

PINE FERODA 21 May – 3 July 2016

Pine Feroda is a group of five artists who work together on a regular basis, in tandem with their individual careers, to collectively make large woodblock prints. The five are Merlyn Chesterman, Julia Manning, Judith Westcott, Rod Nelson and Ian Phillips. Given that most artists work alone, collaborative working is an unusual approach and one that throws up some interesting questions. An artist working alone will be constantly making decisions,



The ink table

from mark making to subject matter, style, materials, technique, colour, tools used, location, hours worked and many other details such as size and framing. In other words the job description for most artists is to have sole control of everything. Moving from lone wolf to pack animal, and adopting the idea of collective decision making, is a big step change.

The Pine group was originally ‘convened’ by Merlyn Chesterman. She fell into conversation with Ian Phillips while they were both attending *Art in Action*, and then, in the autumn of 2013, she invited the others to Hartland with the idea of turning it into a printmaking event. At the time they had no idea how, or if, it would work.

Two and a half years and many prints later, it is clear from the results that it works very well. So how do they achieve their productive working relationship? It would be too simple to say that the sum of the whole is greater than the parts, it is not, but

some of the practical aspects are. For instance the press is huge, the biggest press in the South West, and requires two people to operate it. It's also true that as a group they can be more ambitious; collectively, solutions to problems can be found whereas one person working alone can be stumped by a technical or aesthetic



obstruction. For example, one of the prints they were working on became difficult in that they got tied up in the detail. As a group they felt they had worked too independently and the overall composition was affected. Together they resolved the issue by taking out some detail and simplifying the whole. It took extra time but they are agreed that their perceptions have got better and between them they now achieve what they describe as a forensic overview.

Merlyn and Judith using the press

The group work together in short, intense bursts with each print taking two blocks of five days. The first sessions are divided up into drawing, deciding, cutting and proofing. They go out drawing together, take photographs, make big drawings and get excited by different views. The communal view is thrashed out back in the workshop; a process that they say 'can be difficult but seems to work.' The second five-day period is spent 'changing their minds and printing the edition'.



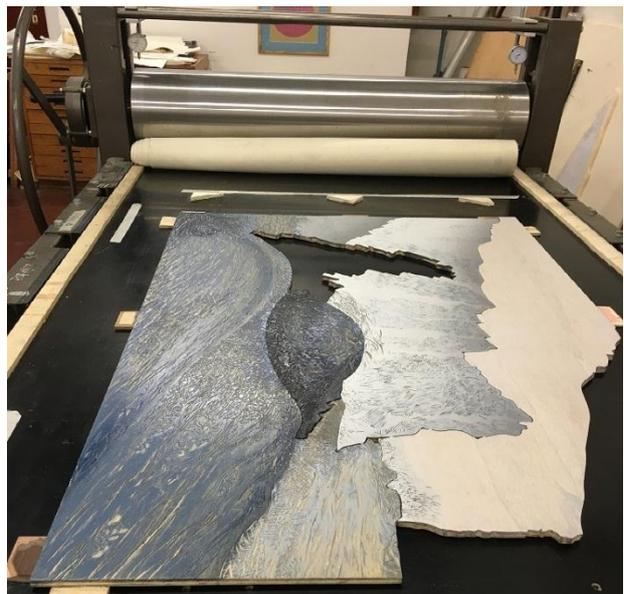
A section of the print block inked up

The group also point out that working together requires trust as they all have different anxieties about the prints and all look at them in different ways. When asked if they divided up the work in particular ways, Rod explained that they try not to pigeonhole each other but it is a bit of a paradox as they do have different strengths so why not utilise them? Julia is of the opinion that their roles should remain fluid but, inevitably, they often end up doing the things they are good at.

A big question about working collectively is, 'how has this affected your individual work?' Judith replied that she was initially thrown by the experience while Julia said that it changed everything for her and she was initially 'flummoxed'. Merlyn said it has increased her confidence but some of the group said the Pine prints had made them less sure about their own work. Without exception they agree that they have all become better technicians and learned a huge amount from working together. Judith describes being part of the Pine group as stimulating and rewarding and Rod writes in his statement that it works as an extended master class for him.

The five are all 'relief' printmakers, using either linocut or woodcut techniques for their individual work.

Relief printing encompasses a family of techniques where the original flat surface of the printing block or plate is cut into. The cut lines and/or marks remain uninked while the remainder of the original surface receives the ink. Intaglio printmaking processes reverse this procedure. The surface of the print block is inked but then wiped. This leaves ink only in the cut recesses and much more pressure is then required to take a print as the paper must be forced into the inky recessed areas of the block.



Sections of the block laid on the press bed

A notable feature of the Pine Feroda prints is their scale. The large size achieved is another advantage of working collectively but, mainly, it was decided that their subject matter was best captured using the biggest scale possible. However, the group have had to



Prints drying in the workshop

adapt and make some of the equipment required to accommodate the size of the prints. In terms of materials the prints are expensive to produce but, happily, the risks and hard work are paying off and Pine is going from strength to strength with a print accepted into the RA Summer Exhibition last year and the entire edition selling out.

Why did they choose to make woodblock prints over any other print making technique? The answer is that 'it has a life and vivacity of its own and can be cut fast and with energy.' Pine Feroda use plywood (never pine) and their huge blocks are made up of smaller sections, jigsaw style. The tools used to cut the blocks are exactly the same as lino cutting tools but on a larger, more robust scale.

All the prints in this exhibition are of the Hartland section of the North Devon coast, a location accurately described in a local information pack as 'dramatic coastal geology of national importance, with visible folded strata, high cliffs, wave-cut platforms and coastal waterfalls.'

Pine Feroda prints are produced in limited editions, are float mounted, and framed in oak. The 'glass' is acrylic – aesthetically pleasing but also a practical, weight saving measure.



Woodblock cutting tools

The five artists who make up Pine Feroda have each produced three individual prints for this exhibition. Staying with an exploratory approach, they worked out a loose set of shared guidelines for each of their three prints - one with a location in common, one in monochrome and one with a theme of rocks and water. These are all either woodcuts or linocuts. From their individual statements it can be seen that process, location and dynamic mark making are important to all of them with both Merlyn and Rod making reference to Shikô Munakata, a 20th century Japanese artist who made beautiful large-scale woodblock prints characterised by a free and vigorous cutting style.

Devon Guild of Craftsmen is delighted to be showing this lovely work made in a spirit of exploration, cooperation and skill sharing.

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GLOSSARY OF RELIEF PRINT TECHNIQUES

Baren - An instrument used for burnishing the back of paper when printing.

Block - Any material which is adapted, cut, or built up to create a surface from which a print can be taken.

Edition - A set of identical prints taken from a block or blocks in the final state. (Also Limited Edition)

End grain - The flat surface of a block of wood cut through the trunk at right angles showing the growth rings. Usually used for wood engraving.

Jigsaw blocks - Printing Blocks cut up into sections, inked, and reassembled for printing simultaneously.

Linocut - A relief print made by cutting lino with knives and gouges.

Multi-block - The use of separate blocks for printing a sequence of colours.

Offset - A transfer method for taking a printed impression from one surface on to another.

Original Print - One of a set of signed and numbered prints produced or supervised by the artist, which exists in no other form, i.e. not a reproduction.

Plank - Wood sawn parallel to the grain. Usually used for woodcuts.

Proof - A trial print taken from the block for studying and correcting.

Reduction print - A print is created through sequential printings using only one block which is cut away progressively.

Registration - The correct alignment of each block when printing several colours on one sheet of paper, giving accurate overprinting.

Relief Printing - Printing an image from the raised surface of a worked block.

(The opposite is **intaglio** – printing from a surface where incised or sunken lines hold the ink.)

Rolling up - Applying a layer of printing ink to the relief surface of a block with a roller.

Woodcut - A relief print from a block of side-grain wood (plank), cut with knives and gouges. Also the term for a worked block and/or a print from the block.

Wood engraving - A printing process using a block of end-grain wood which has been engraved with a burin or graver (engraving tools). Also a print from such a block.

Pine Feroda, April 2016