

Notes on Etching

I learned to etch while I was at the West of England College of Art in Bristol from 1947 to 1949. I joined a small part-time evening class taught by Mr. Price who was a good but conservative instructor. His technique was basically that of the English etching clubs of the 1860's and 70's, which he had learned in Bristol as a student in the 1920's. He taught me a sound technique of hard ground etching and I also made some drypoints at his suggestion. As it was impossible for students to buy sheet copper of any kind, we spent much of our class time in laboriously grinding down and polishing old plates that had been left behind by pre-war students. I made a total of five plates in these art school classes.

When I began to teach in the Falmouth School of Art in December 1949, the school owned a 19th century press which I began to use and made experiments with my first aquatints and also a number of monotypes. I had read about these techniques but had never seen actual examples of either technique. During visits to the Slade in 1953 or thereabouts, I became aware of the teaching of John Buckland-Wright and as a result bought and was greatly impressed by his book on technique. The result was that between 1953 and until I left Falmouth in 1957, I did a great deal of experimenting with various techniques of etching.

At about this time I also bought from Oisín Kelly a lithographic press that he and Louis Le Broquet had owned in Dublin in the 1940's. It was a small, not very good cast iron press, which I brought to Falmouth. I had no instruction in lithography and no one in Falmouth knew much about printing lithographs, however I did make a number of prints both from stones and on zinc plates. When I came to Canada I sold the press to Malcolm Ross-MacDonald and I believe it has remained unused in a barn on his step-father's farm near Helston ever since.

When I came to McMaster in 1960 there were no printing presses on campus. Sometime in 1961 I succeeded in borrowing from a pottery company in Hamilton an old and very primitive press used to make ceramic transfers and this we used until Mr. Herman Levy presented a modern press to the university in the mid-60's.

I have owned a Praga Press made by Emile Carpi since 1970.