

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

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