

## The Bloomsbury Artists print and book design

by Tony Bradshaw

96 pages 260 x 220 38 colour & 70 b/w illustrations

Hardback Scolar Press £29.50

This book represents the most comprehensive record to date of the artistic output of Vanessa Bell, Dora Carrington, Roger Fry and Duncan Grant in the form of woodcuts, lithographs, etchings and other prints and the multiple uses to which they were put.

First it should be said that this book is a considerable work of research by perhaps the foremost expert in the field. As the proprietor of The Bloomsbury Workshop, a gallery and bookshop specialising in books and artworks of the Group, Tony Bradshaw was ideally placed to execute it.

There is an evocative Foreword by Vanessa Bell's daughter, Angelica Garnett and a very sound introduction by James Beechey. In this he describes the book production of the Omega Workshops which was established in 1913 by Roger Fry. This to my knowledge does not appear elsewhere. He also very usefully explores the working relationship between Virginia Woolf and her sister Vanessa Bell. This was a combative

artistic combination which overcame intense criticism and effectively established the house style of the Hogarth Press, the imprint of Leonard and Virginia Woolf.

The book has three areas of interest for those concerned with books as artistic entities; illustrations, dust-jackets and, less importantly, ephemera. Each of the four artists, the subjects of the book, executed wood cut book illustrations and comparisons can be drawn between them. Carrington and Roger Fry persisted with the medium and their ease in it is clear. Particularly immediate, yet spare, is Fry's self-portrait which appeared in his book, *Twelve Original Woodcuts* published by the Hogarth Press in 1921.

This book is an excellent place from which to embark upon a study of the history of the dust jacket. The simple, colourful wrappers, many with fruit and flower motifs, which were created by Vanessa Bell for the Hogarth Press, are immediately accessible now, though they were treated with disdain, if not derision, by critics and booksellers alike when they first appeared. They mostly appeared on Virginia Woolf's books, but not exclusively so. Such was the Woolfs' strength of artistic purpose that they held fast and a critical audience was won over. Duncan Grant was surprisingly prolific in this area, without a unified style, his work spanned the 1920s to the 1960s for a variety of publishers including Heinemann and the Folio Society.

Finally, details are included of bookplates prepared for Leonard Woolf and Lytton Strachey, amongst others, by Vanessa Bell and Dora Carrington respectively, both of which are illustrated and will appeal to those with an eye for the incidental.

Although the book is primarily aimed at those with a specific interest in the period and place, it will deservedly attract the attention of those with a more general interest. The book is a delight to hold, produced to a very high standard, conveniently laid out both as to topic and artist and beautifully photographed. All who take the opportunity to study it will be hugely thankful to the author and his accomplices.

*Alan Isaac*

Alan Isaac holds a Diploma in Fine Binding and Paper Conservation from Guildford College. His forthcoming book, *Virginia Woolf- An Un-Common Binder*, a study of the bookbinding of Virginia Woolf, is to be published by Cecil Woolf in June 2000

Footnote : Related Exhibitions

For those interested in the art of the Bloomsbury Group there are two exhibitions to note:

1. Art Made Modern: Roger Fry's Vision of Art; a celebration of Fry's life & achievements, inc. that of the Omega Workshop.  
Courtauld Gallery, Fleet Street, London