DRAWINGS FOR THE ILIAD · LEONARD BASKIN

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Delphic Arts has acquired the sixty drawings for the Iliad in conjunction with their publication of a de luxe portfolio. This exhibition has been prepared and organized by Delphic Arts, New York City.

The Iliad of Homer was translated by Richmond Lattimore and illustrated by Leonard Baskin. © 1962 by The University of Chicago and used by permission of the publisher.
To see Leonard Baskin’s drawings for the *Iliad* is to behold perhaps for the first time a galaxy of gods and a race of men worthy of Homer’s epic poem. No vestige of the veil of conventional classicistic imagery falls between Baskin’s hand and Homer’s words. Indeed, the *dramatis personae* of the *Iliad* have nothing to do with Classical Greece, but belong instead to a race which lived centuries before the first Kouros smiled upon an archaic dawn; a race said by Homer (in describing Hektor) to be able to ‘snatch up a stone that two men . . . such as men are now’ could not hoist. So, fittingly, has Baskin created a race of giants, who burst beyond the limits of classical canon and possess not merely the idea but the physical actuality of that superhuman power imputed to them by Homer. Of course the *Iliad* was for Homer much more than the story of an heroic battle in which the principals are gods and giants; for him it was the archetype of all human conflict. As such, the *Iliad* has had an enormous impact on Baskin. For him, its personalities and events are, in the most profound sense; real. So it is in Baskin’s drawings that that terrible fire which has consumed much of our civilization finds reflection in the flame of burning Troy. The scope of Baskin’s imagery in these drawings for the *Iliad* ranges from relatively rare, almost lyrical figures, like that of the seated Achilles ‘angered over the girl of the lovely hair, Briscis’, to such blatantly brutal types as Diomede’s ‘of the great war cry’ who, legs arched wide and planted upon the page, lunges forward with awesome wrath upon the viewer. Although the brooding Achilles, with his more finely drawn details and gentler washes, caresses our eye, how magnificent is the assault upon our vision of the cruder beauty of the furious Diomedes. It is
here, perhaps, that Baskin’s prodigious expressive power, in exploding into this bolder style, reaches its highest pitch. This mastery is affirmed in his superb study of Hektor’s fallen horse ‘struck at the point of the head . . . which is a place most mortal’. Rampant upon the page, this tortured creature is transformed into a primeval beast. Executed with a furor to match the agony of his image, the very dripping of the ink seems to run for blood. The whole of the *Iliad* is, in fact, a terrifying blood bath, a tale packed with the graphic details of devastation, a carnage captured in Baskin’s drawings. Here is the malevolent figure, whose face is hidden in his helmet—the Brute of War. And here, too, is the battle’s victim, his eye and jaw run through with a spear, violated. But on this field of battle which is the *Iliad*, not every moment is one of combat. There is a time for the coward, whose face Baskin makes the map of fear; and the lover, Paris, whom Baskin limns seized with ‘sweet desire’, advancing upon the tender figure of the waiting Helen. As broad and bold and swiftly executed as most of these drawings are, they reveal, as well, subtlety and restraint. Baskin seems consecrated to the avoidance of any easy effect which would trumpet its beauty to the casual, but betray a higher summons. There is no display of mean facility, nothing merely decorative or remotely pretty. These trivial values which too often pass for art have no place in the *Iliad* or in Baskin. But these drawings are very beautiful. It is a secret Rembrandt knew. Through these triumphant drawings, Homer’s epic poem has been endowed with a new dimension of meaning. The vision of Dürer’s *Apocalypse* and Blake’s *Job* lives again in Baskin’s *Iliad*.

Marvin S. Sadik curator Bowdoin College Museum of Art
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LIST OF DRAWINGS

All drawings are 26 × 40 in. except nos. 1, 2, 3, 5, 11, 13, 17, 18, 46 which are 22½ × 31 in.

1. HOMER
2. APOLLO THE ARCHER
3. NESTOR
4. AGAMEMNON
5. ACHILLEUS SULKING
6. MENELAOS
7. THE PRIEST
8. APHRODITE
9. HELEN & PARIS
10. STRIFE
11. WOUNDED WARRIOR
12. MYTHIC WARRIOR
13. PIERCED WARRIOR
14. MOURNING WOMAN
15. DIOMEDES
16. ARES DESCENDING
17. GORGON
18. CHIMAIRA
19. ANDROMACHE
20. PORTENT
21. ERUITHALION
22. AJAX
23. HEKTOR'S HORSE
24. NESTOR'S BOAR
25. PLEADING WARRIOR
26. IPHIDAMAS
27. HEKTOR
28. FRIGHTENED WARRIOR
29. THE COWARD
30. HERA
31. HERA & ZEUS
32. HEAD ON SPIKE
33. POSEIDON
34. ASIOS
35. DISEMBOWELED WARRIOR
36. DYING WARRIOR
37. ACHILLEUS WEEPING
38. HEPHAISTOS
39. ZEUS ON OLYMPOS
40. ACHILLEUS
41. RIVER-GOD
42. ARTEMIS
43. PRIAM
44. ACHILLEUS
45. WARRIOR
46. ACHILLEUS MOURNING
47. EAGLE-HEADED ZEUS
48. HERMES
49. HOMER
50. APOLLO THE ARCHER
51. PROPHET
52. HEKABE
53. WARRIOR STANDING
54. PRIAM OFFERING GIFTS
55. FALLEN WARRIOR
56. HELMETED WARRIOR
57. BIRD PORTENT
58. HOODED WARRIOR
59. WARRIOR
60. HEKTOR RUNNING