

The Edinburgh Drawing School: PrintRoom Dundee with Norman Ackroyd

✖ Woods, water and wild animals feature large in an outstanding new exhibition at The Edinburgh Drawing School (EDS), Great King Street.

PrintRoom Dundee is a group of artists and printmakers who use the facilities at the Dundee Contemporary Arts Print workshop to create etchings, linocuts, monoprints, screen-prints, digital prints, woodcuts, photographs and more. In this exhibition they show prints of their diverse and highly individual work.

✖ From 1950s Japanese scenes to pictures of Bob Dylan, the PrintRoom artists' subject matter is nothing if not varied. John Johnstone's *Bob Goes Electric* refers to a concert Johnstone attended in Edinburgh in 1966, shortly after Dylan had somewhat changed his tune. Angela Hamper's *Y5 Boys' Parade 1950, Japan*, shows quite a different crowd, as boys in traditional chequered dress march along, supervised by their black-clad master; there is a deep sense of history in the far-away atmosphere of this image.

Liz Myhill's *Plunge II* and *Flight* are stunning pictures of ✖ birds, the first diving almost vertically down to catch his prey, the second opening his wings for lift-off. These etchings are particularly detailed, the birds' feathers clear and sharp, their long necks slender. I also liked Barbara

✖ Ballantine's *Fancy an Espresso?*, in which two geese waddle along together like a couple of Morningside matrons on their way to Jenners.

Les Mackay's etching of *Drimmie Woods* shows just how ✖

versatile monochrome can be. The stark black and white trees of the foreground give a sense of cold, windy weather, but beyond them we see light, albeit a wintry light, on a patch of rough grass. Les's *Bridge with Bird* shows a single crow beneath the Forth rail bridge, its curved, living silhouette a contrast to the hard lines of the bridge posts. In Allan Beveridge's *Forest Pond* we again see trees, but here they are more abstract, thick lines of ink around a scribble of black water. This is an evocative piece, reminding me of the old curling pond in an Aberdeenshire village.



✖ Not every artist sticks to black and white; in Brian Ballantine's skilful *Backstreets of Venice*, yellow watercolour highlights some of the canal-side houses, whilst a gondolier's shirt has been picked out in pink – small details that bring the whole picture to life. I like the fractured surface of the water; in Venice canals are roads, and like roads, always busy, rarely still.

Claire McVinnie's *Red Night* is ablaze with colour – red, ✖ yellow, green – the seed heads of wildflowers set against the black night sky. The translucent leaves are beautifully drawn, every vein delineated.

Norman Ackroyd CBE RA needs little introduction. Known primarily for his aquatint work, Ackroyd's prints range from large scale landscapes to tiny etchings. Although based in Bermondsey, he often travels to the Scottish islands, painting cliffs and coasts, birds and sea, from a boat. He has also created large-scale murals, published books, and been a subject of BBC Four's *What do artists do all day?* (from which we learned, inter alia, that he starts each morning with a good bowl of porridge.)


✖ In this exhibition, EDS shows several of Ackroyd's haunting landscapes. A highlight is *St Kilda from Flannan* (© Norman Ackroyd. All Rights Reserved 2017) in which gulls fly over a shimmering sea, and the rocks of this lonely island appear

through a haze of evening mist. As Liz Myhill says in her thoughtful appreciation of Ackroyd's work, 'There is...a lasting sense that we have not only glimpsed a place but taken away a memory and experience of what it was to actually be there.'

There is much more to see in this impressive show,  including some beautiful ceramics (Andrew Matheson's *Lidded Ginger Jar*, Henderson Hall Ceramics' *Fish Plate*), a range of gorgeous scent bottles by Nutmeg Glass, and Darrell Evaness' intricate Spitfire sculptures (a great hit with Norman  Ackroyd, we are told). Alison Bell's *Wee Souls* bronze figures are delightful, especially *Echo*, while poet Barbara Morton's artists' books are delicate examples of this increasingly popular genre.

The exhibition also includes a detailed and informative explanation of the meaning of printmaking by Professor Susan Tallman of the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Tallman's *What is Printmaking? A Brief Explanation* from her 1984 publication *The Contemporary Print* sets out the different processes and techniques. An extract from Elspeth Lamb's *Papermaking for Printmakers* explains how to make paper from plants.

To complement the show, EDS has arranged *free* demonstrations of printmaking on Saturdays 12, 19 and 26 August and 2 September, 1.30-4pm. At each session working artists will explain different techniques.

EDS is just a short walk from Princes Street, so do visit  this most enjoyable exhibition. This was my first visit to the gallery – it won't be my last.

PrintRoom Dundee with Norman Ackroyd is on at The Edinburgh School of Drawing, 13a Great King Street, (Fringe Venue 396) until 3 September. Opening hours are 11am-5.30pm Tuesday to Sunday (closed Mondays).