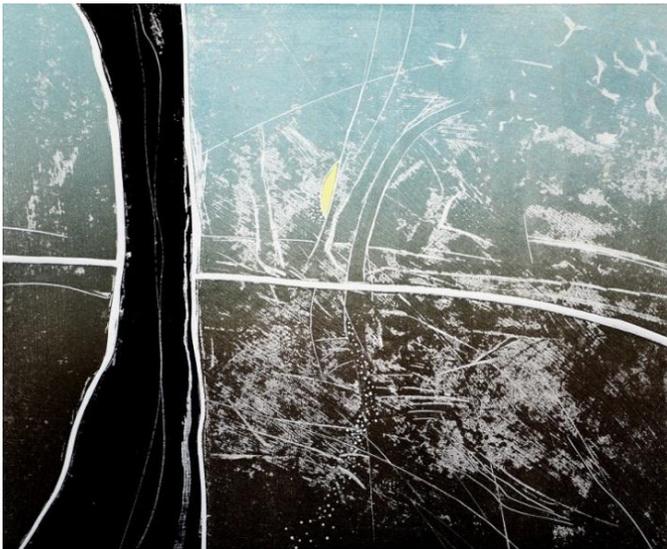


Michael Honor Painter Printmaker

Saturday 19 September – Sunday 1 November

It is unusual to see paintings on show at the Devon Guild of Craftsmen but Michael Honor's paintings and prints are integral to each other and Michael has been a Member of Devon Guild as a printmaker for over thirty years. It is his reputation as a painter, printmaker and teacher of printmaking which brings about this exhibition and we are delighted to be showing this remarkable body of work.

Revelatory moments experienced during childhood are not uncommon; perhaps they are part of what is often called the magic of childhood, but a brief experience that determines a whole lifetime is remarkable and, if it's a positive experience, enviable. As a young boy, Michael watched a man painting on a beach and knew he was observing something full of meaning, something that from then on he knew he wanted to do himself. Although he first studied English at university, Michael has never deviated from his early conviction that painting would be the central activity of his life.



River Bovey. Winter Sun. Lithograph

Michael is chiefly a painter of landscapes, or where-water-meets-land-scapes and for him it all begins with working outdoors; he describes the genesis of a painting as finding the *right* place for a painting to come into his head and the right place can become a lifetime place leading to a number of paintings. So he might visit a place with an expectation of a painting or, as he puts it, 'the chemistry between the expectation of a place and what you actually find there.' Much of Michael's work is done in his home county of Devon but wherever he is, he tends to seek out the wilder places where there is weather and water and light.

Michael works in 'bursts' with one thing feeding another and, all being well, this leads to an *expedition* – or series of painting days. 'The painting needs to get to a certain stage outside and then it comes into the studio for fine tuning and to make it better.' He describes this process as adumbration – bringing something from the darkness into the shadows and then asking what else is required of the painting to bring it further. In answer to the question, 'How do you know when you have made a good painting?' Michael replies, 'You have to judge your own work but you are not *the* judge. I have learned to 'stay' with a painting but occasionally I do abandon one.'

The paintings come first but the prints too are an essential part of Michael's work. A painting may lead to a print, or several prints, and this exhibition has several examples of a painting-to-prints relationship.

So what exactly is a lithograph and why make a lithograph instead of, say, a linocut, a collagraph or an etching?

Lithography was invented in the late eighteenth century by Alois Senefelder, a German actor and author, who used it as a cheap method of publishing theatrical works. 'Lithography can be used to print text or artwork onto paper or other suitable material.'¹ Lithography, using a limestone plate, is done by drawing an image directly onto the smooth, level stone with a waxy crayon (image right). The stone is then treated with a mix of acid and gum which etches the parts of the stone not protected by the waxy drawing. Next, the stone is dampened, causing the etched areas to retain water, which in turn repels an application of oil-based ink so, when the paper is pressed to the stone, it picks up only the marks of the original drawing.



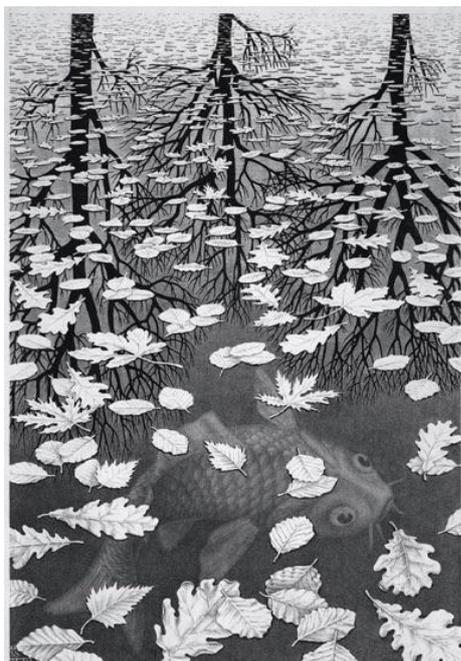
In the early part of the 19th century, lithography was not particularly prominent as an artists' medium as there were still some technical difficulties with the process. When these were overcome, a few artists, in particular Goya, Géricault and Delacroix, began to use lithography to make prints but by the mid-century its use was again sporadic. In the 1890s advances in colour lithography were made and Jules Chéret (image left), often hailed as the father of the modern poster, popularised colour lithographs to a new generation of designers and painters, most famously Toulouse-Lautrec. By the beginning of the 20th century a new chapter began when a Parisian printshop run by Fernand Mourlot invited some well-known artists to explore printmaking in his workshop. These included Picasso, Matisse, Chagall, Miro, Braque, Dufy and Léger who worked directly onto lithographic stones in order to create works

which could be printed by master printers in small editions. These partnerships were used to produce lithographic posters which in turn were used to promote the artists' work and then, as artists realised the scope of lithography, to produce artists' prints.

There is now a more modern form of lithography where metal (aluminium or zinc) plates are used instead of limestone. Stones are no longer used commercially as metal plates are much faster to print from – especially when wrapped around rotary

¹ Wikipedia

cylinders. 'Waterless lithography' works on the same principle but the water part of the process is replaced with silicone.



For artists' prints, metal plates can be worked on by hand in much the same way as stones, and the image can then be printed directly from the plate. Michael uses both methods, partly because the metal plates allow for much bigger, lighter plates and partly because it's another process to experiment with. He describes lithography as the most painterly form of printmaking in that it can accurately reproduce the finest pencil mark and the most delicate reticulation (tide lines) of wash patterns. 'It's a wonderful medium, with alchemy, which is capable of astonishing things.' Lithography is also recognised as a graphic print technique that can capture light, shadow and a sense of depth as in Escher's 1955 lithograph (left), *Three Worlds*.



Michael peeling a print

So, is printmaking easier than painting? Michael's answer is, 'yes, printmaking *is* easier than painting. It has a transformative quality and practitioners love pressing one surface against another. But a lithograph is not quite the same – it's a hard thing to teach. Printmaking does have an element of craft in it and part of the magic is repeatability. Like a footprint in wet sand, or a fingerprint, the magic of the mark that's left behind and one you can make again and again. Painting is temporal whereas printmaking is more like cooking.'

Michael has taught printmaking for almost all his working life, mostly in the Dartington Print Workshop which he set up in 1978, but also in schools to children and young people. He describes teaching as one of the most rewarding experiences of his life and something that has, in turn, taught him a huge amount. Dartington Print Workshop has a loyal following of a number of 'regulars' who use the workshop but Michael ensures its facilities and teaching expertise are made available to all.



Michael printmaking with a group of refugees



What is Michael's own studio like? Well, to start with, it's entirely made with his own hands. Perhaps it's relevant to mention that Michael's father, Pat Honor, was a founding Member of Devon Guild of Craftsmen and a boat builder. He clearly imparted many of his skills to Michael who, if he needs a particular item or something made specifically for a particular purpose, makes it himself. The studio has both southwest and northeast facing roof lights so it is flooded with natural light. When questioned about the non-painter's belief that studios should have a north light, Michael says it's a myth started by the Pre-Raphaelites, who thought the cold purity of a north light was the best light for painting. Michael's studio has as much light as possible.

This photograph (right) of Michael painting by a Devon river was taken by photographer Chris Chapman in 1993 when they were both in an exhibition at RAMM², *New Inhabitants*, which showed the work of artists, photographers and sculptors who lived and worked on Dartmoor. The picture captures the central activity of Michael's working life, a painter painting water and light, and resonates with the outcome of a chance encounter on a beach a long time ago.



Photograph by Chris Chapman

Michael Honnor is represented by the Thackeray Gallery in London.
www.thackeraygallery.com His next exhibition with them is from 7 - 24 June 2016.

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² Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter