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HOW TECHNOLOGY AND TRADITION WORK IN TANDEM THROUGH THE ART OF PRINTMAKING

BY CHRISTINA DONOGHUE ON 12 MARCH 2024

As the capital gears up for what is now the city's longest-running art fair, London Original Print Fair (LOPF for short), art and culture editor Christina Donoghue reflects on the printmaking artists breaking new ground via revolutionary technologies as well as nursing the medium's craft connections.

Despite general assumptions otherwise, the practice of printmaking is arguably as old as visual culture itself. However, our modern interpretation of it - which involves the physical act of transferring images from a matrix onto paper - only came about in the 1400s in China, a period earmarked for the democratisation of fine arts to take place,

making the production of images widely available and affordable for the general public. Such a process rooted in bringing art to the masses was revolutionary then and is, no doubt, revolutionary now, albeit for quite a different reason. Although the tipping scale of popularity seldom proves to be in printmaking's favour, it's this continuous process of waxing and waning that has only spurred the medium to reinvent itself once more, this time, through the advent of technology, and this year's London Original Print Fair is a perfect example of that.

Celebrating its 39th edition this week, (making it the city's oldest art fair), London Original Print Fair (LOPF for short), will bring together over forty international dealers, publishers and studios to champion the art of original printmaking in all of its forms. Ticket holders will be able to attend a specially curated series of inspiring talks, live printmaking demonstrations and an array of exhibitions that will place the work of 20th century greats against (Frank Auerbach, Miro and Picasso) newer artists of equal talent; Bethan Wood, Ellie Hayward and Nooka Shepherd.



Nooka Shepherd, XI, 'Justice', hard ground etching on somerset satin soft white, plate 22 x 14cm, paper 35 x 25.8cm, edition of 10, 2023, Courtesy Soho Revue

Whether you're someone who upholds values embedded in the medium's intrinsic ties with tradition and craftsmanship or you would rather speed towards printmaking's

technological advances, LOPF director Helen Rosslyn assures there are plenty of strokes for plenty of folk. 'What I love about printmaking is its boundless potential and its constant evolution', clarifies Rosslyn. 'From Dürer's engravings and Rembrandt's etchings to Cooper's linocuts and Tilson's innovative screenprints - each generation introduces pioneers who push the boundaries of printing possibilities.' But who are the next trailblazers in this field, you ask? 'This year's LOPF will include Soho Revue's presentation of young UK female artists redefining traditional printmaking techniques, and LITO, a cutting-edge Austrian studio whose groundbreaking patented print technologies create unique textures and effects, alongside gems of C17th, C18th and C19th printmaking', noted Rosslyn who quickly follows this up by stating: 'The ongoing innovation in this field promises exciting developments, as future printmakers explore new artistic horizons'. Below, we meet the next generation of artists and collectives teaming up to form the medium's new technological frontier.

**I read the environment around me though colour
more than of sound or of taste - Bethan Laura
Wood**



Crestata Triptych by Bethan Laura Wood

BETHAN LAURA WOOD

Since SHOWstudio's founding in 2000, we've experimented with many ways of championing fashion illustration. Whether it be through collaborative projects like *Drawing on Style*, curated exhibitions held in our gallery like our most recent showcases *Drawing Daphne* and *FLOWERS* or even just inviting artists to depict the latest season's collections - least to say, documenting fashion's slow dance with illustration is one that certainly hasn't passed us by. When thinking back to the glory days of fashion illustration, Europe's Art Noveau period glistens as bright as Gatsby's green light in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* but there's one artist who reigns above the rest; the great Aubrey Beardsley, whose intense infatuation with Japanese woodblock prints gave us some of history's most detailed, elegant and decadent illustrations. One artist following in his footsteps is Bethan Laura Wood, who too draws reference from Japanese woodcuts and of course, Beardsley himself.

When it comes to what spurs Wood on as an artist in the 21st century, she notes the bulk of her artistry is inspired by Beardsley's sheer 'delicacy and detail', along with 'the amazing quality of his penmanship'. Wood's work is predominantly characterised by her use of bold colour and experimental forms - tropes evidenced in her *Crestata*

series, which will feature at LOPF. 'It comes from an ongoing series of drawings of my Crestata plants, a type of succulent', she tells me. 'Starting during lock down and continuing after, it was a way for me to connect back with the meditative action of observing and drawing from life. I loved the curves and waves formed from the mutation in these plants to make these unique living 3d calligraphy forms - I wanted to capture their ever changing shape'. Colour is also something imperative to Wood's work. 'I am fascinated by how much people connect with colour', she reveals. 'They may not be able to explain why they like a colour or not but they definitely know when they don't. I, for one, connect personally and strongly to colour, so much so that I read the environment around me through colour more than of sound or taste.'

It's fair to say technological revelations aren't necessarily integral to Wood's practice. However, through her dedication in creating modern interpretations of an art form armed with a 1000-year history, it's this constant adaptation that makes her work distinctively modern, almost as if Wood's visual language is one rooted in contemporary calligraphy.



Bethan Laura Wood

LITO EDITIONS

Founded in 2022, LITO Editions positions itself on the more daring side of the 'creativity scale', in part due to the collective creating its own proprietary state-of-the-art printing technology to capture 3-D textures but also because of the leading contemporary artists the company works with. Based in Bregenz, Austria, LITO's

Technology Lab patented technological advances mean their prints are rolled out with extreme precision like no other as textures, colours, effects, glosses and even specific wax brushstrokes are implored to recreate original artworks as well as make anew. To achieve this, LITO commissions leading contemporary artists (Douglas Gordon, Erwin Wurm, Jia Aili, and Peter Halley are just some that have come before) to imagine original artworks, which are then rendered and developed into limited editions at the LITO Technology Lab. Each edition is personally hand-signed and numbered by the artist and reflects both the artist's vision and the expertise of the company's radical engineering team. When it comes to measuring such an undertaking, to refer to LITO Editions as quite simply 'modern' is an understatement. If today belongs to those endlessly experimenting with the latest technological advancements, tomorrow belongs to LITO Editions.

Douglas Gordon for LITO Editions



Douglas Gordon for LITO Editions

SOHO REVUE

Unlike LITO Editions, Soho Revue - a new addition to this year's LOPF - certainly doesn't position itself at the forefront of embracing tomorrow's digital age, but that doesn't mean it's not finding new ways to further its ventures in bringing the best of yesterday's traditional craft. The Soho-based gallery prides itself on primarily championing young, emerging, female artists working in the UK, and whose preference is to look to those who embrace and innovate within traditional media. The gallery's fair debut will introduce etchings, monotypes, lino-cuts and woodcuts by several artists but the work that has taken our fancy is a series of etched tarot cards titled *The Tarot Under The Hill* by Nooka Shepherd. Shepherd, who takes inspiration from regional folklore and mythology says she 'creates art to communicate a deeply

personal and intimate relationship with the natural world', an obvious affinity that weaves itself throughout her entire artistic practise. 'Opening the box that smelled of incense and amber where [my mother's] cards were kept... I would pour over them, fingers moving over the different decks, wondering at the ways in which the cards would be the same, how they would be different, how meaning shifted through the power of images', noted the artist in her personal statement. Dedicated to her craft, Shepherd's etchings express true Intricacy, linking the artist's confident line work to the divine power referenced in her tarot series.



Nooka Shepherd, IV, 'The Lovers', hard ground etching on somerset satin soft white, plate 22 x 14cm, paper 35 x 25.8cm, edition of 10, 2023, Courtesy Soho Revue

ELLIE HAYWARD

Ellie Hayward isn't just a practising artist but also one of the four founders of Verbatim gallery, an important artist-led initiative that looks to keep the intimacy of art going, allowing dialogues with the actual artists behind the work. 'Artists in this collective, which include Thomas Gosebruch, Maite Cascon, Jake Garfield and myself, use print in exciting and experimental ways as we all explore different techniques including mono printing, etching and woodcut', Hayward informs. 'It is these reasons that first drew me to the group last year'.

As for Hayward's own practice, the architectural language of liminal spaces - corridors, thresholds and the places of transition in our everyday lives - holds a large influence over her work, which coincidentally references theatrical spaces and set design. 'I am inspired by the social construction of spaces in our communities and how individuals relate to their spatial environment, though lived experience', Hayward discloses. For this reason, it must be said that scale is inherent in Hayward's artistic output, particularly when she's making sculpture. 'When the work becomes physically bigger than myself, I think the relationship the viewer has with the object changes. It can lead to a more intense dialogue between the viewer and the work and often the scale results in the work dictating the decision-making in the space... often, this results in elements of the architecture being mimicked visually in the work.' To create such drama, Hayward specialises in etching techniques, where she draws lines onto a metal plate using acid, all of which benefit the 3D quality of her work.



Tradition may be the key to success concerning Hayward's practice, but don't be fooled: Hayward's collaged aesthetic boasts an ironic similarity to old German expressionist film sets, particularly those seen in F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* and Fritz Lang's sci-fi hit *Metropolis*. 'Casting and printmaking are central to the way I think about making', notes Hayward. 'They enable me to replicate forms and shapes, transforming the work from manageable objects to something which is stacked towering over the individual to immerse them, which creates a sense of instability and precariousness in my work. Sharing more than just visual references with *Metropolis* - a film that essentially taps into the fear of industrialisation and mass production to portray a struggle of humanity versus nature - Hayward's work inherently comments on the 'strong connection to landscape and natural forms that we see in nature... that relationship and struggle between the urban world and the rural landscape is something that informs my work', the artist admits.

Past or present, technological or traditional, there's no doubt this year's LOPF caters to all ages and interests. To buy tickets to the fair, [click here](#). Otherwise, you can browse and purchase original prints from exhibitors and many other international dealers and galleries through LOPF's online Platform for Prints londonoriginalprintfair.com.

