



CITY AND COUNTY OF NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE.

LAING ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM

CATALOGUE
OF THE
LOAN EXHIBITION OF
PAINTINGS and DRAWINGS
BY
GABRIEL ATKIN

1940

FOREWORD

By

OSBERT SITWELL.

Gabriel Atkin's work is charming, and reflects an individual taste and talent, joined to considerable sensibility. There is nothing intellectual in his approach to art; it is sensual, visual; from the heart and eye rather than from the head.

By nature, he was an esthete (and, in this connection, it may be of interest to note that he was a relative—if I am not mistaken—of Leigh Hunt). He was boundlessly kind, generous, and, as a young man, full of humour and life; and these qualities, too, make themselves felt in his drawings and paintings. Extremely versatile, the things he admired had an inner unity, were co-related. In a time—the end of the World War and the beginning of the peace—when most people of taste looked down on such composers as Verdi and Rossini, he worshipped them, would attend any concert which included their works, and looked forward for weeks to a performance of the Barber of Seville or of Traviata. He would spend hours improvising on the piano in the manner of Verdi. In literature, too, he showed considerable discrimination, and indeed, no doubt helped to discover various talents. (He was an early admirer of Ronald Firbank, for whom he would have made a perfect illustrator) As for pictures, he liked the English Early-Nineteenth century painters (he loved all furniture and objects belonging to that epoch), and I would say he preferred Frith, for example, to members of the Norwich School. But most of all, he loved the pre-Raphaelites, and his drawings are some of the only English modern drawings to be influenced by them. For the rest, the Russian Ballet affected his work much more than did any contemporary paintings. But, perhaps because of this absence of direct influence, his drawings remain very individual. He was trying to follow paths of his own, along which he must be his own guide. His line, his range of colour, his drawings, at one period so full of figures as to be reminiscent of Dicky Doyle, were all his own. He was in competition with himself, and no one else. And it often seemed curious that someone whose attitude had so much humility in it, and who was so keenly appreciative of the work of others in every branch of art and literature, should yet be so sure of himself, in respect of his own taste and his own handiwork.

But certainly his handiwork justified his beliefs; gay and romantic, debonair and sad, fantastic and yet straightforward, grotesque and often beautiful, they stand witness for him, reflecting for posterity those qualities which his many friends in the world of art and literature and the theatre knew so well.

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B. 1897. GABRIEL ATKIN. D. 1937.

B. 1897.

GABRIEL ATKIN

D. 1937.

WILLIAM PARK ATKIN (or Gabriel Atkin, as he preferred to be called), was born at South Shields in 1897. He was educated at the Royal Grammar School, Newcastle upon Tyne, and matriculated at the University of Durham. During his school days he showed a definite aptitude for drawing, and many of his school books bear evidence of this fact. He received his early art training at the King Edward VII School of Art, Armstrong College (now King's College) under Professor R. G. Hatton. On the out-break of war he enlisted, and this cut short his career at the Art School. After the war he completed his studies at the Slade and in Paris.

His paintings consist largely of water colours, but he was also a talented black and white artist. His subjects were often found in the entertainments and the gay life of the London and Paris cafes. He took an obvious delight in filling these compositions with interesting groups of figures displaying individuality, humour, and a strong sense of caricature. In the wide range of his art he included landscapes, portraits (usually in charcoal or pencil), drawings for book illustration, and posters. The chief interest of many of his drawings is that they are strikingly imaginative in composition, and in many cases show considerable decorative qualities. It is a regrettable fact that Atkin was not spared to develop his art, because he undoubtedly had something to say, and could say it with conviction and creative ability.

Atkin travelled extensively on the Continent, and this added considerably to the range and variety of his work. He was a musician of outstanding ability, a great lover of the ballet, and a man of sensitive taste in many directions. His wife was Mary Butts, the distinguished authoress who died suddenly in March, 1937. Gabriel Atkin's own death followed soon after (8th May, 1937) at the home of his aunt (Mrs. Weir), Osborne Avenue, Newcastle upon Tyne.

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The Committee is indebted to Mrs. Weir (aunt of the artist) for so kindly placing the pictures in the care of the Corporation for the purpose of this Exhibition. Grateful thanks are also due to Mr. Osbert Sitwell for kindly writing the Foreword to this catalogue.

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