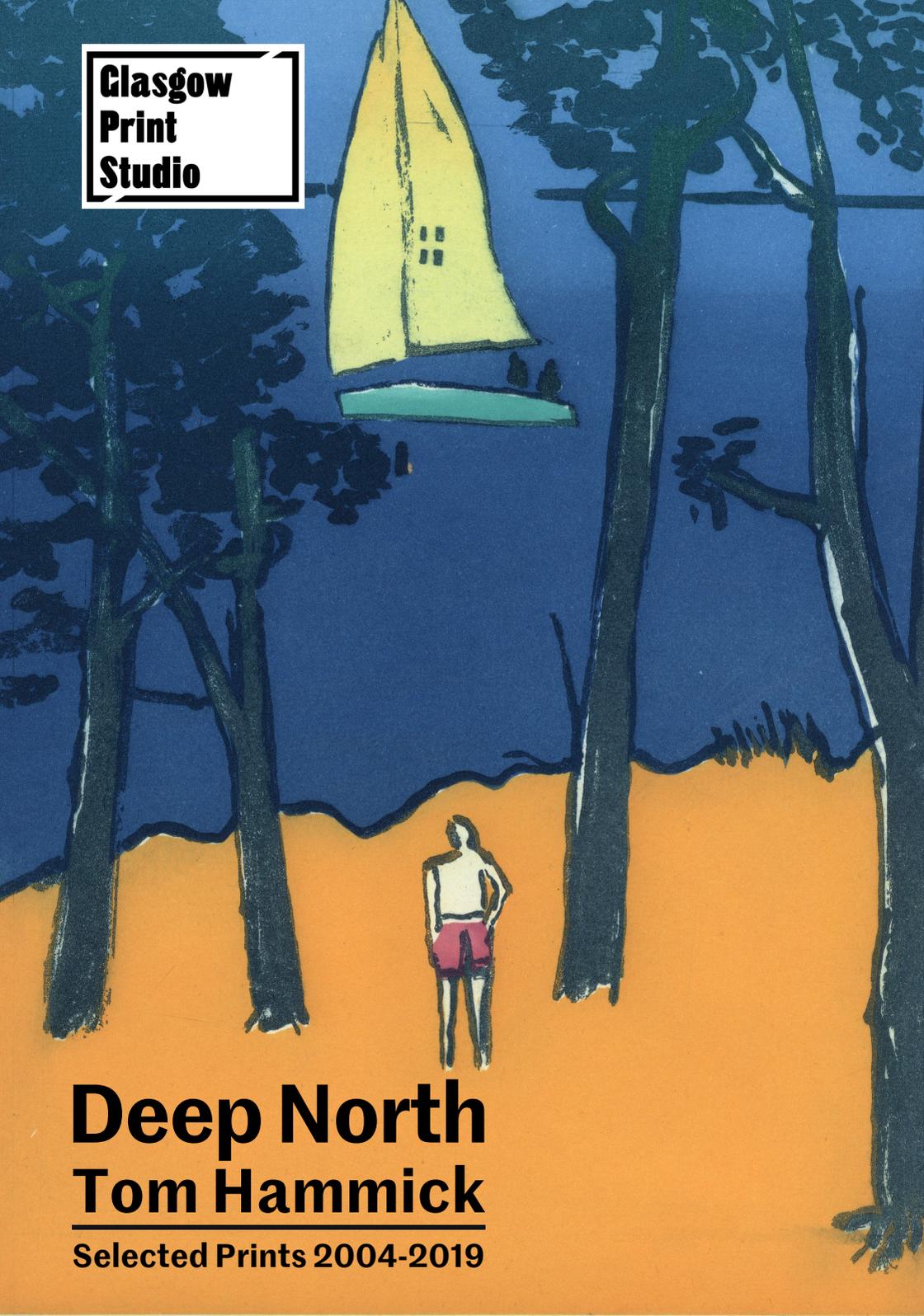


**Glasgow
Print
Studio**



Deep North

Tom Hammick

Selected Prints 2004-2019

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Writing about printmaking for an exhibition in a great print studio such as this, with all your history, is a bit like talking to a gathering of great poets about poetry as an enthusiast. I see myself here as a clunky devotee, trying to keep up with a series of print languages that are out of reach for me technically. My work is often counter-intuitive, cobbled together, and all too often over egged. Perhaps what I can bring to this vast subject though is my passion for this form of art practice and a particularly painterly way of defying the logic, battling the received ideas of process and building a print that takes on board an artist-printmaker's magic and becomes a work of collaboration where the rules of proper procedure are at times turned a little upside down.

My Mum and Dad collected prints alongside paintings. They had, while being visually quite mainstream, an intuitive sense of design and craft, so the pictures that surrounded us as siblings were often bold and simple and full of an open ended narrative. Stanley Spencer's *Marriage at Cana* made me hear the chairs scrape on the floor at the gathering of a party round a table. Liz Frink's paddling seabird, gave me an intoxicating feeling of buoyancy. Anthony Gross's ravishing line etching of an empty railway station in the South of France, conjured up intense heat and the sound of crickets in the sunshine. Ben Nicolson's Cornish cutter, suspended above the rooftops of St Ives, made me marvel at his economy of line in creating such a strong sense of a specific place. Hockney's pool and diving board, and the way the ink in his lithograph kissed the paper, made me marvel at his shorthand for water.

These influences went deep for me, but they lay dormant beyond an appreciation for the form when I went to exhibitions, until years later when I eventually got into Camberwell in 1987 as a mature student to paint. In those days, we were encouraged to spend one day a week, a Friday, in the print studio. (Why were print studios, with all their heavy kit, always on the top floor of an art school?) As soon as I entered, after four flights of stairs, I was smitten. The smells got me first. Soft and hard grounds smelling like chocolate. The fizz and sting of nitric acid on my fingers. The tiny bubbles as a zinc plate got etched and the smell of slightly rancid gum Arabic on the cheesecloth in lithography.

The noise of the vacuum clicking off and on and the zip sound of the squeegee distributing ink through the snap of the taught nylon in the silkscreen end of the studio. The back to front way that every print, made with every process, came to fruition. What a relief to use another part of my brain to build an image away from the vicious shit-or-bust, seat of your pants unforgiving method involved in the painting

Tom Hammick working in Glasgow
Print Studio, July 2019.



studio! In print I realised early on it was an antidote to painting and I could Zen out with process, and that if I could focus on the timeline of what came next, then the imagery just might take care of itself. It was a relief for me to end the week solving problems, almost as a joiner might, when building to an irregular shaped room.

I soon learnt that the limits of my technical knowhow enabled me to reduce the range of mark-making. This was very liberating for me, where painting was all about being set free in a sweetie-shop of infinite choice, printmaking enabled me to reduce my prints to very simple arrangements of flat tone to establish the most basic relationships between figure and ground. While I made my simplistic pictures, I started devouring Degas' monotypes, and early on fell under the spell of Munch's woodcuts, etchings, dry-points and lithographs.

When I left Camberwell, after continuing on a part time MA in Printmaking, after a brief and wonderful term in Nova Scotia at NSCAD my father died and I inherited that Pool lithograph. Thinking David Hockney would understand, I sold it through my friend Gordon Samuel, and bought my first little press with the proceeds, and began to simultaneously make simple prints at the same time as I painted. This arrangement of meshing together imagery in both visual languages, has continued to this day - though now I am fortunate enough to have separate studios for each.

All my images start from an amalgam of personal experiences and reflections of family life, newspaper cuttings, plots from plays and operas, lines from poems; I am interested in re-creating props and staging as a framework for stories in a setting as a way of describing what it is like to be human. So all my works have a specific narrative element to them; however veiled. There is a hook that gives me the impetus to make pictures that I hope are open ended enough that they can be personalised and become appropriated by others.



Silver Dart, 2004

Etching with chine collé

50 x 54 cm

Edition of 25

The earliest work in this exhibition is from 2004 with an etching made at Thumbprint Studios in London called *Silver Dart*. I had travelled to Baddeck, Cape Breton in Nova Scotia, the home of the great Alexander Graham Bell. Bell was on the design team for this early plane and had been trying out motorised heavier-than-air aircraft at Baddeck since the turn of the century. In my image I imagine Bell watching his friend and co-designer John McCurdy fall out of the sky in front of his house in August 1909 as the Silver Dart took to the sky in cross winds that were too strong. I remember at the time thinking that this fragile craft, crumpling out of the sky like paper, was a good metaphor for Graham Bell's struggle in life as an extraordinary inventor and entrepreneur.



***Hide and Seek in Japanese Garden*, 2007**

Etching with aquatint & chine collé

57 x 76 cm

Edition of 25

Hide and Seek in a Japanese Garden started from an old National Geographic cutting I found in a junk shop in Newhaven. It was a challenge having so much going on with the fewest plates possible, inking up à la poupée and adding different odd shaped coloured chine-collé papers to the mix. It is a rare print in that I am still proud of it today, and it still shocks me like the details of an M R James ghost story with two of my children running around the garden trapped in the scene. Those of us who are parents share the trepidation of watching children take early steps exploring the world around them. I like the edginess of this image, claustrophobic, with no horizon line as a leveller, just foliage everywhere for some feared voyeur to hide in, and a pond of oversized orange carp.



Three Beds, 2009
Reduction woodcut
66 x 91 cm
Edition of 10

Two Beds and *Three Beds*, 2009 were two woodcuts made at home in my then minute print studio. I had swapped my old Rochat press for something larger and more versatile; a Polymetaal press designed by Hugo Boss in Holland, with rollers that could be raised on springs to accommodate the making of relief prints as well as intaglio. There was no room to swing a cat, and we had to combine the press bed as workshop, cutting bench, printing machine, inking plate, paper tearing surface, and drawing block!

Three Beds 2009, shown here, came out of imagining refugees in the UK escaping the Second Iraq War which was still under American and British occupation at the time. It also came in part from drawings made in the vegetable patch at home in East Sussex. The (raised) beds I hope double up as unplanted veg patches and hint at a series of three graves in line. The mother's daughter runs across them like a dervish as she watches on in her burka under a particularly English damson tree in blossom.



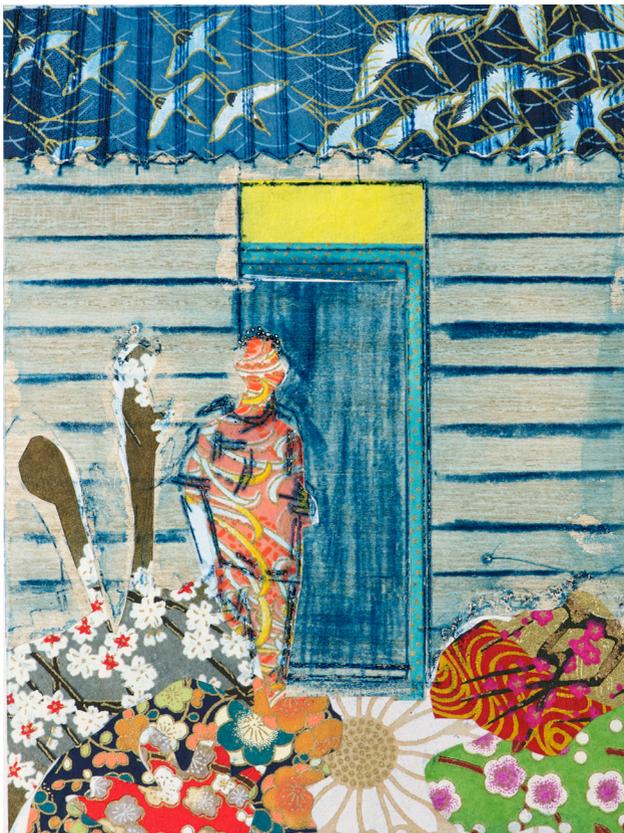
Nocturnal Paintings seen from a Garden, 2012

Edition variable reduction woodcut

80 x 120 cm

Edition of 12

This woodcut was lovely to make after finding a really nice batch of grainy oak veneer at the wood yard. It's a night and day image, as often I work through the night into the morning. The window paintings were probably inspired by Matisse's *Red Studio* 1911 and are reduced versions of the paintings that were going on at the time.



Weekender, 2013

Chine collé drypoint

36.5 x 29 cm

edition variable of 15

Stephen Chambers made a set of ravishing etchings with chine-collé in 2012 and they inspired me to make this series, using Japanese papers and the simplest of lines scratched on zinc plates as a simple matrix to bring the various flat patterns together. There were hundreds of tiny pieces of paper cut to stencils by my children laid out on tables in the studio. This image came from a photograph of Derek Jarman gardening outside his weekend cottage at Dungeness. If you go there you will see that wild flowers have spread and now proliferate all over the shingle near the ominous mass of buildings and razor wire that are what constitutes the nuclear power station.



Night Cabin, 2014

Reduction woodcut in 4 parts

162 x 123 cm (overall)

Edition of 10

The *Night Cabin* woodcut was made on a residency in St. John's Newfoundland. There is a fabulous print workshop there called St Michael's and we had to work to a small press so we made this image from four plates butted together. This woodcut partly came about in response to a fishing trip on the Salmonier river. There I found a handmade memorial etched on a zinc plaque nailed to a tree dedicated to Paddy Furey and Jonny Tibbo by their friends after losing their lives in a hunting accident. This conjured up an image in my head of a young man by a cabin in the woods at the end of the trail wearing a trademark Fox racing T- shirt, scrambling bikes being a passion for young men in rural Canada. The tree above him, a sort of explosion of fireworks, was a way of alluding to their passion for the outdoors and their love of the natural world.



***Walther in the Forest*, 2015**

Etching

50 x 40 cm

Edition of 25

As artist in residence at The Coliseum, this etching was part of a series of works made exploring the operas during John Berry's acclaimed final season as Artist Director at ENO. Here Walther von Stolzing, the self taught singer hero of Wagner's Opera *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* is walking to the singing competition through the woods from his castle in the Black Forest in Bavaria to Nuremberg while listening to birdsong. I wanted to try to convey him as the innocent Wagner portrayed, in top hat and cloak incongruously surrounded by the forest while in his best clothes.



Outskirts (Day), 2015

Woodcut

121 x 158 cm

Edition of 12

This rather Lynchian woodcut was made with Robert White at Sanguine Studios in London. The same plates were inked up dark and light for night and day versions of the same image. It owes a lot of debt to a filmic 'Peeping Tom' tradition of looking into the windows of houses as you pass them.



Gallery Woman, 2017
Monoprint
65 x 89 cm

Monotypes are the lynchpin between paintings and prints, and apart from the pure joy of their making, fast and immediate, they are a constant surprise as they come out back to front on the press.



Cloud Island, 2017
Reduction woodcut
121 x 171 cm
Edition of 16

This was another technical nightmare to make at Peacock Print Studios in Aberdeen. As an early image in my *Lunar Voyage* series, (17 woodcuts depicting a lonely dystopian journey to the Moon and back) it was important that the colours flickering through the trees were registered precisely to help generate the feeling of a prelapsarian Eden, an earthy paradise from which this madman artist/voyager decided to leave. But we couldn't get the registration to work as the paper stretched and this compounded mis-registration over the width of the woodcut. We had to resort to a 'boggit' form of printmaking, by laying down the blocks onto the previously printed paper face up on the bed of the press. It worked eventually but we lost a lot of prints in the process as the blocks slid off under too much pressure from the roller.



Sky Garden, 2018

5 panel reduction woodcut

122 x 410 cm

Edition of 7

Sky Garden is a monumental woodcut in five panels. Oak veneers were again used to emphasise the grain of the print. A central figure, seen from behind, looks down on a miniature walled garden full of weed-like plants, I hope reminiscent of verdant foregrounds seen in Northern Renaissance painting and of an idiosyncratic Japanese garden. Pictorially, *Sky Garden* also conjures up the arrangement of organic forms on a flat picture plain found in Matisse's late cutouts.

The wide, lateral scale of the print, without an externalising horizon from end to end, returns and envelops the image round the spectator. Standing close, in effect, one is unable to see the periphery of the image. I hope this hot-wires the viewer to the figure in the woodcut, so the garden becomes an abstracted photo-bleach, like a flared after image, caused by looking at bright light. In this way the woodcut becomes, as much an internalised vision within the mind, as anything conjured up from reality. The garden is in her head, and through looking, as she is substituted by the viewer, the garden works it's way into our heads.



Tom Hammick and workshop assistant Alistair Gow at work in Glasgow Print Studio.

Thank you so much to all the team at Glasgow Print Studio for making this show happen and for helping me understand so many new ways to make etchings. For James' patience choosing the prints from over thirty years of print-practice. For John keeping me on a long leash and taking me out to supper numerous times. For Claire and her heavenly gifts of chocolate and ensuring I had a roof over my head each night while visiting. And for Al and Ian, working so hard and collaborating at the sharp end of the studio – without whom...and for Sophie Gibson who came up with designing the poster catalogue at the very last minute. Once again thank you! And last but not least, for Sophie Hall at Flowers, who I will miss profoundly, and my partners in crime in the London studio, Sophie Ansell, Jane, Meera, Jimmy, Charlie, Sasha and Koodge.

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Front cover:

Sail Boat (*working title*), 2019

Colour etching, 30 x 41 cm

Edition of 30

Published by Glasgow Print Studio