

Printmaking, by a painter.

I made a series of photographic screen prints in the early 70s, and occasional mono-prints over the years, some on a residency in Canada, but I came to fine art printing fairly recently, invited by the Royal Academy Schools to work on an edition with them in 2011. I loved making *Ruby Tuesday* there with Hen Coleman. The crucial moment was when I asked for a second red to be pulled over the top right rectangle. I had planned for further stages, but that move suddenly opened up the space and everything clicked into place as I wanted, so I decided it was finished.

I think I kept postponing making prints because it is so different as a process from the way I normally work. I imagined it to be like painting back to front, or inside out. I paint strategically but also with a great deal of improvisation, and I enjoy the relationship between these polarities. I though printmaking would not allow such free play. It doesn't, but I have found it offers different possibilities, which have taken a while for me to grasp.

My second print was a smallish silk-screen (*Mesh*) at Advanced Graphics, for their *London Suite II*, in 2012, and something similar happened towards the end of the process. I had built a linear mesh of blues and reds, with three crescent shapes in solid colour as apertures. I wanted the space to twist more, and Bob Saich suggested simply glazing over one of the shapes, which I was amazed to find did the trick.

Then in 2013 I made my first colour etching (*Drift*) with Peter Kozovitz at Thumbprint Press, at the invitation of Other Criteria. This was quite an adventure, seeing the plates go through the press in turn, then struggling to get the right transparency for the dark oval that was to float above a multicoloured grid. I came in one morning rather despondently, after many failed attempts to get exactly the degree of translucency I needed. Pete had tried something new and I saw straight away it was right.

My most recent silk screens (*Bridge, Crossings, Toussaint I – IV, Echo, Line Dance, Centre Stage, Staith*) were made with Kip Gresham at Cambridge. He already knew my paintings and understood the adjustments I had to make in a print studio. It has become a regular event for me to spend a few days in the workshop of this sensitive master. Again, it is often one crucial late decision that resolves everything; in the case of *Bridge*, Kip's suggestion of glazing the navy grid that crossed over blocks of high-key colour made it work. This sheen was barely visible, but it animated the darks and helped them in their relationship with the strong colour beneath. Kip is a wonderful mixer of colour – we work together very intuitively until he finds what I'm looking for.

All these prints have something in common - my interest in how space can be constructed on a surface, opened up by colour relationships and various transparencies; how an image might eventually be arrived at through this exploration. They address many other sensations too, but it has been completely fascinating to discover how very different printmaking is from painting, and how my interests can be explored, expressed, in this other medium. The works are collaborations with artist-printmakers, whose expertise has been for a brief but luxurious time at my disposal; it was surprisingly good to be a raw learner again.

Some of my discoveries made during printmaking have unexpectedly fed back into painting. I went on to explore the motif of *Drift* in some large canvases; I made some paintings directly influenced by the contrasts of dark/ bright in *Bridge*, and *Staith*, and I am always hoping for that shock of resolution that happened in *Ruby Tuesday*, when one small move can make for a sudden conclusion.

Mali Morris, updated 2018