

# IMPRESS

## WINTER 1987

### EDITORS' NOTE

This issue of Impress must begin with an apology, as in the last issue the name of David Partridge author of "Working at Atelier 17" was omitted accidentally. We are sorry for any inconvenience caused to him and our readers.

1987 has been a year of international relations for the PMC. In May, St. Claire Allen held "open studio" for members to meet Aldo Gonzalez of Cuba who runs a silkscreen workshop in Havana. While in June, Rosemary Simmons attended Graphica Atlantica, a conference organised by Icelandic Printmakers in Reykjavik. Irene Scheinmann, our chairperson, hosted an informal evening for Bill Eickhorst, Director of the Missouri Print Consortium, to meet PMC members. Slides of work from both groups were shown and there was much mutual interest. Irene then spent six weeks in the U.S.A., promoting our American Exchange Exhibition in California where she was also invited to lecture at the World Print Council.

A big "thank you" to Sue Thompson, Harland Walshaw and Yolanda Christian for their loyal work and for coping so ably in the office, often under trying circumstances. We wish them and all our readers a Happy Christmas and every success for the coming year.



Kyra Fisher

### KYRA FISHER'S METHOD OF JAPANESE WOODCUT (MOKU - HANGA)

Kyra Fisher was born in Montreal, Quebec. She has exhibited in Canada and has taught and demonstrated printmaking. She will be participating in the future exchange exhibition between the PMC and the U.S.A. and writes the following:

"Last fall I was accepted into the Master's of Fine Art Printmaking programme at the University of Calgary, specializing in Japanese woodcut. My advisor, whom I have known since my undergraduate days, is Noboru Sawai. Noboru studied under Toshi Yoshida of Tokyo, Japan. It was Toshi's father Hiroshi Yoshida, while more traditional than modern, could do anything his artisans could, was alert to new effects and as his own publisher brought the making of his prints under his own control, i.e. the control of the artist. This was extremely significant because traditionally, during Edo times, division of labour was practised. That is, the artist, the cutter, the printer and the publisher were all separate people. Hiroshi is credited with having facilitated the advent of the creative print movement in Japan - where one person both conceives of and executes the print.

While Toshi Yoshida is at home making both traditional and modern style prints, his establishment in Tokyo (which I visited in 1976) is set up on traditional lines. The students he takes on, however, practise modern Japanese woodcut printmaking methods - they do everything themselves.

The actual technique I learnt, practise and teach is relatively faithful to the methods developed in Edo times. I use handmade tools - horsehair brushes and barens (circular pressing pad for printing with) - a printing press substitute. I also use either cherry wood or shina - a Japanese bass wood plywood. Some modifications are necessary. These are due either to cost and availability or practicality. With plywood I can cut much larger images and shina is considerably cheaper than cherry wood. Because

of the climatic differences between Alberta and Japan, Calgary has an extremely dry climate, I need to keep the dampened Japanese paper, before and whilst printing, in a special box or else between pieces of plywood covered in plastic.

For the past few years I have been giving workshops and teaching Japanese woodcut for the Faculty of Continuing Education at the University of Calgary. In its very elementary stages this discipline can be easily learnt. Later on as you learn more, the process seems to get more difficult! I have taught people from many diverse backgrounds - from the Petroleum industry, doctors, accountants, teachers, retired people and artists. People from nine years of age to eighty have attended my classes. They enjoy this form of printmaking because no harmful chemicals are involved and it is transportable - no heavy printing press is necessary. Also, even the simplest of woodcut images can look very "professional" when printed. I also combine the Japanese woodcut method with copper etchings. Technically this method can be demanding in terms of accurate registration and the need to use etching paper which is more difficult to print well, but the colour effects one obtains are really incredibly beautiful and worthwhile. Because I use water-based pigments or watercolour paint the woodblocks must be printed first before the oil-based etching ink.

As well as being a mother of a 10 year old son and a 12 year old daughter, wife, full time student, giving workshops, I am also President of the Burns Visual Art Society of Calgary. We are a group of professional artists mainly painters, who banded together for support when we were evicted from our studios in the Burns Building. We decided to stay together since we would have a greater chance of obtaining affordable studio rent. For the past eight years we have occupied the fourth and fifth floors of the Neilson Building, in the centre of Calgary, situated opposite Glenbow - the Museum and Art Gallery. However just two weeks ago, an arsonist set fire to the second floor of our building and so we now have to decide on our future as well as contending with soot everywhere. We have had a number of offers of help. The local newspaper's art critic wrote an article about us, The Muttart. A public art gallery has offered to hold a benefit for us and the Glenbow sent over



conservators to help and advise artists on cleaning smoke-damaged work. All in all the support we have received has been tremendous.

The following notes are a copy of the hand-out I give to my students:

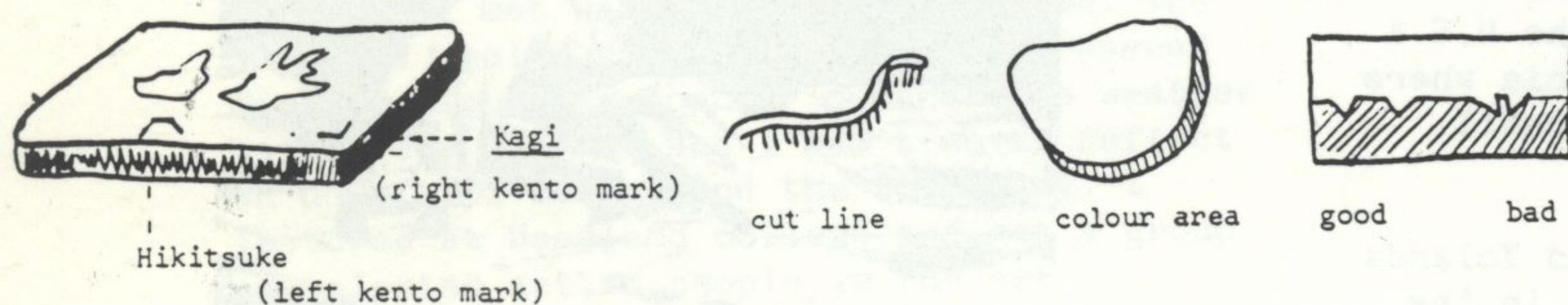
Most of the procedure outlined is traditional: however practicality and necessity have led to some modifications being introduced by some Japanese printmakers. The following are the principal elements of each step involved:

#### 1. PREPARATION OF THE BLOCK:

**Sanding:** The surface of the block must be smooth, hence it is sanded with 80, 120 and then 250 - grit sandpapers. The blocks are usually pre-planed. A hardwood is normally used, preferably cherry wood, or else birch plywood provides a satisfactory alternative.

#### 11. TRANSFERRING THE IMAGE:

The image can either be drawn or glued directly onto the block, or else it may be traced by using carbon paper from the original sketch. Two special marks are cut into the block. These are Kento marks which the printer uses to ensure that images and colours from each block register perfectly. The principle is to maintain the width of the margin by the proper placement of the Kento marks on every block.



#### 111. CARVING THE BLOCK:

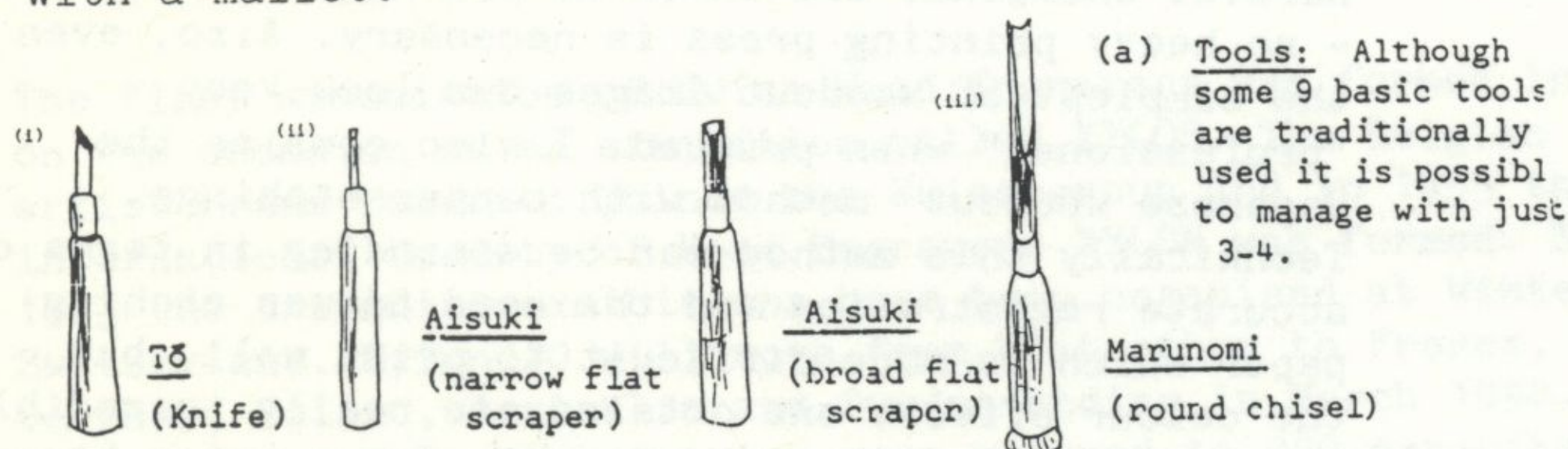
(a) **Tools:** Although some basic nine tools are traditionally used it is possible to manage with three or four.

(b) **Sharpening:** It is essential to keep tools extremely sharp, by using whetstones. Water is used with the whetstones although oilstones can be used as well.

(1) **To (knife)** - Most important of all edged tools since it is used for cutting the lines on the block. The carver cuts with the To by drawing it towards him with the flat side of the blade along the line.

(2) **Aisuki (narrow flat scraper)** - Flat scrapers are used for cutting away unnecessary parts of the block and are manipulated by being pushed forward.

(3) **Marunomi (round chisel)** - is a semicircular chisel used for removing wide spaces. It is normally used with a mallet.



#### (c) Carving:

(1) **Key Block:** The first block to be carved is the one containing the majority of lines. It is called the Key Block. Since both sides of each line must be cut, it requires considerable time equalling or exceeding the total time required for making all the coloured blocks! The lines are cut as truncated pyramid in cross-sections. (see C 3)

(2) **Colour Blocks:** The cutting of the colour blocks does not require such strict accuracy as in the key block since the lines of the latter serve to cover and conceal any unevenness of the edges caused by an unsteady hand. Any number of colour blocks may be incorporated - 40!

(3) **Cutting:** All cuts should be bevel slightly to prevent undercutting and the eventual chipping away of the lines.

#### IV. PRINTING - MATERIALS AND TOOLS:

It requires considerable time in order to undertake the actual printing, equalling or even exceeding the total time required for carving the blocks.

(a) **Paper:** 100% mulberry or paper with a pulp and fibre content is used.

#### (b) Tools:

1. **Baren:** The baren is the Japanese woodblock press. It is a 5½" diameter circular pressing pad consisting of three parts. **Baren proper or core:** A flat spiral of cord (12" long twisted bamboo fibre) or else a beaded plastic disc. **Ategawa:** A backing disc in which the baren proper is held. Made from lacquered pasted paper or heavy cardboard or plywood. **Covering:** A wrapping which fixes the backing disc and core together - dried bamboo sheath or acetate plastic (scotch par).

2. **Brushes:** Type A brushes are used for spreading pigment on the block. Type B are for small spaces. The bristles are made from horsehair. **Mizubake** are goathair brushes used for damping paper.

Small brushes are used to apply pigment to the block in dabs and a stick is used to apply paste. (See d below).

(d) **Pigment:** Only water-based colours are used for Japanese woodblock. Dried pigment reconstituted or water colours in tubes may be used. The colour is diluted to give a variety of effects. A small brush is used to apply the colour to the block.

(d) **Paste:** A paste made from either rice (pounded to a paste) or wheat flour and water is the base of the colour and must be mixed on the block with the pigment by use of a brush. The process must be done before printing. This gives substantial body to the pigment and thus secures its uniform application to the block. If too much paste is used the paper will stick to the block.

#### V. PRINTING PROCESS:

(A) **Damping the paper:** The paper must be damped once it has been cut to the required size. If dry paper is used for printing it will expand, absorbing the water at the first impression and thus causing wrinkles or render the Kento useless. Hence the purpose of moistening the paper is to ensure its size remains uniform during the entire process and at the same time to facilitate the uniform adherence of the pigment to the paper. The paper is damped with a special brush called a **Mizubake**. The paper needs to be damp at least a week before printing and is kept in a special damp box.

(B) The block is moistened using a small block of wood wrapped in a cloth.

(C) Pigment and paste are applied to the block.

(D) **Brush Action:** First a circular motion until pigment and paste have been thoroughly mixed and then in a straight motion across the grain of the wood to give the final touch by making the colour even.

(E) The paper is removed from the damp box and placed into position on the block by means of referring to the Kento marks.

(F) A protective sheet of geofilm is placed on top of the paper - the baren glides over the surface.

(G) Using the baren - it is first rubbed on a pad soaked with mineral or camellia oil to help reduce friction when printing. The baren is then rubbed over the paper. The actual rubbing follows a particular pattern depending on the size and type of areas to be printed. In printing with the baren the strength of the whole body is used, not just pressure from the wrist and hand.

(H) The print is removed from the block and replaced in the damp box until the actual printing is completed. It is best to wait several hours between printing different colours to ensure the setting of each colour and the proper condition of the paper. If the paper is getting dry it must be redamped before further printing can be resumed. The same sequence of sheets is maintained throughout the printing process. KYRA FISHER



## CARNIVAL IN PRINT TOURING EXHIBITION

Paddington Printshop is currently putting together an exhibition of silkscreen prints, contemporary and historical on the theme of "THE SPIRIT OF THE CARNIVAL, PAST & PRESENT". The exhibition will consist of work by contemporary British artists, contemporary Caribbean artists, historical prints and engravings from National Collections and a series of contextual photographs and text. The full exhibition is aimed at galleries and museums but a smaller exhibition of the contemporary work and contextual material is available to smaller galleries and community venues as well. We are interested in hearing from GALLERIES and COMMUNITY VENUES which are interested in the exhibition and ARTISTS who have existing work on the theme of the CARNIVAL, which they are willing to submit for selection. Please contact John Phillips or Fay Rodrigues for further information at Paddington Printworkshop, 1 Elgin Ave, London W9. Tel: 01 286 1123.

## TRAVELLING WITH THE FREMANTLE AWARD



Katie Clemson  
controlling a  
road roller 'press'

On a trip to Australia in May last year I was asked by the West Australian Department of the Arts if I would like the job of accompanying an exhibition of prints that had been winners of the Fremantle Print Award over the exhibition's ten years of running. I think they asked me because not that long ago when I was Artist in Residence at an Art Centre in Perth, I organised a weekend of a group of artists printing large linocuts with a ten ton road roller. This seems to have attracted a lot of attention and given me a reputation of being able to cope with anything!

The Department of Arts has problems that the State is huge (approximately half a million square miles) with a widespread population. Perth is on the coast in the South and is the Cultural Centre. The Department of the Arts is responsible for touring all the arts to reach the greatest number of people possible, all very costly. How this could be a success has always interested me, so I couldn't resist the challenge. I also saw it as an opportunity to expose original prints to a new audience, to be able to unveil the mysteries of techniques to the outback population, and as a bonus, to me the landscape north of the State is a visual delight.

The Fremantle Print Award began 12 years ago under the sponsorship of Shell Australia who are still involved. There are two acquisitive awards of \$1000 each and several prints are also acquired by the Fremantle Arts Centre. It attracts entries from all over Australia and some from abroad.

As we loaded the 38 works into the rather alarmingly large van, I noticed that there was quite a variation of image and quality. I suppose that over ten years the judging is done on the merits of the existing show, so there is no guarantee that when put together they would form a good mixture. There were many more etchings than anything else and only three relief prints, two wood engravings and a splendid collagraph.

So I set off, still jet lagged after arriving only 24 hours earlier to discover that the van had 5th gear after 200 miles! First stop was Geraldton, a big coastal town with a working port and a population of 20,000 engaged in agriculture, fishing and grain export. There is an art gallery with two administrators and a technician. It is a lovely Victorian building showing touring exhibitions all year round, sometimes three at a time. I was upstairs with the prints for four days and downstairs were some wonderful aboriginal dreamtime paintings. I gave slide lectures to local art groups and school children and visited the art college. We had 700 people through in all. I had to pack the prints in bubble wrap and stack them back in the van, no breakages on the whole trip and my fears of flat tyres and shattered glass were unfounded.

Next stop Canarvon, another 300 miles north and still on the next coast. The drive up was magnificent, it was wild flower season in W.A. and the red earth was covered in carpets of flowers, everlasting daisies in yellow, pink and white, kangaroo paws (green and red), the brilliant red black Sturt Peas, endless grey, orange and blue plants with the burnt yellow spinafex. Apart from an occasional 20 feet high anthill, the land is uncommonly flat. The climate is mildly tropical with crayfishing and irrigated fruit farming as the main occupations. There are endless acres of fruit trees, bananas, paw paws, mangoes etc. The population of 7,000 has no gallery; we hung in the library. I'd been spoilt in Geraldton and soon realised that I would have to make do. We used screens, window sills and the lighting was terrible, but the department's hanging system of chains and S hooks was marvellous and made the job of hanging a lot quicker. There is a big aboriginal population in Canarvon and during some of the school visits I really enjoyed meeting some of the kids, they were likewise interested in me cutting lino and I had great fun keeping them from "helping me". I think the teachers up there find their constant hyper-activity a strain, so that a visit to the exhibition was preceded by a long lecture outside the library door about the damnation that would prevail if they broke the prints! There was also a touring and music trio "The Raw Prawns" in the area. I enjoyed meeting them. They had done a two month stint around the outback stations and were in town to give a final performance with a lot of the locals taking part.....

I mentioned before, that the images were 50% abstract and the folks up north like Gum Trees, so I had a battle and a few interesting arguments with indignant sheep farmers who felt it was all a con and they could do it themselves!

Then off to Karatha another 300 miles north through the Pilbarra, an area rich in iron ore, full of gorges and ranges with red earth and white gums. This is a new town built by a big mining company to attract workers out of the city to what would normally be a desert. Culturally it is a desert with the exception



of the technical college which is sparkling new, with a thriving music and art department. This time I hung the show in the local hotel! By now I was ready for anything! Most of the population are hard to entice away from their airconditioned houses (it was winter and 85 degrees) and most of them can afford to go to Perth to see art and go to the theatre while their main entertainment is video. I gave a lecture in the college's energetic print department then visited a wonderful, aboriginal town with its own printworkshop. This seemed so far removed from the air conditioning in Karatha.

Only another 160 miles to my last stop Port Headland. This an older but still mining orientated town on the coast, and is a major port. While I was there the largest shipment of iron ore ever to leave Australia sailed for Japan. The exhibition was in the Civic Centre, a big modern building overlooking the sea (where you can't swim because of deadly water snakes). Headland has a population of 14000 mostly temporary, there to make a fortune. Everyone I met was from somewhere else. The show was really appreciated, we even opened for two nights by popular demand! The weather was lovely and hot and I had time to reflect on how far I'd come and the trip back. I lectured at Headland college and met a group of talented active people in the art department. I enjoyed their hospitality and will probably go up next year to work on a "Prints without Presses" project on a remote inland station run entirely by aboriginals. They have started an emu leather farm and have their own school. It is here that I can learn

#### WHITE GUM PRESS:

The equipment includes one large Albion (print area 25"x 40"), one Columbian (23"x 34"), one small Albion (15"x 9½"), one Littlejohn etching press (28"x 28") and several screw presses. Next year an area will be equipped for papermaking.

Further details from Katie Clemson, Fleetwater Farm, Newton Minstead near Lyndhurst, Hampshire SO43 7GD. Telephone Southampton (0703) 812273.

#### XYLON 10

The first association of Swiss Wood Engravers was formed in 1944 on the occasion of an exhibition called XYLOS. The Belgian artist Frans Masereel joined the Swiss group and in 1953 the International Society of Wood Engravers XYLON was formed. Since 1983 the triennial exhibitions have been organised at Winterthur, Switzerland. Xylon 10 will move from Winterthur to France, Italy, Germany, Poland, Australia and Sweden ending in March 1990. The 1940 entries from 39 countries were reduced to 200 exhibits from 24 countries. Britain is represented by four artists of whom only one is a Printmakers Council member: Roy Willingham. The judges noted that "The classical wood block print is on the decline. New materials and novel techniques are a challenge to contemporary artists and this becomes evident in this exhibition. Strictly speaking the name XYLON (Greek for Wood) is not describing the exhibition accurately. "Relief Printing" would be more appropriate"

#### STOP PRESS

Shiona M Airlie (see her article in the last issue of Impress) has left Arts in Business and has formed her own company under the name ARTIS. Printmakers should get in touch with her at: Shiona M Airlie MA, Dip. AGMS, ARTIS, 26 Gayfield Square, Edinburgh EH1 3PA. Tel: 031-556-7546.

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so much. I feel hopeful and full of a natural excitement which is spontaneous and infectious. The aboriginal people of the north are at last finding a way to keep their own culture and respect. They are good at organising and running their own lives. At last white government is realising this and encouraging them to grow. The adults were interested in print techniques but not in the images. Their images are lyrical, allegorical, primitive and colourful. It will be a pleasure to see them adapting these into print techniques for themselves. Headland Art Department also ran an artists marathon at the local country show. Maybe we could get a U.K. team together and have some sort of International Printmakers Olympics! (It may be a good way to get sponsorship).

I drove all the way back to Perth with a few delightful stopovers. I had time to draw, visit a dramatic gorge and swim in a reef beach. Back in Perth I visited the 11th Fremantle Print Award and noticed that both winners were etchings.

I flew back to the U.K. a few days later to catch the middle of one of the most beautiful autumns. In December I will return to talk to 15 West Australian artists about a portfolio of relief prints which will be published in 1987 at White Gum Press, my new relief and monotype workshop in the New Forest, Hampshire. It all seems like a dream now, but it was real enough and I think quite a lot of people got a lot from seeing the prints and forming their own opinions, whether good or bad; after all, that's what it is all about .....I think!

Katie Clemson



Newcastle  
1986  
Wood engraving by  
Roy Willingham  
7.5 x 10.5 cm.

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