

LOOP08 AT THE MENIER GALLERY

LONDON, JULY 1 TO JULY 12 2008

Printmakers frequently use shared workshops for access to presses, storage and for supporting technologies. Unlike most visual artists they work collectively. Within a workshop, a visitor notices the practice of individual interests and approaches to print, so print processes and forms are shared, despite differing individual ideologies. Print is a meeting ground for ideas, for application of new technologies, debates about art, fashion, and for reflection on everyday events. Through workshop association, printmakers are increasingly extending workshop activity into exhibiting work.

LOOP08 at the Menier Gallery is a show of fifteen diverse UK-based printmakers, each with a particular ideology and approach to printmaking. This is the fourth year the group has exhibited together.

Martin Ridgewell's etchings are one of the first sets of work to catch the eye. Memories of boyhood populate a forgotten patch of grass. Familiar elements from a boy's summer-time party are cast around the uncut green; action man, a toy car, a gun and snake, marbles, two-way radios, and badges are a still life interrupted by cakes and orange fizzy pop. Only the titles suggest that these memories have a deeper meaning for the creator – 'Snake in the grass' and 'First encounter'.

Memory is also the theme in Terry Steckler's digital works. In the series 'Possession', worn nostalgic images, dolls and surfaces, look like items from a catalogue of a life lived, like distressed surfaces of urban streets. Janet Curley Cannon's modern architectural fragments show a similar interest. The face of each block is covered by digitally collaged graphic and typographic elements, implying some near future disintegration of a modern city where only a few pieces of rubble preserves traces of a lost culture.

The urbanscape of British and American cities is also exposed by the silk screens of Helen Bridges. The images are cool, distant, detached, rendered in close-toned light blues, greens, whites and yellows. The city horizon is reduced to an interlaced line over the shadow tower blocks where sky and land meet.

In contrast, Alison Bickmore's monoprints reference tree and mist-

covered landscapes, transient and glimpsed from the corner of the eye, just as Julie Hoyle's silkscreens and digital images of human silhouettes evoke half-forgotten moments of the company of friends in a large open landscape. A mythical landscape pervades the work of Shuxiang Jin Farrall. The child-like images in background fields of colour have mushroom shapes, almost human in form.

Sam Marshall and Perienne Christian both use etching simply and directly, with very different results. Marshall's suite of prints 'The menagerie of the absurd' shows landscapes of metamorphosed animals whose origins appear more mythical than animal. Christian's prints are populated by people interacting in social situations, often in interior spaces, suggesting unspoken narratives of personal interrelationships and group dynamics.

Both John Tate and Bill Pryde reference their experiences aboard. Tate worked with Tibetan refugees in Northern India, while Pryde references a strong emotional visit to the Hamptons. Both use strong, pure colours and linear, schematic forms of architecture, and natural forms. Tate uses complex combinations of mixed print techniques, whereas Pryde uses strong graphic forms and colour in silk screen for his herbaceous works.

Alex Booker references his father's British Merchant Navy Journals, using the diagrammatic images of seamanship. Instructional images, recognition tables of signal flags, are set on the distressed wood surface of a large plank of oak: imagery that for British eyes always holds a certain power, since within living memory so many were involved with the sea.

Ann Norfield, like other members of the group, has an interest in the architectural. Her silkscreened images on roofing slates are mixed with elements of the urban, built environment. A larger carborundum and drypoint work called 'Tower' is major work, roughly a metre and a half in height, showing a stone tower like those seen in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland and also sourced from fairy tales, a prison with only one high window, awaiting a sufficient growth of a woman's hair to aid escape.

Finally Kitty Reford and Sumi Perera's works deal with the formal nature of the print, combined with their subject matter. Reford's large silkscreens show individuals in the street, isolated from any background, and broken up into different layers of multicoloured scaled dots. The eye switches between these decorative dots and the

figurative form. The viewer is aware of the subject and its construction. Perera's complex laser cut and printed books and installations use typographic forms and blind embossing. In 'Turn the Page - the preview vii', a music stand holds a book with pages of musical notation and laser-cut music scores, printed elements and text, tied by colour ribbons within a box frame. The process of construction cannot be avoided nor can the nature of the materials used to construct the work.

LOOP08 represents the continued practice of a group of professional printmakers. This is a snapshot of developing practice by fifteen artists. The group is characterized by inventive commitment to the use of printmaking as a major part of work, by diversity in individual sources and directions, and by openness in the application of new technologies in print. This group show demonstrates what can be achieved in print by long engagement and constant application.

Steve Mumberson, July 2008.