My name is Ian Chamberlain and I am an Artist and lecturer based in the UK. I teaching onto the M.A Printmaking and Drawing and Print UWE, Bristol.

Slide 1-4 –

My work takes reference from my on-going interest into man-made technological and industrial structures. Examples of past locations that I have visited include The Lovell Telescope at Jodrell Bank… The Goon Hilly Satellite Earth Station…….. and ex-military structures such as The Maunsell Sea forts and the Acoustic Sound mirrors.

The prints are not just an architectural study, they are evidence of my observation and responses to the subject through an organic evolution of recording through the interlinking processes of drawing and printmaking.

Slide 5

I use the etching process to record these locations, it enables me to make a sustained enquiry into the subject’s structure and the effects of the passing of time.

Slide 6

The use of etching is a natural extension of my drawing practice. The process offers me a diversity of mark-making and a depth of tone that can capture the form, volume and surface qualities of these objects enhancing my creative language.

It becomes my own visual experience and record of a specific moment in time.

Etching is a traditional process that has not fundamentally changed in 500 years and is certainly not regarded as “cutting edge*”.* The majority of the subjects I record were considered at the forefront of technology during their lifetime.

Slide 7 – Data image

Some of the subjects I have represented are now defunct or have been reconfigured for different uses, the unrelenting obsolescence of technology leaving these monuments behind, the pace of technological advancement continually moving forwards.

Slide 8 – Mirror Group

But whilst technology may fade or shift the etchings remain unchanged once finished.

The constant.

Slide 9 – 10

There is a long history of contemporary and historical artists that have influenced my work by their use of etching such as Goya, Durer, Morandi, Dryden Goodwin, Picasso and Brodsky and Utkin to mention just a few. Trying not pigeon hole myself and the work into a narrow field of reference or process, I also take reference from other practioners in other fields such as Richard Serra, Anselm Kiefer, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Casper David Friedrich, George Shaw, Hugh Ferris, Michael Sandle.

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The two key practitioners that have continually inspired me are Rembrandt and Piranesi.

Slide 12

Rembrandt, for the dramatic use of light and dark to convey a sense of drama and his expressive mark making. Rembrandt showed us his sense of play and risk taking with etching, the images become resolved through the mark making process, experimentation, testing and bold decision making.

Slide 13-14

Piranesi combined the role of artist with that of archaeologist; aiming to discover and preserve the memory of ancient Rome ruins. Piranesi was able to visually restore missing sections of monuments reclaiming their original glory. The etchings were used to witness locations around him, acting as a wanderer among the ruins in Rome. Etching offered him the means of exploring and recording place. He referred to this process as “speaking evidence”,

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

My own interests and subject matter are now clearer, the role of my printmaking is to help me visualise my interaction and connection with these monuments in order to create my own visual historical document.

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This leads me on to my current project based on **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.*

The choice of the Atlantic Wall offers contemporary relevance and a symbolic connection with current social and political debates around visible and invisible barriers and our impending (UK) isolation from the continent.

Some of these visible barriers from the past remain, isolated architectural symbols of permanence slipping into failure and decay, becoming a visual metaphor of the shifting political, social and environmental landscape.

The aesthetic of the bunker design was not a major consideration, the design and construction was purely about the form and function it had to serve.

Slide 16 – images of bunkers

Large stretches of these brutalist objects structures remain showing various evidence of interaction with man from, attempted demolition, vandalism, Graffiti to conversions into domestic dwellings.

Slide 17 – Wanderer

I am acting as the seeker and wanderer in the landscape, paying homage to the work of the Romanticist Casper David Friedrich. There is a commonality in our shared use of light and emptiness and the Echoing of the intense emotional focus and use of landscape as a metaphor to discuss spiritual and political themes of absence and loss.

I usually begin each project with an intense enquiry through on-site observation and drawing.

As part of the research and recording process It is vital that I experience the physical journey to these monuments 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 allowing me to develop my own subjective emotional response.

Slide 18

But the conditions I have encountered so far on the Atlantic wall trips to Northern France and the West coast of Denmark have severely hampered the ability to draw. The realities of trying to work in 70 mph winds, sandstorms, snow and temperatures of -14 degrees meant that I had to rely on other forms of reference.

I became more reliant on other ways of gathering information such as rubbings, photography, the camcorder and the simple act of sitting and taking in what is around me.

Slide 19 – Denmark video … pause

Slide 20

Some basic sketches were attempted on location but the added use of rubbings (Frottage) as a way to record the textures of the bunkers gave me an immediate tactile response to the subject.

Slide 21 – 22

The bunkers were originally formed using lengths of wood that have left an impression of the wood grain in the concrete surface that is still evident today. This in turn has influenced me to incorporate wooden textures into the imagery, a direct influence of the subject matter informing the materials to be used.

Slide 23 – Bunker 360

Photography and film gave me a source of stills and 360-degree footage that I can project and look back on with the added element of sound.

Slide 24

Sound has proven far more influential than I could have planned, it puts me back in the place and helps me to visualise the natural elements that I experienced.

Slide 25 - WIP

When back in the studio, working from a distance creates a dialogue between the original reference material and the print matrix, the mark making and chemical interaction of the etching process pushing my work forwards.

Etching offers a freshness and originality to my work, taking it away from mere direct representation of subject matter and embraces and accepts the idea of the artwork as an evolving and shifting throughout its creation.

I am interested in 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.

Slide 26

Through this geographical and emotional distance the passing of time influences what we remember about the places we visit, it has allowed more abstract ideas to surface and become more relevant, creating an autonomy and uniqueness within the work.

Slide 27

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 drawings.

Slide 28 - 29

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.

There is a constant reworking of the image adding, editing and taking away. A constant and continual erosion of the plate that is echoed the subject matter themselves. The subject matter therefore is echoed in the process used to record it.

Slide 30-31

The bunkers I have recorded were built without foundations, and are slowly sinking, being reclaimed by the earth. The structures themselves remain mainly solid and structurally sound, but the ground is swallowing them up.

The subject itself is then removed from its surroundings and the familiar. 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 monumental and projects a feeling of the iconic coupled with the sense of a frailty and insignificance, they will disappear.

The physical and emotional commitment to working on a large plate is also essential to capture these structures.

The size of the etchings gives them a presence in a room and in your field of vision. It emphasizes the sense of scale and grandeur of the objects that I am recording.

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I hope as the body of work develops over the next 2-3 years it will highlight and promote the relevance of etching in contemporary art practice not only as an extension of the drawn mark but to be celebrated on its own individual and unique qualities.

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As the project continues and evolves into a final exhibition and catalogue my own understanding of what the inherent material values of printmaking will offer my work will change.

In turn, this will give me greater insight in the wider discussion around, materiality, printmaking and its role within the Contemporary art world.

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To be continued…………