



David Hockney, study of a boot with spade digging, ltd. edn. etching, No 53/100, signed/numbered in pencil by the artist, 5 x 4.25in, gilt frame. **Dee, Atkinson & Harrison, Driffeld. Sep 06. HP: £800. ABP: £941.**



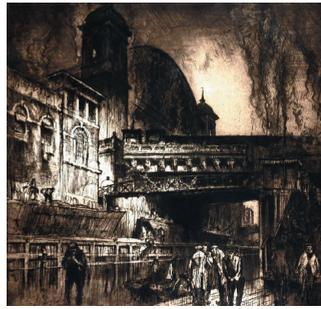
Nevinson (Christopher Richard Wynne, (1889-1946)). The Willows, etching, signed in pencil, plate approx 6.75 x 5.5 in with margins, minor surface marks, traces of damp, some discol. to corners where previously hinged, sheet size approx 12.75 x 9in. **Dominic Winter, South Cerney, Glos. Jul 06. HP: £750. ABP: £882.**



Anders Leonard Zorn 1860-1920, Portrait of a young woman, head and shoulders turned to the left, etching, signed and dated 1906 within the plate, and in pencil, 15 x 12cm. **Rosebery's, London. May 06. HP: £600. ABP: £705.**



Allen Gwynne-Jones 1892-1982, Spring Evening Froxfield, etching in the first state, c1926, signed in pencil, bears label for 'Thomas Agnew & Sons Ltd attached to reverse, 33 x 39cm. **Rosebery's, London. Oct 06. HP: £540. ABP: £635.**



Frank Brangwyn, Cannon Street Station, exterior, etching signed in pencil, plate size 27.75 x 28.75in, stained frame. **Hartleys, Ilkley. Dec 06. HP: £520. ABP: £611.**



William Lionel Wyllie, (1851-1931) etching, docklands view, signed in pencil, 9 x 14.75in. **Gorrings, Lewes. Feb 01. HP: £340. ABP: £399.**



John Byrne, etching in colours 'Girl with Monkey', signed Patrick and entitled and numbered 6/12 in pencil, 13.75 x 9.75in. **Great Western Auctions, Glasgow. Apr 05. HP: £300. ABP: £352.**



Enoch Hendryk Enrico Glicenstein, 1870-1942, A Rabbi with the Torah, etching, signed in pencil, 15 x 15cm, with a drawing of figures in pen/black ink by same hand, signed, 11 x 17.5cm, unframed. **Rosebery's, London. Mar 06. HP: £260. ABP: £305.**

Collecting Prints. Part Two: Etchings

by Chris Murray

Generally small, finely detailed and monochrome etchings don't usually make a bold statement: a subtle and intimate art form, they reward close and patient study. And while some can be very costly, there are etchings to suit all pockets and tastes. Etching developed around 1500, almost certainly from the art of German armourers, who used acid to etch designs into metal. By the seventeenth century it had become popular with both artists and illustrators, and with artists it is still popular as a medium to this day.

Among early exponents were Urs Graf (the earliest datable etching, from 1513, is by him), Albrecht Dürer, and Albrecht Altdorfer - its German origins are obvious. The etching reached a highpoint in Rembrandt, and those wanting to understand the medium are well advised to study his etchings closely. Other notable figures in the history of etching include Jacques Callot (France), Hercules Seghers (Netherlands), Giovanni Piranesi (Italy), Goya (Spain).

Technique

An etching is created by using acid to cut a design into a metal plate. Hence its traditional name, aqua fortis (Latin for acid, literally 'strong water') and its French name, aqua forte.

The first stage involves covering a small copper plate in a 'ground', an acid-resistant coating that's a mixture of beeswax, rosin and bitumen. The plate is heated gently until the ground melts and can be spread evenly with a roller. Once it has dried to a hard, smooth surface, the ground is blackened with smoke: this allows an etcher to see clearly the lines he or she makes when drawing. The design is scratched into the ground: the aim is simply to reveal the metal surface, not to cut into it (as in engraving). The fact that the ground, though hard, is much softer than copper, means that an etched line can be more expressive than an engraved one.

When the plate is placed in acid, the exposed areas are eaten into ('bitten'), creating the lines that will hold the ink. After the acid treatment, the remaining ground is removed. Ink is then spread evenly over the surface of the plate and carefully wiped off: it remains only in the bitten lines. The image is transferred by means of a press, which pushes the plate very firmly against a sheet of damp paper. As plates wear down and images lose their definition, early prints are far more desirable than later prints from the same plate. The pressure exerted by the press leaves around the images, an impression known as a platemark.

The etched line can be varied by a process called 'stopping-out'. After a short time in the acid, the plate is removed and the lines that are to be very fine are covered in acid-resistant varnish. Immersion in the acid continues, allowing the remaining lines to be bitten more deeply. This can be done many times, allowing the etcher a subtle control of both line and tone. Etching's effects range from a simple, spare line (Hockney, Frank Emanuel) to dark, velvety tones (typical of Frank Brangwen).

A further refinement is 'soft-ground etching'. As the name suggests, the ground used is softer, waxy in fact. A sheet of paper is placed over the ground and a design draw on it in pencil. When removed, it takes away the ground where the pencil has applied pressure. The result is a much softer printed line, very like pencil.

Etching is essentially a monochrome process, the precise tint of the monochrome (black, sepia etc) making an important contribution to the overall impact. But colours are sometimes used: they can be applied to the plate before printing, or (more commonly) painted on the prints after printing. The colour is often understated and subtle, particularly in illustrations (George Edwards), but in many

modern etchings and in eighteenth century satirical prints, it can be very bold. Note: in the past, colour was often added by later hands to 'enhance' an etching, and so many not have been intended by the artists, nor be an improvement aesthetically or commercially.

Collecting etchings

Fortunately, etchings are generally plentiful: though sixteenth century examples are rare and expensive, etchings were being produced in large numbers by the seventeenth century. Sources include specialist print sales, galleries (including reputable on-line galleries), antique dealers and, for those with contemporary tastes, graduate shows at art colleges. Even modest general auctions will usually have a few. Price is determined primarily by artist, rarity and condition, and of course where you buy: an etching that costs £100 at auction may cost four times that in a good gallery.

Etchings can be roughly divided into those by 'artists' and those by 'illustrators'. As with any such classification, there are areas of overlap, but it is a distinction that's generally sound. More plentiful and varied, those by illustrators are generally less expensive and are usually collected according to subject - plant and animal studies (George Edwards), satirical cartoons, fashion plates, architectural views, topographical studies, street scenes (beggars, street traders), and so on.

Though not as plentiful, 'art' etchings still exist in very significant numbers, and are often collected according to artist, period, or national schools, such as Dutch, German, French or Italian. The British School provides collectors with a treasure trove of fine etchings, with late nineteenth century and early twentieth century artists being particularly popular - eg Whistler (a major figure in the development of the form), Christopher Nevinston, Frank Brangwyn, Muirhead Bone, James McBey, William Strang, and Gerald Leslie Brockhurst, to name just a few: there are many awaiting discovery by the collector. More recent etchers of note include Paula Rego and David Hockney - and there are always young etchers to look out for (Isabella Easton).

For those new to etchings, here's a checklist of points to consider when buying:

Artist: Many anonymous etchings are worth collecting, but a name always adds greatly to a print's interest.

Authenticity I: Is it by the stated artist? Consider provenance, signature and style. Seek advice if you're in doubt.

Authenticity II: Is it an original etching? Sophisticated reproductions have been available for some time, so with expensive prints it's important to check. The 'Rembrandts' and 'Degas' that do the rounds of poorly regulated sales, and often take in the innocent, are very unlikely to be the real thing. A very basic test: if there's no platemark, it's not an etching (The indentation left in the paper by the edge of the plate when an etching is printed).

Condition

Quality of printing: (a) Is it an early or late impression? (b) Is it over- or under-inked? If colour has been applied, has it been done sympathetically?

Handwritten signature and number: Not essential, and rare before the twentieth century, but always welcome.

If you want to check on an etching's value, you can consult (for a fee) Gordon's Print Price Guides, available on-line: <http://www.gordonsart.com/portalppa.asp> or *Gordon's Print Price Annual 2007* which was reviewed on page 11 of our July/August 2007 edition. Order via the AIS Bookshop on 0870 350 6096.

And if you want to know more about the technique and history of etching: Walter Chamberlain, *Thames & Hudson Manual of Etching and Engraving*, 1972. Ronald Russell, *Discovering Antique Prints*, Shire Publications, 1982. Bamber Gascoigne, *How to Identify Prints*, Thames and Hudson, 1986.



Frank L. Emanuel, *Figure on a jetty with a sailing barge and lighthouse*, pencil, signed & inscribed 'Treport', 18 x 16.5cm, with a pencil drawing of the Head of Christ and two etchings by the same hand. (4) (unframed) *Rosebery's, London. Jun 05. HP: £240. ABP: £282.*



Luigi Russolo, (1885-1947, Italian) *Citta addormentata* etching signed, inscribed as titled in pencil in the margin image 16.5 x 25cm. *Bearne's, Exeter. Jun 05. HP: £180. ABP: £211.*



Richard Bawden b1936, *The Mackerel*, etching, signed, titled and inscribed 'A/P' in pencil, 40 x 62cm, Alyson Hunter 20thC, 'Double Shop front 2', photo-etching printed in colours, signed, titled, dated 75 and numbered 1/50 in pencil with one other similar etching by the same hand. (3) *Rosebery's, London. Jan 07. HP: £120. ABP: £141.*



Kenneth Steel, 1906-1970, *Highland loch*, etching, signed in pencil, 13.5 x 25cm with one other similar signed etching by same hand, two etchings of *Cathedrals* by Dorothy Sweet, both signed in pencil, two Japanese colour woodblock prints & framed Japanese fan. (7). *Rosebery's, London. Mar 06. HP: £100. ABP: £117.*



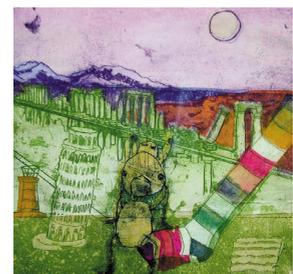
George Edwards 1694-1773, 'Red-Throated Loon from Greenland', publ. September 1743, hand-coloured etching, 23.4 x 18.7cm, with 3 other hand-coloured engravings of birds by the same hand titled: 'A Parakeet from the East Indies', 'The Parrakeet from Carraccos' and one other. (4) *Rosebery's, London. Oct 06. HP: £70. ABP: £82.*



Hubert Andrew Freeth (1912-1986) etching, 'Le Penseur', signed in pencil and dated '52, inscribed 'For Michael Davys with every good wish and many thanks, from Andrew, 1964', 12 x 9in. *Gorrings, Lewes. Mar 04. HP: £60. ABP: £70.*



Miss E. Mordaunt (Exh. 1927) etching, 'Pollyanna', signed in pencil, 7.25 x 7.25in. *Gorrings, Lewes. Jul 04. HP: £55. ABP: £64.*



Isabella Easton, b1971, 'Alf 'n Betty', etching, signed, numbered 1/20 and dated 1995, 17 x 17.5cm with 3 other similar prints, each signed dated and numbered 1/20. (3) *Rosebery's, London. Feb 06. HP: £25. ABP: £29.*