



Ed in his studio, 1950's

A Reflective Retrospective

My father, Ed, died nearly seventeen years ago in July 1987. He was sixty four and I just twenty four. After my mother Jean died in January 1980 Dad made valiant attempts to 'keep it all going' as he said, but the demands of working full time as head of Fine Art at Norwich Art School, commuting daily from our home in the depths of Suffolk, looking after me and the home – and of course still trying to produce work in his studio was a lot to juggle, and of course he desperately missed my mother who had first met him when he was sixteen and she fifteen. He said he had 'done all the work for her' and found it difficult to carry on without her support, understanding of him, the art world and what it was like to be an artist (she herself was a talented engraver who had gained a scholarship to the Royal College of Art aged seventeen). However, Dad did carry on working creating some beautiful charcoal drawings of the landscape near our home. He became keeper of the Royal Academy schools in 1985 after selling our home, a Victorian school – his home for over 23 years and moving to a tiny flat in the Royal Academy. Dad's health continued to decline both physically and spiritually and he died at his sister Ray's house in Chelmsford.

At the time of my fathers death his last major retrospective exhibition had just opened at the Norwich Castle Museum put on by the South Bank Centre and organised largely by Linda Morris who had worked with Dad in Norwich Art School. The exhibition ended in the Serpentine in May 1988. I remember being hugely proud of Dad as I saw posters on the Underground for the Serpentine Show on my way to and from work each day. The Serpentine Show was a great success and looked stunning in such a great space. It felt a fitting place for such a great artist to end up exhibiting.

I vowed to myself after the Serpentine Show to one day to put on a show for Dad myself, a personal exhibition of my favourite work and, I think, some of his finest work. (As it turns out this exhibition has led to a further two, one at the New Cut Gallery in Halesworth, Suffolk at the end of April and one at the Royal Academy in late November.)

Forever dogged by the 1950's 'Kitchen Sink School' label, I have endeavoured to show much later work from the mid 1970's until the early 1980's. The silkscreen prints were largely made in a relatively short period assisted by a master printmaker Mel Clark who worked at Norwich as did Jim Bernie another colleague and friend of Dad's from the Art School. The charcoal drawings were from various locations near our home in Edwardstone and his friend Janet Henderson's pond at Kettlebaston Hall.

This work is very personal to me as I remember Dad creating it. Large drawing boards would be chucked in the back of our old Bedford van, along with boxes of charcoal, felt and large sheets of paper and taken on holiday with us to Dorset where we stayed as a family at the artist John Hubbard's home and where we would go to the local beaches, Mum and I swimming and Dad further along the beach gazing at the sea and producing the drawings later to be come prints. The same happened in the summer Art school vacations in Suffolk with Dad to be found in the garden or fields or surrounding countryside looking, always intently, squinting I think to strengthen the outline of the images of what he saw before him. Always a 'looker' of nature I think he was moved by its beauty even in its decay hence his images of dead flowers and even once a dead bird I used to be morbidly fascinated by as a child which he kept in his studio! He used a beautiful quote on my mother's headstone by John Donne from A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning 'Thy firmness makes my circle Just, And makes me end where I begunne..' which I think is a deeply moving spiritual way of looking at life and the circle's symbolism of life.

It is with my greatest hopes that as well as showing my father's work to be among some of the best of the late twentieth century British artists, of fine draughtsmanship and beautiful, poetic, lyrical and profoundly moving images it also captures the essence of a wonderful and complex man, quite an enigma, always though true to himself full of honesty and integrity. A quiet, witty, highly intelligent, modest, sensitive man. This show is for you Dad, with all my love, always, your daughter Em x

Edward Middleditch

Edward Middleditch is not a print maker in the illustrious sense of Stanley William Hayter, Merlin Evans or Tapies, for instance, who have all created series after series of images which could not exist outside a graphic context: that is, their identity is inseparable from its graphic character, the drawn line being the form itself and no mere support or armature. But Middleditch is a creator of images which haunt the memory: candles and moths, palm trees, birds, fishes, flowers, particular stretches of landscape often particularised by their flat, uneventful discretion, and these images are haunting because of the massive simplicity of each form, in Middleditch's hands, so sharply projected in such a neutrally supportive context that the form as an image takes on something of self-consciousness and isolation of a symbol. There is a case for saying that Middleditch is a kind of latter-day symbolist, *pace* Mallarmé and Redon, but there is an even stronger case for saying that in its passionate searching out of the quintessential formal character of each image. Middleditch's touch of an artist goes beyond the usual specification of painting or drawing and achieves a special authority of its own. The authority is graphic and both tough and subtle: it is not *merely* graphic in the sense of something being drawn. The touch or mark is somewhere between painting and drawing and it is peculiar to Middleditch. In this way, his drawings have always had the rich concentration and fulsomeness of paintings, and his paintings have a graphic terseness and exactness.

The prints in the exhibition were all made in 1976 and although they are perfectly respectable as prints, decently printed on good paper and so on, they do not stay in the mind as prints: these images could just as well be one-off drawings or rather calm, ungestural, paintings. What stays in my mind is the huge *Sea Flower*, rearing up over the horizon like an iceberg or a mountain and so beautifully if strangely reflected in the pale blue glow of the sea. The owl glimmering and glowing in the dark blue-grey and light blue-grey shadows, the poetic frugality of snowdrops seen in unexpected terms of wintry black and white and grey, the delicate striations of frozen fields under the stars, the odd inflexions of the ocean in the seascapes and the hectic light and hard radiance in *Sunlit Beach*. It is possible that Middleditch made these images as prints in order to surprise himself: there is an element of invoking the unknown, the

unexpected, in printmaking, which no amount of technical command ever quite removes and it can be very instructive for the artist, as well as agreeable for us.

CHRONOLOGY

But the central point, of course, is that Middleditch is one of the finest artists working in England and anything he cares to show us is absorbing. Middleditch has never contrived paintings or drawings: he would not know how to manufacture a work of art. His vision is rare and exact and these prints provide us with some extremely agreeable musings on themes which have preoccupied Middleditch for years: creatures and plants and objects and places in the universe. Middleditch reminds us that these quiet images from a highly personal world still relate to a universe through the way in which some of the aesthetic principles of oriental art reinforce their presence, principles of order, formality, abstraction and spirit.

Bryan Robertson, 1981

From the Exhibition 'Books and Folios' Arts Council of Great Britain

EDWARD MIDDLEDITCH R.A.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1923 Born March 23, Chelmsford, Essex. Son of Charles Henry Middleditch and Esme Buckley. In the mid-20s the family moved to Nottingham.
- 1939 The family returned to Chelmsford where he attended King Edward VI Grammar School.
- 1942 Joined the army aged 19.
- 1944 Commissioned in the Middlesex Regiment. On active service in France and Germany.
- On the leave in Paris soon after the Liberation he bought a small book on Goya.
- 1945 Severely wounded. Awarded Military Cross. Invalided home. Sent to Burma.
- 1946 After the surrender of Japan he was sent to West Africa during Independence struggles.
- 1947 Invalided home after malaria. Demobbed aged 24. Married Jean Kathleen Whitehouse.
- 1948 Attended Regent Street Polytechnic.
- 1949 Attended Royal College of Art until 1952 on an ex-serviceman's grant. His contemporaries included Jack Smith, Malcolm Hughes and Derrick Greaves. They were taught by Ruskin Spear and John Minton.
- 1950 Visited Stuttgart to attend an international student conference. The comparison between German affluence and British austerity emphasised the futility of war. Royal Academy Summer Exhibition.
- 1951 'Artists of Fame and Promise' Leicester Galleries.
- 1952 JANUARY. 'Young Contemporaries' exhibition, RBA Galleries. John Minton wrote 'Fair to Middleditch' in the visitors' book.
- 'Eight Young Contemporaries', ICA, with Victor Willing, Alan Reynolds, Richard Hamilton, Alfred Daniels, Harold Cohen, Barbara Braithwaite and Michael Andrews.

- SEPTEMBER. 'Looking Forward: An Exhibition of British Realists',
Whitechapel Art Gallery.
- 1954 JANUARY. 'Some Rising Painters': Roland, Browse & Delbanco, with
Anthony Whishaw, Michael Fussell, William Roberts and Margaret Neve.
MARCH. First one man exhibition at the Beaux Arts Gallery. He showed nine
paintings and fifteen drawings.
'British Painting', Whitechapel Art Gallery, London.
'The New Realism in English Art', by Albert Garrett, published in *The Studio*,
June 1954.
- 1955 'Giovani Pittori', Gallerie Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, toured to Paris
under the auspices of the Congress for Cultural Freedom.
'Three Young Contemporaries' by John Minton on Derrick Greaves, Edward
Middleditch and Jack Smith published in *Ark* 13.
APRIL. Second prizewinner in the 'Daily Express Young Artists Exhibition'
with '*Chicken in a Flooded Stream*'. First prize won by Lucian Freud's '*Hotel
Room*'.
Commissioned to produce a print for Lyons Tearooms.
Exhibited '*Crowds at Earls Court*' at the 'Pittsburg International Exhibition'.
DECEMBER. 'Contemporary English Painting and Sculpture', Leeds.
Taught at Langford Grove near Barcombe Mills, Sussex.
Group exhibition at Heffers Bookshop, Cambridge, with Jack Smith,
Middleditch, Derrick Greaves and John Bratby. A review in *The Times*
14.2.1956 illustrated '*Sheffield Weir*'.
1956 FEBRUARY. One man exhibition at Beaux Arts Gallery of 17 paintings, 26
drawings and 6 prints.
XXVIII Venice Biennale 'Quattro Giovani Pittori Inglesi', with John Bratby,
Derrick Greaves and Jack Smith.
Royal Academy Summer Exhibition.
Painted a mural of the Seasons of Nuffield College with Derrick Greaves.
First visit to Spain.

- 1957 'The Beaux Arts Gallery and Some Young British artists' published in *The Studio*, October
 Royal Academy Summer Exhibition.
 'Six Young Painters', Arts Council of Great Britain exhibition also including Donald Hamilton Fraser, Anthony Fry, Peter Kinley, Jack Smith and Michael Wishart.
 'British Painting 1950 - 57', Arts Council of Great Britain.
 Drew in Blanes on the Costa Brava.
 Middleditch and Greaves families moved into a large old mansion, Ivy House, Buckinghamshire.
- 1958 FEBRUARY. One-man exhibition at the Beaux Arts Gallery. Showed twenty paintings and twenty-one drawings.
 Pittsburg International Exhibition
 Taught at Chelsea School of Art until 1963.
- 1959 '16 Paintings by 16 Painters: Aspects of Realism', AIA Gallery.
 'Spanish Landscape' (untraced) illustrated in *TES* April.
 'The Graven Image', Whitechapel Art Gallery.
- 1960 Taught at the Regent Street Polytechnic.
 APRIL-MAY. One-man exhibition at the Beaux Arts Gallery, showed twenty-six paintings and three woodcuts.
 Visited Spain, stayed for six months near Ronda in Andalusia.
 'British Painting 1700-1960', organised by the British Council and held in Moscow.
 'Young British Painters', Austria.
 'Critic's Selection', selected by Denys Sutton, Arthur Tooth & Sons.
- 1961 JUNE. One-man exhibition at Beaux Arts gallery of thirty Spanish Landscape drawings.
 'British Painting Today and Yesterday'.
 Taught at Cambridge School of Art and St Martin's School of Art.

- 1962 NOVEMBER-DECEMBER. One-man exhibition at the Beaux Arts Gallery, forty-four paintings and drawings, including further Spanish subjects and new English Landscape paintings.
Moved to live at the Old School House, Boxford Suffolk.
Gulbenkian Foundation Scholarship.
- 1963 His daughter Emily was born.
- 1964 Appointed Head of department of Fine Art at Norwich School of Art and within a year the department was recognised as one of the Diploma in Art and Design courses.
Arts Council Bursary
- 1965 Beaux arts Gallery closed.
OCTOBER. 'The Drawings of Edward Middleditch', published in *The Connoisseur*.
- 1966 OCTOBER-NOVEMBER. Two-man exhibition with Arnold Van Praag at Roland, Browse and Delbanco.
'Painters in East Anglia', Arts Council of Great Britain travelling exhibition.
'Drawing Towards Painting 2', Arts Council of Great Britain.
- 1968 Elected Associate Member of the Royal Academy.
'Helen Lessore and Beaux Arts Gallery', exhibition at Marlborough Fine Art.
Arts Council of Northern Ireland Bursary.
- 1968-72 Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions.
- 1969 'The English Landscape Tradition in the 20th century'. Camden Arts Centre.
One-man exhibition at The New Art Centre.
- 1970 'Works on Paper', Bear Lane Gallery, Oxford.
- 1971 One-man exhibition at The New Art Centre.
- 1972 Fischer Fine Art mixed exhibition.
- 1973 Elected a member of the Royal Academy.
'Landscape Painting', Serpentine Gallery with Norman Adams, Adrian Berg and John Hubbard.

- Visited Dorset and returned each year until 1976, to make further sea studies.
- 1974 NOVEMBER. One-man exhibition at The New Art Centre.
'British painting'74', Hayward Gallery.
- 1975 MAY. One-man exhibition at the Radlett Gallery.
Produced a large number of silkscreen prints in 1975 and 1976.
- 1976-79 Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions.
- 1976 'British Painting 1952 - 1977', Royal Academy.
- 1980 Death of his wife Jean.
- 1981 'Books and Folios', screenprints with Derrick Greaves and Robert Medley, Arts Council of Great Britain touring exhibition.
- 1981-84 Royal Academy Summer Exhibitions/
- 1983 'A Happy Eye', Norwich School of Art gallery.
- 1984 'The Forgotten Fifties', Sheffield City Art Galleries and tour.
Retired as head of Fine Art at Norwich School of Art, and elected Keeper of the Royal Academy, in charge of the Schools.
- 1985 A selector of the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition.
Profile published in the *RA Magazine*.
'Rocks and Flesh', Norwich School of Art Gallery and tour.
- 1986 Ill health forced him to resign as Keeper.
- 1987 'A Paradise Lost' Barbican Art Gallery.
- July 1987 Died in Chelmsford.

One Man Exhibitions

1954/56/58	Beaux Arts Gallery, London
1960/62	Beaux arts Gallery, London
1966	Rowland Browse & Delbanco, London
1969/71/74/78	New Arts Centre, Sloane Street, London
1975	Radlett Gallery, Hertfordshire
1987-88	Touring Exhibition 'Edward Middleditch', finishing at the Serpentine Gallery, London
1992	London, Gungah Institute
1994	The Gravel Jump, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London
1998	Cycle's Choice, Arthur Tooth's Gallery, London
2000	Beliefs In East Anglia, Arts Council touring Exhibition
2001	Traveling Towards Painting, Arts Council Touring Exhibition, organised by David Sylvester
2003	Refer to the Beaux Arts Gallery, Marlborough Fine Art, London
2004	Royal Academy Summer Exhibition
2009	The English Landscape Tradition in the 20 th Century, Chelsea Arts Centre, London
2010	Wynne's Paper Box, Paper Gallery, Oxford
2012	Fischer Fine Art, London
2013	Landscape, Serpentine Gallery, London
2014	British Painting '74, Hayward Gallery, London
2017	25 Years of British Painting, Royal Academy, London
2018	Mayra, Images by contemporary artists, Welsh Arts Council
2020	'Books and Folios', touring exhibition, Arts Council of Great Britain
2021	Prints - Books & Folios, Arts Council
2022	British Landscapes, Hayward Gallery, London
2024	'The Forgotten Filmmakers', Sheffield City Art Galleries and tour
2025	'Rocks and Flesh', Norwich School of Art Gallery and tour
2026	'A Paradise Lost', Barbican Art Gallery

Silkscreen Prints

Sunlit Beach II	available - 7 unframed, 1 framed	Edition of 25
Snowdrops II	available - 11 unframed, 1 framed	Edition of 25
Sunlit Pond	available - 7 unframed, 1 framed	Edition of 25
Frozen Field and Stars	available - 1 framed	Edition of 25
Wave	available - 10 unframed, 1 framed	Edition of 25
Iris II	available - 10 unframed, 1 framed	Edition of 25
Snowdrops	available - 1 framed	Edition of 20
Seaflower	available - 5 unframed, 1 framed	Edition of 25
Reflective Landscape	available - 10 unframed, 1 framed	Edition of 25
Pond in Dorset	available - 15 unframed, 1 framed	Edition of 20
Pond	available - 7 unframed, 1 framed	Edition of 10
Seascape I	available - 13 unframed, 1 framed	Edition of 30
Seascape	available - 8 unframed, 1 framed	Edition of 30
Sunlit Pond II	available - 6 unframed, 1 framed	Edition of 20
Sunlit Beach	available - 7 unframed, 1 framed	Edition of 25

Bibliography

- Douglas Cooper, Introduction to Catalogue of Exhibition at Beaux Arts Gallery 1958
- Sir John Rothenstein, British Art since 1900 (Phaidon 1962)
- J Wood Palmer, the Drawings of Edward Middleditch (The Connoisseur, October 1965)
- Anne Seymour – David Sylvester, Drawing towards Painting (Arts Council Catalogue 1967)
- Edward Lucie-Smith, Modern Movements in art since 1945 (Penguin 1969)
- Simon Field, Art and Artists, November 1969
- Edward Lucie-Smith and Patricia Field, Art in Britain (J M Dent 1970)
- Frances Spalding, British Art since 1900 (Thames and Hudson 1968)
- Profile published in Royal Academy Magazine 1985