

# pressing matters

CELEBRATING MODERN PRINTMAKING

## THIS ISSUE:

Illustrator Rosie Leach  
discusses her process

Studio visit with  
Norman Ackroyd

Tools of the trade



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CELEBRATING MODERN PRINTMAKING

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welcome to issue 13

As you can see with our cover choice, we've decided to 'bring the brightness' with this issue. That doesn't mean all of the art featured in the following pages is day-glow, more that we want the publication to be a positive and uplifting moment for our readers in increasingly uncertain times. Whether it's the bold and bright works of Emma Fisher, Kate Clarke and Hannah Brown, fizzing with energy and brilliance, or the surprising colour choices of Robert Tavener's landscape prints, there's something about using bright colours that makes you smile and breathe in the vibrancy of the artwork a little longer.

Early in the planning for this issue, we were lucky to visit print legend Norman Ackroyd at his London studio (socially distanced of course) and learnt how the normally well-travelled artist had been revisiting his trips to the far edges of the UK via his sketchbooks. Drawing from memories and the feelings that his sketches evoke allows him to travel back to these amazing places – a bit of a magic trick in our time of restrictions and regulations. And with our printed work being made increasingly from our homes, it was exciting to talk to illustrator Rosie Leech whose One Inch Etchings project sees her making mini prints from her home studio at the smallest of scales – tiny masterpieces that conjure up so much more feeling than the small marks made in creating them. We are all considering what we have and how we can use it to make work – Andreas Brekke's article talks about just that notion – embracing the limits, making the work even better.

So, make yourself a cup of tea, pull up your favourite chair, tell the world to get lost for a bit and immerse yourself in the colours, shapes, textures and sheer ingenuity of these printmakers and their work.

John Coe / Creative Director

### ISSUE 13 Contributors

Along with the artists and projects featured in this issue, we'd like to thank all of the contributors who helped to make this magazine a riot of inky goodness:

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When only swiss made will do.

# tools of the trade

## Getting Started

There is something beautifully simple about the linocut process although the prints it produces can be extremely intricate and complex. A print is created by carving a design into a block of lino, rolling ink onto the surface and laying paper or fabric on top then applying pressure to produce a print. Like woodcut and wood engraving, it is a relief printing process. Lino was first used by artists at the end of the Nineteenth century, and really took off in the 1920s and 30s, when linoleum was developed for use as affordable flooring. Today, linocut is still very popular, and is often a way to get started in printmaking as there is no need for harsh chemicals or expensive equipment. It is also great fun and is suitable for all ages and artistic abilities.

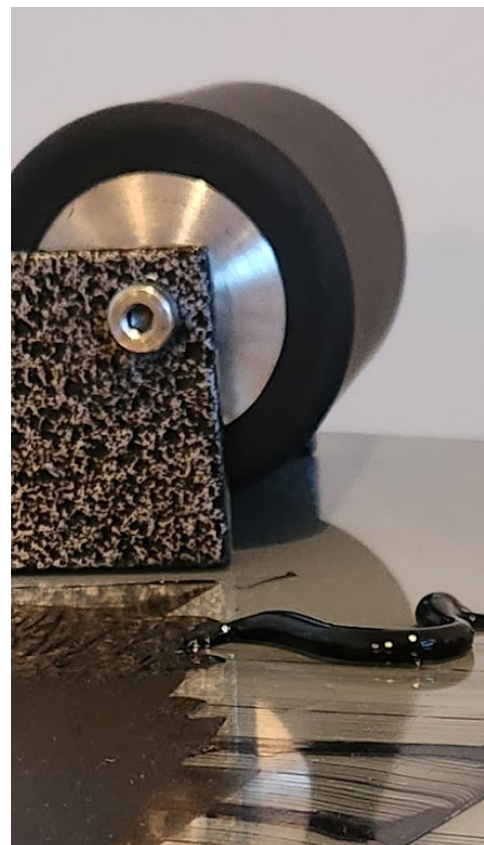


### When Starting Out

It is possible to buy a good starter roller for under £10. They come in a variety of sizes, weights and qualities. Using a roller that is wider than the block will make it easier to apply an even layer across your whole block. If your roller is narrower than your block, you might get some lines from the imprint of the edge of your roller, but with some extra rolling these can be inked away.

The Esdee soft lino roller is a good starter roller, as it is made of soft synthetic rubber and gives an even coverage. Cleaning them thoroughly after use and storing them with the rubber facing up will prolong their lifespan and help the roller keep its shape for longer.

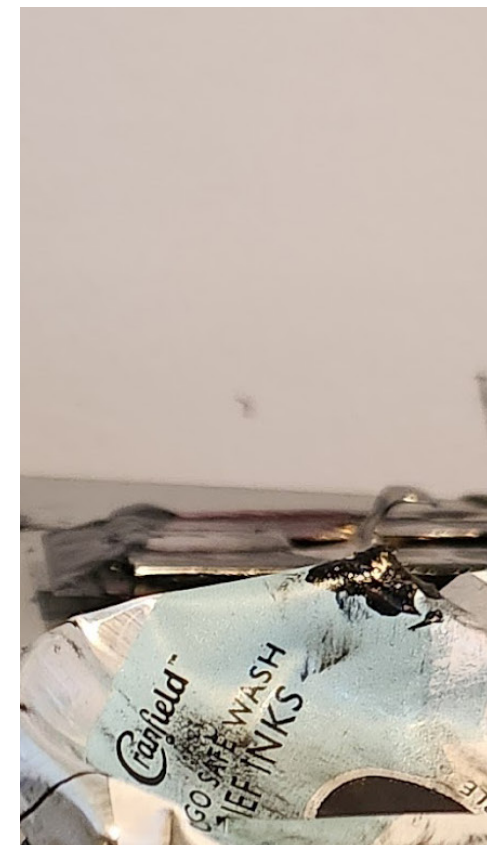
The shore value on some rollers refers to their softness – hard is



over 50 shore and soft under 50 shore. For relief printing, a soft rubber roller is recommended, as they are better at covering the carved detail on the lino block. The Japanese soft rubber roller is a good quality roller that comes in a variety of sizes.

### Tackach Hand Brayers

The rubber composition of Takach hand brayers is the same as our top quality Takach hand inking rollers. Self-lubricating bronze bushings are installed in the powder-coated brayer frame to insure smooth operation. Medium (35) Durometer rubber provides the most versatility for printmaking techniques. Hard (60) durometer available for processes requiring a harder rubber surface such as relief plates.



Each brayer has a large 2.5in diameter core which equals a 7-3/4in roll out length.

The rubber used is a combination of natural rubber with a Buna Nitrile Blend.

Self lubricating bronze bushings allow for easy worry free use.

Powder coated frame allows you to store your brayer without worrying about creating a flat spot in your rubber with the built in stand.

These brayers are ideal for the serious printmaker. They are a life long investment if treated the way they are meant to be treated.



# Futatsu Wari

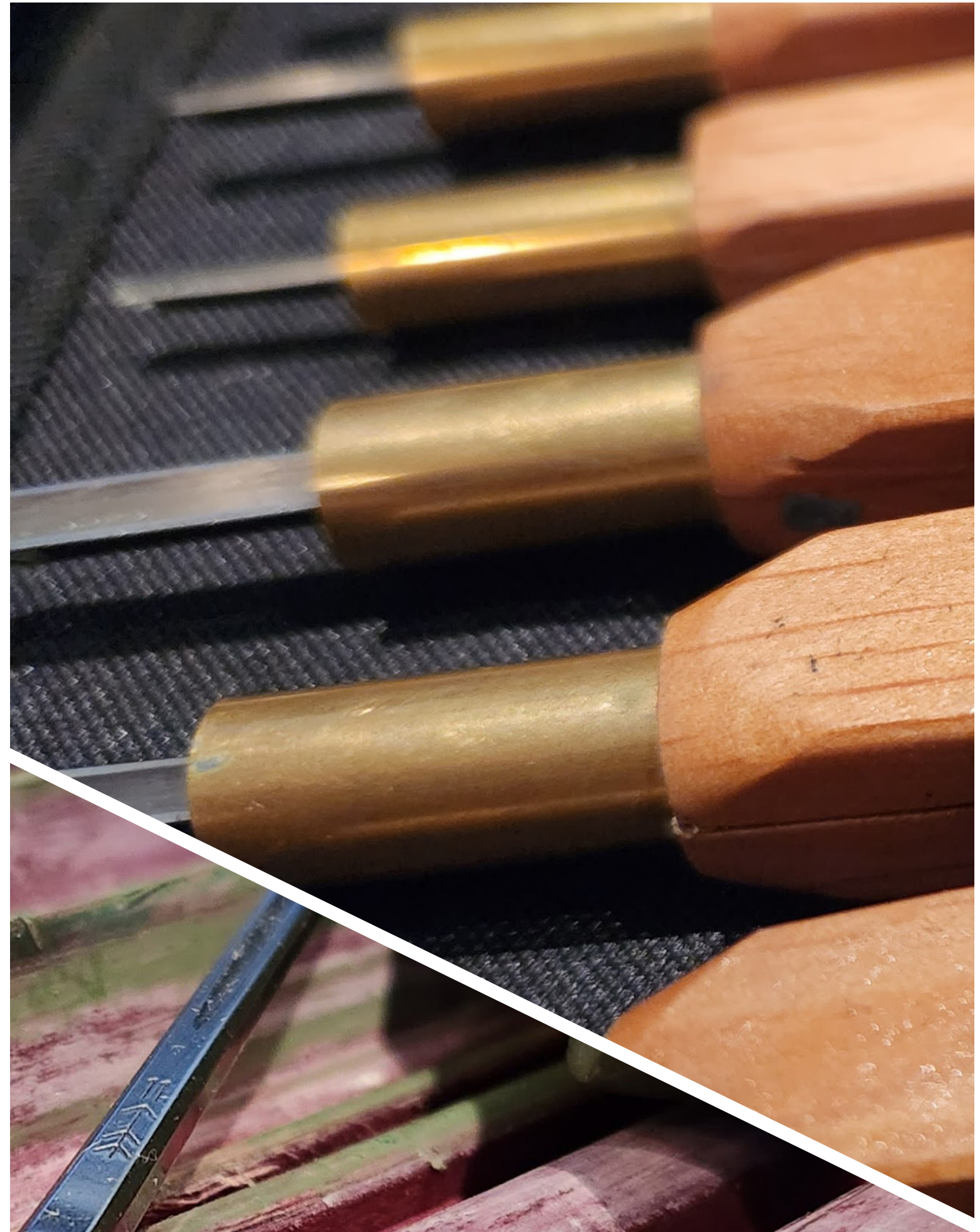
## The sharpest tool in the shed

Carving tools come in two basic shapes – U shaped gouges and V shaped cutters. The V shaped tools create thin, consistent lines, and the U shaped ones make bigger marks or clear areas around the design. Both tools come in various sizes from very small for detailed work to large for bolder marks and to quickly clear large areas.

carving tools are available for all budgets, but it isn't necessary to spend a lot of money on them. There are some budget options for beginners:

- A plastic handle with interchangeable blades at different sizes
- A beginners set of woodcarving tools (they are suitable for all the blocks discussed here) – Jackson's set of five tools are a great, inexpensive starter set

I find the woodcut tools are easier to use than the interchangeable blades because they are more solid and easier to grip, but many artists do start with the handle sets. Investing in more expensive carving tools will give you tools that can last a lifetime, if they are cared for and sharpened regularly. Pfeil make high quality Swiss made lino and block cutting tools that can be purchased individually or in sets containing a mix of U gouges and V cutters in various sizes. They have shaped wooden handles that fit the palm of your hand, so are comfortable to hold. Each tool is categorised by a number – e.g. 11/0.5 which refers to the curvature and the width of the blade in mm.



# Inks

## A clear winner emerges

Hands down the best overall ink on the market for lino printing, in my opinion. It's the ink that I've gone back to time and time again over the years. It has all the benefits of traditional oil-based ink but because of its special formulation, it comes without the cleanup hassle. Here's how to clean your inked brayer. Hold the brayer over the sink and squirt a fair amount of dish soap on it (no water, yet!) and rub it all around until the ink is completely coated with soap. Then rinse it all under warm water, rubbing it off with your hands. Done. Let it dry.

Caligo inks come in a variety of colors and are widely available online. I recommend starting with tubes of black, white and their process colors (red, yellow and blue). With this color palette you can pretty much get any color you want. I prefer the tubes to the cans of ink - avoiding problems with the ink skinning over. After you get used to the inks you can try the different ink modifiers that they sell. I sometimes use the extender to make the inks more transparent.

Unlike water-based inks, oil-based inks take longer to dry and Caligo is no exception. Expect at least a couple days in my experience but it often is longer, particularly if you've stacked a lot of layers on top of each other. Drying time can be affected by the temperature and humidity of the studio, how thick the ink was applied, the type of paper, as well as the number of layers of ink.



# exploring print

## illustrator Rosie Leech discusses her craft

### What was your first experience of printmaking?

I remember as a child endlessly messing about with painting and trying monoprints with an old roller and odd bits of glass, but my first 'professional' experience was going on a collagraph weekend course when I was 14. I was amazed by the vast range of texture and imagery it's possible to create with cardboard and tinfoil. It definitely broadened my understanding of the many possibilities of printmaking.

### Where are you based and where do you print from?

I am currently based in South Herefordshire, having graduated from Edinburgh College of Art last year. I'm still looking around for a regular print studio to join, which is a little complicated at the moment as I'm not quite sure where I'll move to next. Meanwhile I have set up a temporary studio and am trying out various home-based techniques.

### Your illustrations are full of narrative, where do your ideas come from?

I have always been very interested in the mundane – I think the minutiae of life has a lot of illustrative potential. The idea for my most recent comic came when I was stuck on a delayed train just outside London, watching a pigeon trying to gain the attention of a be-suited commuter. It was a fleeting interaction, but I ended up following the idea in the comic and wondering where they might both end up. I'm quite nosy, I spend a lot of time aimlessly people watching and listening to snippets of other people's conversations in cafés, seeking potential illustration ideas.





I also work a lot in ceramics, and find that if I am experimenting with a new mark-making technique in clay that similar shapes and forms will cross over into my illustration and printmaking work. I've been inlaying grids into some very small porcelain pots and then I found grid shapes appearing on the trousers of my characters – it's rather nice when projects link together like this.

**How does your background as an illustrator inform**

**your approach to print projects?** On the whole I think it's incredibly useful – there is an attention to detail which I rely on heavily in both processes. Frequently I find myself thinking in screenprint layers when I am working on an illustration, even if it will never be hand-printed. Quite often I work by hand in black ink or crayon on layers of paper or drafting film, scan them in, minimally edit them and then digitally colour them for an editorial piece at the stage I would otherwise print them out for screenprint separations. I like knowing that an illustrative piece could be developed into a print further down the line.



**Can you tell us about your one inch etchings project?**

I went to an exhibition at the House of Illustration in London, just before my fourth year started, which included the work of illustrator John Vernon Lord. He had set himself the task of doing one one-inch squared drawing a day for a year, they were astonishingly intricate and it was fascinating to see them all displayed together. During my fourth year I did a similar project with one-inch squared observational drawings, some painted, some drawn, then I chose the ones I thought worked best and created one-inch squared etching plates from them. It took a few goes to get the batch right, I tried various different ways of applying the hard ground and different etching times in the acid bath, but eventually I figured out how to get a clean print from something so small. They are a little awkward to ink up, and are dwarfed by the size of most presses I've printed with but I love.

**What attracts you to printmaking over more digital formats?**

I love the feel and immediacy of printmaking, which you just don't get in the same way with digital printing. There is something wonderful about the intrinsically tactile nature of the process, the feel of specific papers and the smell of the inks. I always feel oddly nostalgic when I walk into a print room. Here is a methodical order in which you need to work, in order to get a clean print but within that such depth for exploration and experimentation. I love the moment of reveal when you pull back the blanket or lift the screen bed – it's a hold your-breath moment, very similar to lifting the lid on a full kiln. Brian Park, the head of the print department at Edinburgh College of Art, used to tell me over and over again that if I wanted something to be exactly perfect then I might as well do it digitally and that I ought to see the small unplanned imperfections which come from a hand-pulled print as part of its charm, rather than mistakes. It took me a long time to learn that lesson but it is a very important one!





**You use screenprinting, risograph and monoprint too – how do you choose which illustrations to use with which technique?**

Sometimes I will go into a project with the express reason to get better at a particular technique, or to try out something I've had in mind for a while. I'm currently working on a comic about fruit picking which has some text and I knew from the beginning that I wanted it to be a risograph. I've never explored combining typography and illustration with riso printing so I'm really looking forward to that. I think going into a project knowing which print method the final outcome will be in can be helpful, as it can streamline the process at the development stage, but it is also a little limiting if you are just trying to generate lots of ideas. Sometimes I find myself getting too pigeon-holed early on in the process and

**"I've got lots of other projects ticking away."**

have to try and forget about the final outcome. I always like to be working on a few different things at once, a screenprint, a risograph, as well as various ceramics and textiles projects to balance out the creative processes.

**In one of your projects you used gold ink on dark paper – do you like to experiment with print formats and techniques?**

This particular project went through a lot of different iterations. I tried the idea as an etching and a screenprint before discovering the surprising amount of detail you can get with risograph, and the ethereal effect of the gold ink on dark blue paper – it was a wonderful moment seeing that first print come out! I think a lot of my print experimentations are to do with



figuring out how small and detailed you can go with a technique, pushing the medium as far as I can in this direction before deciding where I want to go next with it and whether I'd like to scale it back up again. I've done this a lot with screenprint, finding the limits of how thin I can print lines and type, as well as the size and intricacy of etching plates, which can be both incredibly frustrating and very satisfying.

**Does your approach differ across personal work vs. commissions?**

Sometimes I will work through all the development stages of a personal piece and then mull it over for a few months before coming back to it with new ideas and working through the next stage. That's not something you have the luxury of with commissions. Often it's quite helpful to have more time to rethink and approach something from a new angle, but there is also something to be said for the energy generated when you know you have a deadline coming up. The screenprint I am currently working on is an illustration I started drawing for more than a year ago, and am only now doing the final separations.

**How did your project with riso-printed publication Counterpoint come about?**

They were a joy to work with! I met the editors Bethany and Sam at an illustration fair a few years ago where I bought my first issue of Counterpoint. I pored over it endlessly, trying to learn more about the layer separations and depth of colour. Shortly after I graduated they asked me to do an illustration for their Growing issue, which was such a delight. I have always been both fascinated and highly amused by photographs in local newspapers of gardeners entering massive vegetables into village fetes, so I took this idea further and had a great time developing some little gardening characters. I had an incredible amount of creative freedom with this piece which was both a real luxury and quite daunting. A lot of my characters end up looking a little bemused to have come into being, but in this instance it was quite appropriate!

**Can you tell us some of your influences?**

I am just starting to work on a children's book, where movement and expression is so incredibly important, so I have been studying a lot of children's book

illustrators. Shirley Hughes is such a beautiful storyteller, her children's books were a very early source of inspiration. More recently I've been looking at Jon Klassen's hat trilogy, Coralie Bickford-Smith's *the Fox and the Star* and William Grill's *Shackleton's Journey*. In terms of printmaking I think that Jon McNaught is one of the best out there, his quiet storytelling and layered screenprints are sensational. I am very interested in pacing and framing, particularly when working on silent comics, and the influence from this comes a lot from films and film stills. I did a project a little while ago where each character and their associated space was based on the colour scheme of a different Wes Anderson

**"A lot of my characters end up looking a little bemused to have come into being, but in this instance it was quite appropriate!"**

film. I also listen to a lot of podcasts when I'm working, most recently *is Love*, which has such beautifully gentle stories and I think a lot of influences from what I listen to are starting to seep into my narratives.

**What's on the horizon/future projects?**

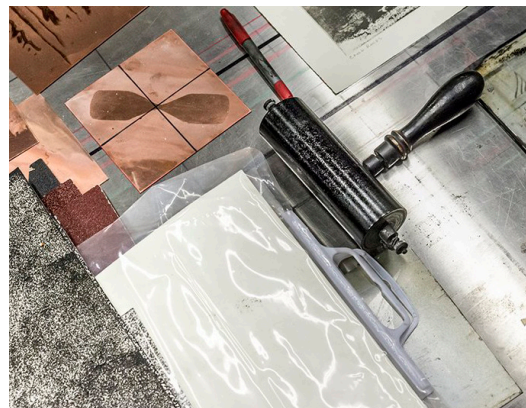
I would love to get this picturebook off the ground and do something with it, it's an idea I've been playing about with for a while. I'm also really excited to finally get back into a proper print studio and do the first run of the screenprinted silent comic I've been working on with the pigeon and the commuter, I can't wait to see how it comes out. I've got lots of other projects ticking away, some small and some slightly daunting – I'm currently juggling things to make sure I can find time for them all!

# Norman Ackroyd

**“Etching is simply a drawing medium. All the great etchers were great draughtsmen. I also think of watercolour as a drawing medium.”**

Norman Ackroyd admits it was the very mood of aquatint and etching that first drew him to the artform. “It was just the feel of the stuff,” he recalls. “It would be the same if you went into music and somebody put a violin in your hand. It’s just instinct. I do a lot of watercolour as well, and oil painting. But I sometimes take etching to an industrial level – making huge etchings on steel. I find working in watercolour and aquatint and etching very similar.” Norman’s research trips for his prints have become legendary, and almost always involve going out to sea. “We go away for long weekends, find a nice hotel, me and my partner. I always take my drawing book, but it’s half holiday, half work. For the bigger organised trips it’s once or twice a year. I had one organised for July, which will now happen next year. Zandra Rhodes was coming this year – she’s a great drawer. She’s actually made some really nice etchings here in the studio. We were students at the Royal College together,” he says. Collaboration

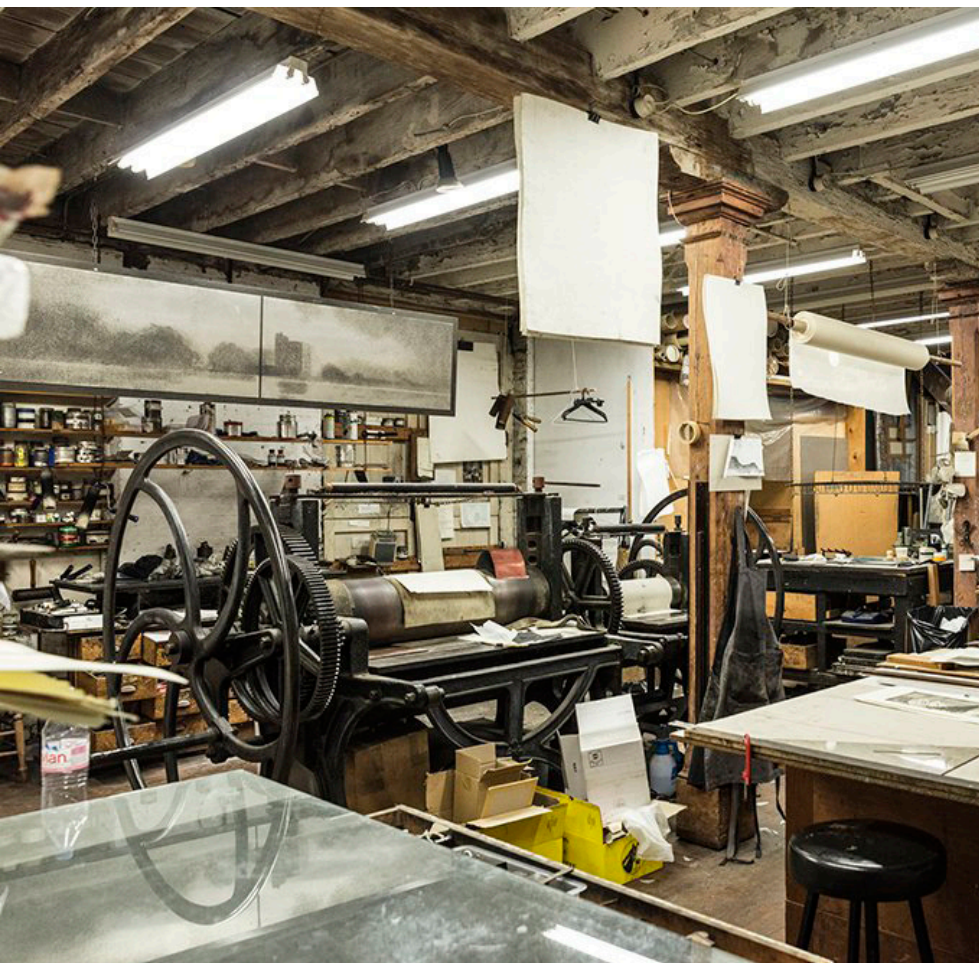
and community are also firm elements of Norman’s research. Part of this, he says, is building trust with those who navigate the boats that take him out and around the country’s waters. “I have one or two favourite boatmen – you need a boatman who intimately knows his area,” he romantically explains. “Sometimes you want to land on an island without a quay. So they need to know the tide and the rocks – a new person wouldn’t know. So one or two I’ve chartered many times. They also know what strength of sea I can manage – they won’t take people out who are going to vomit everywhere – when the sea changes quickly, it can get frightening.” “There’s a group that come with me every year, they’re really good company and I feel comfortable with them. I found one drawing pad from a trip and I just put my tongue on the back of it and it was pure salt! The water splashes all over my sketchbooks.” Obviously the pandemic has jinxed any 2020 plans to get afloat for Norman. But it hasn’t meant



**“Things get distilled. You get a clarity, all the extraneous stuff is gone and the essence is left on your retina and in your memory.”**

he’s stopped working – far from it. “I’ve been going back through my drawing books – hundreds of them. I start daydreaming and remembering particular days – setting off at half four in the morning, things like that. Muscle memory helps and I do have a very photographic retina,” he says. The work and the sketches bring back memories. I can recall a choppy sea, and although all you have are really crude marks there’s a life in them. There’s been lots of time to reflect (during lockdown). Memories come and then you daydream. I’ve done so much daydreaming since March. Just me in this bloody place like a pea in a drum. Things get distilled. You get a clarity, all the extraneous stuff is gone and the essence is left on your retina and in your memory. But also in your hands somehow. I like Picasso’s quote ‘my hand tells me what I’m thinking.’”





There will always be more to see, to record, it seems. And Norman would be the first to agree, with each new artistic endeavor seemingly only a gateway to even more beyond it. "I'd still like to go to Fair Isle, but it's become a bit touristy. It's got a population of about 90. I could charter a boat from Orkney perhaps. I've sailed past it. A great poet called George Mackay Brown lived on Orkney, as well as the master of the Queen's music, Peter Maxwell Davis. His great symphony was Ode To Orkney, which had its premier at the Proms. This was about two years ago, and the Albert Hall wrote to me to ask to use one of my etchings. When things come out of the blue like that it's nice. You feel you're connecting with music or poetry. I just had an email from the University of Georgia in America, and they're doing a big book on all the best writing on the British archipelagos, and they gave a list of etchings of mine they'd

like to use. I love that – that's 5,000 miles away! Of course I'll do it, it's lovely to be asked and to be involved," he says. When we meet him, Norman is in the process of finishing off a hand-coloured etching project called Lockdown Rainbows, as well as his annual boxed set for Eames. "The rainbows project was done for fun but I enjoyed it. They're called Eclipse, Tiara, Forensic, Love Conquers All and Surprise," he explains. There will also be a book based on a Scottish island at some point. "Dursey Island is near Skellig, and it has the Bull, Cow and Calf Rocks. It's one of the extreme islands. The Bull Rock is an amazing place to go. It's now serviced by a helipad but before that people lived there. It's got an arch, and we had a really good boatman who took us through it to the other side where there's a building, which he told us was the gasworks. They used to come in with coal in a boat and lift it out to make natural gas, like an

ordinary gasworks, but in miniature. It's a weird rusty structure on the side of a rock in the middle of the Atlantic. And the gas fired the lighthouse." And again, Norman is away, still travelling the country's coast, despite the restrictions imposed on him. Then, his thoughts return to his upcoming boxed set and its launch, and a rare chance to look back. "At a recent show we showed my first ever boxed set from 1973. So we'll have the first and the most recent side by side. Some people collect them every year. The full set is in the London University of the Arts, and the Royal Academy has most of them, and a few people have full collections and are planning to donate them to museums. "That's all you want, as an artist, to make stuff and it get out there and for people to see it. That's the ultimate thing. It's nothing to do with money really. Although the money actually allows you to do it."





**pfeil**

**SWISS MADE**

