Introduction

‘and Printmaking’ is a large scale and ambitious exhibition that includes the work of 135 contemporary British artists. Although the theme of the exhibition is ‘printmaking’; painting, sculpture, photography and conceptual work are among the 250 exhibits. The organisers, David Beever and Julian Watmough, set out last year to plan an exhibition that would avoid specialisation and include the work of artists from all disciplines. They wanted to create an opportunity to illustrate the original and diverse ways traditional printmaking techniques are applied by artists today, and to present a comprehensive picture of the variety of techniques that are available. Artists were given a free hand to invent or adapt any methods of making a print that seemed appropriate, or else to interpret freely the theme of the show and produce a related painting or three dimensional piece. The only conditions imposed related to size and numbers of works allowed. All work submitted has been shown.

The exhibition has been arranged through a system of invitations. The organisers contacted seven artists with whom they had exhibited at Waterloo Gallery in an exhibition of printmaking in 1980 and whom they felt would be interested in the aims of the planned exhibition. This group of artists distributed a number of invitations to printmakers, painters, sculptors, photographers and conceptual artists throughout the country, bearing in mind the theme of the show. From these first invitations came many more interesting proposals for the show, and the list of invited artists increased to the present number. The exhibition has been financed by contributions from the artists, sponsorship and catalogue advertisements. No money was available at the planning stage so this ruled out the possibility of arranging the exhibition through open entry and a selection panel; slide applications were also avoided as the organisers were aware that they can be misleading. An emphasis has been placed on contacting artists personally, to enlist their support and to describe the aims of the show.

Looking through the exhibits as they arrived, I was impressed by the variety of the work submitted. A quarter of the artists have produced editionable prints; etchings, lithographs, woodcuts, linocuts, silkscreens etc. in their traditional forms and intermixed. Over half the show consists of mixed media: print used in conjunction with painting, drawing and sculpture, monoprints, assemblages and collages. The remainder of the work can be broadly described as conceptual and includes drawing, painting, sculpture, installations and videos ‘about’ print. In my opinion the exhibition has fulfilled the original intentions of the organisers to avoid categorisation, and demonstrate that ‘printmaking’ can be interpreted as anything from the imprint of a hikers boot to a carefully embossed blank canvas. Much of the work is entertaining and imaginative and the space available at Waterloo Gallery has been used to its full potential.

A short time ago it became clear that ‘and Printmaking’ would be the last exhibition at this Gallery; the building is due for demolition. Apart from the obvious disappointment felt by everyone involved with the Gallery and studios; part of the excitement on initiating this exhibition was the idea that the Gallery would become a regular venue for large scale exhibitions such as this one. I hope that the Waterloo artists and Chrissie Iles, the Gallery administrator, can find alternative space to carry on.

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