

Ian Chamberlain

Interview Questions for Interalia Magazine ‘Drawing as Process. Drawing as Document’

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Question: Can we begin by you saying something about your background?

My background is Illustrative but even then the work had a strong textural connection. I was introduced to etching during my Masters Degree at the University of the West of England (where I now teach) and was able to translate these surface qualities and combine them with my drawing. I fell in love with this combination of the graphic and emotive qualities of the process.

I always had a longstanding interest and focus in manmade forms and technologies and using etching as a way of recording these objects and their locations.

The majority of the subjects I record were considered at the forefront of technology during their lifetime. Some of the subjects I have recorded are now defunct, superseded or have been reconfigured for different uses. My use of etching Etching, a traditional, historic process that has not fundamentally changed in the last 500 years, is certainly not regarded as “cutting edge”. The subject matter therefore is echoed in the process used to record it. My use of the etching process enables me to make a sustained enquiry into the subject’s structure, location and the effects of time passing. It becomes my own original visual experience and a graphic equivalent to an observed moment in time.

Question: Has there been any particular influences to your art practice?

As well as technology and manmade objects I have been Heavily influenced by historical and traditional artistic references such as Morandi, Piranesi, Rembrandt but also more contemporary references such as Bernd and Hilla Becher and George Shaw.

The most influential work on my practice is that of Giovanni Piranesi who combined the role of the artist and the archaeologist; aiming to discover and preserve the memory of Romes ancient ruins.

Piranesi was able to visually restore missing sections of monuments to their original glory. He used etching to witness locations around him, as if he were a wanderer among the ruins in Rome. Etching offered him an ideal means of exploring and recording place. He referred to his use of the process as “speaking evidence”, bringing these architectural ruins to life.

This notion of preservation and conservation has driven me to consider my work as a graphic historical record, constantly trying to retain a visual memory.

After studying Piranesi, my own interests and subject matter became clearer. I began to record locations that had long been of interest, such as the Maunsell Sea Forts in the Thames Estuary, and the acoustic sound mirrors, Kent UK.

The use of drawing, photography, film and Printmaking role allow me to visualise my interaction and connection with these monuments.

Whilst the tradition of etching and historical influences such as Piranesi are clear, I am very conscious that there has to be a contemporary awareness in the work and the questioning of what it is I am recording and why?

Question: What is the underlying focus and vocabulary of your work?

The focus main focus of my work is the exploration of manmade forms, many of which have been gradually superseded, forgotten or abandoned. They were at the forefront of technology for their time but technology and purpose have left some of these structures behind and they have become architectural metaphors or reminders of a past.

The work also looks at the idea of permanence and impermanence. Taking an immediate response – a quick drawing or a photograph – and building from this into something more considered, slower, draws a creative parallel with the way one's immediate response to a place is different to the thoughts and feelings that emerge later.

feelings of the object and location shift and deepen over time. But whilst feelings may fade or shift, etchings remain unchanged once finished. “The passing of time influences what we remember about the places we visit and there becomes a fine balance in the work—between the spontaneity and immediacy of the original drawn marks and sketches and the lengthier, methodical approach of the printmaking process.”

The role of my drawing/printmaking helps me to visualise my interaction and connection with these monuments in order to create my own visual historical document.

Question: Your work takes reference from manmade technological forms of industrial structures. What do you hope to add to the existing narratives of your subject matter?

The history and function of a lot of my subject matter is unknown to most of the wider public. The work can act as a way in or introduction to these locations and their back history. The work aims to be more than mere reproduction of the subject but a new composition layering, collaging and bringing together new layers of information. There is an interplay between meticulous planning and drawing and pure chance.

The subject is then taken out of context and its surroundings, the structures are shown devoid of the human figure so that architectural scale cannot be based on the physical measurements of the human body. This ambiguity adds to the sense of the theatrical and monumental projecting a feeling of the iconic.

The physical journey to these monuments is important in itself, the process of identifying and travelling to remote places, feeling the wind and rain, the bleakness and emptiness. All these physical elements feed into an emotional resonance that influences the finished work.

Question: How are your drawing process and printmaking related? Can you say something about how they inform one another in your working process?

By working in both drawing and the etching process it offers me a diversity of recording and representing the locations I visit.

I play and embrace the idea of working on location and then back in the studio and how the geographical and emotional distance will allow abstract ideas to surface and become more relevant, creating an autonomy and uniqueness to the work. This helps me to utilise the potential for expression found within the drawing and printmaking process.

I begin by finding my way around the subject, evaluating the form through the quick use of light and dark charcoal studies. These are then taken into the studio where, if required, more sustained line studies are made. The continuation of the drawing element is an integral part of my process.

Working from distance also creates a dialogue between the original drawing a fine balance between the spontaneity and immediacy of the original drawn marks and sketches and my more sustained works. This will play on my memory of the location and what I remember and images that stay in the forefront of my memory. Lines and boundaries will become blurred.

I want the work to echo the subject matter and embrace the idea of the artwork evolving and shifting throughout its creation. This in turn would celebrate a uniqueness and beauty in the forms described and recorded, drawing the viewer in, highlighting new layers of information and revealing finer levels of detail.

The scale of the prints is important, the majority of etchings I make are traditionally very large and I feel helps give the work prominence. The physical and emotional commitment to working on a large plate is to my practice. There is an intense level of reworking required to build up the layers of information and detail, the original drawings and studies become more evident due to this constant reevaluation. I have also made use of a Dremmel drill to add elements of the industrial and unknown. As it can never be fully under control, the marks the drill produces and the energy it has and gives to the work can reveal exciting results. I have learnt to embrace this element of chance and include it as part of my working process.

Question: The theme of the April issue is 'Drawing as Process. Drawing as Document'. How does this resonate with your own work?

Drawing helps me to record and evolve an idea. My printed works are an extension of my drawing and have a different graphic quality.

I begin each project with an intense enquiry through on site observation and drawing. In visiting these locations I can develop my own subjective emotional response; the artist is not seen but my physical intervention is paramount and my factual research and first hand experience evidence a sense of place. The subject itself is then removed from its surroundings and the familiar.

You can see evidence of the drawings within the etchings' continually changing hierarchy and emphasis. Bringing into focus new elements and pushing others back. This evidences the recording and decision-making taking place. For me, the importance and value of drawing is integral to both the making and the content of the work. Etching offers a unique means of working - inherent in its make up is the intervention upon the surface and the sculptural physicality of the process; layering and building-up information through cyclical reapplications of grounds, drawing, etching, burnishing and drypoint.

What I'm really interested in is the idea that you can be at the location, you take the drawings and photos, then later, in your print studio, hundreds of miles away, something quite different happens, something more abstract, the happy accident. The sustained enquiry, the slow, methodical process, the role of alchemy and chance, these things all bring in something different - that's why the etchings are so much more exciting for me than the original drawings. Whether it's the graphic density, light and dark, tonal range, the physical impression in the paper – the printmaking process takes the image far beyond what I can achieve with drawing.

Question: Can you say something about two of your works, *Transmission IV*, which was longlisted for the Aesthetica Art Prize 2016 and, *The loneliness of being*, which has been shortlisted for the Jerwood Drawing Prize 2017?

Transmission IV is part of my *Transmission* series based on the Lovell radio telescope at Jodrell Bank Observatory, The Lovell telescope has been investigating the depths of space since the 1950's, a symbol and metaphor of our aim to understand the universe. It is now the third largest movable telescope in the world. I was immediately drawn to the linea qualities in the structure and the bowl shaped receiving dish. This subject was ideal for the use of etching allowing me to capture the different line qualities and sense of depth within the structure. *Transmission IV* is part of a series of 5 prints each looking at a different viewpoint capturing a different angle of the structure.

The drawing *The loneliness of being* is part of a series of drawn works looking at simple structures. It highlights mans fundamental need for shelter but also looking at the idea of isolation within the landscape. I chose to only draw these works to emphasise the vulnerability and uniqueness that working in pencil and graphite offered. The scale of the work is also very small, much smaller than I usually work but again I felt this gave the work a greater level of intimacy, vulnerability and sense of quiet.

Question: How has your artwork changed in the past years?

Over the last couple of years especially there has been far more consideration into surface qualities and a move away from linea graphic imagery. This is mainly due to the choice of subject matter such as the *Maunsell Sea forts*, *Acoustic sound mirrors* and my current project *The Atlantic wall* . These are all very brutalist structures and it is more about the form and effects of weathering, human interaction and ageing that I am trying to capture. There has thought been a slight combination of the two linea and weathered elements in the two pieces Sat.I and Sat II.

I have started to use the rubbings (frottage) as way of physically transferring the textures of concrete/metal to paper. This can then be included alongside drawn studies or used a positive to take in to print. This will be especially important in my new *Atlantic wall* project where the concrete used to make the bunkers were formed by using planks of wood. The grain of which is still visible and evident on the surface of the structures. I will be able to create my own wooden textures which could then be incorporated into the image.

The way I record reference from the locations I visit has also altered. I still use drawing and photography but I have now included the use of film and sound. This allows me to record different angles and viewpoints with more ease but also I able to refer back to sounds that can trigger particular memories. This is not always visible in the work but is a real help in remembering certain atmospheres and feelings during the research process.

Question: What projects are you currently working on?

My current project as mentioned previously is *The Atlantic Wall* . The *Atlantic Wall* was a system of coastal fortifications built by Nazi Germany 1942 - 1944 along the coast of Europe stretching over 6000 miles.

Although these structures are still solid in their structure due to the lack of proper foundations they are slowly sinking and being reclaimed by their surroundings.

The landscape continually being changed by natural erosion through tidal shifts and weathering is

These locations have long been of interest and a project I have waited a couple of years to undertake. The choice of the *Atlantic Wall* offers contemporary relevance due to current debates around visible and invisible barriers and our impending isolation from the continent.

Underpinning the structural and figurative representations, there is also a conceptual interest around the idea of communication and Brexit and our upcoming distance from Europe. There is I believe a contemporary relevance due to current debates around visible and invisible barriers and keeping lines of communication and dialogue open and the changing landscape ahead.

The structures themselves remain, isolated architectural symbols and reminders of our past and our future. A visual metaphor of the shifting political, social and environmental landscape.

