Schweidler's philosophies are uttered still, perhaps because of the practical nature of the advice and the timeless nature of the work: "A good frame of mind, a cheerful working space, undisturbed working conditions and excellent daylight are the first pre-requisites for the solution of such difficult problems." "Whoever is not used to cleanliness ... must refrain from restoration work." And "It is not worth it to start a job shortly before the end of a workday. It is also completely wrong to start a big job when you know you will be disturbed several times during the day."

Perkinson's appendix of eleven case studies is extremely useful. The illustrated photographs of paper condition, so hard to do well, and commentary on the work are fabulous. The restoration work of the past is clearly seen. Perkinson points out what to look for and what lighting direction works best for detection by professionals and amateurs alike.

*The Restoration of Engravings, Drawings, Books, and Other Works on Paper* is a window into our professional history. For contemporary conservators, the chief benefit of the book is knowledge of what techniques and procedures predecessors used on items now in their care. The book is best read, then propped open in the conservation lab or studio as a manual. Conservators can replicate techniques Schweidler describes on mock-ups and yard-sale fodder to fully appreciate procedures. The information will also be of interest to curators, serious collectors, and other investors of art. Conservation students, especially, will find the book a valuable supplement to studies. At \$50 it is a relatively inexpensive conservation title worthy of any conservator's bookshelf.