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CSP Journal article

I am a printmaker who has been passionate about, and specialising in etching (intaglio) for several years. My work takes reference from an on-going interest in man-made technological forms of industrial structures. Examples of this interest are bridges; the scientific radio telescopes at Goonhilly Satellite Earth Station, or ex-military structures such as the Acoustic sound mirrors in the UK.

Etching, a traditional, historic process that has not fundamentally changed in the last 500 years, is certainly not regarded as “cutting edge”. The majority of the subjects I record were considered at the forefront of technology during their lifetime. Some of the subjects represented are now defunct or have been reconfigured for different uses. The subject matter therefore is echoed in the process used to record it. 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 visual experience and a graphic equivalent to an observed moment in time. I use etching to explore my subject matter as 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. These, I feel, are the unique qualities etching offers to enhance my creative language.

There is a long history of established artists utilizing intaglio processes, including Goya, Blake, Durer, Picasso, Chagall, and Turner, to mention just a few. I am inspired by the artists Rembrandt and Piranesi. Rembrandt, for the dramatic quality of his etchings, and Piranesi’s architecturally inspired graphic works. These are sources that I turn to, repeatedly, since my first introduction to printmaking. The work of Rembrandt has inspired me in many ways. His work is similar to Piranesi’s in his dramatic use of light and dark to convey a sense of drama within an image, but, for me, his main influence is his expressive power of representation. It’s the individuality of his physical mark-making combined with the selective use of over-wiping and under-wiping the etching plate to create a graphic depth that has such a strong emotive sensibility.

Rembrandt’s printmaking spread his reputation and demonstrated his prolific drawing talent, and large editions of his artworks were printed to feed a growing public demand that, in turn, promoted his paintings. There was, however, a specific use of etching that he held as equal in status to his painting. He embraced the Chiaroscuro method, using the technique to create inspirational effects of light and atmosphere. For me, there is no finer example of this than *The Three Crosses* (1660-61). This series of prints clearly shows how the plate has been continually adjusted and edited, using various wiping techniques to find new areas of detail and interest to enhance the narrative and message of the work. His energetic and expressive use of drypoint, in selectively strengthening particular lines, adds another layer of drama, urgency and intensity to this scene which could not have been produced with any other printmaking process. This was part of Rembrandt’s working practice, showing 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.

This responsive and intuitive use of the medium can be hard to maintain through the many laborious stages of the process, and I continually look back at his work to help push my own use of the process for a greater understanding of my own subject matter and the role of printmaking within it.

Piranesi combined the role of artist with that of archaeologist; aiming to discover and preserve the memory of these ancient ruins. Originally trained as an architect, 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”, utilising his exceptional powers of observation to bring these architectural ruins to life through bold contrasts of light and darkness; revealing the unknown through his romantic vision. 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.

The skills and lessons learned within his commercial practice crossed over in Piranesi’s *Carceri d’invenzione—Prison Series* (1720-1778). These imaginary structures were influenced by apparitions and hallucinations induced by a strong fever and lack of sleep. These epic labyrinthian scenes were very dramatic in scale, with Piranesi’s incredible architectural ideas revealed through a series of etched drawings. The sense of theatre and grandeur in these works have influenced many artists and designers who aim to convey both poetic menace and the idea of monumental scale.

The *Carceri d’invenzione—Prison Series* was printed in two states with a 15-year gap due to the lack of commercial interest in the first state. Piranesi revisited the suite of 14 prints and added two new plates. The first state had a looser, sketch-like quality but the second state and new plates were stronger and more forceful, with greater tonal depth. Piranesi’s pause and reflection gave me the insight to question for myself when a plate is finished and how far it can be pushed until fully resolved. This continual evolution of the image is why I am drawn to etching, to gain a different insight into, and understanding of what it is I am recording. Thanks to Piranesi’s approach, the reworking and building up of layers of information is now ingrained within my own etching methodology.

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 old acoustic sound mirrors, at Kent in the UK. The technologies used to build these structures had been superseded, made redundant, or reinvented. The role of my printmaking here was to help me visualise my interaction and connection with these monuments in order to create my own visual historical document.

I begin each project with an intense enquiry through on-site observation and drawing. Through visiting these locations I can develop my own subjective emotional response. This, combined with factual research and first-hand experience create a sense of place. 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.

I begin by finding my way around the subject, evaluating the form through the use of light and dark in quick charcoal studies. These are then taken into the studio where, if required, more sustained studies incorporating finer lines are made. The continuation of the drawing element is an integral part of my process. This can be seen in the evidence of the drawings within the continually-changing hierarchy of the etching development as new elements are brought into focus and others pushed back. The etching reveals evidence of the recording and decision-making taking place. For me, the importance and value of the etching process is integral to both the making and the content of the work. Etching offers a unique means of working—inherent in its makeup 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.

My aim is to draw the viewer in, highlighting new layers of information and revealing finer levels of detail. For this, a wide range of tones and surface qualities are combined with a strong graphic line quality through etching and related intaglio processes including hard ground, aquatint, sugarlift, spit bite, drypoint and burnishing.

The physical and emotional commitment to working on a large plate is also essential 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 Dremel tool 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.

The effect of working at distance, away from the original source of inspiration is a protracted but flexible experience. The passing of time influences what we remember about the places we visit. 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.

This geographical and emotional distance allows abstract ideas to surface and become more relevant, creating an autonomy and uniqueness that creates the potential for expression found within the intaglio printmaking process. Working from distance also creates a dialogue between the original drawing and the print matrix, the mark making and chemical interaction of the etching process stimulating and pushing my work forwards. Etching offers a freshness and originality to my work, taking it away from mere direct representation of subject matter to embrace and accept the idea of the artwork as evolving and shifting throughout its creation.

My prints are not just an architectural study, they are evidence of my observation and responses to a subject in a meaningful way. This is what etching allows me to do—to investigate place through an organic evolution of recording and insights into location through the interlinking processes of drawing and printmaking.