

Anita Reynolds: A Year on Dartmoor 19 May – 1 July 2018

Anita Reynolds is an artist who is drawn to locations where she can immerse herself in the landscape. She is not alarmed by being on her own in wild places and will spend lots of time outside, sometimes seeming to do very little other than thinking while at other times she is to be found sketching, painting and printmaking. Anita also works from memory and says her colour and place-memory grows stronger as she is practising all the time. She makes notes outside too, returning to her workshop with gems such as;

‘a cruel cold snap just as spring is on the way ... rich reds, silver greys, rain making the soil glisten, skies melting into land. Snow melts and all signs of spring are lost again.’

The concept for the body of work in this exhibition sprang from a previous major project of Anita's, *Outline South West*, an ambitious journey around the South West Coast Path documenting each day with a print. The coast path is 630 miles long and Anita's plan was to walk the entirety in eight blocks of one week, walking at least 12 miles every day, with two weeks of printmaking in the studio after each week of walking, beginning in April and ending in September. Atrocious weather, knee injuries and other unavoidable hazards combined to extend the length of the completed project to just over two years.

As a landscape artist living in the South West of England, Dartmoor has always been a primary source of inspiration for Anita. After completing *Outline South West* her thoughts turned again to the moor and *A Year on Dartmoor* was born. The plan is to visit all of the 365 square miles of Dartmoor and make an artwork representing each one. However, learning from *Outline South West*, Anita realised that she didn't want to set limits or rules, or be too prescriptive; in her words, 'not to set tight boundaries that squash the imagination'. Currently she has covered between 20 – 30 square miles of Dartmoor and thinks that the entire project could take as much as five years.

Anita is an acute observer and often works by looking at the small picture first, for example lichen and cracks on rocks, and then working outwards into the whole landscape. In answer to the question, 'why make prints more than paintings', she replied, 'printmaking is more exciting and risky as you could lose it all.' She also likes the gear and the tools and the 'making' side of the process and pays heed to the words 'paint like a printmaker and print like a painter'. Because she has reached the age where experience really does count, she feels she now has permission to work in a way she has not done before. Having a studio away from home allows focus and concentration in a way that was never possible when she was younger. And, with over half her life lived, Anita is impatient because she feels there is still so much to do!

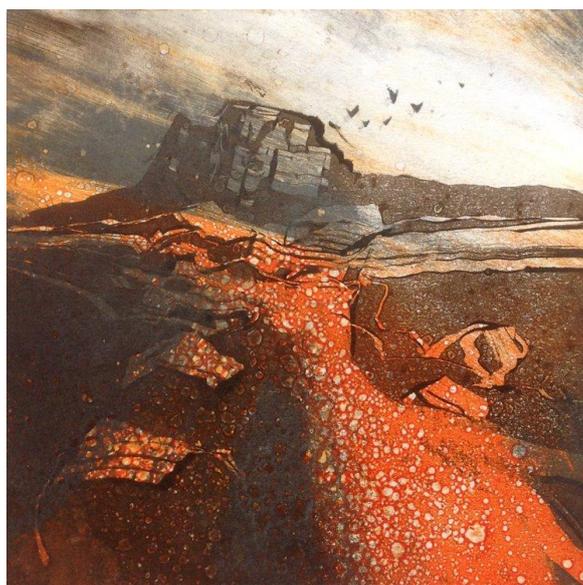


Image: *The rain came in at Haytor*

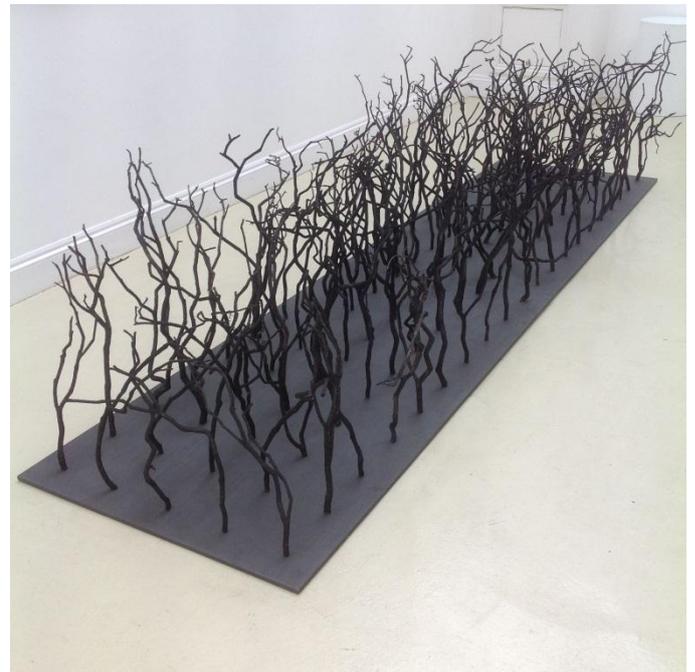


The majority of prints in this exhibition are monotypes. This means they are unique, one-off images, they cannot be editioned as there is only one. Prints such as linocuts, collagraphs, drypoints and etchings can be editioned as the artist has made a plate with permanent marks that can be used a number of times. A monotype is not the same as a monoprint, the two methods are subtly different. Both involve the transfer of ink from an inked plate onto another surface, usually paper. After printing a monotype the plate is wiped clean. With a monoprint however, some elements

are reused in the subsequent prints, for example a leaf or stencil, which results in a series of prints with a common thread or theme. With both methods the image is achieved solely by the artist manipulating the ink which results in one distinctive print. Monoprints and monotypes are the most painterly of all the many printmaking techniques.

The image (above) shows small monotype prints lying on the press bed in Anita's workshop.

Controlled Burning (image right) Anita's delicate installation of burnt gorse, refers to swaling, the practice of setting fire to specific areas of moorland to clear dead vegetation so that new growth can flourish. Over 90% of land within the boundary of Dartmoor National Park (DNP) is farmed, with swaling taking place on the commons, areas of unenclosed, but privately owned upland, on which local farmers and moorland dwellers have rights to graze their livestock. The public too have rights of access to the commons, either on foot or horseback. The commons are managed by Commoners' Councils in partnership with DNP Authority, who are responsible for the good husbandry of the commons. The practice of swaling is not without controversy but, on Dartmoor, can only take place between 1 October and 31 March to afford protection to ground nesting birds. For Anita however, the black scars across the landscape left by swaling are giant graphic marks worthy of a printmaker's, or painter's, close attention.



*'Darkness in our lives can also be places where we find new growth, hope and light.'*¹

¹ Anita Reynolds

Anita does quite a bit of teaching as part of her working life. She says that when she teaches it reminds her to go back to basics and do the things that she asks her students to do.

Printmaking does require students to learn the nuts and bolts so Anita learns too and subscribes to the belief that, with teaching, 'you get back as much as you put in'. However, she sees it more as 'mentoring' than teaching and finds real pleasure in helping students to 'find their voice'. Some of Anita's teaching takes

place in the field with the aid of The Print Bus, her adapted camper van, equipped with Little Barry, the portable press. Big Barry lives a static life in Anita's workshop. The two Barries are named after their maker who not only has the skills to make printing presses but also has the wonderful job title of 'Ink Chemist'.



So what does Dartmoor possess that enthralls an artist-printmaker?

Dartmoor is the stand-out topography of Devon. A huge granite expanse – the remains of an ancient volcanic region – it is sometimes referred to as the last wilderness in southern England but, more accurately, it is the largest open space in southern England. It is a geologist's paradise as it has sedimentary, metamorphic and igneous rocks as well as being the biggest expanse of unglaciated upland in Great Britain and the largest granite surface in England (600 square kilometres).

About three thousand years ago, when the climate was kinder, early Bronze Age² settlers put down roots on Dartmoor making it the site of the oldest settlements in Devon and the beginning of forty centuries of continuous human occupation in the south-western peninsula of England. Therefore 'the last wilderness' is also the first permanent home, leaving the landscape rich in archaeological sites – several thousand of them – comprising 'stone rows; stone circles; cists (burial chambers), cairns and menhirs (standing stones); and hut circles and pounds'³. The image (right) is of Bearddown Man, a 4,000 year old standing stone, set in a typical high Dartmoor landscape of bleached grass and exposed granite, with Devil's Tor in the background at a height of 542m. 'This spot is the last firm outpost for those walking from the south. To the north rise some of Dartmoor's highest tors and loneliest hills, and five miles of blanket bog.'⁴



'Dartmoor is the great source. Its granite produced the stone for votive columns, propitiatory altars, and sacred avenues: for huts and houses and barns: for burial chambers; for the walls of man's earliest cornfields and cattle pounds; and long afterwards for his soaring church towers and his Christian tombs, and for London's streets and bridges'.⁵

² 3 -3,500 BC

³ *Devon*, W.G Hoskins, 1954

⁴ *Dartmoor 365*, John Hayward – J8

Long ago Dartmoor was covered in trees. The trees are now peat bogs, once used for fuel but now left alone, holding millions of gallons of water; a habitat for bog plants and invertebrates. Of the numerous granite quarries once operational on the moor only one, Blackenstone (or Blackingstone) is still operational. Tin mining⁶ which brought prosperity to the moorland towns of Tavistock, Ashburton and Chagford ceased long ago; the mines which produced copper, tin, lead and silver are all worked out, their ruins and workings joining the much older traces of human activity on the moor. The great source has fallen quiet but is still a provider. High rainfall drenches the moor, is captured by the peat, and then flows downwards as either the source, or the feeder, of almost all Devon rivers. The landscape of tors, archaeological sites, great open spaces and picturesque wooded fringes warrant Dartmoor's status of National Park, conferred in the 1950s, and its protection as a unique landscape. It is home to a population of 35,000 people but now has visitor numbers in the region of 2.4 million people each year. Dartmoor's new industry is tourism, a position that has increased steadily since the nineteenth century.

Over half of DNP (57.3%), the Forest of Dartmoor, (don't be confused – it's no longer a forest) is owned by the Duke of Cornwall. Although this land can be termed 'privately owned', the Dartmoor Commons Act of 1985 designated most of this land as 'Access Land' which means it has no restrictions on where walkers can roam. Additionally, there are 450 miles of public rights of way and many more miles of 'permitted' footpaths and bridleways where owners allow access. The Ministry of Defence owns another 14% of DNP - rather anachronistically, Dartmoor National Park has a military training area within its boundaries and, sometimes, live firing practice takes place. Visitors are warned in advance of these sessions and livestock are herded into safer territory. Another 3.8% of the land is owned by water companies, the National Trust owns 3.7%, the Forestry Commission owns 1.8% and Dartmoor National Park Authority owns about 1.4%. Approximately 37% of Dartmoor is common land.

It is of course the landscape and the open access of Dartmoor which attracts visitors, artists, writers, film makers, sky larks, cuckoos, sphagnum moss, children, horses and dogs. A rare landscape of still, lonely places, bogs and boulders, ancient stones, wooded fringes, rivers, rills and wide horizons only accessible on foot. Traces of Dartmoor's earlier inhabitants are everywhere and, on foot, these traces are stepped on, seen and felt in a way that makes it possible to appreciate that you are walking in the footsteps of ages. No wonder that an artist with Anita's powers of observation can find a world of imagery in the detail of the smallest parts to the huge theatre of a snow-filled sky over Haytor Down.

Devon Guild of Craftsmen is delighted to be hosting Anita's exhibition. We have watched her grow from her first exhibition with us in 2013 to the completion of this much larger body of work showing her true colours as an artist and printmaker of rare skill and perception.

*'Dartmoor is my solace, my place of contemplation, inspiration and joy.'*⁷

⁵ *Devon*, W.G Hoskins, 1954

⁶ King Edward 1's Stannary Charter in 1305 established these towns as the place where tin miners carried their tin to be assessed, weighed, stamped and of course, taxed

⁷ Anita Reynolds

Books: *Crossing's Guide to Dartmoor*, first published in 1912, William Crossing. Still regarded as the most informative guide to Dartmoor

Devon, first published in 1954, W.G. Hoskins

Dartmoor 365, 1991, John Hayward. This book has a large Facebook group of devotees who post information about their Dartmoor walks in relation to John Hayward's grid of the 365 square miles.

Moortown Diary, 1975, Ted Hughes. This volume of poetry documents the time Ted Hughes spent on a North Dartmoor farm working with his father-in-law, a Dartmoor farmer.

Dart, 2002, Alice Oswald, 'a songline from the source to the sea'.

Flora

<http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/habitats2/moorland/upland-heathland>

<http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/habitats2/moorland/blanket-bog-and-raised-bog>

<http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/habitats2/moorland/valley-mire>

<http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/habitats2/moorland/grass-moor-and-bracken>

<http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/habitats2/caves,-mines-and-rocky-outcrops/rocky-outcrops>

<http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/habitats2/caves,-mines-and-rocky-outcrops/caves-and-mines>

<http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/habitats2/moorland/lowland-heathland>

Fauna

<http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/wildlife/dartmoors-little-five>

<http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/wildlife/birds>

<http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/wildlife/mammals>

<http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/wildlife/insects>

<http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/wildlife/other-animals>

<http://www.dartmoor.gov.uk/wildlife-and-heritage/wildlife/fungi>

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We encourage visits from schools, colleges and community groups. Let us know in advance and we can arrange an introductory talk & tour of a particular exhibition.

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