

Out to IMPRESS

It's dynamic, proactive, inclusive, and accessible and it's out to impress. And judging by the preparation, passion and promising programme on offer, it will live up to its name and put Gloucestershire on the world map as a host for the largest fine art printmaking festival in the UK

WORDS BY TRACY SPIERS



GPC screenprinting workshop with Chris Norman

Throughout the month of March, IMPRESS 13, a biennial festival held in the Stroud Valleys, Cheltenham and neighbouring towns – organised by Gloucestershire Printmaking Cooperative – seeks not only to promote contemporary printmaking by displaying work from participants from Europe, Canada, South America, Cuba, Africa, Japan and China, but encourage and increase public awareness of this fine art discipline.

Building on the success of its previous two biennial events, IMPRESS 13 carries international status and celebrates every printmaking eventuality, untaps potential and possibilities that can be achieved. A two-day international symposium, workshops for printmakers and the general public, including children; a programme of readings and talks; opportunities to meet the artists and mini-bus guided tours make the festival dynamic and diverse. And of course leading printmakers both locally, nationally and internationally in their specific areas of expertise will be exhibiting in various venues.

Coinciding with this eclectic festival, Gloucestershire Printmaking Cooperative, founded in 2005 and the only printmaking facility of its kind in the county, has marked a significant development by extending its premises by moving upstairs into a former perfumery – allowing more space, facilities and opportunities for printmakers to develop their work. Based at Griffin Mill near Thrupp in the Stroud valleys, GPC is now an impressive facility for etching, lithography, screenprint, relief print, monoprint, collagraph and photo-mechanical processes. For the first time it provides a gallery for members to display any one or combination of the amazing variety of techniques.

“When we started in 2005 we had a much smaller studio, an employed administrator and technicians. We later realised that by running it exclusively on a voluntary basis, we could act more as a co-operative should with members supporting each other, enjoying the facilities and volunteering skills. It meant we then had the money to put back into the co-operative and have been able to expand considerably, have more space and as a result our membership has increased,” explains Tricia Henry, one of the founder members and an instrumental visionary behind the Impress festival.

One of the Stroud venues for the Festival is The Museum in the Park where

two exhibitions will be taking place throughout the course of the festival. Painterly Prints by internationally acclaimed artist Hughie O'Donoghue, whose work has frequently concerned myth, memory and history, will be shown in Gallery 1. Last year some of this series of vibrant carborundum prints Verdant Field were on display in the Royal Academy. Next door in Gallery 2 will be Intaglios, featuring the works of Antonio Romoleroux from Quito, which have been awarded Heritage Status in Ecuador. He takes symbols from facial pictography used by diverse aboriginal groups in the Amazon.

“Antonio said he wanted to bring the outside into the city and I want to bring art to the people and not to wait for people to go to the art. What we are putting on in Stroud is what they would expect to see in big city galleries, places like London and New York,” explains Tricia, who will be exhibiting herself in ‘The Silk Road’ at the Parabola Arts Centre in Cheltenham from March 7-30 (under her artist name Tricia Torrington).

Chinese master printer He Kun from Yunnan Province in China will also be part of this particular exhibition. He specialises in his own unique method of multi-colour reduction woodcut that has vibrancy and an almost pointillist tone.

There's certainly plenty organised for the whole of March. Colleges, the university, and hospitals are a few of the festival's major partners together with dozens of galleries, coffee shops, restaurants and exhibition spaces. One exhibition which explores the use of printing at time of social and historical change is ‘Red Ink’ at Gloucester Cathedral Cloisters and includes work across time, location and event missed.

One Stroud-based printmaker who has made a successful living as a printmaker and has perfected his own unique way of etching using multi-layered plates is Terence Millington, who is also a Fine Art painter. Over the years his incredibly densely coloured designs have appeared on stamps, wine bottles, in catalogues and galleries all over the world. In fact his work has travelled to more countries than he has. For Impress though he and his work will be on home soil.

“Impress is a huge event for an area like this. It's the sort of thing you would normally associate with cities or organised by public bodies. It offers a wide range of approaches in a lot of different print media,” explains Terence.

“They are all original prints made by the artists as opposed to being computer



'Mountain Village in Sunset' by He Kun

generated reproductions.”

He will be showing his work alongside three other printmakers – Christine Felce, George Richards and Fran Christen at Ruskin Mill in Horsley called 4321 – four printmakers, three D, two dimensions and one space.

IMPRESS 13 not only celebrates printmaking in all its glorious forms, but will give individuals the chance to buy an exquisite etching, lithograph, relief print, collagraph, screenprint, or monoprint at an affordable price. But Tricia is quick to point out there is a difference between the definition of a print in terms of digital copy of an oil painting for example and a Fine Art printmaker's editioned print. So what you see at Impress will be literally hot off the printing press and not the computer.

Having had a tiny taste of the printing world, I am blown away by the immense skill involved. Everyone taking part in IMPRESS 2013 is an expert in their own field of printmaking – a heady mix of science and serendipity – which continually inspires both the artist and those who enjoy looking at the results.

“I urge everyone to go and have a look; all the exhibitions are free, so get out there and get involved. We are always very happy to talk to people about our work and show them what we do but also what they can have a go at for themselves,” adds Tricia.

I endorse her final comment. IMPRESS13 will not only inspire but is guaranteed to make a lasting impression on those who take time to appreciate the artistry around them. ■

IMPRESS '13

INTERNATIONAL PRINTMAKING FESTIVAL STRoud

Exhibitions include:

- Feb 22-March 23 Gloucester Cathedral: Red Ink – Printmaking at the cutting edge of national and international change
- March 1-31 Museum in the Park, Stroud: Painterly Prints by Hughie O'Donoghue; Intaglios by Antonio Romoleroux; Stroud College of Art, Stroud: INCprint (IMPRESS National Contemporary Print) Exhibition and Standing Out by Being Outstanding by Stroud College of Art students; Corinium Museum, Cirencester: Land Marks by Ottawa-Gatineau Connective; University of Gloucestershire, Cheltenham: Prints and Posters by Mark Unsworth; Deepspace Gallery, Cheltenham: Stone Litho by various artists
- March 2-24 Little Buckland Gallery, Broadway: 'The Horse' and 'Collagraphs' by Charles Shearer plus exhibitions by local talents
- March 9-22 The Hub Gallery, Christ Church, Cheltenham: Spiritual Landscapes by various printmakers
- March 5-30 Subscription Rooms, Stroud: A Sangre (Bleed) by Taller Experimental de Grafica, Cuba; Lansdown Hall & Gallery, Stroud: Collaborations by Aberystwyth Paper Press Print
- March 7-30 Parabola Arts, Cheltenham: The Silk Road by He Kun, Martyn Grimmer and others

For other events and workshops, visit www.gpchq.org.uk/impress_festival