Between Stone and Screen: The Rise of Printmaking in Post-War Britain with a New Emphasis on Robert Erskine and St. George's Gallery Prints (1955-1963)

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Abstract

This thesis documents the rise of printmaking in post-war Britain that culminated in the print boom of the 1960s, focusing on the activities of the print dealer Robert Erskine and his gallery St. George's Gallery Prints in London. **Chapter 1** outlines the British print scene in the decades prior to the founding of St. George's Gallery Prints in 1955, acknowledging the overlap between the two periods while drawing attention to a shift in attitudes that enabled printmaking to flourish. **Chapter 2** describes Erskine's background, the set-up of St. George's Gallery Prints and the campaign he waged to prove that prints were original works of art rather than reproductions. **Chapter 3**, in addition to recounting three early exhibitions and the creation of the gallery's brand identity, is about the challenges Erskine faced in establishing a professional print publishing industry in Britain that could compete internationally. **Chapter 4** analyses Erskine's core artists – Merlyn Evans, Ceri Richards, Anthony Gross, Edwin La Dell, Michael Rothenstein and Julian Trevelyan – as a group who served as allies in his printmaking movement. This is confirmed in **Chapter 5** where I demonstrate that these same artists helped transform the printmaking departments of key London art colleges. **Chapters 6** and **7** return to Erskine's exhibition programme, with the former analysing his curatorial choices within the context of post-war art and culture. The latter is an in-depth study of *The Graven Image* exhibitions, which I argue, marked the beginning of a new era in printmaking and helped launched the printmaking career of David Hockney. **Chapter 8** shows how Erskine engaged with the limited sources of public patronage available to printmakers while simultaneously developing a new model of corporate patronage.

In order to analyse Erskine's role in the rise of printmaking during this period, the thesis adopts a methodological approach that features both archival research and material gathered from the author's original interviews with some of Erskine's circle. Key themes and insights emerge through analysis of this material, including the role that cross-cultural exchange between English and international printmakers played in the evolution of the global print boom of the 1960s. While the 1960s are often written about in terms of rupture, I will argue for continuity or at least evolution by proving that the seeds of the print boom were planted in the proceeding decade. The tension between the print as an agent of mass dissemination and as an original work of art is highlighted throughout the dissertation. This tension did not dissipate until the mid-to-late 1960s when the print was celebrated rather than denigrated for its mechanical and commercial aspects and the emphasis on originality diminished.

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The staff at the archives, museums and libraries I consulted for my research were extremely helpful. I would like to give particular thanks to those at the Whitechapel Gallery archive, the V&A archive, the Tate archive, the UCL Art Museum and the British Library.

Thanks are due to those closest to me for believing that this was a project worth pursuing. Most importantly, my parents Margarita and Howard for supporting me in every possible way and sparking my interest in the post-war period. Thanks also to Austen and our daughters Xenia and Cosima, whose births in 2017 and 2020, along with the pandemic, meant that the thesis took longer than expected. Finally, I'd like to thank Catherine Ingrams for her generosity and friendship.

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Foreword

This project began in 2011 when I began interviewing family friends about their lives in an attempt to understand more about my background. My family is English but I grew up in Los Angeles before moving to the UK in 2006. Robert Erskine is my godfather and I always regarded him as kind and interesting man with an incredible collection of ancient art. When I decided to interview him, I did not know that he had founded St. George's Gallery Prints in the mid-fifties. When the topic came up in the interview I was intrigued because of my own background in art history but because we were having a casual conversation we did not spend as much time on the gallery as I later would have liked.

Not long after the interview Erskine suffered a stroke that affected his ability to process language. While he remained the same in himself, he could no longer speak cogently about St. George's Gallery Prints. In 2016 when I was working as an archivist for Bridget Riley and learning more about the post-war period, I remembered the interview and with the help of a colleague turned it into a paper for the Paul Mellon Centre.[1] The paper was received enthusiastically and I realised Erskine's work at St. George's Gallery Prints was an important but neglected chapter in the story of post-war British art. The conference was the catalyst behind my decision to pursue a thesis on the topic and it was attended by Martin Hammer who went on to become my primary adviser at the University of Kent until his retirement in 2020.

My personal connection with Erskine is unusual in an academic project of this kind. However, without these family ties it likely that some of the important material would have been lost or never recorded. The original interview has been a fantastic resource despite its cursory nature. My close relationship with his wife, my godmother Lindy Erskine, has been invaluable. She

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[1] 'The Graven Image (1959): Printmaking in Britain on the Threshold of the New' was given at the conference *Exhibiting Contemporary Art in Post-War Britain, 1945-60* which took place at the Tate Britain on the 28 and 29 January 2016.

put me in touch with people like Joseph Rykwert, Caroline Cuthbert, Laura Mulvey and John Kasmin, some of whom were affiliated with the gallery and gave me first-hand accounts of its layout as well as their impressions of Robert Erskine. Lindy provided me with the only available copy of the film *Artist's Proof* that Erskine made about the process of printmaking and gave me a box of exhibition catalogues and gallery invitations that I have drawn upon throughout the thesis. Finally, she shared several conversations that she had with her husband that related to St. George's Gallery Prints. I have tried to be objective and believe that to a certain degree the facts speak for themselves. The facts, however, had not been compiled and synthesised until I embarked upon this research.[2]

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[2] A thesis on a related subject was submitted by Michael Clegg to the University of Birmingham in April 2021. See Michael Clegg '"The Poor Man's Picture Gallery": An Enquiry into Artists' and Print Images in the Cultural and Political Context of Post-War Britain, 1945-60', Ph.d Thesis (University of Birmingham, 2021). It includes a chapter on St George's Gallery Prints and a list of its exhibitions in an appendix.

Introduction

This thesis is about the role that Robert Erskine and St. George's Gallery Prints played in reviving fine art printmaking in Britain in the post-war era. St. George's Gallery Prints was the only gallery after the war that was devoted exclusively to commissioning, exhibiting and promoting original printmakers. When the gallery opened in 1955, neither the facilities for making prints nor the market for selling them existed. But when the gallery closed in 1963, the situation had transformed and the print boom was in its infancy. While Erskine was not solely responsible for the print boom, which was also due to international forces and changing attitudes towards multiplicity, his gallery was a fundamental reason why British printmaking flourished in the 1960s.

The story of St. George's Gallery Prints has not been told in sufficient depth before. In the literature from the period that is related to printmaking, Erskine's importance is taken for granted, but with time he has mostly been forgotten. This omission is in keeping with the critical neglect of British post-war art. It is also in keeping with the neglect of printmaking, a medium that has received far less art historical, aesthetic or philosophical attention than painting or even photography. This thesis will address what I believe is a gap in the scholarship and will help to explain why the British print boom of the 1960s and 70s happened.

I did not begin the project with an art historical methodology in mind, let alone a theoretical angle. I knew that Erskine's work at St. George's Gallery Prints deserved further exploration and wanted to see where the research would lead me. While the specific topic is quite narrow, the history of printmaking is not, and neither is the history of post-war British art. As a result, a challenge has been to include a sufficient amount of contextual information without veering too much off course. The primary goal of the thesis is to provide a full and detailed account of St. George's Gallery Prints, including the background of Robert Erskine, his reasons for starting the

gallery, the challenges he faced trying to publish high-quality prints, his marketing strategies, the artists exhibited, the exhibition history and the closure of the gallery.

In this introduction I will explain the themes and overarching ideas that emerged in the course of my research rather than summarising each chapter chronologically. However, in the process, I will give a broad overview of the content of this thesis. I will also draw attention to some of the theoretical arguments about printmaking in order to provide a framework for the question of how a print can be both an original and a copy. As Michel Melot writes, a print is 'an object of substitution sufficiently linked to its archetype to be described as the direct emanation from it, but sufficiently independent of it' to be widely distributed.[1] However, this duality was not something that could be easily reconciled with cherished notions about creativity that subtly informed much of the print-related discourse in the mid-twentieth century.

Any dissertation on post-war art invariably addresses the spectre of the Second World War, which affected British society profoundly and left deep emotional and physical scars. The recovery period was long and some historians conclude that it took about twenty years. In this thesis, I will place Erskine's exhibition programme within the context of post-war British art and argue that the war and its aftermath is reflected in the sombre quality of the prints. Many of his exhibited artists were a generation older than he was and lived through the upheavals of the 1930s and the trauma of the war. Their work lacks the playful humour and irony that is evident in Pop Art and is more rooted in the past than prophetic of the future. However, it was not as disconnected from the next era as it initially seems.

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[1] Michel Melot, 'The Nature of the Print', in André Beguin, Richard S. Field, Antony Griffiths, Michel Melot, *Print*: *History of an Art* (Geneva and London: Skira/Macmillan,1981), pp.8 -130 (p. 26).

Looking back on the post-war period the critic John Russell wrote that 'one age had come to an end: no one liked to admit it; another had not yet begun.'[2] The interstitial or liminal nature of the fifties is a thread that will run through all the chapters. Poised on the threshold of the sixties, a decade that was seen to break radically from the past, the fifties has been characterised as being drab, depressing and hopeless and its art ignored for being too eclectic to fit into the twentieth-century canon. However, I will argue that in its very heterogeneity, the 1950s actually fostered great creativity in the arts and is a period that is justifiably being reappraised.

The efflorescence of British printmaking in the 1960s has rarely been contextualised in the history of post-war printmaking. Rather than emphasising the stark contrast between the 1950s and 60s, I will point out the continuity between the periods. I will cite St. George's Gallery Prints as an example of this and prove that some of the seeds that bloomed during the print boom were in fact planted by Robert Erskine. In chapters 1 and 2, for example, I will draw attention to his professionalism – from insisting on high-quality printing to devising a marketing strategy - which stood in contrast to the supposed amateurism of the 1950s. And in the conclusion, I will show how Erskine's legacy carried over into the print boom in specific ways that have not always been acknowledged.

This thesis is mainly historical and archival because its primary purpose is to reconstruct a forgotten narrative about post-war printmaking. Nevertheless, I will at times draw upon the scholarship of art historians such as Robert Storr, Stephen Bann and Rosalind Krauss to look at how key tenants of modernism – including originality – forced post-war printmakers into adopting practices that weren't necessarily suited to the medium. The tension between printmaking as a

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[2] Bryan Robertson, John Russell, Lord Snowdon, *Private View* (London: Nelson, 1965), p.6.

collaborative and technologically-driven mode of working and printmaking as a form of creative expression will be felt throughout the following chapters.

The scholarship of Stephen Bann is useful for rediscovering the parts of print culture that have been ignored or forgotten because they did not fit into certain 'grand narratives' about the history of art. While his book *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photogaphers in Nineteenth-Century*, does not address post-war printmaking, his persuasive account of how the field of printmaking has been unduly influenced by what he regards as a teleological and dialectical version of the march of mechanical reproduction as told by Walter Benjamin and William M. Ivins Jr, is worth bearing in mind for the period that is covered in this dissertation.

Benjamin and Ivins are the two scholars who are invariably cited in most books or long articles on printmaking, and Bann points out that the latter was greatly influenced by the former. In Benjamin's famous 1936 article 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' he coined the phrase 'aura' for the magical or transcendent quality ascribed to cult objects in early societies and art objects in developed cultures. The totems of early religions were thought to be animated by gods and modern art objects were thought to be enlivened by the artist's genius or creative spirit. When a work of art is multiplied by mechanical means, it supposedly loses this mythical aura. While many have taken Benjamin's account of the loss of aura as a celebration of the democratic potential of mechanical reproduction, others, like Bann, detect a melancholic romanticism in his tone.

Ivins's influential 1953 book *Prints and Visual Communication* emphasises the communicative rather than the artistic function of prints. He argues that the transmission of knowledge via the printed book brought the middle ages to a close and marked the beginning of the modern world as we know it.[3] Because prints or 'exactly repeatable statements' could travel easily,

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[3] William M. Ivins, *Prints and Visual Communication*, first published 1953 (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), p. 158.

they were responsible for the rapid diffusion of information of both the scientific and artistic variety. When it came to art, prints acted as a 'museum without walls' since the vast majority of prints between 1400 and 1900 served a reproductive function. [4]

Bann criticizes Ivins for relegating most of the famous printmakers from the past to a role that was merely reproductive when at the time their work was not thought of in these terms. He points out that both Benjamin and Ivins take it for granted there is a clear, trans-historical distinction between the 'original' and the 'copy' and that in turn there was a decisive break between the pre-photographic/reprographic and post-photographic/reprographic world. Bann argues that these distinctions did not exist in nineteenth-century France. And he believes that print culture has been whitewashed by a specifically twentieth century way of thinking about originality.[5]

A similar argument can be made about printmaking in general in the first few decades of the twentieth century when reproductive printmakers, original etchers in the style of Whistler, commercial illustrators and avant-garde artists with an interest in prints worked side by side in this somewhat crowded and contested field. Viewers could not always tell the difference between a print and a reproduction and they did not always care about the distinction. However, by the time Erskine was running St. George's Gallery Prints, the need to distinguish original prints from reproductions became a major undertaking for him.

One of the most common philosophical arguments against mechanical art forms is that they do not require any 'independent intellectual control' on the part of the creator.[6] Throughout the thesis, I will look at the extent to which Erskine tried to show the effort, artistry and intentionality that went into printmaking. Another philosophical argument that is used to justify multiplicity is the

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[4] Melot op.cit.,p. 30.

[5] Stephen Bann, *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2001), p.10.

[6] Christy Mag Uidhir, 'Introduction: Printmaking and Philosophy of Art', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art* Criticism, 73 (1) (Winter 2015), 1- 8 (p.6).

theory of 'relevant similarity' which argues that 'one print being an artwork is both necessary and sufficient for the other being an artwork.'[7] While Erskine did not use this terminology, he often drove home the point that each print bore the stamp of originality.

From the late nineteenth century steps had been taken to elevate the print's status via the limited edition, the deployment of the artist's unique signature and the use of high-quality paper as well as large margins. Erskine did many of these things as well, although in his mind it was about professionalism and matching the standards of print ateliers on the continent. Erskine did limit the sizes of his editions, but he said this wasn't in order to increase their value through scarcity but rather to prevent them from flooding the market and remaining unsold. He was resistant to the idea that an artist's reputation would affect the price of the print.

The ultimate success of prints in the mid-sixties was due to the triumph of market driven values in the form of limited edition prints by celebrity artists. Erskine expressed his ambivalence about the business-side of printmaking and was more interested in its democratic potential as a medium for the masses. In this regard, he was ideologically aligned with printmakers from the 1930s and 40s who participated in print series that were produced in large or unlimited editions with the aim of reaching as wide an audience as possible. He was caught between the egalitarianism of the 1930s and the post-war consensus and the heady individualism of the 1960s and, as a result, his messages could be slightly mixed.

One of the messages that was most difficult to convey was that a print could be an affordable product aimed at discerning post-war consumers as well as a work of high art. This was the message conveyed in his *Graven Image* exhibition of 1959 which was held at the Whitechapel Art Gallery and marked a turning point in British printmaking. Printmaking demonstrations for the public were held at the gallery and were also included in his promotional film *Artist's Proof*. They

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[7] ibid. 1- 8 (p.6).

showed artists drawing onto or gouging into the plate with their own hands. And this was important because a manual element was still the benchmark against which high art was measured.

Nelson Goodman, who is one of the few philosophers to address the subject of prints, maintains this definition of originality when he writes that the 'assurance of genuineness' can only come from being certain that the artist produced the print matrix (or plate) himself. [8] He goes on to declare that the artist's direct role in making the print matrix proves that printmaking, like painting, is indeed an autographic art form. But whereas paintings are produced in one-stage, prints and cast-sculptures are produced in two stages. The second stage of multiplication ought not to cancel out the veracity of the first stage. While Rosalind Krauss does not bring up Goodman specifically in her seminal 1986 book *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, like Bann, she argues that artistic originality was never as straightforward as we have been led to believe.

Print production in the mid-1950s was still very much informed by what Krauss refers to as the as the romantic myth of originality. This myth was bound up closely with seemingly direct art forms like painting and sculpture. While Erskine himself was keen to prove that prints were distinct from paintings, lithography was undoubtedly the most popular print technique because its ability to produce gestural and painterly prints. The artist makes liquid marks directly onto the stone with lithographic ink or tusche and his or her individual touch or facture can be detected on the print. By the mid-sixties, screenprinting replaced lithography as the medium of choice precisely because of its more machine-like aspects.

In Chapter 1 will look at the rise of lithography in the form of popular print series that proliferated in the 1930s and 40s and the promotion of the medium by the Miller's Press and the Redfern Gallery. Chapter 2 will document the steps Erskine took to establishing new lithographic

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[8] Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols* (Oxford: OUP, 1969), p.115.

printing facilities in England after deeming the existing ones inadequate. I will draw attention to the fact that, as Bryan Robertson later wrote, 'the habit of print collecting no less than the technical processes of printmaking had largely faded from mind during the post-war years' and that as a result Erskine faced an uphill battle to establish a professional print publishing industry that could hold its own internationally. [9]

The fear that British artists lagged behind their continental and American counterparts dogged painters, but was especially worrying to printmakers. Erskine was determined to provide printmakers with the infrastructure that would enable them to produce prints that matched other countries in terms of the quality of their production and the power of the artwork. But he also did his best to promote a less parochial outlook at his gallery by putting on international exhibitions, providing artists with useful foreign contacts and by fostering an open and welcoming environment. Cross-cultural exchange is key theme in this dissertation and it was ultimately thanks to these international relationships that the print boom of the 1960s and 70s took place on a global scale.

Erskine wanted to encourage cross-cultural exchange by trying to establish a branch of S.W. Hayter's Atelier 17 in Britain. Hayter, who will come up throughout the thesis in many different contexts, served as a lynchpin between the established print scene of Paris and the burgeoning print scenes of New York and London. Hayter, as I will discuss in chapter 1, was a key figure in post-war printmaking whose legacy was long-lasting. Even though Atelier 17 never materialised in Britain, in chapter 5, I will argue that Hayter's ideas were disseminated at art colleges by printmakers who had studied with him in Paris. These were the same artists I write about in chapter 4 because they exhibited regularly at St. George's Gallery Prints and helped fan the flames of Erskine's printmaking movement. In chapter 5, I will also look at how printmakers at London art colleges

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[9] Bryan Robertson, *Out of Print: British Printmaking 1946- 1976* (London: The British Council, 1994), p. 9.

benefited from a more experimental atmosphere that led to the loosening of departmental distinctions and the acceptance that art and design were interrelated.

The fact that Erskine was trying to lead a movement rather than simply run a gallery will become evident in chapter 7 when his important Whitechapel exhibition *The Graven Image* (1959) will be written about at length. The tone that he and his co-curator Bryan Robertson strike in the exhibition catalogue is almost messianic. They are fervent in their belief that printmaking is on the dawn of a new age but extremely disappointed by the lack of print patronage by British museums. In chapter 8, I look more closely at the question of how the state supported printmakers during the post-war era and demonstrate that Erskine worked closely with public institutions to boost their collections of contemporary prints. I also draw attention to the shift that took place in the early sixties between state patronage and corporate patronage of the arts in Britain.

The thesis will conclude with the British print boom of the 1960s and 70s and will discuss how the screenprint became the medium of choice for artists and print publishers. The conclusion will give an account of the creation of the print publishing firm Editions Alecto, which had close ties to St. George's Gallery Prints. It will also focus on Chris Prater's screenprint workshop, Kelpra Studios, which produced some of the most significant print suites of the century. Prints by British artists such as Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi have received far more attention than the prints by Erskine-affiliated artists such as Anthony Gross and Merlyn Evans. My intention is not to rehabilitate Erskine's artists per se (although an argument in favour of doing so can be made) but rather to prove that conditions which made the production print series such as Paolozzi's 1965 'As Is When' were established in the proceeding decade.

The print boom in Britain has been mistakenly written about as though it simply happened of its own accord. It did not. Instead, it took place thanks to the efforts of several individuals – of whom Robert Erskine is very important – and because of changing attitudes towards technology and

mechanically reproduced images, which by the 1960s had become ubiquitous. I hope that this thesis will provide a more accurate account of the rise of printmaking in post-war Britain thanks to its emphasis on Robert Erskine and St. George's Gallery Prints. It is, however, a messy and at times haphazard story that reflects the reality of history rather than the neatness of retrospective theories.

CHAPTER 1: Printmaking Background: The 1930s to 1950s

Printmaking in the Wilderness Years

An account of the printmaking scene in the decades prior to the opening of St. George's Gallery Prints is essential to understanding the curatorial choices Erskine made and the vehemence of his promotional campaign to justify printmaking as an art form. This chapter will provide the essential background for St. George's Gallery prints by recounting the collapse of the British print publishing industry in 1929 and the reasons for the so-called wilderness years of fine art printmaking. It will also look at the revival of lithography thanks to the popularity of semi-commercial print series from the late 1930s through the 50s and the establishment of The Society of London Painter-Printmakers in 1948.

The modern, fine-art print as it is known day is thought to have been established during the etching boom. This vogue for original etching, which began in the late 1860s and continued until the Great Depression of the 1930s, was international in scope. Etching societies sprang up in cities such as Turin, London and New York at roughly the same time.[1] Francis Seymour Haden and his American-born brother-in-law James McNeill Whistler, became the main evangelists of the English Etching Revival and advocated the principle of 'art for art's sake' in relation to prints. Whistler, whose oft-imitated technique *retroussage*, involved heavy inking and the manipulation of the plate's surface for a more manual effect, became the patron saint of painter-engravers. This is

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[1] America was particularly enthusiastic about buying European etchings (as well as producing them at home) and its public seemed less hostile to the print as a manufactured product. This would remain true in the post-war era when the American market became increasingly important – see Michel Melot, 'The Nature of the Print', in André Beguin, Richard S. Field, Antony Griffiths, Michel Melot, *Print*: *History of an Art* (Geneva and London: Skira/Macmillan,1981), pp.8 – 130 (p.116).

evident in *Nocturne* (Figure 1) from the series 'Venice, Twelve Etchings' (1880). Despite his emphasis on artistic purity, it was Whistler who helped commercialise fine art printmaking through his practice of limiting editions and attributing great value to his signature.[2]

The Etching Revival was still going strong in Britain in the 1920s, even though the quality of the prints varied enormously. While etchers continued to churn out derivative landscapes and architectural scenes in the heavily-inked style of Whistler, a group of artists known as The New Pastoralists or Young Visionaries produced exquisite prints that were later criticised for being too old-fashioned. These artists, who included F.L. Griggs, Robin Tanner, Graham Sutherland and Paul Drury, were often published and exhibited by Molly Bernard-Smith of the XXI Gallery.[3] For example, Sutherland's 1926 etching *St. Mary Hatch* (Figure 2) presents and idyllic and nostalgic vision of rural life. Contemporary prints fetched high prices and were often valued more than old master prints at the time.

The worldwide economic crisis of 1929 decimated the print market in Britain. Most print galleries and magazines went out of business and the number of prints published plummeted from 523 in 1929 to 83 in 1938.[4] Artists like Graham Sutherland gave up etching for good and others like Robin Tanner only returned to the medium forty years later. It is not obvious why the economic depression of the 1930s affected prints more adversely than the rest of the art trade, which eventually revived. One possibility is that printmakers did not keep up with changing tastes. Whereas in the 1910s and 1920s, fashionable upper middle-class homes were decorated with black and white etching and dry points, colour reproductions of modern, Impressionist or old master

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[2] Pat Gilmour, *The Mechanized Image: An Historical Perspective on Twentieth Century Prints*, exh. cat. (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), p. 10.

[3] Allan Fuller, (ed.), *A Century in Print, 1920-2020- The Golder-Thompson Gift* exh.cat. (Bristol: Sansom and Co. in association with the Chippenham Museum, 2022), pp. 14-15.

[4] Frances Carey, Antony Griffiths, (eds), *Avant-Garde British Printmaking 1914-1960*, exh.cat. (London: British Museum Publications, 1990), p.15.

paintings had taken their place by the 1930s. Prints, in comparison, may have seemed colourless, insipid and not as good as the paintings that were being reproduced.

Another explanation for the collapse of the print market relates to the fact that industrialisation took place earlier in Britain than in other countries. In his book *About Prints*, S.W. Hayter writes that 'the replacement of hand-made reproductions by those made by photographic methods and printed mechanically was more rapid and more complete than in France.'[5] This resulted in the loss of traditional skills and techniques that were useful to fine art printmakers but that had been phased out by commercial printmakers in Britain. Until the establishment of good fine art printing facilities in Britain during the late 1950s and early 60s, British printmakers often had their work printed in France.

The story of a bloated print market in Britain that collapsed in the 1930s and remained moribund until the print boom of the 60s is one that is generally accepted by print scholars. Bryan Robertson, as already quoted in the introduction, wrote that 'the habit of printmaking no less than the technical processes of printmaking had largely faded from mind during the post-war years.'[6] This view was upheld by Andrea Rose in the same exhibition catalogue and also by Frances Carey and Antony Griffiths in *Avant-Garde British Printmaking 1914-1960*, the exhibition catalogue to an important 1990 exhibition at the British Museum with the same title.[7]

In his dissertation, Michael Clegg criticises this boom and bust narrative of twentieth-century British printmaking, arguing that fine art printmaking in Britain after the Second World War was richer, more complex and more present in society than has previously been

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[5] Stanley William Hayter, *About Prints* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 95
[6] Bryan Robertson, *Out of Print: British Printmaking 1946- 1976* (London: The British Council, 1994), p. 9.
[7] Frances Carey, Antony Griffiths, (eds), *Avant-Garde British Printmaking 1914-1960*, exh.cat. (London: British Museum Publications, 1990).

acknowledged.[8] I also argue that post-war British printmaking has been neglected and agree with

Clegg about the diversity, complexity and value (both historic and aesthetic) of the prints produced

during the post-war period in Britain. However, I do not take issue with scholars such as Carey and

Griffiths who I believe were actually responsible for piecing together this forgotten period in history

and re-establishing the artistic value of prints made during these years.

Avant-Garde British Printmaking 1914-1960 provided the first account of how printmaking

continued in varied ways during these decades and has been an invaluable resource for this chapter.[9]

Carey and Griffiths make it clear that despite the collapse of a professional print publishing

industry, many artists continued making prints privately and idiosyncratically. They were often

produced informally and in tiny editions. They were rarely distributed on a large scale but are often

aesthetically interesting and worthy of scholarly attention.[10] *Avant-Garde British Printmaking*

1914-60 is a survey and is therefore limited in scope. While it draws attention to Erskine and St.

George's Gallery Prints, I have been able to look at the topic in a much more detailed way.

Nevertheless, I broadly agree with the overall argument that professional printmaking went into

hibernation in Britain for several decades.

There are many fascinating examples of British prints made during these debatably fallow

years between the collapse of the British print publishing industry in 1929 and its slow revival in

the mid-fifties. The Grosvenor School of coloured linocuts, which was established by Claude Flight

on the cusp of this period in 1925, produced some of the most radical examples of twentieth-century

British printmaking.[11] A print like Cyril E. Power's 1929 *The Tube Staircase* (Figure 3) has Futurist

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[8] Michael Clegg, ''The Poor Man's Picture Gallery': An Inquiry Into Artist's Printmaking and Print Images in the Cultural and Political Context of Post-War Britain, 1945-60', Ph.D. thesis (University of Birmingham, 2021), p.6.

[9] Anthony Griffiths has written extensively on this period and I will reference his other publications throughout this chapter.

[10] Frances Carey, Antony Griffiths, (eds), *Avant-Garde British Printmaking 1914-1960*, exh.cat. (London: British Museum Publications, 1990), p.23.

[11] Flight and his students Cyril Power, Sybil Andrews and Lill Tschudi aimed to make prints that expressed the speed and movement of the modern age and were influenced by the Italian Futurists.

and Constructivist overtones in its embrace of modernity and also in its formal construction. Flight saw the popular potential of the linocut and hoped to sell them for the price of a cinema ticket, a sentiment that Erskine later expressed. Nevertheless, the production of linocuts was labour intensive (despite the simple equipment) and they remained too expensive for the average buyer.[12]

The coloured woodcut, which involved 'printing from blocks brushed with a mixture of powdered colours and rice paste', was another time-consuming technique with a small but devoted audience.[13] It was brought to Britain from Japan by Frank Morley Fletcher in the 1890s and later championed by William Giles who made prints such as the 1919 *Midsummer Night: A View from the Vejle Fjord* (Figure 4) in a distinctly Japanese style. Giles founded the Colour Woodcut Society in 1920 and the *Original Colour Print Magazine* in 1924. On his death he left a large sum of money to the V&A that was used for the Giles Bequest Competition for printmakers. The competition, which was held from the early fifties through the early sixties, was one of the only opportunities that post-war printmakers had to get into the collection of a major British museum.

While coloured linocuts and coloured woodcuts had a limited audience, wood-engravings reached the general population in illustrated books. Books with illustrations by John Farleigh such as *Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God* and D.H. Lawrence's *The Man who Died* (Figure 5) sold well in the 1920s and 30s. Illustrated books were published by large companies such as Heinemann and also by private presses such as the Golden Cockerel, the Gregynog, the Nonesuch and the Cresset. These publishing ventures provided financial security for artists such as Eric Ravilious, John Nash, Douglas Bliss and Eric Bawden who had learnt the technique of wood engraving at the Central School or the Royal College of Art.

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[12] Their prints were exhibited at the Redfern Gallery and then the Ward Gallery and toured internationally throughout the 1930s – see Stephen Coppel, 'British Colour Linocuts: The Critical Response between the Wars', *The Tamarind Papers: A Journal of the Fine Print*, 14 (1991-2), 21-30 (p.27).

[13] ibid., p.22.

Wood-engraving was promoted by the Society of Wood-Engravers, which was founded by the illustrator Edward Gordon Craig in 1920, and by the English Wood-Engraving Society which was started five years later by Leon Underwood. Leon Underwood, who was influenced by primitivism and non-western art, inspired a younger generation of artists including Blair Hughes Stanton and Gertrude Hermes. Gertrude Hermes had a long career as a printmaker and exhibited regularly at St. George's Gallery Prints. Her highly accomplished prints such as the 1930 *Waterlilies* (Figure 6) were swirling, detailed, biomorphic and had hints of Surrealism. Even though wood-engraving decreased in popularity after the war, it continued to exert a degree of influence well into the 1950s.

The 1920s and 1930s were a golden era for the intersection of art and industry. Although some artists found employment producing wall paper, textile and mural designs, most of their money came from the production of illustrated books and posters. While woodcuts were used in illustrations, lithography was the medium that best suited the poster. By 1927, 9 out 10 posters were lithographs and to this day lithography remains the medium of choice for commercial printing.[14] Even though most lithographic posters were made by skilled artisans using the cheap and often derided technique of chromolithography, high-quality posters were sometimes produced by fine artists for advertising purposes.

Frank Pick was one of the most important patrons of lithography because of the posters he commissioned to advertise the London Underground and other transport services. When Jack Beddington took over as Shell's Publicity Manager in 1929, he commissioned many of the same artists to make posters for the oil company.[15] As a result of the cross-over that existed between

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[14] Alan Powers, 'Artist and Printer' in David Bowness and Oliver Green, (eds), *London Transport Posters: A Century of Art and Design* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries in association with the London Transport Museum, 2008), pp. 63-85 (p.64).
[15] ibid.

commercial and fine art endeavours during the period, there were several good lithographic printing firms that were willing to work with artists. They included Vincent Brooks, Day & Son, the Baynard Press and the Curwen Press. [16]

The Curwen Press was founded in 1863 for letter press work and lithographic sheet-music. When Harold Curwen joined the company in 1908, he began to steer the company in a more artistic direction.[17] With the arrival of Oliver Simon at the Press in 1920, the company's artistic association grew even stronger. This was partly because Simon's uncle was RCA principal William Rothenstein and as a result he was very well-connected. [18] In addition to his work at the Curwen Press, Simon co-founded the Double Crown Club, a dining club whose members supported 'the common cause of design reform', started *The Fleuron*, a journal on typography, and between 1935 and 1955 edited the print-related magazine *Signature* (Figures 7 and 8). Simon was generally regarded as one of the best scholars in Britain on printmaking and the graphic arts. [19]

The Curwen Press was more than a printing firm and influenced printing culture at large because of its emphasis on artistic quality and worker satisfaction. The Curwen Press worked with private presses and employed artist/illustrators such as Paul Nash, Edward Bawden, Barnett Freedman, Eric Ravilious, Edward Ardizzone and Enid Marx in many different capacities. They could be commissioned to make wood-engravings, line block prints, wallpaper from linocuts and lithographs. Lithographic assignments might be for posters or publicity material for, say, the Pavilion Hotel in Scarborough (Figure 9). Auto-lithographs were popular in illustrated books in the

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[16] Paul Rennie, 'The New Publicity: Design, Reform and Commercial Art and Design Education, 1910-39' in David Bowness and Oliver Green, (eds), *London Transport Posters: A Century of Art and Design* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries in association with the London Transport Museum, 2008), pp. 85-109 (p.88).

[17] Harold Curwen who was a member of Design and Industries Association (DIA) and was interested in the Arts and Crafts movement, employed artists like Claud Lovat Fraser to make brightly coloured, illustrative but also modern designs

[18] Alan Powers, *Art and Print: The Curwen Story* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008). p. 24.

[19] Ibid., pp.25-26.

30s and the Curwen Press produced books such as *Men and the Fields* (1938) with lithographs by John Nash, *High Street* (1938) with lithographs by Eric Ravilious and *Old Fashioned Flowers* (1939) with lithographs John Farleigh.

Oliver Simon, who had purchased new lithographic equipment in 1936 for this purpose, actively encouraged the press's artists to make their own lithographs. Lithography is a complicated technique that is difficult to master properly. While some artists like Barnett Freedman immersed themselves in the process, others simply drew their designs on transfer paper or had their drawings translated into lithographs by the press's technicians. Usually the trained craftsmen produced better lithographs than the artists themselves, first making a key outline by tracing over the design and then filling in the colours separately. The process favoured simple, geometric designs with a limited number of colours.[20] When lithographic commissions were commercial, it didn't matter who had 'made' the prints. However, when lithographs were marketed as works of art, the artist's touch became integral to their supposed originality.

Popular Print Series

Lithographic print series produced in large or unlimited editions and aimed at a mass audience flourished in Britain between the mid-1930s and the mid-1950s. This was partly because the demand for colour reproductions of paintings had revealed a market for wall decorations that some entrepreneurs thought could be better met by original prints. Another factor was enthusiasm over the seemingly democratic nature of the print, which could be widely distributed at an affordable price. Many of the artists who later exhibited at St. George's Gallery Prints contributed prints to these series. [21]

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[20] Powers, 'Artist and Printer', op.cit., pp. 63-85 (pp. 67-71).
[21] See Antony Griffiths, 'Contemporary Lithographs Ltd', *Print Quarterly*, 8 (4) (December, 1991), 388-402.

Reproductions had improved greatly and decreased in price since the turn of the century. Anton Zwemmer's book shop on Charring Cross Road cornered the market for art reproductions and from the mid-1920s began importing high-quality German reproductions of Impressionist, Old Master and modern paintings. Educational establishments such as the London County Council and the public schools were their most reliable customers. [22] Part of the reason for this was that there was a strong drive on the part of educational reformers such as Henry Morris (and later Hebert Read) to give children access to high art.

A lack of space led Zwemmer to open an affiliated gallery on Litchfield Street in 1929 where original art was shown alongside reproductions. It quickly established itself as a centre for modern art with the first Dali exhibition and the first commercial exhibition of Picasso in Britain.[23] However, it maintained its relationship with commercial printing companies such as the Curwen Press and gave solo shows to their affiliated artists.[24] When the gallery was looking for a manager, Oliver Simon of the Curwen press recommended the 19-year-old Robert Wellington for the role.

The interconnectedness of commercial and fine art printing was particularly evident in the formation of Contemporary Lithographs Ltd. in 1936. Wellington left Zwemmer's to start the company with John Piper with the aim of selling original lithographs rather than reproductions to school children.[25] John Piper was an artist and printmaker with experience running *Axis*, a magazine about abstract art. For its production he worked closely with commercial printers and

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[22] Anton Zwemmer provided the art historian and spy Anthony Blunt with reproductions while he was still a pupil at Marlborough College, and also to his brother Wilfred Blunt who went on to teach art to Robert Erskine when he was at Eton. It seems likely that he provided colour reproductions to New Society of Art Teachers, which had formed in 1938 and quickly included 100 schools in its scheme – see Nigel Vaux Halliday, *More than a Bookshop: Zwemmer's and Art in the 20th Century* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers Ltd, 1991), pp. 80 -83.

[23] ibid., p.80.

[24] ibid., p.97.

[25] Earlier print series of sorts included *Efforts and Ideals* during the First World War, a poster series for the Empire Marketing Board (EMB) in the late 1920s and early 1930s and a similar one for the British Post Office. The print series for the EMB and the Post Office were also sold to schools – see Ruth Artmonsky, *The Story of School Prints: A Romantic Project* (Melton Woodbridge, Suffolk: ACC Prints, 2010), p.14.

adapted their methods to suit his needs. In the process, 'he realized for the first time what a lot there was to be learned from perfectly ordinary non-art expertise,' an experience that would inform his art practice. Piper went on to exhibit regularly at St. George's Gallery Prints. [26]

The Curwen Press was the natural choice for the printing of the large, colour lithographs (2 feet 6 inches by 2 feet) for Contemporary Lithographs Ltd. Its director, Oliver Simon, was friends with both Wellington and Piper who regularly worked with the Curwen Press on limited-edition lithographic books. [27] Although the originality of the lithographs from Contemporary Lithographs Ltd. was repeatedly emphasised, it later transpired that many of the artists had received a lot of help from the Curwen craftsmen who were more skilled at the process than they were.[28] The issue of whether artists should collaborate with professional printers or other intermediaries was not resolved until the late 1960s.

Contemporary Lithographs Ltd. got off to a promising start with three favourable reviews and an endorsement from Kenneth Clark.[29] The first series of ten lithographs, which were affordably priced at £1.1s per print, were printed in a large edition of 400 and exhibited in January 1937 at the Curwen Press Gallery and then at the Leicester Galleries. [30] The series included prints by Curwen-affiliated artists including John and Paul Nash, Edward Bawden, Barnett Freedman, Eric Ravilious and Graham Sutherland. The second series, published in March 1938, contained 13 slightly smaller prints as well as a large nursery frieze by John Piper. Artists in the second series

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[26] John Piper, 'Working with Printers' in Orde Levinson, *Quality and Experiment: the Prints of John Piper: a catalogue raisonné, 1923-91* (London: Lund Humphries, 1996), pp.31-32 (p.31).
[27] Piper, for example, produced *English, Scottish and Welsh Landscapes, 1700 – 1860*, (1944) with Curwen Press.
[28] Powers, *Art and Print: The Curwen Story*, op.cit. pp. 54-56.
[29] Clark, who greatly admired original prints, became Chairman of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts ('CEMA'), founded in 1940, and which supported printmakers during the war. He was subsequently chairman of the Arts Council which also supported printmakers through exhibitions and the purchase of their prints.
[30] Antony Griffiths, 'Contemporary Lithographs Ltd.', *Print Quarterly*, 8 (4) (December 1991), 388-402 (p.398).

included Edward Ardizzone, Edward Wadsworth, Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant, Ivon Hitchens, Frances Hodgkins, Lynton Lamb and John Piper.[31]

The standard of work was high in both series and there is a degree of experimentation in Contemporary Lithographs Ltd. that is missing from later series. John Piper contributed *Abstract Composition,* a colourful lithograph of overlapping planes that is indebted to Cubism (Figure 10). Although figurative in subject matter, Ivon Hitchens' *Still Life* is semi-abstract (Figure 11). The same is true for Frances Hodgkins' *Arrangement of Jugs* (Figure 12). More straightforwardly representational lithographs include Vanessa Bell's *The Schoolroom* (Figure 13). Paul Nash's *Landscape of the Megaliths,* which was used on the promotional brochure, is aesthetically pleasing, boldly executed and compositionally sophisticated (Figure 14).

Contemporary Lithographs Ltd was not financially successful. An obituary of Wellington blamed his absentminded personality, stating that: 'What had made him the imaginative, understanding and optimistic impresario for artists had not equipped him with a corresponding business sense.'[32]Anthony Griffiths, however, argues that it was actually stymied by problems with distribution and the fact that its audience lacked 'the technical knowledge to understand the distinction between reproductive and original work where lithography was involved.'[33]

During the Second World War, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) commissioned lithographs (both original and reproductive) for their traveling exhibitions with the aim of selling them to 'to factories, forces centres, youth clubs, British restaurants and other wartime groups.'[34] Penguin Books also dabbled in prints and in 1940-41 they published prints

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[31] ibid., p.396.

[32] 'Robert Wellington: Obituary', *The Independent*, 10 August 1990, p. 13.

[33] Frances Carey, Antony Griffiths, *Avant-Garde British Printmaking 1914-1960*, exh.cat. (London: British Museum Publications, 1990), p.18.

[34] ibid., p.19.

by Felix Topolksi in a very large edition of 25,000.[35] Even though large editions were associated with reproductions, these prints were marketed as original. The most ambitious of all the wartime print initiatives was the 'Everyman' print series published and distributed by the Artists' International Society (AIA).

The AIA was founded by Misha Black in 1933 with the broad aim of harnessing the 'the international unity of artists against Imperialist War on the Soviet Union, Fascism and Colonial oppression.'[36] Serving as a cultural Popular Front against war in general, this left-wing organisation with unofficial Communist affiliations gained momentum in the late thirties and remained influential during the Second World War. But by the early fifties, with the creation of the Welfare State, the rise of the Cold War and increasing disillusionment with the Soviet Union, the AIA lost its ideological way and abandoned the Political Clause from its Constitution in 1953. Nevertheless, for twenty years the AIA had united British artists with left-leaning tendencies and was invested in printmaking because of its democratic potential.

The AIA's series 'Everyman Prints' were published in January 1940 and consisted of 52 small prints (20 x 30 cm). [37] Ten were in two colours and the rest were black and white. They were affordably priced and printed in a large edition. Unusually, a number of women including Phyllis Ginger, Vanessa Bell and Pearl Binder, contributed prints. Other contributing artists were Kenneth Rowntree, Maurice de Sausmarez, Felix Topolski and John Piper.[38] As befitted a left-wing political organisation, the prints drew attention to social concerns such as poverty and unemployment. This

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[35] Antony Griffiths, 'The Print Publications of the Artists' International Association: Attitudes to Lithography in Britain, 1938 – 1951', *The Tamarind Papers: A Journal of the Fine* Print, 14 (1991-92), 57-69, (p.61).

[36] Lynda Morris, Robert Radford, *The Story of the Artists International Association 1933 -1953*, exh.cat. (Oxford: The Museum of Modern Art, 1983), p.11. In 1934, it presented these aims in a statement published in *International Literature.*

[37] The inspiration behind the *Everyman* print series was 'Britain Today, Cross-Section' an exhibition of travelling prints that opened at Toynbee Hall in the East End on 16 January 1939. It consisted of 80 works by artists such as Muirhead Bone, James Boswell and Pearl Binder and depicted scenes about the life and work of ordinary people.

[38] Morris, Radford, op.cit., p.56**.** Vanessa Bell and John Piper were the only artists who participated in both Contemporary Lithographs and Everyman prints.

is self-explanatory in the title of James Boswell's *Hunger Marchers in Hyde Park* (Figure 15).

Geoffrey Rhoades' *Blackout* (Figure 16) depicts a man drawing the curtains in a dark, cramped room while his wife cradles their child. In all the mostly figurative prints, the British people are depicted as hard-working and resilient.

The AIA's 'Everyman Prints' were actively publicised and promoted. Kenneth Clark called them an example of 'patronage of art by the people' and celebrated the prints as 'direct works of art' rather than reproductions, which, he said, eventually 'go dead on you.'[39] Despite the good publicity and a promising start (3,000 sold in the first few weeks), interest flagged and sales did not match the project's overheads. In another article, Anthony Griffiths argues that even though the artist's had technically drawn on the zinc plates themselves, the final product was 'feeble.'[40] Griffiths adds that the emphasis on originality was pointless because 'the prints looked no different from ordinary photomechanical reproductions of drawings.'[41]

The endorsement of Contemporary Lithographs Ltd. and the AIA's 'Everyman Prints' by Kenneth Clark was related to his long-term interest in making art accessible, an interest that culminated in his famous television programme *Civilization* in 1969, but that was also at play in his wartime endeavours.[42] There are parallels between Clark and Erskine who despite being a generation apart were both important private patrons of the arts who also worked closely with state-funded organisations like the Arts Council. It is not a coincidence that they had a shared interest in

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[39] Griffiths, 'The Print Publications', op.cit.,p.60. Griffiths quotes from the 1940 exhibition catalogue, p. 60.
[40] Griffiths, 'The Print Publications', op.cit.,p.58.
[41] Griffiths, 'The Print Publications', op.cit.,p.59.
[42] As Director of the National Gallery during the war, Clark organised free lunchtime concerts to boost morale in the temporarily empty museum. He also served as the general editor of the series 'The Penguin Modern Painters,' which were affordable art books aimed at a general audience. He had a founding role in the War Artists Advisory Committee ('WAAC'), the Recording Britain scheme and CEMA (which became the Arts Council after the war) – see F. J. B. Watson, 'Kenneth Clark, 1903 – 1983', *The Burlington Magazine* , 125 (968) (Nov 1983), 690-691.

prints and went on to make arts television programmes. Erskine, however, did not share Clark's conservative tendencies, including his reservations about abstract art.

In the immediate post-war years, it was not easy to publish prints because of paper shortages and other economic difficulties. Brenda Rawnsley, however, was determined to revive her late husband Derek Rawnsley's company School Prints Ltd. which he had founded in 1935 to sell fine art reproductions to schools. This time Brenda decided to commission original prints and with the help of Herbert Read managed to persuade the likes of Kenneth Rowntree, John Nash, Michael Rothenstein, Edwin La Dell, Michael Ayrton and Julian Trevelyan to participate in the first series. L.S. Lowry contributed to the second series, as did a number of international artists. Prints such as Trevelyan's *Harbour* (Figure 17) were cheerful, quintessentially English and relatable to children. Printed by Thomas Griffiths at the Baynard Press in a large run of a few thousand, the lithographs were sold to schools and then later to the public. [43] The project received good publicity from magazines such as V*ogue* and *Good Housekeeping* and was moderately successful.[44]

In 1948, Rawnsley commissioned another series of lithographs by modern French masters. She hired a private plane for a week and convinced Braque, Leger, Matisse and Picasso (allegedly by wearing a swimsuit in his proximity) to produce prints for her. To keep production costs low and avoid transporting lithographic stones, she asked them to draw on plastic plates known as Plastocowell.[45] Henry Moore was the only English artist asked to contribute to the European series and despite initial misgivings, he made two trial drawings for her using the technique. One of them, *Sculptural Objects* (Figure 18), was his first colour lithograph. [46] The cultural climate was still conservative in Britain and Rawnsley's last series of prints was deemed too experimental for

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[43] Ruth Artmonsky, *The Story of School Prints: A Romantic Project* (Melton Woodbridge, Suffolk: ACC Prints, 2010), p.93.

[44] Ibid., p.94.

[45] The technique had just been invented by the company W.S. Cowell in Ipswich, Suffolk.

[46] In 1966, Rawnsley was still worried about the charge that these prints were not original and asked Moore to sign a statement saying that he had drawn on the plastic sheets himself – see Carey and Griffiths, op.cit., pp.149-150.

schoolchildren. The entire company foundered and all that remained was an unpaid debt to the bank and many unsold prints.[47]

It was now apparent that prints did not sell well on the open market and that sources of patronage were needed. An early and successful example of corporate patronage of prints was the 'Lyons Teashop Lithographs' of 1947. The project came about because the Lyons tearooms had become rundown after the war. Building supplies were still restricted and coloured prints seemed like a good means of brightening up their interiors. Jack Beddington, who had produced Shell's much-admired posters, directed the project with Barnett Freedman as his technical director.[48] The participating artists were paid generously (£50 to £150 per print and the promise of royalties) and included Edward Bawden, Anthony Gross, Edwin La Dell, LS Lowry, John Nash and William Scott. As with other series, some of the artists relied on professional printers to translate their designs into lithographs.

The mostly bright and figurative 'Lyons Teashop Lithographs' such as Bawden's *The Dolls at Home* were displayed at all the Lyons tearooms where they remained until the company closed in the 1970s (Figure 19). They were also available to the public and printed in an edition of 1,500. In June of 1949, Julian Salmon, a director of Lyons, asked the Arts Council to exhibit a second series of Lyons lithographs at the Festival of Britain in 1951. When Salmon found out they were going to be displayed in back offices rather than in a more prominent location, he wrote a furious letter pointing out that the company had spent £12,000 on the prints at a time when patronage of the arts was rare.[49] The Arts Council gave in and decided to exhibit the prints at their St. James's Gallery

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[47] Artmonsky, op.cit., p.109.

[48] Michael Prodger, 'Bawden and Battenberg: the Lyons teashop lithographs', *The Guardian*, 12 July 2013.

[49] Huw Weldon, memo to Misch Black Esq., '1951 Festival of Britain: Lyons Lithographs', dated 3rd October 1950 Arts Council of Great Britain – see ACGB/121/621.

before they went on tour around the country. [50] A third and final series of Lyons lithographs came out in 1955.

The Arts Council was involved in two additional lithography series for the Festival of Britain. Both were organized by the skilled lithographer Edwin La Dell who was Chairman of the AIA Prints Committee, taught lithography at the Royal College of Art and later worked closely with Erskine at St. George's Gallery Prints. 'Contemporary Lithographs' (part 1, 1951; part 2, 1952) was made up of 30 prints and toured the country.[51] The second and better known of the two series, the 'AIA 1951 Lithographs', consisted of 18 prints by AIA artists including La Dell, Trevelyan and Rothenstein on subjects related to contemporary British life. Sheila Robinson's *Fair Ground* (Figure 20), for example, captures a working-class crowd enjoying a local pastime. Other prints like Charles Mozley's *Hyde Park Corner* or Leonard Rosoman's *Edinburgh* are of well-known landmarks and locations. The 'AIA 1951 Lithographs' were on display during the Festival of Britain at the Arts Council's gallery in St. James's, the foyer of the Royal Festival Hall and at a kiosk in Battersea Park.[52]

Although the AIA was a well-respected organisation with its own new gallery on Lisle Street, it relied on the Arts Council to fund the print series. In a letter to Philip James of the Arts Council, Edwin La Dell asked for a loan of £2,500 for the 'AIA 1951 Lithographs' but was only granted £500. [53] The money did not cover the costs and led to production problems. The intention had been to produce the lithographs in a 'hand-printed' limited edition of 50 as well as an unlimited,

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[50] The exhibition was described as a great success by the Assistant Art Director of the Arts Council in a letter to Salmon. The fact that only 48 lithographs were sold was glossed over – see Director of Art, letter sto Mr Salmon, dated 31st January 1951 and 12th February 1951, - see ACGB/121/621, 1951.

[51] Julia Beaumont Jones, 'Introduction' in *Art For All: A Century of Prints in Britain*, (London: Hayward Publishing, Soutbank Centre, 2017), p.11.

[52] Minute Paper to Philip James Esq, undated, with reference to the AIA Scheme for Lithographs – see 'Festival of Britain 1951 –AIA Scheme for Lithographs', ACGB/121/615, Festival of Britain 1951.

[53] La Dell, letter to Phillip James, dated 23 December 1949 - see 'Festival of Britain 1951 –AIA Scheme for Lithographs', ACGB/121/615.

machine-printed edition.[54] George Devenish, a talented lithographic printer at the RCA, was tasked with the limited-edition printing but wasn't paid properly and did not finish the job. He also struggled to find paper, which he had to borrow from the college.[55] The machine-printed, unlimited edition also foundered due to lack of money and only six of the eighteen lithographs were printed. [56]

In the print-related correspondence from the Arts Council, it is possible to detect lingering prejudices against the medium. Philip James, for example, rejects Michael Rothenstein's request for funding for a print series by Great Bardfield artists. He invites Rothenstein to participate in the AIA's existing series but will not pay for a new one because 'the lithograph fever is spreading' and 'there will be a superfluity if we are not careful.'[57] The implication here is that the market would get oversaturated by prints. In a different letter, Philip James strikes a peremptory tone when he tells La Dell that he needs 'to remember that your main object is to sell these lithographs.'[58]

The tension between the Arts Council and the AIA is evident throughout their correspondence. The AIA resented the Arts Council for their taking control of creative decisions while failing to provide them with adequate publicity and exhibiting opportunities. Diana Ulhman of the AIA wrote to Philip James on the subject: 'I personally feel very discouraged by the lack of support we have received in this respect as it makes my efforts over the past 3 years appear to have been in vain.'[59] Sales for the 'AIA 1951 Lithographs' ended up being extremely disappointing. [60]

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[54] General Secretary, letter to La Dell from with memorandum, dated 27th April 1950 – see 'Festival of Britain 1951-AIA Scheme for Lithographs', ACGB/121/615.

[55] Griffiths, 'The Print Publications', op.cit., p.64.

[56] Griffiths, 'The Print Publications', op.cit., p.65.

[57] Michael Rothenstein, letter to Philip James, dated 16 April 1950 – see 'Festival of Britain 1951 –AIA Scheme for Lithographs', ACGB/121/615.

[58] Philip James, letter to Edwin La Dell, dated 22 September 1950 – see 'Festival of Britain 1951 –AIA Scheme for Lithographs', ACGB/121/615.

[59] Philip James, personal memo to Diana Ulhman, dated 13 July 1951 – see 'Festival of Britain 1951 –AIA Scheme for Lithographs', ACGB/121/615.

[60] The prints toured the country, and were hung at several airports and exhibited at the independent bookshop Better Books, as well as the Redfern Gallery and the Royal Festival Hall in London – see Griffiths, 'The Print Publications', op.cit., p.63.

Despite its lack of success, Julia Beaumont-Jones writes that the 'AIA 1951 Lithographs'
'marked a turning point for British printmaking in which La Dell sought to establish a new, serious
collectors' market for the colour lithograph.'[61] Both Beaumont-Jones and Anthony Griffiths (in
separate articles) remark upon the fact that the series was a kind of 'hybrid' because of it consisted
of a signed, limited edition series of hand-printed lithographs in conjunction with an unlimited
edition of machine-printed ones. Griffiths writes that the 'publication can be seen as a watershed,
and the last moment when the two views of what constitute an artist's print – which are now
assumed to be conflicting – could be held simultaneously, if only with some discomfort.'[62]

 Beaumont-Jones argues that the growth and vitality of printmaking in the second half of the
twentieth century went hand in hand with 'the democratization of British culture.'[63] High culture,
which had previously been the preserve of the elite, would hopefully be available to everyone who
cared to experience it. Prints, with their capacity for mass distribution, were considered a
democratic medium. As a result, they attracted a broad church of individuals and organisations
including commercial companies like J. Lyons & Co., educational reformers such as Henry Morris,
wealthy patrons like Kenneth Clark and Robert Erskine and state-funded bodies such as the Arts
Council and the British Council.

The prints produced under these democratic auspices were mostly failures because they did
not cover their production costs. They were significant because they united some of the most
talented British printmakers in a common endeavour and raised the profile of lithography. The
deliberate steps taken to reach a wide audience and keep costs low – namely the large edition sizes
and the printing methods – confused buyers who could not tell the difference between original

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[61] Beaumont Jones, op.cit., pp.12-13.
[62] Griffiths, 'The Print Publications', op.cit., p.68.
[63] Beaumont Jones, op.cit., p.3.

prints and reproductions.[64] Anthony Griffiths cites a 'brilliant' article by the V&A's Peter Floud who in 1949/50 wrote that original lithographs and reproductions actually looked the same because they were printed on large machines that erased any evidence of the artist's touch. [65] Another problem cited by Rex Nan Kivell of the Redfern Gallery was that they were often too large to send through the post. In order for fine art printmaking to survive it would have to separate itself from the commercial printing world and establish its own fine art identity.

The Miller's Press, the Society of London Painter-Printmakers and the Redfern Gallery

Known as 'the Ladies of Miller's,' Caroline Lucas and Frances Byng Stamper were two unconventional sisters with ties to the Bloomsbury set and a passion for French art.[66] In 1941 they 'established a gallery and studio at their house in Lewes, which in effect became a regional arts centre.'[67] As the war drew to a close, they grew interested in lithography and founded their Miller's Press with three goals in mind: to provide the public with affordable art; to give English artists more international exposure through the transportable nature of prints; and, most importantly, to encourage artists in a medium that was thriving in the France but languishing in the UK. [68] These goals were very similar to Erskine's when he founded St. George's Gallery Prints over a decade later.

In 1948, the Miller's Press formed the Society of London Painter-Printmakers in conjunction with the Redfern Gallery in London. The organisation's success in persuading many

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[64] Another problem was the scale of the prints which were often thought to be large. Rex Nan Kivell of the Redfern Gallery complained that the AIA lithographs were too big to send through the post.

[65] Antony Griffiths, 'Contemporary Lithographs Ltd.', *Print Quarterly*, 8 (4) (December 1991), p.402.

[66] The two sisters were also generous patrons to many British artists including Robert Colquhoun and Robert MacBryde whom they housed for over two years and commissioned to make a number of paintings and prints.

[67] Peter Vangioni, (ed.), *Graphica Britannica: The Rex Nan Kivell of British Modernist Prints*, exh.cat. (Christchurch NZ: Christchurch Gallery, 2005), p.45.

[68] 'Foreword' in *Contemporary Prints and Ceramics*, 10 July – 17 August 1954, exh.cat., No author. Loose leaflet in the V&A's archive at Blythe House. Folder (ACGB/121/676).

artists to try lithography for the first time was partly due to Lucas and Byng Stamper's willingness to send artists transfer paper in the post rather than expecting them to travel to Lewes to draw on the lithographic stones directly. [69] In a 1948 review of the first exhibition of the Society of London Painter-Printmakers, Clive Bell acknowledged that transfer paper helped artists overcome their fear of the technical aspects of lithography (Figure 21). However, he urged them to 'face for a moment the sound and fury of the shop and make their finishing touches on stone. That way perfection lies, I am sure.'[70] The Miller's Press had acquired its own press in 1945 but most of the printing work ended up being outsourced, first to the Chiswick Press and then, when the number of prints began to overwhelm the English firm, by the master printers *Louis Ravel* and *Mourlot* in Paris. In the same review Bell tactfully praised both the English and French printers, but his preference lay with the 'grave richness' of the latter over the 'gaiety and lightness' of the former, which, he hinted were more amateur.[71]

Despite their limitations in terms of printing and the use of transfer paper, the Miller's Press and the Society of London Painter-Printers made significant strides in renewing interest in fine art printmaking in Britain in the late forties and early fifties. The Miller's decision to collaborate with the Redfern Gallery was a good one because the gallery had been exhibiting contemporary prints since it opened in the early 1920s. The prints were exhibited at the Redfern Gallery in London and would then circulate domestically and internationally via the Arts Council and the British Council.[72]

In the foreword to a 1949 exhibition *Les Peintres-Graveurs: Original French and English Lithographs and Monotypes in Colour* Philip James of the Arts Council credits the 'enterprise of the

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[69] The first lithographs published in relatively large editions of 250 by the Miller's Press were favourably received with copies purchased by the V&A and good reviews - see Diana Crook, *The Ladies of Miller's* (Lewes, Sussex: Dale House Press, 1996), p.30.

[70] Clive Bell, 'The Society of London Painter-Printers' in *Original Colour-Prints by The Society of London Painter-Printers*, Nov-Dec 1948 exh.cat. (London: Redfern Gallery, 1948), unpaginated.

[71] ibid.

[72] Ibid.

ladies of Millers' with turning English painters into *painter-graveurs* (Figure 22).' [73] The Redfern

Gallery often displayed lithographs like *Woman at a Table* by Robert MacBryde alongside the work

of famous European painter/printmakers (Figure 23). This was the case in 1956 when they showed

prints by Richards, Rothenstein and Moore alongside prints by Renoir, Cezanne, Ernst, Matisse,

Toulouse-Lautrec and Chagal.[74] The juxtaposition would hopefully prove that English artists could

hold their own against these more famous names.

    In 1950 Peter Floud, Keeper of the Circulation Department at the V&A and an authority on

prints, wrote an article in which he credited The Society of London Painter-Printers with

transforming contemporary lithography by convincing a significant number of 'established easel-

painters' to make lithographs.[75] He was generally positive about their abilities 'to create prints with

a highly individual stamp, sufficiently close in spirit to their canvases to be immediately

recognizable, but by no means slavishly copying these.'[76] He did, however, criticize the 'hit or miss

quality' of the Bloomsbury printmakers who, unlike John Piper, seemed to lack 'technical

control.'[77]

    The Society of London Painter-Printmakers owed its existence to the Miller's Press and the

Redfern Gallery. While the Miller's Press closed in 1954 due to Byng Stamper's ill health, the

Redfern Gallery, which opened in 1923, is still in operation today.[78] In the 1950s, the Redfern

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[73] Phillip James, 'Foreword' in *Les Peintres Graveurs: Original French and English Lithographs and Monotypes in Colour*, exh.cat., (London: Redfern Gallery, 1949), unpaginated. The apostrophe on Miller's is sometimes changed to Millers' as it is in this quote.

[74] See *Summer Exhibition 1956*, exh.cat., (London: Redfern Gallery, 1956) and *Summer Exhibition 1957*, exh.cat., (London: Redfern Gallery, 1957).

[75] Peter Floud, 'British Lithography Today', *The Studio*, 140 (690) (September 1950), p.66. Floud had curated the important exhibition '150 Years of Lithography' in 1948.

[76] ibid., p.67.

[77] ibid., p.67.

[78] The final Miller's Press exhibition, which took place in September 1954, was organised with the Arts Council and toured the country. It consisted of 40 works by a wide range of artists from the very young Eduardo Paolozzi to the deceased Jankel Adler. The introduction stated that the Miller's Press would 'act as an incentive and a yardstick for those interested in the graphic arts'. See 'Contemporary British Lithographs', exh. leaflet (Lewes, Sussex: Miller's Press, 1954) in the Art's Council's archive held by the V&A, folder (*ACGB/121/676*).

Gallery was a successful modern gallery that was known for its eclectic mixture of paintings, prints and applied arts. The Redfern was unusual in that it showed the work of emerging artists alongside unknown names. This receptiveness to both emerging and established talent was something that Erskine shared with Rex Nan Kivell, the Redfern Gallery's charismatic and influential managing director.

Rex Nan Kivell was the driving force behind the Redfern Gallery for many years. Originally from New Zealand, he was a colourful and eccentric character with a love of collecting.[79] He built up one of the largest collections of Australasian and Pacific art as well as an impressive collection of British prints.[80] Prints, in fact, were always 'near to his heart' and 'he was early in this field.'[81] Under his guidance, the Redfern Gallery led the field in wood-engraving from the mid-twenties and continued to show prints after the collapse of the print market in the 1930s. [82] The gallery had an extensive stock of prints and was the main space for post-war printmaking until the establishment of St. George's Gallery Prints.[83]

The Redfern Gallery was located at 20 Cork Street on the same street as St. George's Gallery Prints.[84] It consisted of an upper gallery at street level with three exhibiting rooms and a picture-lined corridor, and a lower gallery at basement level where Nan Kivell had his desk in an alcove. Prints were usually incorporated into the exhibition programme. For example, in Dec/Jan 1951, the first room showed recent paintings by Victor Pasmore, the second room showed recent colour prints by the Society of London Painter-Printers and the third room showed paintings of the

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[79] Neil Roberts, 'Introduction' in Peter Vangioni, (ed.), op.cit., pp.9-13 (p.9).
[80] In 1953, he donated 1,000 British prints to four art institutions in New Zealand. The gift was primarily of wood engravings but also contained coloured lithographs - ibid. p.10.
[81] 'Obituary: Sir Rex Nan Kivell', *The Times*, 21 June 1977, p.16 [online digital archive accessed 19 September 2019].
[82] Colnaghi's and St. George's Gallery were also important galleries for wood-engraving – see Peter Vangioni, (ed.),op.cit., pp.15-18.
[83] Nan Kivell was the first to distribute prints of the 'Vollard' Suite (1930-1937) and Georges Rouault's 'Miserere' series (1922-1927).
[84] It had relocated from 27 Old Bond Street in 1936.

West Indies by John Harrison. The lower gallery showed French paintings and original prints.[85] A similar distribution of prints was evident from April to May of 1953 when the paintings and prints of Ceri Richards, Alphonse Aquizet and Maurice Vlamninck were displayed upstairs and the 'Coronation Series' of lithographs by the Royal College of Art were shown the lower gallery (Figure 24).[86]

In an unpublished history of the Redfern Gallery based on her research from its archive, Allegra Baggio Corradi, specified that the upper gallery was formal and curated and that the lower gallery was more haphazard. In an email to me, she added that: 'In the lower gallery space, which was most often reserved for friends and regular clients, a vast stock of prints were available for browsing. These were mainly cheap ones that sold easily.' [87] A good opportunity for buying prints came once a month when clients were invited to 'Go to the Pictures' and peruse the stock. They could look at the main exhibits, ask Nan Kivell to go through the wracks in the storage room behind his desk and also browse his large collection of prints. [88]

The Redfern's famous annual Summer Salons were crammed from floor to ceiling with paintings and prints. Original prints and monotypes were always available, although they were not necessarily a high percentage of the total. At the 1950 salon, for example, 42 of the 812 works were prints or monotypes. [89] These numbers increased slightly in the middle of the decade; in 1956, 58 of 687 works were prints and in 1957, 99 of the 711 works were prints. [90] The majority of these prints were by established European artists such as Renoir, Cezanne, Ernst, Matisse and Chagal. Most of

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[85] *Victor Pasmore/London Painter-Printers/John Harrison: French Paintings and Original* Prints, exh.cat. (London: The Redfern Gallery Ltd., 1950).

[86] *Ceri Richards/Alphonse Aquizet/Maurice Vlamninck:Royal College of Art Coronation Lithographs*, exh. cat. (London: The Redfern Gallery Ltd.,1953).

[87] Allegra Baggio Corradi, *Beyond the Redfern: A Pen Portrait of a People's Gallery* (commissioned history report by the Redfern Gallery, unpublished) p.2. Emailed to author by Baggio Corradi 20 April 2019.

[88] *Victor Pasmore/London Painter-Printers*, exh.cat., op.cit.

[89] *Summer Exhibition 1950;* exh. cat. (London: The Redfern Gallery, 1950).

[90] *Summer Exhibition 1957*; exh. cat. (London: The Redfern Gallery, 1957)*; Summer Exhibition 1956,* exh. cat. (London: The Redfern Gallery, 1956).

the British printmakers were members of the Society of London Painter-Printmakers and included Erskine-affiliated artists such as John Piper, Bryan Wynter, Michael Rothenstein, Michael Ayrton and Prunella Clough.[91] Prints by young English artists tended to sell for between 4 and 10 guineas while the prints of established European artists sold for hundreds. [92]

The Redfern Gallery and the London Society of Painter-Printmakers regularly showed monotypes at their exhibitions. The monotype is 'a hybrid which defies easy classification as a print, drawing or painting' and is sometimes referred to as 'printed drawing.'[93] While the technique has been used for hundreds of years, it was widespread amongst British artists during the war and immediate post-war years. [94] This was partly because art materials were restricted and the monotype could be produced without expensive equipment. The creation of monotypes was consistent with the modest, domestic nature of printmaking in Britain and fell out of fashion with the rise of a more professional print industry.[95] Erskine did not exhibit monotypes at St George's Gallery Prints and perhaps thought that their singular nature precluded the need for them to be professionally published.

Rex Nan Kivell and Robert Erskine were both maverick collectors with a passion for prints. They seemed to have a good working relationship, exhibiting many of the same artists, lending

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[91] Other English, or else artists based in England, whose prints were exhibited at the *Summer Exhibition* in the mid-1950s included: Eric Ravilious; Roger Hilton; Patrick Heron; Terry Frost; John Coplans; Kenneth Martin; Keith Vaughan; Graham Sutherland; William Scott; Keith Vaughan; Jankel Adler; Robert Colquhoun; Robert MacBride; Henry Moore; Bernard Cheese; John Craxton; William Gear; Victor Pasmore; Ben Nicholson; Lynn Chadwick; Louis Le Brocquey; Sam Kaner; George Devenish; Peter Lanyon; Kenneth Armitage; S.W, Hayter and Eduardo Paolozzi.

[92] *Summer Exhibition 1957,* op.cit.

[93] Frances Carey, 'The Monotype in Britain 1900 to 1960', *The Tamarind Papers: A Journal of the Fine Print*, 14, (1991-2), 14- 20 (p.15).

[94] The specific monotype technique, in which transfer drawings were created on carbon paper, had been brought to Britain by the Polish émigré Jankel Adler in 1940. Adler, who had borrowed the technique from the artist Paul Klee, taught it to Robert Colquhoun among others. Colquhoun used the technique for the rest of his life. Although Colquhoun remains the British artist most associated with monotypes, many other artists began experimenting with this technique including Keith Vaughan, William Gear and Prunella Clough ⁻ see Carey, 'The Monotype', op.cit. 14- 20 (p.19).

[95] Alan Davie, Keith Vaughan and Michael Rothenstein all produced a significant number of monotypes in the late 1940s before abandoning the technique entirely.

prints to the same Arts Council exhibitions and working closely with the V&A's Circulation Department to build up the museum's collection of modern prints.[96] Both Erskine and Nan Kivell thought that good art should be accessible and their respective galleries had the reputation for being affordable. [97] In the catalogue to the 1949 exhibition of the Society of Painter-Printers, for example, Philip James describes the Redfern as 'a poor man's gallery – in that sense we are all poor men today.'[98] In this instance he was referring to the relative penury of the average British art buyer as a result of the war. However, throughout the 1950s the phrases 'poor man's picture gallery' or 'poor man's paintings' were often used in relation to prints. Erskine took issue with the wording in his 1959 article '"Poor Man's Painting" My Foot!' because he recognised that the word 'poor' was often used pejoratively.[99] He argued that while prints were generally more affordable than paintings, they were not 'poor' versions of them.

The Redfern Gallery and St. George's Gallery Prints were important galleries for printmakers and they exhibited prints by many of the same artists. There were, however, significant differences between them. Most importantly, St. George's Gallery Prints was exclusively devoted to contemporary prints whereas prints were just one strand of the Redfern's business. And while Erskine put a great deal of his own money into improving printing standards, nurturing printmakers and publishing their work, the Redfern exhibited prints 'without investing any capital in the production' of them.[100] It managed this by splitting production costs and by taking prints on a sale or return basis:

> This precarious financial arrangement from the artist's point of view explains why so few prints were properly editioned at the time. Even when an edition size was stated, it often

[96] For *The Graven Image* exhibition of 1959, Nan Kivell lent Erskine four lithographs by Graham Sutherland.
[97] 'Obituary: Sir Rex Nan Kivell', *The Times*, 21 June 1977, p.16 [online digital archive accessed 19 September 2019].
[98] Philip James, 'Foreword', in *Les Peintres Graveurs: Original French and English Lithographs and Monotypes in Colour*, exh. cat. (London: Redfern Gallery, December 1949). Unpaginated.
[99] See Robert Erskine, '"Poor Man's Paintings" My Foot!', *The Studio*, 157 (793) (April 1959), pp.104-108, 126.
[100] Carey, Griffiths, *Avant-Garde Printmaking*, op.cit., p 21.

represented a notional number of impressions which might be attainted if demand warranted the printing of further examples.[101]

Although the Redfern Gallery provided printmakers with the chance to exhibit their work in an excellent venue, printmakers were essentially left on their own and did not have the support they needed to work effectively. As a result, standards suffered, and bodies of work were produced in a piecemeal rather than coherent fashion.

The Miller's Press, The Society of London Painter-Printmakers and the Redfern Gallery had prepared the ground for Erskine and made it possible for British artists to contemplate being *painter-graveurs* rather than artists who occasionally made prints. Nevertheless, there was much more work to be done if his aim of reviving British printmaking was to succeed. In addition to many practical concerns about print production, he still needed to convince British artists as well as the public that prints were original artworks that could compete with current trends in painting. Erskine may have thought that one of the best means of doing so would be by establishing a branch of Stanley William Hayter's Atelier 17 in the UK.

Stanley William Hayter and Atelier 17

Herbert Read, who was one of Stanley William Hayter's best-known advocates, wrote that the great printmaker and print teacher had 'considerably extended the expressive effects of the medium' of engraving, which in recent times had become stale and overly academic.[102] Hayter, who served as the vital link between the established print scene in Paris and the burgeoning print scenes in New York and London, arguably helped liberate printmakers from the burden of making socially conscious art for the masses by giving them the permission to be unapologetically avant-garde.[103]

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[101] ibid. p.21

[102] *Atelier 17: Fourteenth Exhibition of Prints by Members of the Atelier 17 Group*; exh. cat. (New York: The Laurel Gallery, 14 March to 1 April 1949), p. 2.

[103] Andrew Raftery, 'Genealogies: Tracing Stanley William Hayter', *Art in Print*, 2(3)(September – October 2012), 4-9

He did this by infusing the medium with a new philosophical outlook and pushing the boundaries of the intaglio technique. As a result, printmakers were better able to engage with the gestural, abstract and existential tendencies that were dominant in post-war art.

Stanley William Hayter was born in Britain in 1901 where he trained as a research chemist. He moved to Paris in 1926 and was associated with the city for the rest of his life. In Paris, he studied at the Académie Julian where he met and was greatly influenced by the Polish engraver Joseph Hecht. It was through Hecht that he realised that 'in the difficulty and counter-intuitiveness of engraving lay a potential window in the subconscious.'[104] He then began to devote himself single-mindedly and obsessively to a technique that was unfashionable because of its old-fashioned associations and perceived rigidity. Hayter, who was extremely charismatic and good at networking, quickly made a name for himself as a printmaker.

In 1927, Hayter opened his first branch of the print workshop that eventually became known as Atelier 17.[105] Unlike traditional print workshops where proofing was always done by a master printer, artists were encouraged to learn how to print themselves and to pay close attention to technical matters. By showing that printing skills could be used to unlock creativity, Hayter shifted the weight of responsibility from the technician to the artist. [106] Atelier 17 attracted many Paris-based artists including Calder, Ernst, Masson, Tanguy, Picasso, Miro and Giacometti, and 'his ideas and techniques became a kind, of currency' amongst them.[107]

Like many artists at the time, Hayter wrote about the artist's calling in terms of loneliness and alienation. Although he celebrated the artist as an isolated figure who stood outside of

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[104] Ann Shafer, 'Hayter: Content and Technique', *Art in Print*, 2(3) (September – October 2012), 10-16 (p.11).
[105] It was not called Atelier 17 until 1933 when it moved to 17 Rue Campagne-Première. Désirée Moorhead, 'The Prints of Stanley William Hayter', in *The Prints of Stanley William Hayter: A Complete Catalogue*, (eds.) Peter Black and Désirée Moorhead (Mount Kisco, New York: Moyer Bell Limited, 1992), pp. 18-36 (p. 21).
[106] Jacob Kainen, 'An Introduction', in *The Prints of Stanley William Hayter: A Complete Catalogue*, (eds.) Peter Black and Désirée Moorhead (Mount Kisco, New York: Moyer Bell Limited, 1992), pp. 8-18 (p. 10).
[107]'On Stanley William Hayter', Susan Tallman, *Art in Print*, 2(3) (September – October 2012), 2-3 (p.2).

conventional society, Atelier 17 was unusual in its emphasis on the collective.[108] In the preface to

Hayter's 1949 book *New Ways of Gravure*, Read wrote that Hayter 'revived the workshop

conception of the artist,' and that discoveries were shared amongst the group rather than carefully

guarded.[109] Later, in the catalogue to the 1959 São Paulo Biennale, which featured Hayter's prints,

Erskine confirmed that the point of Atelier 17 was to 'experiment, discover and, more importantly

still, to transmit these discoveries to interested parties.'[110]

In 1933, André Breton accepted Hayter as an official member of the Surrealist movement

and he proofed many of their early etchings at Atelier 17. Peter Black writes that the years when

Hayter exhibited with 'the official Surrealist Group were crucial to his development in establishing

attitudes and procedures that would dominate his work for the remainder of his life.'[111] One of these

was automatic drawing which he applied to printmaking. He and his followers drew directly on the

plate in order to benefit from chance and the unconscious. The next step involved the conscious or

intentional transformation of this image. Hayter also encouraged artists to rotate the plate as they

worked in order to avoid a fixed perspective. Joann Moser writes that all of these methods were

intended to help artists 'to approach the medium from an unfamiliar point of departure.'[112]

Hayter and his colleagues at Atelier 17 made a series of technical breakthroughs that

broadened the type of printed images that could be produced. An early development known as

'gaufrage' came in 1934 when Hayter realised that a raised, white line emerged after digging very

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[108] Stanley William Hayter, *About Prints* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p.90.

[109] Herbert Read, 'Preface', in *New Ways of Gravure* by S.W. Hayter (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited, 1949), pp.15-17 (p. 15).

[110] Robert Erskine, 'S.W. Hayter,' in *V Bienal do Museo de Arte Moderna São Paulo*, exh.cat (London: The British Council, 1959), pp. 22-23. Hayter's prints were exhibited with Francis Bacon's paintings and Barbara Hepworth's sculptures. The catalogue essay on Bacon was written by Robert Melville.

[111] Peter Black, 'Differing Modes of Representation; The Originality of Hayter's Imagery', in *The Prints of Stanley William Hayter: A Complete Catalogue*, (eds.) Peter Black and Désirée Moorhead (Mount Kisco, New York: Moyer Bell Limited, 1992), pp.36-48 (p.36).

[112] Joann Moser, 'The Impact of Stanley William Hayter on Post-War American Art', *Archives of American Art Journal*, 18(1)(1978), 2-11 (p. 4).

deeply into the plate with a gauging tool.[113] The line appeared to be floating and contributed to the viewer's sense of recession or depth. Hayter also began texturing his soft-ground etchings with different materials such as crumpled tissues, fabric, wood grains, pieces of string and other objects. As a result, the prints of Atelier 17 had a rich physicality and materiality that was more consonant with contemporary painting than other modes of printmaking.[114]

The most significant technical work done by Hayter was in the complex field of colour printing. Dissatisfied with existing methods of colour printing which involved tinting different plates, Hayter wanted to print colour through a single run of the press on a single plate. Early attempts with Anthony Gross in the 1930s using stencils were not entirely successful and it wasn't until a decade later in New York that Hayter, along with Krisha Reddy, came up with the viscosity printing technique.[115] Liz Folman writes that this difficult process is based on the principle that low viscosity ink resists high viscosity ink which 'allows the colours to remain separate but not mix on the plate.'[116] This breakthrough, which took many years, made colour printing much more effective. In prints such as *Maternity* (Figure 25), which used screenprinting, engraving and etching, we see Hayter moving towards the ultimate goal of printing colour from a single plate. But it was not until 1946 with *Cinq Personnages* (Figure 26) that the technique was truly mastered.[117]

Hayter left Paris in 1939 at the outbreak of war and it was only thanks to Peggy Guggenheim that some of his prints, plates and paintings were saved. He spent several months in London working on camouflage techniques with other British artists but was unable to join the war effort because of health problems. In 1940 he moved to America and ended up setting up a branch

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[113] *Avant-Garde Printmaking*, op.cit., p 121

[114] P.M.S. Hacker, 'The Colour Prints of Stanley William Hayter', *The Tamarind Papers: A Journal of the Fine* Print, 14 (1991-92), 31-43, (p.33).

[115] Ibid. 31-43, (p.38).

[116] 'Stanley William Hayter and Viscosity Printing', Liza Folman, *Art in Print*, 2(3) (September – October 2012), 22-24 (p.23).

[117] Hayter devoted a chapter in *New Ways of Gravure* to the making of *Cinq Personnages*. Hacker writes that it was a 'technical triumph' and 'marked a watershed in the history of printmaking'. Hacker, op.cit. 31-43, (p.35).

of Atelier 17 in New York, first at the New School for Social Research and from 1945 in Greenwich Village. In 1950, he brought Atelier 17 back to Paris.[118] His ten years in America had a fundamental impact on the American printmaking scene.

America didn't have a long and continuous tradition of printmaking and prints were mainly used in advertising and illustration. Nevertheless, some Americans were interested in fine art prints and artists and dealers participated enthusiastically in the etching trade until the market collapsed in 1929.[119] During the Great Depression, the government subsidised the economy on an unprecedented scale with programmes like the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Its arts branch, the Federal Arts Project (FAP) supported artists and nurtured many of the men and women who would go on to become famous in the 1950s. Printmakers flourished under the Federal Arts Project, which published thousands of prints. [120] These prints, which were mostly lithographs, could be found in museums, libraries, schools and hospitals and gave the medium a new public presence.

British and American printmakers of the 1930s were influenced by the same progressive attitudes and tended to make figurative prints in large editions aimed at as wide an audience as possible.[121] While the prints produced by FAP artists were later dismissed for being ignorant of modernist developments, more recently scholars such as Eugene Balk have reassessed them, arguing that they are radical in their own way.[122] However, it is undoubtedly true that in the 1940s

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[118] Duncan Scott, 'Hayter's Legacy in England', *The Tamarind Papers: A Journal of the Fine Print*, 14 (1991-2), (43-56), p.43.
[119] Leah Lehmbeck, 'The Rise of Printmaking in Southern California: An Introduction', in Leah Lehmbeck, (ed.), *Proof: The Rise of Printmaking in Southern California*, exh.cat. (Los Angeles: Getty Publications in association with the Norton Simon Museum. 2011), pp.1- 51 (p. 19).
[120] Eugene Balk, 'The 'American Scene': Print and the Cartoon', *Print Quarterly*, 11 (4) (December 1994), 379-394 (p.387). The figure is slightly different according to David Kiehl who writes: ' 80,000 impressions were pulled of over 4,000 separate images' see David W. Kiehl 'American Printmaking in the 1930s: Some Observations', Print Quarterly, 1.2(June 1984), 96-100 (p.96).
[121] In the Tamarind Papers, Anthony Griffiths writes that there were strong links between the American and British at worlds in the 1930s and that it is likely that the British were aware of the remarkable printmaking initiatives taking place across the Atlantic, in both the United States and also in Mexico - see Griffiths, 'The Print Publications', op.cit., p.59.
[122] Balk, op.cit., p. 96.

artists like Franz Kline associated printmaking with 'multiplying' and 'educating' and avoided the medium because wanted to make 'private images' rather than art with a social agenda.[123]

Hayter's New York branch of Atelier 17 gave American artists the freedom to make subjective rather than political or didactic prints.[124] He also provided them with what Jacob Kainen describes as 'the indisputable connecting link' to the European avant-garde through his close connections to exiled artists such as Dali, Masson, Miro and Ernst.[125] These artists would drop into Atelier 17 (or Studio 17 as it became known) and end up conversing and exchanging ideas with young American artists such as Pollock, Rothko, Motherwell and de Kooning.[126] As a result, Atelier 17 arguably played a part in the absorption of European influences that led to the apotheosis of American abstraction in the 1950s.

Jackson Pollock produced a number of prints at Atelier 17, although he was not satisfied with the results and found the process of intaglio printmaking 'frustrating.' Pollock's experience at Atelier 17 has generated a number of articles by scholars who have proposed that Hayter was partly responsible for Pollock's use of unconscious gesture as well as his use of overlapping forms and looping lines. Reba and Dave Williams, two experts on the subject, convincingly argue that Pollock had been attracted to the ideas of automatic drawing prior to working at Atelier 17. However, they do believe 'that the Atelier 17 experience marked the turning point towards Pollock's mature style.'[127]

Atelier 17 helped energise the American printmaking scene and its effects were felt immediately. In June 1944, the Museum of Modern Art held the exhibition *Hayter and Studio 17: Directions in Gravure* and Atelier 17 artists exhibited regularly in America throughout the

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[123] Susan Tallman, *The Contemporary Print from Pre-Pop to Postmodern*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996), p.15.
[124] Lehmbeck, op.cit. p.18.
[125] Kainen, op.cit.,p.10.
[126] Hacker, op.cit.,p.34
[127] Reba Williams and Dave Williams, 'The Prints of Jackson Pollock', *Print Quarterly*, 5 (4) (December 1988), 347 – 373 (p.352). The authors cite Hayter's 1936 print *Combat* as an example of work that might have inspired Pollock's mature style because of its 'emphasis on line, automatism, free association, and some faint trace of a figurative element'.

forties.[128] Hayter's long-term impact in America, however, lay less in the individual prints produced but rather in the devotion and influence of his acolytes. A number of his former pupils, including Maurice Lasansky at the University of Iowa, established print studios at universities across the country and spread his message about the power of prints. The timing with the GI Bill was fortuitous since it resulted in the creation of new universities with resources to spare on art. [129]

The American printmaking boom, like its English equivalent, was due to a confluence of factors including economic growth and changing attitudes towards multiplicity. While Hayter's influence was only one of these factors, it was a significant one. His network of followers disseminated his printmaking techniques, his philosophical outlook and his teaching methods based on collaboration and critique. This less hierarchical approach to teaching arguably had an impact on the wider art school curriculum and is standard practice to this day. The Tamarind Lithography Workshop and United Limited Art Editions (ULAE) adopted his workshop model in the early sixties. While these workshops promoted lithography rather than intaglio methods, they were still indebted to Hayter.

Hayter's influence in America is well documented and his New York branch of Atelier 17 is attracting increasing attention from scholars. In 2019, for example, Christina Weyl's insightful book *The Women of Atelier 17: Modernist Printmaking in Midcentury New York* was published.[130] And in May 2023 Charles Darwent published *Surrealists in New York: Atelier 17 and the Birth of Abstract Expressionism*.[131] Hayter's influence in Britain, however, deserves more attention. Duncan

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[128] Another example was an exhibition of Atelier 17 Prints at the Laurel Gallery in 1949 which included a catalogue with articles by Herbert Read, Hyatt Mayor and Carl Zigrosser extolling the immediate impact of Hayter on American printmakers – see Herbert Read, James Johnson Sweeney, Hyatt Mayor, Carl Zigrosser, Stanley William Hayter, (eds), *Fourteenth Exhibition of Prints by members of the Atelier 17 Group*, exh.cat. (New York: Laurel Gallery, 1948).

[129] Jennifer Anderson, 'Print University: Printmaking Pedagogy in Los Angeles' in Leah Lehmbeck, (ed.), *Proof: the Rise of Printmaking in southern California* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2011), pp. 90-118 (p.92).

[130] See Christina Weyl, *The Women of Atelier 17: Modernist Printmaking in Midcentury New York* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2019),

[131] See Charles Darwent, *Surrealists in New York: Atelier 17 and the Birth of Abstract Expressionism* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2023)

Scott's 1991 article 'Hayter's Legacy in England' is the only article devoted to the subject. Part of the problem is that Erskine's proposed branch of Atelier 17 in London never materialised. However, Hayter's name comes up in nearly every chapter of this dissertation and I will argue his indirect but powerful presence helped British printmakers in the same way that it helped American printmakers; namely, as Moser writes, by convincing them that printmaking was an 'independent means of expression' and by encouraging them to disseminate his ideas to the next generation.[132]

Conclusion

In this chapter I have presented what might seem like an excess of information about the British printmaking scene before St. George's Gallery Prints given that it is analysed extensively by Carey, Griffiths and Coppel in *Avant-Garde British Printmaking 1914-1960*. St. George's Gallery Prints opened at the tail end of the period covered in their catalogue and served as a bridge between the so-called printmaking wilderness years and the print boom of the 1960s. However, an in-depth account of these decades is essential to making sense of how Erskine's gallery operated. Many of his artists were a generation older than he was and had been making prints throughout the 1930s and 40s. Additionally, a number of the issues raised in this chapter did not go away and only intensified in the following decades.

In a 1991 review of *Avant-Garde British Printmaking 1914-1960* for the journal *Tamarind Papers*, Charles Newton writes about how 'close to death printmaking came at certain times' and how remarkable it is that the print boom of the 1960s took place at all. [133] There is no clear-cut answer as to why printmaking nearly died in England, although I raised a few possibilities at the beginning of this chapter. One was that the market for wall décor was better met by reproductions and people preferred colourful images of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, for example, rather than black

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[132] Moser, op.cit, p.11

[133] Charles Newton, 'The British Museum's Contribution to Print Scholarship', *The Tamarind Papers: A Journal of the Fine Print*, 14 (1991-92), 6-14 (p.9).

and white landscapes or scenes of everyday life. Another related reason, raised by Peter Floud and later Antony Griffiths, was that the quality of original prints was not good enough to distinguish them from reproductions. Some people were confused by the multiple aspect of the print because they believed that works of art should be singular objects or images rather than multiples. And others did not like the print's left-wing associations as an agent for the masses. The print, as touched upon in this chapter, was equally unfashionable in America but the advantage it had over England was that the government stepped in via the WPA and subsidised many art forms including printmaking. The rise of printmaking in England parallels the rise of printmaking in America but the latter topic has received more scholarship than the former. One of the aims of this dissertation is to redress this imbalance.

In his 1962 book *About Prints*, S.W. Hayter asked whether the popularity of prints mattered and answered in the affirmative. He wrote that 'public taste in the end determines what will survive and the conditions in which art are produced, and it is useless to quarrel with it.'[134] If the public is indifferent to the work, it is the artist's job to 'find the means to overcome their indifference, the ability to arrest their attention and move them' he added.[135] Hayter thought that the quality of prints and their reception mattered and his legacy was in convincing others of this. Erskine, who must have been aware of the failure of the popular print projects of the 1930s to 50s, saw Hayter as playing an important part in persuading the British public that prints were not reproductions, posters with pretentions or tools for propaganda. Instead, they were original works of art that could be moving, arresting and impactful. Erskine believed that the British art scene – and by extension print scene - was too insular, and he hoped that a branch of Atelier 17 in London could start off an

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[134] Stanley William Hayter, *About Prints* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 160
[135] Ibid, p. 191.

international print movement in Britain thanks to Hayter's links to the European avant-garde, the French print atelier system and the burgeoning print scene in America.

Even though a London branch of Atelier 17 never materialised, the fine art print eventually became something that mattered in Britain. The remaining chapters in this dissertation will look at how this transformation came about. I will not claim that Erskine was solely responsible for this shift in attitude towards the fine art print, which was due to a confluence of factors, some of which were global in scale and out of his control. However, I will argue that his role in changing perceptions about the medium in Britain and advocating for the print as a work of art has not been sufficiently acknowledged.

CHAPTER 2: Robert Erskine and Founding of St George's Gallery Prints

Two Letters to John Piper

Two letters from Erskine to John Piper dated 30 September 1954 are the earliest archival material concerning the founding of St. George's Gallery Prints.[136] The letters are on St. George's Gallery letter-headed paper, although Erskine clarifies that the accompanying address of 5 Markham Street SW3 is 'only a temporary one, my private address in London to be specific. The gallery proper will be opening at 7, Cork Street, W1, in Late October' he adds. It is unclear whether the gallery opened in 1954 or 1955, with some sources such as this letter stating the first date and others – mainly books – stating the second date. [137]

In 1954, John Piper was well-known as a painter, printmaker, set designer and writer and had been in the public eye for two decades. In his youth he had been associated with the British avant-garde, joining the *Seven and Five Society* of modern art, working as an art critic for the *Listener* and founding the abstract art journal *Axis* with Myfanwy Evans (later Piper) in 1935. His interests, however, were wide-ranging and he began to feel the limitations of abstraction as early as 1938 when he wrote that 'pure abstraction is undernourished' and argued for a return to representation.[138]

Henceforth, Piper was best known as one of the founders of Neo-Romanticism, publishing *British Romantic Artists* in 1942 and forging a movement that looked to the past – specifically England's past - for inspiration. During the war, he worked as an official war artist and participated

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[136] Letters, Robert Erskine to John Piper, dated 30 September 1954 – see Tate Britain archive, file (TGA 200410/1/3698).

[137] I will address this confusion later in the chapter.

[138] John Piper, 'Abstraction on the Beach', *XXe Siècle*, 1 (1938) quoted in Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2015), p.36.

in the Recording Britain project, which aimed to memorialise Britain in the face of what some feared was eminent destruction. Piper achieved particular recognition for his paintings and drawings of bombed churches and ruined buildings, which were done in a topographical, romantic style that showed his love of 'pleasing decay.'[139] His fame increased after war when he designed the stain-glass window for Basil Spence's new Coventry Cathedral.

From Erskine's perspective, Piper was of interest because he was an extremely good printmaker who had been part of the drive to make printmaking more accessible during the 1930s and 40s. The two men knew each other well and, as will be discussed shortly, had already worked with each other on a printmaking project. The main purpose of the first letter was to inform Piper of his plans to open a London branch of Atelier 17 and to ask him to serve on its Advisory Council. He explains that the workshop, where Erskine will serve as the secretary, will have 'facilities for research in methods of colour-printing, and for the printing of editions of fine prints up to the standards set up by the workshops already existing in Paris and New York.'[140]

Erskine assures Piper that his role on the Advisory Council will not require 'inconvenient attendance at meetings,' and would accommodate long trips abroad. He makes a strong bid for Piper to be involved in Atelier 17, urging him to 'accept in view of the esteem that I feel for your work as an artist, and its value to our cause.' The use of the words 'our cause' is in keeping with the messianic tone that Erskine would often strike in his exhibition catalogues and articles on printmaking. He regarded Piper as a fellow disciple and given their shared interest in the print, it seems likely that Piper wrote back favourably. No response is preserved in the archive.

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[139] See John Piper, 'Pleasing Decay,' *The Architectural Review*, 102 (09) (September 1947), pp. 85-94. In this article he argues that the appreciation of 'pleasing decay' ought to be an important element of visual education. Piper, who was close friends with the realist poets John Betjeman and Geoffrey Grigson, formed part of what might be called a vanguard with conservative tendencies in his desire to preserve and even celebrate the past. Piper was commissioned by the aristocrat Osbert Sitwell to paint his crumbling but beautiful country house and was reportedly the model for Charles Ryder in Evelyn Waugh's *Brideshead Revisited* – Harris, ibid., p. 277

[140] The not-for-profit organisation would be funded by a yearly contribution from sponsors in exchange for prints. The plan was that it would be run by 'an advisory board of artists' in exchange for free access to the facilities.

Erskine's plan for a London-based branch of Atelier 17 were relatively well developed and was, for example, mentioned as a certainty in the May 1954 issue of the magazine *Graphis*.[141] Erskine felt confident that it would operate as a sympathetic and complementary organisation to St. George's Gallery Prints. He seemed hopeful that Atelier 17 would encourage English printmakers to join a larger international movement based on the teachings of Hayter. He expressed this subtly the following year in a catalogue essay for an exhibition on Hayter's prints at St George's Gallery, writing in regards to the creation of a British Atelier 17 that the 'exchanges of students with French & American groups can ultimately be arranged.' [142]

The purpose of Erskine's second letter was to put together an edition of Piper's prints for the new gallery. He writes that while he intends to commission new prints, he is initially going to display any high-quality printed work that already exist. He clarifies that his 'editions' will all eventually 'be printed in Paris, at Dejubert or Mourlot for lithography, and at Lacouriere for engraving and etching.'[143] Edition sizes, he adds, will be roughly 100 in order to keep prices down, writing that it is vital not to flood the market with too much work at once. Another reason for keeping prices low is that 'this country of heavy taxation can produce few wealthy private collectors of the normal scale.'

These two letters from Robert Erskine to John Piper are significant because there is a limited amount of archival material relating to St. George's Gallery Prints. This gives any well-crafted written document a degree of weight. Both letters confirm that Erskine's practical and ideological concerns in relation to printmaking were formed early on and remained constant. In addition, the letters draw attention to a major concern that would occupy him throughout the directorship of the gallery; how to boost the international reputation of British printmakers.

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[141] Max Clarac –Sérou, 'Atelier 17: Stanley William Hayter', *Graphis* (1 May 1954), p. 392.

[142] *Hayter: Engravings, Etchings, Lithographs*, exh.cat., (London: St. George's Gallery, 1955).

[143] Trial and error would eventually lead him to establishing printing facilities in the UK.

In the first letter, he writes that his goal for establishing Atelier 17 in Britain is to put British printmakers on par with their French and American contemporaries. This sentiment is echoed in the second letter where he writes what can regarded as a mission statement for the gallery: 'My aim is to give the impetus for graphic art which it has been blessed with on the Continent and in the U.S., and which has never successfully caught on in England.' Over the course of eight years, Erskine set about doing everything in his power to give graphic art in Britain this impetus and in many ways he succeeded.

Robert Erskine's background and early years

The Honourable Robert Erskine was born the morning of the 13th of October 1930 at his London home in St James's Square.[144] He came from privilege, his parents being what he describes as 'noble people': his father, Lord Erskine, was the Earl of Marr and Kellie in Scotland; and his mother, Lady Marjorie, was the daughter of Frederick Hervey, the 4th Marquess of Bristol, and the heiress Alice Frances Theadora Whythes.

Erskine spent six formative years of his childhood (1934-1940) in India when his father was the Governor of Madras.[145] Life during the last years of the British Raj was luxurious and he was too young to question the colonial hierarchy. Despite being primarily brought up by his nanny in India during these years, he also had a close relationship with his mother. In our interview, he showed me her painting of an English hunt in the flat, Persian style she learnt in India. Erskine remarked that his ability to draw and his enthusiasm for the arts probably came from her.

Lord Erskine's governance came at a difficult time in the history of Anglo-Indian relations. Indian nationalism was on the rise and everyone, according to Erskine, knew that British days in

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[144] All information on Erskine in this section unless otherwise referenced comes from an unpublished interview conducted by the author 11 July 2011.
[145] Madras is now called Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu in India.

India were numbered. With the outbreak of the Second World War the family made their slow journey back to England. Wartime England – even in an aristocratic household - took some adjusting to after the colour, heat and ease of the British Raj. At ten-years-old, he 'embarked on being a Brit again rather than a Brit in India,' but he kept the experiences in his mind's eye until he was able to travel as an adult. India had sparked his interest in ancient cultures and taught him that there was so much more to the world than England.

The family moved into Ickworth House in Suffolk, which belonged to his paternal grandfather. The house (commissioned in 1785 but finished in 1829) consists of a neo-classical rotunda flanked by two curved wings that are over a quarter of a mile in length. For a long time, this architectural flight of fancy was considered a fitting backdrop for an eccentric and notorious family. The Dictionary of National Biography described his family as 'reckless, over-confident, addicted to intrigue and morally loose'. [146] Erskine bore little resemblance to his ancestors other than the fact that he too was unconventional. [147]

Ickworth House was 'full of grand furniture' and an art collection with renowned miniatures and a few museum-worthy paintings that Erskine enjoyed looking at. Amongst the British standouts were works by Reynolds, Gainsborough, Kneller, Romney, Lawrence, Lely and Hogarth. The collection also boasted several portraits by Van Dyck, an early Titian from around 1512 of *An Unknown Man (once called Pietro Aretino)* and a portrait of King Phillip IV of Spain's young son thought to be a copy of a Velasquez but later attributed to the painter.[148]

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[146] The National Dictionary Biography as quoted by Jessica Berens, 'Obituary: The Marquess of Bristol', *The Independent*, 12th January 1999, [accessed online 3 April 2023].

[147] To name but a few: Lord Carr Hervey (1691–1723), first son of the 1st Earl of Bristol, died of drink at the age of thirty-two after a brief, debt-ridden life of scandal; his younger brother Henry Hervey Aston (1701-1748) was a profligate curate and sometimes poet; another brother, Thomas Hervey (1699-1775) was prone to mental instability; and Frederick Augustus Hervey (1730-1803), 4th Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Cloyne, was a brilliant man of the church whilst also being a philanderer with a good art collection.

[148] After his grandfather's death in 1951 Ickworth along with its possessions were offered to the National Trust in lieu of death duties since the old man had categorically refused to pay tax on the property. Erskine told his family, 'well I'd like to buy that painting'. Nobody took his request seriously and ignored him. The National Trust bought the work for

Erskine's believes that his love of prints stemmed from his early interest in how objects are disseminated or exchanged. As a schoolboy, he was an avid collector of coins – mostly George III pennies and a few Roman coins, which he would carry in a Tate & Lyle syrup tin and rattle with pleasure. At Summerfields prep school, he assembled model aircraft and became adept at recognising the flying planes overhead. Throughout his life he has collected ancient artefacts. As Erskine said to me in our interview: 'I'm a collector. Give me anything – coins, aeroplanes, prints, shells – and I will categorise them and put them into some kind of order.'

Erskine was sent to Eton because 'that was where people from my background went' and he found himself amongst many 'silly' people who lived for sport and hunting. Erskine was 'not a sporting person' and gravitated to the art department, which was run by Wilfred Blunt, the brother of Anthony Blunt. Erskine described him as 'a very splendid and over-the-top character' who had his students draw from life and arranged for them to attend exhibitions during the holidays. Erskine met Howard Hodgkin in the drawing room where the two of them collaborated on illustrated books – Hodgkin did the drawings and Erskine the script. Erskine remained friends with Hodgkin until his death and they often remarked on their indebtedness to Blunt.[149]

Erskine was not expected to get into Cambridge, but he so impressed the examiners with his extraordinary knowledge of Anglo-Saxon coinage and his beautiful handwriting that he won a scholarship to King's College to study archaeology. Erskine arrived in Cambridge in 1950 after spending his National Service in Malaysia and did his best to avoid the 'grindingly boring conservative set where everybody wore tweed jackets and went hunting'.[150] Instead, he met like-

£300, a relatively large sum but far less than they would have paid if they had thought they were buying a real Velasquez. *Prince Baltasar Carlos aged 6 as a Hunter* (1635) is now attributed to Velasquez, proving that Robert Erskine's instincts were spot on. While he joked to me that 'it was all very galling' and that he'd be a millionaire now if he had been more insistent, he ultimately agrees that the painting's rightful home is with the National Trust.

[149] Hodgkin described the importance of his friendship with Erskine in an article he wrote – see Howard Hodgkin, 'On Collecting Indian Painting', *Ashmolean*, 23 (1992), 9-15.

[150] Two years of National Service in the military for single men had been introduced in 1939 at the outset of the Second World War, and this was finally abolished in November 1960. By the late 1950s National Service was extremely

minded friends such as Mark Boxer, Peter Hall and Sasha Morsoon, 'the brilliant and beautiful Zuleika Dobson of the fifties.'

It was at Cambridge that Erskine began to pursue art seriously. He held exhibitions in his student quarters, focusing on 'a rather extraordinary' artist called Ernst Fuchs who was an Austrian Jew who had converted to Roman Catholicism. Erskine made a very important contact at Cambridge when he met Bryan Robertson, the young director of the Heffer Gallery, which was located at the top of the famous bookshop of the same name. Only five years older than Erskine, Robertson became a mentor, friend and future collaborator. 'I got on with him right away. We were kindred spirits and have been ever since' Erskine told me.

When Robertson put on an exhibition of contemporary prints at the Heffer Gallery, Erskine was immediately enthralled: 'I thought, My God that's a good idea. And because of my interest in dissemination, I thought, I can do that myself!' The prints were published by the Zurich-based *Guilde de la Gravure* and were 'mostly cheerful colour lithographs by such up-and-coming Continental names as Clavé, Manessier, Singier, and Campigli.' They came in editions of 100 and were sold for three guineas, a price that many undergraduates could afford. Erskine bought six and sold them for a big profit decades later. 'At the time, however, such massive returns on an unpopular investment like artists' lithographs were not to be contemplated' he later recalled.[151]

Erskine's interest in prints grew during his trips to Paris where he went on all his vacations in order to 'run around the very lively art world.' He frequented cafes such as the Cafe Mabillon in Saint-Germain where he glimpsed artists like Leger, Matisse and Giacometti. On one occasion Erskine was photographed in the *Figaro* newspaper seated next to his good friend the photographer

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unpopular and its abolition was one of the changes that marked the new decade – see Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 35.

[151] Robert Erskine, 'St George's Gallery', in *A Decade of Printmaking*, (ed.) Charles Spencer, (London: Academy Editions Ltd., 1973), pp 19-24 (p.20).

Michelle Molinaire and Cocteau. 'One got to know all these people that way', Erskine explained, adding that they would wink at him because he was dressed like an Englishman.

Erskine spent his days in Paris looking at and buying art from the galleries on the Rue des Beaux Arts. He was now known as a buyer of modern art with a particular interest in prints. Whereas some people found the process of printing too finicky, Erskine was attracted to them precisely 'because they were the product of an involved technology that was quite unlike the straightforward processes of painting and drawing.'[152] They were affordable relative to paintings and he was able to purchase prints by artists such as Picasso, Matisse and Braque. Erskine was struck by the fact that in France artists prints were an important part of the culture and had been for many years but the same was not true in England. He wondered what was stopping English artists from succeeding as printmakers.[153]

As Erskine's interest in prints grew, he started visiting well-known print ateliers including Lacouriere's with the American artist Sam Kaner. Kaner was a painter and sculptor who had moved to Paris and been taken on as a pupil by Lacouriere, the master printer of Picasso.[154] The atmosphere of the workshop was both sociable and busy and famous artists often dropped by. Erskine remembers rubbing elbows instead of shaking hands because they were covered in ink. The experience had a profound effect on him and inspired him to strike out on his own: 'It was for me the navel of the world, and with the pungent odour of printing ink hovering in the atmosphere, the foundation of St. George's Gallery Prints became inevitable' he wrote.[155]

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[152] ibid.

[153] Lindy Erskine gave the author a longer, unpublished version of Robert Erskine, 'Foreword', in Stanley Jones, *Stanley Jones and the Curwen Studio* (London: Herbert Press, 2010), pp.9-10. The original piece was edited down and contains some material that is not included in the published piece.

[154] John Buckland Wright, 'The Colour Etchings of Sam Kaner', *The Studio*, 142 (704) (November 1951),148 (p. 148).

[155] Spencer, op.cit., p.20.

After leaving Cambridge in 1953, Erskine determined to pursue the business of printmaking even if the odds were against him.[156] Robertson's print exhibitions at the Heffer Gallery suggested that there was at least a small market for modern prints in Britain. Moreover, his exposure to the thriving contemporary print scene in Paris had given him a model for what he could only dream of establishing in London. Because Erskine was young, enthusiastic and not overly concerned about money, he was willing to take a risk on the kind of endeavour that promised little in return.

St. George's Gallery Prints – location, set up and impressions of Erskine

St. George's Gallery Prints was located at number 7 Cork Street in the heart of Mayfair and was close to the Royal Academy and to Savile Row. The area was developed as part of the Burlington Estate in the eighteenth century and quickly attracted tailors and later art dealers. It maintained its reputation as an artistic hub into the 1950s, though the Depression of the 1930s and the Second World War had diminished the art trade all over Britain. When St. George's Gallery opened, Cork Street was still a go-to thoroughfare for buyers of contemporary art and was home to galleries such as the Mayor and the Redfern.

By the mid-1950s, the British art industry was beginning to revive, partly because high taxation and the concomitant closure of many country houses meant that antiques and paintings were newly on offer. Cork Street was a natural area for dealers and collectors to congregate. They benefited from the fact that it was located between the two major auction houses, Christie's and Sotheby's, and interested buyers would pass by on the way from one to the other. [157] As the eminent architectural historian, Joseph Rykwert, said in my interview with him, 'Erskine was a tributary' of this proximity.[158]

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[156] Erskine did not finish his degree because his father died suddenly shortly before finals and he had to attend to family affairs.

[157] Neither auction house sold contemporary art during this period

[158] All remaining quotes from Joseph Rykwert in this chapter are from an unpublished interview conducted with the author on 1 April 2017. Rykwert (born 1926) is the Paul Phillipe Cret Professor Emeritus of Architecture at the

No. 7 Cork Street is four-storey building that was rebuilt in 1814-16 following a fire.[159]

Erskine shared the ground floor and basement with Agatha Sadler, owner of St. George's Gallery

Books, from which the name of the print gallery was derived. His gallery was physically and

nominally connected to the bookstore, while remaining a separate business enterprise. Rykwert

recalls that the publisher George Widenefeld's business was upstairs and that he repeatedly asked

Sadler to lend him change for his taxi rides. Other sources claim that Erskine and Sadler worked

alongside the painter Basil Jonzen.[160] Over the years, the space was occupied by several lively

characters involved in the burgeoning post-war book and art trades - two industries that still had

close ties.

Agatha Sadler (nee Brill) was a Jewish refugee from Vienna who had fled the Nazis with

her parents in 1938 when she was fourteen years old. Her father, Otto Brill, a renowned physicist

and art enthusiast, opened St George's Gallery in around 1945 after purchasing the name from an

older gallery on 32a George Street off Hanover Square that had been showing English prints since

the 1920s and had been home of the English Wood-Engraving Society.[161] Brill's gallery was

located at 81 Grosvenor Street and run by Lea Bondi Jaray, another émigré from Vienna. During its

short existence, it showed Expressionist artists such as Egon Schiele as well as 19th-century French

art. It was an important gallery that attracted German and Austrian exiles but closed in 1950

University of Pennsylvania. His books include *The Idea of a Town: The Anthropology of Urban Form in Rome, Italy and the Ancient World* (1963) and *On Adam's House in Paradise: The Idea of the Primitive Hut in Architectural History* (1972). He was already friends with Erskine in 1955 when he opened St. George's Gallery Prints and remains friends with him to this day.

[159] Its first new resident was the painter and miniaturist Samuel John Stubb who lived there until 1851

[160] 'Obituary: Agatha Sadler: Bookseller who stocked esoteric volumes and kept confidences in London's art world', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 29 January 2016, [online access 31 January 2016]. Also confirmed in Edward Lucie-Smith, 'Obituary: Karin Jonzen', The *Independent*, 2 February 1998.

[161] Several English galleries have had the name St. George's. One that opened in 1842 and closed in 1855 was located at St. George's Place, Hyde Park Corner. Another that opened in the late 1890s was located at 14 Grafton Street. St. George's Gallery Prints was most often confused with the third St. George's Gallery that was located at 32a St. George Street and specialised in prints – particularly wood engravings but also etchings. At the V&A's Blythe House, for example, information on both galleries is kept in the folder (MA/1/S119). Erskine's only link to it was via Agatha Sadler.

because it wasn't making money.[162] Agatha Sadler, who had sold books at her father's gallery, kept this side of the business going because she thought that there was a gap in the market. She was correct and St. George's Gallery Books ended up becoming the main rival to Zwemmer's bookshop.[163]

In the post-war years, museums and galleries did not have the extensive libraries and archives that they have today. It was difficult to obtain information about which exhibitions were taking place in different parts of the world and Sadler's bookshop provided a vital resource to art institutions. 'Every month or two Sadler would bring out a list of the new exhibitions and exhibition catalogues that she thought people should know about,' said the film theorist Laura Mulvey who assisted Sadler.[164] This alone provided her with a significant share of her business since librarians at the art colleges and museums would invariably order a large batch of books off the back of this list, Mulvey added. The art critic Brian Sewell, who knew Sadler, argued that art lovers were reliant on her for anything from obscure exhibition catalogues to out-of-print catalogue raisonnés. [165]

Agatha Sadler was attractive, lively and knowledgeable about a diverse range of topics. She was also an excellent hostess and cook. Thanks to her expertise as well as charm, St. George's Gallery Books brought in erudite clients including Sewell, Denys Sutton, Eric Estorick and Kenneth Clark. She employed intelligent assistants such as Laura Mulvey and Anita Brookner and generally

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[162] Metromod's Archive on St. George's Gallery, https://archive.metromod.net/viewer.p/69/1470/object/5145-11259763, [accessed 15/01/2023]. Also Rosalind Delmar, 'Agatha Sadler Obituary', The *Guardian*, 14 January 2016, {online access 16 April 2016} Nigel Halliday writes that 'Agatha Sadler opened the St. George's Gallery bookshop, which ran in tandem with the St George's Gallery, George Street, off Hanover Square' - see Nigel Vaux Halliday, *More than a Bookshop: Zwemmer's and Art in the 20th Century* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers Ltd, 1991), p. 203. The Hanover Square location appears to be incorrect as other sources state that the location was Grosvenor Street.
[163] ibid., p.203.
[164] Unpublished interview with Laura Mulvey conducted by the author 23 February 2017. All references to Mulvey in this chapter come from the interview. Laura Mulvey is a feminist film theorist who is Professor of Film and Media Studies at Birkbeck College, University of London. Amongst her many publications on film, she is most famous for her 1973 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* and the concept of the 'male gaze'.
[165]Sewell quoted in the same obituary of Sadler in *The Sunday Telegraph*

fostered a stimulating and welcoming environment that no doubt played some part in the bookshop's success.

There is no documentation about how Sadler and Erskine met or why they decided to share the space. The decision, however, made sense given that the original St. George's Gallery on George Street had specialised in graphic art and other book shops such as Zwemmer's had successfully branched out into fine art. Books and prints had an affinity with each other and Joseph Rykwert stated that there was some overlap between their ventures. Sadler, for example, sold several artists' books with texts and elaborate engravings. Robert also dealt in artists' books such as *The Gongora Suite* by Picasso.[166]

St George's Gallery Books changed locations several times in the forty odd years that it was in operation.[167] It was based at Grosvenor Street before moving to the Piccadilly Arcade where Sadler worked in partnership with the old master dealer Alfred Brod.[168] In 1955, it relocated to Cork Street where it remained until 1964 when it moved permanently to Duke Street. While Erskine intended to open St. George's Gallery Prints at the Piccadilly Arcade in 1954, the gallery appears to have opened at the beginning of 1955 in Cork Street. Despite some confusion about gallery's opening date and initial location, I will refer to the Cork Street premises as its primary location throughout this dissertation and its opening date as the beginning of 1955, even if there is a possibility that it opened at the very end of 1954.[169] A few exhibitions, namely *The Graven Image* and some travelling shows were held elsewhere.

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[166] Rykwert remembers that the texts and images were sold separately and that the etched pictures of 'girls' sold for far more than the etched sonnets of the sixteenth-century poet: 'I remember that Robert was selling the girls for £3 each and the sonnets for I think 30 shillings […] Now I think they expect one to pay £700 for a sonnet.' Quote from interview with author. Rykwert still has one of the Gongora etchings he bought from Erskine in his lavatory.

[167] Sadler retired in 1989 and sold the bookshop.

[168] The St. George Street location off Hanover Square is stated by Halliday in *More Than a Bookshop* but not by the *Guardian* obituary of Sadler.

[169] The text in a magazine photoshoot says that Robert Erskine 'is now engaged upon a long-term project: the opening of a gallery in the Piccadilly Arcade, for the sale of modern prints.' This did not happen and instead opened on Cork Street. See 'New Faces, New Cloth,' *The Ambassador* magazine, 7 (1954), 111 – 118 (p.117). All other sources state

A rough layout of the bookshop and the print gallery was described to me by Caroline Cuthbert who spent the summer of 1960 working for Erskine when she was 20 years old.[170] She noted that the premises were on the Bond Street side of Cork Street - about a third of the way down the street - and that Erskine's print gallery was at the back of the building. The print customers would enter the front door to the right of the shop window and walk all the way down the right-hand-side of bookshop until they reached Agatha Sadler's desk at the far end where she was often seated. Near her desk was a lit passageway that led into a cavernous room without any windows where St. George's Gallery Prints was located. On the left side of the room was an office area with desks and a chair and on the right side of the room was a large wall where prints were exhibited. Downstairs was a storage area with plan chests full of prints as well as more office space.[171]

Caroline Cuthbert got the job because Robert Erskine was a friend of her older sister, and he offered it to her when he heard that she was interested in working in a gallery. She believes that it

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Cork Street as the location, which suggests that the Piccadilly plan did not happen. In *A Decade of Printmaking,* Erskine writes that the inaugural exhibition at Cork Street took place in 1954. However, in the same book Charles Spencer writes that the gallery opened in 1955. See Erskine, 'St George's Gallery, op.cit. p.20 and Charles Spencer, 'A Decade of Printmaking,' in Charles Spencer, (ed.), *A Decade of Printmaking* (London: Academy Editions Ltd., 1973), pp 9-19 (p.10). In the catalogue of the 1959 *The Graven Image* exhibition, Bryan Robertson states that the opening date was November 1955 (p.2). This November 1955 date is again mentioned by Erskine in his 'Foreword' to *Stanley Jones and the Curwen Studio* (p.9). Michael Clegg argues that the November 1955 date is wrong and suggests that the opening was in November of 1954 - see Michael Clegg, '"The Poor Man's Picture Gallery": An Enquiry into Artists' and Print Images in the Cultural and Political Context of Post-War Britain, 1945-60', Ph.D. Thesis (University of Birmingham, 2021), Appendix 7, p.398. This theory is in keeping with the letter Erskine wrote to Piper stating that the opening would take place in October 1954 (Tate Archive - TGA 200410/1/3698). Erskine also wrote to Merlyn Evans on 17 October 1954 with a list of prints held by the gallery (TGA 896/1/1/1). G.S. Whittet writes that the gallery opened at the end of 1954 - see G.S. Whittet, 'The St. George's Gallery: The Newer London Galleries', *The Studio*, 163 (829) (May 1962),20-21(p.21). While it is likely that the opening took place at the end of the year, the first documented gallery exhibition was not until March/April 1955 with *Hayter: Engravings, Etchings and Lithographs*. In this dissertation I have taken the beginning of 1955 to be the date of St. George's Gallery Prints even if the opening took place at the end of 1954 and even if Erskine had already begun to build up his gallery stock in 1954.

[170] Unpublished interview with Caroline Cuthbert conducted by the author 16 February 2017. In addition to Erskine, Cuthbert worked with several other art dealers including Antony d'Offay. She helped run his gallery for 11 years. She was one of the original members on the committee of the Artists' Lives project of the National Life Story Collection in the oral history section of the British Library. It was started in 1990 with the Tate Archive and in collaboration with the Henry Moore Institute. Cuthbert had put Erskine's name forward as an important Artists' Lives interview but they did not contact him in time. She was pleased that I had been able to conduct an interview with him.

[171] Part of Cuthbert's account is contradicted by a photograph of Erskine at the gallery reproduced in the *Studio* magazine. He is sitting on a stool in a loft area with windows to his right and stored prints below -see G.S. Whittet, 'The St. George's Gallery: The Newer London Galleries', *The Studio*, 163 (829) (May 1962),20-21(p.20).

helped that she was a young woman who, in accordance with the fashion, 'was probably dressed in a tiny miniskirt.' As she put it in the interview, 'I was the draw'.[172] It was really Erskine, she said, who did the bulk of the work with the help of an assistant/secretary called Anne Lane. Cuthbert said that Anne had wild hair and dressed in the arty style of Dorelia John (the painter Augustus John's partner and muse), wearing long, flowing skirts in pinks and oranges. Cuthbert recalls that she stayed for many years and then went on to work at the print department of the British Museum.

The atmosphere of the bookshop and print gallery was bohemian and erudite. Mulvey recalls that Erskine cut an energetic and dynamic figure coming into the front section of the building to chat, sometimes accompanied by his close friend the travel writer Bruce Chatwin. It was a social but intellectual scene, and there was crossover between those buying books, those buying prints and those drawn to surrounding environs of Cork Street. For example, Cuthbert remembers men walking down Cork Street after lunching at nearby Buck's Club. They would drop in and sometimes be tempted to buy something: 'They'd come pottering in, almost showing off to each other because they were slightly drunk. You'd think, 'Oh God, they'll try to get out of it tomorrow.'[173]

Inebriated impulse purchases made at St. George's Gallery Prints were not likely to set men – female buyers were rare – back too much. Rykwert recalls that at one point, he had about 30 shillings to spare and Erskine offered him either a wood engraving by Kandinsky or an etching by a young art student still at college called David Hockney. It took him some time to make up his mind because he liked both, but he eventually bought the Kandinsky, which he still owns.[174]

In this small mid-century London art scene, buyers tended to be driven by interest rather than profit. While there was some money to be made, art was not the big business that it became,

[172] Unpublished interview of Cuthbert conducted by the author.
[173] ibid.
[174] Unpublished interview of Rykwert conducted by author.

and many galleries struggled to break even. Sales at St. George's Gallery Prints were not usually made by appointment and happened when people stepped into the gallery on a whim. Cuthbert recalls the entire scene being 'sleepy and gentlemanly.' There weren't contracts at St. George's Gallery Prints, a great deal wasn't written down and many transactions were done in cash. All of this changed, she added, when VAT was brought in in 1973 because it forced dealers to be far more accountable.[175]

The unprofessional milieu that Erskine joined when he opened his gallery in 1955 was one that was criticized by Bryan Robertson, John Russell and Lord Snowdon in *Private View*.[176] In their 1965 survey of the London art world, they argued that in the space of ten years it had been transformed into a professional, dynamic and international scene. Robertson, who was Erskine's friend and fellow print enthusiast, wrote that 'the whole vague, Bohemian, badly organised situation' of the early 1950s with its 'old-fashioned, laissez faire attitude towards artists' had given way to a new and improved system. This was one of 'of contracts and a monthly or quarterly-cheques as a retaining fee, to be set against work received from the artist.'[177] This system, Robertson argued, meant that artists no longer had to rely on income from exhibitions that might only take place every few years and instead had a more regular salary.

Robertson's characterisation of the impoverished post-war artist who had to depend on teaching to feed his or her family is confirmed by Adrian Clark in his detailed study of British art and artists between the years of 1945-1951.[178] While his book covers a slightly earlier period, his findings still apply to this dissertation. Clark writes that 'living solely by producing and selling pictures was difficult, particularly if the artist painted in a "modern" way' and 'that the economics

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[175] Cuthbert, interview with author.

[176] Bryan Robertson, John Russell, Lord Snowdon, *Private View* (London: Nelson, 1965).

[177] ibid., p.174.

[178] Adrian Clarke, *British and Irish Art: From War to Festival* (London: Hogarth Arts, 2010), p.108.

simply could not be made to add up.'[179] He reiterates Robertson when he writes that artists were usually exhibited 'on a show-by-show basis, in which case a contract was not signed.'[180] Clark writes that without a legally binding contract dealers could take advantage of artists by reducing the sale price of works or making the artist pay for additional costs such as framing, photography and exhibition catalogues.[181]

Robert Erskine may not have given his artists contracts or paid them monthly retainers as would become customary in the 1960s, but he helped them financially and shouldered most of the operational costs himself – from printing costs to buying the best paper, photographing the prints and producing exhibition catalogues and other promotional material. Michael Rothenstein confirmed that printmakers in the mid-fifties were entirely dependent on Erskine and his gallery for support, adding that:

> Erskine was a very generous man because the first thing he did for each of the artists attached to St. George's was to buy copies of almost every print they had done at the time, which was an extraordinarily encouraging gesture. I think he spent quite a number of thousands of pounds on his artists' work in that way. A marvellous send-off![182]

Stanley Jones recalls that Erskine took a low commission of 20% rather than the standard 50% from artists.[183] This was because the market was weak, and he wanted to ensure that artists could continue working. The small amount of money that Erskine got from his reduced commission did not come close to covering his costs and he ended up putting a great deal of his own money into keeping the gallery afloat.

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[179] ibid.p.97.
[180] Ibid.p.112.
[181] Ibid.p.112.
[182] Michael Rothenstein in conversation with Pat Gilmour and Stuart Mason, 15 November 1974, transcript, p. 14 – see Tate Archive Audiovisual collection, (TAV38AB).
[183] From a telephone conversation with Jones and the author on 9 April 2019.

There is nothing to suggest that Erskine was greedy or that he took advantage of his artists. In fact, he is characterised as generous to a fault. This generosity or lack of business savvy is often attributed to his aristocratic background and private income which enabled him to subsidise the business. In a society still strictly divided along class lines, Erskine's aristocratic heritage was deemed significant by the press, by those who knew him and probably by Erskine himself. Rykwert recalls that while he did not make a display of his background or exhibit snobbery of any kind, he was very conscious of it and took it for granted as a part of who he was. In a portrait of Erskine from the time, which was done with a thin wash of orange and blue paint, he conveys an air of intensity, nobility and bohemianism (Figure 27).

My interview subjects all noted that Erskine was not financially motivated. John Kasmin, who met Erskine when he was working for Victor Musgrave at Gallery One and went on to become David Hockney's first dealer said that: 'Robert was an upper-class inheritor…We thought of him like a millionaire…I shouldn't think he's ever sensed the desperation that most of us have.'[184] Cuthbert also thought that a 'lack of hunger' prevented Erskine from approaching his gallery work with the kind of steely determination often required for making a financial success of a business. Mulvey agreed that making money was not Erskine's priority:

> The impression that I got was Robert had a lot of flare, had a kind of concept, also had a certain amount of money; what he was doing was what he wanted to do, not in order to make a living. The bookshop was not much of a commercial enterprise.[185]

The printer Stanley Jones was more critical of Erskine's lack of business acumen and thought that he could have run it differently. The drawback, he said, was that 'Erskine was always

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[184] Unpublished interview with John Kasmin conducted by the author on 15 September 2013 in relation to another project. John Kasmin, known as 'Kas', was born into a working-class Jewish family in Whitechapel. In his early twenties he worked at Victor Musgrave's Gallery One and in 1963 he set up his own gallery on 118 New Bond Street that was strikingly modern in decor. Kasmin, who was friends with David Hockney, became his first dealer. He showed other British artists such as Gillian Ayres, Howard Hodgkin and Anthony Caro. He also showed the work of American artists including Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis and Helen Frankenthaler. John Kasmin and Robert Fraser were arguably the most important British dealers of the 1960s.
[185] Unpublished interview with the author.

somewhat distant from the nuts and bolts and pros and cons of practicality. He was charming and debonair and great at socialising, but to really pin him down to the practice of printmaking was no easy task.'[186]Stanley Jones, who came from a working-class family based in Wigan in the industrial north, did not have much in common with Erskine other than a mutual interest in graphic artist. Nevertheless, the two men got on well and worked well together.

In my interview with Erskine, he addressed the fact that having a private income enabled him to be a generalist rather than a specialist:

> I have never been tied to a discipline as far as I could help it. I was very fortunate to have been born with a private income and so I haven't had to be like a lot of other people have. And I regard that as a great piece of good fortune. It has affected my life ever since, of course. Yes, I've had a lot of interests, that's the awful problem.[187]

Having a lot of interests was arguably a good thing and despite his many interests, his passion for collecting remained consistent. Erskine was only 24 years old when he decided to open the gallery. Initially he was living in a house on Markham Street and later he moved to another house on Cambridge Place. In both houses a revolving set of like-minded men and one or two women lived side by side with art objects and antiquities acquired by Erskine. According to Rykwert, Erskine also did 'scouting' work for an 'odd' dealer called John Hewett who dealt in antiquities and contemporary art (sometimes Giacometti works were traded) from his flat in Bond Street and then Hill Street.

While it is possible to blame the closure of St. George's Gallery Prints on Erskine's lack of drive and business acumen and also because of his other interests, it does not tell the full story. A market for fine art prints did not exist when he was getting started and a gallery sustained purely on sales wouldn't have been able to break even in 1955. Contemporary paintings were difficult to sell

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[186] Stanley Jones interviewed by Linda Sandino for Artists' Lives branch of the National Life Stories, a charitable trust within the Oral History section of the British Library. Interviewed April 5 and 29, 2004. Accessed at British Library Sound Archive, 13 February 2017. (Section 1). Track 15. Tate 8 (F15066) Side A.

[187] Unpublished interview with Robert Erskine conducted by author on 11 July 2011.

but contemporary prints were nearly impossible. Most artists did not make prints and many buyers confused them with reproductions. Erskine, therefore, had a great deal of work to do before the possibility of large sales could become a reality. One of the biggest challenges was changing perceptions about the medium and this could not be done just by hanging good prints on the walls of his gallery. He also had to wage a promotional campaign about the importance of prints during his directorship of St. George's Gallery Prints.

Media Presence and Marketing

In Erskine's characteristically modest style, he wrote that the 'opening of St George's Gallery Prints was not a major item in the gossip columns of the day' and that although a few prints did sell, his bank managers who had let him overdraw in order to procure the European prints were worried. 'But will anybody *buy* these pictures?' they gasped, as they stared at a couple of *louche* nude lithographs by Matisse, several vivid Picasso etchings and one of the best plates from Rouault's gloomy *Miserere.*' Erskine goes on to write that they were right to worry because prints did not 'fly off the walls' in the mid-fifties. [188]

Why weren't people buying prints and what could be done about it? The louche content of the prints was not the only impediment and the main issue was that prints, as discussed in the conclusion of chapter 1, were widely misunderstood by the British public who often thought of them as posters or reproductions rather than as works of art. Rather than tackle the problem immediately, Erskine first engaged in a subtle publicity campaign in order to give the gallery exposure. Erskine cropped up regularly in the press in both a personal and a professional capacity. Often the articles were frivolous, but they served the purpose of getting the name of the gallery out into the world. In 1957, for example, *The Sunday Times* published a list of promising Cambridge graduates of the post-war generation. The article, 'Cambridge Vintage,' included Erskine, Hugh

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[188] Robert Erskine, longer, unpublished version of 'Foreword', op.cit., p. 1.

Thomas, Peter Hall and David Attenborough, who remained a friend. A photograph of Erskine includes information such as his Cambridge College (King's), his age (26), his profession (runs St. George's Gallery) and the fact that he had made the film *Artist's Proof.* [189]

Another example of indirect publicity is an article in *The Sunday Times* called 'Atticus Joins the Chelsea Set.' Here Erskine bemoans the gentrification of Chelsea: 'Artistically, Chelsea is a dead duck!' He is described as a '29-year-old Etonian and ex-Guards officer, who runs a small, exclusive art gallery in Mayfair.'[190] In an article in *The Sunday Times* on Princess Margaret's surprise engagement to the photographer Antony Armstrong-Jones (later Lord Snowdon), it is revealed that the groom 'sometimes drops into St. George's Gallery in Mayfair to talk with its *avant-garde* proprietor Robert Erskine.'[191]

Erskine agreed to participate in several photo shoots for the benefit of St. George's Gallery Prints. One of these was for *The Ambassador*, a trade magazine for the textile and fashion industry that was known for its photographs by Elsbeth Juda, a refugee from Germany. *The Ambassador* had a history of engaging with fine art and in 1953 sponsored the ICA exhibition *Painting into Textiles* which had included work by artists like William Scott.[192] In this context it made sense for Erskine to pose for an article titled 'New Faces, New Cloth'. In one photograph, he leans jauntily against a wall surrounded by his gallery's artwork with a caption noting what they are: 'On the floor a Rouault, a Rothenstein and a Matisse. Behind him two paintings by a young artist, Martin Bradley, whom Erskine supports.' In the largest photo, he is seated cross-legged in a bay window holding a cigarette and wearing a tailored three-piece suit (Figure 28). Next to him are two sculptures - one by a modern artist and the other of a Burmese deity. Laid out in front of him are a pile of prints from

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[189] 'Cambridge Vintage', *The Sunday Times*, 27 October 1957, p. 5.

[190] 'Atticus Joins the Chelsea Set', *The Sunday Times*, 22 November 1959, p. 9.

[191] Merlin, 'Mainly about Two People',*The Sunday Times*, 28 February 1960, p. 31.

[192] Chronology 1950-1959 – William Scott CBE RA (1913-1989), [William Scott website accessed April 25th 2022].

the gallery. The caption declares that: 'The Hon. Robert Erskine is most things to most men –

patron, last of the bohemians, entrepreneur, eccentric. Above all, he is a collector.'[193]

The impression given of Erskine and his gallery in this photo shoot was consistent with mid-

century stereotypes about artists and art dealers. Supposedly avant-garde qualities such as

eccentricity, bohemianism and creativity were increasingly visible in the media and as a result had

become acceptable and even desirable. While Jackson Pollock was not an eccentric per se, he was

the embodiment of the creative genius and his image was transmitted around the world. In 1951, for

example, in Cecil Beaton's well-known photo shoot for *Vogue,* Jackson Pollock's paintings had

served as a backdrop for fashion models. Erskine was happy to follow in this trend of pairing fine

art with commerce and he participated in several high-couture photo shoots for the society

magazine *The Tatler*.[194]

Erskine and his gallery featured in the photographs for an article from the September 1957

issue of *The Tatler* titled 'London Couture for Daytime.'[195] In one of them, Erskine stands next to a

laughing model in a black coat with a panther skin collar and muff. Seemingly oblivious to her

attention, he is completely absorbed by the Merlyn Evans etching that he is examining (Figure 29).

In other photographs, the model poses in front of a print *Skull* by Evans and also in front of his old-

fashioned etching press that was made in 1880 (Figure 30). The magazine editors perhaps wanted to

contrast the light, femininity of the fashion models with the darker, more masculine energy of the

prints and the gnarled piece of machinery. For, as I will discuss shortly, the myth of the artist that

had existed for centuries, and was particularly strong in the 1950s, was one of a heroic and mostly

male genius. Nevertheless, gender stereotypes in Britain were arguably less binary than they were in

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[193] 'New Faces, New Cloth,' *The Ambassador* magazine, 7 (1954), 111 – 118 (p.117).
[194] Erskine let his house be photographed for a spread titled 'The Versatile Sack', *The Tatler*, 25 September 1957, pp. 608-613.
[195] 'London Couture for Daytime', *The Tatler*, 4 September 1957, pp. 435 – 439.

America and there is a decidedly humorous and even subversive quality to the images that is entirely lacking in Beaton's photographs of Pollock. A more fluid attitude towards gender norms would become a feature of British artists and musicians in the 1960s and was subtly emerging in 1950s Britain.

Erskine's light-hearted photographic forays hid the underlying seriousness of his intentions about printmaking which were revealed via the written word. When interviewed nearly a decade after the gallery closed, he hinted that his media presence, particularly in newspapers, was not random and was actually part of an overall strategy to give printmaking more exposure: 'I managed to fiddle letters into *The Times* whenever the slightest opportunity arose; I mercilessly buttonholed critics and journalists and tried, without success to infiltrate the telly' he said.[196]

Responding to letters to the editors enabled Erskine to reveal his core beliefs about the importance of accessibility and also to counteract false claims about prints. In April of 1959, for example, he responded to a letter stating that 'there is little left for the poor collector.' Erskine argues that it is possible to find bargains when works of art fall out of fashion due to changing tastes. While he doesn't mention prints directly, his message is in keeping with his modus operandi as a print dealer: follow your interests rather than trends and you will discover that some art is reasonably priced. Good art, he suggests, can be available to people from all socio-economic backgrounds.

On the 5 November 1959, Erskine responded to a disappointing article in which *The Fine Art Trade Guild* stated that they were going to 'promote the acquisition of reproductions for 'home and office use' because 'no comparable means of developing interest in the arts exists.'[197] Erskine writes that 'an entirely preferable means exists' in the form of the 'ever-growing revival' of prints,

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[196] Spencer, op.cit., p.21
[197] Erskine, 'Interest in the Arts', *The Times,* 5 November 1958, p. 11.

which, he points out, are often cheaper than reproductions. He explains that original prints differ from reproductions because they are made directly by the artist rather than by a skilled craftsman. Although this statement would be repeated by Erskine on many occasions, the concept of the original print remained difficult for people to grasp. For example, in a rebuttal to Erskine, Phyllis Marshall of the Stone Gallery accuses Erskine of riding 'a personal hobby horse to the detriment of fact.' She adds that Picasso and Leger signed reproductions of their own work as 'proof of their perfection.'[198]

The weight of prejudice against the original fine art print was strong enough for Erskine to invest £2,000 of his own money (an enormous sum at the time) on a promotional film about the process of printmaking called *Artist's Proof*. [199] Erskine must have assumed the time, money and effort would yield tangible results and no doubt knew about the part that Hans Namuth's photographs and 1951 film on Jackson Pollock played in transforming the artist into an international celebrity. He may also have seen S.W. Hayter's 1951 film on printmaking with the same title as his book *New Ways of Gravure*. Fine art, while supposedly able to speak for itself, could sometimes benefit from the more immediate impact of film and Erskine was perfectly happy to use one means of mass production, filmmaking, to promote another, printmaking.

The commission of *Artist's Proof* coincided with a burgeoning branch of British film and television specialising in art programmes. Herbert Read's son, John Read, had produced a film on Henry Moore for the BBC in 1951. Read went on to direct five more films on Moore as well films on Barbara Hepworth, John Piper, Graham Sutherland and L.S. Lowry.[200] In a March 1958 article in

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[198] Phyllis Marshall, 'Interest in the Arts: Letters to the Editor,' *The Times*, 8 November 1958, p. 7.

[199] The author received a copy from Lindy Erskine in the absence of any other copies available in any library or archive in the UK.

[200] John Wyver, 'Obituary: John Read', *The Guardian*, 18 August 2011. Stanley Jones said that John Read made a BBC documentary about printmaking, although I have not been able to find it. He also mentioned that several art films were made at the Curwen Studio. Stanley Jones interview with Linda Sandino, British Library sound archive, Track 18: Tape 9 (F15067) Side B.

The Studio magazine, Read writes that 'the film on art has become a well-established branch of specialised filmmaking' and that 'every year there is at least one major international festival of art film.' He points out that the BBC is the main producer of art films, but that the Arts Council and the British Council have been responsible for distributing them and making them available to more people.[201] Erskine was unusual in that he eschewed the BBC in favour of his own independent production.

The spate of art films in the 1950s was due several factors, the most obvious one being that television was very popular and public broadcasters like the BBC wanted to air informative and educational programmes. However, a surge of films about the lives of artists (rather than movements or groups of artists) was arguably related the fact that artists were now seen as rugged individualists whose biographies impacted their art. This topic has been exhausted by critics, but the stereotypical artist of the 1950s was an extension of the Romantic hero: an outsider and a tortured soul who stood on the fringes of society but expressed himself through his art (whether it be painting, music or literature) deeply, spontaneously and, above all, originally. By the mid-fifties, this idea had been integrated into popular culture with films such as *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) in America and so-called Kitchen Sink dramas such as *Look Back in Anger* (1956) in Britain.[202]

Erskine's obsession with how objects (particularly ancient ones) are disseminated meant that he did not want to create art stars or engage in hagiographic narratives about individual geniuses. His allegiance lay with the printed medium itself. However, the medium was under threat in part because of what Rosalind Krauss would later identify as the myth of originality. In her extremely influential 1981 article 'The Originality of the Avant-garde,' Krauss argues that this myth of

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[201] John Read, 'Artist into Film', *The Studio*, 155 (780) (March 1958), pp.65-69, 91 (p. 65).
[202] The term kitchen sink was coined by David Sylvester in 1954 about the realistic paintings by John Bratby, Derrick Greaves, Jack Smith, Edward Middleditch and other artists shown at Helen Lesorre's gallery. The term was then applied to plays and also to certain novels.

originality, which lay at the heart of avant-garde and modernist discourses, was fuelled through the repression of the 'ever-present reality of copy.'[203]

Rodin serves as Krauss's primary example of an artist whose reputation was based on a false cult of originality. Rodin, she writes, was celebrated as the consummate 'form giver' or 'maker of originals' through 'the autographic character of his own kneading of matter into formal life.'[204] However, his sculptural practice of casting, as Nelson Goodman points out, is similar to printmaking because it involves the production of multiples. In addition, many of his moulds weren't cast until decades after his death which made a mockery of the requisite intentionality of the artist. Contrary to most writing on Rodin, Krauss argues that his was an art of 'reproduction, of multiples without originals.'[205] Krauss's post-structuralist critique of modernism – with her particular focus on multiplicity – can provide a helpful framework for analysing the problems that printmakers faced with regards to originality. Those devoted to mechanically reproducible art forms in the 1950s still had to prove that multiplicity and originality were compatible, that Benjamin's aura had not been lost but had actually been multiplied.

In the conclusion of this dissertation I argue that the problem of the print's supposed lack of originality did not go away until romantic or modernist notions of individual genius and creativity gave way to a pop aesthetic that some art historians such as Alex Seago have argued foreshadowed postmodernism. Postmodernism and modernism are such vague and contested terms that they can lead to confusion rather than clarity in a dissertation that is as historically specific as this one. But although the term modernism is undoubtedly problematic, it is unavoidable and comes up occasionally. In some instances, I use it very broadly to denote a type of (mostly American)

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[203] Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), p. 162.
[204] ibid., p.156.
[205] Ibid., p.156.

formalist art criticism that dominated during the second half of the twentieth century and was famously propounded by Clement Greenberg. In his book *Master Narratives and their Discontents*, James Elkins writes that Greenberg's 'influence on the shape of art history is acknowledged if not undisputed' and that his 'choices have made many painters nearly invisible to Anglo-American scholarship.'[206] Arguably, this is also true of printmakers, including many of the artists featured in this dissertation.

There is no evidence that Greenberg's criticism affected Erskine or any of his gallery's artists, although some of his essays were available in Britain in the fifties.[207] When I draw attention to Greenberg's ideas on a number of occasions in the following chapters it is not because they were of interest to Erskine, but because of the critic's retrospective impact on an art historical narrative that was, as Elkins writes, 'derived from a very small number of models.' One of the goals of this dissertation is to show that post-war printmakers (especially British ones) have been unjustifiably excluded from the 'canon' and it is possible that the diffusion of Greenberg-esque ideas in the sixties through to the nineties was partly to blame. The print, or at least the British post-war print, was overlooked in most surveys of twentieth century art which focused on key movements in art (mainly painting and sculpture) with one following the next as propounded by art historians such as Alfred Barr.

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[206] James Elkins, *Master Narratives and their Discontents* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), pp.65-66.

[207] In April 1940, the journal *Horizon* published Greenberg's essay 'Avant-Garde and Kitsch' and in October 1947 it published 'The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture.' Interested British readers would have been able to access more of Greenberg's essays at art school libraries. It wasn't until 1960, three years before St. George's Gallery Prints closed, that Greenberg's important essay 'Modernist Painting' was published. (See 'Modernist Painting' in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, Vol.4, ed. by John O'Brian (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1993), pp.85-93.) As a result, Greenberg's impact on British culture was greater in the sixties than it was in the fifties and ran in parallel to the development of pop art. Greenberg visited Britain on several occasions, first in 1939, then in the summer of 1954 and the summer of 1959 when he visited Cornwall. He also made various trips in the sixties and seventies. Despite supporting the likes of Anthony Caro, Greenberg was mostly dismissive of British artists and critics. See John A. Walker, 'A Vexed Trans-Atlantic Relationship: Greenberg and the British', *Art Criticism*, ed. by Donald Kuspit, 16.1 (*200*1), pp.44-61.

Artist's Proof's agenda had nothing to do with Greenberg but was arguably responding to ideas about modern art and modernism that were in circulation at the time. As will become evident in Chapter 3, the cultural climate was conservative relative to France and philistinism was a powerful force. Erskine's intended audience, however, seems to have been a more open-minded group of men and women who were familiar with European artists such as Picasso, Matisse and Mondrian and were open rather than hostile to abstraction. This audience – along with Erskine and his artists – could likely have read articles by forward-thinking critics such as David Sylvester who wrote reviews for *The Times* and *The New Statesman*. While Erskine did not reference Sylvester, his criticism provides a more relevant and specific point of comparison than Greenberg's and will be brought up in the context of the film *Artist's Proof*.

The film *Artist's Proof* was made between 1956 and 1957 and is 25-minutes long.[208] The opening credits, which are formed from printed images (most likely coloured woodcuts), state that that the film was directed by John Gibbon and that the music was composed by Gerald Gover. Erskine's role is listed as technical adviser, a characteristically humble description given that he was the driving force behind the film's production. He later regretted the director's decision to add music and a voice-over over because he thought they made the film too pompous.[209]

The film opens with a glamorous private view of a print exhibition that may have been filmed at St. George's Gallery Prints. A throng of men and women crowd the relatively small viewing space, talking animatedly or gazing intently at a selection of framed prints. Although well-dressed by today's standards – and certainly not long-haired or clad in hippy garb as would be the

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[208]Thanks in the film's credits are given to the Slade School of Fine Arts and the Harley Brothers of Edinburgh where most of the printmaking demonstrations were shot. An article in *The Sketch* reveals that 'the shooting was done during four weekends and four evenings– see Stephen Watts, 'Work and Play', *The Sketch*, 24th April 1957.

[209] Information about the film is from the copy of *Artist's Proof* lent to me by Lindy Erskine. Robert Erskine expressed his regret about the voiceover in my 2011 interview with him.

case a decade later – the presence of a few striking and unconventional-looking guests suggests that this was a gathering for bohemians rather than 'stuffed-shirts' as Erskine might say.

The aim of the opening sequence is to prove that prints are contemporary rather than old-fashioned and that they are very much in demand. Erskine places a red dot on a desired print at the request of an eager buyer. Many prints have red dots already, suggesting that they are getting snapped up by collectors and members of the public. The prints are avant-garde by post-war British standards because they are bright, gestural, abstract (or at least semi-abstract) and large. The film was shot in Eastman colour because it was essential to show that prints were no longer decorative black and white etchings but autonomous works of art that were comparable to paintings in their capacity to be appreciated as pure, aesthetic objects.

In the next sequence, prints from the ages flash past the viewer so as to emphasise the continuity between past and present. The narrator gives a brief history of printmaking and is open about the fact that prints are multiples: 'Here is an exhibition that could be shown in all five continents at one and the same time' he says with enthusiasm. This, of course, would not be possible with paintings. The advent of photography, he adds, freed printmakers from the burden of reproduction and enabled them to flourish as artists. The narrator then says that 'many modern artists find printmaking offers all kinds of qualities that they can't otherwise obtain.' In other words, printmakers seek out qualities that are specific to medium.

Medium-specificity as a central component of Modernism was taken to its most extreme and reductionist form by Greenberg in the early sixties, having identified it as the culmination of a process set in motion by Enlightenment rationalism.[210] In regard to this process, Noël Carroll in the

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[210] In 1961, Greenberg wrote that: 'A modernist work of art must try, in principle, to avoid dependence on any order of experience not given in the most essentially construed nature of its medium…The arts are to achieve concreteness, "purity" by acting solely in terms of their separate and irreducible selves.' See Clement Greenberg, 'The New Sculpture' in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), pp. 139-46 (139).

article 'The Specificity of Media in the Arts', writes that the idea 'that each art form, in virtue of its medium, has its own exclusive domain of development was born of the eighteenth century, almost at the same time that distinctions between the aesthetic and the nonaesthetic and the between the fine arts and the practical arts crystallised.'[211] The specificity of different mediums, therefore, was an important part in the development of European art, and while Erskine, never used the term 'medium-specificity' directly, his overriding concern with demonstrating that his printmakers made artwork that could not be made in any other medium, suggests that he was engaging with its terms, even if not consciously. [212] Any deliberate engagement with medium specificity, however, may have limited the ground of experimentation for printmakers, who perhaps ultimately benefited from the loosening of these categories in the sixties and seventies. Printmaking, as I will argue in the conclusion, truly flourished when artists embraced the medium's heterogeneous and interdisciplinary aspects and engaged with the fact that printmaking could combine painting, photography and technology in a way that reflected the diversity of the modern world.

Printmaking, while distinct from painting and drawing, shares many qualities with both. It is not always easy to distinguish a print from a painting or drawing, although a well-trained eye can usually do so. Prints, like paintings and drawings, are generally flat and can be produced in a variety of different styles, using a variety of different techniques. Printmaking, however, can seem less spontaneous than painting because the artist must often draw the image in reverse and there is a delay between making the matrix and producing the final image. Some artists including Pollock

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[211] Noël Carroll, 'The Specificity of Media in Arts,' *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 19.4 (winter 1985), 5-10 (p.5).
[212] In the catalogue to *British Graphic Art 1957*, Erskine wrote: 'We have not attempted to follow any particular artistic creed, for in the graphic arts much depends on the quality of the prints and the exploitation of the potentialities of printmaking.' See Robert Erskine, 'Introduction,' *British Graphic Art 1957*, exh.cat. (London: St.George's Gallery Prints, 1957), unpaginated. The same statement is made in *Contemporary British Printmakers 1958*, with the additional argument that: 'What appears in the print is entirely governed by the intentions of the artist, and by his individual skill in his medium. Indeed each process offers qualities which are not available in other media, and it is for this reason that artists make prints in the first place.' See Robert Erskine, 'Introduction,' *Contemporary British Printmakers 1958*, exh.cat. (London: St. George's Gallery Prints, 1958), p.1. Similar statements were made the catalogue of *The Graven Image* exhibition of 1959.

found this delayed reaction inhibiting, while others, like Hayter, were attracted to the element of accident or chance evident in the final print. The primary difference between printmaking and painting, however, as stated in the introduction, is that printmaking is a two-step process that involves marking or incising the plate/matrix and then transferring the image onto a piece of paper. This second step of multiplication is what calls its originality into question and is what made Erskine keen to emphasise that it is 'the artist who makes the plates, stones, blocks or screens from which editions are pulled.'[213] *Artist's Proof* gave Erskine the opportunity to show the active role that the artist could play in the production of his own prints.

The second half of *Artist's Proof* is taken up with meticulous printmaking demonstrations given by artists, most of whom worked closely with Erskine. Roland Jarvis uses muscular force and ordinary carpenter's tools to cleave out the wood for his coloured woodcuts. The same physicality is evident in Anthony Harrison's engraving demonstration. The works of Merlyn Evans (aquatint), Alistair Grant (lithography) and Anthony Gross (etching) reveal the specialist knowledge necessary to master their respective techniques. Anthony Gross, we learn, often smoked while preparing his baths of nitric acid for etching, a skill that takes years to master. Erskine, who had been drawn to printmaking in the first place because it was 'the product of an involved technology that was quite unlike the straightforward processes of painting and drawing' was keen to demonstrate these involved processes in his film.[214] The silkscreen demonstration (as it is called in the film) is given by John Coplans, an early British advocate of the technique. Erskine showed prescience in including this 'modern invention' in 1957 since it was still mainly used for commercial purposes.

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[213] Robert Erskine, 'Introduction,' *British Graphic Art 1957*, exh.cat. (London: St.George's Gallery Prints, 1957), unpaginated.

[214] Robert Erskine, 'St George's Gallery', in *A Decade of Printmaking*, (ed.) Charles Spencer, (London: Academy Editions Ltd., 1973), pp 19-24 (p.20). Certain printmaking techniques are extremely difficult to master properly and it is not a coincidence that Hayter studied chemistry before becoming a printmaker.

The camera in *Artist's Proof* focuses entirely on each artist in their own work space. They appear alone with their materials and the suggestion is that they control every element of the printmaking process. The solitary aspect of printmaking was emphasised in *Artist's Proof* and we do not see the artists working with master printers in a print atelier as was often the case. In a culture obsessed with originality, any intermediaries – from Rodin's assistants to lithographic craftsmen – were suspect. As a result, the collaborative aspect of printmaking, which is arguably integral to its nature, was often denied in the post-war era. While none of this is openly addressed, the camera shows each artist marking the plate directly with his own hands. Therefore, the matrix, which has been touched by the artist's essence, is the original from which all the impressions are generated. The hope, presumably, was that this aura would migrate from the matrix to the prints.

The tone of *Artist's Proof* is extremely subtle but, as stated earlier, I believe that Erskine was trying to reposition printmaking as a medium that should matter to a mid-century audience that had absorbed broadly modernist ideas about originality and the importance of the creative act. These ideas were in the ether, but were specifically articulated in Britain by the critic David Sylvester in his essays from the mid-fifties to early sixties, which may have been read by Erskine and his gallery artists. In Sylvester's important 1955 essay 'The End of the Streamlined Era' he argues that the post-war era is characterised by rough rather than smooth surfaces with the suggestion that gesture is paramount.[215] In his 1957 essay 'English Abstract Art,' Sylvester advocates for a formalist approach to art that is not dissimilar to ideas espoused by the likes of Greenberg when he states that: 'before the work conveys reality it must achieve its own reality, before it can be a symbol it must rejoice in being a fact, and the more it affirms its autonomous

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[215] David Sylvester, 'End of the Streamlined Era' in David Sylvester, *About Modern Art: Critical Essays 1948-2000* (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp. 49 – 52 (49).

reality the more will it contain the possibility of returning us to the reality of life.'[216] Good art, according to critics such as Sylvester and Greenberg, should be autonomous, pure and ultimately free.

It was not easy to apply the exalted language of mid-century art critics to printmaking because of its long-term association with commerce, craft and multiplicity but S.W. Hayter did his best. In his book *About Prints*, he wrote that through the contemplation of the 'exceptional' print, the viewer could escape 'the banal conformism of our everyday existence into a fuller life of the spirit.'[217] Hayter, like Erskine, was keen to emphasise that prints were totally distinct from paintings and hoped that they could be appreciated as works of high art in their own right despite resistance to this idea.[218] In *The Women of Atelier 17: Modernist Printmaking in Mid-century New York*, Christina Weyl argues that 'in the course of overcoming engraving's stigma as a specialised trade, Hayter transformed the burin into a highly masculinized object.'[219] She points out that he did this by using aggressive or warlike language in his writing, teaching and also in his film *A New Way of Gravure* which described the burin as an artillery attack and stated that: 'If a print is to be good, there has to be a violent impulse to make something.'[220] It is not clear if Hayter was intentionally trying to distance printmaking from any pejoratively female associations with craft, but Weyl argues that his strident language alienated some of the women members of Atelier 17 who had been

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[216] David Sylvester, 'English Abstract Art' in David Sylvester, *About Modern Art: Critical Essays 1948-2000* (London: Pimlico, 2002), pp. 149 – 52 (151). An abbreviated and revised version of a review article published in the *New Statesman* for 21 and 28 December 1957.

[217] Stanley William Hayter, *About Prints* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 116.

[218] In the conclusion to *About Prints* Hayter positions prints as major rather than minor works of art that 'are to be distinguished as possessing an importance beyond the repetition of the results of drawing, of painting, or of sculpture. ibid, p. 167.

[219] Christina Weyl, *The Women of Atelier 17: Modernist Printmaking in Midcentury New York* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2019), p. 96

[220] ibid., p.97.

drawn to the studio precisely because it had initially been less hostile to them than other fine art establishments.[221]

The film *A New Way of Gravure* came out a year before Harold Rosenberg coined the phrase 'action painting,' describing the canvas as 'not a picture but an event.'[222] While Rosenberg was the most famous advocate of action painting, many artists and critics including Hayter and Sylvester were interested in action in relation to art. Hayter had always emphasised the physicality of printmaking and taught his students at Atelier 17 to attack the plate, to rotate the plate, to walk around the plate, and finally to 'draw by moving your whole body.'[223] Sylvester's ideas were consummate with Hayter's in this regard when in 1955 he wrote that the artist is compelled 'to create works which are complex traces of his acts.'[224] He returned to this idea two years later when he criticised British painters for their lack of 'concreteness' and 'physical substance' and praised American painters for their being bold in their conviction, adept at improvisation and ultimately not afraid of the 'act of painting.'[225] Throughout the 1950s, it was commonly believed that art should be intuitive, corporeal, participatory, aggressive and, implicitly, masculine.

In analysing the gender dynamics of post-war printmaking, Weyl draws on the scholarship of Michael Leja to account for an apparent crisis of masculinity after the Second World War.[226] The sexism of the 1950s is by now a common trope. In brief, the war disrupted the status quo and gave

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[221] ibid., p.20. A more complicated view of Hayter's attitude towards masculinity is presented by Charles Darwent who writes that Hayter disliked the 'masculinizing' of New Yok art and stereotypes about 'hairy-chested' men being superior to women. See Charles Darwent, *Surrealists in New York: Atelier 17 and the Birth of Abstract Expressionism* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2023), pp. 175

[222] Harold Rosenberg, 'The American Action Painters', *Art News*, (1952), pp.22-23, 48-50, esp.p.49.

[223] Darwent, op.cit., p.105. Hayter, who taught Jackson Pollock at Atelier 17, recalled Pollock telling him that he had had two great influences – Thomas Hart Benton and Hayter. In 1965, Clement Greenberg tried to downplay this influence by stating that Pollock had 'learnt nothing from Hayter or any of the other Europeans in person or by physical proximity.' See Darwent, p. 179. Greenberg, as Darwent points out, was keen to present an American version of art history that left little room for European painters let alone European printmakers.

[224] Sylvester, 'End of the Streamlined Era,'op.cit., p.52.

[225] Sylvester, 'English Abstract Art,' op.cit., p.150. Greenberg would use the word 'concreteness' in an approving way several years later in his 1961 essay 'The New Culture' in *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), pp. 139-46 (139).

[226] Weyl, op.cit., p. 97.

women newfound autonomy and power. After the war, men tried to reassert their authority and confine women to the home, presuming they were satisfied with their gleaming new vacuum cleaners and fridges. In film, the agency and angularity of Katherine Hepburn was replaced by the pneumatic sexuality of Marilyn Monroe or Diana Dors. In fashion, shoulder pads and shorter skirts gave way to Christian Dior's New Look with its copious amounts of fabric. It was not until 1963 that Betty Friedan punctured the myth of domestic bliss with her book the *Feminine Mystique* and the first stirrings of the feminist movement began.

Artist's Proof is a product of its time and the lack of women in the film is jarring to a contemporary viewer. Although Erskine exhibited female artists including Elizabeth Blackadder and Birgit Skiold at St. George's Gallery Prints, they were significantly outnumbered by men and no woman was ever given a solo exhibition. So much has already been written about the legal and cultural impediments that made a career (especially a career in art) extremely challenging for women in the 1950s. I will simply point out that the guise of heroism and spontaneity was more easily adopted by male artists who did not have the same domestic and societal pressures. Erskine was a product of his time and did not make any overt references to the topic of women or gender in his exhibition catalogues for St. George's Gallery Prints. The masculine tone of *Artist's Proof* is faint and there is nothing that can be interpreted as overtly sexist. Nevertheless, it does position printmaking as a predominantly male arena where mid-century ideas about fine art – including originality, creativity and masculinity – could thrive.

It is difficult to determine whether the hard work and money that went into making *Artist's Proof* impacted the medium's standing in Britain. Reviews tended to be favourable but anodyne, with G.S. Whittet, for example, stating that: 'Films like this can do nothing but good in introducing the general public to the way prints are produced and the serious way in which artists produce

them.'[227] What can be determined is that Erskine distributed the film as widely as possible, circulating it domestically as well as internationally and holding screenings at different venues including commercial cinemas, clubs and schools. The film could also be privately rented or purchased for £35.[228]

A 1957 article for the *Sketch* stated that Erskine would be screening the film at the International Art Festival at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Other international screenings were organised by the British Council. In a 1957 review in the *Manchester Guardian* of an exhibition co-organised by Erskine at the Austen Hayes Gallery in York, the reviewer wrote that the film would be screened in York later that year. And in London it was shown at the Royal Empire Society cinema and had a four-month run at the Academy Cinema which was located on Oxford Street above the Marquee jazz club.[229]

It is significant that *Artist's Proof* was shown at the Academy, which was London's premier art house cinema. In addition to screening films about fine art, it also introduced the British public to films by vanguard directors or *auteurs* such as Ingmar Bergman, Satyajit Ray and Ken Loach. [230] The programme was in large part determined by its director George Hoellering who was a 'fierce champion of original filmmakers.' [231] Hoellering, who was Austrian, had been interned at a camp on the Isle of Man during the war where he made friends with the German artist Peter Strausfeld. Strausfeld went on to make the Academy's advertising posters, which, unusually for the time, were

[227] G.S.Whittet, 'Review', *The Studio: The Leading Magazine of Contemporary Art*, 154 (772) (July 1957), p.31**.**

[228] In the exhibition catalogue for *Contemporary British Printmakers* which ran from 1st July to 30th August 1958 at St. George's Gallery Prints, an additional page was devoted to advertising *Artist's Proof.* It is stated that it 'runs for 25 minutes, is shot in Eastman Colour, and is available for hire on both 35 mm and 16 mm. It should be booked through Contemporary Films Ltd, 14 Soho Square, London W1. In most countries abroad, the British Council possesses a copy. Copies on 16 mm can be bought from the gallery for £35, or $105' – see *Contemporary British Printmakers,* exh.cat. (London: St George's Gallery, 1958), p.3.

[229] It was located above a ballroom until 1958 and then the Marquee Club from 1958 to 1964.

[230] It often showed films on art such as one on the 'Golden Age' of Dutch art in 1955 – see G.S.Whittet, 'Review', *The Studio: The Leading Magazine of Contemporary Art*, 150 (750) (September 1955), p.94**.**

[231] See entries for George Michael Hoellering (1897-1980); George Michael (1897-1980) in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (2014), [accessed 7 April 2022].

made from a single linocut on a brightly coloured background and were Expressionist in tone.[232]
This link to printmaking, although tangential, shows the intersection between prints, film and
advertising in the post-war era. It also shows connections to the pre-war European avant-garde that
existed in post-war Britain.

Erskine was sufficiently encouraged by the reception of *Artists' Proof* to produce another
film *Linoprints* in 1958. I have not found a copy of *Linoprints* but an article in *The Studio* by GS
Whittet provides a description of it. The 20-minute colour film begins with 'descriptive sequences'
of the artist Michael Rothenstein creating the figure of an owl, followed by a demonstration of how
the 'lino is cut, gouged and filled with gesso.' Whittet adds that the 'colour proofing and printing
seen in all the richness of Kodachrome present the chromatic answer that since the war the graphic
arts have made to the traditionally brighter media of oils and watercolour.' [233]

Conclusion

This chapter begins with two letters from Erskine to John Piper on the founding of St.
George's Gallery Print's and his related but unsuccessful plan to open an English branch of
Hayter's Atelier 17. The bulk of the chapter provides a detailed account of Erskine's background,
the layout of the gallery and a description of how Erskine operated as a gallery owner. This material
is mainly historical rather than theoretical and comes from original interviews with Erskine and the
men and women who know him that have never been published before. In this section, I am
indebted to Lisa Tickner's article 'The Kasmin Gallery', which provides a good model for how to
situate one gallery within the broader art scene of the period.[234]

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[232] See entry 'Peter Strausfeld', (online alumni page at University of Brighton: Peter Strausfeld | Alumni and associates | Arts and culture (brighton.ac.uk) [accessed 7 April 2022].

[233] Whittet comments: 'Last year a further film was made showing Michael Rothenstein making a linocut. 'Linoprints' was shot by Anthony West on 16 mm Kodachrome and runs for 20 minutes. It can be booked (in the UK only for the moment) through the gallery at £4' – see G.S. Whittet, 'London Commentary', *The Studio: The Leading Magazine of Contemporary Art*, 155 (781) (April 1958), p.126.

[234] Lisa Tickner, 'The Kasmin Gallery', *Oxford Art Journal*, 30 (2) (2007), 233-268.

The chapter concludes with a detailed analysis of Erskine's media presence and marketing strategies, with a particular emphasis on his film *Artist's Proof*. In this final section, I argue that Erskine's marketing strategies were intended to advocate for printmaking as an art form that was distinct from painting and drawing but that was equally worthy of praise. I argue that he did this by subtly positioning printmaking within a broadly modernist framework advocated by critics such as Greenberg and Sylvester. By focusing on the criticism of Sylvester, I demonstrate that he espoused an artistic philosophy based on originality, creativity and gesture and that many of these ideas were in circulation at the time. *Artist's Proof* conforms to this mid-century outlook by emphasising the direct presence of the artist, the solitary (and masculine) aspects of printmaking and by staging a print exhibition that had the trappings of high art.

The analysis of *Artist's Proof* situates St. George's Gallery Prints firmly within a 1950s discourse about originality and the myth of the artist that would be questioned by a younger generation of Pop artists who came of age in the 1960s. While Erskine may not have been ideologically aligned with this younger generation, he shared two very important qualities with them; his interest in professionalism and his use of the mass media. Erskine understood from the very beginning that printmaking needed to be run in a more professional way and established himself as print publisher who, as Susan Tallman writes, 'puts up the money' and 'often initiates the project, playing matchmaker between artist and printer.'[235] As will become evident in the following chapters, he went to great lengths to ensure that high standards were maintained in the production of prints. This move from amateurism to professionalism in printmaking was part of a broader shift in the 1950s that took place in a variety of fields including academia, publishing, and even in football.

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[235] Susan Tallman, *The Contemporary Print from Pre-Pop to Postmodern* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996), p.11.

By the early sixties, British artists were increasingly present in newspapers, television and books. In February 1962, for example, Peter Blake was heralded as the 'Pioneer of Pop' in the *Sunday Times Colour Magazine*, the first Sunday colour supplement of its kind in a British newspaper. That same month, the BBC aired Ken Russell's black and white film *Pop Goes the Easel*, which profiled four up-and-coming art starts from the Royal College of Art: Peter Blake, Pauline Boty, Derek Boshier and Peter Phillips.[236] Erskine's sophisticated use of the media in the late fifties with the production of the film *Artist's Proof* and other promotional campaigns suggests that he was ahead of the time and receptive to the importance of marketing. The co-existence of seemingly contradictory ideas (in simple terms, romanticism/modernism and professionalism/embrace of commercialism) in one gallery is symptomatic of the fluidity that characterises the period.

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[236]These artists, and many other RCA students, were fascinated with commercial or 'mediated' images and broke from tradition by incorporating them into their work. See - Chris Stephens, Katherine Stout, 'This was Tomorrow' in Stephens, Stout (eds), *Art & The 60s: This was Tomorrow* (London: Tate Britain Publishing, 2004), pp.8-41, p.28.

CHAPTER 3: Early Gallery Exhibitions and Printing Decisions

Three Exhibitions in 1955

In the first few years of the gallery's existence, it was difficult to commission new work because of a lack of printers and Erskine relied on established artists whose work was printed abroad. In 1955, for example, most of the exhibitions featured artists who were not based in Britain and in this section I will look at the three exhibitions from that year for which catalogues still exist: *SW Hayter: engravings, etchings, lithographs* from 15 March to 16 April; *Picasso Etchings 1930 to 1936* from 21st June to 23 July; *Japanese Actor Prints* from 13th October to 18th October. These exhibitions demonstrated the standards that he expected from his commissioned artists in terms of production and aesthetics and set the curatorial tone for St. George's Gallery Prints.

The exhibition catalogue for Hayter's prints is made up of a horizontal piece of poster-sized paper that has been folded into thirds. A large colour reproduction of Hayter's 1952 engraving and soft-ground etching *Figure in Two Fields* (Figure 31) takes up most of the front cover, giving the artist's work pride of place. Although abstract, the composition in orange, green, purple and maroon with black and white is arguably biomorphic because some forms suggest animal life. Here and also in its subtle three-dimensionality the influence of Surrealism and the continent can be detected. The 1955 drawing *Pegasus* (Figure 32), made up of bright green and orange curvilinear lines, was reproduced on an invitation for the exhibition. For the average English gallery-goer, both of these intricate and vigorous works would have stood out as decidedly modern.[1]

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[1] The catalogue includes an 'Introduction' to Hayter by Herbert Read and an account of 'Atelier 17' likely written by Erskine. Herbert Read's anarchism did not prevent him from being one of the most well-connected champions of modern British art from the 1930s to the 1960s. As co-founder of the ICA and a member of the Fine Arts Committee of

Hayter was considered to be the best living engraver in international circles, but he was still relatively unknown in Britain. A retrospective organised by Bryan Robertson the following year at the Whitechapel Art Gallery would help in this respect, as would his inclusion alongside William Scott and Kenneth Armitage at the British Pavilion of the Venice Biennale in 1958. While Erskine was undoubtedly keen to familiarise the British public with Hayter's work, he was primarily concerned with the impact that Hayter might have on British printmakers. For in 1955, he still thought that a London branch of Atelier 17 was going ahead and that it would invigorate the British printmaking scene in the same way that it had done in New York.

Hayter has been characterised as the consummate modernist printmaker because of his ability to transform a medium that had become stale, rigid and old-fashioned into a conduit for spontaneity. Nevertheless, he was an artist who struggled with his perceived lack of recognition and who died feeling misunderstood. Picasso, on the other hand, achieved worldwide recognition from a young age and sustained his reputation for brilliance over his long life. Even more than Pollock, it was Picasso who was the embodiment of the intuitive male genius, an artist whose extraordinary output totalled over 20,000 works of art and who practically turned anything he touched into gold. It was also the myth of Picasso that structuralist and post-modernist critics attacked in 1980s and 90s, with critics such as Rosalind Krauss writing about the undue emphasis placed on his autobiography – particularly his love life.[2]

In 1955, Picasso was in his seventies and occupied a curious cultural position. In the UK, for example, he had never gained full acceptance from a public that was deeply suspicious of

the British Council, he was well-placed to give institutional and critical support to artists. Read was also interested in art education and in 1943 wrote the influential book *Education Through Art* where he argued that education should be aimed to form artists broadly understood as people engaged in different modes of creation. Although Herbert Read and Robert Erskine are not usually associated with each other, they both promoted Hayter's work in the form of exhibitions and articles.

[2] Rosalind E. Krauss, 'In the Name of Picasso' in Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), p.25.

modern art and foreigners. In December 1945, his work had been exhibited alongside Matisse at the V&A and it had been pilloried by the press. A few years later in 1949, Picasso had been criticised by the Royal Academy's conservative President, Sir Alfred Munnings, who attacked his work in a drunken speech that was broadcast live by the BBC.[3] This episode had been so bruising to Picasso that when, in 1953, the Royal Academy asked to borrow works by him for a School of Paris exhibition, the artist refused.[4]

When, in 1955, Erskine exhibited *Picasso Etchings* (Figure 33), the critical tide was turning in the artist's favour and the show was received without controversy. However, in high modernist circles this very acceptance in conservative England would arguably have been taken as a sign that he had strayed off course. The sheer diversity of Picasso's *oeuvre* was something that Clement Greenberg viewed with suspicion and increasingly held against him in his art criticism starting in the 1940s. In 1957, for example, Greenberg used the occasion of Picasso's 75th birthday to declare that since the mid-twenties he had turned into a superficial, disharmonious and decorative artist.[5]

In the mid-1920s, Picasso had begun producing work in a neo-classical style that was part of a wider artistic turn, termed variously as the 'return to order' after the horrors of the First World War. It is obvious why figurative and traditional works that harked back to ancient Greece by formerly avant-garde artists were thought of as retrograde by some critics, especially when

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[3] Sir Alfred Munnings was the President of the Royal Academy from 1944 until his death in 1959. He was an accomplished but traditional painter who excelled at horses and hunting scenes and who was openly dismissive of abstract and 'so-called modern' art. In his speech broadcast on the BBC (part of which was addressed to Winston Churchill) he sneered at the 'high brows' and 'experts' who 'think they know more about art than the men who paint the pictures.' Brian Harrison points out that in some way he was speaking for a large section of the population and cites the public furor that took place in 1972 when the Tate Gallery bought a sculpture or 'pile of bricks' by Carl André – see Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom 1951-70* (Oxford: Clarendon Press/OUP, 2009), p.382. Munning's speech was a disappointment to many artists, including Stanley Jones. Interview with Linda Sandino, British Library sound archive, Track 5: Tape 3 (F14968) Side A.
[4] Andrew Brighton, 'The Politics of Picasso in Cold War Britain' in Chris Stephens (ed.), Picasso and *Modern British Art,* exh.cat. (London: Tate Publishing, 2012).
[5] Michael Hill, 'Leo Steinberg vs Clement Greenberg, 1952–72', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art,* 14 (1), (2014), 21-29, p.24.

classicism became a feature of fascist art. While many artists between the wars pursued what Robert Storr has called 'reactionary modern art,' he argues that without Picasso it would not have had 'an overarching presence.'[6]

Picasso was a prolific printmaker who made over 2,000 prints (mainly etchings, lithographs and linocuts) over the course of seven decades. He tended to work with French master printmakers such as Roger Lacouriére during the 1930s and Fernand Mourlot right after the war, but he confounded them with his disregard for rules: 'He listened carefully, then did the opposite of what he had been taught, and it worked.'[7] It was Lacouriére who printed one of his best-known cycles of prints, the so-called *Vollard Suite* of 100 etchings, made from 1930-37. Although the 29 etchings exhibited at St. George's Gallery Prints were printed in Geneva and Zurich rather than in Paris by Lacouriére, they appear to be from the Vollard suite based upon their titles. Storr believes that the *Vollard* etchings, 'are the most psychologically and formally complex of all Picasso's treatment of antiquity.'[8] Set mainly in the artist's studio, with himself as the artist and his model as his erotic subject, the famous series is an exploration of mythology, eroticism, creativity and violence.[9] As Storr writes, 'it is a wondrously discursive evocation of a Golden Age of heroes and goddesses, satyrs and Minotaurs, bacchanalia and sexual paradise.' The etchings reproduced in Erskine's exhibition catalogue are mostly of the serene rather than the primal variety.[10] One is of a pensive nude with crossed arms and a profile that resembles his then lover Marie-Thérèse Walter (Figure 34). Another is of a sculptor putting the finishing touches on a bust while his placid muse looks on.

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[6] Picasso, Storr writes, was an 'insurgent' who 'had become an assiduous but promiscuous lover of tradition, mixing, matching and mismatching styles with such agility, speed and aplomb that the results caught the breath of even those who objected to his shifting allegiances' – see Robert Storr, *Modern Art despite Modernism*, exh.cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2000), p.48.

[7] André Beguin, Richard S. Field, Antony Griffiths, Michel Melot, *Print*: *History of an Art* (Geneva and London: Skira/Macmillan,1981), p.184.

[8] Storr, op.cit., p.48. Storr also draws attention to Picasso's 1930 illustrations for Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and by those of 1934 for Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*.

[9] Online entry on the *Vollard Suite* by Picasso, Colby Museum of Art – see Pablo Picasso's Vollard Suite - Colby College Museum of Art · Colby College [accessed 5 May 2022].

[10] *Picasso. Etchings 1930-36*, exh.cat. (London: St. George's Gallery Prints, 1955).

However, the final print, *Faun and Sleeping Woman* is darker and more ambiguous (Figure 35). It depicts a faun who is either at the point of violating a sleeping nude or simply gazing at her very intently. While the first prints are line etchings, this one is an etching and aquatint, a combination which adds to its sense of depth and tonality.

In my interview with Erskine he said that Vollard's conception of the print suite was behind his decision to publish series of prints around a single theme. There were, of course, famous print series from the past such as Dürer's 'The Apocalypse', Goya's 'Los Caprichos' and Hogarth's 'A Rake's Progress', but it was Vollard who standardised the practice. Ambrose Vollard was the most important European art dealer from the late nineteenth century till his death in a car crash in 1939. While he is said to have 'discovered' Cezanne and boosted the careers of post-Impressionists such as Degas, Renoir and Gauguin, he was also one of the first and most important print dealers of the modern age. [11]

By aligning himself with Vollard, Erskine was arguably inserting himself and his artists into the modernist canon.[12] Erskine, however, would probably have said that Vollard's conception of the suite was particularly important because it gives prints a cohesion that they can lack when exhibited in a more piecemeal way. In the catalogue to *The Graven Image* exhibition that he co-organised with Erskine, Bryan Roberson wrote that 'an artist can sometimes fail with an individual print, the

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[11] Vollard opened the first gallery for contemporary prints in France in the 1890s and encouraged many artists to produce prints in addition to their paintings. He commissioned printed books and several renowned print series including Rouault's *Miserére et Guerre* aquatints and the eponymous *Vollard Suite*. Vollard's death in a car crash in 1939 and the outbreak of war delayed its publication. It did not become well known until the 1950s. As a result, when Erskine exhibited the *Vollard* prints in 1955 they would not have been well known to his audience (although they had already been shown at the Redfern Gallery).

[12] In the introduction *Picasso Etchings 1930 to 1936*, Joseph Rykwert takes stock of Picasso's reputation, writing: 'Intense & intricate, the huge bulk of Picasso's achievement towers above the crowd of admirers, detractors, commentators, interpreters; being insoluble, the mystery of his art will continue to challenge the writers' baiting, their periodical onslaught.' In this quote, Rykwert acknowledges the controversy surrounding Picasso, but suggests that his art is so powerful or universal that it transcends language. Rykwert's poetic and arguably modernist tone continues when he describes the exhibited prints as 'fatally charming objects' that need no 'exposition.' He adds that 'in these prints, as in all Picasso's work, we are made to witness the hunt after certainty.' Etching, Rykwert, concludes is the perfect medium with which to capture or fail to capture this elusive struggle of 'our common predicament' – see Joseph Rykwert, 'Introduction' in *Picasso. Etchings 1930-36*, exh.cat. (London: St. George's Gallery Prints, 1955).

image can be dull or unsuitable for the graphic medium, but the same artist will succeed with a series or suite in which variations are played on one theme or between connected ideas.'[13]

The production of a suite of prints takes time, effort and money and usually needs the backing of a print publisher. Erskine's decision to produce prints went hand in hand with his desire to create a professional print industry that operated on a larger scale. Print series such as Hockney's 'A Rake's Progress' and Paolozzi's *'As Is When'* would become a mainstay of the print boom and I argue that their success was at least partly due to the example that Erskine set at St. George's Gallery Prints. By exhibiting prints related to Picasso's Vollard Suite in the first year that his gallery was in operation, Erskine was raising the stakes of printmaking in Britain and subtly declaring his allegiance with European printmakers who excelled in the medium.

Japanese Actor Prints, which coincided with performances of Kabuki dance at the Royal Opera House, was the last exhibition of 1955 and featured historic rather than contemporary prints. It consisted of 35 wood-block prints from the eighteenth century which were sold for between one and five pounds. The only image reproduced in the catalogue is a black and white wood block of a woman in a flowing kimono that is not dissimilar to the Picasso etchings in style despite the gap of several hundred years (Figure 36). Japan had a rich printmaking culture and their *ukiyo-e* prints had a profound influence on western artists including van Gogh, Whistler and Degas from the 1860s onwards, following the reopening of Japan to foreign traders. It is, therefore, not surprising that 18th-century Japanese prints and 20th-century modernist prints are comparable.

Even though the revival of contemporary British printmaking was Erskine's primary aim, he also exhibited printmakers from around the world. He was especially interested in Japanese prints, which he showed on at least three occasions at St. George's Gallery Prints. In the 1950s, Japanese

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[13] Bryan Robertson, 'Preface and Profile', in *The Graven Image*, exh.cat. (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery Press, 1959), p.4.

culture, particularly Zen Buddhism, was attracting English artists, particularly those in Cornwall who moved in the circles of the potter Bernard Leach. [14] Artists such as Trevor Bell read texts such as *Zen in the Art of Archery*, which had been published in 1949, and explored ideas around loss of self or non-attachment.[15] Erskine's exhibition on Japanese prints, although unrelated to Buddhism, would have been in keeping with the cultural interests of the period.

Erskine always wrote informatively and enthusiastically about Japanese prints in his exhibition catalogues. In the 1955 catalogue, for example, he explains that the woodblock prints were made by 'popular artists, little regarded by the rich and cultivated, whose patrons were the common people.' This, we know, is a form of patronage that he would have approved of since he thought of printmaking as a popular art form. Erskine writes that 'we can only marvel at the taste of a nation which could afford to relegate these minor masterpieces to the rank of popular decoration.' He adds that their equivalents would be the cheap photographs of movie stars such as Marilyn Monroe, thereby linking these 19th-century prints with 20th-century mass culture.

In all three exhibitions from 1955 that I have looked at, Erskine set a high standard for the prints he wanted to display and revealed certain interests/tendencies that would influence his curatorial choices in the future. When, in a year or two he was able to commission new prints by English artists, he hoped that they would make work that was outward looking and internationally engaged. He also hoped that they would aspire to being as technically accomplished and aesthetically effective as Hayter, Picasso and the anonymous Japanese artists. Erskine, in turn, would help his artists by maintaining professional standards in the production and distribution of

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[14] Chris Stephens, *St Ives: The Art and Artists* (London: Harper Collins, 2018), p.194. Stephens credits the potter Bernard Leach, who had studied in Japan, with helping spread these ideas.
[15] Christ Stephens, Arthur Goodwin, 'The One from the Many: Trevor Bell, 1959', online entry, Tate Catalogue – see 'The One from Many', Trevor Bell, 1959 | Tate [accessed 6 April 2023].

their prints. One of the ways he ensured that the gallery was perceived as a professional outfit was by hiring Anthony Froshaug to design his exhibition catalogues and promotional material.

Anthony Froshaug was one of the best graphic designers in Britain who was revered in modernist circles. [16] He had a long and varied teaching career, most memorably at the Hochschule für Gestaltung Ulm at the beginning of the sixties where he designed their journal. In Britain in the forties and fifties, Froshaug was one of the first proponents of the 'new typography' an asymmetric, sans serif style of design developed by Jan Tschichold in Germany in the twenties and early thirties. Its lineage can be detected in the clarity and economy of Froshaug's design work for St. George's Gallery Prints. [17]

Froshaug gave St. George's Gallery Prints a specific brand at a time when marketing was rare in the arts. He came up with its logo, which was a variation on the traditional St. George's Cross; the vertical bar of the cross was extended and curved to create an asymmetrical 'S' shape (Figure 37). Like all good logos, it is simple and memorable. He also designed most of the gallery's exhibition catalogues and invitations including those for the three exhibitions of 1955. His work was meticulous, and he paid close attention to spacing and fonts. Unusually, he often used several different paper stocks within one catalogue to differentiate the sections. As a result, Erskine's designs stood out as decidedly superior to those being produced by other galleries at the time.

Froshaug sometimes incorporated transparencies into invitations and catalogues for St. George's Gallery Prints. He did this as early as 1955 but took the feature further in the catalogues for 1957 and 1958 group exhibitions which contain transparencies of each exhibited print – 32 prints in 1957 and 40 prints in 1958 (Figure 38). The former catalogue is made of thick paper that

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[16] Froshaug had a Norwegian father and an English mother. He taught for many years at the Central School of Arts and Crafts as well as at other art colleges

[17] Victor Margolin, 'Reviewed Work: *Anthony Froshaug: Typography and Texts/Documents of a Life* by Robin Kinross', *Journal of Design History*, 15(2) (2002), 121-123 (p.121).

unfolds like an accordion and has imbedded transparencies (Figure 39). The latter catalogue is made

of different coloured pages and 2 strips of transparencies that are held together with spiral binding

(Figure 40). One transparency is imbedded into the invitation for the exhibition. The addition of the

film strips makes it easier to get an overall visual impression of the exhibited works in a way that

would not be possible with a few reproduced images.

It seems likely that Agatha Sadler put Erskine in touch with Froshaug, who despite his talent

was often too drunk to deliver his work on time. In my interview with Joseph Rykwert, he told me

that Agatha Sadler was 'unswervingly loyal to Froushag and sent many clients his way.'[18] Rykwert

had met Froshaug in 1949 at a Tristram Tzara lecture at the Anglo-French Art Centre where

Froshaug did the publicity. The Anglo-French Art Centre, which was based in St. John's Wood,

held classes and, as its name would suggested, invited French (as well as English artists) to give

lectures. The short-lived organisation was an avant-garde hub that was frequented by the likes of

Francis Bacon, Henry Moore and Julian Trevelyan and will come up several more times in this

thesis.

The avant-garde community was small in post-war Britain and artists met each other

through a few overlapping networks. Cornwall, as I will discuss in the next section, was a key

artistic centre with links to London. In addition to the painters and sculptors, the area was home to

several typographic printers, including Guido Morris and Anthony Froshaug. Morris set up the

'Latin Press' in 1946 where he printed the publicity material for the Crypt Group and its associated

artists as well as for Bernard Leach's pottery business. Morris, who used the fifteenth-century serif

typeface Bembo, was working in the tradition of the British Arts and Crafts movement that

favoured handmade techniques over mechanisation. Anthony Froshaug, who lived and worked near

Penzance between 1949-52 and from 1954-57, was Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth's

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[18] From the unpublished interview with Rykwert conducted by the author.

favoured graphic designer. [19] The co-existence of Morris and Froshaug in the same artistic community despite their very different styles is testament to the complicated dynamic that existed between the followers of the Arts and Crafts movement and those who embraced a more streamlined and modern aesthetic.

Thanks to the design work of Froshaug and the high-quality exhibitions of international artists that Erskine curated in 1955, St. George's Gallery Prints got off to a good start. He could now begin commissioning and publishing prints by English artists. But without any reliable printers in Britain, he decided to send his artists to Paris where he knew their work would be exquisitely printed at long-established print ateliers.

Printing work in Paris

Prints made in Britain in the 1950s were often presented in a shoddy and unprofessional manner. The paper quality was poor, the colours didn't match the proofs and often they arrived with visible registration marks in their margins. Erskine did not agree with the argument that margins didn't matter because the print would be framed and thought that prints needed to be 'presented in the sheet.' [20] The months that Erskine spent in the print workshops of Paris determined how he thought they should look: 'I could only think of the stacks of superbly-printed editions on their crisp deckle-edge paper all neatly interleaved with tissue in the store at Lacourier's.' Rather than accept low quality prints, he decided to send his artists abroad – usually to France but sometimes to Italy - even if this meant that he 'was not really in control of what the artist did.' [21]

[19] Stephens, op.cit., pp.91-2.

[20] Robert Erskine, 'St. George's Gallery Prints,' in Charles Spencer, (ed.), *A Decade of Printmaking* (London: Academy Editions, 1973), pp. 19-23 (pp.20-21).

[21] Stanley Jones interviewed by Linda Sandino for National Life Stories, a charitable trust within the Oral History section of the British Library. Interviewed April 5 and 29, 2004. Accessed at British Library Sound Archive, 13 February 2017. (Section 1). Track 6: Tape 3 (F14968) Side B.

The first artist Erskine sent to Paris appears to have been John Piper. Even though John Piper had a good deal of experience producing prints for limited edition books, he still credits Erskine with renewing his interest in fine art printing:

> I was not much concerned with making prints for some time, but quite suddenly three opportunities to make lithographs presented themselves, which kept me busy for some time. First, there was Robert Erskine who was running an enterprising gallery in the early fifties in central London and he was commissioning lithographs. He was in contact with Mourlet Fréres in Paris, who were Picasso's lithographic printers, and I went over there for two or three weeks and made a number of sheets for him, and also for Curt Valentin in New York, at whose gallery I had already had two shows of paintings and drawings. So at Curt's request I did a few sheets for him. Two of the images (for Robert Erskine) required seven colours besides black, but the master printer had a plan of work dividing the surface into two areas with the two hand rollers charged with different colours on each side.[22]

I have quoted this passage at length because there are few accounts of Erskine's early years in operation. Piper, who mistakenly thought the gallery started in the early fifties, acknowledges Erskine's role in facilitating his work with Mourlet Fréres and provides an account of how French printers collaborated with the artists to meet their needs. We can infer that Valentin became interested in Piper's prints after Erskine had already arranged for him to go to Paris to make them. Erskine, therefore, was inadvertently responsible for the production of prints by a British artist that were printed in Paris and exhibited in New York.

The two prints produced for Erskine in Paris, *Foliate Heads I* and *Folliate Heads II* (Figure 41), are bright, lively works in a flat, semi-abstract style. Both have theatrical overtones because of the stylized faces with sprigs of foliage that are reminiscent of masks used in plays. Piper was openly interested in the theatre and made many designs for stage sets, operas and ballets throughout his long career. This embrace of the theatrical was a sin in modernist circles and was another reason why his work was later frowned upon. Theatre, Storr explains, 'as a hybrid world of dance, music

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[22] John Piper, 'Working with Printers' in Orde Levinson, *Quality and Experiment: the Prints of John Piper: a catalogue raisonné, 1923-91* (London: Lund Humphries, 1996), pp.31-32 (p.31).

and décor, was the ultimate misalliance of separate forms.'[23] These issues were of no concern to Erskine or Piper and *Foliate Heads I* and *Folliate Heads II* were printed in editions of 70 on Arches paper and are dated 1953 in the catalogue raisonné of Piper's prints. This date, while surprising, is from a reliable source. If we assume that this date is correct, we can conclude that either Erskine sent Piper to Paris prior to the start of his gallery or his gallery existed in another form prior to its move to Cork Street in 1955.

In 1956 Erskine appears to have invited a group of artists to make prints in Paris, although there is no extant correspondence about the trip. These artists included Geoffrey Clarke, Patrick Heron and reportedly William Scott – although I haven't been able to find any evidence of the prints produced by him. We do know that 5 plates by Geoffrey Clarke titled *Harlequin*, *Antithesis*, *Study for Sculpture*, *Warrior I* and *Warrior II* were proofed by Jacques Frélaut at the Atelier Lacourière in Paris in September 1956. The plates were large (roughly 1030 mm in height and 658 mm in length for the sheet) and thematically related to each other. *Harlequin* and *Study for Sculpture* appear to have been printed in black and white in Paris, possibly by Mourlet Fréres. A colour version of *Harlequin* was printed the next year in Britain using a new plate made by Clarke and his father. In 1958, an edition of 50 colour prints of *Harlequin* was produced for St. George's Gallery Prints at the Royal College of Art. A version of *Harlequin* is now owned by the British Museum but the impression was taken later. [24]

The above information shows the extent to which Erskine was operating on a trial-and-error basis during the first few years. One image was reprinted three times in three years on different plates using multiple printers in two countries. The result would have been several slightly different

[23] Robert Storr, *Modern Art despite Modernism*, exh.cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2000), p.30.

[24] See Judith LeGrove, *Geoffrey Clarke: A Sculptor's Prints* (Bristol: Samson and Co., 2012), as referred to in the online entry on 'Print' - see the British Museum's website: print | British Museum [accessed 2 April 2022].

versions of the same print in circulation at once. This might have caused a degree of confusion amongst buyers and be taken as an example of how difficult the printing process was. But it is also possible to see this multiplicity in a positive light. The print, by its very nature, exists as a multiple and the fact that these versions are all different from each other is an arguably interesting feature of the print.

Like many works from this period *Harlequin* occupies an ambiguous zone between abstraction and figuration (Figure 42). The print is oriented vertically and is executed in a limited palette of white, black, mauve and muted yellow on a tan background. The main image could be read as abstract were it not for a disproportionately small head or eye-like structure and a few wispy lines that suggest arms. A flurry of semi-circular marks in black and white hint at organic movement of some kind. The tone of the print is ominous and depressing.

Harlequin is reminiscent of the work produced by artists Francis Bacon and Graham Sutherland who 'turned to the creation of hybrids, extensions of the surrealist investigation of the subconscious.'[25] These artists blurred the boundary between the human, animal and natural world and explored ideas around transformation or metamorphosis. Their influence on a group of sculptors who exhibited at the Venice Biennale in 1952, of whom Clarke was one, was profound. Herbert Read famously described these artists using the phrase 'geometry of fear:'

> These new images belong to the iconography of despair, or of defiance; and the more innocent the artist, the more effectively he transmits the collective guilt. Here are images of flight, of ragged claws 'scuttling across the floors of silent seas', of excoriated flesh, frustrated sex, the geometry of fear. [26]

The term 'geometry of fear' captured the imagination of a public deeply scarred by the war and its aftermath. A collective loss of hope was felt after the atomic bombs were dropped on

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[25] Margaret Garlake, *New Art, New World: British Art in Postwar Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), p.188.

[26] Herbert Read, *New aspects of British Sculpture'* (1952) as quoted in Margaret Garlake, op.cit. p..197.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the extent of the Nazi war crimes came to light. Western society was fundamentally altered by these events, and the fear of nuclear war loomed large. The economic and psychological impact of the war lasted longer than most people expected. Margaret Garlake writes that 'until 1954 almost nothing took place of any social or political significance that was not related to the war.'[27] And by many accounts, it wasn't until the mid-sixties that the English could truly move on from it. While the spiky sculptures of Reg Butler, Lynn Chadwick, William Turnbull and other 'geometry of fear' artists overtly reflected contemporary anxieties, all post-war British artists, including the printmakers in this dissertation, were grappling with the war in other ways.

There is little information on Patrick Heron's lithograph *Red Garden* other than that it was printed in an edition of 30 for Robert Erskine in Paris (probably by Mourlet Fréres) in 1956 and that an impression is owned by the Tate (Figure 43). *Red Garden* is a vertically oriented print in four colours. A dominant blood red is applied with vertical, brush-like marks all over the picture plane – though some of the white background remains visible. It is overlaid with dark burgundy markings and a sparingly applied wash of light umber. A small amount of black is then applied with vertical and horizontal marks as well as dots. The depth of field of the entire composition is shallow, although the black does appear to pop out slightly.

Red Garden is a print that 'reflects a critical moment of change in his work' as Heron moved away from representational imagery and began exploring abstraction even though, as the titles of works from this period suggest, they still drew inspiration from the outside world. In *Red Garden* and related works Heron seems to be in dialogue with the likes of Pierre Soulages and Sam Francis, both of whom were based in France, and whose work was familiar to him.[28] While he was becoming aware of the American Abstract Expressionists, whose paintings were exhibited for the

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[27] Garlake, op.cit., p.4.
[28] Christ Stephens, 'Red Garden: 1956: Patrick Heron', online entry on Tate website – see 'Red Garden : 1956', Patrick Heron, 1956 | Tate, [accessed 3 April 2022].

first time in London in 1956, and whose 'all-over' style he had arrived at simultaneously, their direct influence on him is not considered strong.

The title *Red Garden* refers to Heron's garden in Eagles Nest, the house of Heron in Zennor, West Cornwall that he had moved to in 1956. Henceforth Heron would be associated with the artistic community of St. Ives.[29] The abstract work of Heron and his St. Ives contemporaries was not as obviously related to the trauma of the Second World War as that of Clarke and the Geometry of Fear artists. Nevertheless, Chris Stephens writes that the St. Ives artists 'represented Britain's contribution to an international search for an art that was suited to the post-war, post-Holocaust world.'[30]

Red Garden is important for this dissertation because, along with John Piper's *Foliate Heads I* and *II* and Geoffrey Clarke's *Harlequin*, it demonstrates that from early on Erskine was facilitating the production of high-quality prints by excellent British contemporary artists. John Piper, as discussed earlier, was an established and well-respected artist. Geoffrey Clarke was much in demand in the 1950s, although his reputation did not continue to grow in later decades. Patrick Heron was best known as an art critic but was increasingly establishing himself as an artist. In all these prints that were made in Paris, Erskine showed himself to be thoroughly engaged with artistic trends of the mid-1950s and able to produce prints for his gallery that were beautifully printed and well presented.

Sending English artists to Paris proved to be an extremely expensive undertaking. Erskine had to pay for their journey to Paris, their accommodation and for their use of the printing studio. When the prints came back into the United Kingdom, he also paid a purchase tax of about 20% on

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29 Ibid.
30 Chris Stephens, 'Between Landscape and Abstraction, the Local and the International', in Paul Denison, Sara Matson, Rachel Smith, Chris Stephens and Michael White, (eds), *Modern Art and St. Ives: International Exchange 1915-65* (St Ives: Tate Publishing, 2014.), pp. 8-169 (p.8).

them because Customs & Excise did not regard them as original works of art, which were exempt. In my interview with Erskine, he said that in his bid to persuade the government that prints were indeed works of art, he brought in a print expert from the V&A who argued that he could easily tell the difference between an original print and a reproduction. Customs & Excise eventually agreed to remove the extra tax, but Erskine saw his victory as a 'Pyrrhic one' because they limited edition size to 75 and stipulated that the prints must be signed. In order to avoid an additional journey to France to sign their prints, Erskine received permission for his artists to sign them in bond. This meant that they had to travel to the depot in Dover, which, he said, was highly unusual and very inconvenient.[31] The whole process was so 'infuriating' that Erskine sought out ways to have his work printed in Britain.[32]

Terry Frost and the Production of Prints in Britain

In 1957, Robert Erskine commissioned the artist Terry Frost to make several lithographs for St. George's Gallery Prints. They were titled *Composition in Red and Black*, *Brown Figure, Newbattle* and *Red and Grey Spiral*, and were printed in editions ranging from 15 to 30 (Figures 44, 45 and 46). Frost made an additional print *Brown and Black Action* for Erskine but only a few trial proofs were made rather than a complete edition (Figure 47).[33] Working with St. George's Gallery Prints on these lithographs was important to Frost's development as printmaker.[34] In the introduction to the Catalogue Raisonné of Terry Frost's prints, Dominic Kemp writes that:

> Up to this point, Terry had been doing most of the printing himself, using presses in Leeds, Corsham and St Ives with mixed results. He continued experimenting with different inks and paper types, and turned out proofs with slight variations, rarely deciding to pull an entire

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[31] Longer, unpublished version of Robert Erskine, 'Foreword', in *Stanley Jones and the Curwen Studio*, by Stanley Jones (London: Herbert Press, 2010). The original piece was edited down and contains some version that is not included in the published piece, p.2.

[32] Ibid.,p.2

[33] Dominic Kemp, John Hoyland, Brad Faine, Charles Booth-Clibborn, (eds), *Terry Frost Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Farnham, Surrey: Lund Humphries, 2010), pp. 54 - 57.

[34] Robin Garton, *St Ives and Printmaking: British Printmakers 1855 – 1955* (Devizes and London: Garton & Co, 1992), p.308.

edition. It was only when John [*sic*] Erskine from St George's Gallery, London commissioned him to produce *Composition in Red and Black* in 1957 (Cat 27) that Terry was introduced to the professional realm of printers and publishers. The results were clean, bright colours and bold shapes on a much larger scale. It was a whole new universe and Terry launched himself into it with characteristic gusto.[35]

Frost went on to become one of the most respected British printmakers of his generation and his later success may have been facilitated by his early encounter with Erskine. It is useful to look at Frost's background and early prints in order to shed light on how Erskine was able to jumpstart the careers of naturally talented printmakers by providing them with resources and technical advice.

Terry Frost, who came from a working-class background, served in the Second World War and was held as a Prisoner of War at Stalag 383 in Bavaria from 1941 until the end of the war. Despite the deprivation, Frost found the experience transformational and it steered him in the direction of becoming an artist.[36] It was at Stalag 383 that he made friends with artists such as Adrian Heath and where he made his first prints which were 'crude woodcuts using pieces of timber from the floorboards, nails etc.'[37] Printmaking would inform his practice for the rest of his life.

In May 1946, following Heath's advice, Frost and his wife moved to St. Ives where they would remain on and off for about fifteen years and where they would become part of a close-knit community of artists. Frost made prints in St. Ives and also at Camberwell School of Arts & Crafts where he studied on an ex-serviceman's grant between 1947 and 50. An early monotype from 1948/49 shows the influence of Sickert and Coldstream, the latter of whom taught at Camberwell. Frost's 1953 print *First Silkscreen* was made in the studio of Dennis Mitchell when they were

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[35] Kemp, Hoyland, Faine, Booth-Clibborn, op.cit., p.19.

[36] Frost found the experience in prison to be profoundly spiritual. He later wrote that the war had brought out the best in people, dissolved class boundaries and made the arts more accessible. He wrote that there 'was a genuine belief in the spiritual side of art. Its responsibility to help towards the better life expected by all after the war' - see Chris Stephens, *Terry Frost, St Ives Artists*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Publishing, 2000), p.12.

[37] Kemp, Hoyland, Faine, Booth-Clibborn, op.cit., p.17.

working as assistants to Barbara Hepworth (Figure 48). [38] This print, which is made up of squares and semi-circles, shows the influence of Victor Pasmore and British Constructivism which was another dominant strand of teaching at Camberwell.[39]

Frost continued to make prints throughout the fifties when he resided variously in St. Ives, at the Bath Academy of Art at Corsham Court where he taught life drawing from 1952-54 and at Leeds University from 1954-57 where he received a prestigious Gregory Fellowship. [40] Frost made his first lithographs at Corsham Court but began pursuing the medium more seriously in Leeds. Chris Stephens argues that his art was profoundly influenced by the region's more monumental and often snowy landscapes. As a result, he began working on a 'larger scale' with 'a reduced range of colours and a preponderance of black and white lines.'[41] It was in Leeds that Frost's subjective take on the world began to take precedence over visual objectivity and became more expressive. [42]

Frost made several lithographs in 1957 that belong to this phase in his artistic development and are often related to paintings. In prints such as *Verticals and Sun* and *Composition,* which he printed himself on zinc plates at the university, he deploys a hexagon-like form that is intersected by dripping, vertical lines (Figures 49 and 50). The hexagon, which can be perceived as window or an opening into space, was common in his work from this period and is evident in the Erskine-commissioned *Brown and Black Action*. Here the hexagonal structure is pushed to the edge of the frame and the application of ink is thick and gestural. The structure of *Composition in Red and Black*, which was exhibited at St. George's Gallery Prints in 1957 and sold for five guineas, is based on the intersection of diagonals with verticals. And in the Erskine-commissioned *Brown Figure,*

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[38] ibid.
[39] Stephens, *Terry Frost,* op.cit., pp.13-15.
[40] Kemp, Hoyland, Faine,Booth-Clibborn, op.cit., p.10.
[41] Stephens, *Terry Frost,* op.cit., p.37.
[42] Stephens, *Terry Frost*, op.cit., pp 45 – 57.

Newbattle and *Red and Grey Spiral*, Frost reintroduces a spiral motif that he had deployed in the early fifties and that he would take up again later in his career. [43]

The difference between the lithographs that Frost printed himself in 1957 and those that were commissioned by Erskine is not in their aesthetic merit but in the quality of their production. Many of Frost's early prints were on the wrong paper, with irregular margins and inconsistent editions. The ill-effects of thin paper, for example, can be seen in *Verticals and Sun* which has faded and turned yellow with time. Dominic Kemp attributes their poor quality to the fact that 'editioned prints were not fashionable in England at this time and there were virtually no commercial presses set up to cater for artists in this way.'[44]

After determining that sending artists to Paris was too expensive and inefficient, Erskine began experimenting with English printers. Some of the best printers were employed at art colleges in London and throughout the gallery's existence a significant number prints were printed at the Slade, the Royal College of Art and the Central School of Arts and Crafts. John Watson, for example, who taught lithography at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, was an excellent lithographic printer and according to the British museum's website he was 'a professionally trained printer.' [45] In Erskine's biography of Watson for his 1960 solo exhibition, however, there is no mention of this and he simply writes that Watson trained as an architectural draughtsman before joining a repertory theatre and then the navy.[46] At any rate, Frost's *Composition in Red and Black* was first printed on wove paper in an edition of 25 by John Watson.

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[43] There is no information on the reception of Frost's prints, but they were exhibited. *Brown Figure* was shown at *Contemporary British Printmakers*, St George's Gallery Prints, 1958, and at the *Fifth International Biennial of Contemporary Lithography*, Cincinnati Art Museum, 1958. *Composition in Red and Black* was only exhibited at *Contemporary British Printmakers* 1958. *Red and Grey Spiral* was exhibited at Contemporary British Printmakers 1958 and at the Redfern's 1958 exhibition *Graveurs (2,000 gravuers en couleurs).*
[44] Kemp, Hoyland, Faine, Booth-Clibborn, op.cit., p.17.
[45] British Museum website, print | British Museum [accessed 6 of April 2022].
[46] Watson exhibited regularly at St George's Gallery Prints and in 1960 had a solo show – see *John Watson: The Point-to-Point Lithographs*, exh. cat., (London; St. George's Gallery Prints, November 1960)

In a conversation with Piper, Frost later recalled 'that it was not until he worked in Edinburgh in 1957 that a professional printer pointed out to him the importance of using the right paper.' [47] The printer was Johnstone Douglas who printed *Red and Grey Spiral*, *Brown Figure, Newbattle* and *Brown and Black Action* in 1957 at Harley Brothers in Edinburgh. [48] This experience was important to Frost's development as a printer because it led to a more nuanced understanding of lithography.

Harley Brothers Ltd. in Edinburgh

Harley Brothers Ltd. was a small printing firm in Edinburgh that specialised in the production of litho-printed drink labels that were ordered by larger companies. [49] By the time Johnston Douglas became Managing Director in the 1950s, the firm had fallen upon hard times because the market was dominated by offset printing and their old-fashioned techniques were no longer financially viable.[50] Douglas, who was interested in fine art, 'sought to exploit the traditional skills of craftsmen by offering an editioning service to artists.'[51] After attending evening classes in art and educating himself in fine art printing, an opportunity arose when he was asked to print John Piper's 1956 lithograph, *King's College, Cambridge, from Trinity* (Figure 51). The print was

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[47] Dominic Kemp et al, *Terry Frost Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné*, op.cit., p. 54. *Red and Grey Spiral* was printed in an edition of 15

[48] Christopher Allan, 'Aritsts at Harleys' in *Artists at Harleys: Pioneering Printmaking in the 1950s*, exh.cat., (Glasgow: Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, 2000), pp.6-26 (p.13). *Red and Grey Spiral* and *Brown Figure, Newbattle* were printed in an edition of 30. *Brown and Black Action* was machine printed in an edition of 70

[49] The building had been occupied by a series of lithographic printers for over a century. *Artists at Harleys: Pioneering Printmaking in the 1950s*. Allan, 'Artists at Harleys', op.cit, p. 7.

[50] Allan writes that: 'Harley's workforce included a litho-artist skilled in chromo-lithography who could analyse and break down complex artwork into appropriate constituent colours, several transferrers well versed in all the potential of stone lithography to prepare and proof any artist's images, and printers adept at nursing Greig's 19th century direct presses to pull consistent editions of high quality. These traditional skills were fast disappearing as photo-mechanical colour separation and plate-making for offset printing came to the fore among the bigger and better-equipped printing firms.' Allan, 'Artists at Harleys', op.cit, p. 8.

[51] Christopher Allan, *Elizabeth Blackadder Prints* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2003), p.18. In John Piper's catalogue raisonné, the print *King's College Cambridge* (1953) was printed at Harley Brothers, which puts the start date of the workshop earlier.

commissioned by The Cambridge Contemporary Art Trust, which intended to sell prints to

subscribers in order to promote contemporary art. [52]

Erskine had been involved with The Cambridge Contemporary Art Trust as a student at

Cambridge and heard about Douglas through them and/or Piper. He flew to Edinburgh for a visit

and arranged for the lithography section of *Artist's Proof* to be filmed at Harley Brothers. He also

commissioned Alistair Grant to go to the Edinburgh in the autumn of 1956 to make *Spanish*

Landscape (or *Spanish Mountain*) and *Rain at Honfleur* (Figures 52 and 53). Grant produced other

similarly themed prints at that time such as *Spanish Rain* (1957) and *Rain* (1956) but I cannot prove

that they were printed at the Harley Brothers. Grant was a serious printmaker who had taught the

subject at the Royal College of Art from 1955 and went on to become head of Department in 1970.

In these richly textured and layered prints, which although figurative contain abstract passages, his

affinity for lithography is apparent. Erskine's initial meeting with Douglas was a productive one,

and for the first 12 months of the company's foray into fine art lithography, the bulk of the

commissions came from Erskine. [53]

English artists commissioned by Erskine either travelled to Edinburgh or worked remotely

on 'down grained zinc plates' sent to them through the post. They included Terry Frost, Alistair

Grant, Bernard Cheese, and Michael Ayrton.[54] Ayton's *Greek Suite* of six lithographs, which was

published by St. George's Gallery Prints in November 1958, was 'printed on the presses of Messrs

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[52] Michael Jaffé, of King's College and later Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Michael Newall and Bamber Gascoigne were involved in the project. In the post-war period, fine art subscription services were thought to be a good means of making art more accessible and supporting contemporary artists. In 1945-47, for example, Anthony Emery had persuaded Oxford students to pay 1 pound a year in order to buy work for the university. With the advice of Kenneth Clark, Emery bought works by John Piper, John Minton, Duncan Grant, Robert Colquhoun, Robert MacBryde, Prunella Clough, Michael Ayrton. The idea had come to him when he was a prisoner of war and had been surprised by how little his fellow inmates knew or cared about art, particularly modern art – see Anthony Emery, 'The New Oxford Movement', *The Studio*, 141 (694) (January 1951), 14 -17 (p.14).

[53] Allan, 'Artists at Harleys', op.cit, p. 10.

[54] Douglas writes that editions were usually split three ways: 'The artist would take a third to sell as he saw fit, Erskine would take a third for distribution through his gallery, and Harleys would retain the final third, as covering the bare cost of printing did not necessarily reflect the value of what was printed.' Allan, 'Artists at Harleys', op.cit, p. 11.

Harley Bros' on Imperial Waterleaf paper.[55] The *Greek Suite* is an early example of Erskine

following through with his decision to commission suites of prints by individual artists and it was a

'major undertaking and an especial stimulus' for Douglas and his craftsmen. When Erskine

commissioned Piper for new prints, he began work on *Three Somerset Towers*, a print that became

'one of the largest and most complex prints that was created at Harleys (Figure 54).[56]'

As word grew about the fine art activities at Harley Brothers, Scottish artists also started

making prints with Douglas. As a result, Erskine developed a relationship with several Scottish

artists including Anne Redpath and Elizabeth Blackadder, both of whom continued working with

him for years to come. Blackadder was only twenty-six when she began making her first lithographs

at Harleys. [57] One of these, *Tuscan Landscape*, is a semi-abstract print in purple and black that

Erskine decided to exhibit at his gallery (Figure 55). Erskine was taken with Blackadder's style of

printmaking and continued to show her work in group shows. [58] In 1960, he commissioned her to

make 3 prints related to the Fifeshire landscape in Scotland and in 1963, he commissioned a final

series related to Roman architecture. [59] All of these prints are extremely painterly in their handling.

The trees in *Fifeshire Farm* (Figure 56) are depicted with swirling and feathery black strokes and

the ground is made with dabs and marks in ochre. *Dark Hill*, *Fifeshire* (Figure 57), which 'was a

commission he was handling for the Museum of Modern Art' is in grey, black and maroon and

could be perceived as abstract were it not for the title. [60] Erskine's cooperation with MoMA on

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[55] *Michael Ayrton: The Greek Suite*, exh. cat. (London: St. George's Gallery Prints, 1958).

[56] Allan points out that the print cost 25% more than all of the other lithographs printed at the firm. He also made four other related prints. Piper's presence at the workshop generated a fair amount of publicity in Edinburgh and he was given a reception there on 29 January 1959 – see Allan, 'Artists at Harleys,' op.cit., p.16.

[57] Blackadder was interested in printmaking as a student but hadn't been able to get adequate tuition at Edinburgh College of Art because of its association with commerce - see Allan, 'Artists at Harleys', op.cit., p.18.

[58] She exhibited *Tuscan Landscape* at *Contemporary British Printmakers 1958* and at *The Graven Image* exhibition of 1959.

[59] Erskine's final collaboration with Elizabeth Blackadder came in 1963 when he commissioned her to make a suite of prints related to Hadrian's Wall but only two of these were proofed - see Allan, op.cit., p.20.

[60] Allan, 'Artists at Harleys', op.cit., p.19.

behalf of Blackadder is another example of his interest in furthering the international careers of British artists. [61]

Anne Redpath was one of the Scotland's most accomplished painters and it was she who reportedly encouraged and helped Douglas to apply to the Scottish Arts Council for funding for the Harley Brothers workshop. The Arts Council ended up agreeing to buy '£1,000 worth of lithographs, provided it could choose the artists, and advanced £500.'[62] The Council chose 15 artists to make prints and asked for a copy of every print to add to their permanent collection. In their Annual Report of 1957/58, the Arts Council described the 'remarkable revival of fine art lithography that has taken place' at Harley Brothers with the suggestion that they were in great part responsible for it.

Thanks to the Arts Council, the Harley Brothers lithographic project received a good amount of publicity and the episode comes up a few times in later books and articles on printmaking.[63] For example, in the 1991 article 'The Scottish Printmaking Workshops' by Martin J Hopkinson, he credits the Arts Council with making 'a significant attempt to stimulate serious interest in lithography' without mentioning Erskine.'[64] While Erskine wasn't entirely responsible for the success of the Harley Brothers workshop, he provided Douglas with a high proportion of his editioning work. Erskine did not commission any more artists to travel to Edinburgh after the exhibition of *The Greek Suite* in November of 1958 and it is telling that no new fine art lithographs were made at Harley's after 1959. The demand for fine art lithographs in Edinburgh was small and

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[61] Allan, 'Artists at Harleys', op.cit., p.19.

[62] Allan, 'Artists at Harleys', op.cit., p.13.

[63] On May 24th and May 31st 1958 a two-part article by B.J. Chambers titled 'The Revival of Fine Art Lithography – Tradition and Craftsmanship in a Scottish Studio' appeared in *The Scotsman.* An exhibition *Original Lithographs* took place during the Edinburgh Festival at the Arts Council's building from August 22nd to September 14th 1958. Douglas arranged for artists and craftsmen to provide printmaking demonstrations – see Allan, 'Artists at Harleys', op.cit., pp.20-21.

[64] Martin J. Hopkinson, 'The Scottish Printmaking Workshops', *The Print Collector's Newsletter*, 22 (5) (November–December 1991), 166-168 (p.166)s

it seems that without Erskine's business Douglas couldn't afford to keep going. He ended up resigning in 1961.[65]

There are different accounts of the lithographic workshop's demise. John Piper, for example, wrote that 'within a couple of years the firm had gone bankrupt, and this excellent fellow (Douglas) had disappeared without trace overnight.'[66] This was not strictly accurate since Douglas resigned before the firm collapsed, but it is true that his fine art lithography project ended quite quickly. In my interview with Erskine, he pointed out that it was inconvenient for his artists to travel all the way to Edinburgh. Stanley Jones recalled that Erskine was 'ultimately not satisfied' with their printing work because 'the quality and character of their prints were totally different from what was being done on the continent.'[67] As a result, Erskine began making plans for what would become the Curwen Studio in East London where he was satisfied with the quality and character of their prints.

Printmaking in St. Ives and the Curwen Press in London

In his 1950 article 'British Lithography Today', Peter Floud had written that contemporary lithography was seriously hindered by:

> the dearth of skilled master-printers able to collaborate with artists in taking hand-printed impressions from the stone – in, fact, the absence of craftsman as Clot in the past, and Mourlot and Ravel, in the present, whose skill has so well served French lithographers from Toulouse-Lautrec to Picasso.[68]

Erskine agreed with Floud's assessment and thought that printmaking would not flourish in Britain until he could establish a comparable lithographic workshop in London. The first step was finding

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[65] Allen, 'Artists at Harleys', op.cit., pp.25.

[66] Orde Levison, *John Piper: the Complete Graphic Works: a catalogue raisonné 1923-1983: etchings, and aquatints, wood engravings, lithographs and screenprints* (London: Faber, 1987), p.11.

[67] Stanley Jones interviewed by Linda Sandino for Artists' Lives branch of the National Life Stories, a charitable trust within the Oral History section of the British Library. Interviewed April 5 and 29, 2004. Accessed at British Library Sound Archive, 13 February 2017. (Section 1). Track 14: Tape 7 (F15065) Side B.

[68] Peter Floud, 'British Lithography Today', *Studio Magazine*, 140 (690) (September 1950), 65 -72 (p.70).

the right person to train as a master-printer and he later recalled that 'for this very purpose, I always had my eye on the art schools, hoping to find printmaking students with the patience and potential skills to 'turn the handle' of the press,' he later recalled. [69] He consulted Ceri Richards, who taught lithography at the Slade. Richards suggested his student Stanley Jones because of his 'strong sense of the lithographic medium' and his 'quiet, sympathetic, and unhurried personality which would help other artists get the best out of their lithographs, calm their nerves and, if need be, flatter their egos.' These initial observations proved correct, and Stanley Jones went on to become one of the best lithographic printers in Britain. However, the job that Erskine had in mind 'did not yet exist' and it would take time for his plan to come to fruition.

Stanley Jones, who has written a book on the Curwen Studio and has been interviewed at length for the Artists' Lives series at the British Library, was an important figure in the post-war printmaking revival but I will only give a cursory account of his work. Jones, who grew up in the working-class community of Wigan, Greater Manchester, began pursuing printmaking seriously after winning a scholarship to the Slade between 1954 and 56. While at the Slade he attended a lecture given by SW Hayter on viscosity printing that had a profound impact on him:

> His enthusiasm and authority were infectious. I was being pointed toward new possibilities in printmaking…For this first time I had met someone for whom printmaking was a major preoccupation. To have met and listened to such an individual was very significant for me.[70]

Jones, like many other British artists at the time, felt inspired by Hayter because he proved to them that printmaking could be a serious art form. However, Jones received specific encouragement from Ceri Richards and also from John Piper (who sometimes lectured at the Slade) who urged him to go to Paris to learn more about printing.

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[69] Robert Erskine, 'Foreword' in Stanley Jones, *Stanley Jones and the Curwen Studio* (London: A&C Black, 2010), pp.9-10 (p.9).

[70] Stanley Jones, *Stanley Jones and the Curwen Studio* (London: A&C Black, 2010), p.39.

After receiving his Diploma from the Slade, Jones was offered two university scholarships to study lithography in Paris. It seems likely that Piper, Richards and Erskine encouraged Coldstream to grant him these scholarships but that has not been proven. At any rate, Erskine, who Jones knew from his gallery and with whom he had long conversations about prints, promised to supply him with contacts in Paris. One of these contacts, it seems, was Hayter who gave him a letter of introduction to an up-and-coming lithographic printmaker called Gérard Patris because he thought he would be more open about divulging 'secrets of the metier than the more established studios.'[71]

The learning curve at Atelier Patris was steep because it was competing with larger workshops such as Mourlot Fréres or Desjoubert which employed between 10 and 20 people. Jones worked hard and mastered the continental techniques of stone printing, 'in particular the use of dilute nitric-acid washes to preserve the most delicate work and the mixing of colour followed by the cleaning of the hand rollers for proofing or edition printing.'[72] Along with perfecting these traditional methods, Stanely Jones (with the encouragement of Gérard Patris) experimented with larger brushes and new materials such as petrol in a bid to produce prints that were in keeping with contemporary styles such as *Art Autre* and *Tachisme*.[73]

Jones writes about the fact that the print scene in Paris was becoming quite international in the late fifties. In his book, he states that American artists like Robert Motherwell would drop into Atelier 17 in Paris and that Japanese printmakers were also on the scene. Jones, for example, spent several weeks with the artist Kumi Sugai devising a method of corroding stone using a mixture sand and washing detergent.[74] The effect of these unusual materials can be seen in the greasy-looking

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71 ibid., p.48.
72 ibid., p.50.
73 ibid., p.51-52.
74 ibid., p.52.

markings in Sugai's 1957 lithograph *Summer* which combines Japanese and European influences (Figure 58). As interest in Atelier Patris amongst younger School of Paris artists seemed to be growing, Jones agreed to become a permanent member of staff in January 1957. He also continued to work on prints such as *Alesia* which has stylistic affinities with *Taschist* artists such as Serge Poliakoff who also made prints (Figure 59).

Later in 1957, Erskine arrived in Paris out of the blue and proposed that Jones run a studio for limited-edition prints that was being set up by the Curwen Press in the East End of London. The decision to leave Atelier Patris wasn't easy and at first Jones declined the offer. Erskine persisted and ended up persuading him to spend a few years establishing the Curwen Studio before returning to Paris. Jones knew that the venture was a gamble because there was 'no obvious market' for collaborative printmaking in England. But he also knew that 'in the long term, the foundation of a more permanent professional atelier in England would be a long-overdue venture.'[75]

The Curwen Press, as discussed in chapter 1, had been at the forefront of innovation in graphic design during the first three decades of the 20th century. But by the 1950s the business was suffering, partly because its premises had been heavily bombed during the war and partly because new technology was making their printing methods obsolete. However, as proved to be the case at the Harley Brothers workshop, these traditional skills were now in demand for fine art printing. When, in 1957, Erskine heard that Herbert Simon and his son Tim were considering branching out into limited-edition lithography, he recommended that they employ Stanley Jones as their printer and studio manager and promised to supply Curwen with printing work from his gallery. After the company's board was persuaded of the viability of the venture, it was agreed that the Curwen Studio would be a physically and financially separate venture from the Curwen Press.[76]

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[75] ibid., p.61.
[76] ibid., p.10.

It would take over a year for the studio's premises in an old barn to be renovated. In the interim Erskine decided to set up a temporary studio in the artists' colony of St. Ives. St. Ives had been an important site of avant-garde activity since Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson and Naum Gabo had moved there in 1939, and arguably even before. After the war more artists including Terry Frost, Bryan Winter, Patrick Heron and William Scott joined them. Some came for the summer, others like Heron relocated there permanently, and all became affiliated with the area. The artists of the so-called St. Ives School generally 'pursued a dialogue between abstraction and landscape or nature' and often worked using their own 'gut reaction.' As a result of this emphasis on intuition and gesture, some of them, particularly Peter Lanyon and Roger Hilton, had affinities with Abstract Expressionism and French *Tachism*.[77]

While the work of the St. Ives artists was generating interest locally and internationally, Erskine was likely drawn to the region because their style of abstraction was well-suited to lithography. [78] He also would have known that printmaking in St. Ives had been a 'casual activity' since the end of the war. This was ideal because he didn't have to start from scratch and could instead nurture their pre-existing interest by providing printing facilities, expertise and a London gallery where they could exhibit their prints.[79]

Monotypes, as discussed in chapter 1, were popular after the war and this was true in St. Ives where artists including Bryan Wynter, Peter Lanyon, Terry Frost and John Wells experimented

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[77] Frances Spalding, *British Art Since 1900* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), pp.173-4, p.189.

[78] St Ives was geographically isolated, but it was well-connected to London via dealers and artists who went back and forth. The Arts Council had a strong presence in St. Ives and provided artists with funding. In the mid-to-late fifties new connections were being developed with the New York school of artists and critics. Patrick Heron formed a friendship with Clement Greenberg and in 1959 the critic spent time in St. Ives. The painter Mark Rothko also visited St. Ives. Cross-cultural exchange was in the air, and everyone involved in Erskine's project would have been sensitive to this – see Norbert Lynton, *William Scott: Lithographs* (London: Thames &Hudson, 2007), p.134.

[79] Ben Nicholson had made linoprints in London in the 1920s and also used the technique to make fabrics for domestic interiors. In the 1930s and 1940s some artists in St. Ives held an exhibition of linoprints - see Garton, op.cit., p.306.

with the technique. [80] More unusually, fine art screenprinting was practiced as early as the late

1940s when Peter Lanyon began experimenting with the technique.[81] In 1951, Lanyon developed

this interest with the help of the American potter Warren Mackenzie who had moved to Cornwall

with his wife to study with Bernard Leach: 'I knew silk screening from school and my army work

and set up a studio space above what was then the Leach Pottery showroom,' he recalled.[82] Then, in

1955, Dennis Mitchell established Porthia Prints and enlisted Terry Frost, Roger Hilton, Barbara

Hepworth and Peter Lanyon to make screenprinted table mats which were sold at Heals Department

Store. The venture wasn't a financial success. [83]

The exhibition *Prints for Under £1* was held at Robin Nance's gallery on Wharf Street in

December 1951. Screenprints by Lanyon and the Mackenzies were on display as well as other print

types by artists including John Wells and Patrick Hayman.[84]Hayman, who contributed *Bird and*

Trees, a dark purple linocut with simple markings that resemble hieroglyphs, described the

exhibition as a 'friendly coming together…an amusing idea (Figure 60).'[85] Although very few

works sold and the prints were mainly exchanged amongst the artists themselves, the potter Bernard

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[80] Wells, Lanyon and Wynter were all members of the 'Crypt Group' which was founded in 1946. Some of their exhibition posters were made using transfer monotypes, and their exhibitions often included prints. Earlier in this chapter I drew attention to the printer Guido Morris who was a member of the Crypt Group and printed their posters and promotional material – see also Garton, op.cit., p.306.

[81] Lanyon's father was a commercial photographer so he knew about the technique through him – see Garton, op.cit., p.307.

[82] See online label 'Warren Mackenzie "Untitled", 1951, (Tate online, 2004) - see 'Untitled', Warren Mackenzie, 1951 | Tate. [accessed 24th April 2022].

[83] There was an overlap between fine art screenprinting and fabric design or wallpaper during this period. Patrick Heron had designed scarves for his father's firm Cresta Silks and in 1947 Hepworth and Nicholson had screenprinted scarves. Later in 1954, Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi set up Hammer Prints for textiles, ceramics and wall papers. In the British export magazine, *the Ambassador*, there were regular advertisements for screenprinted fabrics at companies such a David Whitehead - see *The Ambassador* 3(1958), p.21.

[84] Some sources refer to Nance's furniture shop rather than gallery. Warren Mackenzie's screenprints are done in a style reminiscent of Mondrian. Alix's screenprints are more figurative and illustrative. Both Warren and Alix Mackenzie's screenprints were printed by the artists themselves on wove paper in editions of 20 – see online catalogue entry 'Alix Mackenzie "Cornish Fields", 1951' - first published in *The Tate Gallery 1984-86: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions,* (London: Tate Gallery, 1988), p.409. See online version - 'Cornish Fields', Alix Mackenzie, 1951 | Tate [accessed 24h Aprll 2022].

[85] See online catalogue entry 'Patrick Hayman "Birds and Trees", 1951', first published in *The Tate Gallery 1984-86: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions*, (London, Tate Gallery, 1988), p.376. See online version 'Birds and Trees', Patrick Hayman, 1951 | Tate [accessed 24th April 2022].

Leach wrote an article in the *St Ives Times* in which he praised the exhibition for 'seeking to bring their art within the reach of the general public in order to bridge the gulf separating modern art from popular taste.'[86]

More printmaking opportunities came through the Penzance School of Art where John Wells, Peter Lanyon and Dennis Mitchell made etchings and engravings.[87] The most advanced printmaking training, however, was at the Bath Academy of Art in Corsham Court, Wiltshire, where Henry Cliffe taught lithography. [88] Although far from Cornwall, Corsham Court had links to St. Ives and many artists associated with the region taught there. Michael Bird writes that: 'The creative stress on expression, discovery, movement and experiment made the school a congenial place for the artists from St Ives, including Lanyon and Wynter, who through their connections with Scott (a regular visitor to Cornwall) found work there at various times.'[89]

Henry Cliffe was an excellent teacher who provided his students and colleagues with sound lithographic training and access to proper equipment.[90] Like Erskine, Cliffe believed in proper editioning and was one of the first in post-war Britain to ensure that it was done correctly. He was keen to have the work of staff and students exhibited, and in the summer of 1955 curated an exhibition of 54 lithographs and other prints at Dartington Hall.[91] This exhibition, which included

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[86] ibid.

[87] Wells' *Abstraction* (1950) is an accomplished engraving made up of overlapping curved and triangular lines. It gives the impression of movement and three-dimensionality and shows the influence of Barbara Hepworth, Ben Nicholson and Nam Gabo. It was printed and published by the artist himself who seems to have paid careful attention to editioning and paper quality. It too was exhibited at *Prints under £1*. Wells later exhibited at Erskine's *Graven Image* exhibition of 1959 – see

See online catalogue entry 'John Wells, "Abstraction", 1950', first published in *The Tate Gallery 1984-86: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquistions*, (London, Tate Gallery, 1988), p.470-1. See online version ['Abstraction', John Wells, 1950 | Tate](#) [accessed April 24th 2022].

[88] Corsham Court was established in 1946 with Clifford Ellis as its principal, William Scott as Head of Painting, Kenneth Armitage as Head of Sculpture and up-and-coming artists on short teaching contracts – see Stephens, *Terry Frost,* op.cit., p.34.

[89] Michael Bird, *The St. Ives Artists: A Biography of Place and Time* (Hampshire: Lund Humphries, 2008), pp.110-1.

[90] Henry Cliffe made friends with William Scott during the war and went on to teach alongside him at Corsham Court, where he served as the principal lecturer of lithography until his retirement in 1981.

[91] Frances Carey, Antony Griffiths, (eds), *Avant-Garde British Printmaking 1914-1960*, exh.cat. (London: British Museum Publications, 1990), p.179.

prints by Cliffe, Scott, Jack Smith, Bernard Meadows, Kenneth Armitage, Howard Hodgkin and Peter Potworoski, was an early indicator that fine art lithography was gaining ground. [92]

Henry Cliffe became a well-known printmaker in his own right. He exhibited regularity at St. George's Gallery Prints where in 1959 he had a solo exhibition. [93] The exhibition marked the gallery's publication of *The Metamorphoses Suite,* a group of six gestural lithographs with titles related to Greek mythology (Figure 61). [94] In 1960 his engravings were included in the British Pavilion of the Venice Biennale alongside prints by Geoffrey Clarke and Merlyn Evans.[95] While the later career of Henry Cliffe may seem far removed from the topic of St. Ives, the existence of these overlapping networks and friend groups is integral to explaining the ultimate success of printmaking in the UK.

The fact that some artists in St. Ives had already received sound lithographic training from Cliffe at Corsham Court would have encouraged Erskine with his St. Ives project. However, the logistics of installing a temporary studio proved complicated. Erskine remembers hauling a large, flat-bed Winston press from London to St Ives in a truck and installing it above the artist Bruce Taylor's sculpture studio on Fore Street. Jones recalled that the arrival of the button-operated press was 'quite an event' in the rural community of St Ives. Jones found two boating engineers who got it working by installing it with an electric motor and a belt suspension drive.[96]

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[92] All of these artists (other than Howard Hodgkin) were teachers at Corsham Court. Peter Potworoski was a Polish painter whose work influenced Peter Lanyon, Patrick Heron, Adrian Heath and William Scott – see online Tate entry 'Peter Potworowski, 1898-1962' - Peter Potworowski 1898–1962 | Tate [accessed 24th April 2022].

[93] He exhibited work at *Contemporary British Printmakers 1958* and *The Graven Image* exhibitions of 1959, 1962 and 1963.

[94] See online Arts Council entry 'Henry Cliffe' - Henry Cliffe | Artists | Collection | British Council – Visual Arts [accessed 22nd April 2022]. Cliffe exhibited *The Metamorphosis Suite* at *The Graven Image* exhibition of 1959.

[95] His career took off in America when in 1961 he won a Ford Foundation Scholarship at the Pratt Institute and in 1965 he published the book *Lithography: A Studio Handbook.*

[96] Stanley Jones interviewed by Linda Sandino for Artists' Lives branch of the National Life Stories, a charitable trust within the Oral History section of the British Library. Interviewed April 5 and 29, 2004. Accessed at British Library Sound Archive, 13 February 2017. (Section 1). Track 15: Tape 8 (F15066) Side A.

The venture was launched from the sitting room of Bruce Taylor's House with a screening of the film *Artist's Proof*. Jones said that the atmosphere was icy because of the tensions between the artists - several weren't speaking to each other, and some had just arrived from the pub. During this introductory period while the printing studio was being assembled, Erskine, Jones, Bruce Taylor and his wife Jenny drove around Cornwall visiting artists, gauging interest and establishing a rough schedule for making prints. They visited Patrick Heron who was living at Eagle's Nest and Bryan Wynter who had a studio on the headland. They also spoke to John Wells, Terry Frost, Trevor Bell, Alex Mackenzie, Karl Weschke and the opposing factions of Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson versus Peter Lanyon.

Erskine wrote that: 'Despite the charm of the coastal town itself, it soon turned out that the St. Ives artistic community was permanently riven by ill-feeling, both stylistic and personal, which grew into a divisive rivalry between the claque of Barbara Hepworth and that of Peter Lanyon'. They ignored each other on the street and would only go to pubs that the others avoided. Jones had to manage this rivalry quite carefully, and according to Erskine, artists ended up seeing him as 'a mediator between artist and stone' as well as between 'artist and artist'. On one occasion Lanyon and Hepworth were seen working alongside each other in the studio quite cordially – an event that Erskine attributes to Jones's calm diplomacy.

Jones did not enjoy the social tension and found the whole experience to be quite challenging. The facilities were inadequate for edition printing and he ended up proofing the work in Cornwall and producing the finished editions in London.[97] The proofs could be transported in tubes, but the editions had to be packed carefully in boxes that were difficult to transport. It was safer for the artist to come to the London studio to sign the finished prints rather sending them back

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[97] The proof is a signed record for the printer of what the artist expects the rest of the prints to look like and is accompanied by explanatory notes.

to Cornwall. The system worked well enough for the year that Jones was in Cornwall, but it was ultimately more efficient to produce both the artist's proofs and the final editions from the same studio in London.

Jones wrote that establishing a printing studio and overseeing the production of gallery-ready prints in the space of a year required 'considerable patience and determination on everyone's parts, and often much reproofing'. [98] It also meant coming to terms with the collaborative nature of printmaking which wasn't easy for artists who were used to working alone. Barbara Hepworth, who had never made prints before, 'produced two very successful proofs for Robert Erskine' after great effort (Figure 62). [99] Patrick Heron, who spent hours discussing 'printing trends in Paris and New York' with Stanley Jones, produced several accomplished lithographs for St. George's Gallery Prints in 1958 including *Green Night*, *Grey and Brown Stripes*, *Blue and Black Stripes*, *Grey and Brown Stripes* and *Red and Yellow Image* (Figures 63 and 64).[100]

Trevor Bell was another St. Ives artist who produced lithographs such as *Experimental Proof* and *Five Stages* for Erskine (Figures 65 and 66). Trevor Bell 'decided to link his ideas with the work he was preparing for a show at Waddington Galleries in London' and had to rush in order to finish the prints on time.[101] The fact that Trevor Bell and other St. Ives artists were already represented by other galleries could have made it difficult for Erskine to show their work at St. George's Gallery Prints. In this instance, however, he benefited from the lowly status of prints: 'Many printmaking artists 'belonged' to other dealers; but such was the nuisance-value of their

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[98] Jones, *Stanley Jones*, op.cit.; Track 15: Tape 8 (F15066) Side A.
[99] Jones, *Stanley Jones*, op.cit.; Track 15: Tape 8 (F15066) Side A.
[100] Andrew Wilson, 'Patrick Heron "Green Night", 1958' (online Tate entry, 2019) – see 'Green Night : 1958', Patrick Heron, 1958 | Tate [accessed 24th April 2022].
[101] Jones, *Stanley Jones*, op.cit., Track 15: Tape 8 (F15066) Side A.

printed work – too unpopular and too cheap to relate to the high price-per-unit customary for fully-fledged paintings – that I was always permitted to deal with them directly.'[102]

While it isn't easy to access the long-term impact that the St. Ives scheme had on Erskine's overall vision, it was a significant experiment that deserves more critical attention. Erskine's pilot scheme produced prints by Barbara Hepworth, Trevor Bell, Peter Lanyon, Alexander Mackenzie, John Wells, Karl Weschke, Bryan Wynter, Sandra Blow and Wilhelmina Barns-Graham (Figures 67, 68 and 69). Some but not all these artists continued to exhibit work at St. George's Gallery Prints and to pursue seriously printmaking as a result of this initial contact. The gallery exhibited a range of artists and styles but the kind of gestural abstraction practiced in St. Ives continued to be well represented at group exhibitions.

It was hoped that the lithographic studio in St. Ives could be kept open but there was no one to manage it once Jones relocated to Plaistow, East London. The stones and plates used in Cornwall were brought to London where the final editioning of the St. Ives work was completed before being published at St. George's Gallery Prints in editions of 50. In this way, the St. Ives venture and the Curwen Studio were inextricably linked. Erskine did not have any official involvement with the newly opened studio but he had facilitated the hiring of Stanley Jones and helped with publicity in the early days. [103]They got along well and can be seen chatting together in a photograph of the first opening of the Curwen Studio's print gallery in Bloomsbury in 1962 (Figure 70). Most of Erskine's lithographic work was printed at the Curwen Studio. This included Ceri Richards's 1959 *Hammerklavier Theme* suite as well as prints by Elizabeth Blackadder, John Piper and Michael Ayrton. [104]

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[102] Charles Spencer, *A Decade of Printmaking* (London: Academy Editions Ltd, 1973), p.21.
[103] Jones, *Stanley Jones*, op.cit.; Track 15: Tape 8 (F15066) Side A.
[104] For the catalogue of the *Graven Image* exhibition staged in 1959, the Curwen Studio printed one of these lithographs from *The Hammerklavier Theme*, *La Cathédrale Engloutie I*, as the frontispiece.

The Curwen Studio was a subsidiary of the Curwen Press, but it was located down the road to prevent any conflict with the craftsmen who might be offended by a printing studio for fine artists. The Curwen Press employed roughly 20 lithographic craftsmen even though their skills were becoming redundant as photolithography took over in the commercial sector. Jones had to make use of his noted diplomacy with the craftsmen, but also with the unions which still wielded power over the printing industry.[105] In the late fifties it was still difficult for artists to learn about lithography without entering a seven-year apprenticeship that led to a professional job. Jones, for example, had to ask the National Graphic Association (NGA) for a dispensation to 'handle materials on the firm's premises.' [106]

The difficulty of acquiring printing skills had resulted in the inconsistent standards that had so infuriated Erskine when he opened his gallery, and it was because of this that the Curwen Press was such a breakthrough for fine art lithographers.[107] The combination of the Curwen Press's expertise and Jones's continental printing knowledge meant that the Curwen Studio became to the go-to workshop for English artists interested in making lithographs. Henry Moore was the first artist to collaborate with the studio for his 1958 lithograph *Eight Reclining Figures* (Figure 71). He developed a lifelong relationship with the studio that would benefit both parties. John Piper was

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[105] In England printmaking was primarily a commercial industry after the turn of the 20th century. As late as 1961, there were 6,093 printing firm and the industry employed over 250,000 people even though the industry was in decline. Print-related unions included the Typographical Association (58,364 members); the London Typographical Society (20,037); the National Union of Printing; Bookbinding and Paper Workers (158,028); the Amalgamated Society of Lithographic Printers (10,048); and the Society of Lithographic Artists, Designers, Engravers and Process Workers (14,393) among many others. In addition to British unions there were also international unions such as the International Graphic Federation which had 625,131 members in 25 different countries. Data from A.D.O Jenkins, 'The Structure of the British Printing Industry,' Undergraduate thesis (London College of Printmaking & Distributive Trades, 1961), unpaginated – see the London College of Communication Archive, file V2259541, book number 24,258 (visited 3 July 2017).

[106] Jones, *Stanley Jones*, op.cit., track 15: Tape 8 (F15066) Side A.

[107] At the beginning, the Curwen Press struggled to acquire the right paper to use. Suitable paper could be bought from France, Germany and Italy but in England 'there was no mould-made paper made especially for printmaking.'Eventually, the company Barcham Green was able to provide them with the paper they needed. The Curwen Press also had to find good ink for hand rolling and other such materials and equipment - see Jones, *Stanley Jones*, op.cit., Track 15: Tape 8 (F15066) Side A.

another artist who worked extensively with the Curwen Studio or Curwen Prints as they later became known. Over the years lithographs by Barbara Hepworth, Ceri Richards William Scott, Alan Davie, Paula Rego, Patrick Heron and RB Kitaj were beautifully printed by Curwen.

The Curwen Press's initial decision to open a studio for fine art printing was due to a renewed interest in lithography amongst artists and members of the public that began after the war and grew throughout the 1950s. There were many reasons for this but the primary one was that the rich, painterly medium was compatible with the style of gestural abstraction being practiced by artists internationally. The establishment of lithographic studios took place in both Britain and the United States at roughly the same time.[108] In New York, the Russian émigré Tatyana Grossman founded Universal Limited Art Editions in 1957 and by the early sixties was encouraging some of the most important artists in country - Larry Rivers, Sam Francis, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Jim Dine and Cy Twombly – to make prints.[109]

In Los Angeles, the Tamarind Lithography Workshop was founded in 1960 by June Wayne thanks to a generous grant from the Ford Foundation. Wayne, who had travelled to Paris in 1957 to work with the French master printer Marcel Durassier, was frustrated by the lack of printmaking knowledge or facilities in the United States and, much like Erskine, was determined to take matters into her own hands. Both ULAE and the Tamarind Lithography Workshop are often credited with starting the print renaissance in the United States.

The Curwen Studio did not have the same resources as the Tamarind Lithography Workshop which was a non-profit organisation rather than a commercial business. The Tamarind workshop gave artists a stipend, allowed them to keep many of the prints they produced and helped trained

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[108] Some have argued that in the US the lithographic studios came before the demand but this is debatable.
[109] In 1955 she decided to publish illustrated books similar to *French livres de artists*. However, in 1957 a conversation with William Lieberman, a curator at the Museum of Modern Art, persuaded her to publish original prints by artists instead – see online 'Our History', Universal Limited Art Editions website - Our History | Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE) [accessed 24th April 2022-.

future printers such as Kenneth Tyler and Jean Milant who went on to form their own important print studios.[110] While the tiny Curwen Studio was not quite to the UK equivalent to the Tamarind Lithography Workshop and ULAE, it was the first lithographic studio capable of producing high-quality prints for artists in post-war Britain and certainly played a part in ensuring that Britain's printmaking talent was developed in the lead-up to the print boom of the 1960s.

Conclusion

This chapter studied Erskine's early exhibitions and aesthetic decisions in order to show how certain themes were established that ended up influencing the tone of his gallery for the next eight years. In the first year of his gallery, he put on high-quality exhibitions by established printmakers and developed his marketing brand thanks to expert printing work of the designer Anthony Froshaug, who I demonstrated, had links to pre-war modernist circles and the post-war community of artists in St. Ives.

I also outlined the slow process by which Erskine eventually found an adequate means of producing fine art prints in Britain. After commissioning the likes of John Piper, Geoffrey Clarke, Patrick Heron and (possibly) William Scott to make work in Paris, he found the process too cumbersome and expensive. Instead, he experimented with having the lithographs of artists such as Terry Frost printed at London art colleges and also at the newly available Harley Brothers workshop in Edinburgh. Erskine was best able to help artists who had a facility for the medium but lacked technical knowledge and printing facilities. This was also the case when it came to establishing a temporary print studio in St. Ives where Erskine was able to work with a number of artists who had already shown a sustained interest in printmaking.

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[110]Jordan Karney Chaim 'How and LA Printmaking Workshop Advanced the Career of Women Artists', online entry -see How an LA Printmaking Workshop Advanced the Career of Women Artists (hyperallergic.com) [accessed 28th April 2022].

The type of technical advice provided first by the Harley Brothers workshop and then the Curwen Studio, along with a growing interest amongst the general public in printmaking, enabled British printmakers to hone their practice and eventually to sell and exhibit on an international scale.[111] Thanks to these new facilities and expertise, printmaking was able to grow and flourish in a way that it hadn't before. In the next chapter, I will show how Erskine furthered the careers of already established printmakers by commissioning and publishing suites of their prints. A show at St. George's Gallery Prints was often the first time that artists exhibited prints on their own rather than in a group exhibition. Thanks to Erskine, they were better able to establish specific identities as printmakers rather than as artists who sometimes made prints.

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[111]   In the print boom of the following decades, printmakers had many more print studios to choose from, with Frost, for example, entering into a partnership with one in Zurich.

CHAPTER 4: Solo Exhibitions by Established Artists

There is little information on how Erskine chose the artists he exhibited and championed at St. George's Gallery Prints. Exhibition catalogues provide the best means of discerning his preferences, and in the introductory essays to group exhibitions he often stated that he did not favour any particular school of artists and that his taste was catholic. For example, in *British Graphic Art 1957*, he writes: 'We have not attempted to follow any particular artistic creed, for in the graphic arts much depends on the quality of the print and the exploitation of the potentialities of printmaking.'[1] Erskine's solo exhibitions seemed to be guided by the same principle and he tended to exhibit artists working in a wide range of styles who, nevertheless, took the medium of printmaking seriously. Artists given solo shows were usually commissioned to make new suites of prints that were published and exhibited at the same time.

In this dissertation I have tried to impose a degree of order on what can at first seem like a thematically random group of about fifty-five known exhibitions that took place between 1955 and 1963.[2] In chapter 6, I analyse some of these exhibitions in the context of post-war art and culture and argue that his curatorial eclecticism was very much in keeping with the times. At the beginning of chapter 7, I then discuss his group shows that culminated in *The Graven Image* exhibitions and posit that group exhibitions may have been better suited to promoting the burgeoning printmaking movement than solo shows. In this chapter, I focus more narrowly on six well-established, mid-career artists who were given solo shows; Ceri Richards, Anthony Gross, Michael Rothenstein, Julian Trevelyan, Edwin La Dell and Michael Ayrton.

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[1] Robert Erskine, 'Introduction,' *British Graphic Art 1957*, exh.cat. (London: St.George's Gallery Prints, 1957), unpaginated.

[2] There is no complete exhibition history of St. George's Gallery Prints available and throughout this dissertation I have based my selection on a stack of exhibition catalogues given to me by Robert Erskine's wife, Lindy Erskine, supplemented by additional exhibition catalogues at the Tate Library, the National Art Library and the British Library. While St. George's Gallery intended to put on monthly exhibitions, the number of remaining catalogues suggests that this did not happen. It is also likely that some exhibition catalogues have been lost.

Most of the artists studied in this chapter had been making prints on and off for decades but welcome the focused attention and resources that Erskine directed at their prints. Their names appear throughout this dissertation in different contexts, and it is evident that Erskine saw them as allies whom he could turn to for support in his aim of reviving fine art printmaking in Britain. In addition to their solo exhibitions, they participated in Erskine's group exhibitions, gave printmaking demonstrations for his film *Artist's Proof* and allowed their prints to feature in photoshoots to promote the gallery.[3] Erskine formed a mutually beneficial relationship with these artists and while he helped promote their work, they also helped further his printmaking cause.

The first half of this chapter will attempt to categorise these artists as an unofficial group and the second half will analyse their specific solo exhibitions at St. George's Gallery Prints. While other artists were given solo shows, I believe that Erskine favoured these five artists because of their collective devotion to printmaking. By analysing their backgrounds, I will demonstrate that they had a great deal in common with each other despite their stylistic differences. They were united by generation, class and education (for the most part) and by artistic interests. While there is not much information on how Erskine became acquainted with them specifically, it is likely that they moved in the same upper/middle-class, bohemian circles. Post-war Britain was still very constrained by class and many interactions (business, art or otherwise) took place as a result of small, interlocking and relatively privileged networks.

Ceri Richards, Anthony Gross, Michael Rothenstein, Julian Trevelyan, Edwin La Dell and Michael Ayrton were all older than Erskine, some by a generation. Rather than discovering his youthful contemporaries, he was exhibiting the work of mature or middle-aged men.[4] Whereas Erskine had been too young fight in the Second World War, these artists had lived through the

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[3] Merlyn Evans and Anthony Gross gave printmaking demonstrations for the film *Artist's Proof* and Rothenstein featured in the film *Linoprints*. Evans lent his prints for magazine shoots.
[4] Ayrton, who was born in 1921, was the youngest. He was ten years older than Erskine.

Depression of the 1930s, the rise of Fascism and Totalitarianism, the Second World War and its

aftermath. Their art tended to be sombre or serious and is reflective of a generation that had

experienced unprecedented turmoil and was not inclined to take life or art for granted.[5]

Most of the artists in this chapter came from artistic, intellectual or bohemian families with

good connections and a degree of financial security. Michael Rothenstein's father was the painter

William Rothenstein who served as Principal of the Royal College of Art from 1920 to 1935. His

brother, John Rothenstein, became the director of the Tate. Julian Trevelyan's father was a classical

scholar and poet who was a descendant of the historian G. M. Trevelyan and counted Bertrand

Russell and E. M. Forster as good friends. Michael Ayrton's father was a poet and fellow of Merton

College, Oxford. His mother, whose surname, unusually, he adopted, was a Labour politician and

suffragette. Anthony Gross's mother was a suffragette and playwright, and his father was a

Hungarian cartographer. Ceri Richards, Merlyn Evans and Edwin La Dell came from less privileged

families in Wales (Richards and Evans) and the West Midlands (La Dell). Their parents had had

creative inclinations: La Dell's father was a bookbinder, Evans's was an analytical chemist and

Richard's father was a tinplate worker with a passion for music and the theatre.

With these artistically inclined and comfortable backgrounds, it is not surprising that these

men chose to become artists despite the financial insecurity of the profession. For, as stated in

earlier chapters, it was extremely difficult to make a living as an artist even with the addition of

paid teaching work. Until the influx of working-class students into British art colleges in the 1960s,

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[5] The biographical information in the following section is culled from a variety of sources including: *Julian Trevelyan: A First Retrospective*, Nicholas Underwood (ed.), exh.cat. (Brentford: Watermans Art Centre, 1986); Mel Gooding, 'A Biographical Chronology' in *Ceri Richards*, exh.cat. (London: The Tate Gallery, 1981), pp.22-26; Robin Herdman, (ed.), *The Prints of Anthony Gross: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1991)**;** *Merlyn Evans 1910-1973: A Retrospective Exhibition*, exh.cat, (London: Redfern and and Mayor Gallery, 1988); *Michael Rothenstein: The Retrospective,* exh.cat. (Stoke on Trent and Bradford: Stoke on Trent City Museum & Art Gallery, Bradford Art Galleries, 1989); *Julian Trevelyan: Catalogue Raisonné of Prints*, (ed.) Silvie Turner, Aldershot: Scolar Press in association with Bohun Gallery, 1998). Mel Gooding's *Ceri Richards* (Moffat: Cameron & Hollis 2002) *EdFwin La Dell: Paintings, Drawings, Lithographs and Etchings*, exh.cat.,(London: King's Street Galleries, 1984).

artists in Britain – with some exceptions – were more likely to come from privilege rather than poverty. [6] Of the six artists studied in this chapter, most were able to afford a formal art education of some kind, even if they chose to drop out of their studies. They could also afford to travel abroad which, again, was the exception rather than the norm in Britain at the time.

Evans, Richards and La Dell all attended the Royal College of Art. Rothenstein went to the Chelsea School of Art followed by courses at the Central School of Arts & Craft. Ayrton was mainly self-educated although he did receive some painting instruction in Vienna and Paris in the late 1930s. Gross dropped out of the Slade and moved to Paris where he studied painting at the Académie Julian and etching at the École des Beaux-Art. Trevelyan dropped out of Cambridge where he was reading English and moved to Paris to study painting.

Many British artists who came of age before the war travelled to Paris to absorb the atmosphere and influences of what was still considered to be the centre of artistic life. In the late 1930s, Rothenstein shared a studio with John Minton in Montparnasse.[7] Between 1934 and 1936, Merlyn Evans spent time in Paris where he met Mondrian, Kandinsky and Giacometti. While in Paris, Trevelyan, as will be discussed shortly, benefited from the relationships he formed with printmakers such as Hayter, John Buckland Wright and Joseph Hecht. Although Ceri Richards did not live abroad, his work was directly influenced by the School of Paris, and he kept abreast of artistic developments in Europe.

Anthony Gross was the artist in this group who most fully embraced French life. An avid traveller, he fell in love with Paris in his teens and spent his youth there before coming back to England at the outbreak of war. In 1955 he bought a home in La Boulvé, a village in the South of

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[6] See chapter 6 for an explanation of why the student body at art colleges in Britain became more diverse in the 1960s.

[7] Rigby Graham, 'Introduction' in Richard Cumberland, (ed.), *Michael Ayrton: Goldmark Gallery,* exh.cat. (Uppingham: Goldmark Gallery, December 1987), pp.1-5 (p.3).

France where he spent several months of the year until his death in 1984. It is for this reason that many critics considered him an artist who straddled both cultures, with some like Jenny Lee classifying him as a School of Paris painter.[8] Others, like Michael Rothenstein, who wrote the introduction to the catalogue raisonné of Gross's prints, acknowledge his indebtedness to both English and French artistic traditions, while emphasising that he was 'in no sense a modernist.'[9]

Gross's experience working with Hayter at Atelier 17 had a great impact on his development as a printmaker. A precociously talented engraver and etcher, Gross excelled during the etching revival of the 1920s. His youthful prints of French street scenes and moody landscapes were stylistically in keeping with the tonal work of well-known etchers like Muirhead Bone and DY Cameron. But after meeting Hayter and Hecht in 1926, he abandoned the tonal style favoured at the time for a clean, linear style. Gross would acknowledge his debt to Hayter as late as 1973 when he published his book *Etching, Engraving and Intaglio Printing*.[10]

Hayter's influence on Julian Trevelyan and Michael Rothenstein was equally impactful. In Paris Trevelyan studied briefly at Leger and Ozenfant's Académie Moderne before finding Atelier 17 more suited to him. Hayter became Trevelyan's mentor and was responsible for his lifelong devotion to etching.[11] Trevelyan was drawn to the strictness of his printing methods, remarking that: 'He soon had me tied down to the problem of expression in the limited technical medium of etching, which was just what I needed at that moment.'[12]Trevelyan maintained a friendship with Hayter after moving back to Britain. He returned to Atelier 17 for a brief spell in 1950 in order to

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[8] Jenny Lee, 'Introduction' in *Anthony Gross: Paintings Drawings Prints*, exh.cat. (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1989) p. 7.

[9] Michael Rothenstein, 'Foreword' in foreword to Robin Herdman, (ed.), *The Prints of Anthony Gross: A Catalogue Raisonné* **(**Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1991)**,** p.7 (p.7).

[10] Alan Windsor, 'Anthony Gross: A Technical Note' in Robin Herdman, (ed.), op.cit., pp.9-16 (p.9).

[11] *Julian Trevelyan: A First Retrospective*, Nicholas Underwood (ed.), exh.cat. (Brentford: Watermans Art Centre, 1986). Unpaginated.

[12] Trevelyan in *Indigo Days (*p.22) quoted by Frances Carey, 'The Early Etchings', in Silvie Turner, (ed.), *Julian Trevelyan: Catalogue Raisonné of Prints* (Aldershot: Scolar Press in association with Bohun Gallery, 1998), pp.9-12 (p.9).

prepare himself for his teaching duties, first at the Chelsea College of Art and then at the RCA. In 1963, Trevelyan published the book *Etching*: *Modern Methods of Intaglio Printmaking* in which he also acknowledged his indebtedness to Hayter. [13]

Michael Rothenstein came to printmaking relatively late in life - in his forties - but took to the medium with an obsessive zeal and became a devoted printmaker for the rest of his life. In the mid-fifties Rothenstein studied etching with Hayter at Atelier 17 and found the experience transformational:

> What Hayter did was hook me, and it's a debt that I can never possibly repay. When I said I really felt that my life started from the time I began making prints, it's really true. He precipitated an emotional revelation that turned my life upside down.[14]

Rothenstein and Hayter maintained a long correspondence and had a good working relationship. Hatyer, for example, wrote the introduction to several of Rothenstein's Redfern exhibition catalogues. Rothenstein, like Hayter, Trevelyan and Gross, wrote about printmaking and published the books *Linocuts and Woodcuts* in 1962 and *Frontiers of Printing: New Aspects of Relief Printing* in 1966.

The fact that Gross, Trevelyan and Rothenstein all made very different prints is testament to the freedom that Hayter gave his followers. He never intended to develop a school of printmakers and instead hoped his philosophy would unleash the creativity of individual artists. However, some artists did find Hayter's workshop proscriptive because of his emphasis on automatism, line and geometry. Duncan Scoot writes that: 'The Surrealism of Hayter united intuitive and intellectual content, being simultaneously avant-garde and yet rooted in the tradition of European classicism: it was predominantly anti-realist.'[15] Gross, Trevelyan and Rothenstein broke away from this

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[13] Duncan Scott, 'Hayter's Legacy', *The Tamarind Papers: Journal of Fine Print*, 14 (1991-92), 43-56 (p.47).

[14] Michael Rothenstein in conversation with Pat Gilmour and Stewart Mason, 15 November 1974, Tate Archive Audiovisual Collection, TAV38AB, (transcript) p.3.
Michael Rothenstein in conversation with Pat Gilmour and Stuart Mason, 15 November 1974, transcript, p. 14 – see Tate Archive Audiovisual collection, (TAV38AB).

[15] Scott, op.cit., p.32.

orthodoxy by producing work that was related to the real world. But what they did take from Hatyer was a set of technical skills and a belief that printmaking knowledge needed to be transmitted in order change perceptions about the medium. As a result, they pursued the art form seriously, wrote books on the subject and shared their expertise through their teaching practices at key London art colleges in the 1950s and 60s – something I will look at in the next chapter.

Hayter's emphasis on abstraction and surrealism was perfectly in keeping with avant-garde trends of the 1930s, and the artists I have grouped together all experimented with these movements before developing their own personal styles. Ceri Richards showed three paintings at the Zwemmer Gallery's *Objective Abstraction* exhibition of 1934 and exhibited work at the London Gallery's 1937 exhibition *Surrealist Objects and Poems*. His semi-abstract, biomorphic paintings, drawings and prints with sexual undertones from this period show the influence of Surrealism.[16] Merlyn Evans was more influenced by abstraction than Surrealism, but he did show work at the 1936 *International Surrealist Exhibition* in London and at other similar exhibitions. In 1936 Julian Trevelyan exhibited 2 etchings at the *International Surrealist Exhibition*. He became a Surrealist for a few years despite his fascination with more traditional imagery – an artistic dichotomy that he later described in terms of Jekyll and Hyde.

Most Britons participated in the war effort, including these artists. Evans travelled all over North Africa and the Middle East as an army engineer. Rothenstein stayed in Britain but worked for the Recording Britain scheme as well as for the War Artists' Advisory Committee (WAAC). Gross worked as an Official War Artist, documenting campaigns in Normandy, India and Burma. He became well known for the wash drawings he did during this period.[17] La Dell was also an Official

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[16] Mel Gooding, (ed.), *Merlyn Evans 1910-1973: A Retrospective Exhibition*, exh. cat. (London: Mayor/Redfern Gallery, 1988), p.31.
[17] Robert Erskine, 'Anthony Gross: Painter-Etcher', *The Studio*, 153 (770) (May 1957), pp.150-53.

War Artist, working on public murals and camouflage projects, including some with the Camouflage Corps at Leamington Spa.

Camouflage was something that suited artists because of their knowledge of colour and Atelier 17 affiliates including Trevelyan, Hayter and Buckland-Wright formed part of the short-lived Industrial Camouflage Research Unit at the beginning of the war. Trevelyan ultimately ended up working at the Camouflage Corps at Leamington where the AIA had established a nearby Artists' and Designers' Collective. The Leamington AIA group, which attracted left-leaning artists, was responsible forging a bond between Trevelyan, La Dell and Robin Darwin that continued after the war.

When Darwin was appointed Principal of the RCA in 1948, he enlisted both Trevelyan and La Dell to help revitalise the School of Engraving. (Darwin, who was the great-grandson of Charles Darwin, was extremely well connected, and in 1934, Trevelyan had married Ursula Darwin, Robin Darwin's sister). After the war friendships developed between La Dell and the Redfern Gallery Director, Rex Nan Kivell, as well as between Trevelyan, Richards and Evans and their wives. In fact, Richards and Trevelyan played piano and oboe duets with each other.[18] The existence of these overlapping friend groups suggest that a small community of printmakers and print supporters was slowly being forged.

In the first chapter, I described the renewed interest in lithography in the 1930s and 40s that took the form of print series aimed at a mass audience. Rothenstein, La Dell and Trevelyan made lithographs for School Prints Ltd. La Dell and Gross contributed to all three series of the Lyons Teashop Lithographs (1947, 1951, 1955) while Ayrton contributed lithographs to series 2 and 3. Gross, Trevelyan, Rothenstein and La Dell participated in the 'AIA 1951 Lithographs' for the

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[18] Bryan Robertson, 'Introduction' in *Ceri Richards*, exh. cat. (London: The Tate Gallery, 1981), pp.8-18 (p.17).

Festival of Britain. And in 1953, La Dell persuaded Richards, Gross, Rothenstein, Ayrton and Trevelyan to contribute to the 'Coronation Series.' Richards, Rothenstein, Ayrton and Evans exhibited prints at the Redfern Gallery, sometimes for the gallery itself and sometimes for the Society of London Painter-Printers. In this way, most of Erskine's core artists were actively involved in the lithographic revival of the 30s through the 50s.

By the time Erskine began working with Evans, Gross, Rothenstein, Ayrton, Richards, La Dell and Trevelyan they were mid-career artists with respectable careers. Evans exhibited his paintings and drawings at the Leicester Galleries, as did Gross. Rothenstein had shown paintings, drawing and prints at the Redfern Gallery. He also exhibited prints with the New Editions Group at the Zwemmer Gallery in 1956 and 1957. Richards and Ayrton were the most critically successful of the group. Richards had been having regular one-man exhibitions at the Redfern Gallery since 1940 and participating in important group shows such as *Sixty Paintings for '51* for the Festival of Britain. Ayrton exhibited at major London galleries throughout the forties and fifties, including the Redfern Gallery, Roland Browse & Delbanco, the Hanover Gallery and the Leicester Galleries. Like Richards, he also exhibited internationally.

The artists Erskine chose to vigorously promote had been making prints for decades and were some of the most accomplished printmakers in the country. Nevertheless, Erskine knew that their prints had not been adequately represented in a gallery setting and he wanted to set a higher standard for the exhibition of their prints. Proper printing standards, as written about in the previous chapter, were essential and Erskine, as discussed in chapter 3, relied variously on art colleges, the Harley Brothers in Edinburgh and later the Curwen Press. On some occasions artists printed their own work.[19] Erskine determined that C.H. Welch, who printed Anthony Gross's '8 Etchings' and

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[19] Some artists printed their own work. Anthony Harrison, for example, with the help of his wife, Rita Lyons, printed *The Formentera Suite* (1958-59) in deep-etch sugar aquatint on their own press in Blackheath. Rita Lyons also printed other works by St. George's Gallery Prints artists including Laxman Pai's 1959 suite *The Life of the Buddha.*

Merlyn Evans's 'Vertical Suite in Black', was the best printer for etching and aquatints. With the help of Welch and the skill of artists like Gross, Evans and Trevelyan, Erskine helped re-establish the relevance of etchings and aquatints by presenting them in a more dynamic light.

St. George's Gallery Prints showed all types of prints, but etchings and aquatints seem to have been given a particular pride of place. Unlike the small black and white etchings of the past, these were often large and colourful. The increase in the size of prints was a topic that came up regularly in discussions about printmaking in the press and at art colleges during this period. Erskine facilitated the production of much larger etchings and aquatints for Gross, Evans and other gallery artists by finding printers who were up to the task and by organising solo shows where larger print sizes became standard. By finding ways to elevate the status of etchings, he was following in the footsteps of Hayter and suggesting that prints could hold their own against paintings.

The black and white etchings for 'Anthony Gross: 8 Etchings' or 'La Boulvé Suite' as it was also known were made between September 1955 and June 1956. They were on a larger scale than any of Gross's previous etchings (Figure 72). This resulted in a series of challenges that had to be overcome by the artist. For example, in the exhibition catalogue Erskine wrote that the tiny line of the etching needle could sometimes get lost on a larger scale: 'Each plate has an approach which is a variation on the problem set by the unaccustomed scale, coupled with the demands of the subject' he added. [20] The suite was inspired by La Boulvé, a French village near the Dordogne where Gross had his country house. He was fascinated by its landscape and its people and 6 of the 8 etchings incorporate figures – usually villagers in the process of tending or threshing the fields, lifting wheelbarrows or engaging in other rural activities.

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[20] *Anthony Gross: 8 Etchings*, exh.cat. (London: St George's Gallery, 1956). The suite was printed by C.H. Welch on hand made rag paper in an edition of fifty with five artist's proofs. Individual prints sold for 8 guineas, but artist's proofs sold for 12. The entire suite was on sale for 60 guineas.

In some of the prints such as *The Valley*, the subject matter is pushed to the point of abstraction (Figure 73). The landscape has no people and thick parallel lines devised using a sideways mezzotint rocker create an all-over effect. The eye ranges across the picture plane without settling on any fixed point and were it not for the just visible horizon line, the landscape would not be bounded at all. As described in the catalogue, the impact of the work is 'harsher' and more forceful than prints such as *Village Encounter* which deploys a thinner, scratchier line and is decidedly figurative (Figure 74). The influence of 'the all-pervasive abstract trend' on Gross's prints was described by Gustave von Groschwitz in an article on the 1960 print Biennial in Cincinnati where Gross exhibited.[21] But while Gross's work sometimes had abstract tendencies, he was essentially a figurative artist.

Gross was a printmaker who was known for his supreme technical mastery of etching. Erskine describes how Gross experimented with a range of techniques in 'La Boulvé Suite' including broken stippling and the use of a mezzotint rocker: 'The character of *The Plateau* (Figure 75) required qualities in the etching of the copper which evoke the sunny tangle of juniper and wild grasses, and the mild haze hanging over the distance: while something much harsher was wanted for the intractable rocky *Valley.*' Erskine, who considered Gross to be a rare example of a modern-day painter-etcher, wrote admiringly that 'it is he who manipulates the medium and not the medium,' he wrote in an article on Gross in *The Studio*.[22] Indeed, Gross was one of Erskine's most valued artists because he made work that was intentional and specific to the printed medium.

Merlyn Evans was another artist Erskine admired and with whom he had a close relationship. [23] As with Gross, Erskine oversaw the production of much larger etchings for Evans as

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[21] Gustave von Groschwitz,'International Prints', *The Studio*, 160 (809), (September 1960),82-86,115-116 (p.82).

[22] Erskine, 'Anthony Gross', op. cit.

[23]Evans was one of the few artists whose work Erskine continued to engage with after his gallery shut down in 1963. In 1972, for example, he and Bryan Robertson both contributed articles to the catalogue of a retrospective of Evans' graphic art at the V&A from November to February 1973. Robertson, as I discuss in a later chapter, had a lifelong

a means of giving the medium the kind of impact usually reserved for paintings. Erskine later described how 'Vertical Suite in Black', which consisted of six aquatints that were exhibited at the gallery from February to March of 1956, had been printed on an 'unprecedented scale.' Their scale necessitated the use of CH Welch's huge 44-inch press which Evans later bought from the printer for himself. [24]

In the catalogue to 'Vertical Suite in Black', Erskine describes Evans's painterly and calligraphic approach to making the aquatints. The black and white prints, which only hint at natural forms, are indeed reminiscent of Chinese characters and possess the same flatness and verticality of written symbols. In the catalogue to a 1988 retrospective organised by the Mayor and Redfern Galleries, Mel Gooding writes that Evans's work from the period is 'characterised by a hieratic formality and a majestic sense of balance and order with an emphasis, monumental in effect, upon the absolute architectonics of verticality and horizontality.'[25] This formalist description of his work, which does not reference subject matter and instead draws attention to purely aesthetic qualities like size, verticality and balance, would likely have met with the artist's approval since he was thoroughly engaged with modernist art of the first half of the twentieth century. Some of the prints in the suite can be compared to paintings by Franz Kline which are similarly vertical, calligraphic and monochromatic.

The influence of African sculpture is obvious in the 'Vertical Suite in Black', which Evans wrote was a direct 'homage to African carving, from which these designs derive.' In the exhibition

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friendship with Evans whom he regarded as a very significant but underrated artist – see *The Graphic Work of Merlyn Evans: A Retrospective Exhibition*, exh.cat. (London: V & A, 1972).

[24] Robert Erskine, (ed.), *Merlyn Evans: Vertical Suite in Black*, exh. cat., (London: St George's Gallery 1956) The six prints, five of which are sugar aquatints on zinc and one of which is aquatint on copper, are all reproduced in the catalogue. They were printed by CH Welch on Whatman mould-made paper in Double Elephant Size in an edition of 50 with 5 artists' proofs and a few trial prints and states. Individual prints were sold for 10 gns and the entire suite was 55 gns.

[25] Mel Gooding, 'An Artist of his Time,' *Merlyn Evans 1910-1973: A Retrospective Exhibition* (London: The Mayor Gallery and the Redfern Gallery, 1988), p.6

catalogue, he explains that the print *Helmet Mask* 'bears a strong resemblance to the great Banga dance mask representing a maternity goddess, recently acquired by the British Museum' and that *Skull* 'has the family characteristics of Bajokwe carvings from Angola' (Figures 76 and 77).[26] Evans was fascinated with African sculpture, spent time on the continent and acknowledged his indebtedness to the well-known ethnographers and art historians William Fagg and Margaret Plass in his introduction.[27]

While Evans's deep respect for African art is evident in his writing, Michael Clegg draws attention to the problematics of primitivism at such a late date. An interest in so-called primitive cultures developed around the turn of the century and Picasso's iconic *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon*, which referenced African and Iberian sculpture, was made in 1907. It is arguable that by 1956, when Evans made 'Vertical Suite in Black', the exoticisation or 'othering' of cultures (even if done as a celebration of indigenous culture in opposition to a debased western tradition) was morally questionable and/or intellectually uninteresting. For with the decline of the British Empire and the concomitant critique of colonialism, the rise of mass communication and the surge in international travel, the binary of us versus them, black versus white and European versus 'primitive man' ought to have broken down.[28]

As I have argued throughout this thesis, there were many competing narratives during the post-war period and Evans's fascination with so-called primitive art was not simply a form of reactionary modernism. As I will discuss in chapter 6, ethnographic art still captured the public imagination in the post-war period, with avant-garde organisations such as the ICA exploring the perceived continuity between past and present with exhibitions such as *40,000 Years of Modern*

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[26] Mervyn Evans, as quoted in Robert Erskine, (ed.), *Merlyn Evans: Vertical Suite in Black*, op.cit., p.8.

[27] William Fagg, who worked at the British Museum, was one of the first art historians to give African art the 'kind of close scholarly attention hitherto reserved for European work and became the leading English speaking-authority' – Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom 1951-70* (Oxford: Clarendon Press/OUP, 2009), p.368.

[28] Michael Clegg, ''The Poor Man's Picture Gallery': An Inquiry Into Artist's Printmaking and Print Images in the Cultural and Political Context of Post-War Britain, 1945-60', Ph.D. thesis (University of Birmingham, 2021), pp.277-280.

Art: A Comparison of Primitive and Modern (1948/49). Artists associated with the Independent

Group also incorporated ethnographic images into their work. Clegg, however, contrasts the serious,

modernist approach of Evans with the more ironic collage aesthetic of Eduardo Paolozzi while

arguing that both propagated an out-of-date view of indigenous culture as magical, mysterious and

incomprehensible.[29]

The macabre but mechanical aspect of Evans's work was emphasised by G.S. Whittet who

described his work as 'Machine Gothic'.[30] Other critics wrote about his work using the philosophy

of existentialism, which was applied to both figurative and abstract art as well as to literature and

films in the 1950s. This was true of Bryan Robertson who in his 1973 essay for the V&A compared

Evans to the likes of Francis Bacon and Franz Kafka and described his prints as compassionate and

free because of their fundamental humanity. In 1974, Frederick Laws wrote that in Evans, 'tragedy

was to be given a plastic, formal stillness.'[31] And as late as 1988, Mel Gooding wrote that Evans

combined modernist influences with an 'intensely personal elegiac note.'[32]

Ceri Richards was a colourist and a draughtsman whose dynamic line was admired during

his lifetime. He engaged fully with modernism, and much of his work shares striking affinities with

Matisse and Picasso. In fact, his work is arguably too derivative of these artists. Bryan Robertson,

who was a friend and champion of Richards as well as Evans, considered his drawings to be 'among

the finest in this century' and thought he ought to have achieved the same status as Graham

Sutherland and Henry Moore.[33] Although this never happened, he was still one of Erskine's more

successful artists who was better known as a painter rather than as a printmaker.

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[29] ibid.

[30] G.S.Whittet, 'London Commentary', *The Studio*, 153 (770) (May 1957), 26-27 (p.26).

[31] Federick Laws, 'Introduction' in *Merlyn Evans 1910-1973*, exh.cat., (Cardiff: The National Museum of Wales, 1974), pp.5-8 (p.6).

[32] Gooding, 'An Artist of his Time,' op,cit., p.7.

[33] Bryan Robertson, 'Introduction' in *Ceri Richards*, op.cit. p.14.

Richards, like Evans, was variously described by critics as a modernist, an existentialist and a Celt. Mervyn Levy, for example, described Richards as 'the haunted man of British painting'. In the same article he wrote that Richards was 'passionate and lyrical' and described his paintings as the 'marriage of fire and poetry.'[34] In 1973, the critic Robert Senesi argued that this Celtic connection was integral to the artist's 'own personal understanding as a painter of the perennial flux of procreation, death and resurrection.'[35] While this racial and existentialist interpretation of Richards's work is outdated, he did feel strongly attached to his Welsh identity and argued that metamorphosis, music and sensation were integral to his work.[36]

In April of 1959, Richards exhibited 'The Hammerklavier' Theme lithographs at St George's Gallery Prints, which included *Hammerklavier*, *Le Poisson d'Or*, *La Cathédrale Engloutie I*, *La Cathédrale Engloutie II*, *La Cathédrale Engloutie III* and *Ce qú a vu lent de L'Ouest* (Figures 78, 79 and 80).[37] The prints are united by deep colours such as ultramarine and dark grey, an even distribution of colour, a lightness of touch, planarity and compositionally balanced movement. They shift from semi-abstraction to representation with apparent ease. It is possible to pick out musical references such as an abstracted keyboard, but there isn't a one-to-one correlation between title and image. Richards wanted his work to 'create a sensation inseparable from the feeling I have for the subject from which it stems.'[38]And from the late fifties to the mid-sixties this subject was music – specifically Debussy's tenth piano prelude *La Cathédrale Engloutie* (The Submerged Cathedral), which is in in the titles of three of the 'Hammerklavier' lithographs. [39]

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[34] Mervyn Levy, 'The Artist at Work: the Celtic Eye of Ceri Richards', *The Studio*, 165 (843), July 1963, 4-7 (p.4).

[35] Roberto Senesi, The Graphic Work of Ceri Richards, trans. by Richard Burns (Milan: Cerastico Editore, 1974), p 72.

[36] See Arts Council online entry for Ceri Richards: Ceri Richards | Artists | Collection | British Council – Visual Arts [accessed 21 February 2023].

[37] *Ceri Richards: The Hammerklavier Theme,* exh. cat., (London: St. George's Gallery, 1959). This was made in an edition of 50 with 6 artist's proofs, the suite was printed on Japanese straw paper (with no margin) by the Curwen Press.

[38] Mel Gooding, *Ceri Richards* (Moffat, Scotland: Cameron & Hollis, 2002), p 135.

[39] In 1957, Richards exhibited 5 paintings related to *La Cathédrale Engloutie* at the Redfern Gallery. *Hammerklavier* is a reference to Beethoven's 29th piano sonata but three of the six prints in his *Suite* for St. George's Gallery Prints are

Richards, with high-minded obsession with classical music and his apparent disinterest in popular culture or politics, was broadly out of step with the cultural climate of the late 1950s. Mervyn Levy touches upon Richards's political apathy using an approving or at least ironic tone: 'What on earth had the *Engloutie* to do with H-bombs and world hunger and CND?....I doubt if Ceri Richards will close his Celtic eye on Debussy for the sake of a few pennyworth of political fish and chips.'[40]Richards was not alone in avoiding politics and many other broadly modernist or formalist artists did the same. As I will demonstrate in chapter 6, the kind of political art favoured by critics like John Berger tended to be realistic and documentary rather than abstract or semi-abstract. But even an artist like Edwin La Dell, who was left wing in his views and figurative in style, did not make prints that were openly about the politics or culture of the day.

Edwin La Dell, as I revealed in chapter 1, was extremely important in the revival of autolithography (as it was then called) thanks in part to his role as chairman of the AIA Prints Committee and his commissioning of the AIA 1951 Lithographs among other print series. He had egalitarian intentions about how lithography could serve 'the cause of cultural democracy.' And in the next chapter, I will look at how he tried to fulfil these ambitions through his teaching work. [41] However, he is an artist who has been greatly neglected and there is little recent criticism about his work. One of the reasons for this is that present-day viewers have trouble understanding that his 'representational and romantic' style was not thought to be incompatible with his politics. [42]

Edwin La Dell's suite of 8 lithographs, 'The Oxford & Cambridge 8', was published by and exhibited at St. George's Gallery Prints in November 1959.[43] The catalogue cover reproduces a

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variations on the *La Cathédrale Engloutie* theme. Richards was still making work related to Debussy when he participated in the Venice Biennale of 1962-3.

[40] Levy, op.cit., p.7.

[41] *Edwin La Dell: Paintings, Drawings, Lithographs and Etchings*, exh.cat., (London: King's Street Galleries, 1984).

[42] Tom and Maria La Dell, (eds), *Edwin La Dell: Lithographs and Etchings* (Maidstone: Passiflora, 2004), p.8.

[43] *Edwin la Dell: The Oxford & Cambridge 8*, exh.cat. (London: St. George's Gallery Prints, 1959). This was published by St. George's Gallery in an edition of 50 with 6 Artist's Proofs. Costing 7 guineas each or £55 for the entire edition for £55, they were drawn on zinc plates and printed at the Royal College of Art.

lithograph of *St. John's* in which the Cambridge college is eclipsed by a view of the river, a picturesque bridge and an abundance of green foliage on the riverbanks (Figure 81). Other prints have titles such as *King's Parade*, *The Meadows, Oxford* and *Christ Church* (Figure 82). The prints are rendered with strong blocks of colour contrasted with linear elements and areas of the page that are left uncovered. The apparent simplicity of the work belies the obvious skill and adeptness of the artist.

A short catalogue essay probably written by Erskine provides a basic analysis of the prints: 'They represent a number of visits to the two university towns in recent months, and the various landmarks familiar to any alumnas appear against a background of the changing seasons.' La Dell, he writes, is less interested in figures than he is in landscapes and buildings which he regards as the 'most permanent expression of the locus genii'. With these prints, La Dell was working in a topographical tradition that extended back to the likes of Paul Sandby who was a successful eighteenth-century water colourist and etcher of so-called 'views' of landscapes and buildings. The topographical tradition, which was allied with printmaking, was still strong in the post-war period thanks to neo-Romantic artists such as John Piper. And tellingly, the print publisher Editions Alecto, which became known for slick print productions such as Paolozzi's 'As Is When' series of 1965, got their start commissioning topographical prints of public schools.

A contemporary viewer might justifiably feel puzzled about how La Dell's beautifully executed illustrations of an elite educational institution could go hand and hand with his democratic outlook. While I cannot answer for La Dell, it is possible that his radicalism did not take the form of dismantling institutions but of providing access, and that he hoped more working class students would eventually attend Oxford and Cambridge. What is clear is that of all of Erskine's artists, La Dell and Julian Trevelyan, were the most openly left-wing and most committed to the democratic function of printmaking.

Julian Trevelyan, who ended up teaching printmaking alongside La Dell at the RCA, had been profoundly affected by the political turmoil of the 1930s. He became a prominent member of the AIA and participated in the May Day Parade against fascism in 1938. During this period, he became very involved with Tom Harrison's Mass Observation Project in Bolton and although he had made prints in his youth, he only returned to printmaking in earnest in the 1950s.[44] Nicholas Underwood argues that his cessation might have been due to the limitations on materials during the war, the difficulty of making prints while working on Mass Observation and 'a need to work through this very new kind of industrial/landscape/figurative subject matter he had now adopted for his work.'[45]

By the early fifties, Trevelyan was fully immersed in British (rather than French) art, and he began working in a 'tougher more linear style with generally much stronger black outlines.'[46] It was also during this period that Trevelyan began pursuing printmaking as a serious art form. His printmaking practice coincided with his teaching practice; he taught etching at the Chelsea College of Art from 1950-55 and then at the RCA from 1955-63. In preparation for teaching, he returned briefly to Atelier 17. While artist historians such as Susan Tallman have written off his prints from the early fifties through sixties as 'nostalgic topographical', Usherwood writes that this interpretation fails to understand 'what an artist of an older generation, like Trevelyan, was doing.'[47]

Julian Trevelyan's six etchings for 'The Malta Suite', which were exhibited between September and October of 1959 and include *Neolithic Temple*, *Quarries* and *Valetta* (Figures 83

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[44] Sylvie Turner and Nicholas Underwood, 'Between Painting and Printmaking' in Silvie Turner, (ed), *Julian Trevelyan: Catalogue raisonné of prints* (Hampshire: Scolar Press in association with Bohun Gallery, 1998), p.13 – 16 (13).
[45] Ibid.
[46] Nicholas Underwood, 'Introduction: Travelling from Watermans Art Centre to Norwich School of Art to Bolton Museum and Art Gallery' in *Julian Trevelyan, A First Retrospective*, exh.cat. (Brentford: Watermans Art Centre, 1986).
[47] In fact, Usherwood argues that this work 'can be seen as seminal in the development of post-war Pop Art'. Turner and Underwood, 'Between Painting and Printmaking,'op.cit., p.14.

and 84), are topographical and representational but stylised.[48] A grid-like system of horizontal and verticals is used to denote the landscape and the resultant squares are sometimes coloured in and sometimes outlined. In *Neolithic Temple* stones are rendered using a grouping of dots and a few large, spirals. Significant parts of the paper remain visible in all the prints which contain only two colours each. According to the catalogue, the prints represented a departure from his usual work in terms of colour. Whereas his work usually had a cool, English palette, here he tried to evoke the strong Mediterranean sun of Malta with umbers, oranges and deep reds. *The Malta Suite* is in keeping with a neo-romantic style that both Trevelyan and Michael Ayrton were associated with but it also shows affinities with the School of Paris painter Alfred Manessier.

Michael Ayrton had a ubiquitous public presence in the 1950s. He was not only a printmaker but also a painter, sculptor, book-illustrator, author and broadcaster. The critic Terence Mullaly, took note of Ayrton's extraordinary success but posed the question of whether his maverick tendencies made him a dilettante:

> For, ask Ayrton's detractors, who in 1955, can at one and the same time produce large oils, design décor, write fantasies, essays, deliver lectures on Pisani, make films, become a successful broadcaster and write art criticism without being either superficial or insincere?'[49]

Time has not been kind to Ayrton, although it is possible that his reputation may be rehabilitated one day. While Erskine got along well with Ayrton on a personal level, his wife recalls that he was not drawn to his work. Nevertheless, Ayrton exhibited regularly at St. George's Gallery Prints and was one of the first artists commissioned to make a suite of prints for the gallery.

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[48] 'The suite was carried out by a technique of deep etching between January and July 1958. The plates measure 15 x 19 ½" and are printed on a Barcham Green 140 1b Waterleaf rag paper, on Imperial size. The edition prints have been printed by Messrs J Brunsden and J Sturgess on their presses at Digswell House, Welwyn Garden City. There are 50 edition prints of each etching, and six Artist's Proofs. They are published by the St. George's Gallery as from 29 September 1959. The edition prints are priced at 8 gns each, and the entire suite at 44 gns.' – see *Julian Trevelyan: The Malta Suite*, exh.cat., (London: St. George's Gallery, 1959).

[49] Terence Mullaly, 'The Still Life Paintings of Michael Ayrton', *The Studio*, 150 (750) (September 1955), p.79.

'The Greek Suite' of six colour lithographs was exhibited in November 1956 alongside

pencil and brush drawings and three bronze sculptures.[50] The opening was described as a

'publication event' for these swirling and poetic landscapes. Some feature stoical peasants or others

like *Eagle Landscape* are of the natural world (Figure 85). The lithographs, which show the

influence of Surrealism, have a visionary, dream-like quality. Ayrton drew inspiration for the *Greek*

Suite while filming a documentary on Greece called *The Immortal Land*. In the catalogue, he writes

that the prints are an 'effort to bind together the celebrated past and the vigorous present of Greece

and the Greeks.' They are not based on real landscapes or ruins and are instead 'capriccios'

intended to evoke the 'atmosphere of this remarkable country.' [51]

If Michael Ayrton was an artist who spread himself quite thinly, Michael Rothenstein was

one who focused deeply and intently on printmaking. Although Rothenstein had studied etching

with Hayter, he found the technique too restrictive and preferred relief printing (mainly woodcuts

and linoleum engravings). He later wrote that 'all such marks have a sculptural element; something

that comes from the active struggle to master a tough, resistant material.'[52] He also found it easier to

create large-scale and brightly coloured prints using relief techniques, some of which he developed

himself. While he initially printed his own work out of necessity, the act of printing soon became an

important part of his practice.[53]

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[50] *Michael Ayrton: Greek Suite*, exh.cat., (London: St George's Gallery, 1956). The prints, which came in an edition of 50 with six artist's proofs, were sold individually for 7 gns each or the entire suite could be bought for £41.

[51] Ayrton was mainly self-educated and his knowledge of ancient Greece came through his interest in the Renaissance. The Renaissance was a long-term obsession that often featured in his work. He was also interested in early German art (Cranach, Durer, Grunewald), the music of Berlioz, mirrors and the mechanics of flight (thus his frequent depiction of the Daedelus myth). These themes informed his practice and there was a great deal of cross-over between his paintings, prints, drawings and sculptures – see Rigby Graham, 'Introduction' in Richard Cumberland, (ed.), *Michael Ayrton: Goldmark Gallery,* exh.cat. (Uppingham: Goldmark Gallery, December 1987), pp.1-5

[52] Michael Rothenstein, 'Block and Image', *The Studio*, 162 (824), (December 1961), 214 -217 (p.17)

[53] Mel Gooding, 'Introduction: The Art of Michael Rothenstein' in *Michael Rothenstein – The Retrospective : A Touring exhibition* (Trent City Museum and Bradford Art Galleries, 1989), p.8.

'The Sailing Boat Suite' by Michael Rothenstein, which consists of eight relief and lino prints, was exhibited at St. George's Gallery Prints with related gouache drawings in December/January 1958/59. [54] Rothenstein had only started making lino-cuts in 1954 but had, according to Erskine, quickly become 'one of Britain's leading and most prolific printmakers.' The catalogue states that 'Rothenstein maintains that his idiom is "more abstract than people think" and upon examination it does become evident that he uses figurative subjects such as road-signs, farm-machinery, and small sailing-craft as an excuse rather than as a literary motive for formal composition.' The suite was inspired by trips to the Breton Coast and Yugoslavia but was the 'outcome of consistent and painstaking experiment in his studio at Great Bardfield in Essex.' [55]

The prints of Michael Rothenstein have a rich materiality due to the directness of his approach. In an interview with Pat Gilmour, he told her that 'when you ink an object and print it by direct pressure, it has this curious presence, like a skin.'[56] In the same interview he said that he was not a 'subject artist' and that he always worked with 'what is out there in various forms.' This might mean printing from an old piece of wood, a brick, rusty metal or even a piece of plastic rubbish. [57] And in the sixties and seventies, he began incorporating photographic images from newspapers and magazines into his prints. He always wanted to upend 'the idea of a continuous printing surface' by making prints that were collaged mosaics of hand-cut blocks and that incorporated a variety of outside objects.

In the foreword to *The Prints of Michael Rothenstein*, Eduardo Paolozzi acknowledges Rothenstein's engagement with Rauschenberg's use of collage, assemblage and found objects. Paolozzi also draws parallels between Rothenstein's techniques and Max Ernst's 'frottage', writing

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[54] *Michael Rothenstein: The Sailing Boats Suite*, exh.cat., (London: St George's Gallery Prints, 1957).
[55] ibid.
[56] Michael Rothenstein in conversation with Pat Gilmour and Stewart Mason, 15 November 1974, Tate Archive Audiovisual Collection, TAV38AB, (transcript) p.18.
[57] Ibid.

that Rothenstein 'has grasp of the invisible world and will employ any material or use any method to release his vision'.[58] Mel Gooding, who notes Rothenstein's 'indifference to stylistic consistency,' argues that his work is informed by the 'welter of ideas and influences' of twentieth century including surrealism and abstraction.[59]

The dialogue between abstraction and figuration as described by Erskine in the catalogue is visually evident in the 'Sailing Boat Suite' where the distinction between, say, a white sail bounded by the horizon line and purely geometric forms become blurred. The suite, which was made during the height of abstract expressionism, is undoubtedly engaging with gestural painting via the lens of relief printing. Rothenstein, who spoke of the 'therapeutic aspects of working from very free gestures in fairly resistant materials' renders crashing waves or billowing sails in a way that is somehow frozen and still.[60] The rich layering, rubbing and autographic mark-making in prints including *Rock Shelf, Brittany*, which were in fact inspired by the graffiti he saw at Rovinj, Yugoslavia, are reminiscent of Cy Twombly.[61] The same qualities are evident in *Black Mast, Dalmatian Sea* and *Red Cliff, Brittany* (Figures 86 and 87).

Relief printing was not particularly fashionable in the 1950s and 60s. Rothenstein, however, pursued his own path single-mindedly and became the best-known relief printmaker in Britain.[62] He demonstrated the technique in the film *Linocuts* made with Robert Erskine and remained an active promoter of printmaking for the rest of his career. One of the more formal means of doing this came in 1965 when he became a founding member of the Printmaker's Council, a non-profit organisation

[58] Eduardo Paolozzi, 'Foreword' in Tessa Sidey, (ed.), *The Prints of Michael Rothenstein*, exh.cat. (Aldershot, Hants: Scolar Press, 1993), p.7.

[59] Gooding, 'Introduction: The Art of Michael Rothenstein', op.cit.

[60] Michael Rothenstein in conversation with Pat Gilmour and Stuart Mason, 15 November 1974, transcript, p. 13 – see Tate Archive Audiovisual collection, (TAV38AB).

[61] Whittet, 'London Commentary', op.cit.

[62] In 1956 he won first prize in the Giles Bequest Competition for his linocut *Cockerel Turning Round* and a few years later in 1962 he won a prestigious Trust House award in Erskine's *Graven Image* exhibition for the print *Liqutio*.

whose aim was 'to enhance the public's conception of printmaking as an art form and to make known to a wider audience both traditional and innovative printmaking techniques.'[63]

Several of Erskine's affiliated artists were instrumental in the creation of the Printmaker's Council including Stanley Jones, Julian Trevelyan and Anthony Gross, who served as its first President.[64] The establishment of the Printmaker's Council by Erskine's affiliated artists shows how well their interests were aligned with his and how they went on to support his overall mission after St. George's Gallery had closed. During the height of the print-boom they were in their fifties and sixties. While their work at this stage of their lives was not always conversant with zeitgeist, they were still able to use their expertise to support printmakers, print exhibitions and print culture in general.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have looked at the lives and careers of the printmakers who Erskine worked closely with throughout his directorship of St. George's Gallery Prints. I have addressed their relatively similar backgrounds, arguing that their class backgrounds enabled them to pursue art at a time when very little money could be made from selling fine art prints. Even more unusually, most of these artists showed a devotion to printmaking at a time when it had fallen out of fashion. As a young gallery owner starting out, it was easier for Erskine to work with seasoned printmakers rather than to goad painters with graphic potential into making prints – something he also did. By associating with relatively established printmakers, he did not have to start entirely from scratch and could even learn more about the medium through them. They brought a degree of prestige to what was at first an unknown enterprise and helped steer him in the right direction as he began to build

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[63] See online entry on the establishment of the Printmakers Council on Artbiogs.co.uk: Printmakers Council | Artist Biographies (artbiogs.co.uk), [accessed 29 April 2022].
[64] Another founding member was Agatha Sorel, an important London-based printmaker who studied with Hayter in Paris and moved back to England at around the time St. George's Gallery Prints closed – see Scott, op.cit., p.56.

up a roster of artists. And also, as stated in chapter 3, he benefited from the fact that he could exhibit the prints of artists who were technically represented by other galleries.

What did Erskine provide for these artists in return? He upped the ante of their printmaking practice by professionalising printing and production standards, serving as a print publisher as well as a gallerist, commissioning significant suites of prints rather than individual works, staging both solo shows and annual group shows of contemporary graphic art, actively promoting their work both at home and abroad, paying his artists well and generally raising the profile of the medium through a multi-pronged media strategy. Whereas the Redfern Gallery and Zwemmer's dealt in prints on the side, so to speak, St. George's Gallery Prints was the only outfit in the country that dealt solely in contemporary prints. With Erskine fine art printmakers found their first full-time advocate who devoted nearly ten years to energetically championing original printmaking.

The revival of printmaking in the 1950s was not solely due to Erskine's efforts, and the main artists he championed had done a great deal of the groundwork themselves during the proceeding decades. Nevertheless, he gave them the support they needed to make some of their finest prints to date. In essence he was showcasing what was already there but had been relatively ignored – prints by some of the best artists in Britain - but he was repackaging or rebranding the work for a new era. While the work exhibited, which reflected the concerns of an older war-torn generation, is not always considered ground-breaking in terms of content or style, the act of exhibiting it in the way that he did was innovative in and of itself and paved the way for the next generation of print dealers who came into their own in the 1960s

In addition to characterising the artists in this chapter as an unofficial group who were united by a common interest in reviving prints, I have analysed their work individually and tried to give them a degree of cohesion despite their stylistic diversity. In the next chapter, I will look at the part London art colleges played in the revival of printmaking and draw attention to the fact that

several of Erskine's core artists were employed as printmaking instructors. I will argue that they

were able to shift conservative attitudes towards the medium thanks to their Hayter-inspired

practices and nurture a new generation of printmakers. As a result, their collective network of

influence expanded, and the printmaking movement grew. While the focus on art colleges in the

next chapter arguably breaks up the flow of the narrative, the information adds to the overall story

of the rise of printmaking and is therefore a necessary addition.

CHAPTER 5: Art Colleges and the Revival of British Printmaking

The period from the end of the Second World War through the mid-sixties saw remarkable changes to Britain's entire educational system, which grew enormously and was transformed from a fundamentally Victorian model to a more democratic and student-focused one.[1] Rab Butler's Education Act of 1944, which came into full force with the new Labour Government of 1945, aimed to provide all pupils with free secondary education and was intended to rectify the class inequalities of the past and make life fairer to those who had suffered during the Second World War.[2]

Although class barriers were difficult to dismantle, the Act of 1944 set in motion the expansion of secondary education and in turn higher education. The state's contribution to higher education increased from £7 million in 1946 to £157 million in 1966 and by the late sixties there were three times as many universities as there had been in the late thirties.[3] The number of university students increased 'by nearly a quarter by 1950 and by an unprecedented three-quarters between 1961 and 1968.' As a result, university became accessible to a larger cross-section of the population.[4]

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[1] Government spending on education increased by threefold between 1950-1980. And the number of children going to school increased from 5.3 million in England to 7.6 million in 1970 – see Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom 1951-70* (Oxford: Clarendon Press/OUP, 2009), p.349.

[2] Quite quickly the tripartite system of grammar schools, secondary modern schools and secondary technical schools was criticized for its streaming of students according to ability. Those who didn't get into the selective grammar schools were perceived to be disadvantaged. By the 1950s, the journey to so-called 'comprehensivisation' was already underway so that all students would be taught together – see Harrison, op.cit., p.353.

[3] Barry Curtis, 'A Highly Plastic and Mobile Environment', in Chris Stephens, Katharine Stout, (eds), *Art &the 60s: This Was Tomorrow*, (London: Tate Britain, 2004), pp.46-63 (p.58.)

[4] Harrison, op.cit., pp.358 - 362. Harrison draws attention to the fact that the professional middle classes benefited disproportionately from the expansion of higher education. Working class students were not necessarily better off. He writes that their traditional route to university had been through adult education, often with the help of the trade union movement and the Workers' Educational Association (WEA). This was true of Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson, Hugh Gaitskell and Richard Crossman.

Art Colleges were affected by the expansion of higher education and student attendance also increased during the post-war period. Some were mature students enrolling on ex-serviceman's grants and others were working-class students who were the first in their families to go to university. Many of these students sensed that the British art world was opening-up and that there were new opportunities for them.[5] Because they were older, experienced and from more diverse backgrounds, these students helped to create an atmosphere that was more experimental and rebellious, and less deferential than it had been.[6] But despite the energy and excitement that pervaded art colleges in the 1950s, there was tension over how art should be taught in an increasingly technologically driven and consumerist society.

The period of this dissertation was a transitional one that saw art colleges shedding the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement and turning to the Bauhaus and modernism for inspiration.[7] Most students studying during the period covered by this dissertation were working towards the National Diploma in Design (NDD) that had been established in 1949. With hindsight, the NDD put too much emphasis on old methods of craftsmanship that were rapidly becoming obsolete and was thought to eschew modernism. In the mid-fifties the government began to re-evaluate art education and laid out the plans for the Diploma of Art and Design (Dip.AD) which was approved in 1963.[8] The Dip.AD was intended as the art/design equivalent of a university

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[5] Margaret Garlake, *New Art New World: British Art in Postwar Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), p.4.

[6] Alex Seago argues the relationship between military service and art education provides a vital and overlooked clue as to why 'art schools became important catalysts of change in the 1950s.' He writes that ex-servicemen at art colleges had a 'disruptive' presence that 'radically altered the rather genteel atmosphere' and resulted in a period of 'iconoclastic, student-led experimentation.' See Alex Seago, *Burning the Box of Beautiful Things: The Development of a Postmodern Sensibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p.77.

[7] Paul Wood, 'Between God and the Saucepan: Some Aspects of Art Education in England from the Mid-Nineteenth Century until Today', in Chris Stephens, (ed.), *The History of British Art: 1870 – Now* (New Haven CT and London: Yale Centre for Publishing Art and Tate, 2008), pp.162-187p.176.

[8] William Coldstream, in addition to his work at the Slade, was Chairman of the National Advisory Council on Art Education between 1958 and 1971. In this role, he oversaw the so-called Coldstream Report which came up with proposal for what came to be the Diploma in Art and Science (Dip.AD).

degree. It was made up of a one-year Basic Design course (later named a Foundation course) followed by a three-year programme of study and is still the model for art education in Britain.[9]

Alex Seago points out that the replacement of the NDD with Dip. AD actually resulted in a lack of consensus of any kind about how art should be taught and contributed to what some perceived as an interdisciplinary free-for-all in the 1960s.[10] In the 1950s, however, the issues that led to the abandonment of the NDD were debated and discussed with serious aims. A topic that comes up frequently in the archives of the Royal College of Art, the Slade, the Central School of Arts and Crafts and the London School of Printing and Graphic Arts, as well as in the literature from the period, is the role that design should play in art education. Design is a broad term and it sometimes referred to practical areas of study such as industrial design or book illustration. But equally, art colleges grappled with the question of how to apply design principles to traditionally high art subjects.

The application of design principles was one component of the influential Basic Design course that made such a mark on art circles in the 1950s and lived on in a more diluted form in the Basic Design course of the Dip AD. It was also a consideration in the 1950s and early 60s when colleges tried to divide subjects along departmental lines. Should printmaking, for example, be taught in the Department of Graphic Design or the Department of Painting? Some educators argued that it would be better to dissolve these distinctions between design and art and take a more interdisciplinary approach to both subjects and materials.

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[9] It was immediately criticised because of a minimum age requirement of 18, an academic requirement, the loss of local and part-time vocational students in favour of full-time students, and the massive culling of art colleges that took place as a result of it. Controversy over the DipAD continued into the 60s and played a small part in the student protests at Hornsey College of Art in 1968. Amongst their criticisms was the academic entrance requirement for the Dip.AD. The Movement for Rethinking Art and Design Education (MORADE) eventually grew out of discontent over art education – see Stephen Hunt, '50 years ago: May 1968 and the British art school uprising', https://www.researchcghe.org/blog/2018-05-04-50-years-ago-may-1968-and-the-british-art-school-uprising/, [accessed 5 May 2022].

[10] Seago,op.cit., p. 23.

In this chapter I will look at how the printmaking departments at several influential art colleges in London navigated this period of flux and helped create a distinct new role for a medium whose status and economic viability would alter beyond recognition by the mid-1960s. My decision about which colleges to focus on was based on several factors including the existence of archives to draw upon, the relationship that Erskine had with these colleges and/or their overall standing as institutions. I will also look at Birgit Skiold's Print Workshop, which I will argue played an educative function for young print makers.

The Slade

A new era began for the Slade in 1949 with the appointment of William Coldstream as Slade Professor. Like Robin Darwin at the RCA, he remained in his post for over 20 years (Darwin retired in 1971 and Coldstream in 1975) and made a significant impact on the institution. Coldstream found the Slade in a bad way after the war and began to implement a series of initiatives that he hoped would improve the school's overall standing.

One of Coldstream's first concerns was that the staff/student ratio at the Slade was high relative to other comparable schools (a ratio of 1 staff member to 62 students at the Slade, 1 to 20 at Camberwell, and 1 to 22 at the RCA) and started hiring more faculty members.[11] Coldstream solicited the advice of others and received several responses from trusted colleagues about how to steer the school in a new direction. The most important for the purposes of this PhD were two letters written by Lynton Lamb, an artist, illustrator and writer, on the 1st of September 1949 and the 9th March 1950 in which he wrote about how design should be taught at the Slade in a way that accorded with the school's general vision.[12]

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[11] Information in this section comes from the Slade archive at the UCL Art Museum visited on 9 August 2017.

[12] Lynton Lamb was closely involved with the Oxford University Press for many decades. He co-edited the Oxford Paperback series with Quentin Bell, designed book-bindings and postage stamps. He was also a painter and printmaker. He was head of Lithography at the Slade from 1950 until his retirement in 1970.

In the first letter Lamb writes in general about how the lack of 'interplay of painting and decoration' is a grave problem in England.[13] In the second letter he makes this argument more specific by providing 'some observations which I hope may be of help to you in the reorganisation of your design school'. He concedes that the Slade is primarily a school for painting, drawing and sculpture and should not attempt to produce professional designers. That said, he believes that design should be better incorporated into the curriculum in order to benefit fine artists. He writes that painting and design have always been complementary and faults the Slade for not trying to 'relate the subjects.' He is critical of the fact that the staff are entirely separate, and that design is an 'extra' subject looked upon with prejudice by students. He concludes his letter with five recommendations including that design 'should be taken by all students as an essential part of their academic education.' He clarifies that design classes should be limited to engraving, lithography, etching, book illustration, murals, theatre design and costume rather than more obviously commercial courses.[14]

Lynton Lamb's words to Coldstream made an impact, and several of his recommendations were implemented. The retirement in 1950 of Norman Janes, the head of the etching department, gave Coldstream the opportunity to replace him with the distinguished printmaker John Buckland-Wright. Buckland-Wright was born in New Zealand in 1897. He taught himself engraving at the age of 24, perfecting his technique with the help of Hayter who became a close friend and mentor. Buckland-Wright was a member of the London Group and the Society of Wood Engravers and was best known for his work as an illustrator for the Golden Cockerel Press and the Halcyon Press. After settling in England in 1940, he found teaching work at the Anglo-French Art Centre, the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts, and eventually the Slade School.

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[13] Letter from Lynton Lamb to William Coldstream dated 1 September 1949.
[14] Letter from Lynton Lamb to William Coldstream dated 9 March 1950.

John Buckland-Wright and Lynton Lamb shared similar views about the importance of integrating design and fine art. In his 1953 book *Etching and Engraving: Techniques and the Modern Trend* Buckland-Wright wrote:

> These techniques [etching and engraving] are not and should not be, regarded as forms of specialisation, the curse of the modern world; but should be part and parcel of every artist's equipment, a corollary to drawing and painting. There is an unfortunate tendency in art schools today to separate illustration and design, and their so-called associated techniques of engraving, etching and lithography, from painting and drawing.[15]

This was not a battle that could be easily won at the Slade. Although design became part of the Slade's Diploma, it remained a secondary subject and was not fully integrated into the main curriculum as per Buckland Wright and Lamb's recommendations. The fact that both men were so adamant about this perceived problem shows how contested design in art education had become.

Buckland-Wright had a close relationship with Coldstream and wrote to him about the state of printmaking in general and problems in the department in a letter from the 25th of February 1952.[16] He tells Coldstream that until recently few outside the college even realised there was an etching department at the Slade as it was so unimportant. This, he writes, was in keeping with the general apathy for the medium that had existed internationally until Hayter had given it a new lease on life and sparked an American 'renaissance'. Buckland-Wright predicts a similar renaissance will take place in England if the necessary steps are taken.[17]

Buckland-Wright argues that this new Hayter-inspired interest in engraving has led to overcrowding, with student numbers increasing from 25 to 60. He writes that the department must expand and have more resources in order to prevent the deterioration of equipment and provide students with adequate instruction. He compares the Slade to Royal College of Art, which has fewer

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[15] John Buckland-Wright, 'Introduction', in John Buckland-Wright, *Etching and Engraving: Techniques and the Modern Trend* (New York, N.Y: Dover Publications, Inc., 1973), pp.13-14 (p.13).
[16] Letter from John Buckland-Wright to William Coldstream, dated 25 February 1952.
[17] ibid.

students, better equipment and an etching/engraving instructor who teaches 5-days a week with the help of a full-time assistant. Buckland-Wright acknowledges the Slade's more limited resources but asks Coldstream to hire an etching instructor for more than one day a week in order to 'remedy an almost impossible situation.' Coldstream's response is not preserved, but archival evidence shows that Buckland-Wright ended up teaching etching three-days a week. [18]

A sign of the expansion of printmaking at the Slade under Buckland-Wright's behest came in 1953 when a lithography studio was opened in the basement of the Slade with several hand presses and a large off-set press. The Slade may have been slow to add lithography to its curriculum precisely because of its association with illustration and design. But from September 1954, Coldstream employed Lynton Lamb to teach lithography for one day a week while he looked for an additional teacher. He was initially hoping to hire one of the Mourlot brothers after an introduction had been made by John Piper. Piper, as written about in chapter 2, knew them both because he had made prints with them at the behest of Erskine who had sent him to Paris in 1953. [19]

The employment of one of the best French lithographic printers would have been a great feat for the Slade. It did not happen and instead Ceri Richards was hired for one day a week in 1954 and then for two-days a week in 1955. In August 1958 Richards reduced his teaching to one-day a week and Stanley Jones was brought in from St. Ives (where Erskine had hired him to set up a temporary lithography studio) to work the other day. [20] Thanks to Stanley Jones, the Slade eventually had the expertise of someone who had trained in the art of lithography in Paris.

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[18] Note from Lynton Lamb to William Coldstream dated 5 October 1953.

[19] Coldstream, letter to Mr Goetz, dated 23 July 1954.

[20] The Slade Calendars confirm what I have read elsewhere, namely that the Diploma in Fine Art was offered in either Painting (with drawing) or Sculpture (with drawing). These were primary subjects and Design and Architecture were subsidiary subjects. The importance of figure drawing is clearly evident. The Diploma students had to submit no less than six drawings of the human figure from life. For the painting component, they had to submit six works; 2 of the head, 2 of the figure and 2 mixed compositions. In 1949-50 Norman Janes was listed as Assistant in etching and engraving – see *Slade Calendar 1949-50* (London: Slade, 1950). In 1950-51 Lynton Lamb and John Buckland Wright joined the staff. Design lectures were added to the curriculum: 'In conjunction with these classes a series of lectures in design will be given by Mr Ormrod and Mr Lynton Lamb. Students taking design as a subsidiary subject for the

John Buckland-Wright died unexpectedly in 1954 and was eventually replaced by Anthony Gross. His loss was felt at the Slade where many teachers and students penned tributes to him. In a letter to *The Times* dated the 4th of October 1954, Coldstream described Buckland-Wright as a generous and much-loved teacher who within the space of four years had transformed the etching department and attracted the 'most talented students' to his classes and lectures. This sentiment was echoed in several handwritten letters by students that are preserved in the Slade archive. According to his obituary, he 'combined a serene yet unobtrusive mastery of the technical aspects of his subject with a sympathetic appreciation of all forms of genuine art, whether experimental or conventional.'[21]

In *Creative Spaces: Printmaking at the Slade in the 1950s*, a catalogue for an exhibition from 2005, Johanna Plant argues that Buckland-Wright 'epitomizes the attitudes that allowed for a decade of highly creative printmaking' at the Slade.[22] Plant gives Buckland-Wright credit for transforming the Slade's printmaking workshop into 'a creative space' that fostered 'exploration and experimentation' and attracted the most innovative students in the 1950s as well as the

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University of London Diploma in Fine Art are required to attend this course of lectures over a period of three years and to pursue a course of study in the above classes' – see *Slade Calendar 1950-51* (London: Slade, 1951). Lithography seems to have been added in 1952-53. By 1958-59 Anthony Gross, Ceri Richards were working assistants and also Keith Vaughan. In 1960-61 Lamb, Richards, Gross, Ormrod were all still teaching.

[21] 'Obituary: John Buckland-Wright', *The Times*, 1st October 1954.

[22] David Bindman, (ed.), *Slade Prints of the 1950s: Richard Hamilton, Stanley Jones and Bartolomeu dos Santos*, exh.cat., (London: Slade School of Art, 2005). This was a catalogue to accompany a 2005 exhibition made up of Strang Print Room prints and organised by UCL Art Collections in collaboration with MA students from the Department of History of Art at UCL

1960s.[23]According to Stephen Chaplin, who studied with Buckland-Wright in 1953, many students 'opted for etching as an easy subject and stayed on to become enthralled.'[24]

Teaching at the Slade in the 1950s was dominated by life drawing and Coldstream upheld Alphonse Legros's system of using dots and crosses to establish a figure in space. Students who wanted to sidestep these rules, gravitated to the printmaking rooms where they did not apply. Plant believes that students inadvertently benefited from the medium's lowly status in the lingering hierarchy of mediums. Because it was a subsidiary subject that was outside of the core curriculum, printmakers were accorded more freedoms than painters. [25] As a result, the prints produced by students at the Slade in the 1950s were arguably more advanced then the paintings which were often derivative of Coldstream.

The most significant artist who made prints at the Slade during the post-war period was Richard Hamilton.[26] Hamilton enrolled at the Slade in October of 1948, the same month that Buckland-Wright began teaching there. In retrospect, Hamilton was dismissive of his time at the Slade, writing that: 'If I only got that from the Slade – the companionship of (Nigel) Henderson - it is enough for a lifetime.'[27] Hamilton, however, was not telling the full story since he benefited from

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[23] In the summer term of 1950-51 Harold Cohen received a prize for his history of art paper and Mr. R.F. Ginzel received the etching and engraving prize. In 1952 a lithography prize was added as well as second and third place categories for the other prizes. That year Margaret Summerfield won first place for etching and engraving and Phillip Sutton won first place in lithography. In 1956 E Finlay shared first prize for etching and engraving with Jacqueline Simpson. Jones won first place in lithography. In 1956-57 B dos Santos took first place in etching and engraving. In 1958-59 Teresa Jaray won second prize in both lithography and etching and engraving. In 1959-60 Marc Vaux shared first prize in lithography with Chenghim Lim. In 1960-61, B Eliot won a special prize for silk-screening. In 1965-66 Phyllida Barlow won first prize in etching and engraving – see Ledger Books at Slade archive.

[24] See Stephen Chaplin, *The Slade Archive Reader* (College Collection, MS ADD 400), section 9.73

[25] ibid., section 9.57

[26] Printmaking was integral to Hamilton's practice and he always saw himself as 'a printmaker and also a painter' rather than a painter who also made prints – see Richard Hamilton, 'Printmaking', in *Collected Words 1953-1982* by Richard Hamilton (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), pp.84-110 (p.84).

[27] While Paolozzi and Hamilton came from working-class backgrounds, Nigel Henderson had had a more privileged upbringing from his bohemian mother who managed Peggy Guggenheim's gallery Guggenheim Jeune. Henderson broadened Hamilton's horizons through his contacts and knowledge of the Parisian art world. He introduced Hamilton to Edwardo Paolozzi, William Turnbull and also to D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's 1917 book *On Growth and Form* which made such an impact on his work in the 1950s. Hamilton, Paolozzi, Turnbull and Henderson were all members of the Independent Group which first formed in the winter of 1952.

the encouragement of Buckland-Wright and produced two important early bodies of work at the Slade: the *Ulysses* illustrations and the print series *Variations on the theme of a reaper*. [28]

Hamilton's journey to the Slade was circuitous and he spent long periods working as an engineering draughtsman. He did not join the Slade until he was a mature student of 27.[29]Alice Rawsthorn argues that Hamilton's experience in technical employment 'imbued him with a nuanced understanding of the engineering side of design, and its relationship to science and technology, that complemented his knowledge of commercial art.'[30] Unlike many artists and art institutions of the time, Hamilton did not distinguish between art and design and was fundamentally interested in how things work.

What one might call the mechanics of meanings was already evident in the 17-odd prints that make up *Variations on the theme of a Reaper* (Figure 88).[31] Not content with a superficial understanding of how the reaper operated, Hamilton bought patents of them for five guineas each from a Parisian patent office in order to deepen his understanding of its form and function. Paul Schimmel writes that by 'by appreciating the structure, engineering and functionality of the reaper, he developed a foundation through which to explore it conceptually.'[32] And John Russell argues

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[28] He started the *Ulysses* illustrations 1947 while on military service but completed them in 1949 while at the Slade. Buckland-Wright encouraged him to continue with his *Ulysses* illustrations which were originally planned as etchings

[29] He had developed a love of printmaking from a young age and took etching classes at the Central School of Arts and Crafts. The disruption of war meant that he spent nine months employed as a draughtsman at an engineering design office. In 1946, he enrolled at the Royal Academy but was expelled by their new president Alfred Munnings 'for not profiting from the instruction given in the Painting School.' Instead, he had to spend 18 months doing military service with the Royal Engineers in Aldershot. Hamilton then applied to the Slade and was accepted in 1948 because Coldstream 'looked upon his RA expulsion as the best possible recommendation' – see Dawn Leach, *Richard Hamilton: The Beginnings of his Art*, trans. Eileen Martin (Bern and Oxford: Peter Lang Gmbh, 1994), p.29.

[30] Alice Rawsthorn, 'Richard Hamilton and Design' in Mark Godfrey, Paul Schimmel, Vicente Todoli, (eds), *Richard Hamilton*, exh.cat. (London: Tate Publishing, 2014), pp.125-169 (p.127).

[31] Hamilton may have drawn inspiration for the prints from Siegfried Giedion's 1948 book *Mechanization Takes Command*.

[32] 'Introduction' in Mark Godfrey et al, *Richard Hamilton*, exh.cat., op.cit., pp.15-61 (p.17).

that the series is an example the poetics of process in Hamilton's art – the subtle transformation of an everyday object into something that is unfamiliar and mysterious. [33]

In Richard Hamilton's *Collected Words,* he writes that: 'As time goes by I become increasingly aware of the irrelevance of making a distinction between one medium and another, or one process and another, or even one style and another**.'**[34] This attitude was unusual in the late 40s and early 50s and is one of the reasons why Hamilton is regarded as a proto post-modernist who predicted future trends decades before they emerged. In the *Ulysses* illustrations, Hamilton aimed to 'to make a pictorial equivalent of Joyce's stylistic leaps' by using different drawing styles within one, unified body of work.[35] He did the same in the *Reaper* prints but took this one step further by using different etching techniques - drypoint, aquatint, sugar-lift etching – to emphasize the different qualities of the machine.

While the *Reaper* series was forward-looking in its conscious embrace of heterogeneity, it was also very much of its time. Hamilton writes that 'their style and treatment slots them perfectly into the pre-Festival of Britain provincial art scene.'[36] Dawn Leach-Ruhl draws attention to the 'rod-like' or 'spike-like' pictorial motif in the prints that was a common motif in post-war art. [37] And Paul Coldwell writes that the prints show the influence of Coldstream in their structure. Other art historians have characterised them as Constructivist in style with their emphasis on line, geometry and spatial recession. While the influences of the *Reaper* prints are debatable, what is not always emphasised is that they were produced with the support of the Slade. Hamilton finished the etchings off in Buckland-Wright's print workshop and their merit was immediately recognised.

[33] John Russell, 'Introduction' in *Richard Hamilton: Prints, multiples and drawings*, exh. cat., (Manchester: Whitworth Art Gallery, 1972), pp.6-7 (p.7).
[34] Hamilton, 'Printmaking' in *Collected Words*, op.cit., p.84.
[35] Ibid.,p.84.
[36] Hamilton, *Collected Words*, op.cit., p.84.
[37] Dawn Leach-Ruhl, 'The Chronology of Richard Hamilton's *Reaper Series*', *Print Quarterly*, 5 (1) (March 1998), 66-71 (p.71).

Ferdinand Leger spoke approvingly of the prints when he visited the Slade and because of them Hamilton was given his first one-man show at Gimpel Fil's.[38] After Hamilton left the Slade, Coldstream wrote him a glowing letter of recommendation for a teaching post and drew particular attention to his 'distinguished work in etching.'[39]

In 1953, presumably with the help of Coldstream's letter of recommendation, he became a lecturer in the Fine Art Department at the University of Newcastle and was put in charge of their new basic design course.[40] In Newcastle, he took advantage of the unused etching facilities by organising 'an evening class for those students who were interested in studying the technique. He also made more prints himself including *re Nude Etching* and (b) *Hers is a Lush Situation* (Figure 89).[41] These prints and also the prints he had made at the Slade were all printed in tiny or irregular editions and were either unpublished or published by Hamilton himself.[42] Although printmaking was close to his heart throughout the 1950s, he pursued it privately or with the help of art colleges.

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[38] Some sources state that three of the prints sold; one to Roland Penrose, one to the artist Lynn Chadwick and one to the orientalist Arthur Waley, for example, see Fanny Singer, 'Chronology' in Mark Godfrey et al, *Richard Hamilton*, exh.cat., pp.306 -325 (p.309).

[39] William Coldstream, letter of recommendation for Richard Hamilton, dated 24th October 1951. Coldstream describes Hamilton as 'a man of outstanding talent as a painter and designer. In particular, he has done some most distinguished work in etching, and he has an exceptionally wide knowledge of this art. Mr Hamilton is a man of lively intelligence, great energy and initiative. I believe he would be a most valuable teacher.' Slade archive.

[40] At the time it was called the Fine Art Department, University of Durham (later University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne).

[41] The 1958 etching *Hers is a Lush Situation* stands as a mature print that is more in keeping stylistically with his well-known 1960s work. Anne Seymour, argues that the Ulysses drawing prefigure this work, describes it as 'Sofia Loren afloat on waves of pressed steel.' – see Anne Seymour, 'Introduction' in *Richard Hamilton: Drawings, prints and paintings 1941-1955*, exh.cat. (London: Anthony D'Offay Gallery, 1980), unpaginated. There seems to be an overt eroticism on display in the gleaming curves of this gendered automobile. As with many of the prints from this period it, it served as a study for a painting and is a good example of the dialogue between different mediums. In fact, in the painting version Hamilton added 'a shallow relief component' to simulate the effect of the print, something he would continue to do in later paintings. As with other prints, the printing process was complex rather than straightforward and the 'few proofs made were 'tarted' up by hand' – see 'Notes by Richard Hamilton' in *Richard Hamilton: Prints, multiples and drawings*, exh.cat., (Manchester: Whitworth Art Gallery, 1972), p.12

[42] For example, *Reaper b* was published in an edition of 15 and *Reaper b* in an edition of 25. The etchings *Structure* and *Microcosm* (both 1950) were printed at the Slade. The former was unpublished and few editions were made, and the latter was published by the artist in an edition of 20. Prints such as *Hommage a Chrystler Corp.* (a) and (b) were printed by the artist in tiny editions of twos and threes at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, and these were not published. The same is true for *Hers is a Lush Situation - see Richard Hamilton: Prints, A complete catalogue of graphic work, 1939-84* (London: Waddington Graphics and Editions Hansjörg Mayor, 1984), pp.23,33,49,51.

Hamilton did not exhibit or publish prints with St. George's Gallery Prints. I suspect that Erskine would have been happy to do so given his eclectic, even catholic taste in art but there is no information on the topic. But for whatever reason, Hamilton only started making professionally published prints in uniform editions when he began working with the Kelpra Studio in 1963. In the 1960s, his printmaking career took off and he produced some of the most iconic British Pop prints such as *My Marilyn* (1965) and *Swingeing London 67 (f)* (Figure 90). In the conclusion, I will raise the possibility that artists like Hamilton and Hockney indirectly benefited from the work that Erskine put into professionalising the industry in the proceeding decade. [43]

In analysing Hamilton's early prints, I have veered slightly off course from my original discussion of printmaking at the Slade. However, I think it is important to draw attention to the fact that Hamilton seems to have benefited from the creative and experimental atmosphere fostered by Buckland-Wright in the etching rooms. The success of the *Reaper* series, which were acknowledged as exemplary by Coldstream and led to his first one-man exhibition, shows that his talent as a printmaker was celebrated early on in his career and that his work was not considered odd or out of place at the Slade. It is also important to point out that Hamilton's belief in the interrelatedness of art and design was part of a larger conversation on the subject that was taking place at the Slade and other art colleges in London throughout the 1950s.

Printmaking at the Slade enjoyed great success in the 1950s and 60s thanks to a cultural climate that was more receptive to the medium and the hiring of staff who took a more experimental, Hayter-infused approach to their craft. The staff included John Buckland-Wright, Ceri Richards, Stanley Jones, Anthony Gross and the Portuguese artist Bartolomeu dos Santos who

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[43] Paul Coldwell regards the *Reaper* prints as an early endeavour that is equal to Hockney's *A Rake's Progress* – see Coldwell's review of several exhibitions of Hamilton's works, 'Just what is it that makes Richard Hamilton so appealing, so important?' *Art and Print*, *4*(1)(May- June 2014), 14-18 (p. 15).

began teaching after completing his own studies there in 1958. Students from this period included Bernard Cohen, Harold Cohen, Phillip Sutton, Dennis Hawkins, Marc Vaux, Charles Fabian Ware and Peter Snow. Although most of this work remained unpublished, evidence of its quality can be found in the Slade archive which contains loose student prints by the likes of Cohen and Vaux as well as many prints that are not signed (Figures 91 and 92). [44] By the 1960s, the department was given its own space on the second floor of the main building and student printmakers participated actively in the print boom

The American artist Warrington Colescott, who had travelled to Atelier 17 in Paris, found it ill-equipped and lacking in 'the kind of structured learning environment I wanted.' Instead, he went to London to study with Anthony Gross with whom he had had bi-weekly tutorials at the Slade alongside Dos Santos. What Colescott admired most about Gross was his mastery of 'beautiful, rich line etching full of life and texture, which he achieved with various handmade and antique tools'. In 1957 Gross put Colescott in touch with the printmaker Birgit Skiöld who had recently opened her Print Workshop in Adrian Heath's basement and he furthered his print explorations with her. [45]

Robert Erskine, as I have already shown, enjoyed a close relationship with the Slade. He was given permission to use the Slade's lithography and engraving equipment for the filming of *Artist's Proof* and worked closely with Slade printmakers including Ceri Richards, Anthony Gross, Stanley Jones and Bartholomeu dos Santos. He benefited from having students capable of making gallery-worthy prints and students benefited from having a professional gallery in which to exhibit

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[44] At the UCL Art Museum on 9 August 2017 I also looked at a selection of Slade prints from the 1950s including works by Hamilton, Sutton, Cohen, Hawkins, Vaux, dos Santos and E Finlay. The majority were abstract or semi-abstract, some make use of Hayter's colour techniques and all exhibit a diversity of styles. I also procured an excel spreadsheet with a list of all the Slade prints dated between 1950 and 1970 that are in the collection of the UCL Art Museum. The majority of early works are etchings, some of which are colour etchings. Lithographs become more popular in the mid-fifties and the first silk screen appears in 1956. Artists with more than one or two prints include Richard Hamilton, Dennis Hawkins, Margaret Summerfield, Phillip Sutton, Jean Nicoll, Norah Wilson, Gordon Snee, Michael Tyzack, Stanley Jones, Eric Finlay, Bartolomeu dos Santos, Marc Vaux, Gerald Coles, Tess Jaray, Phyllida Barlow.

[45] Richard Cox, 'Warrington Colescott, The London Years 1956-66', *Tamarind Papers: A Journal of the Fine* Print, 14 (1991-2), 70-74 (p.72).

and sell their work. As the emphasis on youth grew in the 1960s, art schools were sought out by talent spotters looking for painters, sculptors and also printmakers.

The Central School of Arts and Crafts

At craft-focused institutions such as the Central School of Arts and Crafts and the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts, the 1950s was a period of uncertainty. Tension existed between those who wanted to scrap what they saw as an out-of-date emphasis on hand-made skills and those who opposed technological advances. While a general understanding of crafts such as bookbinding, textiles, weaving, furniture, pottery and silversmiths' work was still deemed important in the 1950s, this would end in 1964 when the Central qualified for the Diploma in Art and Design (Dip AD) and placed a new emphasis on single subject specialisation. The Central School of Arts and Crafts had to give up many of its craft courses and the shift was formalised in 1966 when it changed its name to the Central School of Art & Design.

In the 1950s the Central School was on the cusp of reorganising, but did not yet realise the extent to which commercial and fine art practices would soon inhabit separate realms. Printmaking, particularly lithography, was still used for reproductive purposes in illustrated books, posters and the newspaper industry but was gradually becoming obsolete. Nevertheless, the potential collaboration between printmaking and industry was written about encouragingly during the early fifties. For example, in a 1952 article on the Central School in *The Artist,* the author describes how a 'student has been experimenting on a method of colour-etching that may in the not-too-distant future have great influence on commercial colour reproduction'. The author also discusses the school's indebtedness to William Morris who wrote that 'the artist and designer should be practically as one'.[46]

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[46] 'Around the Art Schools: The LCC Central School of Arts and Crafts', *The Artist (magazine)*, 254 (43/2) (April 1952). No author. Cut out copy of article. I visited UAL: Central Saint Martin's Museum and Study Collection on 12 July 2017.

The multi-faceted role of the print, which was thought to serve both industry and fine art, was evident in the fact that printmaking techniques were spread out across three different departments: screen-printing on fabric was taught in the School of Textiles; lithography was taught in School of Book Production and Graphic Design along with typography and calligraphy; etching, drypoint, aquatint and mezzontint were taught in the School of Drawing, Painting, Modelling, Etching and Allied Subjects headed by Morris Kestleman. Etching was taught by C.P. Robbins, who was an excellent technician, as well as by Eskine's affiliated printmakers, Merlyn Evans and Anthony Gross (until 1954).[47] Evans and Gross had both been inspired by Hayter and fostered an atmosphere of experimental creativity that was developing simultaneously at the Slade.

In the early 50s, lithography was taught three-days a week by J.D. Watson, E. Devenish, S. Clarke Hutton and L. Vilaincour. The syllabus states that the Monday class was 'entirely open to those wishing to become printmakers in the general exhibition sense' while the other two days were reserved for those studying book illustrations and poster production. Lithography was intended for both artists and craftsmen and, unlike other art colleges, the Central was better able to accommodate the medium's dual nature.

The Central's more sophisticated approach to the technique may have been related to the fact that it developed a lithography programme earlier than other institutions at the urging of A.S. Hartrick, a well-known lithographer, who taught there from 1914 to 1939. It was under Hartrick's watch that James Fitton taught an influential evening course in lithography, and that Thomas Devenish was hired as a senior printer. When Thomas Devenish retired in 1937, he was replaced by

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The museum holds material on the Central School of Arts and Crafts, including prints by students and professors form the post-war period, related articles that have been cut out of magazines and newspapers as well as syllabuses and timetables. Information on the print staff at the Central comes from this archive.

[47] *Syllabus and Timetable: Central School of Arts & Crafts 1951-52* (London: Central School of Arts & Crafts, 1951).

his son Ernest who, according to Hartrick, was 'the best hand-printer of lithography now in London.' [48]

Ernest Devenish, who retired in 1966, spent over thirty years turning the lithography department into one of the best in the country.[49] Ernest Devenish and his brother George Devenish, who performed a similar function at the Royal College of Art, were instrumental in educating a generation of students in the techniques of auto-lithography. They contributed significantly to the developments in printmaking in the late 1950s and 60s by giving students an arsenal of technical skills and permission to apply them as they chose.[50] I will write more about Ernest's brother, George, in the section on the RCA.

There is limited information on printmaking at the Central in the 1950s, although student prints at the Central Saint Martin's museum and study collection shows that the quality of the prints produced was excellent. Nor is there much critical writing on printmaking or printmakers at the Central during this period. An important exception, however, is Eduardo Paolozzi, who in 1949 was hired by the Central's principal William Johnstone to teach in the School of Textiles alongside Anton Ehrenzweig.[51] It was Ehrenzweig who introduced Paolozzi to screenprinting in his class on fabric printing, an encounter that sparked a lifelong engagement with the technique.[52]

Paolozzi is an artist who is often linked to Richard Hamilton, especially at the early stages of their careers. As stated previously, they were close friends who were key members of the ICA's Independent Group, which throughout the 1950s organised exhibitions including *Growth and Form*

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[48] Tessa Sidey,'The Devenish Brothers', *Print Quarterly*, 14 (4), 354-81(p.366).
[49] He was the printer for a short-lived lithographic scheme started by Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell in July 1951 which ended in December 1952.
[50] Sidey, op.cit., p.380.
[51] Paolozzi had studied at the Slade from 1945-47 and then spent two years in Paris.
[52] Anton Ehrenzweig was an Austrian émigré who became an influential teacher and writer on topics related to creativity including music, art and art education. His book *The Psychoanalysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing* (1953) looked at the role the unconscious plays in creativity. He was drawn to British psychoanalysis, especially the work of Melanie Klein, and applied her theories to a course for school art teachers that he taught at Goldsmiths College in the 1960s. Ehrenzweig gave encouragement to young artists including Paolozzi and Bridget Riley.

(1951), *Parallel of Life and Art* (1953), Man *Machine and Motion: an Iconography of Speed and Space(1955)*, *This Is Tomorrow* (1956) and *an Exhibit* (1957).[53] The Independent Group has been credited with challenging the dominant modernist discourse (proselytised specifically by the ICA and more generally by culture at large) and paving the way for Pop art thanks to its embrace of mass culture and, among other things, its use of found objects and collage.

Like Hamilton, Paolozzi cared about how things work and had an 'appreciation of the various technical processes used in industry and commerce.'[54] Screenprinting was a commercial process that fascinated Paolozzi and after his encounter with the technique at the Central School he began using it to transfer images from one medium to another. Some of his earliest works that incorporated screenprints were collages with screenprinted fragments. Others like *London Zoo Aquarium* (1951) involved the transfer of a drawn rather than collaged image.[55]

In 1954 Paolozzi and Nigel Henderson founded Hammer Prints where they used screenprinting to make textiles, wallpaper and other applied arts. Their purpose was not straightforwardly commercial and was thought of as 'an attack' on the 'craft field' using silkscreen as the media.' [56] While crafts were mainly intended to be decorative or aesthetic, the Hammer Prints designs could be abrasive, frenetic and perplexing. Sometimes they brought together images that were not usually associated with each other. For example, the wallpaper design, *Barkcloth*, incorporated bicycle wheels, clocks and spectacles. It had, according to the artists, been inspired by

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[53] The ICA was founded by Roland Penrose and Herbert Read in 1947 with the aim of creating an avant-garde institution that could educate the British public about modernism. It was their hope that the ICA could survive without official funding because they feared that any state-backed organisation would have to bow to public opinion and could not show adventurous work. As Anne Massey writes, from its inception, 'high design values were important to the ICA' – see Anne Massey, Gregor Muir, *Institute of Contemporary Arts 1946-1968* (London: ICA, 2014), pp.10-17.
[54] Rosemary Miles, *The Complete Prints of Eduardo Paolozzi: Prints, drawings, collages 1944-77* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1977), p.6.
[55] ibid.p.9.
[56] Michelle Cotton, Lesley Jackson, Robin Spencer, (eds), *Nigel Henderson & Eduardo Paolozzi: Hammer Prints Ltd, 1954-57* , exh.cat. (London: firstprint, 2013), p.21.

the 'semi-abstract designs of some primitive peoples.' [57] Ehrenzweig wrote that Paolozzi had 'an

immediate and decisive influence on contemporary wallpaper and textile design (Figure 93). This

influence, he wrote, was in the discovery of an unsuspected elegance in uncouth or 'unskilled'

forms.'[58]

Paolozzi's early prints were not usually published, but they were sometimes exhibited in

group shows at the Redfern Gallery and the Society of London Painter-Printers. [59] Other prints were

part of group exhibitions organised by the British Council in the 1950s.[60] In general, his scratchy

lithographs with child-like markings stood out from the other prints that they were exhibited with.

Like Hamilton, Paolozzi did not publish his prints professionally or exhibit with St. George's

Gallery Prints in the 1950s. In the 1960s, however, he began to work with the printer Kelpra

Studios Ltd. and the publisher Editions of Alecto for the production of famous screenprint suites

including 'As Is When' (1965). He became one of the best-known artists of the print boom of the

1960s and 70s.   .

The fact that Paolozzi was introduced to screenprinting almost by accident in the Texile

Department was thanks to the interdisciplinary approach that William Johnstone (Principal from

1947-60) took to running the Central. Johnston, like Coldstream at the Slade and Robin Darwin at

the Royal College of Art, joined the college just after the war. He was an artist and educator who

did not believe in the separation of high art from craft and had long been interested in the creative

potential of every individual. He wrote about topic in his 1941 book *Child Art to Man* and tried to

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[57] Ibid.,p.21.

[58] Anton Ehrenzweig ,'William Johnstone: Artist and Educator', *The Studio*, 157 (794) (May 1959), 146-48 (p.146).

[59] For example, he exhibited at the exhibition, *The Redfern Gallery: An Exhibition of Colour lithographs, etchings, aquatints, lithographs, affices, pochoirs*, held between November and January 1957.

[60] Three of his early lithographs from between 1950 and 1952 were exhibited in a travelling exhibition organised by the British Council that took lithographs and engravings by 'Contemporary British Artists' in November 1957 alongside prints by William Turnbull, William Scott, Peter Lanyon and others. The tour lasted until February 1959.

put his theories into practice at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts before moving to the Central. [61]

An important development that took place at the Central School was the fine-tuning of the Basic Design course that 'aimed to provide a basic training in keeping with the demands of modern visual art.'[62] Rather than just copying from nature or life, artists were expected to understand the basic principles of form, space, colour and line. The more formalist approach was informed by the pedagogy of the Bauhaus and as well as by Johnstone's research into child art and his concomitant belief in an intuitive approach to making art. Basic Design had a long-term impact on how art was taught in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century since, as stated in the introduction, elements of it were incorporated into the one-year Basic Design (later Foundation) course of the Dip.AD.

In the 1959 ICA exhibition catalogue for *The Developing Process*, Roger Colman writes that 'most of the subsequent basic design courses in British art schools owe something to work done at the Central.[63] It is true that Victor Pasmore, William Turnbull, Alan Davie and Richard Hamilton all taught elements of the Basic Design course at the Central before bringing it to other institutions such as Newcastle University, Leeds College of Art and the Scarborough Summer School.[64] As a result, the Central became part of what Chris Stephens terms an avant-garde 'network of influence' where 'complementary artistic practices' were nurtured and developed.[65]

This interdisciplinary environment of the Central was ahead of its times and resulted in the breaking down of barriers between textile design, printmaking and painting. I do not know whether

[61] Alan Powers, 'William Johnstone at the Central School', Sylvia Blackemeyer, (ed.), *Making their Mark: Art, Craft and Design at the Central School: 1896-1966*, (London: Herbert Press, 2000), pp. 65-72 (p. 66).

[62] Elena Crippa, Beth Williamson, (eds), *Basic Design Booklet*, (London: Tate Design Studio, 2013), p.5.

[63] Sylvie Blackemeyer, *Making their Mark: Art, Craft and Design at the Central School: 1896-1966* exh. cat. (London: Herbert Press, London, 2000); Powers, op.cit,, p.71.

[64] Harry Thubron, Tom Hudson and Maurice de Sausmarez were also key players in the develop of Basic Design

[65] Chris Stephens, *St Ives: The Art and Artists* (London: Harper Collins, 2018), p.104.

the Basic Design course had a direct impact on artists studying printmaking at the Central, but it seems likely that they would have benefited from being at an institution where experimental ideas about the teaching of design were being formulated – both in relation to painting and drawing and in relation to industrial design. [66] Students specifically interested in etching, engraving and lithography would have learnt a great deal from Evans and Gross (up until 1954) in the School of Drawing, Painting, Modelling, Etching and Allied Subjects, and from Ernest Devenish in the School of Book Production and Graphic Design.

The Royal College of Art

The Royal College of Art opened in 1837 as the Government School of Design and, although it quickly evolved to teach fine art as well, it remained committed to teaching specialised subjects related to the commercial application of design. When William Rothenstein, became Principal of the RCA in 1920, the college experienced a golden period when art and design co-existed and some of the best artists in the country deployed printmaking techniques for the purposes of book illustrations and posters.[67] However, most of the innovation that took place at the RCA during this period was in the School of Design rather than the School of Engraving.

The School of Engraving was formally established in 1913 under Frank Short who was an expert in the field and ran the department with vigour and discipline. Malcolm Osbourne, a highly skilled but traditional etcher and engraver, took over the School of Engraving in 1924 and in 1948 was succeeded by Robin Austin. Austin, who held the post until 1954, took a stern, old-fashioned approach to teaching and was not particularly popular with students. Alistair Grant recalled his

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[66] A.E. Halliwell headed the design department, later the department of industrial design. By the early sixties it was regarded as a great success because of the Basic Design course that he had developed in relation to commerce and industry – see Mervyn Levy, 'The Future of Art Schools', *The Studio Magazine*, 161 (818) (June 1961), 198-201.
[67] Famous artists and illustrators such as John Nash, Edward Bawden, John Piper, Eric Ravilious and Barnett Freedman were associated with the school.

'fierce' discipline and stifling emphasis on 'life drawing, composition and plate preparation.'[68]

Bernard Cheese echoed Grant in his criticism of Austen's 'autocratic control' of the School of Engraving which was governed by 'rigid rules of technique and drawing' and where lithography was neglected.[69]

A new era for the RCA began in 1948 when Robin Darwin became Principal. Darwin, as mentioned in chapter 4, was the great-grandson of Charles Darwin and was a very well-connected member of the British establishment. In his important book on the RCA in the fifties and early sixties, *Burning the Box of Beautiful Things: The Development of a Postmodern Sensibility*, Alex Seago writes that Darwin's reforms 'had a distinctly patrician character.'[70] He tried to model the RCA on Cambridge, encouraged old-fashioned 'English good taste', and was dismissive of the mass media, especially television. While these qualities were often mocked by students, he also helped modernise the RCA by encouraging professionalism, forming connections between design and industry and breaking down barriers between fine art and the applied arts. 'Paradoxically,' Seago writes, 'Robin Darwin's leadership helped forge, focus, and promote' the cultural rebellion that came to the fore at the RCA in the 1960s.'[71]

Like Coldstream at the Slade and Johnston at the Central, Darwin improved the RCA after the war by changing the curriculum and making good hiring decisions. One of the most inspired hiring decisions for future printmakers was the appointment of Edwin La Dell in 1948 to run the Department of Lithography within the Department of Engraving. La Dell and Darwin were good friends who worked alongside each other at the RCA for over twenty years.[72] With Darwin's

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[68] *Twelve Artists: The Royal College of Art Centenary Year Portfolio of Prints*, exh.cat. (London: RCA, 1996). This is a portfolio of prints made to commemorate the centenary year of granting the name 'Royal College of Art' by Queen Victoria in 1896. The catalogue contains notes on the history of the printmaking department.

[69] See Elizabeth Mellen in *Edwin La Dell ARA: Paintings, Drawings, Lithographs and Etchings*, (London: King's Street Galleries, 1984), unpaginated.

[70] Seago, op.cit.,p.50.

[71] Seago, op.cit.,p.212.

[72] Both men retired in 1971

encouragement La Dell helped the printmaking department to shed its conservative reputation and become one of the most innovative and inspiring departments at the Royal College of Art.

Edwin La Dell is a name that has come up many times in this dissertation because he was one of the preeminent lithographers in Britain after the war. I have already looked at his printmaking experience in the previous chapter and shown that like Erskine he took a multi-pronged approach to the revival of printmaking. In La Dell's case he participated in lithographic projects, organised lithographic series, wrote many articles on colour lithography for the magazine *The Artist* and devoted himself wholeheartedly to his teaching job at the RCA. The first step that La Dell took to improving printing standards at the RCA was to encourage Darwin to hire skilled craftsmen in the Department of Engraving. These early appointments included the stone engraver G.E. Connor, the copperplate printer D.V. Wicks and, most importantly, the lithographic printer George Devenish. George Devenish, whose brother Ernest, held a similar position at the Central School, was one of the most accomplished technicians in the country.[73] Together, George and Ernest Devenish, helped make up for the lack of professional printing expertise in Britain relative to France. In Gordon Samuel's introduction to the 1986 Redfern exhibition *British Post-War Prints 1945-60*, he writes that 'a great deal of credit is due to these three men (Edwin La Dell and the Devenish brothers) for the emergence of colour lithography in Britain.'[74]

Devenish and La Dell performed different roles in the department. According to Bernard Cheese, the former was responsible for the 'day-to-day printing in the print studio' while La Dell was more of an 'impresario' who was often away 'organising print shows and visiting schools, printers and publishers in Paris.[75] Despite being less active in everyday college affairs, La Dell was

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[73] Devenish did not retire until 1974 and as able to make his mark over a career that spanned 26 years.

[74] Gordon Samuel, 'Introduction' in *British Post-War Prints 1945-60*, exh.cat., (London: Redfern Gallery, 1986). Unpaginated.

[75] Sidey, op.cit., p.373.

generous with his contacts and involved students in important lithographic print projects: 'Festival of Britain' (1951), 'Coronation Series' (1953), 'Wapping to Windsor' (1957-60) and 'Shakespeare Series' (1964). This enabled RCA students to gain professional experience and to exhibit with established artists.

For the 'Coronation Series', La Dell brought together 40 different RCA artists, some of whom were students, and invited them to create lithographs that were 'remotely connected with the ceremony' in order to commemorate 'what might be termed the pomp, play and paraphernalia of the occasion.'[76] While the series has a traditional and figurative bent because of the nature of the topic, some of the prints had more subversive elements. This is true of John Minton's lithograph *Horseguards in their Dressing Room at Whitehall* where a guardsman is seen in the process of undressing. His red coat is hung up, he is taking of his busby helmet. His boots, knife and other accoutrements, which are laid out on the bed, have a subtly homoerotic charge (Figure 94). Minton was gay at a time when homosexuality was illegal and a work like this can be interpreted as an act of resistance to this oppression. The 'Coronation Series' was printed and published by the RCA but received funding from the Arts Council, was exhibited at the Redfern Gallery and travelled 'throughout the provinces' as well as internationally. The experience was deemed 'profitable in many ways' by the writers of the Annual Report of 1952-53 for the RCA.[77]

The retirement of Robert Austin as head of the School of Engraving brought changes to the department. The Annual Report of 1954-55 noted that on his retirement the School of Engraving would merge with the School of Graphic Design because 'interest in etching, aquatint have declined, and this has been reflected in the quality of candidates wishing to join the school of

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[76] I visited the Royal College Archive on 26 July 2017. I consulted the Annual Reports, which from 1956 were for a single year rather than two years. The reports, which included analysis of the college and cultural climate, appear to have stopped in 1960. I also consulted the RCA's calendars which contained more factual information. For information on the 'Coronation Series' see - *Royal College of Art: Annual Report 1952-3* (London: Royal College of Art, 1953), p.9
[77] Ibid.,p.9

engraving'.[78] It was hoped that by making etching less specialised that it could become more

commercially viable. While they had considered merging the department into the School of

Painting, it was decided that printmaking fit better with graphic design because of its association

with illustration.[79] It seems likely that this merger ended up benefitting printmakers since the

School of Graphic Design was an extremely innovative department where the magazine *ARK* was

produced and where some of the college's most talented students studied.[80]

On Austin's retirement, La Dell was made the Head of Engraving and his impact was felt

almost immediately. As he wrote in the annual report of 1956:

> The emphasis on the teaching of etching has now moved to more experimental work on the
> possibilities of the medium. Etchings have become larger in size, broader in conception, and
> more varied in approach. The possibilities of colour etching and aquatint are being explored.
> The change in attitude has been very healthy and opened the eyes of students to fresh fields
> in pictorial intention and expression.[81]

Both La Dell and Erskine – who commissioned suites of large etchings from Gross and Evans –

were interested in encouraging the production of etchings that were more expressive and

experimental than had previously been thought possible. La Dell did this by buying better and more

up-to-date equipment for the department and by making good hiring decisions.

In 1955 Julian Trevelyan was hired to teach etching and engraving and eventually became

Head of the Etching Department. Trevelyan, as written about in the previous chapter, had studied

with Hayter and was devoted to the medium. He became a much-loved teacher who went on to

influence future printmakers including R.B. Kitaj and David Hockney. In 1956, La Dell hired

Alistair Grant to teach etching and lithography. Grant remained at the college until his retirement in

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[78] *Royal College of Art: Annual Report 1954-5* (London: Royal College of Art, 1955), p.14
[79] Ibid., p.14
[80] The School of Graphic Design was headed by Richard Guyatt who was made 'Professor of Publicity Design' by Darwin in 1948. He had been the first person to coin the term 'graphic design'. Seago, op.cit., p. 25.
[81] *Royal College of Art: Annual Report 1956* (London: Royal College of Art, 1956), p.57.

1990 and was also an important teacher. Trevelyan and Grant exhibited regularly at St. George's Gallery Prints.

The opening of St. George's Gallery Prints in 1955 provided a boost to professional and student printmakers alike. In 1957, La Dell and Erskine decided to build on the success of the RCA's 'Coronation Lithographs' by collaborating on the 'Wapping to Windsor' series which focused on the River Thames. Made by 'students, staff, visiting lecturers in the Printmaking Department for the 'sheer pleasure' of it' they were printed by George Devenish in an edition of 70 in order to free up the college's presses which were needed for other purposes. In order to keep the costs low, the hand drawn prints were printed mechanically in an offset press, allowing for a larger or unlimited edition if desired. [82] In the exhibition catalogue, Erskine carefully explained the difference between offset and flatbed printing. He also emphasised that the prints were original because 'it is the artist himself who draws the image on the plates' but acknowledged the mechanical aspect of the offset process by printing the titles of the works and the artists' signatures and removing the justification marks from the editions. Each of the 27 prints by artists including Julian Trevelyan, Mary Fedden, Edwin La Dell, Alistair Grant, Edward Bawden, Leonard Rosoman, Carel Weight and Allen Jones were sold for £3.10.0 each. Trevelyan's *Chiswick Eyot*, which is of abstracted swans, sail boats, water and clouds in blue, black, green and salmon pink is on the front cover of the catalogue (Figure 95). [83]

Erskine's collaboration with the RCA is an example of his interest in encouraging young printmakers and working closely with art colleges to support printmaking in general. His links to London art colleges would prove useful when, in 1960, he introduced a student section to his annual *Graven Image* competition and awarded the RCA student David Hockney first prize for a print that

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[82] *Royal College of Art: Annual Report 1959* (London: Royal College of Art, 1959), p.82
[83] Julian Trevelyan's offset lithograph *Chiswick Eyot* (no date or dimensions) on the cover of *Wapping to Windsor*, exh.cat., (London: St. George's Gallery Prints, 1960).

had been submitted by Alistair Grant. This episode will be explored in the next chapter. Erskine's

impact on the printmaking scene was acknowledged in the RCA annual reports from 1958 and

1959. The report from 1958, for example, writes about an increased demand for prints in the UK

and an improved economic climate for artists in general:

> The department of engraving received a tremendous impetus these last few years from the demand for prints by the galleries. Students now stand a chance of making a living as artists, at least by mixing work from galleries and advertising, with teaching.[84]

The only gallery exclusively devoted to contemporary prints in 1958 was St. George's Gallery

Prints and the report mentions that 'works by students were commissioned by the St. George's

Gallery and exhibited in the Royal Academy and other London and provincial galleries.'

Professional exhibiting opportunities for students were rare at the time and Erskine was one of the

few gallerists working with young people in this way. In the annual report of 1959, Erskine is

praised for exhibiting student work and for encouraging them to achieve high standards in the

presentation of their work:

> With the help of the St. George's Gallery and Robert Erskine, it has been possible to exhibit more prints. The exhibiting of prints has made the student more particular about the presentation of his work. The general standard of work has improved to such an extent that it has been suggested we should institute a *Young Contemporaries* Exhibition of prints in the near future. [85]

From this quote it seems likely that Erskine took RCA students to task for not presenting their prints

in a professional way and that he pushed them to produce better prints. Erskine took a hands-on

approach to working with the RCA and his presence is felt quite strongly in their annual reports.

In the annual report of 1959, La Dell noted that 'students are making fewer distinctions

between one medium and another' and that while 'not all media are considered alike' they are

primarily concerned with solving aesthetic problems. [86] This interest in aesthetic problems over

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[84] *Royal College of Art: Annual Report 1958*(London: Royal College of Art, 1953), p.43
[85] *Royal College of Art: Annual Report 1959* (London: Royal College of Art, 1953), p.81.
[86] Ibidp.81.

specific mediums was part of the general breaking down of barriers in art colleges throughout the 1950s and was an attitude that La Dell and Darwin encouraged. RCA tutor Robert Buhler later wrote that La Dell had been instrumental in bringing talented students from other schools to the print rooms by helping them realise 'that their interests were interrelated.'[87]

In 1960, Erskine exhibited six coloured etchings related to the North Welsh landscape by the artist Brian Perrin at St. George's Gallery Prints. Perrin, who was in his late twenties and had attended the RCA, was the youngest artist to publish a suite of prints at the gallery. Erskine wrote that Perrin was part of a '"new wave" of printmakers whose need for an expert medium is expressed by a considerable output of very high quality.' This quality is evident in the prints *Cyffty Mine* and *Cunmachno*, which are reproduced in colour in the catalogue, and are rich, texturally detailed, highly abstracted and decidedly gestural (Figures 96 and 97). Of relevance to this section, however, are the remarks Erskine makes about the changes that had taken place at the RCA in relation to printmaking in the space of a few years. Erskine writes that when Perrin was a student, painting students only applied to the Department of Engraving because it was easy to get into. Now, he writes, painting students are increasingly drawn to the etching rooms. [88] This 'vital interest in printmaking' was attributable to both international and domestic factors, including the now well-run and popular printmaking departments at London art colleges such as the RCA.

In 1960, the RCA's School of Engraving had been formally changed to the Department of Printmaking. Alistair Grant wrote that this was 'mostly because Engraving didn't happen anymore.' Ironically, in 1961, the RCA student David Hockney began work on his famous series of etchings, *A Rake's Progress*. Nevertheless, it made sense for the RCA to acknowledge the role of other

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[87] *Edwin La Dell ARA: Paintings, Drawings, Lithographs and Etchings*, ex.cat., (London: King's Street Galleries, 1984).
[88] *Brian Perrin/North Wales Landscape: 6 Colour Etchings with Associated Drawings*, exh.cat., (London: St. George's Gallery, 1960). The etchings were printed by the artist himself on the press of the Royal College of Art, and also by Messrs Sturgess & Brunsden in Welwyn.

techniques such as lithography through a more general departmental name. Colour lithography was flourishing at the RCA thanks to La Dell. In the early sixties Alistair Grant added screenprinting to the syllabus in order to accommodate increased demand for the technique. The transformation of the newly named Department of Printmaking, thanks to the combined efforts of Darwin, La Dell, Trevelyan, Grant and, to a certain extent, Erskine, ensured that the atmosphere in 1960 was far less stuffy and restrictive than it had been immediately after the war.[89]

The RCA went on to become one of the best-known art colleges of the 1960s thanks to a group of its students whose identities were formed there and whose work seemed to embody the new youthful and rebellious spirit of London. These students included Peter Blake, Derek Boshier, Peter Phillips, Pauline Boty, David Hockney, Robyn Denny, Patrick Caulfield, Richard Smith and R. B. Kitaj. Most of these artists were associated with Pop art and the first four were in fact featured in Ken Russell's short 1962 film *Pop Goes the Easel.* Despite Robin Darwin's suspicion of mass media, Seago, as stated earlier, argues that he had nevertheless encouraged an interdisciplinary atmosphere that had inadvertently helped his students develop a Pop sensibility. Seago, who in 1995 associated Pop art with Postmodernism, writes that this sensibility embraced whimsy, humour, collage, eclecticism, consumerism and low as well as high culture. While Seago and other scholars emphasise the role that design played in developing this sensibility, I will argue in the conclusion to this chapter that printmaking also played its own distinct part in the process.

It is not a coincidence that many of the RCA's most successful students including Hockney, Kitaj, Boshier and Caulfield made prints. Thanks to the reforms of Darwin. La Dell, Trevelyan and Grant, the printmaking department was flourishing by the early sixties. Christ

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[89] When St. George's Gallery Prints closed, Erskine gave his remaining print stock to Editions Alecto. The company took over incomplete projects and continued working with La Dell at the RCA. In 1964, for example, *The Shakespeare Series* of hand-drawn lithographs, which was organised by La Dell to celebrate the birth of Shakespeare, was printed and published jointly by the RCA and Editions Alecto in an edition of 50. Contributing artists included La Dell, Sandra Blow, Alistair Grant, Anthony Gross, Brian Perrin and Allen Jones. See Edwin La Dell, 'Introduction' in Shakespeare Lithographs, exh.cat. (London: Editions Alecto and RCS, 1964).

Stephens and Katherine Stout confirm that: 'There was a productive two-way flow of ideas between the Graphic and the Fine Art Schools at the Royal College.' They quote Alan Fletcher who remembered that most of the cross-over came in the 'litho' rooms where both Joe Tilson and Peter Blake could often be found.[90]

London School of Printing and Graphic Arts

The London School of Printing and Graphic Arts was a training college for tradesmen and executives in the printing industry rather than an establishment for fine artists with an interest in printmaking. When I visited its archive, I was expecting the material to be quite different from what I found at the Slade, RCA and Central archives. I mistakenly assumed that it would be more technical, more commercial and have less emphasis on art history and writing. This was not the case, and there were marked similarities between fine art and technical colleges in terms of their curriculums.

A Diploma in Art and Design could be obtained from the London School of Printing and Graphic Arts after three years of full-time study. Art was presumably incorporated into the name of the degree because it was thought that an understanding of art went hand in hand with an understanding of design. The college's emphasis on fine art is evident in the number of hours per week that students were expected to allocate to each subject. In 1959/60, for example, first year students were expected to spend 12 hours each week studying fine art, 3 hours studying art history, 6 hours studying lettering and typographic design and 6 hours studying basic design. The emphasis on fine art decreased each year and by their last year of study students were expected to devote only 3 hours a week to fine art, 3 hours a week to professional practice, 3 hours a week to three-dimensional design and 12 hours a week to typographic design.[91]

[90]Chris Stephens, Katherine Stout, 'This was Tomorrow', op.cit., p.21.
[91] *London School of Printing and Graphic Arts: Prospectus 1959/60* (London: London City Council, 1960), p.42.

In the year 1957-58 there were 325 full-time students and over 6,500 part-time students. Of the full-time students, 150 were studying either commercial or typographical design and the rest were photographic students or trainee executives. [92] The prestigious three-year Diploma Course for trainee executives had been taught for over thirty years and was 'intended for students possessing a good educational background and suitable personal qualities, who will later be taking up administrative posts in the industry.'[93] The syllabus boasted an in depth curriculum with courses in art (anatomy, figure drawing), design (colour training, commercial design) and many different printing techniques as well as academic subjects such as history of art, law and business. [94]

Most fine art colleges had printing departments, or at least printing courses, on offer. The London School of Printing and Graphic Arts, however, had about five times as many print-related courses on offer as the Slade, RCA or Central and provided students with a level of detail and expertise that was geared towards professional employment. Their equipment was much more extensive and included both hand-presses and offset presses. In the Graphic Reproduction Department students could study camera operating, photoengraving, photogravure and photolithography. The department also provided extensive training in the screen-printing process, including 'the manual and photographic techniques of stencil preparation' and serigraphy which was defined as 'the screen process as applied to making limited-editions of prints in colour.'[95] It is interesting that they acknowledged limited-edition prints in the capacity of screenprinting at a time when none of the other colleges did.

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[92] There were 78 trainee executives that year and 67% came from public schools, 22% from grammar schools and 11% other schools. Nearly half of the trainee executives were introduced to the school through a family firm. All of the students had an art background. G.H.B. Roberts and N.K.J. Bolton, 'Survey of Whole-Time Students at the London School of Printing and Graphic Arts: 1957-58' (unpublished undergraduate thesis, London School of Printing and Graphic Arts, 1958), p.10. LCC archive.

[93] *London School of Printing and Graphic Arts: Prospectus 1957/58* (London: London City Council, 1958).p.20.

[94]*LSPGA: Prospectus 1957/58,* op.cit, pp.22-25.

[95] *London School of Printing and Graphic Arts: Prospectus 1956/57* (London: London City Council, 1957). P. 90.

The London School of Printing and Graphic Arts was known for its graphic design courses. The first course in the subject for undergraduates had been created by the poster designer Tom Eckersley who was the head of design until 1977. Throughout the 1950s and early 60s, their prospectuses are beautifully designed and illustrated (Figure 98). Often, an old-fashioned image of a printing press is interposed with contemporary graphics suggesting that the college aimed to meld tradition with innovation. The cover of the 1956/57 prospectus, for example, shows a black and white image of an eighteenth-century printer working at the press, overlaid with an arrangement of coloured squares (Figure 99).

The design talents of students were revealed in invitations, pamphlets, and news bulletins. An invitation for a 'social' that took place on March 7th, 1956 at the Westminster Arms has illustrations of food, animals, cocktails, instruments and artists' tools (Figure 100). This type of invitation is reminiscent of the printed menus that were designed for Oliver Simon's Double Crown Club suppers. Another example of student work is a programme for the 'Dedication and Opening of the Royal Festival Hall'.[96] By participating in such projects, students at the London School of Graphic Art were able to gain practical experience in the working world.

The atmosphere at the London School of Printmaking and Graphic Art appears to have been collegiate and social. The teaching staff was large with dozens of full-time and part-time teachers. There were, for example, twelve staff members who taught lithography. Members of the faculty would sometimes go on work-related trips that were documented with photo albums and accompanying write-ups. Staff went on a tour of printing firms in Bristol with the objective of 'fostering team spirit' amongst the greatly expanded body of teachers and 'maintaining contacts

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[96] Loose leaflet in LCC archive.

with the industry.'[97] In May 1958 an educational tour took place in South Germany and was followed by similar tours in Sweden and Denmark.[98]

The London School of Printmaking and Graphic Art had a close relationship with the unions. Scholarships and school prizes were given out to students annually and many were given by unions or official bodies in the industry such as the National Union of Printing, Bookbinding and Paper Workers, London Master Printers' Association and the Amalgamated Society of Lithographic Printers. External awards were given by the Ministry of Education and the National Diploma in Design (NDD). Governors for the school were nominated by the London City Council, by trade unions and by companies of the print industry.

While a background in fine art was deemed essential to studying printmaking, the school was aligned with the printmaking industry and students were expected to become professional workers. The slow demise of printmaking as profession is not the subject of this dissertation. However, suffice it to say that many skilled craftsmen and technicians eventually lost their jobs as industrialised methods of production took over. By the 1950s and early 60s, the art tradesmen's days were numbered and training colleges would have to reinvent themselves in order to survive. The London School of Printing and Graphic Arts, for example, was renamed itself the London College of Communication.

Birgit Skiold and the Print Workshop[99]

In the small world of contemporary prints in the1950s and early 60s, the Swedish artist Birgit Skiold carved out a distinct role thanks to the Print Workshop, which she started in the

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[97] Unpublished photo album with typed summary of trip with paragraphs on 'Objectives,' 'Accommodation,' 'Results and Summary'.p.2.
[98] *Educational Tour: LSPGA* (London: LSPGA, 1957), printed leaflet in LCC archive.
[99]The material in this section unless otherwise stated comes from the Victoria & Albert Museum's Archive of Art and Design visited on 26 April 2019. Information on Birgit Skiold is kept in the folders (AAD/1997/18/366, BSMB II), (AAS/197/18/356 BSMB II) and (AAD/1997/18/357-358 BSMB II)

basement of Adrian Heath's house in Charlotte Street in 1957. Modelled loosely on the French-style atelier system, the Print Workshop was an experimental space where artists could make etchings and lithographs, learn new techniques and commune with other printmakers. I have placed this section on Skiold in a chapter on art education because I believe that her workshop served an educative function for students and recent graduates.

Birgit Skiold was born in Sweden but came to Britain as a teenager in 1948 to study. She began frequenting the Anglo-French Art Centre which, as previously discussed, was an avant-garde organisation along the lines of the ICA.[100] The Anglo-French Art Centre was where Skiold came across Francis Bacon, Eduardo Paolozzi and where her interest in printmaking was sparked thanks to an exhibition of French lithography[101] This exhibition convinced her that she wanted to devote herself to the graphic arts and she began studying etching and lithography at the Regent Street Polytechnic where she took classes with Richard Beer. She also travelled to Paris to learn more about printmaking.[102]

On Skiold's return to London, she was questioned by the Home Office about her immigration status. A letter from the Home Office to Lt. Colt JK Cordeaux, an MP who was advocating for her, said that the government would be more likely to treat her exceptionally if she started 'some small business connected with her profession.'[103]This letter seems to have been the impetus behind the proposal for the Print Workshop, which, along with letters of recommendation

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[100] As discussed earlier, the Anglo-French Art Centre was where John Buckland-Wright had taught briefly and where Erskine's friend and architectural historian Joseph Rykwert first met the designer Anthony Froshaug

[101] Charles Spencer 'Birgit Skiold: Alecto Monography 9' (London: Editions Alecto, 1972), pp. 1-8. Leaflet kept at V&A archive, folder (AAD/1997/18/366, BSMB II 8)

[102] Richard Beer exhibited frequently with St George's Gallery Prints. Some of the exhibitions he participated in include the annual group shows of 1957 and 58 as well as the Graven Image exhibitions of 1959, 1962 and 1963.

[103] Letter from Home Office to Lt. Col. JK Cordeaux CBE, dated 7 May 1956, V&A archive, folder (AAD/1997/18/340, BSMB I)

from Edward Ardizonne and others, successfully led to her being granted permission to remain the UK. [104]

The Print Workshop became the only non-commercial studio where artists could pursue experimental printmaking in Britain. For a nominal monthly fee they could use the presses, learn technical skills and meet other print enthusiasts. Artists gravitated to the Print Workshop in order to develop their craft and push their work in new directions. After changing locations a few times, the Print Workshop settled permanently in the basement of artist Adrian Heath's house at 28 Charlotte Street. Heath, who was a kind of benefactor to Skiold, is an artist whose name has come up on several occasions in this thesis and who seems to have served as a link between artists from different schools. [105]

The Print Workshop was confined to two rooms and it required a degree of organisation to accommodate the presses, drying sheets, printing material and the artists. [106] Skiold kept the premises clean and tidy and set up a rota system in order to prevent overcrowding. Helena Markson, who sometimes exhibited with Erskine, helped run the Print Workshop but in general employees weren't needed. Instead, it was a space for artists that was run by artists. However, the presence of these two women at the Print Workshop serve as important counterweight to the mainly male narrative of post-war British printmaking.[107]

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[104] Letter from Home Office to Birgit Skiold dated 7th November 1956, same folder.

[105] As written about in chapter 1, Heath and Terry Frost had become friends while POWs and had gone on to teach alongside each other Corsham. Heath had exhibited at Cliffe's exhibition of Corsham prints and lithographs in 1955 and seemed sympathetic if not devoted to the medium. Heath went on to exhibit lithographs at Erskine's *Graven Image* exhibitions of '62 and '63. He was an important advocate of abstract art and was sometimes seen as an intermediary between the St. Ives artists and the Constructivists.

[106] Skiold had originally worked from Vanessa Bell's old printing press but acquired two newer and lighter ones for the Print Workshop.

[107] American women including June Wayne and Kathan Brown played an important part in the US print boom. And Weyl writes extensively about the women who studied at Hayter's American branch of Atelier 17. Printmaking, as a collaborative activity, was in some ways more open to women than other forms of fine art.

The openings of Print Workshop exhibitions or 'do's' as Skiold referred to them were always social events. As her friend the American printmaker Warrington Colescott recalled, 'These simple affairs mixed artists, critics, writers and gallery people, warmed by a few jugs of Algerian wine.' One, which took place in June, but did not state the year, is titled *An Exhibition of Prints* and featured the work of Skiold, Richard Beer, Elizabeth Aslin and Rosemary Jane Foot. The *Exhibition of Etchings & Lithographs*, which was held in December of 1959, featured the same artists as well as Adrian Heath, Stanley Jones, and Keith Tyson.[108]

The social aspect of the Print Workshop was essential to its identity but did nothing to detract from the seriousness of its aims. As Skiold said in an interview: 'People can exchange ideas in this amazing and marvellous fashion…it has all grown up entirely by word of mouth. Now we have contracts all over the world, and people can give each other help about where to get hold of the right sort of paper; how to get an exhibition in other countries and so on.'[109] This quote, which is from the mid-sixties, show the degree to which an international network was fundamental to the print boom. During the print boom the Print Workshop was frequented by important artists such as David Hockney (whose 'Grimms' Fairy Tales' (1970) etchings were proofed there), Allen Jones, Joe Tilson, and Jim Dine. It also attracted print enthusiasts like Pat Gilmour, Kathan Brown and Graham Reynolds.

In 1956, Myfanwy Piper, the artic critic, librettist and wife of printmaker John Piper, had written an article for *The Times* in which she wrote that artists would benefit from what she called a 'working home' where they could make prints: 'What is needed and what, with the enthusiastic energy of Mr Erskine and others, we may yet get, is an atelier where artists and professional

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[108] *Exhibition of Etchings and Lithographs*, exh.cat. (London: Print Workshop, 1959) – V & A archive, folder (AAD/1997/18/357-358, BSMB II)

[109] Agela Lambert, 'Birgit Skiold's Studio Workshop, 1966, unpaginated. Loose leaflet in V&A archive, folder (AAD/1997/18/366, BSMB II 8.)

engravers can inspire each other' she wrote.[110] Erskine, who failed to establish a branch of Atelier 17, is thought to have encouraged Skiold to set up the Print Workshop as a possible alternative.

Skiold gained printing experience doing editioning work for St.George's Gallery Prints and exhibited regularly at the gallery.[111] In 1957, for example, she participated in the exhibition *Swedish Graphic Art* which consisted of 37 prints by 10 Swedish artists.[112] In the catalogue the artists are described as a 'loosely-knit collection of friends' with a common link to continental studios such as Atelier 17 and Lacoruiere's. The only image reproduced is a black and white linocut in a geometric style by Tore Hultcrantz (Figure 101). The exhibition was the Swedish equivalent to a recent exhibition of English prints that 'brought home to the Swedish public the newfound vigour of English graphic art.' [113] In 1960, Erskine organised a similar exhibition in Stockholm titled *Engelsk grafik/British Printmakers*. These exhibitions are examples of Erskine's interest in promoting artistic exchange between international printmakers – particularly amongst those sympathetic to Hatyer.

Skiold continued to participate in Erskine's group exhibitions over the years, and by the time St. George's Gallery closed she was becoming a successful printmaker in her own right.[114] The Print Workshop was doing well and she secured a teaching post at the Bradford Regional College of Art. In 1965 she was a founding member of the Printmakers Council of Great Britain and in 1968 she was instrumental in starting the Bradford Print Biennial. While Erskine was not responsible for

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[110] Myfanwy Piper, 'The Painter Engraver,' *The Sunday Times*, July 1956, p.4.

[111] Pat Gilmour, 'Artist Observed' in Canvas: the Magazine for All Artists, 4 (11) (March 11 1970) , p.36.

[112] *Swedish Graphic Art*, exh. cat., (London: St. George's Gallery, 1957).

[113] Jurgen von Konow, 'Introduction' in *Swedish Graphic Art*, exh.cat., (London: St George's Gallery, 1957).

[114] In 1958, she exhibited the lithograph *Landscape in Blue* in the exhibition Contemporary Printmakers. In the equivalent exhibition of 1959 she exhibited the etching *Blue Island*. In 1958, she had been invited to attend the premier of Erskine's film *Artists' Proof* at the Royal Empire Society and saved the elegant printed invitation for many years along with exhibition catalogues from his gallery. It states: 'The Hon Robert Erskine has great pleasure in inviting you to the premier of his film Artist's Proof, 6 pm, Monday 8 April, Royal Empire Society (Craven St. entrance) Northumberland Avenue WC2. The film runs for 25 minutes and will be shown twice during the evening at 6:30 and 7:30. Champagne from 6 pm till 8 pm.' Skiold participated in *The Graven Image* exhibitions of 1959, 1962 and 1963.

any of these achievements, he no doubt played a role – as he did with many artists - in supporting,

mentoring, and helping launch her as a printmaker. Skiold, in turn, is an artist who furthered

Erkine's legacy though her long-term promotion of the printed medium via The Print Workshop.[115]

Conclusion

In Brian Harrison' *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom 1951-70*, he writes that the British

education 'bonanza' of the 1950s and 60s was facilitated by generous state funding relative to

previous and later periods. The impetus to expand, however, stemmed from 'the liberal concern for

individual growth and self-realisation and democratic participation which extension of the franchise

had nourished. As a result, new teaching methods tended to encourage personal fulfilment, inquiry

and expression over a traditional emphasis on obedience and rote learning.' [116]

British art colleges in the 1960s – particularly the Royal College of Art – were celebrated by

some and frowned upon by others for their rebelliousness, innovativeness, classlessness and for the

cross-fertilisation that took place between music, design and art. A combination of factors including

an influx of resources, an increase in student numbers and the diversification of the student body,

and a series of reforms implemented during the post-war years by the likes of Darwin, Coldstream

and Johnstone all contributed to this new vitality. While scholars like Alex Seago and Anne Massey

have emphasised the important role that art colleges in the 1950s played in the development of

British Pop, their research has mostly ignored printmaking.[117] In this chapter I have used archival

sources to place a new emphasis on the reforms to the printmaking departments in the 1950s that

attracted more students, including painters, to the medium. Many of these students went on to make

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[115] Like Erskine, Skiold had a longstanding appreciation for Japanese printmaking and spent time in the country in order further her own practice.

[116] Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom 1951-70* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, OUP, 2009), pp. 348, 350, 370.

[117] See Seago's *Burning of the Box of Beautiful Things* as cited previously and Anne Massey and Alex Seago, eds., *Pop Art and Design* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), pp. 11.

printmaking an important part of their practice and were part of the print boom of the 1960s. In this chapter I also used evidence from sources including the RCA's annual reports and exhibition catalogues to show that Erskine maintained close ties with several art colleges and provided printmaking students with financial and artistic support.

The changed status of printmaking at art colleges such as the Slade, the Central and the RCA by the early 60s was remarked upon by the likes of Erskine and John Piper. Piper wrote about printmaking at the RCA, noting that the medium could now hold its own as an art form:

> For the student printmaker, there is no place so promising in all the world… Here at the College… an atmosphere where experimentation is encouraged and merit rapidly rewarded. Students in the Engraving Room no longer niggle on little copper plates 3 x 2.5 inches but they attack enormous pieces of metal a couple of feet across and produce prints with a pattern that can be read at a range of one hundred and fifty yards. In lithography, too, there is the same feeling of attack – of bold colour, strong line. The point about this is that it shows confidence, a kind of conviction that used to be lacking; and it shows that in printmaking here in these days the craft side of business is totally in the service of the art side. [118]

The language Piper deploys in this quote is arguably modernist in its emphasis on boldness, attack and conviction. It is also telling that he diminishes the 'craft side' of printmaking in favour of the 'art side.' For, as discussed in chapter 2, modernist printmakers in the school of Hayter were at pains to prove that prints were large, expressive (and arguably masculine) works of art that were comparable to paintings rather than small, domestic (and implicitly feminine) crafts. Weyl, as also stated in chapter 2, has drawn attention to the masculine overtones of printmaking during this era and the fact that Hayter often compared the act of engraving to war. Hayter, as also stated earlier, was the printmaker who made printmaking attractive to a generation of Americans through his New York branch of Atelier 17 and who also influenced the work of future Abstract Expressionists such as Jackson Pollock.

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[118] From a loose document in the RCA's archive.

In this chapter I have argued that Hayter's ideas were disseminated at the Slade, Royal College and (to a lesser extent) the Central through the likes of John Buckland-Wright, Anthony Gross, Stanley Jones and Edwin La Dell. While no branch of Atelier 17 opened in Britain, the printmaking departments at the art schools performed a similar function, albeit on a much smaller scale. Another stand-in for Atelier 17, however, was the Print Workshop, which was an affordable space where many young printmakers continued learning after their formal studies had ended. I believe that the combination of the Hayter-inspired teaching methods at the Slade, RCA and Central along with the Hayter-esque spirit of collaboration and exchange at the Print Workshop helped educate the younger generation of printmakers in the creative and expressive potential of the medium.

Alongside this triumph of printmaking as a mode of expression comparable to painting in its status was a simultaneous and at times contradictory development that I have drawn attention to in this chapter: the rise of design. The question of how to integrate the teaching of design into the Slade's curriculum was one that was raised by both Lynton Lamb and John Buckland-Wright. It was also a topic of conversation that was important to Robin Darwin who encouraged the free flow of students, equipment and design between the fine art departments and the department of graphic design. Darwin encouraged professionalism amongst his students and, as a member of the Council of Industrial Design, hoped that the college would have direct links to the commercial sphere.

The correct instruction of design was also at the heart of the controversial decision to abandon the National Diploma in Design (NDD) in favour of the Bauhaus-influenced Diploma in Art and Design (Dip.AD) which came into effect in 1963. The Dip.AD signalled the end of many of the craft-based, vocational courses at colleges like the Central and the beginning of a more liberal

and generalist curriculum.[119] The transition also coincided with the demise of the traditional but commercial printmaking skills taught by craftsman at institutions such as the London School of Printing and Graphic Arts and the takeover of the printing industry by mechanisation. Some but not all of these skills survived in print studios like the Curwen Press and Skiold's Print Workshop.

The rise of printmaking in the 1960s was arguably related to the breaking down of barriers between art and design as well as between high culture and low culture. Screenprints could incorporate photographs or found objects such as newspapers and magazines and tended to engage with the mass media. The Pop print was a hybrid that played with different mediums and styles and was arguably more reflective of the world at large than a solipsistic, abstract painting. And yet, the Pop print was very much a work of art and was treated as such. They too were bold, strong and compelling in their own right and they too adorned the walls of houses, businesses and museums in the same way that artwork always had done. I will return to this topic in the conclusion of the dissertation, but I would like to end with the possibility that Pop prints – despite their emphasis on banality and detachment - could not have achieved the status that they did without the hard work that went into proving that prints were indeed art objects.

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[119] Chris Stephens and Katharine Stout, 'Introduction', in Art & the 60s: This was Tomorrow, edited by Chris Stephens and Katherine Stout, London 2004, pp.8-41 (p.31).

CHAPTER 6: Gallery exhibitions in the Context of British Art and Culture

In April of 1947, the critic Cyril Connolly described the people of Britain as neutered and care-worn, adding that:

> the symbol of this mood is London, now the largest, saddest and dirtiest of great cities, with its miles of unpainted, half-inhabited houses, its chopless chop houses, its beerless pubs…its crowds mooning around the stained green wicker of the cafeterias in their shabby raincoats, under a sky permanently dull and lowering like a dish-cover.[1]

While all of Europe had suffered terribly during the war, the British people had fought for longer than anyone else and were exhausted. The immediate post-war years offered little respite because the country was broke and overstretched. Churchill had sustained the war effort by borrowing and Britain had gone from being the greatest creditor to the greatest debtor nation. Her debt had tripled and she had lost a quarter of her wealth. However, expenses were still high because of a military presence in 40 countries. In 1949, the pound was devalued and a period of austerity with deep spending cuts began. Rations, which were not lifted until 1954, were even smaller than they had been during the war for certain goods. A sense of scarcity and restriction was pervasive.[2]

For many the post-war years were grimmer, greyer and harder than the war itself, which had at least felt like a fight for survival. The reality of emerging with an empty treasury, bombed out cities, and greatly diminished global reach was not what Britain had predicted after her herculean effort to save the world from fascism. And the newfound knowledge of the horrors of both the Holocaust and the atomic bomb contributed to a growing sense of unease, anxiety and moral confusion. The fifties in Britain were a decade of readjustment, of managing expectations and of

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[1] Cyril Connolly in 1947, writing in the journal *Horizon* (volume XV, no.87) as quoted by Tony Judt, *Postwar: A Histoy of Europe since 1945* (London: Penguin, 2005), p.162. No volume of magazine specified in Judt's text.
[2] Mark Donnelly, *Sixties Britain: Culture, Society and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2019), pp.17-18.

finding a new role. If the arts in any given culture reflect society at large, it is not surprising that British artists were uncertain about their position on the world stage. With the scales of artistic influence shifting in favour of New York over historically dominant Paris, where would English art – condescended to for much of the century as provincial, insular or romantic – fit?

In 1932, Paul Nash wrote an article titled 'Going Modern and Being British' in which he discussed the difficulty or reconciling Britishness with modernity.[3] For a long time post-war British art (including prints) had been badly served by art historians who continued to dismiss it because it did not fit into strict definitions of what was considered modern. In a 1991 review of *Avant-Garde British Printmaking 1914-1960* for the journal *Tamarind Papers*, Charles Newton quibbles with use of the word 'avant-garde' in the title, which, he argues is misleading because much of the country stood 'outside the mainstream of Modernism and many little Englanders were proud of the fact.'[4] Newton's implied opinion, which was not uncommon at the time, was that British artists produced work that was too figurative, illustrative or traditional to be avant-garde. By the early nineties, when Newton wrote his review, post-war British art was out of fashion despite an interest in individual artists such as Freud and Bacon. One problem was that the perceived vitality, glamour and internationalism of the swinging 1960s had overshadowed the preceding decade. A related problem emphasised by the art historian Martin Harrison was that the 'attention paid to Pop Art and Op Art in the 1960s, eclipsed the priorities of the 1950s, and that the onset of Minimalism, Performance and Conceptual Art by the end of the decade marginalised much, if not most, of representational art.'[5]

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[3] Paul Nash, 'Going Modern and being British,' *Weekend Review*, 12 March 1932,pp. 322-3.
[4] Charles Newton, 'The British Museum's Contribution to Print Scholarship', *The Tamarind Papers: A Journal of the Fine Print*, 14 (1991-92), 6-14 (p.9).
[5] Martin Harrison, *Transition: The London Art Scene of the 1950s* (London: Merrell Publishers Ltd in association with Barbican Art Galleries, 2002), p.20.

Many post-war British artists produced the kind of art that the art historian Robert Storr characterises as 'anti-modernist modern' in his book *Modern Art despite Modernism.* In it, he calls for a reappraisal of this type of work, writing that:

> Since the 1970s, the gradual exhaustion of old antimonies of Left and Right, radical and conservative, abstract and perceptual, has required a more pluralistic, integrated, and nuanced appraisal of what happened in modern art.[6]

A reappraisal of post-war British art has been taking place slowly since the mid-nineties when exhibitions on the period became more commonplace and influential books such as Anne Massey's *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain 1945-49* and Alex Seago's *Burning of the Box of Beautiful Things: The Development of a Postmodern Sensibility* were published.[7] In the catalogue to an exhibition from the late nineties, *The Fifties: Art from the British Council Collection,* Andrea Rose writes that a 'remarkable spectrum of practice' and 'corresponding divergences of theory' is a key characteristic of British art from the post-war period.[8]

Post-war British art is no longer maligned for its eclecticism and scholars are increasingly taking its diversity as a sign of great creativity.[9] This was the opinion of a reframing of post-war British art that began with the 2010 conference *New Approaches to British Art, 1939-69* that aimed to redress a lack of contemporary scholarship on the period.[10] The papers delivered at this conference by art historians including Martin Hammer, Lisa Tickner, Chris Stephens, and Alex Potts were published in a special issue of the magazine *Art History* in 2012 that emphasised the

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[6] Robert Storr, *Modern Art despite Modernism* (New York: Museum of Modern Art and Harry N. Abrams, 2000), p.34.
[7] See Anne Massey, *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain 1945-49* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995) and Alex Seago, *Burning the Box of Beautiful Things: The Development of a Postmodern Sensibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995)
[8] Andrea Rose, 'Foreword' in Tamsyn Woolcombe, (ed.), *The Fifties: Art from the British Council Collection* (London: The British Council, 1998), pp.7-9 (p.9).
[9] Martin Harrison, op.cit., p.12.
[10] *New Approaches to British Art, 1939 – 1969* was held at the Courtauld Institute of Art in June 2010.

political and historical context of post-war British art, persuasively arguing that it 'belongs to increasingly transnational histories and geographies.'[11] It was important to understand British art in the broader context of empire, immigration, gender and class and also to foreground historical and archival material that had been neglected.

The progress made by the 2010 Courtauld conference was furthered by a series of conferences funded by the Paul Mellon Centre for British Art, including, among many others, *Exhibiting Contemporary Art in Post-War Britain, 1945-60* in 2016 where I delivered a paper on *The Graven Image* exhibition of 1959.[12] The Paul Mellon Centre remains one of the most important centres for the scholarship of post-war British art and does much to support the field. In addition to conferences, exhibitions such as the Barbican's *Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945-65*, which was held from March to June 2022 and included a wealth of new scholarship in its exhibition catalogue, have shown that post-war British art is a rich and relatively unexplored subject in the history of art. An important point made by Jane Alison in the introduction to exhibition's catalogue is one that she borrows from Ben Highmore, namely that 'any idea that the art of 1945 to 1965 was simply a prelude to Pop is categorically debunked. It emerged as a powerful response to its own times.'[13] This chapter supports the view that British art of the post-war period is worthy of attention in its own right and was not only a stepping stone to something else. The artists exhibited at St. George's Gallery Prints were responding to the aesthetic and historical concerns of the era and

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[11] Lisa Tickner and David Peters Corbett, 'Being British and Going Somewhere...', *Art History*, 35.2(March 2012), 207-215 (p.207).

[12] 'The Graven Image (1959): Printmaking in Britain on the Threshold of the New' was given at the conference *Exhibiting Contemporary Art in Post-War Britain, 1945-60* which took place at the Tate Britain on the 28 and 29 January 2016.

[13] Jane Alison, 'Introduction' in *Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945-65*, ed. by Jane Alison with Hilary Floe and Charlotte Flint, exh. cat.(Munich, London and New York: Prestel, 2022), pp.11 – 21 (p.11).

making work that was vital and significant. But what were the qualities of the era – other than heterogeneity?

Periodization is inevitably arbitrary since we rely on events such as the end of war or the beginning of a new decade to separate one era from the next. Lived history is of course more fluid and we feel change gradually. That said, art historians and historians need to impose some kind of order on a period so that they can make sense of it. I have tried to make sense of Erskine's wide range of exhibitions by analysing them thematically and relating them to broader movements in painting and sculpture. These movements or trends include documentary/realism; neo-romanticism; expressive figuration with existential overtones; abstraction with a tendency towards gesture rather than geometry; ethnographic/ancient art and international art.[14] By grouping them in this way I will demonstrate that his curatorial choices were not as random as they initially seem and that they are reflective of a specific era.

The 1950s are sometimes considered a politically apathetic decade where post-war exhaustion and a longing for material comfort overrode the political idealism of the 1930s. In 1951, a conservative government was elected, and it remained in power for thirteen years. In 1953 the AIA removed their political clause, which for many artists – who tended to be left-leaning - signalled a new separation of art from politics.[15] Despite this, many progressive seeds were planted in the 1950s that bloomed in the 1960s. For example, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND), which catalysed young people into participating in mass demonstrations against the use of atomic weapons, was formed in November of 1957.

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[14] I will not focus on exhibitions or artists that I have written about at length in other chapters even though they inevitably fit into these categories
[15] Martin Harrison, op.cit., p.14.

Throughout the 1950s, left-wing intellectuals such as EP Thompson, Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams sought to understand class in relation to culture.[16] Their ideas were part of a broader movement to give a voice to groups that had been ignored by the establishment such as the working-classes, non-Londoners, women and people of colour. This movement would grow throughout the 1960s, which became a decade associated – perhaps falsely - with rebellion and the creation of a new classless meritocracy. Richard Hoggart's influential book *Uses of Literacy* was published in 1957 to great acclaim. In it he paints a positive picture of working-class culture, which he argues is being 'destroyed' or assaulted by mass culture in the form of newspapers, television and advertising. [17]

The artists who were most Hoggart-like in their celebration of working-class culture were the Kitchen Sink artists who included John Bratby, Derrick Greaves, Edward Middleditch and Jack Smith. The term, which was coined somewhat sarcastically by the critic David Sylvester because their art featured gritty scenes of domestic life, became part of the common vocabulary.[18] Their work, which Bratby described as 'introvert, grim, khaki in colour, opposed to prettiness, and dedicated to portraying a stark, raw, ugly reality' was sometimes given a political angle.[19] The Marxist critic John Berger tried to align them with the Social Realist painters in Europe and in doing so exaggerated their political motives.

The Kitchen Sink artists represented one strand of British art that can be broadly categorised as documentary or realistic. For the first half of the twentieth century British printmakers, as shown

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[16] Lynda Nead, *The Tiger in the Smoke: Art and Culture in Post-War Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press in association with the Paul Mellon Centre, 2017), p.228.

[17]Ironically, left and right-wing intellectuals such as Evelyn Waugh were united in their criticism of popular culture, particularly American popular culture – see Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy: Aspects of Working-Class Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957).

[18] They were represented by Helen Lessore of the Beaux Arts Gallery reached their height of fame in 1956 when Bratby, Greaves, Middleditch and Smith represented Britain at the 1956 Venice Biennale.

[19] John Bratby, quoted by Julian Spalding, 'Preface' in *The Forgotten Fifties*, exh.cat. (Sheffield: Sheffield Arts Department, 1984), p.5.

in the first few chapters of this thesis, often fell into this documentary category that was part of a wider societal interest in documenting or recording Britain's people and environment. Artists interested in prints were employed as official war artists, participated in schemes such as Recording Britain or Mass Observation, exhibited with the AIA and contributed to popular print series aimed at a mass audience. While some printmakers moved away from making socially conscious art in the 1950s, many did not. Erskine continued to exhibit documentary work at his gallery and some of the prints of La Dell and Trevelyan can be classed as documentary/realist. The same can be said for the prints of George Chapman, Josef Herman, John Watson and Peter Peri.

George Chapman was the son of a railway superintendent who converted to socialism after living through the hardships of the 1930s. [20] He was fifty-two when *The Rhondda Suite* was published and exhibited at St. George's Gallery Prints in August/September of 1960.[21] The prints, which were inspired by the Rhondda Valley in South Wales and depict a working-class mining town, could be from an earlier era were it not for the presence of television aerials and telephone lines in street scenes such as *Pigeon-houses* (Figure 102). In the catalogue, Chapman draws attention to fact that consumerism has entered the village when he states that 'married couples are busy buying their TV, bubble-cars and contemporary wallpapers, and the old people gossip and chatter without a trace of bitterness about the old days.' He does not malign the influence of the mass media in the way that Hoggart does and goes on to describe the valley as a place of 'strength and courage, sometimes sad with tragedy, but always intensely alive.'[22]

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[20] George Chapman trained as a commercial designer and worked alongside John Piper, Graham Sutherland and John Nash for Jack Beddington's Shell-Mex poster campaigns, as well as making art for Transport for London. He moved to Great Bardfield in Essex where he became part of the artistic community that included Michael Rothenstein, Edward Bawden and Kenneth Rowntree. He earned a living through teaching graphic design at the London School of Printing and Graphic Design, Central School of Art and Colchester Art School. His mode of working, which was influenced by Sickert and the Euston Road School was not fashionable in the sixties and he quickly lost confidence as an artist. See Robert K. Meyrick, 'Obituary: George Chapman', *The Independent*, 3 November 1993. [See online version, accessed 6 November 2021, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-george-chapman-1501818.html].

[21] *George Chapman: The Rhondda Suite*, exh.cat. (London: St. George's Gallery Prints, 1960).

[22] ibid.

George Chapman's brother, Henry Chapman, wrote the successful play, *You Won't Always Be On Top*.[23] The play, which was based on his work at a building site, incorporated working-class dialogue and was produced at Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop in the East End. Littlewood was a seminal figure in post-war British theatre because she rejected the standard artificial, upper-class theatrical milieu in favour of more authentic scenarios. Plays such as *A Taste of Honey*, which, among other things featured an unwed, pregnant teenager and an interracial relationship, set the tone for the gritty theatre and television productions that became commonplace in the early 1960s and were also described as Kitchen Sink dramas. [24]

While plays such as *A Taste of Honey* and *You Won't Always Be on Top* were considered experimental, print series such as *The Rhondda Suite* did not have the same impact.[25] Avant-garde sensibilities, as Storr argues, do not necessarily translate from one art form to another – especially in the mid-twentieth century when the avant-garde in fine art was very narrowly defined. However, it is possible that the problem lay less with the mode of expression but the message. The etchings and accompanying text of *The Rhondda Suite*, which are sympathetic to the condition of the worker and mildly patriotic, present a somewhat nostalgic view rural life. In reality, many mines in Wales were closing down and mining communities were already suffering from a resultant loss of jobs. That said, there is a sombre emptiness to the street scenes that possibly reflects the dwindling number of inhabitants due to economic migration.

Josef Herman was another artist with an interest in Welsh mining communities. Although he was born in Poland to a Jewish family, he fled to Scotland at the beginning of the war and became friends with Jankel Adler. In 1944, he moved to a village in South Wales where he lived for eleven

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[23] W.J. Strachan, 'The Artists of Great Bardfield', *The Studio*, 155 (781) (April 1958), 72-76, (p.74).

[24] In 1958, Littlewood shocked audiences with *A Taste of Honey* written by the 19-year-old playwright Shelagh Delaney who broached previously untouchable subjects including a mixed-race baby born to parents out of wedlock.

[25] Littlewood's innovations were not just in terms of content. She also introduced an improvisatory working style as well as innovations in stage design and lighting – see Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom, 1951 -1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.375.

years and whose miners became the main subjects of his art.[26] He depicted a row of hunched miners in 1951 when he was commissioned to paint a mural for the Festival of Britain and he returned to the theme when Erskine gave him his first print commission for St. George's Gallery Prints in 1960-2.

Two Miners is a stylised print of two seated miners with bowed heads and crossed arms who are cast in a dark shadow and set against a strong, mustard coloured background (Figure 103). Their eyes are deep holes, their faces are mask-like and their bodies are bulky and wooden. Whereas Chapman's miners were specific, these are generalised and anonymous. The work has formal affinities with the African-influenced paintings of Picasso and can be analysed in terms of neo-primitivism and modernism rather than social realism. Michael Clegg, who looks at the Erskine-commissioned prints of Herman and Chapman in his dissertation, writes of the 'tension between an earlier modernist stress on permanence and an emerging aesthetic of the transitory' that is evident in their related but contrasting work.[27]

John Watson is a lesser-known St. George's Gallery artist who wanted to document working-class traditions that were dying out by the early sixties[28]. The subject of his *Point-to-Point* lithographs, which were published by St George's Gallery Prints in November 1960, is an amateur steeple chase race that is unique to the UK and Ireland.[29] Watson's scratchy, stylised lithographs have abstract tendencies while remaining resolutely figurative. Perspective is rejected in favour of

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[26] See 'Biography', Josef Herman Art Foundation website: <u>Josef Herman - Josef Herman Foundation</u> [accessed 28 August 2021].

[27] Michael Clegg, ''The Poor Man's Picture Gallery': An Inquiry Into Artist's Printmaking and Print Images in the Cultural and Political Context of Post-War Britain, 1945-60', Ph.D. thesis (University of Birmingham, 2021), p.298.

[28] Watson was born in Manchester, began making art while serving in the navy during the war and ended up teaching lithography at the Central School.

[29] *John Watson: The Point-to-Point Lithographs*, exh.cat. (London: St. George's Gallery Prints, 1960).
Printed by the artist at his studio in Buckinghamshire (he always printed his own work) in editions of 30 plus 4 artist's proofs, the entire suite could be purchased for £100 and individual coloured prints sold for 8 gns, and black and white prints for 7 gns.

an intentionally flat, childlike depiction of space. In lithographs such as *Horses & Flags*, figures are piled on top of each other, and riders and horses turn into one huddled mass (Figure 104).

The artist Peter Peri, who exhibited his 'Pilgrim's Progress Suite' at St. George's Gallery Prints in 1958, experimented with different styles throughout his career.[30] The etchings in this series are figurative and expertly executed. In the *Death of the Faithful*, for example, two powerful steeds ascend to heaven carrying the martyred faithful in a chariot (Figure 105). In the catalogue, P.H. Hulton, Assistant Keeper in the Department of Prints & Drawings at British Museum, describes him as a contemporary traditionalist in the spirit of William Blake who is reviving the nearly lost tradition of illustration. And while this description is accurate, these prints are just one part of an extremely eclectic oeuvre and his development took many twists and turns.

Peter Peri was a Hungarian émigré artist who lived in Germany and Austria. His identity as a working-class Jewish man informed his politics and he was a member of the German Communist Party (KPD). He toured with a radical theatre company, studied architecture and showed abstract reliefs with Maholy-Nagy at Der Sturm Gallery. After immigrating to England in 1933, he exhibited with the Artists' International Association (AIA), worked on commissions for the London County Council and, in 1951 made a well-known pink, concrete sculpture the *Sunbathers* for the Festival of Britain.[31] He was greatly admired by the Marxist critic John Berger and remained politically committed throughout his career.[32]

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[30] *Peter Peri: Pilgrims Progress Suite*, exh.cat. (London: St. George's Gallery Prints, 1958). The suite of 18 etchings was printed in an edition of 18 and sold for £122 in black and white and £150 in colour. Individual sheets in an edition of 75 were available for 8 gns uncoloured and 9 gns in colour.

[31] Peri made a name for himself in in post-war Britain because of his sculptures and reliefs that were funded by the LCC and decorated public buildings such as council houses and schools.

[32] Examples of these include *Following the Leader* at Darley House in Vauxhaull Gardens, a dedication to children who died during the Blitz. (Darley House had been built to house those who had lost homes during the Blitz). He also made two architectural reliefs for council houses in South Lambeth. In 1966 he staged an exhibition called 'It's the People Who Matter' – see Historic England webpage blog: https://heritagecalling.com/2017/04/26/its-the-people-who-matter-the-post-war-public-art-of-peter-laszlo-peri/ - [Accessed 14 April 2023].

The meandering career of Peter Peri is a small example of the overlap between different artistic groups that was not uncommon. This is true of the documentary and romantic strains in British art, which, according to Margaret Garlake, had 'strong and formal links between them' as evidenced by the inherent romanticism of the Recording Britain Project. [33] Documentary and Neo-Romantic art burned bright during the Second World War but lost some of its momentum afterwards. Nevertheless, both types of art were still present in British art during the 50s and early 60s and were well-represented at St. George's Gallery Prints. John Piper, who had been the first artists to make prints for Erskine in Paris, was, along with Graham Sutherland, Paul Nash, and John Minton, one of the main proponents of the movement. Neo-Romantic landscapes were tinged with an air of melancholy and tended to hark back to a rural ideal. While modernism was not eschewed, it was adapted to accommodate a style of British art originally practiced by the likes of Samuel Palmer and William Blake.[34]

In addition to Piper, Erskine exhibited other artists who were associated with Neo-Romantic movement including Graham Sutherland and Michael Ayrton. Martin Harrison writes that Ayrton was part of a second wave of Neo-Romantic artists who 'seldom tackled contemporary or political realities. Instead, from 1947, many of them joined an exodus to the Mediterranean.'[35] These artists were continuing in the escapist vein of their predecessors but drew their inspiration from abroad instead rather than from England. Harrison's definition of second-wave Neo-Romanticism can be applied to Michael Ayrton's 'Greek Suite' and Julian Trevelyan's *1959* 'Malta Suite.'*[36]*

Lesser-known artists who exhibited at St. George's Gallery Prints in the Neo-Romantic vein include Anthony Harrison and Francis Kelly. Harrison, who was born in Cornwall, was introduced

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[33]Margaret Garlake, *New Art New World: British Art in Postwar Society* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1998), p.86.
[34] Martin Harrison, op.cit., p.29.
[35] Martin Harrison, op.cit., p.35.
[36] *Michael Ayrton: Greek Suite*, exh.cat. (London: St George's Gallery Prints, 1956).

to etching in 1954 by Merlyn Evans and ended up teaching the medium at the Central School of Arts & Crafts alongside him. Harrison's 'Formentera Suite' of aquatints was published by St George's Gallery Prints in April of 1959 and consist of flat, planar landscapes and seascapes executed with thick, black outlines (Figure 106).[37] Francis Kelly was born in Minnesota and in 1955 he came to London on a Fulbright grant where he studied graphics at the Central School of Arts and Crafts. In May of 1960 his aquatints of Portugal were exhibited at St. George's Gallery Prints.[38] Although nominally of Portugal, they do not seem regionally specific and are in keeping with the other prints of the Mediterranean which also have an atmospheric, romantic and slightly melancholic mood (Figure 107).

In classifying Harrison and Kelly as Neo-Romantic, I am undoubtedly taken some license since they arguably fall into the documentary category. Most realistic art can have documentary qualities as well as more expressive, fanciful and imaginative qualities. In Britain during the post-war period, realistic art became the topic of heated debates between John Berger and David Sylvester, with the former advocating for 'art as socialism' and the latter for 'art as existentialism.'[39]Berger, as discussed earlier, attributed socialist motives to the Kitchen Sink artists and their ilk. Sylvester, meanwhile, attributed existential qualities to a wide range of figurative artists including Francis Bacon. While there was no victor in their public battle, existentialism remained relevant in the 1950s and the 1960s while socialist art was rapidly fading from view.

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[37] *Anthony Harrison: Formentera Suite*, exh.cat. (London; St George's Gallery Prints, 1959). The prints, made out of deep-etch sugar aquatint on zinc, were printed by the artist and his wife, Rita Lyons, from their press in Blackheath in editions of 50 (plus 5 artist's proofs) and sold for 10 guineas a piece or 55 guineas for the entire set.

[38] *Francis Kelly: Aquatints of Portugal,* exh.cat., (London: St George's Gallery Prints, 1960). The catalogue explains that the works themselves were produced between October 1959 and April 1960 and that some were printed by the artist himself and others by Messrs Brunsden and Sturgess of Welwyn Garden City. All of the aquatint were made in editions of 50 (plus 5 Artist's Proofs), were published by St. George's Gallery Prints and could be purchased individually for 12 gns. The entire suite cost 70 gns.

[39]Harrison, op.cit., p.14. See also - James Hyman, *The Battle for Realism: Figurative Art in Britain during the Cold War, 1945–60* (London: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre, 2001).

The philosophy of existentialism, which had its roots in the nineteenth century, became part of the mainstream culture after the Second World War thanks to the celebrity of Sartre and the relevance of a philosophy that sought meaning in the self or subjectivity after the supposed death of God and the horrors of the Holocaust and Hiroshima. Many post-war artists worked in a mode that can be characterised as existential but that I will define more loosely as expressive figuration. In this category, I include Lucian Freud, Francis Bacon, Graham Sutherland, the Geometry of Fear artists and many lesser known artists whose work reflected the anxiety and uncertainty of the post-war era.

The language of existentialism dominated the exhibition catalogue for the *New Images of Man* exhibition at MoMA in 1959. Its curator Peter Selz presented the public with a group of artists who he argued were striving to represent the subject appropriately in an era when humanity seemed under threat:

> The revelations and complexities of mid-twentieth-century life have called forth a profound feeling of solitude and anxiety. The imagery of man which has evolved from this reveals something of a new dignity, sometimes despair, but always the uniqueness of man as he confronts his fate. Like Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Camus, these artists are aware of anguish and dread, of life in which man – precarious and vulnerable – confronts the precipice, is aware of dying as well as living.[40]

Selz's selected artists include, among many others, Karel Appel, Francis Bacon, Jean Dubuffet, Alberto Giacometti, Reg Butler, Jackson Pollock and St. George's Gallery artist Leonard Baskin. Eduardo Paolozzi's sculptures were also on display. These artists were from different countries, different generations and had different styles. Nevertheless, the argument that they were united by a strong sense of existential dread was still thought to be compelling in 1959.

Leonard Baskin, who was included in the *New Images of Man* exhibition, had a solo show at St. George's Gallery Prints in May 1962. Born in New Jersey in 1933, he taught printmaking at

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[40] Peter Seltz (ed.), *New Images of Man*, exh.cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), p.11.

Smith College and set up the Gehenna Press in New Hampshire. The prints reproduced in Erskine's exhibition catalogue combine illustration and expressionism. Some such as *Angel of Death* are romantically macabre and others such as *Walt Whitman* show the artist's literary interests (Figure 105). The main figures are rendered in a thick, strong line and the addition of a swirling, feathery strokes give the prints an otherworldly quality.

The catalogue introduction was written by the celebrated poet Ted Hughes who knew Baskin well and calls him 'one of the most skilled engravers in the history of art.' [41] Hughes writes about the 'daemonic energy and trenchancy' of Baskin's prints and, in a roundabout way, suggests that his art reflects the trauma of an era of 'radioactivity' and 'death-camps.' [42] Leonard Baskin was highly regarded as a printmaker. In an article on the 1960 Biennial in Cincinatti, its founder Gustave von Groschwitz describes his woodcut *Everyman* as 'one of the most important prints in the exhibition.'[43] 1962, Baskin was granted first prize for engraving at the Sao Paulo Biennial, and he received many other public accolades.[44]

Ernst Fuchs is another artist whose work was expressively figurative. He was an eccentric character who was best known for co-founding the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism in the late 1940s.[45] Erskine met him in Paris while he was still at Cambridge and began organising exhibitions of his work in his student rooms. He continued to promote Fuchs's work while running St. George's

[41] *Leonard Baskin: Woodcuts and Wood-engravings*, exh. cat. (London: RWS Galleries, 1962). The exhibition was part of *The Graven Image* exhibition of 1962.

[42] Ted Hughes, 'Introduction' in Leonard Baskin exh. cat. op.cit., unpaginated. Baskin, who was American, spent nine years living in Devon near Hughes and his first wife Sylvia Plath who dedicated her play 'Sculptor' to him.

[43] Gustave von Groschwitz,'International Prints: Gustave von Groschwitz reviews the 1960 Biennial at Cincinatti', *The Studio*, 160 (809), (September 1960), 82 – 86, 115 – 116 (p.115).

[44] Albert D. Hinrichsen, 'Biennial São Paulo', *The Studio*, 163 (825), 24-25 (p.24.)

[45] The movement was influenced by old-master painters and by fin de siècle artists like Klimt and Schiele and Dali and the Surrealists. His bright paintings from this period combine mysticism, realism and eroticism and are early harbingers of psychedelic poster art of the 1960s. Towards the end of his life he converted a decaying Otto Wagner villa on the outskirts of Vienna and in 1988 turned it in to a museum dedicated to his prints, paintings and tapestries Although a fair amount of literature can be found on Fuchs in the German language, there is little about him in English – see 'Ernst Fuchs: Obituary', *The Telegraph*, 8 December 2015 – see online version http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/12039502/Ernst-Fuchs-artist-obituary.html [accessed 14 April 2023].

Gallery Prints, and from May to June of 1958 staged a solo exhibition of his paintings, drawings and etchings.[46] The prints, including the etching St George, have mystical or religious connotations and hark back to an older age of printmaking (Figure 108). The world Fuchs conjures up is medieval in its imagery of saints, devils and martyrs and he states that his prints are the external manifestation of his inward spirituality.

Post-war British art has a reputation for being tonal, muted and full of shadows. This was partly a reflection of Britain's cold and wet climate and partly because the country felt dark and bleak after the hardships of war.[47] In *The Tiger in the Smoke: Art and Culture in Post-War Britain* Lynda Nead argues that a 'loss of colour became a symbol of all that was wrong with the post-war settlement' and that colour became associated with progress and modernity.[48] Despite longing for brightness, Nead writes that colour was also perceived of as threatening and alien. She writes that many post-war British artists forgot how to use colour after the war and that the basics of colour had to be retaught by the likes of Richard Hamilton and Tom Hudson in their Basic Design courses.[49] By the 1960s, bright (even garish) colours were ubiquitous – in contemporary art, fashion, colour supplements and on record covers – and became a symbol of the decade.

Many British artists working in the documentary, romantic and expressive modes of figuration tended to make work with a dark palette. Abstract art was generally brighter, and the St. Ives abstractionists were particularly adept with colour. As discussed in chapter 3, Erskine commissioned prints by Terry Frost, Patrick Heron, Sandra Blow, Bryan Wynter and Trevor Bell and encouraged St. Ives artists pursue printmaking professionally rather than privately. Colour had been at the forefront of Frost's mind when, in 1953, he organised the exhibition *Space In Colour* at

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[46] E*rnst Fuchs: Paintings, Drawings and Etchings*, exh.cat. (London: St George's Gallery Prints, 1958).
[47] Even before the war, English artists had a reputation for shying away from bright colours and using a palette more in keeping with their physical surroundings.
[48] Nead, op.cit., p.129.
[49] Nead, op.cit., p.238.

the Hanover Gallery in order to draw attention to the abstract artists who he believed were using colour effectively. The implication of the exhibition was that many post-war artists were afraid of colour.

During the first half of the twentieth century, the British printmaking scene was associated with black and white etching and as, Anthony Griffith writes, 'colour was eschewed by most of the existing societies for printmakers' until the 1950s. [50] When printmakers did begin making more colourful prints in the 1950s, their work – for better and for worse – competed with the new market for colour reproductions. In 1948, Clive Bell had criticized the quality of these reproductions, writing about 'the glaring discrepancies between the current reproductions of Van Gogh's more popular pictures and the originals lately seen at the Tate.' [51] He thought that the original lithographs by fine artists were a good alternative to these shoddy reproductions. However, some public figures such as Peter Floud looked upon this new love of colour with a degree of suspicion, as though it might yield vulgar results. [52]

As a gallery owner, Erskine tried to navigate the dynamics of colour in the post-war art world. I stated in chapter 2 that that colourful work was on display in his film *Artist's Proof* in order to demonstrate that prints could be bright and modern. And in the catalogue for *The Graven Image* exhibition of 1959 he wrote that: 'The first striking feature in the exhibition is the lack of little black and white etchings in large white mounts.' [53] By distinguishing the colourful prints from the subdued decorative etchings of the previous decades, Erskine was hopeful that British prints could

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[50] Frances Carey, Antony Griffiths, (eds), *Avant-Garde British Printmaking 1914-1960*, exh.cat. (London: British Museum Publications, 1990), p.20.

[51] Clive Bell, 'Introduction' in *Original Colour-Prints by The Society of London Painter-Printers*, exh.cat., (London: Redfern Gallery, 1948). Unpaginated.

[52] In 1950, Peter Floud wrote critically about this new 'demand for colour' amongst lithographers, arguing that it 'was not entirely healthy' and attributing it to the fact that the public wanted pictures rather than prints.' Floud seemingly regarded 'pictures' as decorations rather than works of art and thought that printmakers should aspire to making the latter – see Peter Floud, 'British Lithography Today', *The Studio*, 140 (690) (September 1950), 64 - 72 (p.66).

[53] Robert Erskine, 'Introduction', *The Graven Image Exhibition* exh.cat. (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1959), pp.6-8. (p.6).

make the same impact as paintings. In this regard his wishes were granted when in 1957, a reviewer praised his annual group show for being 'being colourful and vigorous' and wrote that colour has been 'used with more success, and with more pleasing texture, than in much contemporary painting.'[54]

Colour was an important part of abstract art. Abstraction, however, was still controversial in the immediate post-war years. The topic was debated in the press and many artists seemed uncertain about whether to pursue abstraction, figuration or both. In 1948, for example, Victor Pasmore had switched to an abstract style in the middle of a successful figurative career. The opposite was true for John Piper. Other artists like Julian Trevelyan and Peter Peri went back and forth between abstraction and figuration. By the mid-fifties abstraction was more widely accepted as a legitimate style of art. Lawrence Alloway, who served as director of the ICA and was a leading member of the Independent Group, helped formalise the discourse around abstraction in Britain with the publication of his book *Nine Abstract Artists* in 1954. It included St. Ives-affiliated artists such as Terry Frost, William Scott and Roger Hilton who were guided by their instinctive response to nature as well as Constructionists such as Victor Pasmore and Kenneth and Mary Martin who were more interested in geometry and architecture.[55] But by the time Alloway put his stamp on the first *Situation* exhibition in 1960, he excluded the St. Ives artists entirely. Instead, he favoured a younger generation of artists such as Gillian Ayres, John Hoyland, Robyn Denny and Richard Smith who made large-scale works with harder edges, cooler colours and 'new conception of space' that supposedly engulfed the viewer in a way that was physical rather than purely optical.[56]

Out of all the artists who exhibited at St. George's Gallery Prints, the St. Ives artists were the ones who came closest to fulfilling the modernist requirements of abstraction – even if many of

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[54] 'From Our Critic: Vituperative Hogarth: Engravings Which Repay Attention', *The Times*, 25 July, 1957, p 3.
[55] Adrian Heath was seen as an intermediary between the groups.
[56] Frances Spalding, *British Art Since 1900* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1987), p.189.

them were inspired by nature. As I stated in chapter 3, the artists were critically admired in Britain

and received international attention, including visits from Clement Greenberg and Mark Rothko.

(Greenberg, however, never promoted their work and in retrospect seems to have been prejudiced

against any contemporary art that was not American). Looking back on this period, Patrick Heron

wrote that 'a case could be made for considering St. Ives the most influential centre of Western

painting during the late Fifties.'[57] However, their claim to avant-garde pre-eminence was relatively

short-lived as evidenced by Alloway's rejection of their 'all-over' compositions as passé by the

early sixties.

Erskine tended to stay away from contentious debates about art and claimed not to follow

'any artistic creed' in his selection process.[58] However, a cutting-edge critic like Alloway, if he had

considered Erskine's curatorial choices, would probably have dismissed the mainly semi-abstract,

documentary or expressively figurative prints as a safe option for a cultured but not particularly

adventurous clientele. The majority of the prints on display at his annual group shows of

contemporary British prints were semi-abstract compositions in a gestural rather than hard edged or

geometric style. The colours that stand out are quite bold: red, purple, blue, orange and black, and

animals, birds and creature-like forms are common, and an element of metamorphosis or

transformation can be detected in many of the prints by artists such as Merlyn Evans, Allin Braund

and Henry Cliffe.

Semi-abstraction was an important feature of Erskine's annual round-ups of contemporary

prints but also of other group exhibitions such as *Stonehenge,* an exhibition of 'eleven new

engravings and lithographs' in 1960.[59] Artists featured included Allin Braund, Keith Armour,

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[57] Patrick Heron, 'St Ives and Penwith',leaftlet, June 1977, np, quoted by Chris Stephens, 'Introduction,' *St Ives: The Art and Artists* (London: Pavilion, Tate, London 2018), pp.4-22 (p.17).

[58] Robert Erskine, 'Introduction,' *British Graphic Art 1957*, exh.cat. (London: St.George's Gallery Prints, 1957), unpaginated.

[59] *Stonehenge*: *eleven new engravings and lithographs*, exh.cat. (London: St. George's Gallery Prints, 1960).

Valerie Thornton and Julian Trevelyan. All eleven prints are semi-abstract, and over half of them could be read as fully abstract were it not for one's knowledge of the theme of Stonehenge. Other works in the series bear a passing resemblance to human figure. This is evident in Keith Armour's coloured etching which is similar in style to David Hockney's 1961 student painting *We Two Boys Together Clinging*. In both works, a rounded block-like form and an adjacent but not connected sphere can be read as stylised or abstracted versions of a torso and head (Figures 110 and 111).

Stonehenge is an iconic British monument that has fuelled the imagination of artists and writers for centuries. Like many prehistoric artworks, it has both figurative and abstract qualities. We stand in relation to the massive sarsens and bluestones, which are firm and upright and can be interpreted as Gods or human avatars. Equally, they can be regarded as beautifully arranged abstract sculptures that interact with the surrounding landscape, perhaps even aligning with the sun during summer solstice. As pure forms, they arguably show man's universal preoccupation with how to arrange figures in space, how to erect freestanding structures and how to engage with lines, curves, and geometric shapes.

Stonehenge, which was a source of inspiration to Romantic artists such as Turner and Constable, became particularly important to British artists in the first few decades of the twentieth century. In her book *Romantics Moderns*, Alexandra Harris writes about how the likes of Moore, Hepworth, Piper and (Paul) Nash appropriated English prehistoric art for different purposes. Harris writes about the influence of Neolithic monoliths in Hepworth's sculptures and the profound impact that a late night visit to Stonehenge had on Henry Moore. In addition to stone monuments such as Stonehenge and the stone circles of Avebury, artists and the general public in the 1930s were drawn to the ancient chalk figure of the Uffington White Horse in Oxfordshire.[60]

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[60] Alexandra Harris, *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2010), pp..211-213.

Primitive, ethnographic and prehistoric art – as discussed in earlier chapters - was an inspiration to modernist artists including Picasso, Matisse, Brancusi, Moore and Evans. While early avant-garde artists such as Marinetti and Malevich advocated the radical rebirth of art, later modernists saw themselves as part of tradition that extended back into prehistory. Both the modern nativism of the Neo-Romantics and the evolutionary approach of modernists from the 1930s was arguably out-of-date by 1960 when the group exhibition *Stonehenge* was published. Nevertheless, an interest in anthropology, ethnography, morphology and the study of universal forms continued to interest artists in the post-war era.

The ICA was the institution that engaged most directly with ideas about the continuity between past and present with exhibitions such as *40,000 Years of Modern Art: A Comparison of Primitive and Modern* (1948/49) and *Growth and Form: The Development of Natural Shapes and Structures* (1951). While the work Erskine exhibited at St. George's Gallery Prints was very different from the ICA, his obsession with the art of the ancient world was aligned with the broader cultural climate. In 1961 and 1962, Erskine published two sets of silkscreen prints of the ancient cave paintings in Lascaux and the Etruscan tomb-paintings from Tarquinia (Figure 112). [61] The unearthing of the caves at Lascaux in 1940 had been an important discovery to artists who found the work fresh, direct and surprisingly modern.[62] Because photographs could not capture the scale and impact of the paintings *in situ*, the artist D. Mazonowicz made life size copies of the originals. All of the prints were over a meter in height and one of the Tarquinia prints measured 12 feet in length. The Tarquina prints could be rolled up in cardboard and sent in the post and instructions for displaying and protecting the prints were provided.

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[61] See *Lascaux: Six Upper Palaeolithic Paintings,* exh.cat. (London: St George's Gallery Prints, 1961); *Etruscan Tomb-Paintings from Tarquinia,* exh.cat. (London: St George's Gallery Prints, 1962). They were Douglas Mazonowicz's full-size silkscreens prints.

[62] The Lascaux caves were first officially discovered in 1940 but it was not until after the war that they began to be visited in earnest. William Scott, for example, visited Lascaux in 1954 and found the experience impactful on his art. Many artists felt the same way.

The scale and price of the work, which at £87 for the set of Lascaux prints was not cheap, suggests that they were intended for museums or schools. In this instance Erskine was willing to produce reproductions even though he spent years trying to convince the public that prints were original works of art. This stemmed from his belief that art could be used for educative purposes and the project harks back to an earlier era when prints were mainly intended to reproduce paintings. [63] It is not clear what impact these large-scale prints had – if any – but I believe it is worth drawing attention to their existence as an example of the cross-over between modernist art, ethnographic art, educative art and reproductive art that still existed in the early 60s.

Many artists and intellectuals criticised the culture of post-war Britain for being insular, conservative and run by philistines. They thought that Britain needed to look outwards and engage with the wider world in a cultural sense, even if her political power was diminishing and she was slowly losing her imperial territories. Artists affiliated with the Independent Group were interested in popular culture, particularly American pop culture, which they began engaging with in new ways. Abstract painters, as I have already shown, were engaging in a dialogue with *Tachisme* and Abstract Expressionism as it was developing France and the U.S. While Erskine was not specifically aligned with any art historical movements, I have argued that he was international in outlook and encouraged cross-cultural exchange by putting British artists in touch with American contacts or trying to set up a branch of Atelier 17 in London. He had, or course, been inspired by French ateliers to set up his gallery in the first place.

Erskine's wide-ranging interests took him further afield than Europe and the U.S., and he curated several exhibitions of printmakers from non-western countries including Asia and India. Erskine's childhood spent in India during the British Raj left him with a love of the country that

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[63] These were Erskine's first major silkscreen publications, and the medium would of course come to dominate printmaking in mid-1960s.

manifested itself in his lifelong pursuit of collecting Indian art objects. In 1959, he exhibited and

published the work of a contemporary Indian artist called Laxman Pai.[64] Although Pai's work is

Indian in terms of content, the illustrative, child-like style shows a mixture of influences including

Dubuffet and Chagall. Pai lived abroad for many years, and at the age of 25 had left his teaching

post in Bombay to learn painting, lithography and the Beaux Arts in Paris. A successful

international career followed with exhibitions in Europe, America and India before the artist's

decision to move from Paris to London in 1958 and begin work on the *The Life of the Buddha* at the

Central School of Arts and Crafts (Figure 113).

Erskine did not have a personal connection to Japan, but he rated Japanese culture very

highly and particularly valued their printmakers. He held multiple exhibitions of Japanese prints at

the gallery and was one of the most active promoters of Japanese printmaking in the UK. In a

review of the 1959/60 exhibition *The Polite Tournament*, GS Whittet wrote: 'Colour, texture and

the varying tones of grey that sing in tonal harmonies allied to the forceful use of white paper

combine to present one of the most telling shows – the first exhibition of modern Japanese art to be

seen her since the war.' [65]

The theme of *The Polite Tournament* as stated in the exhibition catalogue is cross-cultural

exchange, and Erskine uses the language of boxing to describe the artistic relationship between

Europe and Japan. [66] Round Two, for example, is the influence of Japanese Ukiyo-ye prints (which

were casually used to wrap up exported lacquer boxes) on the likes of Whistler and Manet in the

mid-to-late nineteenth century. Erskine, who writes that he is drawn to the abstract nature of

Japanese calligraphy, concludes his essay by saying that he hopes the Japanese 'will win Round

Four, and that the Polite Tournament will never end!'

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[64] *Laxman Pai: The Life of the Buddha,* exh.cat. (London: St George's Gallery Prints, 1959).
[65] G.S.Whittet, 'London Commentary', *The Studio*, 159 (803) (March 1960), 101-102 (p.102).
[66] *The Polite Tournament: Contemporary Japanese Printmakers*, exh.cat. (London: St George's Gallery Prints, 1959).

A retrospective of the Japanese woodcutter Shiko Munakata was held at the Royal

Watercolour Society Galleries in 1961 (Figure 114). In the catalogue Erskine compares the artist to

Picasso by stating that he too worked in an instinctive, frenzied way, 'like some devil-possessed

shaman in the grip of trance.' [67] The comparison to Picasso, while arguably part of a strategy to

make Japanese prints more familiar to the British public, was also related to the fact that Munakata

– like his mentor Un'ichi Hiratsuku – combined the Western woodcutting method of cutting directly

into the wood block with Japanese motifs. 'Munakata's prints, filled with Japanese legend,

Buddhist figures, and traditional images are, like their counterparts in Mexico, hybrids of modern

European influences and older national expression taken predominantly from folk and archaic

sources.'[68]

Munakata's hybrid practice made an impression on Michael Rothenstein when he saw his

exhibition at St.George's Gallery Prints: 'Here was an altogether different perception of *hanga*

(print), dissolving boundaries between colour and scale, painting and print, nature and idea.'[69] The

relationship between Japanese and British printmakers continued to grow in the 1960s, and many

British printmakers began showing their work at the International Print Biennial in Tokyo thanks to

Erskine's efforts. Artists like Birgit Skiold were greatly influenced by Japanese prints, as were

American printmakers during the print boom.

Erskine held his final exhibition of Japanese prints in 1963, the year the gallery closed, in

combination with British contemporary prints from his final *The Graven Image* exhibition at the

RWS Galleries.[70] The fact that he included the work of Japanese artists in an exhibition that was

originally devised to champion British printmakers is a sign of how important this work was to him.

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[67] *Shinko Munkakata*, exh.cat. (London: RWS Galleries, 1961). This was an exhibition organized by Kokusai Bunka Shinkokai and St. George's Gallery Prints.

[68] Riva Castleman, *Prints of the Twentieth Century,* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), p.126.

[69] Tessa Sidey, (ed.), *The Prints of Michael Rothenstein*, exh.cat. (Aldershot, Hants: Scolar Press, 1993), pp.16-17.

[70] Robert Erskine, (ed.), 'The Graven Image. Contemporary Printmaking - East meets West in contemporary printmaking', *The Studio,* 165 (842), 266 -269 (p.266).

It can also be taken as a sign that by 1963 he found any strict divisions along national lines too restrictive. By then, Erskine's ideas about internationalism and cross-cultural exchange were becoming more widespread and the insularity of Britain began to seem like a problem of the past.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have aimed to give the work exhibited at St. George's Gallery Prints a more 'pluralistic, integrated and nuanced appraisal' as advocated by Robert Storr.[71] Rather than dismissing the prints as falling between modernism and pop art, or merely paving the way for the print boom of the 1960s, I have situated them within the broader artistic context. In doing so, I have drawn attention to the artistic intermingling that took place in small artistic communities, the about-faces in style that were relatively common and the connections between seemingly different and opposed schools of art. I have emphasised the porousness of an art scene that could not be pinned down to a particular style or creed but that is increasingly valued for this eclecticism.

By looking at Erskine's exhibitions within a wider context, I have argued that his curatorial choices were not as random as they initially seem and were in fact perfectly reflective of the period. This period is one that is being recognised and re-evaluated by art historians, including those who wrote essays for the catalogue to the Barbican's landmark 2022 exhibition *Postwar Modern*. While the diversity of British art is undeniable, there are other qualities that stand out such as an emphasis on the disfigured human body, an interest in urban detritus, an ambiguity of forms and a proclivity for metamorphosis and, ultimately, as eloquently described by Ben Highmore, a need to make sense of a world that had been fundamentally altered by The Second World War. Highmore writes that post-war British art 'does not have the glitz and glamour we associate with the new. It is often shop-

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[71]At the beginning of this chapter, I quoted Robert Storr who writes that the 'gradual exhaustion of old antinomies…has required a more pluralistic, integrated and nuanced appraisal of what happened in modern art.' Robert Storr,op.cit.,p.34.

soiled and dog-eared. And yet this was not an art of mourning or acquiescence. What comes through is a restless energy, a lively, fleshy assertion of obdurate existence.'[72]

The prints exhibited by Erskine have received very little scholarly attention since their initial publication despite their energy, vitality and obdurateness. I think that this total omission is not justified and it will hopefully be corrected by future scholars. Some of the prints can be described with the language of mid-century modernism because of their flatness, use of gesture and all-over compositions. The majority of the prints, however, are semi-abstract or representational. A number of them are nostalgic and hark back to a simpler time, others capture the anxiety of the atomic age and the rest are obliquely political in their depiction of the working-classes. All are serious and sombre rather than glib and ironic. And many are of high quality, both in terms of print production and in terms of aesthetics.

All in all, there is a richness and a complexity to Erskine's exhibition history that defies stereotypes about his privileged, upper-class background and supposed dilettantism. His progressive tendencies are evident in his interest in making art available to everyone and his promotion of obliquely left-wing subjects. His inclusivity and disdain for provincialism is evident in his support of multi-cultural artists like Laxman Pai and his long-term interest in Japanese art. Despite being the founder of a gallery for contemporary British artists, Erskine wanted to break down national barriers and encourage international exchange. While the artists he exhibited were predominately white men, he was at least aware of the fact the future of Britain was an increasingly international one where colonialism, immigration, class and gender would come to the fore. In this regard he was ahead of his times.

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[72] Ben Highmore, 'Art, Aftershocks and the Promise of a New World' in *Postwar Modern: New Art in Britain 1945-65*, ed. by Jane Alison with Hilary Floe and Charlotte Flint, exh. cat.(Munich, London and New York: Prestel, 2022), pp.29 – 34 (p.29).

CHAPTER 7: *The Graven Image* exhibitions

Erskine's annual group shows of contemporary British printmakers were central to his exhibition programme because he saw the revival of printmaking as a collective endeavour. [73] Group shows were better able to demonstrate 'the individual qualities of each medium' and help viewers achieve 'a greater understanding of the purpose & character of printmaking.' [74] Ultimately, Erskine wanted to prove that prints were distinct from paintings and the best means of doing so was via these annual surveys. [75]

Erskine's group exhibitions of contemporary prints were generally well-reviewed in the press. For example, the 1957 exhibition was praised in *The Times* for 'embracing most of the current styles.' Certainly, his embrace of multiple styles was in evidence in this format which brought a wide range of techniques and artists together. Most of the prints were lithographs, etchings or aquatints, although there were some engravings, linocuts, woodcuts and screenprints. [76] Erskine tended to show prints by artists he had already commissioned including his core artists La Dell, Evans, Gross, Ayrton, Richards and Trevelyan; St. Ives artists such as Frost, Heron and Wynter; and Scottish artists such as Elizabeth Blackadder and Anne Redpath. [77] Other women exhibited in his group shows included Gertrude Hermes, Birgit Skiold, Helena Markson and Valerie

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[73] Letters, data and other information in this chapter come from the folder on the *Graven Image* exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery Archive unless otherwise stated. The folder number is WAG/EXH/2/63. I visited the Whitechapel Gallery archive on two occasions, first on 9 November 2015 and again on 12 April 2019.

[74] Robert Erskine, 'Introduction,' *Contemporary British Printmakers 1958*, exh.cat. (London: St. George's Gallery Prints, 1958), p.1. The exhibition ran from 1 July to 30 August and was open from 10 am to 6 pm on the weekdays and 10 am to 1 pm on Saturdays.

[75] Robert Erskine, 'Introduction,' *British Graphic Art 1957*, exh.cat. (London: St. George's Gallery Prints, 1958), unpaginated. Erskine writes that 'each process offers qualities which are not available in other media, and it is for this reason that that the artist makes prints in the first place.'

[76] The artist John Coplans contributed the 'silkscreen' *Cinema Screen* to the 1957 exhibition and the artist Cliff Holden contributed the 'silkscreen' *Nude* to the 1958 exhibition.

[77] 'From Our Critic: Vituperative Hogarth: Engravings Which Repay Attention', *The Times*, 25 July, 1957, p.3.

Thornton.[78] No women were given solo shows except for Charlotte Jennings whose *Conversation Suite* of three etchings was part of the exhibition *Contemporary British Printmakers 1958*.

In 1957, G.S. Whittet wrote about that year's survey of contemporary prints in his London Commentary section of *The Studio*, giving Erskine much of the credit for a 'tremendous renaissance in printmaking' that had taken place:

> One is not ignorant of the efforts of the Senefelder Club, the encouragement of the Giles Bequest and the stimulating teaching at the Royal College of Art, the Slade, the Central and other art schools in London, when one says that much of the heralding of this renaissance is due to the efforts of one individual: the Hon. Robert Erskine of St. George's Gallery.[79]

Whittet praises specific prints such as Richard Beer's 'incredible *Red* etching', Helena Markson's *Limehouse* and Derek Hyatt's lithograph *City by Night*. In Whittet's review of the next year's 1958 exhibition, he writes about the high-quality and affordability of the prints and compares them favourably to contemporary paintings which he describes as being in the 'doldrums.' [80]

By 1959, Erskine could feel encouraged about the progress he had made but he also knew that much more needed to be done. He decided to build on the success of his annual exhibitions with a larger survey of British printmaking at the Whitechapel, which under the direction of Bryan Robertson had become the preeminent venue for modern art in the country. Erskine, as stated earlier, had first met Robertson while studying at Cambridge: 'I got along with him straight away. Kindred spirits and have been ever since' he said in his interview.[81] Erskine, as also noted in the second chapter, regarded Robertson as a mentor even though he was only his junior by five years. Robertson, however, had had a precocious start and was running the Heffer Gallery in Cambridge

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[78] Hepworth and Clough exhibited in the *Graven Image* exhibition of 1959 and not the previous annual round-ups.

[79] GS Whittet, 'London Commentary', *The Studio*, 154 (774) (October 1957), p.126 (p.196).

[80] GS Whittet, 'London Commentary', *The Studio,* 156 (786) (September 1958), p. 92 (p.92).

[81] Bryan Robertson and Robert Erskine were very different people. Robertson, who was born into genteel poverty, attended Battersea Grammar School but spent much of his childhood reading as a result of severe asthma. Erskine, who was educated at Eton and Cambridge, was a wealthy aristocrat in good health. While Robertson was homosexual, Erskine was decidedly not. Nevertheless, they got along very well and were both key figures in the revival of British printmaking.

by his mid-twenties. It was in Cambridge that Robertson's 'gift for catalytic friendship developed' and where he used his contacts to put on important exhibitions that few others could pull off such as one on modern French painting.[82] The exhibition that made a great impression on Erskine, however, was one of lithographs and etchings by *La Guilde de la Gravure,* a Zurich-based publishing house.[83] This encounter with beautiful but inexpensive prints planted the idea that eventually led to the creation of St. George's Gallery Prints. In this way, Robertson and Erskine were inextricably linked.

In 1952, when Robertson was 27 years old, he beat out stiff competition from David Sylvester and Lawrence Gowing to become the Director of the Whitechapel Art Gallery.[84] The Whitechapel Art Gallery had been founded in 1901 with the aim of bringing fine art to the people of East London, a historically poor area that was home to many immigrants. The gallery had an educational remit that complemented Robertson's core beliefs. For Robertson was 'driven by two, deeply interlinked, unifying purposes: the radical revitalising of British art, and the education through pleasure of the British going public.'[85] But a problem for Robertson was that while he thought that radical art ought to be educational and pleasurable, the trustees of the gallery did not always agree.[86]

When Robertson arrived at the Whitechapel in the early 1950s, he found the emphasis placed on the Euston Road School and the realism championed by John Berger to be dispiriting. In fact, he was resistant to going ahead with the 1952 exhibition *Looking Forward* that had already been curated by Berger prior to Robertson's arrival at the gallery:

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[82] see entry for Bryan Robertson in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: www.oxforddndb.com.
[83] Erskine recalled that the prints were made in editions of 100 and sold for about 3 guineas, an amount many students could afford.
[84] see entry for Bryan Robertson in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*: www.oxforddndb.com.
[85] ibid.
[86] Lambirth, op.cit., p.51.

> Everything was a kind of monochromatic haze of subfuse greys and browns and ochres and no colour. It was very drab, and the show was ill-attended…I realised that what the people of East London wanted was colour and vivacity and something to lift them up.[87]

The art that Robertson found uplifting was colourful and harmonious: French nineteenth and early twentieth-century art; American Abstract Expressionism; and the work of some contemporary British artists 'once they got their palettes cleansed.' Even though the Whitechapel had a limited budget, he was able to put on expensive and often international shows because of his extensive network of contacts.

Significant exhibitions of work by Mondrian and Malevich that came to the Whitechapel rather than to the Tate or the Arts Council were due to Robertson's friendship with Willem Sandberg at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Similarly, his friendships with Stefan Munsing at the American Embassy and Peter Selz at New York's MoMA brought seminal exhibitions of American art to the Whitechapel. The most famous of these, *Jackson Pollock* (1958) attracted over 30,000 visitors and was so popular that its run was extended by a few weeks. [88] The exhibition was one of the first opportunities for the British public to see such a large body of Pollock's work in person.[89]

Robertson was meticulous about how work was displayed, and consulted artists whenever he could. For the *Jackson Pollock* exhibition, Robertson oversaw the construction of a total environment by hanging the paintings individually on freestanding concrete walls and draping the ceiling with muslin cloth.[90] For Mark Rothko's Whitechapel retrospective in 1961, Robertson followed the artist's detailed instructions about hanging the paintings low to the ground and dimming the lights.[91] Even

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[87] Lambirth, op.cit., p.19.

[88] The exhibition was sponsored by MoMA's International Circulating Exhibitions Programme.

[89] In 1956 the Tate had put on *Modern Art in the United States: A Selection from the Collections of the Museum of Modern Art* and in 1958/50 they put on *The New American Painting as Shown in Eight European Countries*. Both exhibitions contained some works by Pollock.

[90] Trevor Dannatt was hired to realise Robertson's vision.

[91] Marco Livingstone, 'Reshaping the Whitechapel: Installations from Tomorrow to Today', in *The Whitechapel Art Gallery Centenary Review, 1901-2001* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2001), pp.32- 36 (p.33). Robertson also worked very closely with Robert Rauschenberg on his 1964 retrospective at the Whitechapel Gallery where he exhibited combine works, some of which were made with screenprints.

though Robertson was known for his autocratic running of the gallery, he could also cede control if a high-quality exhibition like *This Is Tomorrow* (1956) was presented to him.

This Is Tomorrow, which is often said to have heralded Pop Art in Britain, consisted of 12 installations by teams of artists and architects loosely affiliated with the ICA and the Constructionist movement.[92] The second installation, the so-called 'fun house', represented Richard Hamilton, John McHale and John Voeckler's vision of the future and 'was dedicated to visual stimulation and pleasure.' It took the form of a small environment mostly adorned with collages of American magazines and advertisements and large photographic cut-outs of celebrities.[93] In Hamilton's poster for the exhibition, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* the word 'pop' actually appears. The installation by Alison and Peter Smithson, Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi, meanwhile, engaged with surrealism and art brut rather than mass culture.[94] *This Is Tomorrow* seemed to synthesise many of the ideas about art and culture that had been in the ether for the past ten years in Britain but also to set the mood for what was to come next.

This Is Tomorrow had little input from Robertson, but its eclecticism matched his own curatorial tendency to 'show a range of simultaneous discourses at once' rather than championing one school of art. In doing so, Mary Yule writes that Robertson was 'very much at odds' with the orthodox modernism of Clement Greenberg. By organising a series of exhibitions that included international modernists as well as British artists (both young and mid-career), she argues that Robertson 'presented a view of richness and variety in British art, placing it, where he felt it was

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[92] An early meeting about the exhibition had in fact taken place at Adrian Heath's Charlotte Street studio. This is another example of how Heath was at the centre of various overlapping artistic groups during this period.

[93] Much of this material had been brought back in John McHale's suitcase after a trip to America.

[94] Jeremy Millar, 'This is Tomorrow', in *The Whitechapel Art Gallery Centenary Review, 1901-2001* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2001), pp.67- 70 (p.68).

merited, on equal terms with distinguished foreign art.'[95] In his rejection of orthodoxy and in his acceptance of heterogeneity, Robertson shared a curating style with Erskine.

Robertson was known for supporting emerging artists through his *New Generation* exhibitions in the mid-sixties. Nevertheless, he was also devoted to helping artists who faced unique challenges in middle age. He described these challenges in the catalogue to Michael Ayrton's 1955 Whitechapel show, writing that:

> In their middle years, artists need, with even greater urgency, every chance to exhibit their work in this country and abroad… For it is in this time in their lives that artists may find themselves temporarily becalmed in the doldrums of uncertainty.[96]

Robertson was acutely aware of the financial difficulties that even successful artists had, especially those with familial and/or teaching responsibilities, and he made a point of giving mid-career artist solo shows. In 1954, he gave Barbara Hepworth a Whitechapel retrospective and helped revive her temporarily lagging career. He also gave Whitechapel shows to mid-career, Erskine-affiliated artists such as Michael Ayrton (1955), Josef Herman (1955), Merlyn Evans (1956), S.W. Hayter (1957), Ceri Richards (1960) and Prunella Clough (1960). In 1955, the work of Elizabeth Blackadder was included in a show along with Gillian Ayres. [97]

The crossover between Erskine and Robertson's exhibition history reveals a shared sensibility and mutual interest in prints. Robertson's Whitechapel shows tended to concentrate on these artists' total bodies of work, but he also acknowledged the importance of their prints.[98] This was true of Merlyn Evans who Robertson described as 'the outstanding engraver in this country' in

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[95] Mary Yule, 'A Place for Living Art: the Whitechapel Art Gallery 1952-68' in Margaret Garlake, (ed.), *Artists and Patrons in Post-War Britain: Essays by Postgraduate Students at the Courtauld Institute of Art* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp.94-125 (p.96).

[96] Lambirth, op.cit., p.50.

[97] In 1958 a solo show at the Whitechapel was given to Robert Colquhoun, a painter and printmaker who Erskine had intended to commission but who blew the money he had given him up front on drink and was not given a second chance to make work for St. George's Gallery Prints.

[98] Of the 149 exhibited works at S.W. Hayter's retrospective, for example, 49 were prints. This was a relatively high percentage of the total. In the Merlyn Evans exhibition, 20 out of 132 works were prints – see *Merlyn Evans: Paintings, Drawings and Etchings*, exh.cat. (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1956), p.7.

his 1956 Whitechapel exhibition catalogue. Evans had been an early mentor to Robertson (along with Kenneth Clarke and Colin MacInnes) and Robertson was extremely loyal to him for the rest of his life.[99]

Hayter was another artist who Robertson always championed. In the 1957 exhibition catalogue to Hayter's Whitechapel retrospective – the first of its kind in Britain - Robertson describes him as 'the greatest living engraver' and laments the fact that he is not sufficiently well-known in England. [100] Robertson, who thought that the English were woefully ignorant about contemporary printmaking, hoped to get additional essays for the catalogue written by American curators. The first, Carl O. Schniewind, Curator of the Department of Prints and Drawings at the Art Institute of Chicago, died suddenly before his text was completed. [101] The second curator, James Johnson Sweeney of the Guggenheim Museum, did not end up writing an essay for reasons not specified. [102]

In a letter to Hayter a week before the exhibition opened, Robertson admits that Sweeney's 'failure to deliver his text' is a 'great blow.' However, he tries to assure Hayter that the exhibition will still be a success:

> Do not be despondent over the lack of critical writing in the catalogue. Honestly, it is no real loss. It will be a big, fat catalogue, full of information and very stylish in appearance; and that is all that matters.[103]

The tone that Robertson strikes is complimentary and hopeful, as though he is trying to boost Hayter's mood. Even though Hayter was a well-known artist whose work was due to be shown at

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[99] In 1972, Robertson (as well as Erskine) contributed an essay to the catalogue of the V&A's exhibition *The Graphic Work of Merlyn Evans*. And as late as 1999, Robertson was still praising the work of Evans while lamenting that he 'always seemed to be outside of prevailing fashion' – Robertson as quoted in Lambirth, op.cit., p.41.

[100] *S.W. Hayter: Paintings Drawings and Engravings 1927-1957*, exh.cat. (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1957), p.3

[101] Bryan Robertson, *S.W. Hayter 1927-57*, exh.cat., (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1957), p.4.

[102] Letter from Robertson to Sweeney dated 29 August 1957. Whitechapel Gallery archive, Hayter folder: (WAG/EXH/2/53/1). All correspondence in this section related to Hayter comes from this folder.

[103] Letter from Robertson to Hayter, dated 24 October 1957.

the 1958 Venice Biennale, letters reveal that he lived a hand-to-mouth existence. [104] In February he tells Robertson that he is pleased with the number of works sold (about £900 worth of sales) and that the exhibition was well received. This, he adds, 'is not at all easy with an English public.'[105] However, in a letter written a month later, it appears that Hayter owes Robertson money and that he intends to repay him out of future sales: 'Roland (Penrose) informed me that the Brit Council is buying three prints for about forty quid so that will get us over the end of the month. Another sale in England would be more than welcome at this time.'[106]

Information about Hayter's exhibition is preserved in the Whitechapel Gallery archive. The print *About Boats* was popular and was ordered by 43 people. Painting prices ranged from £25 to £250 and print prices ranged from to £6 to £45. Print buyers included institutions such as Balliol College, Oxford, the Shakespeare Institute and the Swedish Embassy, as well as individual buyers such as Clarke Hutton of Ladbroke Road and Miss de Zoete of Gordon Square. While Erskine wasn't actively involved in the exhibition, a typed note reveals that he lent several works by Hayter that were being stored at his home address.[107] This is evidence of the cordial relationship between Hatyer, Robertson and Erskine. Erskine and Robertson remained close to Hayter for the rest of his life. [108]

Robertson's long-term involvement with Hayter, starting with his promotion of his work at the Whitechapel and continuing after the artist's death, is indicative of his regard for prints.

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[104] The majority of the works selected by the British Council for the Venice Biennale exhibition of 1958 appear to have come from the Whitechapel retrospective.

[105] Letter from Hayter to Robertson, dated 23 February 23 1957 sent from his house in Paris at 36 *rue Boissonade*.

[106] Letter from Hayter to Robertson, 18 March 1958 sent from his house in Paris at 36 *rue Boissonade*.

[107] Data is from the Whitechapel Gallery archive, 'Hayter folder', subsection (WAG/EXH/2/53/6).

[108] In the 1980s Robertson intended to help Hayter write his autobiography, but the book never materialised. Instead, he contributed an essay to a book on Hayter by P.M.S Hacker that came out after Hayter's death in 1988. In his contribution, Robertson describes Hayter's limited success in England using the metaphor of a wild bird that was too exotic and dazzling for 'national assimilation.' That same year, Roberson spoke at Hayter's Memorial Tribute at The New School for Social Research in New York along with MoMA's print expert William L. Lieberman, the critic John Russell and several other art-world figures – see Lambirth, op.cit., p.225.

Throughout his career, he supported contemporary British printmaking through his job at the Whitechapel and later as a writer, broadcaster and public figure. In his articles on the subject, he revealed his respect for Erskine whom, he wrote, 'did more than any other individual to raise the standards and help the professional exposure of all the British artists who showed an interest in printmaking.' [109]

The collaboration between Robertson and Erskine on the exhibition *The Graven Image* which took place from April to May 1959 at the Whitechapel made perfect sense. The two men got along very well and were both print enthusiasts who wanted good art to be accessible to everyone. Erskine could provide Robertson with a ready-made exhibition of prints (and a few drawings) by some of the best living British artists. Robertson, in addition to his knowledge of printmaking, could provide Erskine with a larger and more prestigious venue. For while St. George's Gallery Prints had little light and was confined to one room, the Whitechapel Art Gallery was a museum-like setting with large walls, a high ceiling and natural light. [110] An exhibition of prints at this preeminent venue for modern art would hopefully attract a wider audience and raise new awareness about the medium.

Robertson's well-designed and essay-laden Whitechapel catalogues were unusual at the time. Mary Yule writes that while the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) 'had pioneered scholarly catalogues in the US,' there was no history of this in the UK until Robertson. She writes that his catalogues 'were central to his strategy and set the tone for a new attitude towards contemporary

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[109] Bryan Robertson, (ed.), *Out of Print: British Printmaking 1946-1976* (London: The British Council, 1994), p.13. This was an exhibition Robertson organised with the British Council. In 1973, Robertson and Erskine both contributed articles to the book *A Decade of Printmaking* (London: Academy Editions Ltd, 1973). Erskine's 'St. George's Gallery Prints' has been referenced throughout this dissertation, and Robertson wrote an article on 'The New Generation', pp. 49-55.

[110] The space itself had always been large but it had been transformed under Bryan Robertson's directorship. When he took over the gallery, it was: 'like a grim, scruffy East End mission Hall. The walls were covered with grubby coffee coloured hessian; the supporting pillars were chocolate brown, the terrazzo floor was grimy and the whole place reeked of poverty and good works among the poor' – see Lambirth, op.cit., p. 47.

art.'[111] Yule's description of the catalogue prefaces as 'manifestoes or declarations of intent' is true for the *Graven Image*, which is impassioned in tone. At 25 pages long with 14 black and white reproductions as well as a lithographed frontispiece and plate, it was on a grander scale than Erskine's previous catalogues (Figure 115).

As with the Hayter exhibition, Robertson was keen to persuade an American scholar to contribute to the catalogue. On the 26 February 1959, Robertson wrote to William Lieberman, head curator of the recently established Department of Prints at MoMA in New York, asking him to contribute an essay to their 'fairly elaborate catalogue.' He said that he was looking for a 'solid text giving some account of modern print making in Europe in general, and ending with some slight account of the increasing activity in this field in this country during the past few years.' Robertson did not think that any one in England was up to the task: 'There are some very scholarly people in the print field over here, but they are really not competent to talk about modern prints in any way,' he added. [112]

Robertson had met Lieberman during the organisation of Pollock's Whitechapel exhibitions in 1958 and befriended this leading authority on prints old and new. Lieberman had recently persuaded Tatyana Grossman to set up United Limited Art Editions (ULAE), the print publishing outfit that eventually did much to revitalise lithographic printmaking in America along with the Tamarind Lithography Workshop. He was involved in building up MoMA's collection of modern prints and, as I will show in the next section, would remain a useful American contact for Erskine during the next few years. However, he did not write an essay for the catalogue.[113]

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[111] Yule, op.cit., pp.101-5.

[112] Letter from Robertson to William Lieberman dated 26 February 1959. Whitechapel archive. In 1949 Lieberman became the first curator of MoMA's new Department of Prints which in 1960 became the Department of Prints and Drawings.

[113] He was offered the Whitechapel's standard fee of 25 guineas, an amount that Robertson feared might be 'insulting by American standards.' Same letter from Robertson to Lieberman dated 26 February 1959.

In the end, only Robertson and Erskine contributed essays. In Robertson's, he commented on their idiosyncratic selection process, writing that 'we have given no more prominence to very popular artists than to other less popular print-makers' and have instead tried 'to show the London public a cross section of graphic art as it is practiced today by the livelier artists in England.' [114] In this statement, he positions himself and Erskine as egalitarian and anti-elitist. His use of the word 'lively' is perhaps a means of suggesting that prints were no longer dull and musty but were instead vital and relevant.

Robertson gives Erskine the credit for singlehandedly reviving contemporary printmaking in England. He writes that Erskine 'canalized everything' when he opened St. George's Gallery Prints and that he changed the cultural landscape of printmaking in a very short amount of time: 'More to the point, such an exhibition as this would have been totally impossible even five years ago: the work, the variety, the resources, even the right atmosphere did not exist.' It would have been a 'private folly,' he writes, for interested artists to make prints because, with a few exceptions, dealers weren't interested and didn't possess the 'machinery' for marketing them.

The rest of Robertson's text is an open attack on British museums for their lack of print patronage relative to America: He writes that:

> There is no museum official in England with the passion, scholarship and understanding of modern art in all its forms to compare with the late and formidable Carl Schniewind of the Chicago Art Institute, or, happily, still very much with us, Carl Zigrosser at the Philadelphia Museum or Bill Lieberman at the Museum of Modern Art, or Elisabeth Mongan at Washington. Our national museums are hopelessly behind the times in this activity: despite treasures at the British Museum or the Victoria and Albert Museum, there is no absolutely thorough, up-to-date collection of modern prints in the country. Our own artists, producing splendidly imaginative work of high technical invention and craftsmanship, are resolutely ignored. I suspect that this is due, logically enough, to ignorance. Nobody in the museum

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[114] Lambirth, op.cit., p.47.

field has any real feeling for modern art, so they mostly continue to add to their more reassuring and familiar collections of old master prints.[115]

Robertson concludes his essay by chastising the museum establishment for failing to purchase any of the 'magnificent' suites of prints that Erskine's gallery had commissioned in the fifties – specifically Merlyn Evans's *Vertical Suite in Black* and Anthony Gross's *Le Boulvé Suite* - and urging them to start engaging with Erskine immediately.

Chapter 8 focuses on public patronage of the arts during the post-war years and confirms that Robertson's accusations were broadly correct. Most British museums, except for the Circulation Department at the V&A, did not buy contemporary prints. Robertson blamed this on 'ignorance' and a lack of 'feeling for modern art' and echoed the commonly held belief amongst the avant-garde that English cultural institutions were run by philistines. While there had been some important exhibitions of 20th century art at major museums after the war, on average the Whitechapel put on higher quality ones during Roberson's directorship.[116]

Robertson's desire to publish essays by American curators in *The Graven Image* catalogue was due to his belief that American curators knew more about contemporary prints than their English equivalents. The Cincinatti Museum of Art had been home to the International Biennial of Colour Lithography since 1950 and was building up a collection of lithographs by living artists. And several key American museums were working side by side with Print Council of America to promote fine art printmaking. The Print Council of America had been founded in 1956 by Lessing J. Rosenwald, the son of a business magnate and a great print collector. Its mission was to increase 'the appreciation by the public of fine original prints as great works of art.'[117] And it did this by

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[115] Bryan Robertson, 'Preface and a Profile,' *The Graven Image*, exh.cat. (London: The Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1959), pp. 2-5 (p.5).

[116] Exhibitions of modern art including *Picasso & Matisse* at the V&A in 1946 and *Modern Art in the United States* in 1956 at the Tate were widely attended and very impactful.

[117] Carl Zigrosser, 'New Books: Prints: Thirteen Illustrated Essays on the Art of the Print', *The Studio*, 165 (844) (August, 1963), 88 (p.88).

supporting printmakers financially, building up public collections of prints, publishing scholarly articles and putting on exhibitions.

One of the Print Council's early exhibitions, *American Prints Today*, opened simultaneously in eight major American museums in September 1959.[118] 62 prints were selected from 2,000 entries by a jury of curators who also chose four individual cash prizes of $250.[119] *American Prints Today* and *The Graven Image* took place within five months of each other and were both coming out parties for contemporary prints – although I do not think they have been compared to each other before. While *American Prints Today* had the backing of Una Johnson at the Brooklyn Museum, Harold Joachim at the Art Institute of Chicago, William S. Lieberman at the Museum of Modern Art, Carl Zigrosser at Philadelphia Museum of Art and Gustave von Groschwitz at the Cincinatti Museum of Art, *The Graven Image* only had the support of Erskine and Robertson.

The contemporary print scene in America undoubtedly had more financial and institutional support than its English equivalent. However, I believe that in some respects English printmakers had the advantage in the late fifties. American printmakers faced many of the same challenges because the country also lacked print ateliers and print publishers for contemporary prints. Most prints made by artists and collected by American museums in 1959, including those in *American Prints Today*, were printed by the artists themselves and were largely unpublished. Despite a strong interest amongst American artists in making prints, printmaking would not take off for a few years when the infrastructure for printmaking was more firmly entrenched.

Most of the 154 prints exhibited at *The Graven Image* were professionally printed and published. The better-known artists who contributed prints included Barbara Hepworth, Trevor Bell, William Scott, Graham Sutherland and William Turnbull. Also included were 19 drawings by

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[118] *American Prints Today* then travelled around the country.
[119] Gustave von Groschwitz, 'American Prints Today', *The Studio*, 157 (798) (October 1959), 65-69 (p.67).

artists such as Henry Moore, Frank Auerbach, Leon Kossoff, John Bratby, Reg Butler and Jack Smith.[120] As a result, *The Graven Image* was indisputably a survey of the best British talent in prints and drawings. The same was not true of *American Prints Today,* which included a few recognisable names such Caro Z. Antresian, June Wayne, Gabor Peterdi and Maurice Lasansky. This comparison is testament to how much Erskine had already accomplished and may also explain why English prints did so well during the international print boom despite the country's relatively small size.

Erskine's contribution to the catalogue is not about himself but rather about the exhibition which he describes as 'a movement gaining momentum' that will form part of 'artistic life of the nation of the future.' The messianic tone of Erskine's introduction is echoed in an article he wrote about the exhibition for *Art News and Review* dated 11 April 1959 – midway through the show. Here, he loftily predicts that: 'The artists' print will come into its own and be able to serve our society in the way that it is destined to do.' He goes on to exhort government buildings, schools, hospitals and hotels to decorate their walls with original prints. In this article Erskine suggests that prints should be part of the public domain because their purpose is, as he puts it, 'to serve society' rather than artists or individuals.

The obvious place for prints – in addition to schools, hospitals and hotels – was thought to be in ordinary homes. The closest twentieth-century prints ever came to achieving this was during the etching boom of the 1920s when they adorned many middle-class houses. Erskine, however, looked down on these small black and white etchings as boring and decorative. Instead, he wrote that the prints in *The Graven Image* were part of a 'true tradition of printmaking' that extended back

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[120] The catalogue states that 'the show includes a modest section of original drawings to round off the graphic representation.' The drawings were lent by the Beaux Arts Gallery, the Hanover Gallery, the Marlborough Gallery, the Leicester Gallery and private individuals – see Robertson, 'Preface and Profile', op.cit., p.2 and 'Catalogue Prints,' in *The Graven Image* exh.cat, pp.14-22, (p.22). It provides a list of measurements, titles and basic information.

to Rembrandt and Dürer and continued to the present day. Here, Erskine seems to be adopting the evolutionary view that there is a sequential logic to the development of art history.

In arguing in *The Graven Image* that prints could be both accessible and works of high art, Erskine found himself in a tricky ideological position. As a result, his message in the exhibition catalogue comes across as slightly mixed. Erskine disagreed with modernists who thought that high art was incompatible with mass production and he took an optimistic view of technology: 'Being printed in quantity, prints belong to that class of merchandise which it is the especial genius of the twentieth century to promote and distribute, on a scale that has never before been possible' he wrote in the catalogue.[121] Erskine was confident that any prejudices related to their 'association with machinery' would be dispelled with time.

Erskine's approach also differed from the modernist or formalist approach because of his strong interest in the class of people who viewed art. The aesthetic value of the object was less important to Erskine than its reception and he was hopeful that the general public would be more favourably disposed to art once it became more affordable. In the catalogue, he wrote that it was the high price of art that was holding ordinary people back rather than a lack of interest:

> This failure in interest among the public is greatly due to the relative cost of ownership of works of art on the one hand, and of books, gramophones, records and theatre tickets on the other: ownership, or the potentiality of it, is the greatest stimulus to interest that there is, and for that reason the visual arts have been badly served in recent years.[122]

Erskine's emphasis on ownership echoed the post-war ideal that, after the horrors of the war, everyone was their entitled to their fair share – be it housing, medicine, or, in this case, art.

The boom in consumerism in the 1950s was due to a confluence of factors including economic growth after the depression and the Second World War, the rise of advertising and the

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[121] Robert Erskine, 'Introduction', *The Graven Image Exhibition* exh.cat. (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1959), pp.6-8. (p.8).
[122] Ibid., p.7.

mass media and technological innovations that made products more affordable. Harrison writes that 'home-based activity was seen to be of growing economic significance' and that the purchase of televisions, washing machines and refrigerators from do-it-yourself (DIY) stores 'caused the home to more closely resemble a workshop.'[123]An interest in the workshop-like and mechanical aspects of the domestic sphere is apparent in the work of early Pop artists like Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi. Both artists, as discussed in chapter 4, had a particular interest in technology and how things work and both artists excelled as printmakers in the 1960s.

The prints in *The Graven Image* do not engage with mass culture, consumerism or technology. However, the exhibition can be seen in relation to the post-war emphasis on the need to rebuild the domestic sphere after the disruption of war.[124] Exhibitions such as the V&A's *Britain Can Make It* (1946), the Whitechapel's *Setting up Home for Bill and Betty: a shopping guide with Oxford House – furniture, wallpaper* (1952) and the Daily Mail's *Ideal Home Show* (1958) in Olympia, were all intended to help consumers make informed choices about what to buy for their homes. [125] Erskine also wanted buyers to make informed choices but, in this instance, the 'product' for the home was a print rather than a kitchen appliance.[126]

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[123] Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom, 1951 -1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.384.

[124] Gregory Salter writes about the reconstruction of 'the home' in post-war Britain in both a literal and metaphoric way. The literal reconstruction effort was enormous and Ernest Bevin assured the public that Labour would build 'five million homes in quick time.' The metaphoric return to a comfortable home space environment was more contested, particularly since the nuclear family upon which the fantasy of home was based tended to white, heterosexual and middle class. See Gregory Salter, 'Introduction', *Art and Masculinity in Post-War Britain: Reconstructing Home* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), pp. 1-24 (p.6).

[125]Curated in 1952 by Alan Jarvis, the exhibition had an aesthetic and practical bent since the catalogue listed shops in the neighbourhood where products for the home could be purchased. It was so popular that the Whitechapel Gallery decided to extend its hours – see Andrew Horrall, *Bringing Art to Life: A Biography of Alan Jarvis* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill and Queen's University Press, 2009). The *Ideal Home Show* ran from 1910-1990 but was particularly popular in 1958 with over 300,000 visitors – see V&A's online entry for the Ideal Home Show idealhome_aad-1990-9_20140709 (vam.ac.uk) [accessed 12 November 2022].

[126] In his essay for the catalogue, Erskine wrote that it 'is a matter of allowing the public to become familiar with the product, so that its members may make their own choice once the prejudices have been forgotten.' Erskine, 'Introduction', *The Graven Image*, op.cit., p.8.

The purchase of prints from *The Graven Image* was fundamental to Erskine's vision and luckily the Whitechapel had introduced the policy in 1954 for the Hepworth retrospective at the urging of Robertson. [127] Robertson made his mark on the Whitechapel in other ways and was desirous to turn exhibitions into unique and sometimes participatory events. In 1958, for example, he commissioned a poem for Robert Colquhoun's retrospective and for Ceri Richards's retrospective in 1960, he held a piano recital of Debussy's 'La Cathédrale Engloutie.'[128] For *The Graven Image*, printmaking demonstrations in etching and lithography were given by students during the week and by established artists on the weekend.

Robertson and Erskine worked together closely together on *The Graven Image*. Robertson, who disliked anything on the walls other than art, would have insisted that no labels be attached to the walls. Visitors could use the catalogue, which had a section in it for taking notes, or consult a sheet of paper with a list of works and prices. The prints were sold for between 5 and 15 guineas and could be purchased anonymously. Visitors were provided with a card and envelope in order to write down their purchases (framed or unframed) and asked to return it with a cheque. Each evening the Whitechapel Gallery mailed the envelopes to St. George's Gallery Prints. The process, Erskine wrote, was 'all simple as pie' and saved Robertson the task of chasing down payments.[129]

The *Graven Image* closed its doors on 10 May 1959. The financial arrangement was that the Whitechapel Gallery would receive 33% of the total sales, and the rest would go to St. George's Gallery which had provided most of the prints. In December of 1959, Erskine wrote a letter to Robertson apologising for being 'beastly late' about payment and enclosing a cheque for £259.10.9

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[127] Robertson hoped his high exhibition costs could be partly covered in this way. The trustees were not pleased with this decision or with other cost covering measures such as having an artist donate a work of art that would then be sold to pay for their own exhibition expenses. Their disapproval about his spending and his failure to engage with the local community came to a head in 1968 when he was forced to resign – see Yule, op.cit., p.107; Janeen Haythorwaite, 'Roller-Coasters and Helter Skelters, Missionaries and Philanthropists: A History of Patronage and Funding and the Whitechapel Art Gallery' in *The Whitechapel Art Gallery Centenary Review*, op.cit., 18-27(p.22).
[128] Yule, op.cit., p.80, Lambirth, op.cit.,p.49.
[129] Undated note by Erskine in the Whitechapel archive.

(about £4,000 today). This left £788 (roughly £12,000 today) for St. George's Gallery Prints.[130] These sums were relatively small and show how undervalued prints were at the turn of the decade.[131] Nevertheless, some of the 64 sales were notable. The Contemporary Arts Society, for example, bought 4 framed prints. Another 40 unframed prints were purchased by Henry Rossiter, a print connoisseur and Curator of Prints and Drawings at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, who built up a substantial print collection for the museum. An absence of purchases from major museums in Britain proved Robertson's point that museums did not collect contemporary prints.

The *Graven Image* received extensive press coverage with reviews in *The Times*, *The Observer*, *The Listener*, *The Studio*, *Tatler*, *Vogue*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times Educational Supplement*, *The North Wales Chronicle* and *The Spectator*. Most of the articles were favourable and many reiterated Erskine's belief that printmaking was on the rise. *The Times* referred to the 'resurgent popularity of printmaking' which it attributed in great part to Erskine, whom it dubbed 'its prime mover, tirelessly educating a public in the technicalities of collecting and connoisseurship while simultaneously persuading ever more artists to adopt the media.'[132] A critic for *The Spectator* wrote that 'Mr Erskine's standards and enthusiasms are well known, and the show is intended, not as a retrospective survey, but as the hint of the beginning of a new movement.'[133]Erskine wrote an article in *The Studio* called ' "Poor Man's Painting", My Foot!' and in it repeated many of his thoughts about the merits of printmaking.[134]

The *Graven Image* exhibition of 1959 has received very little critical attention even though it marked a turning point in British printmaking. In the catalogue for *The Graven Image* Erskine

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[130] The Whitechapel archive has the sales data.
[131] For the sake of comparison, it is worth noting that sales for the Whitechapel Gallery's Sydney Nolan retrospective totalled £2,355. The fact that paintings are generally more expensive than prints will account for some but not all the difference.
[132] 'The Graven Image', *The Times*, Apr 11, 1959, p.8.
[133] Simon Hodgson, 'Whom the Gods Love,' *The Spectator*, April 10, 1959, p.16.
[134] Robert Erskine, 'Poor Man's Painting, My Foot!,' *The Studio*, 157 (793) (April 1959), pp. 104 -105, cont. p.126.

writes that 'the umbrella is only half-open' and correctly predicts that 'in ten years' time there will be infinitely more prints to choose from and ten times as many artists making them.' In 1959, America and Britain stood on the threshold of a printmaking boom but nobody could have predicted the scale of what was about to happen. Susan Tallman writes that by late sixties 'virtually every major American artist was making graphic work and some, including Ed Ruscha and Jim Dine, had temporarily stopped doing anything else.'[135] And in Britain, prints would provide artists with a lucrative source of income thanks to an expanding art market at home and thanks to international sales – particularly in America.

Facing a new decade that marked great cultural transformation in Britain, it would seem possible for Robertson and Erskine to pick up on the winds of change by presenting a brasher, flashier and more individualistic programme. Instead, *The Graven Image* favoured the group over the individual, the buyer over the artist and education over profit. The tone struck by Erskine and Robertson in the catalogue to *The Graven Image* was more in keeping with the immediate post-war spirit that drove the Education Act, the founding of the NHS and the creation of the welfare state and in that regard the exhibition looked backwards rather than forwards.

It is rare for an exhibition like *This Is Tomorrow* to successfully predict future trends. Instead, *The Graven Image* provided the British public with one of their first opportunities to see a large-scale, museum-worthy exhibition of contemporary printmakers. The high standard of production in evidence throughout the entire exhibition showed that printmaking was no longer an amateur pursuit and was instead a professional activity supported by printers, publishers and

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[135] Susan Tallman, 'Irresistible: the rise of the American print workshop' in Stephen Coppel, Catherine Daunt and Susan Tallman, eds., *The American Dream: Pop to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2017), pp. 20-33 (p.27).

galleries. *The Graven Image* gave contemporary British printmakers an important debut and set a precedent for future print exhibitions even if the style of work changed radically in the next decade.

Future Graven Image Exhibitions

In the catalogue to *The Graven Image* exhibition of 1959, Bryan Robertson bemoans the lack of corporate patronage of the arts in Britain: 'An impressive amount has been accomplished during the past four years, but sources of patronage which are so active in America are sadly dormant in this country: restaurants, chain stores, business offices and so on.' However, as the art market grew, more companies began sponsoring artists and creating corporate collections. The best known of these in Europe was the Peter Stuyvesant Cigarette company, which began by building up a collection of mainly Dutch art.[136]

In 1963, Bryan Robertson persuaded the cigarette company to form the Stuyvesant Foundation to support British art.[137] The Foundation sponsored his *New Generation* exhibitions at the Whitechapel (which were held in 1964,1965 and 1966), provided awards to six of the exhibited artists in the form of travel grants and built up a permanent collection of art by buying work from the shows.'[138] The first *New Generation* exhibition, which was aimed at artists 'who were roughly half way between leaving art school and becoming established,' boosted the careers of Patrick Caulfield, Derek Boshier, Allen Jones, Bridget Riley and David Hockney. Not coincidentally, many of these artists were also printmakers.

The Stuyvesant-sponsored *New Generation* exhibitions provided a successful model of corporate patronage of the arts in Britain. Roberts Erskine, however, had already set a lesser-known precedent for this in the early sixties. Off the back of the success of *The Graven Image* exhibition of

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[136] Charles S Spencer, 'The Peter Stuyvesant Collection: Paintings while you work', *The Studio*, 165 (837) (January 1963), 18-21 (p. 19).

[137] 'A Word from Our Sponsor', *The Spectator*, 24 November 1967 – see online version: A word from our sponsor ARTS » 24 Nov 1967 » The Spectator Archive [accessed 13 March 2023].

[138] Lambirth, op.cit., p.82.

1959 at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, Robert Erskine continued the exhibition at the Galleries of the Royal Society of Painters in Watercolours in 1960 and the next three years (Figure 116). In a letter dated 30 January 1963, the year St. George's Gallery closed, Erskine wrote to Piper requesting that she 'mention' the exhibition in her monthly column and provided her with information:

> It consists of three exhibitions in one: a section of 70 graphics produced in the current year by professional British artists, a student section consisting of 40 prints by students still at art school, and lastly a foreign section, consisting of a group of contemporary Japanese woodcuts.[139]

The earlier *Graven Image* exhibitions had all been annual surveys of prints but in the early sixties, Erskine expanded the format to include a 'talent-spotting student section' and the work of foreign artists. These changes ensured that the exhibition was more international and in tune with the youthful zeitgeist. Importantly, Erskine had also secured corporate sponsorship for the entire exhibition. The Trust Houses hotel chain provided five cash awards of £200 for the best prints and displayed prints from the exhibition in their hotel rooms across the country. The student awards of £100, £50 and £25 for first, second and third prizes were given by the beer company Messrs. Guinness and Co. during the first few years and then by Messrs. Watney Mann Ltd. in 1963.

Cash prizes were a regular feature of international print biennials and important group shows and helped elevate the exhibition in status. Erskine's simple reason for giving out prizes was to 'stimulate the quality of the prints produced which we hope will continue to improve in the years to come.'[140] He later said that the awards probably helped ignite the careers of Hockney and Allen Jones who both received prize money for their student prints.[141] In general, the sponsorship by individual companies rather than the state marked a shift in the model of patronage that had defined the post-war era.

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[139] Robert Erskine, letter to Myfanwy Piper, dated 30 January 1963 – see Tate archive, TGA 200410/1/1/3698.
[140] I have not been able to track down the 1961 catalogue but it seems likely that the sponsorship of Trust House began that year.
[141] Charles Spencer, *A Decade of Printmaking*, (London: Academy Editions Ltd, 1973), p.22.

Erskine chose a three-person jury for the selection of prices in order to make the process fair. The jury initially consisted of himself, Bryan Robertson and John Rothenstein. In 1963, however, the art critic David Thompson, replaced Rothenstein whose taste may have been deemed too conservative. John Rothenstein was the director of the Tate from 1938-1964. He was not sympathetic to modernism and had notoriously turned down Matisse's *Red Studio* in 1941, which instead went to MoMA.[142] Robertson, as we have seen, had done a great deal to champion cutting edge art as the director of the Whitechapel Gallery. These two important art world figures were representative of the different attitudes towards contemporary art that existed simultaneously at fine art institutions during this transitional period. [143]

Robertson thought that Rothensein's directorship at the Tate was 'benighted' and did not share his taste. But despite their differences, they had a cordial relationship with each other and were happy to meet at Brown's Hotel to finalise choices for *The Graven Image* exhibition in 1961. When choosing the student prizes, opinions were predictably divided over the not-yet-famous David Hockney's etchings. Robertson and Erskine loved them but Rothenstein did not. It is not surprising that these scratchy, childlike etchings with awkwardly rendered figures and graffiti-like words did not appeal to him. Robertson and Erskine were likely cognisant of the influence of Art Brut and Dubuffet. They perhaps admired Hockney's hesitant figuration and narrative/literary inclinations at time when abstraction still dominated. And they perhaps saw that these very qualities, coupled with his obvious gift for drawing, lent themselves to the printed medium.

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[142] John Richardson, 'Bust-up at the Tate', *The Telegraph*, 19 July 1997- see online version: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4709676/Punch-up-at-the-Tate.html>[accessed 1 June 2017].
[143] Robertson desperately hoped to succeed Rothenstein at the Tate when he retired a year later in 1964. But sadly, his application was rejected, partly because of his lack of formal education, and Robertson's career never quite recovered this blow.

Rothenstein was overruled and in 1961 Hockney was awarded first prize and £100 for his etching *Three Kings and a Queen* (Figure 117).[144]

The fact that David Hockney's prints were discovered at *The Graven Image* exhibition is significant because Hockney went on to become one of the most iconic British artists of the 1960s whose prints were integral to his work.[145] Hockney is considered a consummate printmaker by many art historians, and he had started engaging with prints from a young age. As a schoolboy in 1940s Bradford with scant access to museums, the printed or popular image was his main source of inspiration, and he spent a lot of time making posters. Later, while studying for the National Diploma of Design (NDD) at the Bradford School of Art, he chose lithography as his second subject after painting.[146] While painting was still his primary concern at this point, his fascination with the print was deep-rooted.

When Hockney was accepted at the Royal College of Art he began to pursue printmaking more seriously, even though he claims that he took up etching simply because he was too poor to buy paint and the graphic department provided free materials. The art historian David Lloyd believes that at this stage 'Hockney clearly felt freer depicting a sequence of events in print, rather than limiting himself to the presentation of a single image, as in his paintings'.[147] Lloyd writes that while at the RCA his prints 'were simply a product of his desire to create, and a means to an end' rather than objects of value. They were given away to friends or sold cheaply to anyone who was interested and were often in bad condition with pinholes and even footmarks.[148] This was very

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[144] In 1962, Hockney entered the etching and aquatint entitled *Kaisarion with All His Beauty* into the student section of *The Graven Image* exhibition. In 1963, he entered *The Diploma* and *The Hypnotist* into the general section.

[145] Some of the material on Hockney was included in my paper '*Three* Kings *and a* Queen (1961): The Institutional Framework Behind the Success of David Hockney's Early Etchings' given at the conference 'A Bigger Picture: New Approaches to David Hockney' on 5 May 2017 at the Paul Mellon Centre in London. Among other papers delivered were Gregory Salter's 'David Hockney and Egypt in the 1960s' and Martin Hammer's 'Photographic Sources and Affinities in David Hockney's Art of the 1960s.'

[146] Nikos Stangos, (ed.), *David Hockney by David Hockney* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), pp. 31-34.

[147] Richard Lloyd, (ed.), *Hockney Printmaker* (London: Dulwich Picture Gallery, 2014), p.11.

[148] ibid., p.11.

different from the printing standards encouraged by Erskine and was something that would change once Hockney began working with print publishers in the next few years.

Hockney's prints were first exhibited in a more professional milieu when they were exhibited in *The Graven Image* exhibition of 1961. Alistair Grant, who was the head of the printmaking department at the RCA and had exhibited regularly at St. George's Gallery Prints, came across Hockney's etching *Three Kings and a Queen* on the drying racks and is said to have entered it into *The Graven Image* student competition without telling him.[149] This account is consistent with Hockney's recollection that his receipt of first prize was totally unexpected. 'It was amazing! I just got the cheque through the post. I didn't even know the exhibition was on' he writes.[150] While Hockney may have been unaware of Erskine or St. George's Gallery Prints, he benefited from the new infusion of money that the gallery had received from Trust House and Guinness. The £100 in prize money helped fund a significant trip that he took to New York on 9 July 1961, the day of his 24th birthday. It marked the beginning of his love affair with the United States and introduced him to several key contacts who would help further his career.

Bryan Robertson believed in providing British artists with funding for trips – particularly to America – as part of his broader project of making the British art scene more international. While there is no record of Robertson's involvement in Hockney's trip, he was friends with William Lieberman and may have put Erskine in touch with him. Lieberman was in the perfect position to advance the career of an up-and-coming printmaker and Erskine helped broker an introduction with Hockney when he arrived in New York. In Hockney's account, he bumped into Lieberman who said to him: 'Why haven't you come to see me? Robert Erskine wrote me a letter about you.'[151] In

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[149] Ibid.p.11.
[150] Stangos, (ed.), op.cit., pp. 64 -65.
[151] Stangos, (ed.), op.cit., p. 65.

other accounts, Hockney brought a selection of prints directly to Lieberman on the recommendation of Erskine. In either case, the encounter was fortuitous.

Hockney had stood out at the Royal College as a student to watch and had done well at the *Young Contemporaries* exhibition of 1961.[152] His meeting with Lieberman, however, was the first indicator that his work could appeal to an international audience and was an early example of how British printmakers would find a lucrative market for their work in America during the 1960s and 70s. Lieberman was very taken with Hockney's work and bought the etchings *Kaisarion with all His Beauty* and *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall* for MoMA and sold the rest of the edition to other collectors (Figure 118). He also arranged for Hockney to begin work at the Pratt Institute, an experimental print workshop in Brooklyn.[153] While the acknowledgement of his talent by Lieberman was significant, it was the $200 in cash that excited Hockney the most because it enabled him to explore a city that represented erotic and artistic freedom.

Hockney's trip to New York inspired *A Rake's Progress*, his famous series of sixteen etchings loosely based on William Hogarth's original series of paintings and engravings.[154] In Hockney's witty, updated version, he depicts himself as the rake and the money received for his prints as the catalyst for his undoing (or his liberation). His meeting with Lieberman is depicted in *Receiving the Inheritance* where we see the great print collector inspecting one print while another, *Myself and My Heroes*, lies on the table (Figure 119). Lieberman's purchases lead to *The Start of the Spending Spree and the Door Opening for a Blonde* (Figure 120). In the latter image an oversized bottle of Clairol hair dye hovers above Hockney like a holy relic, and opens the door to

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[152] The *Young Contemporaries* exhibition of 1961 is often written about as the first Pop exhibition in Britain that brought public attention to David Hockney, Derek Boshier, Peter Phillips, Alan Jones, Patrick Caulfield, R.B. Kitaj and Antony Donaldson. Lawrence Alloway played a big part in organizing both the *Situation* exhibitions and *Young Contemporaries* – see Chris Stephens, Katherine Stout, 'This was Tomorrow' in Stephens, Stout (eds), *Art & The 60s: This was Tomorrow* (London: Tate Britain Publishing, 2004), pp.8-41, p.17.
[153] Stangos, (ed.), op.cit., p.11.

sun, sex and freedom. As the agent of Hockney's final transformation from a provincial youth into the sixties icon that he became, the bottle is rendered in more detail than the wispy outline of Hockney himself. The stylistic change from dark to platinum hair would become integral to Hockney's image and identity.[155]

While there are autobiographical elements to 'A Rake's Progress', Martin Hammer suggests that this aspect has been overemphasized. In 'David Hockney's Early Etchings: Going Transatlantic and Being British,' Hammer compares Hockney to the contemporaneous American poet Frank O'Hara and argues that both men kept their true selves at bay in their work through a detached, playful and subtly camp aesthetic. This aesthetic, which incorporated high and low culture, fragments of conversation and references to literature and other sources, was quite distinct from the pathos of 1950s abstraction. Hammer argues that by synthesising American culture, Hockney actually ended up embodying a specifically British sensibility in 'A Rake's Progress'. In doing so, Hammer writes that Hockney gave 'expression to a distinctive voice on the newly transatlantic art scene of the 1960s.'[156]

A Rake's Progress generated a great deal of interest before it was even finished and is now regarded as one of the most significant print series of the new decade. Devoid of Hogarth's moral message, it was an early example of the rejection of traditional mores that would come to characterise the 1960s. It was also an early example of how much money prints could now generate. In the two years between Hockney's receipt of first prize in *The Graven Image* student competition in 1961 and his completion of *A Rake's Progress* at the end of 1963, the London art market had grown, as had the international print scene. The prospects of emerging artists like Hockney were far greater than those of their immediate predecessors.

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[155] Stangos, (ed.), op.cit., p.65.
[156] Martin Hammer, 'David Hockney's Early Etchings: Going Transatlantic and Being British' in *Tate Papers*, 27, David Hockney's Early Etchings: Going Transatlantic and Being British – Tate Papers | Tate [accessed 17 April 2023].

The changes to the art market had begun in the late fifties with the opening of commercial galleries such as Marlborough Fine Art and the Waddington Galleries. Both galleries opened their own print publishing divisions and provided artists with more financial stability. The transformation of the British art scene seemed complete when, in 1963, the Robert Fraser Gallery and the Kasmin Gallery opened. The Robert Fraser Gallery, in particular, 'was at the heart of what was dubbed 'Swinging London'; it was a crucial nexus where avant-garde artists, wealthy collectors and celebrities including American film stars like Marlon Brando as well as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, could mingle.'[157] By the mid-sixties, British artists had finally shed their inferiority complex and could hold their own internationally.

The Robert Fraser Gallery and the Kasmin Gallery were international galleries in the sense that they exhibited contemporary British art and contemporary American art. Internationalism was now synonymous with America, which was culturally and economically hegemonic. Britain, however, in spite of her loss of real power, had become cool and American celebrities, artists and cultural tourists streamed into London. Cross-cultural exchange between British and American printmakers, publishers and galleries was one strand of this larger trend in the 60s. Erskine's predictions about the importance of the American print scene in the mid-fifties had in fact come true. And rather than playing second fiddle to the Americans, their relationship was one of equals.

Erskine continued to exhibit the prints of David Hockney in the two years prior to the closure of his gallery. In 1962, he awarded Hockney first prize in the student section of the next *Graven Image* for the etching *Kaisarion with all his Beauty*. He put on one final *Graven Image* exhibition in May 1963 where Hockney's prints *The Diploma* and *The Hypnotist* were exhibited in the general section because Hockney was no longer a student. Erskine, however, was winding down his efforts and St. George's Gallery Prints closed for good a few months later. As I will explain in

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[157] Stephens, Stout, 'This was Tomorrow', op.cit., p.17.

the conclusion, he handed over his print stock to and remained on the board of Editions Alecto, the company that was establishing itself as the go-to contemporary print publisher in London.

Editions Alecto was eager to win the rights to Hockney's 'A Rake's Progress' which they predicted would sell very well. Their director Paul Cornwall-Jones raised the stakes by offering Hockney the huge sum of £5,000 (about £98,000 in today's money) in exchange for publishing, printing and distributing the series. But the series proved difficult to finish since Robin Darwin of the RCA, who had originally hoped to publish it himself a book, persuaded Hockney to increase the number of etchings from eight to over twenty, although only sixteen were made. In the end, John Kasmin, who now represented Hockney, helped him complete *A Rake's Progress* by paying for his trip to the Pratt Institute in exchange for a complete set of prints. [158]

At Editions Alecto's opening exhibition for *A Rake's Progress* in December 1963, each set of prints (in an edition of 50) sold for £250 (about £4,900 today). These great sums took Hockney by complete surprise since he thought etchings should sell for a pound or two. 'It seemed like madness' he recalled. Hockney's gut feeling that prints should be affordable was in keeping with medium's popular connotations. In the sixties, however, the print began to lose its democratic pretentions as it was increasingly sold in limited editions to a wealthier client base. Thanks to a professional network of print publishers and distributors, the business of selling prints had become global. As I have stated before, the very qualities that had stymied the print in the past – its multiplicity, its relationship with technology and consumer culture, and its collaborative nature – were what made the medium attractive and resulted in a golden age of printmaking that lasted through the mid-seventies.[159]

[158] Lloyd, (ed.), p.15.

[159] For the boom in British printmaking see: *As Is When: A Boom in British Printmaking1961-1972*, exh.cat. (London: The British Council, 2003); *Out of Print: British Printmaking 1946-1976*, exh. cat. (London: The British Council, 1994); *Kelpra Studio: An Exhibition to Commemorate the Rose and Chris Prater Gift, Artists' Prints 1961 -80*, exh. cat. (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1980). For the boom in American printmaking see: *Technics and Creativity: Gemini G.E.L.*,

With the money from *A Rake's Progress*, which was distributed to Hockney over the course of several years, he was able move to California without worrying about selling paintings. The print, therefore, provided him with an important source of income while he was getting started and was the catalyst for two life-changing experiences: his first trip to New York City in 1961 and his first trip to Los Angeles in 1963 where he ended up living for many years and whose hedonistic lifestyle featured so prominently in his art. In the decade that followed, Hockney reached a wider audience than would have been possible with painting and drawings alone through the publication of print series such as the Cavafy prints, 'Six Fairy Tales from the Brothers Grimm' and the Flaubert etchings, and he continued to reap the benefits from a greatly expanded print market.

To do this day, Hockney's prints form an integral part of his overall body of work and remain enormously popular. For an artist who is not ashamed of being accessible and is unabashedly interested in subject matter, it is no coincidence that he has consistently made prints. Now that the art world has become more pluralistic about what falls into the category of high art, Hockney has shaken off the charge of 'making superficial gestures towards Modernism as an illustrator would.'[160] With this comes a freedom to enjoy Hockney's prints for their illustrative qualities, to delight in the layers of meaning that become evident over time and to marvel at the artist's ability to both hark back to an earlier tradition of printmaking, while continuing to explore the limits of what the medium can do.

In *David Hockney by David Hockney*, the artist warns against accepting artists' statements at face value, writing that 'any respectable art historian would never go by an artist's words; he would look for evidence of them in his work.'[161] Nevertheless, Hockney's power for mythmaking is strong

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exh.cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1971); Calvin Tomkins, 'Profile: The Moods of a Stone', *New Yorker* (7 June 1976), pp. 42-76.

[160] Marco Livingstone, *David Hockney* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), p. 11.

[161] Stangos, (ed.), op.cit. p. 27.

and it is easy to believe that his successful career was driven by talent and good luck alone. For example, in his own account he received the prize money for *The Graven Image* exhibition by accident and he was then gifted a huge amount of money for *A Rake's Progress* out of the blue. Art historians seem to concur and describe him as an artist who emerged as a 1960s icon, fully formed, and who was powered by the strength of his own innate abilities.

Hockney's early prints, which are still critically acclaimed, have rarely been written about in the broader context of the graphic movement that was gaining momentum thanks to the new institutional framework partly set up by Robert Erskine and his St. George's Gallery Prints. The fact that Hockney benefited from the $100 in prize money from *The Graven Image* of 1961 is not a secret. But Erskine's direct involvement in promoting the prints of David Hockney – thanks to the cumulative effect of his gallery's work along with specific role of the *The Graven Image* exhibitions between 1959 and 1963 – has not been sufficiently acknowledged. No artist works in a vacuum and without a new network of print publishers, a public suddenly receptive to the medium and a clientele willing to spend good money on limited edition prints, Hockney's prints would never have received the popular and critical acclaim that they did.

Conclusion

The Graven Image exhibition of 1959 is an important but neglected post-war exhibition that marked a turning point in British printmaking. Standing on the threshold of a new era, the exhibition was rooted in the ideology of the post-war consensus but opened the door for the professionalism and internationalism of the British art scene of the 1960s in which prints had a newfound prominence and prestige.

In the first section of this chapter, I provided an account of Bryan Robertson's work at the Whitechapel, his friendship with Erskine and his relationship with printmaking in order to emphasise the importance of their collaboration. The Whitechapel Art Gallery gave *The Graven*

Image exhibition a much larger platform, as did Robertson's connections and contacts. Both Erskine and Robertson were unorthodox in their curating approaches and were willing to show a range of different artists and styles in one exhibition. While not necessarily ground-breaking in content, *The Graven Image* exhibition of 1959 was a survey of everything Erskine had done up to this point and showed the progress he had made in building up a professional, fine art print publishing industry in Britain from scratch.

The spectre of American superiority is strong in Robertson's catalogue essay and I compared *The Graven Image* to a similar exhibition, *American Prints Today*, in order to discuss the burgeoning American and British prints scenes. The comparison of these two exhibitions does not appear to have been made before. While Robertson was correct about the lack of institutional support for printmaking in Britain relative to America, I argued that in some respects English printmakers had the advantage in the late fifties. However, America remained a focal point for British artists who were extremely interested in its culture. And the American art market would provide British printmakers with a good source of income during the print boom.

The Graven Image exhibitions provide a link between the austerity and egalitarianism of the 1950s and consumerism and individualism of the 1960s. By 1963, when the final exhibition took place, London had turned into a global art hub and prints were a coveted commodity. David Hockney's swift ascent – partly aided by his prize money from *The Graven Image* exhibition of 1961 - as a printmaker is evidence of how quickly attitudes towards printmaking had changed. While it is easier to write about art history in terms of rupture, I hope that this account of *The Graven Image* exhibitions will draw attention to the continuity that existed between these two periods when it came to printmaking. For while the print boom in London was due to many factors, it was made possible by the less glamorous and more earnest printmaking endeavours that were on display at *The Graven Image* exhibitions of 1959, 1961, 1962 and 1963.

CHAPTER 8: Public Print Patronage in the Post-War Decades

The thorny question of how the visual arts could survive was of great concern to artists and art institutions in the post-war period. It was generally acknowledged that it was difficult for artists to make a living through selling their work and that contemporary artists were worse off than they had ever been. [1] In 1950, Cyril Connolly shut down *Horizon* magazine with an editorial that concluded with the pessimistic statement that: 'From now on an artist will be judged only by the resonance of his solitude and the quality of his despair.' [2] In the post-war period, contemporary artists – particularly those with avant-garde tendencies – were perceived as lonely, side-lined and misunderstood. Their alienation was thought to be related to public apathy and a lack of money.

Gloomy missives about the lives of artists and 'the chronic economic insecurity for arts bodies' were a regular feature in the Arts Council's annual reports and magazines such as *The Studio* from the end of the war until the early sixties.[3] In 1951, for example, Robert Melville wrote: 'It is a curious situation: art has never displayed greater assurance, yet the artist has never been more isolated or more uncertain of a livelihood.'[4] The problem was sometimes attributed to the end of private patronage thanks to high taxes and death duties.[5] If the state had caused the problem through high taxation, it was also assumed that the state would provide the solution through public patronage.

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[1] Adrian Clarke, *British and Irish Art: From War to Festival* (London: Hogarth Arts, 2010), p.97.

[2] Frances Spalding, *Art Since 1900* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1986), p.143.

[3] *Art in the Red: The Twelfth Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain 1956-57*(London: Arts Council 1957), p.5.

[4] Robert Melville, 'The Exhibition of the Institute of Contemporary Art', *The Studio*, 141 (697) (April 1957), 98.

[5] G.S. Whittet blamed this uncertainty on death duties which had 'vanquished the descendants of such resplendent figures of the high-noon of Augustan patronage of the arts as Lord Burlington.' – see G.S. Whittet, 'London Commentary', *The Studio*, 149 (747) (June 1955), 189-90. The Arts Council was also of the opinion that private patron was a dying breed and expected the state to step in his/her place: 'In almost every country the private patron is rarer and poorer than he was even 30 years ago, and most nations have accepted the obligation to replace private by collective public patronage through high rates of tax' – see *The First Ten Years: The Eleventh Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain 1955-56* (London, 1956), p. 31.

The welfare state was an extension of emergency wartime measures that introduced unprecedented government intervention in the name of waging total warfare. [6] After the war, the British public was accepting of the idea of a re-distributive and broadly socialist state that provided health care, education and arts funding to everyone. As Margaret Garlake writes, the 'relationship between state and private patronage was radically reformulated' in the two decades following the war because 'a welfare-orientated social democracy demanded that the state acknowledge the burden of cultural provision.'[7] In some ways, the post-war years were a golden period for the arts as a result of an increase in funding from the state. However, there were many who thought that if the government had too much control of aesthetic decisions they were likely to make conservative or staid choices. Garlake writes that cracks in the model of 'patronage as the idealistic provision of a social benefit to passive recipients' appeared in the sixties when both the viewing public and artistic practice became more diverse. [8]

In this chapter I will look at the role that the state played in supporting the burgeoning post-war print movement through their funding of the Arts Council, the British Council and the V&A's Circulation Department. These were the three organisations that supported printmakers most directly by buying prints for their permanent collections and putting on print-related exhibitions. They were also the organisations that Erskine engaged most closely with in order to support printmakers. In this chapter, I will show that while Erskine conformed to an old-fashioned stereotype of the private patron, he was not invested in preserving this model and encouraged both state and corporate sponsorship of the arts. [9]

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[6] The Emergency Planning Bill of May 1940 authorised the government to do almost anything in the national interest – see Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Vintage, 2009), p.67.

[7] *Artists and Patrons in Post-War Britain: Essays by Postgraduate Students at the Courtauld Institute of Art,* ed. by Margaret Garlake (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2001), p.2.

[8] ibid.

[9] In a 1962, Whittet wrote that Erskine belonged to the great and unrivalled tradition of private patronage that had led to the Italian Renaissance, Dutch seventeenth-century painting and the great collections in England - see G.S. Whittet, 'The New London Galleries: The St. George's Gallery', *The Studio*, 163 (829) (May 1962), p. 191.

Museum Print Patronage and the V&A's Circulation Department[10]

In the exhibition catalogue to *The Graven Image* exhibition of 1959, Bryan Robertson writes a damning critique of British museums, pointing out that 'there is no absolutely thorough, up-to-date collection of modern prints in this country.' [11] He was right in that there was no comprehensive collection of modern prints. Most of the major museums did not even collect contemporary prints. The British Museum, for example, did not make a concerted effort to acquire modern prints until the mid-seventies. And most of the prints currently owned by the British Museum that relate to this dissertation were acquired at a much later date.[12]

The Tate, which now has one of the best collections of 20th century British prints, did not begin collecting these works until the mid-seventies with the establishment of the Modern Collection's Print Department. The print boom was well under way by then and had arguably already peaked. This late establishment of the Print Department in one of Britain's most important museums is indicative of the resistance that contemporary prints encountered during the post-war period.[13]

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[10] All information on the Circulation Department, unless otherwise stated, comes from the V&A's archive at Blythe House from the folder (MA/15/17 – MA/15/23).

[11] *The Graven Image*, exh.cat. (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1959), p. 5.

[12] For example, Terry Frost's screenprint *Abstract Composition with Squares and Semicircles* (1953) was acquired in 1985; Michael Sandle's etching *Field Kitch/Warriors* (1958) was acquired in 1988; Bortolomeu Dos Santos's aquatint *The Feast* (1958) was acquired in 1991; Terry Frost's lithograph *Composition in Red and Black* (1957) was acquired in1985; Henry Moore's lithograph *Eight Reclining Figures* (1958) was acquired in 1991 (check date); Ceri Richards's lithograph *The Artist's Studio – Blue Nudes* (1952-54) was acquired in 1987; Ceri Richard's lithograph *Costers Dancing* (1952) was acquired in 1987; Bryan Wynter's untitled monotype (1944-55) was acquired in 1985; Bryan Wynter's lithograph *Back Yard – Skidden Cottage* (1948-49) was acquired in 1985; Terry Frost's linocut *Black and White* (1952) was acquired in 1985; Terry Frost's drypoint *Ridge, Yorkshire* (1956) was acquired in 1985; Terry Frost's lithograph *Vertical and Sun* (1956) was acquired in 1985.

[13] The Tate had in fact given its collection of prints and drawings to the British Museum and the V&A after the war because it was thought that different London museums should focus on different mediums. In 1972, however, the Tate created the Institute of Contemporary Prints (ICP) as a charitable trust to collect pints on behalf of the gallery. The ICP received significant gifts from many print producers, the most import of whom were Kelpra, the Curwen Studio and Waddington Graphics. Kelpra gifted about 1,500 screenprints and Curwen about 650 lithographs. The ICP gift now forms to backbone of the Tate Print Department. In 1974 the print expert Pat Gilmour became the Assistant Keeper of the newly formed department. See *Catalogue of the Print Collection: Complete Acquisitions to April 1978 with Supplement for May 1978 to March 1980* (London: Tate, 1980), pp.7-14.

Robertson, however, was not telling the full story when he dismissed all British museums since the V&A's Circulation Department did purchase contemporary prints on a regular basis.[14] The Circulation Department, which was responsible for organising travelling exhibitions and for loaning educational material to art schools, dated back to the mid-nineteenth century and was as old as the museum itself. Initially the Circulation Department sent out 'circulating museums' from the V&A's collection to the provinces. But in 1909 when the museum moved to South Kensington, objects from each department were set aside to form the Circulation Department's permanent collection. The number of objects catalogued under the heading 'Circ.' (as the department was known internally) ended up being 32,000 in total.[15]

The Circulation Department had a distinct status and was more like a museum within a museum. In 1959 Hugh Wakefield wrote that: 'The Scope of the Department's collection is actually wider than the parent Museum, since it includes a high proportion of modern and recent objects in the field of decorative and graphic arts. The Circulation Department has been concerned more than the other Departments with modern work.'[16] It was able to sidestep the museum's wider policy of eschewing modern work and ended up building up a significant collection of contemporary prints.

Peter Floud, who served as the Keeper of the Circulation Department from 1947 until his premature death at the age of 48 in 1960, was a key figure in the revival of post-war printmaking.[17]

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[14] In 1996 the V&A was gifted a group of prints form the series 'Wapping to Windsor', the 'Coronation Series' and the 'Shakespeare Series' from the Printmaking Department of the Royal College of Art. The gift of 360 prints by past and present RCA students coincided with an exhibition *The Spirit of the Staircase* and was 'an attempt to fill the gap that has appeared and so strengthening the Museum's holdings of RCA printmaking material.' This gift shows that the museums such as the V&A have continued to build up their post-war print collections in later decades – see the V&A's Blythe House archive (96/1435).

[15] Joanna Weddell, 'Room 38A and Beyond: Post-War British Designs and the Circulation Department', *V&A Online Journal*, 4 (2012) < http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/journals/research-journal/issue-no.-4-summer-2012/room-38a-and-beyond-post-war-british-design-and-the-circulation-department/>[accessed 2 April 2020]

[16] *Handbook for Museum Curators* (London: The Museum Association, 1959) Part F. Section 1, 'Circulating Exhibitions' by Hugh Wakefield (Circulation Department, V&A) and Gabriel White (Art Director, Arts Council). (Loose booklet at Blythe House archive.)

[17] Under Floud's stewardship the department expanded, with the number of exhibitions increasing from 153 in 1949 to 318 in 1955. Key exhibitions were first shown at V&A before travelling around the country. See *Handbook for Museum Curators* op.cit.

He was best known for his exhibitions and articles on Victorian and Edwardian decorative art, but he also staged important exhibitions on graphic art such as *150 Years of Lithography* in 1949 and wrote articles such as '150 Years of Lithography,' 'British Lithography Today' and 'International Woodcuts.'[18] He was instrumental in growing the department's collection of prints and oversaw the Giles Bequest Competition for coloured prints.

Giles Bequest Competition[19]

The Giles Bequest Competition (1950-62) was organised by the Circulation Department 'to promote interest in or further the art of the colour print' and was made possible thanks to £3,000 left to the Victoria & Albert Museum and the British Museum in 1939 by Ada Matilda Shrimpton and her husband William Giles for this purpose. [20] William Giles, as stated in chapter 1, had been President of the Society of Graver-Printers in Colour and was an active promoter of colour printmaking, particularly wood cuts.

The interruption of the Second World War put the bequest on hold and in 1950 the V&A decided that a biennial competition for colour woodcuts and linocuts was the best way to honour it. Prizes of £25, £20 and £15 would be awarded and the best prints purchased by the Print Room of the British Museum, the V&A's Department of Illustration, Engraving and Design (IED) and the V&A's Circulation Department. An exhibition of the best entries was put on at the V&A in

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[18] *150 Years of Lithography* coincided with the anniversary of the technique's invention and with the first exhibition of the Society of London Painter-Printmakers at the Redfern Gallery. '150 Years of Lithography' was published in *The Modern Lithographer and Offset Printer* in October 1948. 'British Lithography Today' was published in *The Studio* in September 1950, and 'International Colour Wood-Cuts' was published in *The Studio,* January 1955.

[19] All information in this section, unless otherwise stated, comes from the V&A's archive in Blythe House from the file on the Circulation Department (MA/15/17 – MA/15/23) and the folder (VA 110/3).

[20] Information on Giles's last Will and Testament (1939) is preserved in the V&A's archive. Also, a notice in the *Times* states that Giles died on 24 February 1939, that he was 66-years-old and that he left £3,000 for what became known as the Giles Bequest -see 'Deaths,' *The Times*, 15 June 1939, p. 19.

November 1950 in order to give the mostly unknown participants their first opportunity to exhibit at a major museum.[21]

During the first year of the competition, the organisers decided to invite the established printmakers John Farleigh, Gertrude Hermes, Edward Bawden and Leon Underwood to make relief prints that would be exhibited alongside the best of the 280 submitted entries. In two adjoining rooms, 'progressive proofs, which traced the development of the four commissioned lino-cuts from the printing of the first blocks to their final states' were displayed. A few years later, the museum decided to incorporate a 'small, selective international exhibition of colour wood and linocuts' in order to make the show 'more interesting.' [22]

Throughout the competition, established printmakers continued to exhibit alongside younger artists. The fee of £5 (later raised to £6) given for purchased prints remained the same irrespective of the status of the artist, which caused the museum a degree of embarrassment.[23] In 1960, for example, Hugh Wakefield, Keeper of the Circulation Department, wrote to Edward Bawden with 'some hesitation' because he was aware that he was getting the print at a bargain price.[24] Bawden admitted that the price was lower 'than the usual retail price' but added that 'to have one's work accepted by a museum is itself an honour: I am quite content.'[25] This statement shows that it was still rare for printmakers to have their prints in British museums.

Peter Floud supported the competition by regularly writing to art schools such as the RCA in the hopes of attracting the best printmaking students.[26] Despite his efforts, it is difficult to gauge the

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[21] A brochure 'The Giles Bequest Competition', dated 25 October 1950, provides information on prizes, judges (who consisted of the Keepers of the relevant departments of the V&A and the British Museum) and related exhibitions.
[22] ibid.
[23] In a letter from James Laver of the Giles Bequest Competition dated 30 March 1950 to John Farleigh, he writes that the museum does not retain the copyright of the commissioned prints.
[24] Letter from Hugh Wakefield, dated 21 November 1960 to Edward Bawden.
[25] Letter from Bawden, dated 30 November 1960 to Wakefield.
[26] Letter from Floud, dated 11 January 1953 to Robin Darwin of the RCA telling him about the competition.

overall impact of the competition. The names of some of the competitors are recognisable – Alistair Grant, Gertrude Hermes and Kenneth Martin – but many are not. In 1954 first prize for the Giles Bequest Competition went to Michael Rothenstein for his colour linocut *Bird and Farm Machine II*. In 1956, he won first prize again for his linocut *Cockerel Turning Round*. Rothenstein, as discussed in this thesis, became a well-known printmaker who exhibited regularly St George's Gallery Prints.

By the mid-fifties the prize money had been increased to £75 (for first prize) after the organizers decided to consolidate the awards rather than giving separate ones out for woodcuts and wood-engravings.[27] The more substantial prize money may have convinced Edward Bawden to enter the competition himself and in 1958 he won first prize for the linocut *Brighton Peer.* Second prize went to Ann Bridgeman of the Royal Academy Schools for the linocut *Landscape*. And third prize went to Roland Jarvis, an artist who exhibited with Erskine, for his woodcut *Provençal Landscape.*[28]

The Giles Bequest Competition was reported on by newspapers and magazines including *The Times*, *The Studio* and an AIA newsletter.[29] The AIA coverage of the exhibition in 1954 focused on the circulating aspect of the exhibition, which travelled to twenty-four provincial museums. The anonymous writes approvingly of the regional emphasis of the competition, pointing out that this would have 'pleased' Giles who came from Reading and returned there after university in order to 'study the Japanese method of making colour woodcuts, under Morley Fletcher, one of the first artists to learn and practice the technique in this country.'[30]

In 1955, Peter Floud had published the article 'International Colour Woodcuts' in *The Studio* magazine in which he credited the Giles Bequest Competition for significantly reviving

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[27]During the first half of the 1950s there had been separate prizes for wood-engravings and wood-cuts.

[28] 'The Giles Bequest Show,' *The Times*, 28 November 1959, p.8.

[29] '1956 Giles Bequest Competition,' *The Times,* 1 November 1956, p.5.

[30] From a loose leaflet in the V&A's archive.

interest in the coloured woodcut and linocut in Britain. He wrote that the technique had lost its status in England despite being taken seriously by European artists working in an Expressionist vein.[31] He was hopeful that its compatibility with the increasingly popular geometric mode of working would help its cause but did not predict that the screenprint would better fill this role in the coming decade. It had arguably been a mistake to limit the competition to relief printing at the expense of more widely used print techniques as it never gained much momentum.

In January 1962, *The Times* reported that the Giles Bequest Competition had ended but that 'trustees, the keepers of prints and drawings at the British Museum and Victoria and Albert Museum will buy prints directly from artists under the terms of the bequest.'[32]While the impact of the Giles Bequest Competition seems limited, it deserves more attention because it was one of the only means that contemporary prints entered the permanent collections of major British museums in the 1950s and this alone is significant.

The Circulation Department's Collection of Contemporary Prints

The Circulation Department consistently bought contemporary prints until its closure in 1977. Some of the prints were original works of art but many of them were reproductions sent to schools for educational purposes. Although information about print sales during this period is rare, the V&A's archive at Blythe House contains invoices from the galleries and individuals who sold prints to them. These invoices shed light on the obscure economics of print sales during the pre-war and post-war periods by providing data on who was selling prints to the museum and how much they sold for.

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[31] Peter Floud, 'International Colour Woodcuts', *The Studio*, 149.742 (January 1955), p. 11
[32] 'News in Brief,' *The Times*, 16 January 1962, p.12.

A topic that comes up in the correspondence is a discount ranging from 10 to 25% that the V&A received from sellers. The discount was not popular with artists like the wood-engraver Gertrude Hermes who found that it left her with very little money after framing and mounting costs. In a letter to the museum she wrote that it was discouraging to have to 'give away our prints to cover the cost of selling another.'[33] However, she did not hold the discount against the Circulation Department and continued to correspond with them about print sales for the next decade.[34] Artists like Hermes and even Paolozzi would send the museum batches of prints on approval in the hopes that they would buy some of them. [35] From the mid-sixties, however, Paolozzi was successful enough to donate his prints to the museum instead.[36]

In the 1930s and first half of the 40s, the Circulation Department corresponded most regularly with the Zwemmer Gallery. Their purchases included books with illustrations by artists such as Leon Underwood and prints by well-known continental artists such as Pablo Picasso and Raoul Dufy.[37] In the decade after the war, the Redfern Gallery enjoyed a close relationship with the Circulation Department. They sold them prints by European masters as well as a batch of lithographs by English artists from the inaugural exhibition of the Society of Painter-Printmakers in

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[33] Unpublished and handwritten letter from Gertrude Hermes dated 1 July (no year). Blythe House archive, Hermes folder (MA/1/H1733**).**

[34] In 1956, Peter Floud wrote to Hermes about purchasing the linocut *Bull Fight* that he had seen at 'the Painter-Etchers exhibition'. He added that: 'Quite honestly I thought it – and your two prints – were almost the only ones worth looking at in the whole show.' See unpublished letter, dated 20 March 1956 - Blythe House archive, 'Hermes folder' (MA/1/H1733).

[35] In July 1947 Hermes sent the Circulation Department twelve etchings on approval, and they purchased three for the sum of 14 pounds and 1 shilling. Blythe House archive, Hermes folder (MA/1/H1733).

[36] In July of 1959, Eduardo Paolozzi submitted twelve screenprints on approval to the museum. The Circulation Department ended up buying five of them for the School Loan scheme. There are many memos about this purchase throughout July 1959 from Floud and Hogben. Folder (MA/1/P200). In April 1964 Paolozzi donated seven screenprints and in August 1966 he donated four screenprints to the Circulation Department. (MA/1/P200). On 7 December 1967, the new Director John Pope-Hennessy thanks Paolozzi for his gift of the portfolio 'Universal Electronic Vacuum'. Hennessy describes them as 'prints of extraordinary richness' that 'will be greatly valued' by the Circulation Department (MA/1/P200**)**. On 2 September 1971, Pope-Hennessy thanks Paolozzi for his 'great generosity' his suite 'The Conditional Probability Machine' to the Circulation Department. (MA/1/P200). And on 5 October 1972, Hennessy thanks him for his extraordinarily generous gift of his suites 'Bunk*'* and 'General Dynamic Fun' to the Circulation Department (MA/1/P200).

[37] See 'Zwemmer folder', 1939-73 (MA/1/Z93).

1948.[38] The number of invoices from the Redfern Gallery decreased as the 1950s progressed, although they continued to sell prints to the Circulation Department on a regular basis.[39]

St George's Gallery Prints sold the most prints to the Circulation Department during the mid-fifties and early sixties.[40] The department did, however continue buying prints from the Redfern, the Zwemmer Gallery and occasionally the Beaux Arts Gallery.[41] The data in relation to St George's Gallery Prints is important because no other gallery records have yet been found. The first invoice from January 1955 supports the view that the gallery did indeed open at the beginning of 1955.[42] The rest of the invoices from 1955 are either for relatively expensive works by European masters like Matisse or Picasso or prints by younger English artists, which generally sold for between £5 and £10. [43]

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[38] In October of 1947, the department bought 8 lithographs by English artists such as Bell and Grant and Richards as well as a print by Seurat. In June of 1948, they bought 8 lithographs by Paul Nash as well a print by Vlaminck and another by Picasso. July of 1948, they bought ten lithographs by the French masters including Vuillard, Bonnard, Roualt, and Daumier. In December of 1948, Nan Kivell sent Floud a selection of lithographs by the English artists Rothenstein, Lucas, Vanessa Bell, Colquhoun, Humphry Spender, Ayrton Hughes-Stanton Wynter, Hermes and Ravilious. Each print was sold for roughly between £4 to 6 and the museum received a 25% discount for the prints. Based on the dates they seem to have been from the first exhibition of The Society of London Painter-Printers. The forties came to a close with a purchase in 1949 of three Braque etchings and one Dali etching – see 'Redfern Folder', (MA/1/R411).

[39] In July 1951, the Circulation Department bought several prints from the Redfern including one by Ceri Richards, one by Graham Sutherland and Richard Hamilton's *Reaper I*. And in July of 1953 they bought Redfern prints by the likes of John Minton and Prunella Clough. Other prints sold include Trevelyan's etching *Oxen II* from the London Group Prints Exhibition in March 1955. In November 1957, they purchased the lithographs *Roses* by Edward Middleditch and *Landing the Catch* by Bernard Cheese for a total of £9.9. In April 1959 they bought two prints by Graham Sutherland.The decade ended with the purchase of lithograph by Victor Pasmore for the Circulation Department's School Loans scheme – see 'Redfern Folder', (MA/1/R411).

[40] Earlier invoices from another St George's Gallery are also kept in this folder. This St. George's Gallery was entirely separate from Erskine's Gallery. It was located at 32a Hanover Square and sold a number of woodcuts and wood-engravings to the Circulation Department in the 30s and 40s. The English Wood-Engraving Society was been located within the first St. George's Gallery.

[41] In November 1957, the Beaux Art Gallery sold them a lithograph by Edward Middleditch for £6 and in March 1958 they sold them John Bratby's etching *David Seated* for £6.6. The etching has the same title as a drawing that was also sold to the museum in the same invoice for £25 – see 'Beaux Arts Folder' (MA/1/B871).

[42] The invoice is dated 19 January 1955 and is for David Russell's etching *Interior with Objects* for £2 minus a 10% discount -see 'St George's Gallery File', (MA/1/S119**).**

[43] The second invoice is from 15 February 1955 and is for a Bernard Buffet print that was sold for £10.3.6. A July invoice for 17 prints (lithographs, etchings and linocuts) by artists including Rothenstein, Richards, Piper, Chagall and Vlaminck came to £141.1. The most expensive single item purchase from St. George's Gallery Prints in 1955 (22 July) was for a Lacouriere-printed aquatint by Matisse for £94.10. Towards the end of year, Erskine sold the V&A two illustrations by Andre Derain mounted and framed for £15.2.6 – see 'St George's Gallery File' (MA/1/S119).

The stark difference in prices between European and British prints continued throughout the decade. In 1956, for example, Erskine sent two invoices to the Circulation Department; one was a Picasso sugar aquatint for £120 and the other was for three prints by Piper, Ayrton and Harrison that came to £14.1.6 with their frames. In 1957, the Circulation Department purchased five prints from Erskine for £31.4 by Italian artists including Gino Severini for an upcoming exhibition on contemporary Italian graphic art. This shows that Erskine was able to source material by international artists whom he did not generally sell. However, the majority of the invoices were for artists he exhibited regularly. A batch of prints by Bell, Hepworth, Heron and Ayrton sold to the Circulation Department in 1959 were intended for 'school teaching sets.' This purchase is proof that the department did indeed buy high-quality art for purely educational purposes.[44]

Towards the second half of the gallery's existence, Erskine sold fewer prints to the Circulation Department by European masters and more by contemporary British artists. This suggests that as he grew more confident in the printing and publishing of works by homegrown talent, he did not have to rely as much on prints from abroad. But he did continue to sell some foreign work and a 1960 memo concerns Japanese woodcuts ordered by Floud that took over three months to ship. [45] The turn of the decade brought news that V&A's Department of Engraving, Illustration and Design (EID) was building up its collection of contemporary prints and Erskine sent a letter to its keeper, Graham Reynolds, on the subject.

Dear Mr Reynolds:
I understand that EID is planning to bring its collection of contemporary prints up to date. Accordingly, I enclose a group of catalogues which you may find useful.

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[44] On the 11 June 1959 Erskine sent a batch of prints by William Gear, Stanley Jones, Anthony Harrison, Bernard Kay, Brian Perrin, Julian Trevelyan, Bryan Wynter, Frank Avray-Wilson and Ceri Richards on approval. The prints by Bell, Hepworth, Heron and Ayrton were purchased for between £6 and £8 each on the 27 August 1959 – see 'St George's Gallery file', (MA/1/S119).

[45] An invoice for these 8 woodcuts is dated 1 April 1960 and comes to £80.6.6 with a 15% discount – see 'St George's Gallery file', (MA/1/S119).

Our policy in the way of prints is to publish current British work, and I think it is fair to say that we do almost all the publishing of this kind in Britain.

In addition to this we have a very carefully selected group of foreign artists. We are more interested in print quality than in the relative fame of the artists, so our selection includes both well-known and unknown people. [46]

Furthermore we handle master prints of the Twentieth Century, but only the very finest: for example out of the 400 subjects by Picasso, we only buy about 20, and do not keep a regular stock.

Yours very sincerely,

Robert Erskine

I have quoted this in full because it is clear, to-the-point and one of a limited number of letters from Erskine about print-related matters. While it was true that he was still one of the only print publishers in the country, the situation was changing as other galleries and entrepreneurs turned to print publishing. The EID's decision to begin collecting contemporary prints in 1960 was probably related to the fact that Erskine's longed-for printmaking movement was finally beginning to show signs of life. The museum undoubtedly realised that it was time to pay attention.

The minutes from a meeting held on Friday 3 December (no year written but from its context likely to have been 1960) state that the purpose was to discuss the policy with regard to the purchase of contemporary prints and drawings. The meeting was important enough to merit the attendance of Trenchard Cox, the Director of the V&A; Graham Reynolds, the Keeper of the EID; Hugh Wakefield, who had replaced Peter Floud as Keeper of Circulation after his death; David Thomas, the Assistant Director of the Arts Council, and several more junior staff members. [47]

Trenchard Cox is documented as having observed that since their last meeting in January 1957, the EID had started to build up a comprehensive collection of modern prints. Graham Reynolds reported that his department was given £750 at the beginning of the financial year for a

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[46] The letter was dated 1 April 1960.
[47] Also in attendance were the Assistant Keeper of the EID, the Assistant Keeper of Circulation, the Keeper of Prints and Drawings and the Assistant Keeper.

Modern Prints Fund but that the Director agreed to purchase more expensive prints out the V&A's general grant. So far, the department had purchased 49 prints by 36 artists for a total of £3,270. £520 of this had come from the Modern Prints Fund and the rest from the general purchase grant. This imbalance suggests that the Modern Prints Fund was not yet able to meet the museum's print needs.

The types of prints bought were divided into two categories: expensive works by 'great masters of the late 19th and 20th century' that averaged to about £230 a print, and cheaper works by young British artists. The cost of the twenty-two prints that had been bought by new, emerging artists averaged out at approximately £10 per print. As the minutes put it, 'Mr Reynolds estimated that it would be possible to build up a reasonably representative collection of modern prints during the next two or three years, with an expenditure of between £3,500 and £4,000 a year. After that, it would mainly be necessary to keep pace with new productions'.[48] Meanwhile, the Circulation Department continued to buy their own prints, spending an estimated £500 to £700 per year.[49] The museum's total expenditure on prints was much higher than the Arts Council which, according to David Thomas, had spent £400 on prints in 1959 and £500 in 1960.

The meeting concluded with the decision that the museum would concentrate on the purchase of contemporary rather than older prints. Reynolds recommended that the British Museum and V&A ask the Treasury to increase the purchase grant by about £3,000-£4,000 to help the EID buy more modern prints and the Print Room to buy modern drawings. This large infusion of money for contemporary prints was a sign that British museums were beginning to address some of Erskine and Robertson's criticisms as stated in *The Graven Image* catalogue. From these sums, it is evident

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[48] Trenchard Cox, Minutes of EID, dated 3 December (1960?), V & A archive.
[49] The money came from the general purchase grant and from a new decision in 1958 to introduce a hire charge for the School Loan Scheme.

that by the early sixties the V&A had become the English institution that spent the most money on prints.

The impact of the Modern Prints Fund on Erskine's gallery was immediate and about half the invoices from St. George's Gallery Prints to the museum from 1960 are addressed to the EID. The other half are still to the Circulation Department. [50] By 1962, Robert Erskine was winding down his gallery activities and moving on to his next role as arts television presenter but there was overlap between the two ventures.[51] The last letter to the V&A from Erskine, which is dated 5 October 1962, is still on St. George's Gallery Prints headed paper but is about borrowing an item that will feature on his non print-related television programme.

On average, Erskine sent the V&A about 4 invoices a year to the Circulation Department and/or IED between 1955 and 1962. While this money was not enough to keep artists financially afloat, it was significant to them that their prints were being collected by one of the best museums in the country and perhaps the world. This tranche of material proves that Erskine had close connections with the V&A, which was the only major British museum buying contemporary prints on a regular basis during the post-war years.

The closure of the Circulation Department because of budget cuts in 1977 was a great blow to artists (particularly regional ones) and foreshadowed the cuts that took place under Thatcher. In December of 1976, the magazine *Studio International* (formerly *The Studio*) had sponsored a petition against its closure, which was presented by David Hockney to the government and argued

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[50] On the 22 March 1961, Reynolds wrote to Erskine to confirm the purchase of prints sent to them on approval and adds that he is looking forward to seeing a portfolio of Hayter's prints. Two months later, the Circulation Department bought a large group of prints from Erskine that came to £112. Among these works were two screenprints by Dennis Hawkin. In May 1962, Erskine sold the Department of Prints of Drawings four prints, including one screenprint by Brian Elliot, from *The Graven Image* exhibition of that year. An internal memo from the museum suggests that Elliot, who taught silkscreen at the Slade, provide them with a display about the silkscreen technique for the Department's 'technical exhibition.'

[51] In June of 1962 he had sold a batch of prints including etchings, lithographs, woodcuts and a silkscreen for £79.7.7. The last invoice from St. George's Gallery Prints is for a lithograph by Uchiyama for £11.7 and is dated 18 September 1962.

that the loss of the Department would be a terrible disservice to the nation. [52] For the Circulation Department had given post-war artists as well as the general public access to high-quality original art as well as reproductions. Print culture, as shown in this chapter, had been particularly well represented by the Department which had supported printmaking at a time when it was neither popular nor lucrative.

The Arts Council

The Arts Council, which was ratified on 9 August 1946, was the public institution that most embodied the post-war ethos. It developed out of the Committee for the Encouragement of Music and Arts (CEMA), which began as an emergency wartime venture. CEMA put on concerts, sent musicians and theatre troupes around the country and circulated works of art throughout London and the provinces.[53] As the circulation of works of art was fundamental to its existence, it is not surprising that the Arts Council was actively involved in putting on print exhibitions and collecting prints.[54]

In any given year from the mid-fifties to mid-sixties there were usually about a dozen print shows on offer out of a total of about 60-80 art exhibitions. Certain print exhibitions were on permanent rotation and are listed in the appendices of the Arts Council's reports nearly every year. These include *Contemporary British Lithographs*, *Contemporary Foreign Lithographs*, *Etchings from the Arts Council Collection* and *Contemporary Prints from the Arts Council Collection*.[55]

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[52] Letter from Studio International to Mark Haworth-Booth of the V&A, dated December 1976 – see file (MA/15/17 – MA/15/2315)**.**

[53] *The First Ten Years: The Eleventh Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain 1955-56* (London: Arts Council,1956).

[54] CEMA had links to the egalitarian and educational ethos of the 1930s and was loosely based on *Art for the People* which had been founded in 1935 by W.E. Williams of the British Institute of Adult Education. *Art for the People* was like the Circulation Department in that it borrowed art from around the country in order to put on exhibitions for people who didn't normally go to museums. Sir William Emrys Williams, a foundational member of CEMA and the Arts Council who helped shape their policies, believed in 'spreading the riches of the world of art' and 'making it possible for ordinary people to share in the privileges of the few.' For more on the founding of the Arts Council see *Ends and Means: The Eighteenth Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Brtain* 1962-3 *(*London: Arts Council,1963)

[55] *Eleventh Annual Report 1955/6*, Appendix D.

Most seem to have been made up of prints from the Arts Council's permanent collection and toured the country throughout the year.[56]

In 1955/56, for example, there were roughly 13 exhibitions under the categorisation of 'Graphic Arts, Books, Design, etc.' Of these, several were devoted to contemporary printmaking including some of the above as well as *British lithographs published by Millers of Lewes* and *Contemporary Foreign Lithographs*. Included in a section titled 'Reproductions and Photographs' was an exhibition of *Japanese Woodcuts* organised by UNESCO.[57] As with the Circulation Department, the educational element of the Arts Council was strong, and they organised many exhibitions of reproductions and photographs.

The Art Council's print collection formed part of their larger collection of contemporary art that was started in 1946 at the behest of Philip James.[58] In creating the collection, they supported living artists and had access to artwork for their travelling exhibitions. The choice of art for the collection was made by a purchasing sub-committee of the Arts Panel whose membership changed annually but always included key figures in the art world.[59] By 1956, the collection consisted of 140 paintings, 119 watercolours and drawings, 28 sculptures and 329 graphic art works. At this point

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[56] In 1962/3 annual report, the category 'Graphic Arts, Books, Designs, etc.' is further divided to include a new category for 'Exhibitions formed from the Arts Council Collection'. In the former category are exhibitions such as *Contemporary Japanese Prints*, *Recent British Graphic Art* and *Stage Design in Great Britain*. In the latter are exhibitions such as *British Etchings 1960-1960*, *Contemporary British Lithographs*, *Contemporary Prints and Foreign Etchings 1890-1960.* Also included in this section is an exhibition *New Prints* which is not formed from the Arts Council Collection — see I, Appendix E (exhibitions held in Britain).

[57] *Eleventh Annual Report 1955/6*, Appendix E.

[58] When Philip James retired from the Arts Council in the late fifties, his role in establishing their collection of contemporary art was emphasised. The collection itself was described as a 'true mirror of the visual arts in our time, as well as a remarkable vindication of the principle of public patronage.' *A New Pattern of Patronage: The Thirteenth Annual Report of the Arts Council of Great Britain* 1957-8 (London: Arts Council, 1958) p. 21.

[59] In 1955/56 members of the Arts Panel included William Coldstream (Chairman), Anthony Blunt, Lawrence Gowing, EC Gregory, Henry Moore, John Piper, Ben Nicholson, John Rothenstein, Keith Vaughan, Carel Weight and Lillian Somerville. In 1961/62 members included Alan Bowness, Lawrence Gowing, Roland Penrose, Nikolaus Pevsner, John Russell and David Sylvester.

they had spent £24,363 on the collection, which amounted to nearly £3,000 a year and was representative of the amount that they would spend annually for the rest of the decade.[60]

While the collection contained a high proportion of graphic art, the number of prints purchased each year could vary greatly.[61] For example, only two prints were bought in the year 1955/56 but 25 prints were purchased the following year. The increase in number was related to the panel's decision to 'strengthen the graphic collection (especially by artists of the school of Paris)' after the success of their exhibition on Picasso's graphic art to celebrate his 75th birthday.[62] The new work included prints by Picasso, Braque and Giacometti, artists who the Arts Council could not usually afford in other media. This large batch was unusual, and they acquired between 5 and 40 prints each year throughout the 1950s. [63]

In 1956, St. George's Gallery Prints sold their first work to the Arts Council with Anthony Gross's etching *Threshing*. And in 1957, the Arts Council purchased another etching by Anthony Gross from St. George's Gallery Prints. Only 7 prints were purchased in 1958, including a lithograph by Trevor Bell from St. George's Gallery Prints and monotype by Derrick Greaves from Zwemmer's. No prints were sold by the Redfern Gallery for the first time that decade. A print by Robert Colquhoun was bought from the Whitechapel Gallery where the artist had had a solo exhibition. The 1950s concluded with the purchase of 22 prints by the Arts Council. While no prints were officially purchased from St. George's Gallery Prints, two prints by Anthony Harrison and Bartolomeo dos Santos came from his 1959 exhibition *The Graven Image exhibition* of 1959. [64]

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[60] *The Priorities of Patronage: The Fifteenth Annual Report of the Arts Council, 1959-60* (London: Arts Council, 1960), p.12.
[61] The data on prints acquired by the Arts Council in the 1950s and 1960s comes from two unpublished and hitherto unavailable lists emailed to me by the Arts Council in May 2019.
[62] *1956/57 Arts Council Annual Report*, p. 42.
[63] 28 prints were acquired in 1950; 40 prints in 1951; 16 prints in 1952; 36 prints in 1953; 14 prints in 1954; 5 prints in 1955; 11 prints in 1956; 21 prints in 1957; 7 prints in 1958; 14 prints in 1959.
[64] Other purchases by the Arts Council included a colour lithograph by Bonnard, a lithograph by Edward Ardizonne and prints by Reynolds Stone, Raoul Dufy and Whistler.

The galleries that sold the most prints to the Arts Council throughout the 1950s were the Redfern Gallery, the Zwemmer Gallery and St. George's Gallery Prints. Towards the end of the fifties and the beginning of the sixties, St. George's Gallery Prints took over from the Redfern Gallery as the dominant supplier of prints. Other occasional print sellers included the AIA Galleries, the Iowa Print Group, Gallery One, the Cambridge Contemporary Arts Trust, the Hanover Gallery, School Prints, the Royal Society of Painters, Etchers and Engravers, the Leicester Galleries, Colnaghi, Craddock & Bernard, A. Rozelaar Green and foreign galleries such as Galerie Ferdinand Moller, Cologne which provided German Expressionist prints. [65]

During the print boom of the mid-sixties, the number of prints bought by the Arts Council grew significantly. While only 14-26 prints were purchased annually in the early sixties, numbers increased to 29 in 1965, 50 in 1966 and to 103 prints in 1967. 1967 represents the height of the print boom and the numbers begin dropping down slightly towards the end of the decade. The Arts Council bought nearly twice as many prints in the 1960s as it did in the 1950s.[66]

In the early sixties most of the prints purchased by the Arts Council were lithographs or etchings. Prints by English artists like Derrick Greaves and William Scott were bought from St. George's Gallery and international artists like Sam Francis, Antoni Tapies and Serge Poliakoff were bought from the Redfern Gallery. Other prints purchased in the early sixties include Hockney's etching *My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean,* a Hans Hartung lithograph and the only silkscreen of the group which was by an Erskine-affiliated artist, Dennis Hawkins.

In 1963, 14 prints were added to the Arts Council collection and 6 of these came from St. George's Gallery Prints. The fact that Erskine sold the Arts Council nearly half of their prints

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[65] The Arts Council sometimes purchased prints directly from artists and in 1950 they purchased a print from Hamilton's 1949 'Reaper' series.

[66] 192 prints were bought in the 1950s and 371 prints in the 1960s: 14 prints were acquired in 1960; 21 prints in 1961; 28 prints in 1962; 14 prints in 1963; 26 prints in 1964; 29 prints in 1965; 50 prints in 1966; 103 prints were acquired in 1967; 50 prints in 1968; 36 prints in 1969.

during the year he shut down his gallery suggests that it closed at the height of its powers. The most significant change in 1964 is the new prevalence of the screen print. That year almost all the 24 prints acquired were screenprints from the ICA's print portfolio. By the mid-sixties the dominance of the screenprint was indisputable and in 1965, the Arts Council acquired a group of screenprints by Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Roy Lichtenstein, Frank Stella, Robert Motherwell, Ellsworth Kelly and Ad Reinhardt.[67]

In 1965, Marlborough Fine Art and Editions Alecto make their appearance as key distributors of prints to the Arts Council. In 1967, only four years after the closure of St. George's Gallery Prints, the Arts Council bought 103 prints including Hockney's Cavafy etchings from Editions Alecto. By the late sixties, other print mediums such as coloured engravings and coloured lithographs begin to make a return after several years of being eclipsed by the screenprint.[68] While the data provided by the Arts Council in relation to print sales in the 1950s and 60s is not necessarily extensive, it does confirm the broad arc of the story that I have been telling about the rise of printmaking in the UK.

Robert Erskine's Relationship with the Arts Council

Only two files in the Arts Council's archive are specifically related to printmaking during the years that St. George's Gallery Prints was in operation.[69] The first file (Contemporary Lithographs and Prints – Cambridge 1955) was for the year the gallery opened and the second file (New Prints) was for the year that it closed. Robert Erskine was actively involved in both exhibitions. While this may have been a coincidence, it strongly suggests that Erskine played a critical part in helping the

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[67] It is possible that they were donated to the Arts Council, which put on the touring exhibition *Pop Prints* of mostly American screenprints although the exhibition toured England the year after.

[68] Prints purchased in the mid to late sixties included those by Robyn Denny, Larry Rivers, Gordon House, Gillian Ayres, R.B. Kitaj and Richard Hamilton. Eduardo Paolozzi's 'Universal Electronic Vacuum' series of screenprints was purchased and Joe Tilson's 'Transparency Clip-O-Matic Lips 2'.

[69] I visited the Arts Council's archive, which is held by the V&A at their Blythe House location.

Arts Council organise their exhibitions related to contemporary prints, and it seems likely that he was involved in other print-related exhibitions whose records have been lost.

1. Contemporary Lithographs and Prints – Cambridge 1955[70]

The Arts Council had a generous network of contacts and borrowed material from different galleries and individuals. This was the case with *Contemporary Lithographs and Prints* which was held at their gallery in Cambridge from 16 – 30 April 1955. The 50 prints were all for sale. 24 had come from St. George's Gallery Prints and the others had mainly come from the Redfern Gallery and the Zwemmer Gallery. [71]

The bulk of the letters related to the exhibition are from John Commander, the Assistant Regional Director of the Arts Council. In a detailed letter to John Price, editor of *The Cambridge Review*, he asks him to write an article on 'the revived interest of prints' in Britain.[72] Price describes this renewed interest in prints as 'a movement that is rapidly gaining momentum' and informs him that a branch of Hayter's Atelier 17 may soon be opening in London. From this language and the fact that he told Commander that Erskine would be 'pleased' to write the article himself, it is likely that Price had been communicating with Erskine and may have been quoting from him directly.

There are several letters between Commander and Erskine and the tone between them is jovial. On 11 May 1955, Erskine thanks him for a cheque for two lithographs sold, adding that while a few students have visited the show already 'I shall expect multitudes to follow.'[73] On 18 May 1955 Commander writes to the Redfern Gallery about retuning 10 prints lent on sale or return but adds that they are holding onto Michael Rothenstein's *Farm in a Landscape* because someone

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[70] All information pertaining to this exhibition is in the file (ACGB/121/197) in the Art's Council's archive at Blythe House. All information on the exhibition in this section comes from this file.

[71] This data is from press cuttings in the file.

[72] Letter, dated 6 April 1955, from John Commander to Roy Price, the Editor of *The Cambridge Review*.

[73] Letter from Robert Erskine, dated 11 May 1955 on St George's Gallery headed paper, to John Commander.

had shown an interest in buying it.[74] Unfortunately, it did not end up being purchased after all. [75] On returning two prints lent to him by the Zwemmer Gallery, Commander writes that: 'The exhibition was, from the point of view of attendance, quite successful but, alas, sales were disappointing.'[76]

Many early print exhibitions were disappointing from the perspective of sales. Although some of the prints were relatively affordable – they ranged in price from £3 to £130 for a Rouault print – they were not easy to sell. In a press cutting from the time, the reviewer mentioned some of the more famous artists including Ardizonne, Sutherland, Chagall, Braque and Picasso but felt the overall tone of the exhibition was too dark: 'One or two more Matisse's in place of the sombre, surreal canvases which monopolise most of the exhibition would have cheered things up a lot.'[77] Despite this criticism and despite the lack of sales, the exhibition attracted 562 people during its short run. On Saturday 23 May, 112 people looked at the exhibition although on average there were about 40 visitors a day.

2. New Prints

In a travelling exhibition of 41 prints organised by the Arts Council in 1963, 38 of them were borrowed from St. George's Gallery Prints.[78] These included many of his regular artists as well as younger artists such as David Hockney and Allen Jones.[79] Prices for these prints ranged from £8.8 for Hockney's *My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean* to £21 for Ceri Richards's *Trafalgar*

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[74] Letter from John Commander, dated 18 May 1955, to Tatlock Miller of the Redfern Gallery.
[75] Letter from John Commander, dated 2 June 1955, to Tatlock Miller.
[76] Letter from John Commander, dated 18 May 1955, to Michael Chase of Zwemmer Gallery.
[77] Press cutting in file, full source not visible.
[78] Annotated loan sheet on St George's Gallery Prints headed paper, dated 1 March 1963. All information pertaining to this exhibition is in the file (ACGB/121/776) in the Art's Council's and V & A's archive at Blythe House.
[79] Geoffrey Clark, Ceri Richards, Anthony Gross, Elizabeth Blackadder, Michael Sandle, Henry Cliffe, Richard Beer, Brian Perrin, John Watson, Martin Bradley, Josef Herman, Helena Markson, John Piper, Michael Rothenstein, Robert Colquhoun, Anthony Harrison and Stanley Jones were exhibited.

Square.[80] The relative affordability of Hockney's prints shows that he was still on the cusp of becoming an art star.

In January 1964 Editions Alecto sent a letter to the Arts Council along with a returned cheque for £8.13.[81] The money was owed to St. George's Gallery Prints but had been sent to them mistakenly. This confusion arose because while the exhibition was on its regional tour Erskine had closed St. George's Gallery Prints and told Editions Alecto to take over the remaining business. The confusion about the ownership of the prints caused a degree of administrative confusion.

In a letter dated 19 February 1964 from T.D. Benton at Editions Alecto to Hugh Shaw at the Arts Council he apologises for their failure to provide an Allen Jones print to someone who had already purchased it: 'I am sorry about the muddle which has been caused by the fact that the exhibition came originally from St George's, now merged with us, and am afraid it is an unavoidable mix-up.' He adds that he wanted to meet with him in person in order to replace unavailable prints with possible alternatives. [82] He also informs Shaw that they will be raising the prices of most of the prints. Erskine wrote back to Shaw confirming that the remaining works were indeed consigned to Editions Alecto. [83] However, he clarified that money for any sales should 'be made out to my St George's Gallery account and sent to me at Cambridge Place' along with a list of the remaining prints.[84]

In May 1964, Benton wrote to the Arts Council with an adjusted list of prices for the exhibition and notations about which prints were available – about half were no longer in stock. He agrees to reissue an invoice for a lower price because they had mistakenly issued it at their

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[80]Annotated loan sheet dated 1 March 1963 on St George's Gallery Prints headed paper (orange paper) sent to the Arts Council.
[81] Letter from Editions Alecto, dated 27 January 1964, to Shaw.
[82] Letter from Benton, dated 19 February 1964, to Shaw.
[83] Letter from TD Benton, dated 7 May 1964, to the Arts Council.
[84] Letter from Erskine, dated 6 May 1964.

increased rate and had evidently been criticised for this by the Arts Council. This correspondence proves that Editions Alecto was more commercially minded than Erskine had been and/or that Erskine had failed to take the medium's recent surge in popularity into account when setting his prices in the sixties. [85]

This exhibition generated more sales than the Cambridge exhibition of 1955. In December 1964 the Finance Department of the Arts Council made out two separate cheques to St. George's Gallery for the sale of prints. The first was for £12.12 and the second was for £18.18.[86] Some specific sales are included in the file. The Art Gallery and Industrial Museum in Aberdeen ordered 5 prints for a total of £54.14 after the exhibition was shown in Aberdeen. These included Hockney's *My Bonnie lies over the Ocean*, Alan Davie's *Sleep My Angel* and Allen Jones's *Sleeping Figure* which turned out to be unavailable. A print by Brian Perrin was bought by the Edinburgh College of Art for £10.15. And the City of Manchester Art Galleries bought a print by Denis Hawkins for £9.14.0.

3. Pop Prints[87]

Pop Prints, the third print-related exhibition in the Arts Council archive took place a few years after St. George's Gallery Prints shut down. I have included it here because it shows the ascent of the screenprint and the shift from state to corporate patronage that took place in the sixties.

Pop Prints was a large print exhibition that toured the Britain in 1966 and was made up of art commissioned by Ever-Ready Personna, a razor-blade manufacturer and subsidiary of Philip Morris International. The 33 prints were almost all screenprints by American art stars such as Andy

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[85] In the new price list compiled by Editions Alecto most of the works were sold for more money. However, some prints were sold for less. For example, Robert Colquhoun's *Black Horseman* was sold by Erskine for £8.8 but sold by Editions Alecto for £6.6. A print by Laxman Pai decreased from £6.6 to £3.3.

[86] Two notes to the Finance Department sent on 3 December and 14 December 1964.

[87] All information pertaining to this exhibition is in the file (ACGB/121/854) in the Art's Council's archive at Blythe House. All information on the exhibition in this section comes from this file V&A Archive.

Warhol, Jim Dine, Roy Lichenstein and James Rosenquist. Allen Jones, one of three British artists involved, contributed a few lithographs.

The Arts Council had very little to do with the content of the exhibition and was merely lending its name and venues to the UK-branch of the international tour. Unlike the correspondence for the 'AIA 1951 Lithographs' where the Arts Council comes across as controlling, their tone here is deferential. Due to their own limited funds, they cannot afford to buy the prints and ask for a copy of each print to be donated to their collection. Upon receiving the prints as a gift from Ever-Ready Personna, they released a press release in which they wrote that they 'warmly welcome this example of the patronage of the arts by an international manufacturing company.'[88]

Since 1946, the Arts Council had expressed their strong concerns about a lack of funding in their annual reports. But by the early sixties, they showed a degree of optimism about the rise of local participation in the arts and an increase in what they call 'industrial patronage.' [89] By 1963/64, they refer to London as 'the flower of all cities' and are hopeful that the art scene will continue to thrive thanks to a combination of the Arts Council's and other models of patronage.

The British Council and Print Patronage

The British Council was founded in 1934 and is several decades older than the Arts Council. Nevertheless, both organisations were influenced by the spirit of the 1930s and what the Arts Council described as a 'belief in the civilizing powers of education.'[90] The possibly elitist view that culture and education can somehow civilise the masses both at home and abroad is now viewed with suspicion. At the time, however, it was thought that investment in the cultural field through the British Council and related institutions could potentially stave off economic and social unrest.[91]

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[88] Press release dated 12 January 1968.
[89] *The Thirteenth Annual Report of the Arts Council* 1957-8, p.8.
[90] *The Eleventh Annual Report of the Arts Council* 1955-56, p.6.
[91] *The British Council Annual Report, 1953*-54 (London: British Council, 1954), p. 8, (from 'Report for the 20th Year' by Harold Nicholson).

This sentiment was also responsible for the rapid growth of the BBC and the major changes that took place in the realm of adult education.

The British Council and the Arts Council were in close communication with each other and the former often solicited advice from the latter.[92] There was cross-over between the two organisations which both placed great importance on education. The British Council often used photographic displays, wall-charts and transparencies for presentations/exhibitions on diverse topics such as British ballet, Children's Theatre, Town Planning or English Country Houses. Sometimes they would use photographic reproductions of fine art exhibitions, although prints were a preferable alternative. [93]

Decisions about fine arts policies for the British Council were made by a Fine Arts Committee, which, for much of the fifties was chaired by Sir Philip Hendy and included a rotating group of members including Roland Penrose, Philip James, Herbert Read and John Rothenstein. Lilian Somerville, who was one of the few women in power at any British arts institution during this period, headed the Fine Art Department from 1948 to 1970 during what is now thought of as a golden period for the British Council.

The British Council began building a permanent collection of art in 1938 when they acquired 147 works, the majority of which were prints. [94] These included woodcuts/wood engravings, linocuts and lithographs by mainly British artists. This disproportionate emphasis on prints did not continue and during the rest of the forties and first half of the fifties the British Council tended to acquire a few prints each year. In 1955, for example, the British Council bought 8 prints, including Henry Cliffe's lithograph *Figure with Trees* and several by Henry Moore. In 1956

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[92] *The British Council Annual Report, 1949*-50 (London: British Council, 1950), p. 54.
[93] *The British Council Annual Report, 1951-2* (London: British Council, 1952), Appendix XIX.
[94] *The British Council Annual Report, 1949*-50, (London: British Council, 1950), p.51.

only 9 works were acquired in total and none of them were prints. In 1957 twelve works were acquired and only one, Hayter's *About Boats*, was a print.

In the last two years of the fifties, the British Council purchased several prints by Erskine-affiliated artists. Of the 8 prints purchased in 1958, two were lithographs by Ceri Richards, one was an aquatint by Merlyn Evans, and another was Sandra Blow's 1957 screenprint *Red Movement*. In 1959 thirty-two works were acquired, and ten of these were either prints or monotypes. These included several works by Eduardo Paolozzi, Terry Frost's 1957 lithograph *Red and Grey Spirals* and Julian Trevelyan's etchings *Neolithic Temples*, *Boy with a Goat* and *Valetta* which were from the Malta Suite recently published by St. George's Gallery Prints. From this information it is possible to infer that Erskine sold prints directly to the British Council on behalf of his artists.

Between 1960 and 1963 the British Council did not buy many prints. In 1963, however, 201 artworks were acquired and most of them were prints by members of the Society of London Painter-Printers. There is no information about this bulk acquisition, and it is possible that it was a gift. In 1964 and 1965, the first two years after St. George's Gallery Prints closed, the British Council increased their number of print purchases to 20 and 25 prints. They bought more screenprints and works by younger artists such as Allen Jones, Gordon House, Bernard Cohen, Howard Hodgkin, Peter Blake, Alan Davie and David Hockney. Many of these came from the ICA's 1964 portfolio of screenprints.

It is difficult to draw many firm conclusions from this heterogeneous collection of information. However, it is evident that the British Council had less money than the Arts Council to spend on their permanent collection of art and that as a result they bought fewer prints. While there is no data on which galleries or individuals their prints were acquired from, it is possible to deduce that that a relatively high proportion of prints were purchased from St. George's Gallery Prints.

Finally, it is evident that the print boom of the 1960s resulted in an increase in the number of print purchases with a new emphasis on the screenprint.

The British Council's touring exhibitions and international biennials

Only 2% of the British Council's total budget was spent on the arts. The rest went on other endeavours such as teaching English and helping foreign students come to the UK.[95] Despite their limited funds, the British Council was able to successfully promote British art abroad since fine art was relatively inexpensive compared to other art forms. They also benefited from the fact that host countries were often willing to fund their exhibitions. [96] The British Council either organised travelling shows made up of their permanent collection or entered British artists into international exhibitions and biennials. Prints formed an important part of both exhibition types.

The British Council's print exhibitions were selected from their permanent collection and could tour internationally for many years at a time. In 1957 and the beginning of 1958, the exhibition *British Recent Artists' Lithographs* toured Spain and spent roughly a week in each city. An internal report stated that the tour had been successful, that it was 'well thought of by the critics and the general public, and a great number of people visited it in every centre where it was shown.'[97] While it was in the British Council's best interests to declare the exhibition successful, favourable reviews were printed in Spanish newspapers. [98]

The exhibition catalogue to *British Recent Artists' Lithographs* had a short essay by Philip James of the Arts Council and an introduction by Peter Floud of the V&A. This collaboration between the three organisations shows that they had a harmonious and collaborative relationship with each other. The exhibited artists included many established artists such as Michael Ayrton,

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[95] *The British Council Annual Report, 1955*-56 (London: British Council, 1950), p. 5. This includes the text 'Some Impressions of the British Council at Work' by Sir David Kelly.
[96] *The British Council Annual Report, 1949*-50, p.53.
[97] Tate Archive, British Council Visual Arts, graphic arts exhibitions file (TGA 9712/3/6).
[98] ibid., file (TGA 9712/2/7).

Robert Colquhoun, Prunella Clough, William Gear, Robert MacBryde, John Minton, Henry Moore, Paul Nash, Eduardo Paolozzi, John Piper, Ceri Richards, William Scott, Graham Sutherland, Keith Vaughan and Bryan Wynter.[99]

A similar exhibition, *Lithographs and Engravings by Contemporary British Artists*, toured France from the end of 1957 to the beginning of 1959. Roland Penrose wrote an internal memo about its formal openings: 'It was possible to see from their persistent questions that the exhibition was awakening their interest in achievements in British art of which they had little knowledge.' The French press also wrote enthusiastically about the exhibition and Penrose was sure that 'it fulfilled its purposes in presenting to the French provinces a summary of current tendencies in British art which are almost unknown in those parts at present time, and in forming a cultural link between France and Britain.' Penrose was positive about the 'variety and originality' of the exhibited works and had little to criticize other than the fact that too few catalogues were sold. [100]

Of all the printing techniques, lithography was the most featured in travelling exhibitions. In 1958/59 the exhibition *Recent Artists' Lithographs* from the British Council's permanent collection travelled to Burma, Greece and Yugoslavia and then in 1959/60 it travelled to Thailand, Indonesia and Ceylon, and then Malta and Turkey. In 1958/59 the exhibition *Recent Artists' Prints* which travelled to France, Austria and the German Federal Republic and then in 1959/60 it travelled to Austria and Sweden and then again to the German Federal Republic.[101] There is no evidence that Erskine had any role in these touring exhibitions other than providing the British Council with prints for their permanent collection.

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[99] Tate Archive, file TGA 9712/3/6.
[100] Tate Archive, file TGA 9712/3/4 -FR/643/32.
[101]*The British Council Annual Report, 1960-61* (London: British Council, 1961), Appendix XIX.

The British Council's touring exhibitions of prints were relatively well received and well attended. While none of the individual exhibitions seem to have been particularly ground breaking or impactful, they slowly introduced international audiences to developments in British printmaking. Of more immediate concern to the printmakers themselves, however, were the international exhibitions or biennials that brought together artists from all over the world, offered prize money and were increasingly important for their careers. They relied on the British Council to liaise with the host countries on their behalf and ensure that their work was adequately represented.

The Venice Biennale, which was established in 1895, is the oldest of its kind and served as a model for post-war exhibitions in countries all over the world.[102] Some of these exhibitions accepted prints along with paintings and sculptures. Other exhibitions, such as The International Biennial of Colour Lithography in Cincinnati, were exclusively devoted to prints. Founded in 1950 by Gustave von Groschwitz, the Curator of Prints at the Cincinnati Museum of Art, its existence proved Bryan Robertson's theory that American museum officials were more sympathetic to contemporary prints than their English equivalents. In 1958, the exhibition changed its name to The Cincinnati Print Biennale in order to accommodate other print types. [103]

British art was relatively well represented at international print exhibitions, though French and Italian printmakers often dominated. At the Cincinnati Biennial in 1958, there were 450 prints by 284 artists from 37 countries. The French contributed the most with 90 prints, followed by the Italians with 60 and the British with 34. The British artists included Alistair Grant, Bernard Cheese, John Watson, Edwin La Dell and Henry Cliffe, all of whom were associated with St. George's Gallery Prints. Patrick Heron's print *Red Garden* and Terry Frost's *Composition in Red and Black*

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[102] *The British Council Annual Report, 1955*-56, op.cit., p.15.
[103] Clinton Adams, 'The Cincinnati Biennials: A Conversation with Gustave von Groschwitz,' *The Tamarind Technical Papers,* ed.by Clinton Adams, 7 (1977), 86-88 and 96 (p.86).

were praised in an article on the exhibition. These prints were commissioned by Erskine, and it seems likely the some of the other prints were too. [104]

Erskine's affiliated artists Anthony Gross and Leonard Baskin showed work at the Cincinatti Biennial in 1960. Baskin's woodcut *Everyman* was regarded by Groschwitz as one of the most important works in the exhibition. Groschwitz, who wrote about the exhibition, mentioned the increased size of the prints which could hold their own amongst paintings and a renewed interest in fine art prints: 'There is even some talk of a "boom" in prints', but that is an unpleasant word for anyone who lived during the Depression.'[105] This boom, which was in its infancy, did not just take place in American and the United Kingdom. France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Yugoslavia, Mexico and Brazil also had thriving print scenes that all benefited from this new emphasis on the medium.

The First International Exhibition of Graphic Art at Ljubljana, which began in 1955, was held every three years. The first exhibition had over 700 prints by 158 artists from 22 different countries who had been sent invitations to submit work. Ten jury prizes were given out and catalogues were available in Serbian and French.[106] The British Council helped coordinate the British section of the exhibition and the annual report from 1961/2 stated that Henry Cliffe, Anthony Gross, Ceri Richards and Michael Rothenstein had shown work there.[107] These artists were all affiliated with Erskine, and it again seems likely that he gave their prints to the British Council for submission. By 1963, the tide was turning in favour of younger printmakers. David Hockney received a 'particular mention' and a purchase prize along with the artist Joe Tilson. That year first prize was awarded by Philip James to the French Op Artist Victor Vasarely.

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[104] *The Fifth International Biennial of Colour Lithography* in Cincinnati took place from 28 February to 15 April 1958. In *The Studio*, Gustave von Groschwitz cites Bernard Buffet's *Slice of Melon* as print to take note of and draws attention to Clavé and Manessier — see Gustave von Groschwitz, 'Contemporary Lithographs: The Representational Element,' *The Studio*, 156 (784)(July 1958), 19 (p.19).

[105] Gustave von Groschwitz, 'International Prints,' *The Studio*, 160(809)(September 1960), 82 (p.82).

[106] Aleksa Celebonovic, 'The International View of Graphic Art,' *The Studio*, 151(755)(February 1956), 33 (p.33).

[107] *The British Council Annual Report, 1961-62* (London: British Council, 1962).

Printmaking was thought to be compatible with 'developing economies' because of its 'relative affordability' and its 'potential for both practical and political applications.'[108] For these reasons it had a rich history in Mexico, where it had been popularised by artists ranging from José-Guadalupe Posada to Diego Riviera. [109] Printmaking flourished in Brazil during post-war period and artists such as Lygia Pape made highly experimental prints until 1964 when the country became a military dictatorship.[110]

The São Paulo Biennial, which was founded in 1951, showcased thousands of works by dozens of countries, and was an important cultural event where printmakers were often featured alongside painters and sculptors. The British artists who were represented at the 1959 biennial, for example, were Francis Bacon for painting, Barbara Hepworth for sculpture and S.W. Hayter for printmaking.[111] In the exhibition catalogue, the art historian Robert Melville wrote about Bacon's paintings. Erskine wrote about Hayter and argued that he had 'perceptibly affected the course of the twentieth-century.' [112] In 1961, the Erskine-affiliated artist Merlyn Evans contributed prints for the British section of the Sao Paulo Biennale.[113]

The Venice Biennial was the most famous of the international exhibitions and brought together the best artists from around the world. While prints were only one element of the overall programme, most printmakers were delighted if their work was chosen. In 1958, S.W. Hayter, along with William Scott and Kenneth Armitage, was chosen to represent Britain and he won first prize

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[108] Adele Nelson, 'Sensitive and Nondiscursive Things: Lygia Pape and the Reconception of Printmaking,' *Art Journal*, 3(2012), 26-45 (p.30).

[109] Sarah Suzuki, *What is a Print: Selections from the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2011), p. 29.

[110] Nelson, op.cit., (p.37).

[111] *Paintings by Francis Bacon, Paintings and Etchings by SW Hayter, Sculpture and Drawings by Barbara Hepworth*, exh.cat., Museum of Modern Art Sao Paulo, (Sao Paulo: British Council, 1959).

[112] At the 1962 Biennial, Leonard Baskin was granted first prize for his 1954 engraving *Hanged Man* -see Albert D Hinrichsen, 'Biennial Sao Paulo,' *The Studio*, 163 (825) (January 1962), 25 (p.25).

[113] *The British Council Annual Report, 1961-62*.

for a religious work. At the next Venice Biennial in 1960, the British Pavilion displayed prints by artists who were all affiliated with St. George's Gallery Prints: Geoffrey Clarke, Henry Cliffe and Merlyn Evans.

Hayter, as is evident by awards at the Venice and São Paolo Biennials, received a groundswell of recognition as a printmaker in the late fifties and early sixties. He was supported by the British Council, which submitted his work to these exhibitions, and by the Arts Council. In 1958, for example, a retrospective of his work organised by the Arts Council travelled all over England. And from November 1959 to May 1960, a British Council-organised exhibition of his paintings and engravings toured Paris, Cologne, Brussels and Zürich. Hayter also received the International Grand Prize at the second International Biennial Exhibition of Prints in Japan (Osaka and Tokyo) in 1960.

The Japanese Biennial, which ran from October to November in Tokyo and from January to February in Osaka, began in 1958/59 and quickly became an important specialist print exhibition. Jalaluddin Ahmed, who wrote about the 1961/2 biennial, was very impressed with the quality of the work. Organized by the Japanese Museum of Modern Art, there were 600 works on display by 226 artists from 45 countries and an International Grand Prize of 300,000 Japanese yen. While British artists were well represented, Ahmed declared it an 'American year' since three of the five international prizes were given to Sam Francis, Robert Raushenberg and Ben Shahn. [114]

Because the British Council lacks an official archive, it was not easy to prove that Erskine worked closely with the British Council until I came across the Tate Archive's box on the Japanese Print Biennial. Of the 23 records of British prints exhibited at the 1960 Japanese Biennale, 11 came from St. George's Gallery, three came from the collection of Robert Erskine and the rest came from

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[114] Jalaluddin Ahmed, 'International Prints in Japan,' *The Studio*, 165 (838) (February 1963), 60 (p.60).

artists rather than from other galleries. This data suggests that Robert Erskine was the primary dealer providing the British Council with material for the 1960 Japanese Print Biennial.[115]

The prints lent by Erskine, or his gallery, were valued between £5.5 for Sandra Blow's 1958 silkscreen *Elemental Form* and £20 for Ceri Richard's 1959 lithograph *La Cathédrale Engloutie*. On average, the prints were valued at roughly £12. The rest of Erskine's prints include lithographs and etchings by S.W. Hayter, Adrian Heath, Bryan Wynter and Henry Cliffe. The additional prints were mainly lent by Erskine-affiliated artists such as Anthony Gross and Merlyn Evans. Paolozzi, who was not affiliated with Erskine, submitted two screenprints from 1958 which were valued at £25, suggesting that he was beginning to eclipse the older, more established artists such as Hayter.

By 1963, Erskine was winding up his activities as a print dealer and did not provide as many prints for the 1962/63 print biennial in Japan. Of the 25 British prints, 4 came from St. George's Gallery, 2 from Curwen Prints Ltd. and the rest from individual artists. Erskine provided Hockney's print *Kaisarion* while the artist himself provided the British Council with *My Bonnie Lies over the Ocean* and *The Diploma*.[116] Despite a smaller role, Erskine still signed most of the insurance documents for prints by artists including Paolozzi, Hayter, Cliffe, Gross and Hockney. Several of the unsold prints were sent back to Editions Alecto rather than to St. George's Gallery Prints.

Robert Erskine's gallery closed in 1963 and as a result he was not involved in the Japanese Biennale of 1964. Instead, new organisations such as the Marlborough Gallery, the Waddington Gallery, the New London Gallery and, most importantly, Editions Alecto filled his place. While some of Erskine's artists such as Gross, Evans and Hayter still showed at the biennial, they were

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[115] Information pertaining to the *2nd International Biennale Exhibition of Prints*, Tokyo 1960 comes from the Tate archive, file TGA 9712/3/8.
[116] Information pertaining to the *3rd International Biennale Exhibition of Prints*, Tokyo 1960 comes from the Tate archive, file TGA 9712/3/10.

getting less attention than younger stars such as Hockney, Paolozzi, Allen Jones and Joe Tilson, most of whom were now represented by Editions Alecto.[117]

David Hockney was a young artist whose artistic promise was recognised at many of the international exhibitions we have been discussing.[118] In addition to the exhibitions in Japan, and Ljubljana, he had participated in the 2nd Paris Biennale in 1961 and in 1963 when he won the Foreign Prize in the Graphics Section.[119] Hockney had exhibited alongside other British painter/printmakers Peter Blake, Derek Boshier and Allen Jones at the 2nd International Biennale for Artists Under Thirty-Five at the Musee d'Art Modern in 1961. And he also exhibited prints at the 3rd International Biennale for Artists Under Thirty-Five in 1963. Given that Hockney was one of the best British printmakers of the period, it is fitting that when Britain finally hosted its own international print biennial it took place in his hometown of Bradford.

The first British International Print Biennale, as it was called, ran from 23 November 1968 to 19 January 1969.[120] An early announcement emphasised that it was the first of its kind in Britain and it was felt by many that it was ought to have come much sooner. [121] The prime movers behind the creation of the Bradford Print Biennale were Brigit Skiold and her husband Peter Bird. Skiold, as discussed in an earlier chapter, was a printmaker who had founded the Print Workshop, an invaluable resource to printmakers and the closest there was to an Atelier 17 in Britain. Bird had been the Director of the Bradford Art Gallery and Museums since 1958 and who would go on to work at the Arts Council.

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[117] Prints exhibited at the *Japanese Print Biennale* of 1964 included *He's Real She's Real, Bikini and Aeroplane* by Allen Jones; *Tafel 16*, *Girot* and *Materialisation of a Dream* by Eduardo Paolozzi; *Ziggurat*, *Lufbery and Rickenbacker* by Joe Tilson.

[118] G. S. Whittet, 'David Hockney: His Life and Good Times,' *The Studio,* 165 (848) (December 1963), 262-263 (p.263).

[119] *The British Council Annual Report, 1963-4* (London: British Council, 1964), Appendix XIX, pp.99-101.

[120] Information pertaining to the Bradford Biennale comes from the V&A's Archive at Blythe House from the file AAD/1997/18/351, BSMB I (e) 2 of 2.

[121] Preliminary Announcement about the Biennale.

An advisory committee for the biennial included Lilian Somerville of the British Council, Graham Reynolds of the V&A, Rosemary Simmons of the Curwen Gallery and established printmakers S.W Hayter, Anthony Gross, Michael Rothenstein. These men all had close ties to Erskine's gallery and two of them, Gross and Rothenstein, had helped establish the Printmakers Council in 1965. The Printmaker's Council and the Bradford Biennale can arguably be seen as a continuation of Erskine's work on the part of his affiliated artists to promote original graphic work. And thanks to the new print-friendly cultural climate, they were increasingly able to do so.

All the prints in the Bradford Biennale were for sale and a final selection of the submitted works were selected by a committee which included Paolozzi and Hayter. Because of unresolved debates about what constituted an original print were taking place in the late sixties, the committee had to be very clear about their terms. Prints needed to be signed and edition size was limited to 75. Monotypes were not permitted. Nor were works that were 'a close or literal copy of an original work of art, however produced.' This included copies made by 'photo-mechanical' processes that were signed by the artist in a limited edition.' [122] The subtlety of this definition ensured that more experimental techniques that incorporated photography were not excluded but that copies of pre-existing artworks were.

The Bradford Biennale was funded in main by the Arts Council, although other organizations contributed prize money. For example, during the first biennale, the Polish artist Roman Opalka received £200 from the Arts Council, R.B. Kitaj received £200 from Friends of Bradford Art Gallery and Colin Self received £200 from the Giles Bequest.[123] This shows that the Giles Bequest continued to support printmakers even though their competition had ceased to exist. Even though the first Biennale took place during the height of the print boom, it was not initially a

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[122] Internal Memo from the Bradford Biennale.
[123] Preliminary announcement about the Bradford Biennale by John Morley, Director of Bradford City Art Gallery and Museums.

financial success. During its second year, expenditure came to £7,949 while income, including grants, was only £4,252.[124]

The reviews of the Bradford Biennale were generally favourable, although *The Studio* magazine, which had recently been renamed *Studio International*, was not impressed. The critic Edward Lucie-Smith thought the print quality was mediocre and that the sheer number of attendees (10,000) and prints (4,200) made attending the exhibition 'feel like a man who has unwarily stepped on a Corporation bus.'[125] A few years later, Michael Rothenstein said that those who attacked the Bradford Biennale had no idea how deprived printmaking had been for so many years. The financial backing from large galleries and the concomitant perks such as beautiful exhibition catalogues 'hadn't really been offered until these big international biennales came along' he added. [126]

International biennales helped put printmaking on the map and became one of the contributing factors to the print boom of the 1960s, which, as I will look at in the conclusion, depended on an international network of artists and sellers. While the print boom was well underway by the time the Bradford Biennale came about, it was a significant event that tied together many of the strands that had been started by Erskine in the previous decade by showing that printmaking was now taken seriously as an art form by institutions and by artists. And as already noted, it was supported by artists who had worked closely with St. George's Gallery Prints and who were continuing his legacy in their own different ways. These included Hayter, Gross and Rothenstein, but also Hockney who designed the biennale's poster and also hosted a Prints Party.

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[124] In a report by the Director to the Advisory Committee of the Second British International Print Biennale total sales are listed as approximately £3,200.

[125] Edward Lucie Smith (aka Lucy 'Deadwood' Smith), 'Outside the Bradford Print Biennale'. This was an undated draft article for the June issue of *Studio International*, devoted to prints. Despite Smith's criticisms, many well-known artists contributed prints, including U.S. artists Jim Dine, Sam Francis, Grace Hartigan, Claes Oldenberg, Ad Reinhardt, Frank Stella and William Weege.

[126] Michael Rothenstein in conversation with Pat Gilmour and Stewart Mason, 15 November 1974, Tate Archive Audiovisual Collection, TAV38AB, (transcript) p.16.

Hockney, whose prints had arguably been discovered by Erskine in 1962, was the face of British printmaking in 1969.

Conclusion

In the introduction to *A Century of Prints in Britain*, a book based on the Arts Council's print collection, Julia Beaumont-Jones argues that the growth and vitality of printmaking in the second half of the twentieth century went hand in hand with 'the democratization of British culture.'[127] High culture, which had previous been the preserve of a small elite, should now be available to everyone who cared to experience it. The print was thought to be the medium best suited to making art accessible and from the 1930s onwards it was called upon to do so in print schemes such 'Contemporary Lithographs Ltd.', 'School Prints Ltd.', the 'Lyons Lithographs', the 'AIA 1951 Lithographs'– three of which the Arts Council contributed to financially.

The democratization of culture influenced the policies of the Arts Council, the British Council and the Circulation of Department. They were committed to bringing fine art to the public, which included people who lived outside London. The print, as an easily transportable and affordable medium, was a good means of doing so. All three organisations organised print exhibitions (some of original prints and some of reproductions for educational purposes) and bought contemporary prints. They built up their own print collections and in doing so provided valuable (but limited) financial support to printmakers. They also helped promote the medium at a time when it was languishing in obscurity.

Erskine, as I have shown, had a close relationship with the V&A, the Arts Council and the British Council and did everything he could to ensure that his printmakers benefited from the public patronage of these institutions. He was ideologically aligned with them because he too thought that

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[127] Julia Beaumont-Jones, *A Century of Prints in Britain* (London: Hayward Publishing), p.3.

art should be available to as wide an audience as possible and was attracted to the print because of its capacity to be easily disseminated. However, as demonstrated in chapter 7, he took a pragmatic approach to patronage and also sought ought corporate sponsorship for the later *Graven Image* exhibitions.

As the post-war era drew to a close by the end of the 1950s, the British art world was in a much stronger position than many artists and dealers had expected. An infusion of cash from a generous welfare state meant that 'government grants to museums and galleries rose fourfold in real terms between 1945 and 1964, and to the Arts Council sixfold.'[128] While it is unclear whether this resulted in a more artistically inclined general public, it may have contributed to a newfound optimism about the role of art in society. When in 1965, the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (which formed in 1956) put on *Painting & Sculpture of a Decade: '54 –'64* at the Tate Gallery, its anonymous catalogue author declared that avant-garde culture was gaining acceptance amongst the majority and that 'experimental art…has been well supported and earned a decent living, as it never has before in the last ten years.'[129]

[128] Brian Harrison, *eeking a Role: The United Kingdom, 1951 -1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 2011), p.381.
[129] 'Untitled Essay,' *Painting & Sculpture of a Decade: '54 – '64',* exhibition catalogue (London: The Colouste Gulbenkian Foundation, 1964), pp. 5-48 (pp.18 and 48).

CONCLUSION

The closure of St. George's Gallery Prints; Editions Alecto, Kelpra Studio and the Rise of the Screenprint in Britain; Pop Art and Printmaking

By the early-to-mid 1960s, a growing economy and a new focus on youth culture and the creative industries had benefited the art market and, by extension, the print market. Prints were becoming a popular form of expression for young artists and several new print publishers emerged to help fund the production and distribution of prints to a domestic and international market. The most important of these publishers was Editions Alecto but, as stated earlier, the Marlborough and Waddington Galleries opened graphic divisions to cater to the new demand as did other print publishers in London and abroad.

Editions Alecto was started in the late 1950s by two Cambridge students, Michael Deakin and Paul Cornwall-Jones, who hoped to make money by selling prints of Cambridge colleges to former students.[1] After successfully selling a Cambridge college print by Julian Trevelyan, they then commissioned John Piper to make a lithograph of Westminster School for a series of prints on public schools. While Editions Alecto would go on to be associated with the swinging sixties and the production of high-end Pop prints, it is important to note the fact that their origins were topographical and that they were linked to Erskine via their commissioning of his affiliated artists and their mutual Cambridge connection.

Editions Alecto maintained the precedent set by Erskine by establishing a strong marketing identity for the company. They hired Eric Ayers to design their catchy logo of an interlocking "e" and "a", which shared a certain quality with the logo of St. George's Gallery Prints. In her 2003

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[1] This was something that had already been done by the Cambridge Contemporary Art Trust in 1956 when they commissioned John Piper's lithograph *King's College Cambridge*. Erskine had been affiliated with the Cambridge Art Trust during his student days.

book on Editions Alecto, Tessa Sidey writes that 'their approach appeared fresh and progressive, combining spacious wording and layout with simple eye-catching devices such as Cobb Demise coloured paper inserts for catalogues.'[2] This, as I demonstrated in chapter 2, was also true of Erskine's promotional material. (See Figure 121 for a selection of Editions Alecto's promotional material, which includes their logo.) Like St. George's Gallery Prints, Editions Alecto also made use of the film strip as a marketing device. But, as would prove true in other areas, they did it on a much larger scale. In 1966, for example, they sent a film strip catalogue of over 200 images out to prospective buyers. [3]

The overarching goal of the company was to make money and Sidey writes that: 'Unlike Erskine, Editions Alecto raised the financial stakes and expanded their operations from the start.'[4] In 1962, for example, they moved to 8 Holland Street, a large location in west London that was near the fashion store Biba and the Royal College of Art. The building included a gallery on the ground floor called the Print Centre where they exhibited new work as well as office space and stock rooms. Several full-time employees were hired along with new executives. One of these, Joe Studholme, quit his job in the city to run Editions Alecto. Another recruit, Mark Glazebrook, was a former Arts Council employee who was well-connected to the London art scene.

From the size of the building to the number of employees, it was evident that Editions Alecto was expecting to sell a lot of prints. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, they raised the prices of prints and offered artists more money for their work. In 1963, Hockney had been paid an unprecedented amount for the rights to 'A Rake's Progress' and other artists were paid good sums for existing editions. In 1963, they also began paying artists a monthly retainer of £50, which in

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[2] Tessa Sidey, *Editions Alecto: Original Graphics, Multiple Originals 1960-81* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2004), p.13.
[3] ibid., p.13.
[4] ibid., p.13.

1967 was raised to £100. Monthly retainers became more common in the 1960s and were supposed to make up for the financial insecurity of selling art on a show-to-show basis.[5]

The monthly retainer was designed to make the art world more professional, transparent and fair. However, Richard Hamilton thought that 'dealers were having a whale of time' and making a lot of money off printmakers during the boom years. He writes that artists were only offered a third of the sale price of an edition and that production costs were often deducted from that. He points out that once the edition was handed over, the artist lost all control and could be taken advantage of by unscrupulous publishers.[6] Despite the inevitable greed of some print publishers, artists at least stood a chance of making money from prints in a way that had not been possible when Erskine opened his gallery. In the eight years between the opening of St. George's Gallery Prints in early 1955 and its closure in 1963, the opportunities for printmakers in Britain had increased enormously and throughout this dissertation I have argued that more credit for this is due to Erskine than has previously been acknowledged.

The closure of St. George's Gallery Prints in 1963 is surprising given all that it had accomplished and there is no adequate explanation for Erskine's decision to shut down the gallery entirely. As stated in chapter 8, there was some overlap between his new career as a television presenter and his old one as a print dealer and it is not clear exactly when he vacated the Cork Street premises. There is evidence that he participated in the Japanese biennial of 1963 and we know that the last *Graven Image* exhibition was held from 6-28 May 1963. While he may have organised a

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[5] ibid., p.15.

[6] 'Once the print edition is made and in the hands of a publisher, what does the artist have? Faith and hope. The publisher is better placed: he holds the work physically, he holds the income from the sales, he holds the accounts. In the case of disagreement the publisher can claim ownership because the printing bills were paid by him.' See Richard Hamilton, 'Printmaking', in Richard Hamilton, *Collected Words 1953-1982* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), pp.84-110 (p.110).

few more exhibitions after that, it seems like he was winding down his print-related activities by the middle of 1963.

By 1963, St. George's Gallery Prints had become more than a space for exhibiting contemporary prints. It provided a model for how to run a print gallery and had been instrumental in creating the infrastructure for the production of high-quality prints that could be published and distributed in a professional rather than amateur way. This professionalization (in terms of edition size, paper quality, and printing standards) of the fine art print industry, which Erskine had begun to implement in the fifties, is one example of how this in-depth study of St. George's Gallery Prints subverts the idea that the sixties represented a radical break from the bohemian and unprofessional fifties. Nevertheless, there were differences in outlook between those who came of age after the war and those who came of age during the sixties.

The sixties art scene was certainly more commercial than the art scene of the previous decade and Erskine may have had trouble adapting. In his rather indirect account of the closure of the gallery in the 1973 book *A Decade of Printmaking,* Erskine writes that while 'prints and printmaking gradually entered the public consciousness, and the gallery's status burgeoned' that the gallery's financial viability stayed where it was.'[7] Erskine, who wanted to keep prints affordable, was hesitant to raise his prices and could also be too trusting of people. There is an unconfirmed rumour that an assistant took money from the gallery for several years. While he had a private income, he did not have unlimited resourced and he could not continue to support printmakers indefinitely. One possible explanation for his decision to close that gallery was that his money was running out and he had not established a sustainable business model for St. George's Gallery Prints.

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[7] Robert Erskine, 'St. George's Gallery,' in *A Decade of Printmaking*, ed. by Charles Spencer (London: Academy Editions, 1973), pp.19-24 (p.23).

Another possible reason for Erskine's decision was that he may have felt out of step with the sixties in terms of age, class and cultural references. Tessa Sidey suggests as much when she writes that: 'Though Erskine himself had little in common with the rapidly changing London of the early 1960s, his vision of a committed centre for the contemporary British print was now in place for a younger generation.'[8] While Sidey acknowledges Erskine's influence, the implication in her text is that Editions Alecto represented a new era of Pop printmaking that was worlds away from the post-war spirit of St. George's Gallery Prints. Erskine did not comment on the generational differences between himself and the directors of Editions Alecto, but he did suggest that he was pleased when they came along: 'Rather, thankfully, I handed over the mantle of St. George's Gallery Prints to them, and as a very sleepy director I now feel like an ageing uncle to a family of spirited youngsters who have grown up.'[9]

Erskine's merger with Editions Alecto was done in a characteristically uncompetitive way. He was not worried about the loss of the St. George's Gallery name that he had built up over nearly a decade because his main reason for founding the gallery had been to revive contemporary printmaking. He had accomplished what he had set out to do and prints were increasingly attractive to buyers. He hints at his ambivalence about the new status of the print when he writes that the business had become 'a going concern,' adding that: 'Three guineas a print seems a long way off, beside Paolozzis and Jim Dines at ten times that amount, but I suppose that's what I was aiming to bring about.'[10] Erskine clearly had mixed feelings about how money-oriented the print market had become and was ready to move on to his new job as an arts television presenter.

Erskine did not step away from the world of prints entirely and remained a director of Editions Alecto for many years. He was actively involved in the company and in 1968 attended its

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[8] Sidey,op.cit., p.12.
[9] ibid., p.23.
[10] Erskine, op.cit. p.23.

promotional tour of Italy (Figure 122). In 1969, Elizabeth Deighton, a director of the Alecto Gallery

was interviewed on the subject of 'How to Break Into Print' for *The Daily Mail*. She was clear

about the fact that Editions Alecto had 'evolved out of St. George's Gallery Prints' and credits

Erskine with reviving printmaking in Britain.[11] In an earlier article in *The Times* on 'New

Techniques in Printmaking,' St. George's Gallery Prints was described as having been 'absorbed

into Editions Alecto.'[12] Without diminishing the differences between the two companies, it is also

important to acknowledge the continuity that existed between them.

Erskine, as discussed in chapter 8, had given Editions Alecto his unsold stock and allowed

them to take over some of his exhibitions (causing a degree of financial and logistical confusion).

The most important of these exhibitions was the annual *Graven Image* exhibition at the Royal

Watercolour Society (R.W.S.) Galleries, which in May 1966 was renamed *Graphics in the Sixties:*

An Improvisation.[13] Sidey argues that *Graphics of the Sixties* was Editions Alecto's most influential

show (Figure 123). It kept to Erskine's original format because it was a survey of graphic talent but

it included prints by artists who for the most part resided either in London or New York. These

artists included Richard Hamilton, Eduardo Paolozzi, Bernard Cohen, Alan Davie, Josef Albers,

Victor Vasarely, Sam Francis, Lee Bontecou, Jim Dine, Larry Rivers and Robert Rauschenberg.

Any hint of localism or regionalism that had remained in Erskine's exhibitions had given way to a

new internationalism that was in reality focused on a few metropolitan centres.

British prints were recognised around the world and often sold abroad throughout the

sixties.[14] The print market and contemporary print culture in Britain had transformed between the

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[11] Jan Gillies, 'How to Break Into Print,'*The Daily Mail*, 28 May 1969, p. 16**.** Deighton, who was interviewed at the height of the print boom, spoke about the good German market for prints, but said that 'the best of all is in the United States.' Finally, she was certain about the fact that 'many of these prints will rise enormously in price in the future.'
[12] 'New Techniques in Printmaking', *The Times*, 25 October 1966, p. 1
[13] Sidey,op.cit., p.16 -17.
[14] In the exhibition's catalogue, Paul Cornwall-Jones writes of the demand the company had received from overseas for their prints, adding that 'the mobility and low prices of graphics has helped the growing international appreciation of

first *Graven Image* exhibition of 1959 and the last (retitled *Graphics in the Sixties*) in 1965. Erskine, as stated in chapter 7, had believed this would happen, writing that the 'umbrella is only half open' and that his exhibition was just the beginning of a printmaking movement. Richard Riley makes a similar point when he writes that 'Erskine's prediction in the catalogue was correct and that ten years later the floodgates had opened' for printmaking. He credits Erskine for helping to 'pave the way for this boom' but adds that 'what Erskine could not have anticipated in '59 was that screenprinting would become the dominate process in the decade to follow.'[15] It was not a coincidence that the majority of prints exhibited in Editions Alecto's *Graphics in the Sixties* were screenprints.

The rapid growth of Editions Alecto in the mid-to-late sixties was partly due to their marketing savvy, financial acumen and art world connections. However, their real success was because the establishment of their company coincided with an international vogue for the screenprint. While Editions Alecto also published other print types, they were famous for their screenprints. The screenprint was well-suited to producing bold, colourful and hard-edged abstractions and to making collages via a combination of photographs and individually crafted stencils. This was done with unprecedented skill in Eduardo Paolozzi's 'As Is When' series of prints that was published by Editions Alecto in 1965 (Figure 124). Thanks to a cultural climate that embraced new technologies and popular culture, the screenprint had finally come into its own.[16]

For the first half of the twentieth century, the screenprint's connection with advertising and design was considered problematic. When the technique was used by American artists in the Works

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London as a creative centre.' See Paul Cornwall-Jones, 'Introduction,' *Graphics in the Sixties: An Improvisation* (London: Editions Alecto, 1966) (no page numbers given) quoted in Sidey, op.cit., pp.16-17.

[15] Richard Riley, 'Introduction,' in *As Is When: A Boom in British Printmaking 1961-72* (London: The British Council, 2003), pp. 7-13, (p. 8).

[16] Editions Alecto also branched out into multiples and prints that blurred the boundary with sculpture. In 1966 (published 1968), Claes Oldenburg produced 'London Knees,' which included 21 prints and a multiple of life-size latex knees.

Progress Administration (WPA) during the Depression, it was rebranded as 'serigraphy' in order to 'distance the practice from its commercial origins.'[17] Throughout the 1930s and 40s, serigraphy 'occupied the bottom of the rung' in the 'hierarchy of artistic print media' and was associated with social realism rather than with gestural abstraction.[18] Ironically, Pat Gilmour writes, the National Serigraph Society, which had formed in the 1940s, closed down just as the medium was beginning to be admired by artists for its 'brasher commercial possibilities.'[19]

In France, the *pochoir*, or hand-coloured stencil method, was deployed in printed books and posters. Matisse's illustrated book, *Jazz* (1947), for example, was made this way and 'the plates were the most brightly hued prints executed up to that time – the hard edges of each form abutting each other in an astonishing clash of colours.' Despite Matisse's supervision of the hand printing, the prints were still considered reproductions.[20] In the mid-1950s, Victor Vasserly delighted in its machine-like qualities and began producing screenprints with the commercial firm Arcay.[21]

In Britain, the screenprint was promoted in late forties and early fifties by the husband and wife team Francis and Dorothy Carr. Francis Carr taught 'silk screen printing' at the Guildford School of Art and together they exhibited their screenprints at the Redfern Gallery and other venues.[22] Other early English screenprinting endeavours, as written about in chapter 3, took place in Cornwall. Peter Lanyon along and the American potter Warren Mackenzie produced screenprints and in 1955 Dennis Mitchell set up Porthia Prints in order to screenprint designs onto fabric. [23] As

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[17] Sarah Suzuki, *What is a Print: Selections from the Museum of Modern Art* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2011), p.116.

[18] Susan Tallman, 'Irresistible: the rise of the American print workshop' in Stephen Coppel, Catherine Daunt and Susan Tallman, eds., *The American Dream: Pop to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2017), pp. 20-33 (p.26).

[19] Pat Gilmour, 'Introduction' in *Kelpra Studio: An exhibition to Commemorate the Rose and Chris Prater Gift*, exh.cat., the Tate Gallery (London: The Tate Gallery, 1980), pp.11-57 (p.16).

[20] Riva Castleman, *Prints of the Twentieth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), p.90.

[21] Gilmour, 'Introduction' in *Kelpra Studio*, op.cit., p. 15.

[22] 'Francis and Dorothy Carr: Pioneers in Serigraphy', *The Studio*, 142 (1951), p. 109.

[23] Robin Garton, ed., *British Printmakers, 1855-1955: A Century of Printmaking from the Etching Revival to St. Ives* (Devizes, Wiltshire: Garton & Co. with Scolar Press, 1994), p. 307.

discussed chapter 5, Paolozzi and Henderson created Hammer Prints in 1954 and used the screenprint to subvert the field of craft.[24]

The artist John Coplans, who moved to the USA in 1960 and became a founding member of the magazine *Artforum*, was the most important advocate of the screenprint in Britain during the fifties. He had read an American book on the subject and was so impressed with 'the simplicity of the equipment and the ease of application' that he decided to set up his own studio from his home in Hampstead. He invited several artists including Alan Davie and William Turnbull to make screenprints and he put on the exhibition *British Silkscreen Prints* at the ICA in December of 1956. The introduction to the catalogue was written by Erskine and according to Pat Gilmour: 'Erskine spoke of the screenprint's commercial image retaining "some of the undeserved stigma of mass production" but praised its inexpensiveness, its speed, its spontaneity, its capacity for serial mutation. All these things, he concluded, meant it "must now be recognised as a full-fledged artistic medium."'[25]

It is significant that Erskine wrote the introduction to *British Silkscreen Prints* because it shows that he could be forward-thinking in his willingness to encourage new technical developments. It is possible that Erskine asked Coplans to give a screenprinting demonstration for his film *Artist's Proof* in 1957 because of this experience. Given that only a limited number of artists were using the technique for artistic purposes, he could easily have left it out of his film. Erskine exhibited the silkscreens (as he called them) *Cinema Screen* by John Coplans in 1957 and *Nude* by Cliff Holden in 1958. And, as shown in chapter 6, he commissioned Douglas Mazonowicz to make silkscreen copies of ancient cave and tomb paintings.

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[24] Michelle Cotton, ed., *Nigel Henderson & Eduardo Paolozzi: Hammer Prints Ltd, 1954-75* (Colchester, Essex: Firstsite, 2013), p.21.

[25] Gilmour, 'Introduction' in *Kelpra Studio*, op.cit., p. 16. She is quoting the introduction by Erskine in the catalogue to *British Silkscreen Prints* which opened at the ICA Arts Library on 17 December 1956. I have not been able to find this catalogue.

Throughout this thesis I have emphasised continuity and overlap rather than rupture and decisive breaks. Erskine's advocacy of the screenprint in the mid-fifties is an example of this and suggests that the technique's triumph in the mid-sixties was not entirely unexpected. While Erskine did not have much involvement in the growing Pop art movement, he did sense that the screenprint was going to be very important for fine art printmaking and supported those with an interest in it. For example, Erskine is thought to have encouraged Chris Prater to set up Kelpra Studio in 1957 with his wife Rose.[26] If this story is true, his instincts were correct since Prater was the single person most responsible for turning the screenprint into one of the most exciting mediums for British artists in the 1960s.[27]

The Kelpra Studio, which produced almost all of Editions Alecto's screenprints, became synonymous with innovation, collaboration and experimentation in the 1960s. Prater worked closely with artists including Paolozzi, Hamilton and Hockney and was always willing to look for new technical solutions in order to realise specific requests that initially seemed impossible. This approach was unique to Kelpra in Britain. Most American artists, for example, had to send their designs to commercial screenprint studios without any back-and-forth over ideas. As a result, Britain led the field in cutting-edge screenprinting in the 1960s and American artists like Jim Dine, Larry Rivers and Claes Oldenburg travelled to London to work with Kelpra and Editions Alecto.[28]

Chris Prater came from a poor family but received an art school scholarship after serving in the war. In 1951, he took a three-month course in screenprinting and discovered his metiér. For the next six years he perfected his technical skills by working with almost every commercial screenprinter in London.[29] When he founded Kelpra he did not intend to work with artists but after

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[26] Rosemary Miles, *The Complete Prints of Eduardo Paolozzi: Prints, Drawings, Collages 1944-77* (London: V & A Museum, 1977), p.18.

[27] See - *Kelpra Prints*, Arts Council exhibition (17 June to 7 July 1970).

[28] Coppell, Daunt and Tallman, op.cit., p.26.

[29] Gilmour, 'Introduction' in *Kelpra Studio*, op.cit., p. 24.

producing a poster for the Young Contemporaries exhibition in 1958, commissions from the Arts Council and the ICA came his way. In 1961, Gordon House, a designer for the Arts Council, asked for help with the production of screenprint. In 1962 and 1963, he was approached Paolozzi and Hamilton respectively for the same reason. It was Hamilton who came up with the idea of inviting a group of artists to the ICA to make a portfolio of screenprints with Prater's guidance.[30]

The 'ICA Print Portfolio' which was not finished until 1964, was produced in an edition of 40 and printed on thin paper for the sake of economy. 24 artists including Hamilton, Paolozzi, Hockney, Howard Hodgkin, Bridget Riley, Peter Blake, Robyn Denny, Victor Pasmore, Richard Smith, Joe Tilson and R.B. Kitaj contributed a print each to the portfolio. 'The ICA Print Portfolio' is regarded as the debut of fine art screenprinting in the UK since many of the participating artists went on to make it an important part of their practice. It was also at the centre of a debate about originality after six of the screenprints were submitted to the gravure section at the Fourth Paris Biennale in 1965.

In the mid-sixties, most official print organisations still adhered to the Print Council of America's 1961 definition of what constituted an original print. In their guide, they specified that: 'the artist alone has made the image in or upon the plate, stone, wood block or other material, for the purpose of making a work of graphic art.'[31] This definition precluded outsourcing any work to a professional printer or incorporating photographic elements, both of which were true for the ICA prints in question. While Alan Jones defended Paolozzi's ICA screenprint in a February 1967 letter in *The Guardian*, the controversy continued for several years.[32] As late as 1969, Graham Reynolds,

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[30] Riley, 'Introduction' *As Is When*, op.cit, p.13.

[31] Karin Breuer, 'What's LA Got to Do with It: Artists as Printmakers in Los Angeles, 1960-1980' in *Proof: The Rise of Printmaking in Southern California*, ed. by Leah Lehmbeck (Los Angeles: Getty Publications in association with the Norton Simon Museum, 2011), pp.118 – 53 (p.152). Footnote referencing guidelines stated in *What Is an Original Print? Principles Recommended by the Print Council of America* in Joshua Binion Cahn, ed.*(New York: Print Council of America, 1964).*

[32] Riley, 'Introduction' in *As Is When*, op.cit, p.12.

the Keeper of Prints and Drawings at the V&A, stated that prints made in collaboration with a master printer were not original.[33]

In America, the Tamarind Lithography Workshop codified the rules of fine art printing by insisting that artists work directly on the printing matrix, that proper records were kept, that edition size was clear, that stones were cancelled after the edition was completed and that prints bore the workshop logo and chop of the individual printer.[34] Despite the benefits of these protocols, they were deemed too restrictive by some artists and proved difficult to maintain. The printer Ken Tyler, for example, who was trained at Tamarind but left in 1965 to establish the innovative fine art printing company Gemini Ltd., allowed the artist Josef Albers to break the rules during his year-long Tamarind fellowship in 1963.[35]

The debates around originality that continued into the late sixties were oddly out of step with the times given that Robert Rauschenberg (and Andy Warhol) had started screenprinting images onto canvases in 1962. This blurred the boundary between printing and painting, reproduction and depiction and showed that the notion of medium specificity was breaking down. Brandon Taylor writes that Rauschenberg's 'shift' into screenprinting was 'part and parcel of the widespread technicisation of the image among artists of the early 1960s.'[36] He draws attention to the young Stephen Bann's prescient 1964 article in which he wrote that Rauschenberg had used the

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[33] Gilmour, 'Introduction' in *Kelpra Studio*, op.cit., p.14. Gilmour quotes a letter she received from Graham Reynolds on 13 February 1969 stating that: 'When an artist gives a design to some other artist in some other medium for him to make the screens for its reproduction in print form, it is not our practice to regard them as original prints by the first named of these artists.'

[34] Coppell, Daunt and Tallman, op.cit., p.23.

[35] In his *Day and Night: Homage to the Square* series of ten lithographs, Albers provided Tyler with detailed instructions about how to execute the coloured concentric squares and was not even on the premises when they were made. Breuer, op.cit., p.125.

[36] Brendan Taylor, 'The Rauschenberg Retrospective in 1964' in *The Whitechapel Art Gallery Centenary Review 1901 - 2001*, ed. by Catherine Lampert and Andrea Tarsia (London: The Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2001), pp.71-76 (pp.74).

silkscreen to make a substitution rather of an imitation of an external form. The silkscreen, Bann posited, 'had allowed Rauschenberg to comment on the illusory nature of illusion.'[37]

In 1964, Bryan Robertson fought hard to put on a Rauschenberg retrospective at the Whitechapel Art Gallery because he thought that the time was right and that it would be extremely important for London. It is telling that Robertson, who advocated for Erskine-affiliated artists such as Evans and Hayter, also recognised the significance of Rauschenberg at a relatively early date. As already stated in chapter 7, he appreciated various artistic styles and did not see his recognition of an artist like Rauschenberg as a rejection of another like Evans. This proclivity for simultaneity was something that united both Robertson and Erskine and made them both unfashionable in certain respects and ahead of their times in other respects.

The Rauschenberg retrospective at the Whitechapel was a triumph and set the tone for a new mode of working that was ironic and detached rather than subjective and emotive. Taylor argues that Robertson pushed for the show because it helped reconcile 'the photographic or commercial surfaces of say, independent Group avant-gardism' with 'the format of modernist colour field painting' which had inherited the mantle of abstract expressionism.[38] However, in 1968, when the art historian Leo Steinberg gave his lecture 'Other Criteria' at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, he openly declared the end of a certain type of modernism via the rise of the so-called flatbed picture plane in the work of Robert Rauschenberg and other 'post-Modernist' paintings:

> The flatbed picture plane makes its symbolic allusion to hard surfaces such as tabletops, studio floors, charts, bulletin boards – any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, data is entered, on which information may be received, printed, impressed – whether coherently or in confusion. The pictures of the last fifteen to twenty years insist on a radical new orientation, in which the painted surface is no longer the analogue of a visual experience of nature but of operational processes.[39]

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[37] ibid. p.75. Taylor references an article by Stephen Bann published in the *Cambridge Review* in March 1964.
[38] ibid. p.72.
[39] Leo Steinberg, *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth Century Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.84.

Steinberg borrowed the term 'flatbed picture plane' from the flatbed printing press and printmaking terminology is used throughout the essay. In another passage he writes that this new horizontal rather than traditionally vertical picture plane 'has affinities for anything that is flat and worked over – palimpsest, cancelled plate, printer's proof, trial blank, chart, map, aerial view.' Fittingly, Steinberg was a lifelong print enthusiast and began building up a collection of prints in the 1950s, a time when, he later wrote, they were 'used, but not cherished, readily overlooked.'[40]

Printmaking was a fundamental part of Rauschenberg's practice and he began making lithographs at ULAE in West Islip, New York in 1962. Some of these prints such as *Spot* (1964) were made with the same screens that Rauschenberg used in his paintings, but he worked them over with lithographic ink.[41] In the late sixties, he collaborated with Gemini G.E.L. in Los Angeles to produce his ambitious *Stoned Moon* series of thirty-three lithographs. The lithograph and screenprint *Sky Garden* was the largest hand-pulled print at the time and was extremely difficult to operate (Figure 125). Incorporating real technical diagrams from NASA, photographs of the Florida landscape including birds and palm trees, and many other elements as well, it is a print that is rich with data and information.[42] It is a print that benefits from Steinberg's 'flatbed' argument since it needs to be decoded in a piecemeal way rather than optically observed.

Abstract paintings from the 1950s were thought to be too removed from the modern world, which, thanks to air travel and the mass media was both getting smaller and speeding up. People had access to more images and information than ever before and the effect of this was intoxicating as well as disorientating. New disciplines related to communication and the media were developing

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[40] Leo Steinberg, 'What I Like About Prints,' *Art in Print Review*, 7 (5) (Jan to Feb 2018), 3-28 (p.3). The article is based on a 2003 lecture he gave on the subject after donating over 3,200 prints to the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas at Austen.
[41] Coppel, Daunt and Tallman, op.cit.,p. 71.
[42]ibid. p. 72, and see also the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's website [accessed 15 January 2023]:
 Robert Rauschenberg, Sky Garden (Stoned Moon), 1969 · SFMOMA.

in the 1960s and critics such as Alloway and Marshall McLuhan brought these issues to the fore in their work.[43] When, for example, McLuhan famously wrote that 'the medium was the message,' he was commenting on the profound impact that electronic communication was having on lived experience.[44]

While artists in the early twentieth century engaged with modernity, Pop artists were specifically concerned with 'mediated' images via advertising and television. Many Pop artists – Hamilton, Warhol, Lichtenstein, Ruscha – had worked in the commercial art world and identified as designers, illustrators or engineers rather than as exclusively fine artists.[45] The strict separation of high art and commercial art was breaking down as evidenced by the interdisciplinary outlook and cross-departmental fertilisation at London art colleges like the RCA. While printing did not usurp painting, painting had to expand its visual repertoire by borrowing from other art forms and disciplines. As Richard S. Field writes: 'By 1960, the printed image became central to artistic creativity because painting had turned to printed languages and had begun to explore their meanings.'[46]

If Abstract Expressionism was sublime and plumbed the depths of the subconscious, Pop art purported to be ordinary and banal. Any object or image became fair game and as Andy Warhol later wrote: Pop artists made images of 'comics, picnic tables, men's trousers, celebrities, shower curtains, refrigerators, Coke bottles – all the great modern things that Abstract Expressionism had tried so hard not to take notice of at all.'[47] Warhol's embrace of capitalism was not limited to the

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[43] Barry Curtis, 'A Highly Mobile and Plastic Environ' in *Art & The 60s: This Was Tomorrow*, ed. by Chris Stephens and Katherine Stout (London: Tate, 2004), pp.46-64 (p.59).

[44] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Oxford: Routledge, 2001), p. 6.

[45] Hal Foster, *The First Pop Age: Painting and Subjectivity in the Art of Hamilton, Lichtenstein, Warhol, Richter and Ruscha* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 11.

[46] Richard S. Field, 'Contemporary Trends' in in André Beguin, Richard S. Field, Antony Griffiths, Michel Melot, *Print: History of an Art* (Geneva and London: Skira/Macmillan,1981), pp.187-233 (p. 188).

[47] Marco Livingstone, 'Introduction' in *Pop Prints from the Arts Council Collection* (London: Southbank Centre, 1993), pp. 2-21(p. 8). Livingstone quotes from Andy Warhol's book *Popism: The Warhol Sixties* published in 1980.

content of his images but also to the production of them. He declared that he wanted to be a machine, called his studio the Factory and, with the help of his assistants, churned out art objects as quickly as possible.[48]

The screenprint was the perfect medium for Warhol's assembly line of images and he revelled in its capacity for replication and repetition. For example, with the 1963 painting *Elvis II*, he used the screenprint to overlay sixteen slightly different versions of the same photograph on top of each other (Figure 126). Hal Foster argues that the image is destabilised and appears 'ghostly'; 'both immediate and faded, present and simulacral.'[49] By making screenprints of celebrities, Warhol was exploring the ways in which individuals get commodified in a capitalist society. But through the use of repetition, he was possibly hinting at a loss of self, origins and the real in a world of surfaces, superficiality and multiplicity.

The antecedents of Pop are various. The collage aesthetic, for example, was practiced by Dadaists like John Heartfield whose photomontages during and after the First World War recombined images and text from newspapers and magazines. Cubism was also a form of collage and the paintings of Braque incorporated textual elements. The term "readymade," which was integral to the work of Johns, Rauschenberg and arguably Warhol, was coined by Marchel Duchamp, who, among other things, was a founder of Dadaism. In the late fifties and early sixties, many artists and critics (such as Reyner Banham and Alloway) revisited early avant-garde movements such as Dadaism, Surrealism, Futurism which they believed had been repressed by a version of modernism that suited the heroic subjectivity of abstract expressionism.

One of the modernist myths that Rosalind Krauss tackles in her writing is the myth of originality, which she argues (using Rodin and his proliferation of multiples as an example) was not

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[48] ibid., p. 15. In 1964, the Factory produced about 80 versions of the screenprint *Flowers* every day and about 900 prints were made in total.
[49] Foster, op.cit., p.9.

based on fact. Nevertheless, the topic of originality dominated the discourse around printmaking throughout Erskine's directorship of St. George's Gallery Prints and affected how he promoted the medium of printmaking in the media and also in his exhibitions. He engaged with the media in a way that showed great foresight and argued that prints were original works of art that had been unfairly maligned for their association with craft, technology and commerce.

Stephen Bann argues that the history of printmaking has been adversely affected by a twentieth-century emphasis on originality which led to an unhelpful distinction between reproductive and expressive prints. [50] When Leo Steinberg gave a lecture on prints in 2003, he seemed to agree with Bann about the fact that reproductive prints from the past performed more than a merely communicative role: 'So, when you look at prints, please remember that the aura whose loss Walter Benjamin feared, is yours to restore.'[51] Aura, Steinberg suggest, is not something that can be objectively measured but is instead something that is felt by whoever is engaging with the print. Irrespective of an artist's manual engagement with the print, it can still have layers of meaning, deep signification and it can still elicit a strong response from the viewer.

Susan Tallman refers to the neither 'fish nor fowl' problem for prints in the twentieth century when they couldn't be categorised and occupied several conflicting roles: 'Partly handmade and partly automated, partly populist and partly elitist, the original print has struck many as either a fussy little craft or as posters with pretensions.'[52] Erskine, as I have shown in this thesis, had to contend with these conflicting categories at St. George's Gallery Prints and was not always clear himself about how to situate printmaking. He was invested in the print as a medium for the masses but also insisted that his gallery artists were part of the printmaking canon. He was drawn to

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[50] Stephen Bann, *Parallel Lines: Printmakers, Painters and Photographers in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 10.
[51] Steinberg, 'What I Like About Prints,' op.cit.,p. 27.
[52] Susan Tallman, *The Contemporary Print from Pre-Pop to Postmodern* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996), p.9.

printmaking because of its technological aspect but also needed to emphasise the direct presence of the artist's hand via printmaking demonstrations and promotional films. This, as I have argued, was because the print's dual function as a reproducible product and a work of art did not sit easily with a mid-twentieth century public.

For eight years Erskine poured his energy and resources into raising printing standards, commissioning and publishing prints, putting on high-quality solo and group exhibitions, promoting the medium through the press and encouraging public arts organisations such as the Arts Council, the British Council and the V&A's Circulation Department to buy contemporary prints. He did not explain why he closed St. George's Gallery Prints in 1963. Along with the other reasons outlined earlier, he simply may have thought his work was done. The art market in London had grown and the international print boom was just beginning. Prints were becoming more lucrative and new print studios such as Editions Alecto were raising the financial stakes of the medium. While corporate sponsorship was on the rise, museums also began making up for their previous lack of print patronage. There was a new optimism about contemporary art (and contemporary prints) which continued until the economic slowdown of the mid-1970s when printmakers turned inwards and brought back a more earthy and autographic approach to their work.

By the early 1970s the triumph of fine art printmaking was complete and prints were ubiquitous in Britain and America. In 1972, one American painter remarked that when he bumped into his friends they were no longer on their way to visit their 'shrinks' but rather their lithographers.[53] Joking aside, printmaking had become part of the practices of most major artists including Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Jim Dine and Richard Hamilton and was

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[53] Susan Tallman, 'Irresistible: the rise of the American print workshop' in Stephen Coppel, Catherine Daunt and Susan Tallman, eds., *The American Dream: Pop to the Present* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2017), pp. 20-33 (20).

institutionally accepted.[54] The seeds of change, which had been planted in America and England in the mid-fifties to early-sixties had grown and the time was ripe for printmaking to take centre stage as an art form. Artists began to subvert sacrosanct notions about high art, originality, the artist's presence and the unique, aura-laden object. Viewers, in turn, were ready to move away from expressionistic qualities such as gesture and personal style and to accept the validity of mechanically reproduced images.

The history of the twentieth century print is complex, multi-faceted and in need of revisiting. In this dissertation, I have shed light on one small part of this history by focusing on the role that Robert Erskine and St. George's Gallery Prints played in revitalizing the fine art print publishing industry in Britain after years of neglect. I have taken a primarily archival and historical approach to piece together the untold account of how he did so and have aimed to be clear, concise and accurate. I have uncovered new sources, conducted original interviews and given close readings on neglected artists and exhibitions. In the process, I have also shown how the print engaged with key issues related to what Tallman refers to as 'the mechanics' of meaning and the 'nature of reproduction' in twentieth-century society.[55]

In this dissertation I have argued that post-war British prints ought to be recognized for their own aesthetic and historical merit rather than dismissed or merely seen as a precursor to Pop prints. However, I have simultaneously acknowledged the part that the creation of a professional print publishing industry played in paving the way for the print boom. I have drawn attention to the importance of networks and friend groups in the revival of printmaking, and have written about the strong links between seemingly very different artists, schools of art and theories about art in post-

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[54] Tallman, 'Irresistible: the rise of the American print workshop,' op.cit.,p.27. The US Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1970 was devoted to prints with workshops in lithography and screenprints. And that year *Life* magazine wrote an enthusiastic article on the print market.
[55] Tallman, *The Contemporary Print from Pre-Pop to Postmodern*, op.cit., p. 11.

war Britain. I have let the facts speak first, and shown that there was a fluidity in the post-war art scene that allowed for great creativity and freedom. I have argued for a more nuanced approach to the period that emphasizes continuity, overlap and the haphazardness of lived experience to account for artistic and historical change. I have shown that the British print scene was more international than has been previously been acknowledged and that cross-cultural exchange was important to both artists and dealers. In essence, I have tried to subtly reframe the narrative around post-war British prints via a close reading of the hitherto neglected topic of Robert Erskine and St. George's Gallery Prints.

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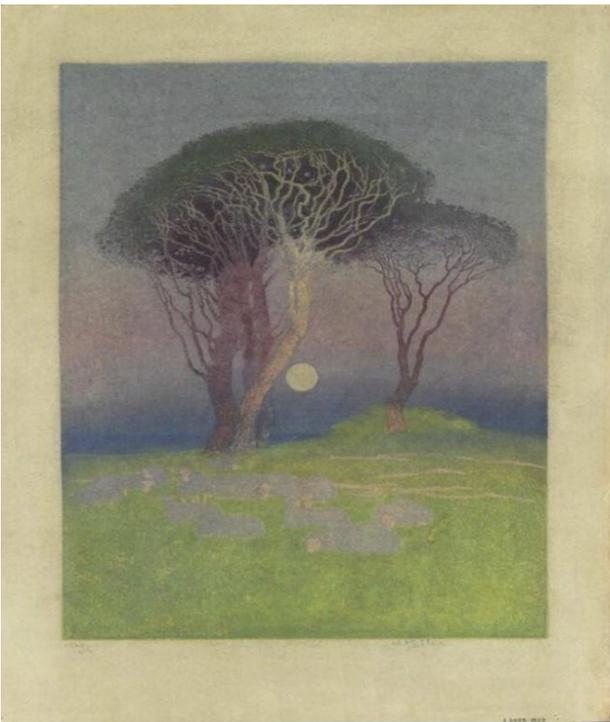
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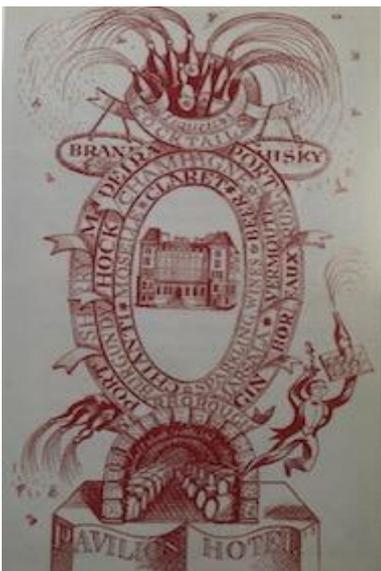
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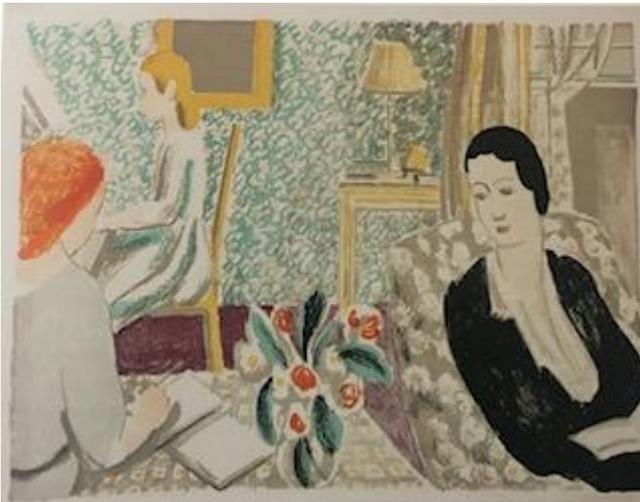
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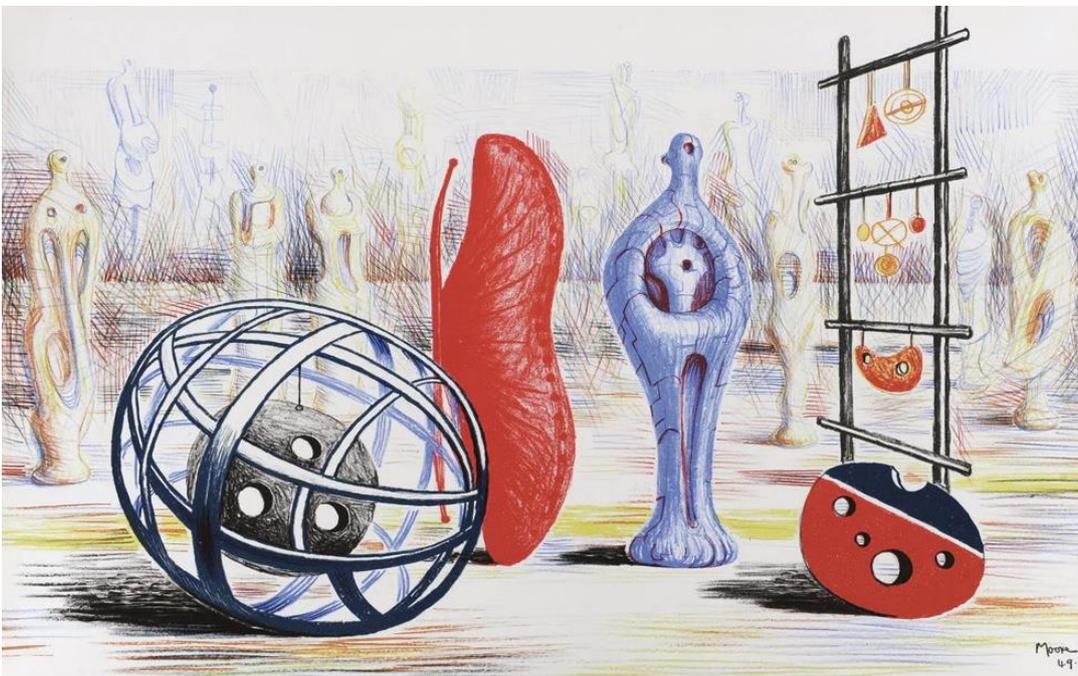
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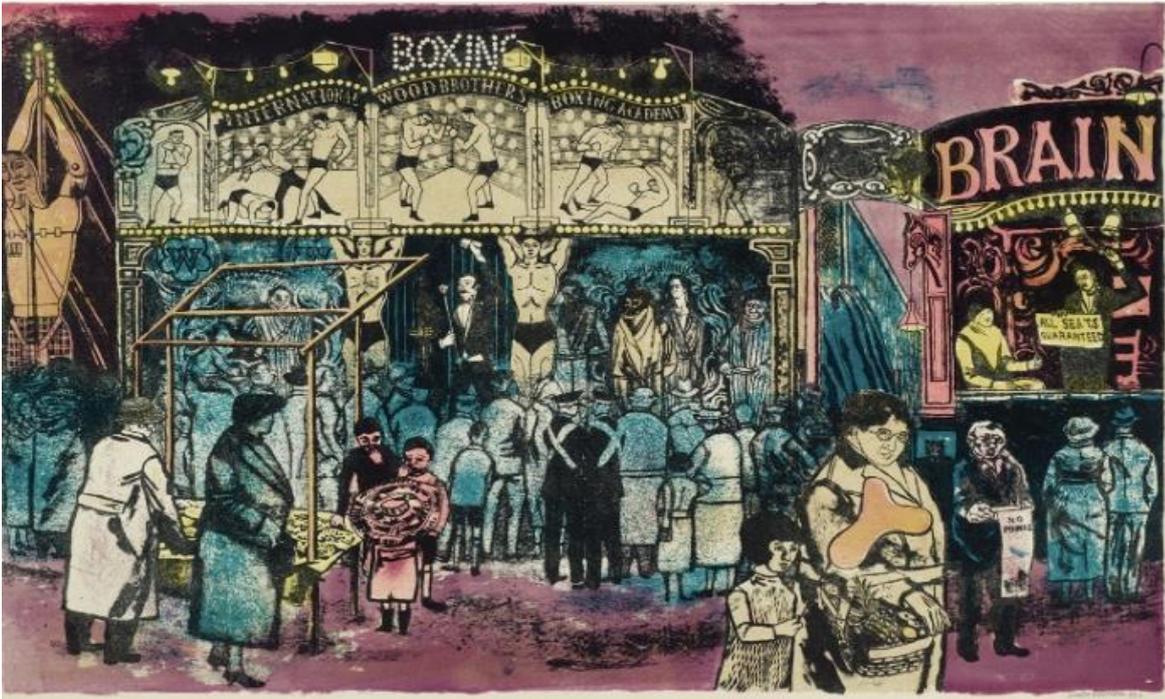
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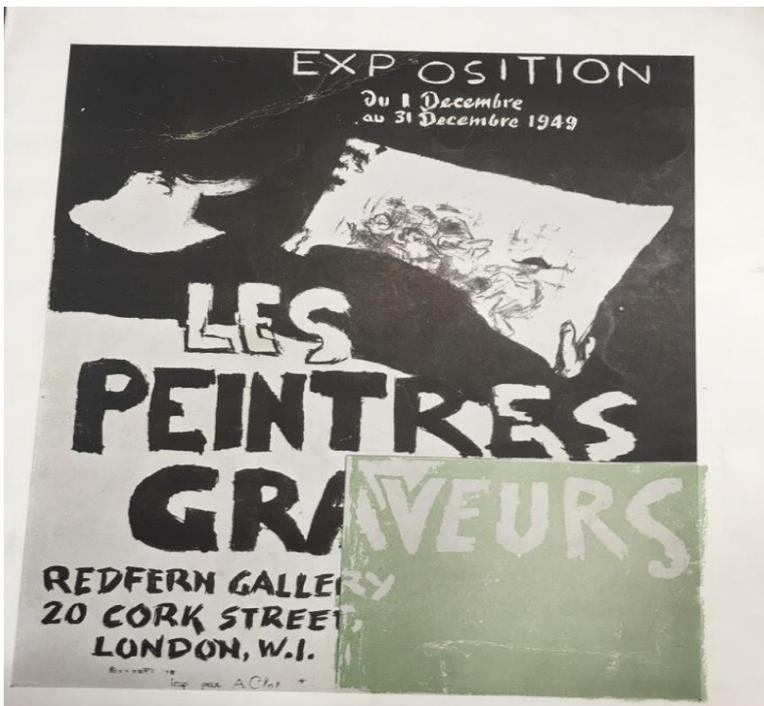
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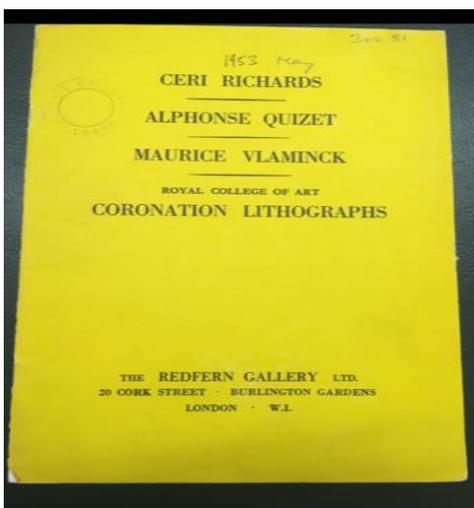
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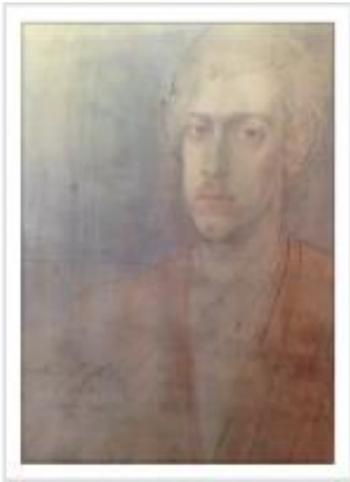
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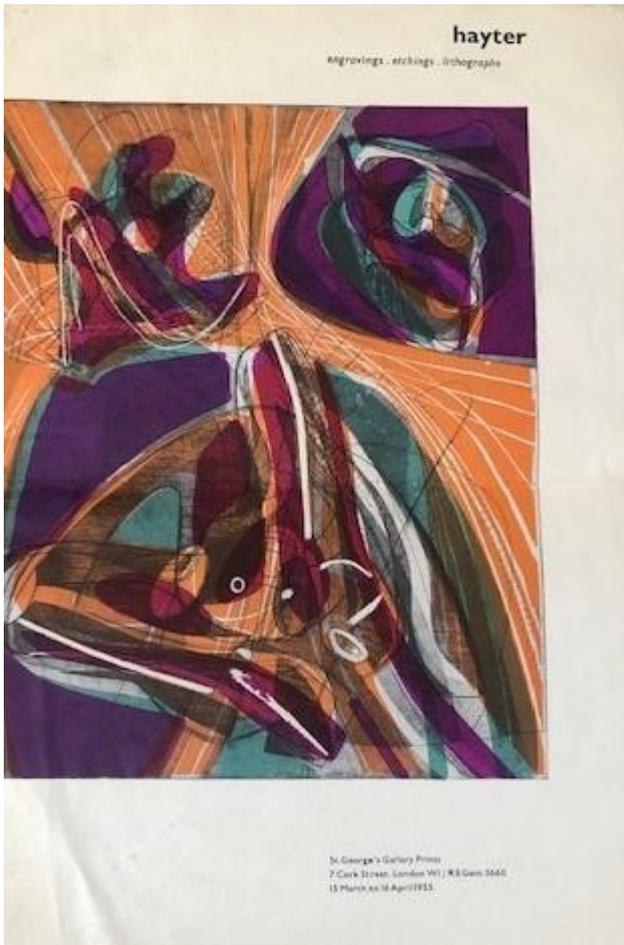
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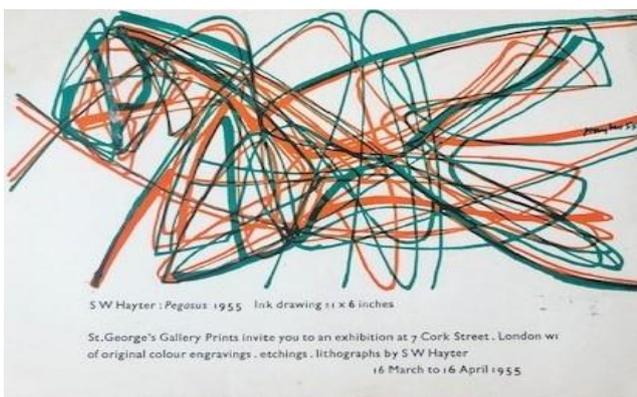
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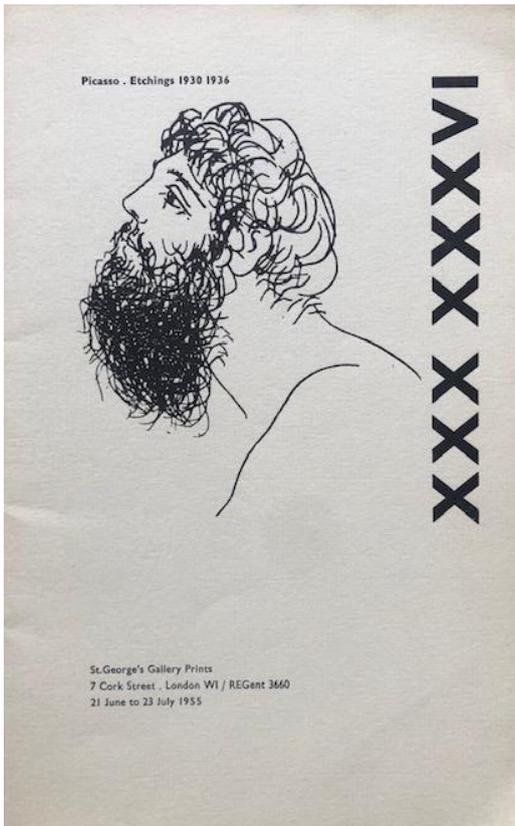
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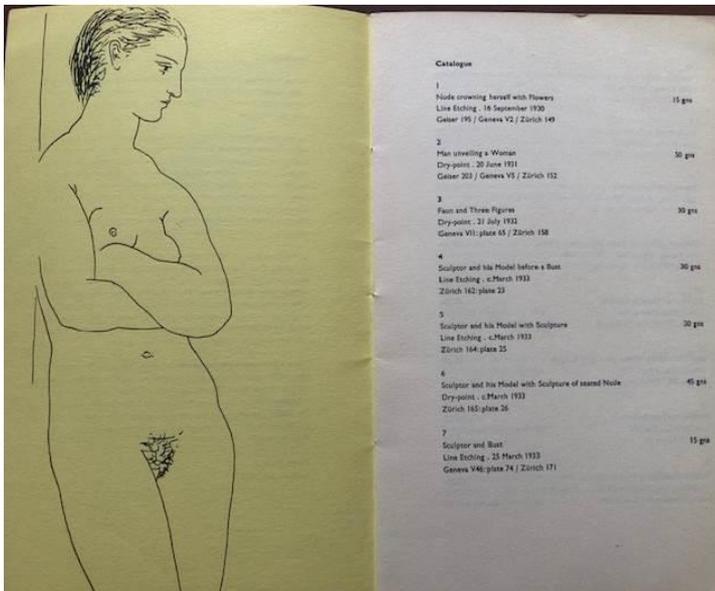
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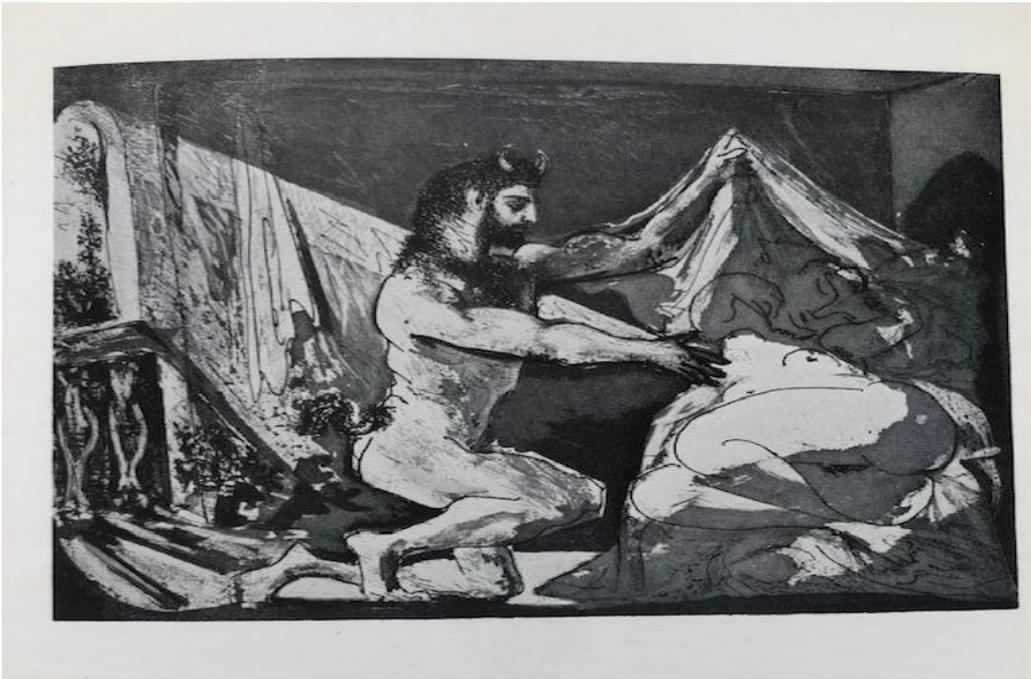
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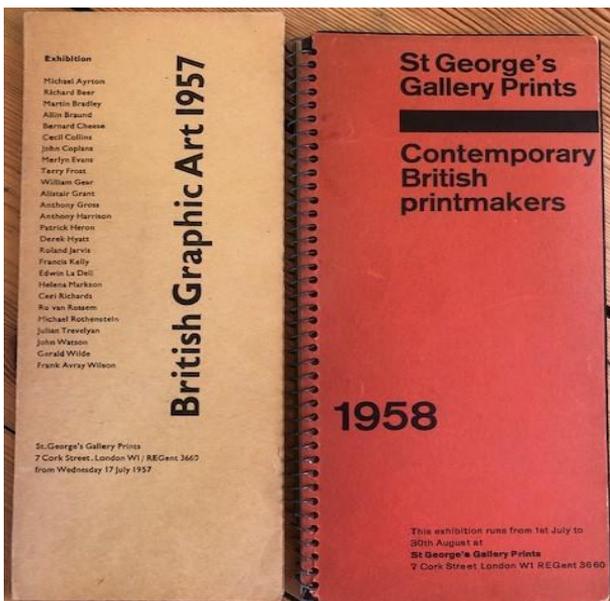
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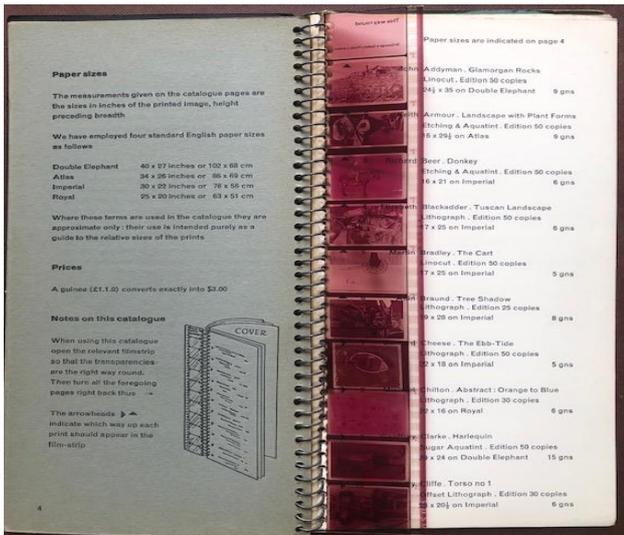
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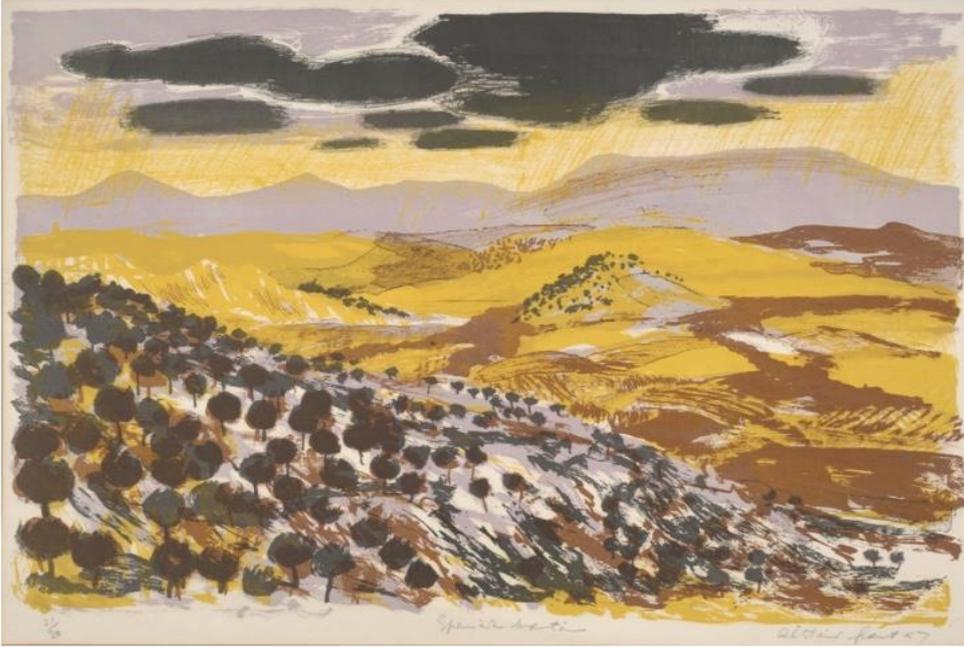
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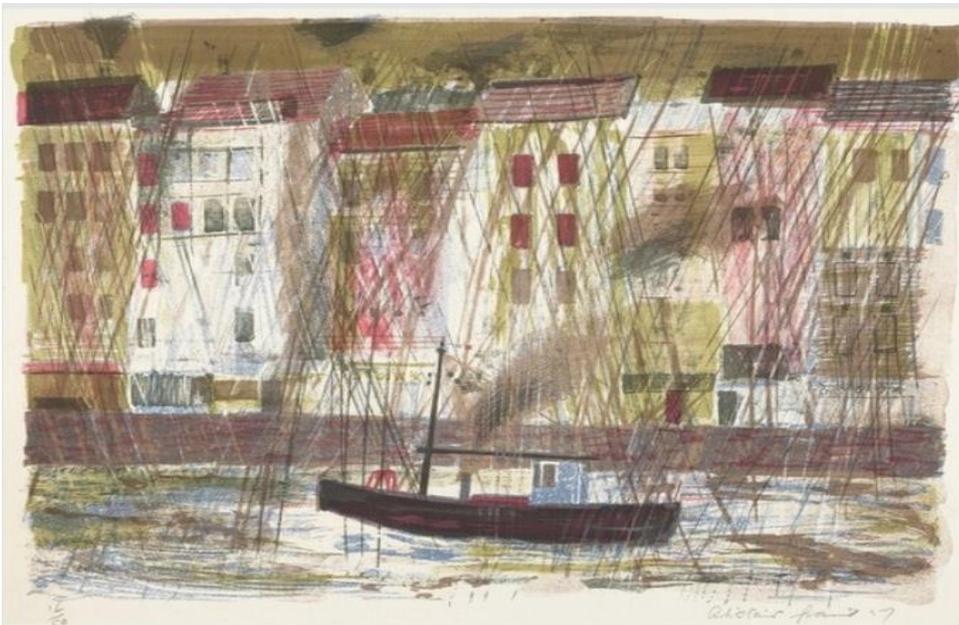
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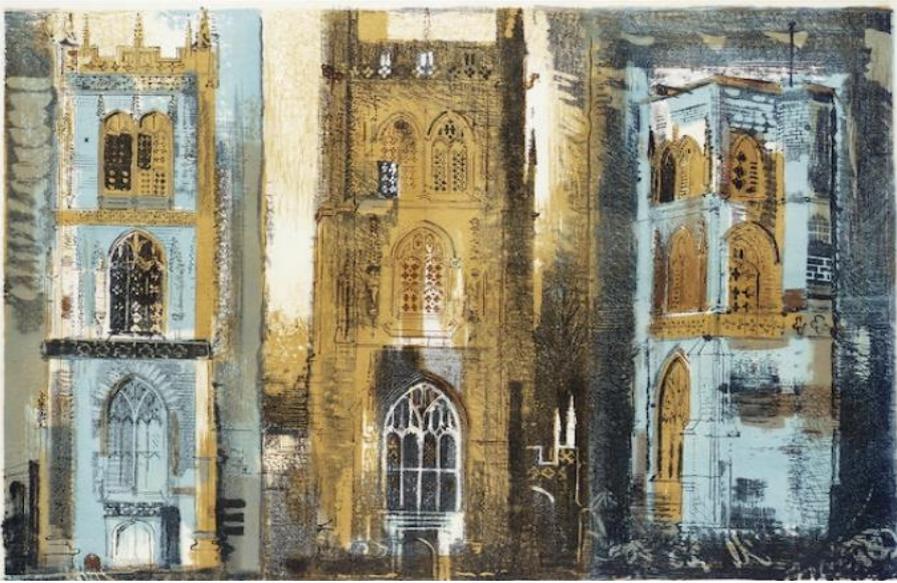
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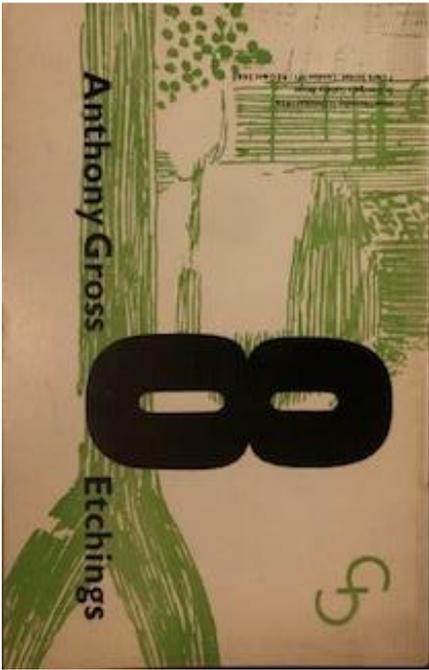
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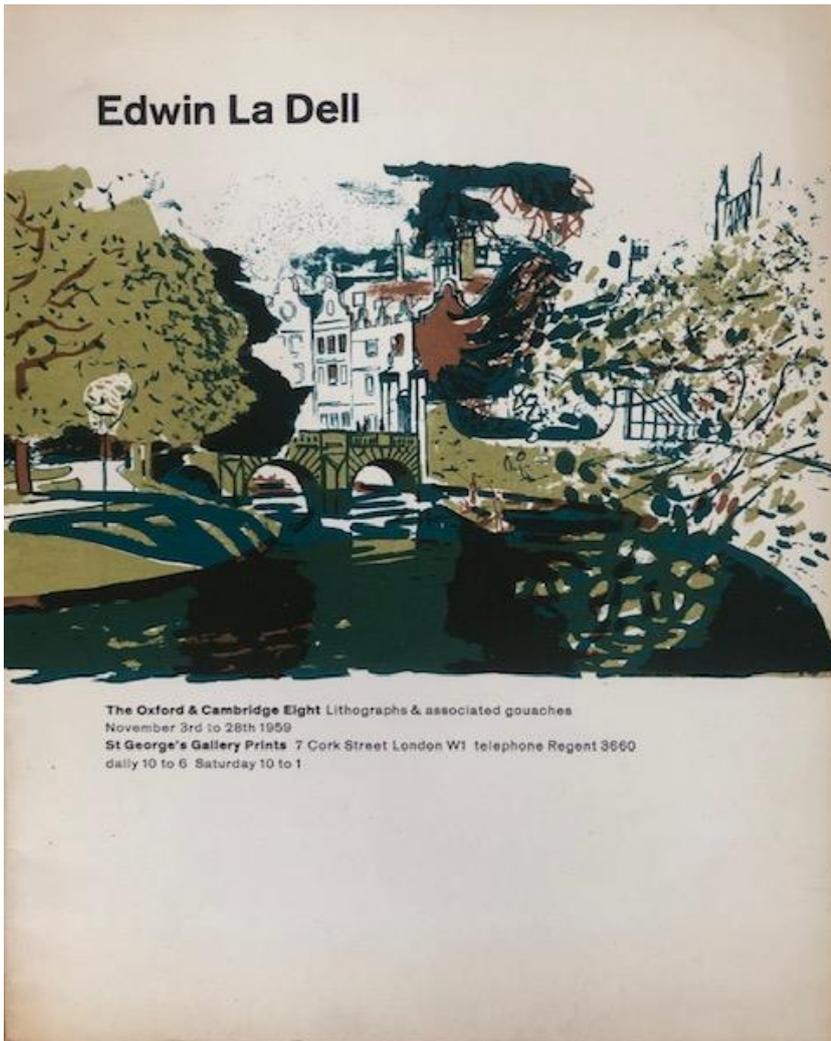
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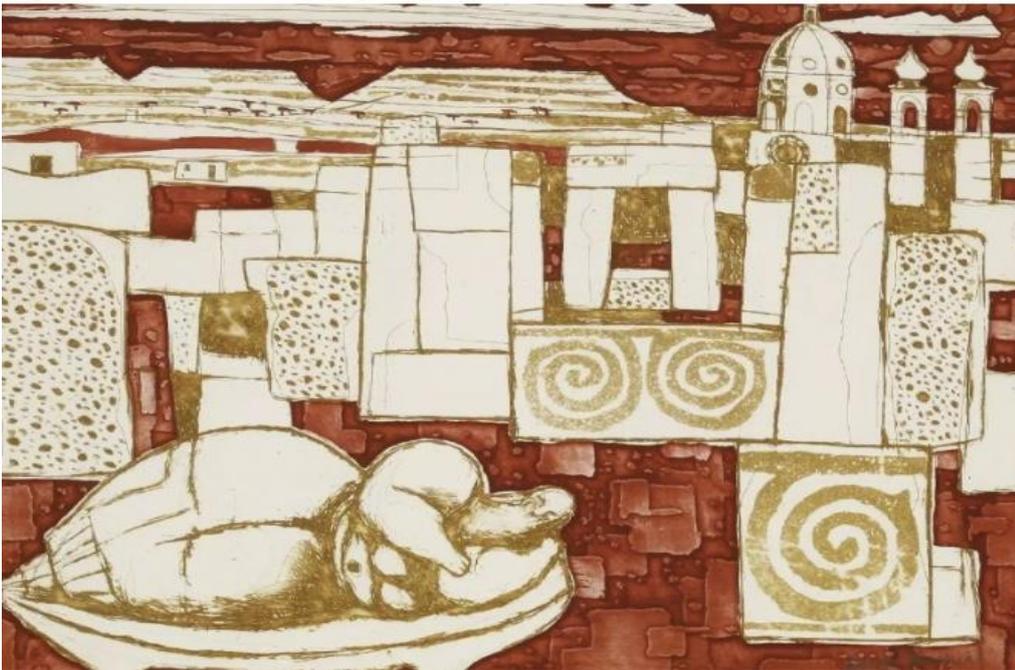
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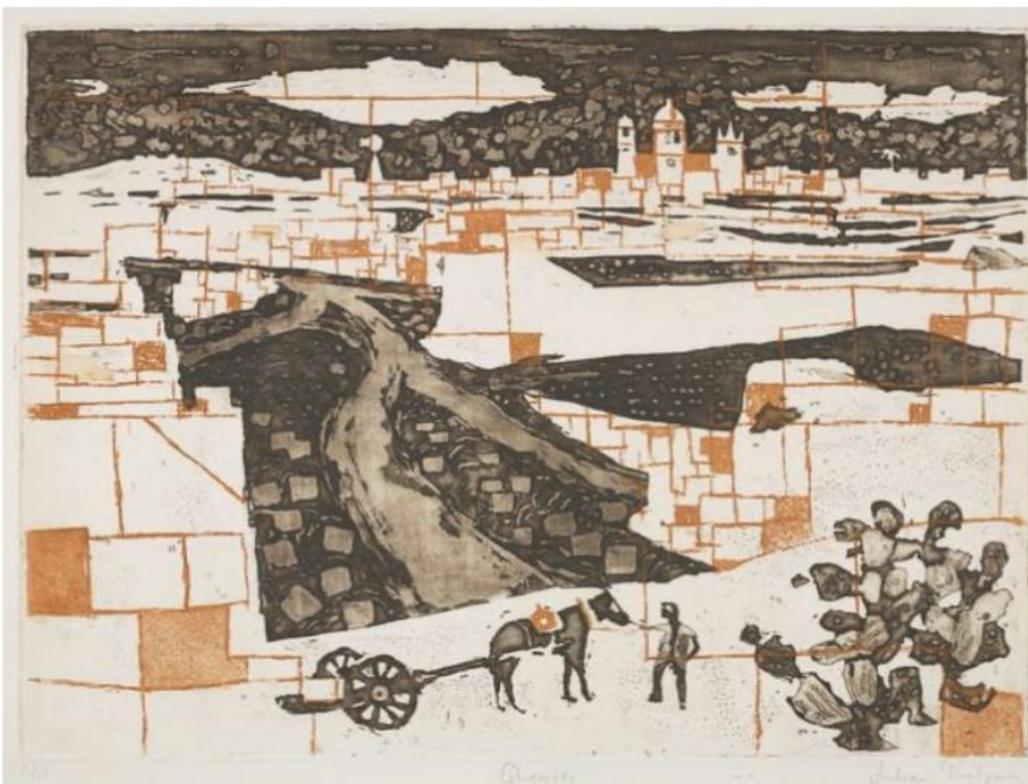
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Figure 86. Michael Rothenstein, *Black Mast, Dalmatian Sea*, 1958, colour linocut on paper, (47.50 x 72.10 cm), edition 50

Figure 87. Michael Rothenstein, *Red Cliff, Brittany*, 1958, colour linocut on paper, (55.7 x 76.2 cm), edition 50
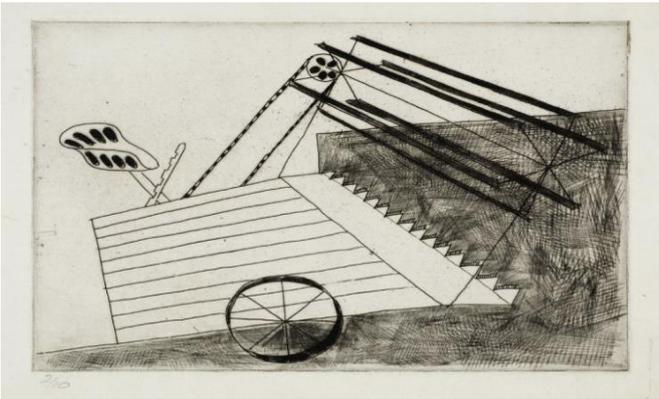
Figure 88. Richard Hamilton, *Reaper e*, 1949, hard-ground etching with roulette, (17.5 x 22.2 cm)

Figure 89. Richard Hamilton, *Hers is a Lush Situation*, 1957(restored in 1982), collotype, screenprint and foil on paper, (38.3 x 49cm)

Figure 90. Richard Hamilton, *Swingeing London 67 (f)*, 1968-69, acrylic paint, screenprint, paper, aluminium and metalised acetate on canvas, (67.3 x 85.1cm)

Figure 91. Harold Cohen, student print, proof, no other information, Slade archive, visited 9 August 2017

Figure 92. Bernard Cohen, student print, 1959, proof, no other information Slade archive, visited 9 August 2017

Figure 93. Hammer Print wallpaper design, *Barkcloth*, reproduced in *Nigel Henderson & Eduardo Paolozzi: Hammer Prints Ltd, 1954-75*
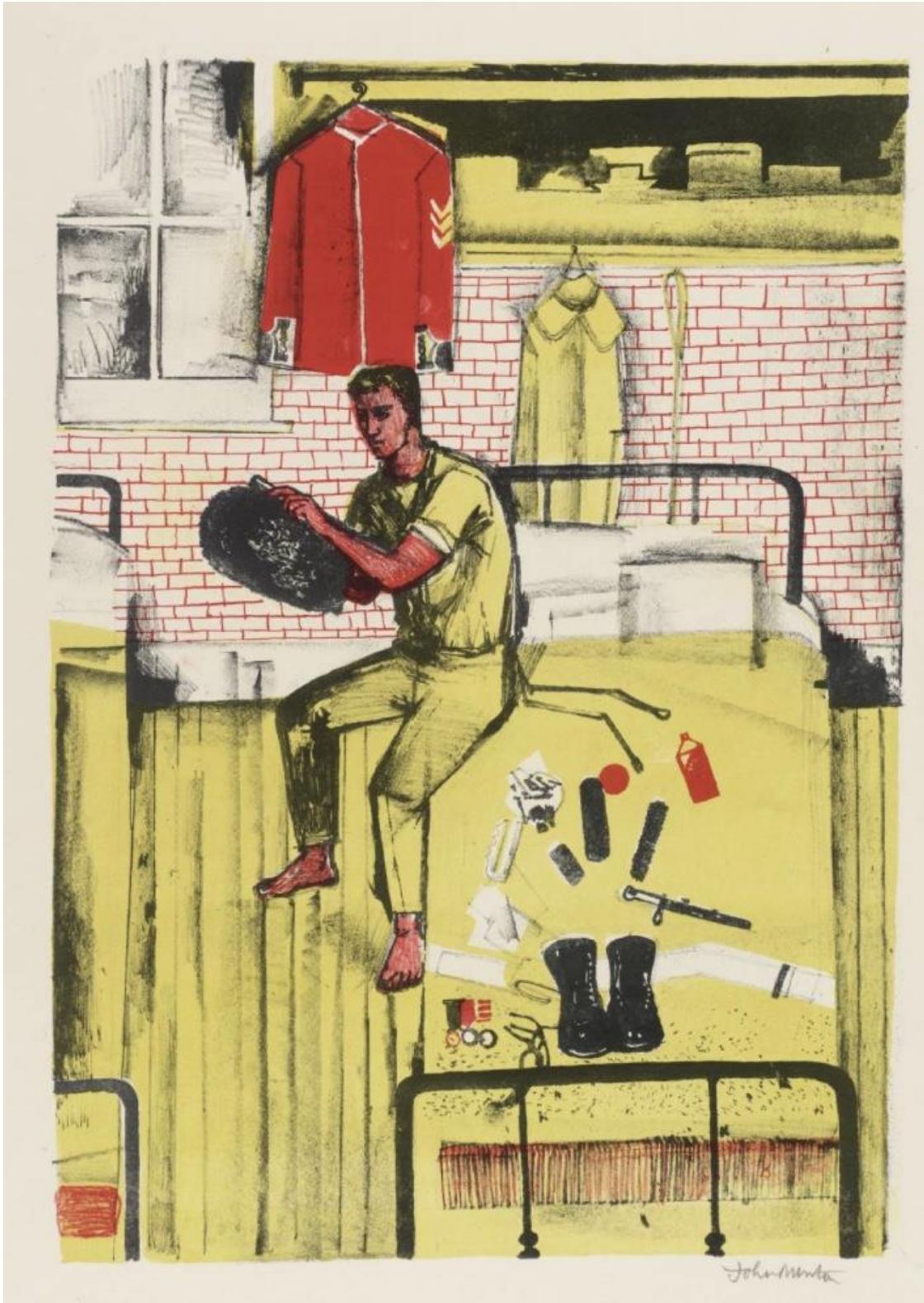
Figure 94. John Minton, *Horse Guards in their Dressing Rooms at Whitehall*, 1953, lithograph (42 X 30 cm), Collection: Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Figure 95. Julian Trevelyan's offset lithograph *Chiswick Eyot* (no date or dimensions) on the cover of *Wapping to Windsor*, exhibition catalogue, St. George's Gallery Prints, 2 June – 5 June 1960
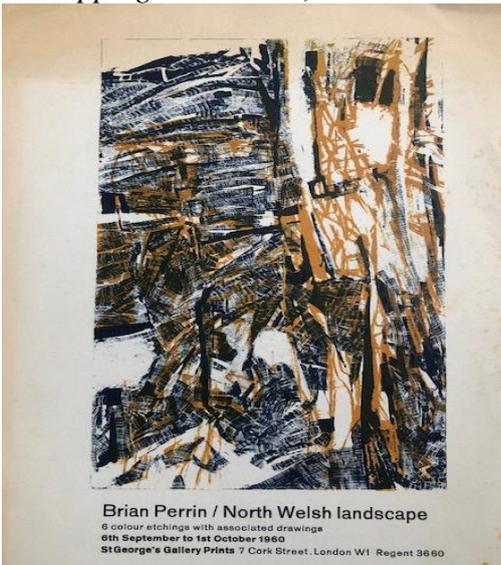
Figure 96. Brian Perrin, *Cyffty Mine*, colour etching, 1960 (30 x 18 in, 76.2 x 45.72 cm)

Figure 97. Brian Perrin, *Cunmachno*, colour etching, 1960 (24 x 20 in, 60.96 x 50.8 cm)

Figure 98. Prospectuses of the London School of Printmaking and Graphic Arts. Photo: London College of Communication archive, 3 July 2017
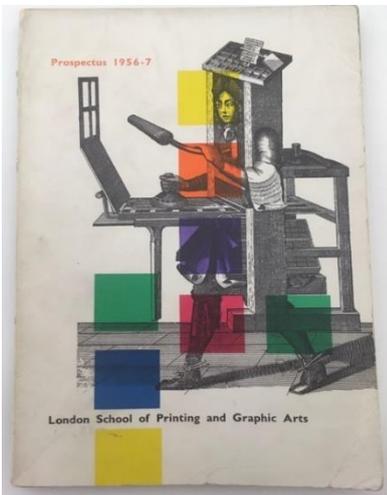
Figure 99. Prospectus for London School of Printmaking and Graphic Arts 1956-57. Photo: London College of Communication archive, 3 July 2017

Figure 100. Leaflet for the 1953 Social for the London School of Printmaking and Graphic Arts. Photo: London College of Communication archive, 3 July 2017
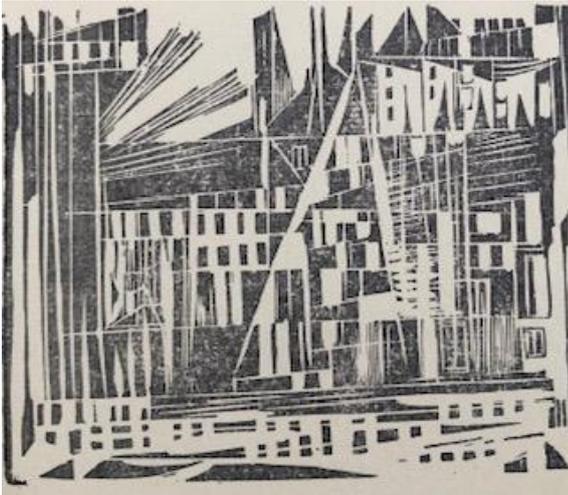
Figure 101.Tore Hultcrantz, *Monumental Town*, 1957, linocut (18 ¾ x 9 ¾ in, 47.6 x 24.78 cm), reproduced in *Swedish Graphic Art*, exhibition catalogue, St. George's Gallery Prints, 21 January - 16 February 1957

Figure 102. George Chapman, *Pigeon-houses*, 1960, etching (20 x 20 in, 50.8 x 50.8 cm)

Figure 103. Josef Herman, *Two Miners*, 1960-2, lithograph, (47.6 x 47.6 cm), Collection: Tate Britain, London

Figure 104. John Watson, *Horses & Flags*, 1960,lithograph (22 x 27 in, 55.8 x 68.58 cm, paper)

Figure 105. Peter Peri, *The Death of the Faithful,*1958, etching (no measurements)

Figure 106. Anthony Harrison, *Fig Tree*, 1959 deep-etch sugar aquatint (18 x 26 ½ in, 45.72 x 67.31 cm)

Figure 107. Francis Kelly, *Cliff*, 1959, aquatint (14 x 23 in, 35.56 x 58.42 cm, estimate)

Figure 108. Leonard Baskin, *Angel of Death*, 1959, woodcut (no dimensions given)

Figure 109. Ernst Fuchs, St George, etching (no dimensions given)

Figure 110. Keith Armour, Untitled from 'Stonehenge' suite, colour etching (20 x 33.5 in, 50.8 x 85.09 cm)

Figure 111. David Hockney, *We Two Boys Clinging Together*, 1961, painting (121.9 x 152.4 cm), Collection: Arts Council, London.

Figure 112. D Mazonowicz, *Horse*, screenprint,(1,14 m x 1.47 m)

Figure 113. Laxman Pai,*The Buddha's Youth*, 1959, etching (11 x 14 in, 27.94 x 35.56 cm)

Figure 114. Shiko Munakata, *Rangora* from 'The Ten Disciples of Budda', 1939, woodcut (no dimensions given)

Figure 115. *The Graven Image*, exhibition catalogue, The Whitechapel Art Gallery, April – May 1959, front cover and lithographed frontispiece
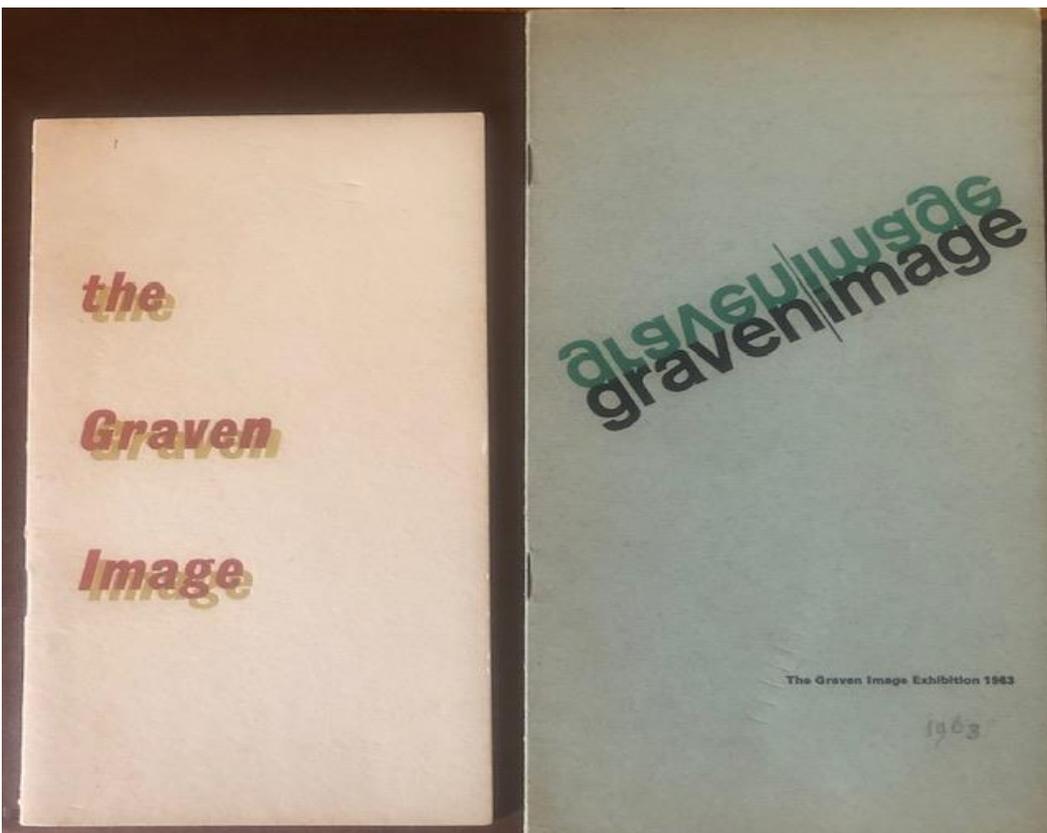

Figure 116. *The Graven Image*, exhibition catalogues, the Galleries of the Royal Society of Painters in Watercolours, 1 – 26 May 1962 and 6 – 28 May 1963
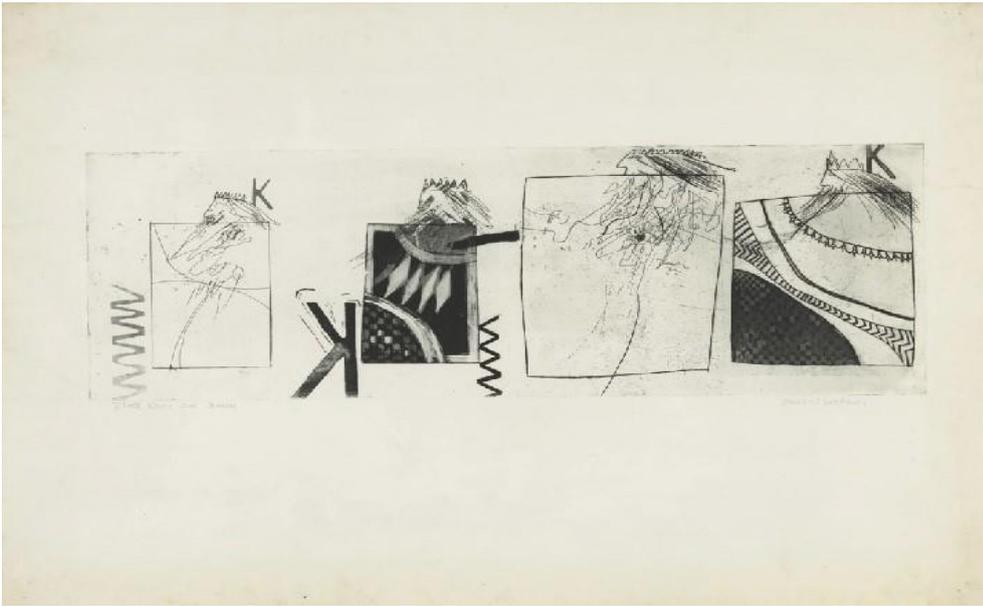
Figure 117. David Hockney, *Three Kings and a Queen*, 1961, etching and aquatint (23.0 x 64.5 cm), Collection: Tate Britain, London.
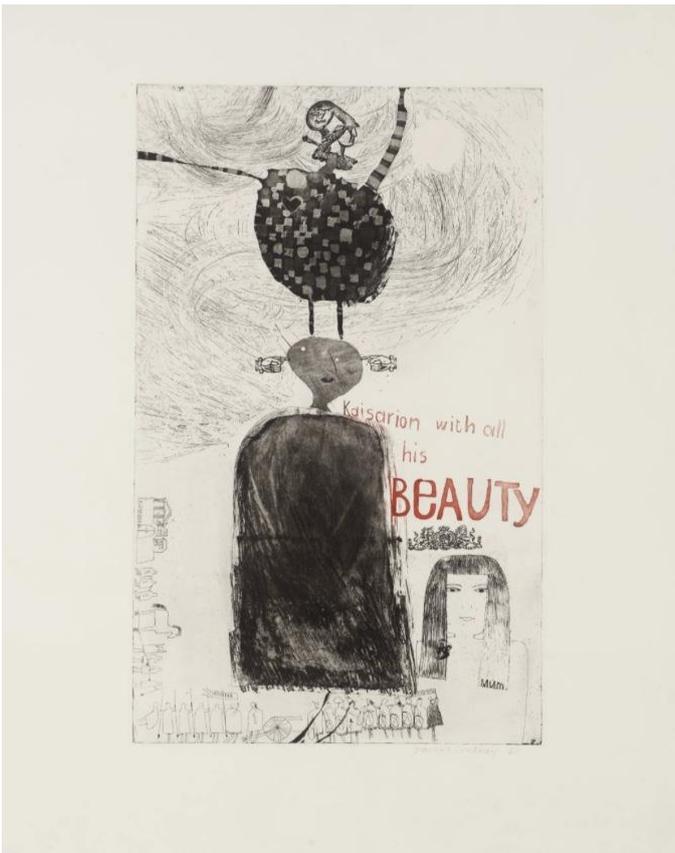

Figure 118. David Hockney, *Kaisarion and All his Beauty*, 1961, etching (49 x 27.6 cm), Collection: Tate Britain, London.

Figure 119. David Hockney, *Receiving the Inheritance* part of 'A Rake's Progress,'1961-3, etching and aquatint (40.0 x 40.5 cm), Collection: Tate Britain, London.

Figure 120. David Hockney, *The Start of the Spending Spree and the Door Opening for a Blonde* part of 'A Rake's Progress,'1961-3, etching and aquatint (30.2 x 40.0 cm), Collection: Tate Britain, London.

Figure 121 Promotional material produced by Editions Alecto

Figure 122. Photograph of Editions Alecto's promotional tour of Italy in 1968. Erskine is lower right. Also pictured are Robyn Denny, Howard Hodgkin, Gillian Ayres and William Scott.
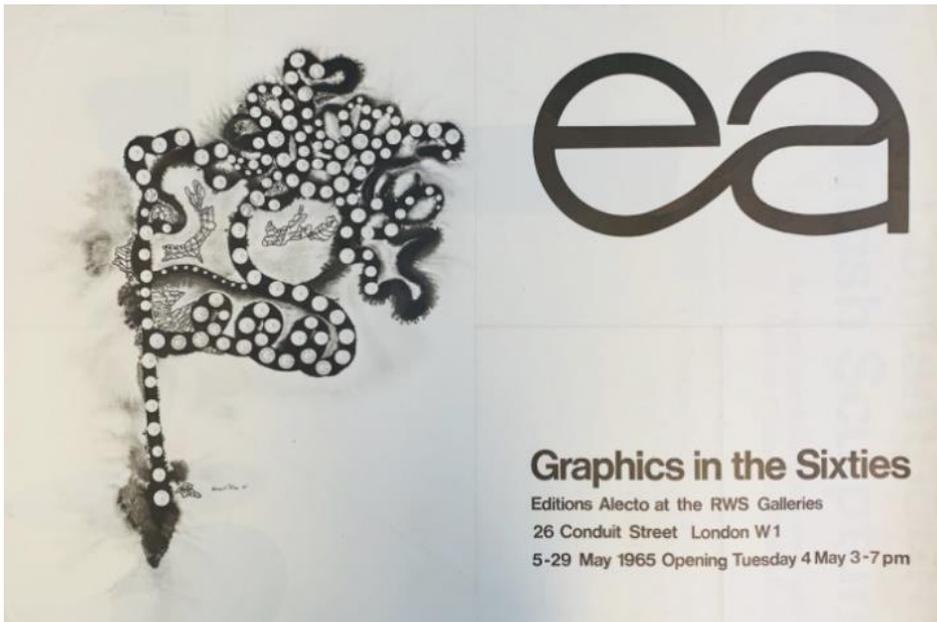
Figure 123. Promotional brochure for Editions Alecto's 1965 exhibition *Graphics in the Sixties*.

Figure 124. Poster for the publication of Paolozzi's 'As Is When' print series in 1965.

Figure 125. Robert Rauschenberg, *Sky Garden* from the 'Stoned Moon' series, 1969, lithograph and screenprint (226.06 x 106.68 cm), Collection: SFMOMA, San Francisco.

Figure 126. Andy Warhol, *Elivs II*, 1963, silkscreen ink and spray paint on canvas (82 x 82 in, 208.28 x 208.28 cm), Collection: The Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.