

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