

MONOPRINTING, EMOTION, AND THE HUMAN FORM

Chloe Barnes

BEFORE THE MA

Before the MA, I studied BA Illustration at UWE, graduating in 2019. During my undergraduate degree, I wanted to be a book illustrator, and I produced speculative illustrations for *Lord of the Flies* [Fig 1] and *Geek Love* [Fig 2]. My interest in these characters, their stories and their psychology were matched by my desire to experiment with different mediums in the quest to find my unique visual language. In a tutorial with my tutors, I remember when they exclaimed - "You're a process person!". I've always loved experimenting, but no medium or illustration style truly felt like 'me', until I ventured into printmaking. I don't need to tell you that the term 'printmaking' covers a plethora of different processes, but there was one I was particularly drawn to, and that was monoprinting.

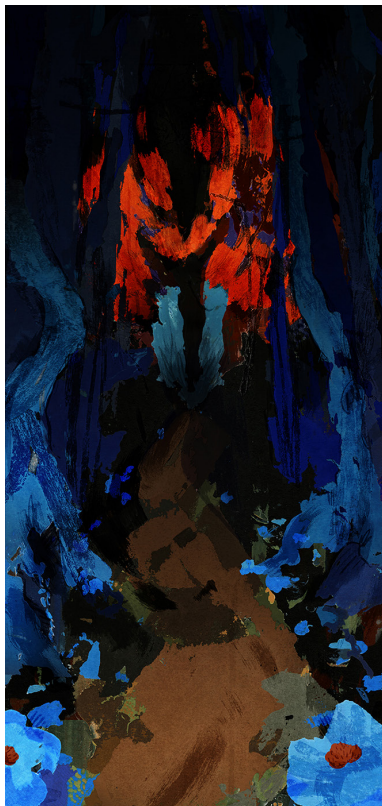


Figure 1



Figure 2

Unpredictable by nature, there are restrictions in the monoprint process, including the time frame you work in, the layering of inks and the uncontrollable transformation it goes through when it is printed onto paper but destroyed from the matrix. Although unconventional, I found the medium exhilarating and it allowed me to work spontaneously and intuitively – something which has become a necessity to my practice today.

Whilst there are several ways to produce a monoprint, on my BA, I specialised in silkscreen monoprinting - I used palette knives to paint inks on the screen before using a squeegee to push it onto paper. To regain the control I lost in the print process, I scanned my monotypes into my computer and collaged them to produce resolved digital illustrations. After graduating, I spent time developing a commercial illustration practice using the methodology I developed at university. However, before long, I realised that the work I was producing did not emotionally resonate with me, and I longed for a final output that was handmade and physical. I wanted to be an artist who exhibited in galleries and produced work that

Figure titles and information:

Figure 1: 'Shadow and Tall Trees', 2019. Speculative illustration for the novel, *Lord of the Flies*
 Figure 2: Speculative book cover design for the novel, *Geek Love*

mattered to me, not for a creative brief. So, I diverged from becoming a book illustrator and decided to apply to the MA Multi-Disciplinary Printmaking course to develop my “painting with print” process and redefine myself as an exhibiting artist.

DURING THE MA

Within the first couple of months of the MA, I discovered light/dark field monoprinting, which used an etching press. I achieved more painterly and expressive marks. I was also able to produce a wide variation of tones, in comparison to the flat colours in my silkscreen monotypes. As I discovered when writing my dissertation, there is a lack of research about monoprinting - due to its association as a form of experimentation, not a final output. Despite this, I felt it had so much potential if I combined oil painting theory with the technical knowledge surrounding an etching press.

Alongside my technical experimentation, I reflected on what I wanted to say in my art and the themes that thread through my practice. If you spoke to my tutors, they would tell you that this was my Achilles heel – where I was uncertain and perhaps unconfident in what I wanted to say, I hid behind processes. So, I referred to my inspirations, including expressionist artists Egon Schiele, Francis Bacon and Tracey Emin, and Paula Rego. It became clear that emotion was a driving factor in my work. After all, it was the main reason I did not want to become a commercial illustrator. For my dissertation, I investigated and answered the question, “Do the limitations and inherent lack of complete control in monoprinting produce emotionally resonant portraits?” – the answer being yes. With this in mind, I became interested in depicting the psyche/ inner identity of a being and exploring how I can emulate this when portraying the human form through monoprint. Like how Emin reflects on moments in her life, I started to look inward, reflecting on the relationship I have with my body, the people around me and the world I live in. I was particularly interested in portraying my experience as a woman, wanting to emit female empowerment through my work.

Combining technique with my interests, I produced “Self-Portrait, Three States” – a large-scale, vivid red monotype of a figure transitioning from standing to being in a ball (or vice versa). In this work, I explored the low self-esteem I felt towards my body, heightened by the chronic eczema I was suffering from. The final piece evolved from four previous monoprints. With each attempt, I altered my approach to the image-making processes, searching for the right feeling I sought to capture.

In addition to this artwork, I also made portraits of witches, masked children, and a series based on Atalanta, the Greek Heroine of Hunting – a figure whose story resonated with me, my upbringing and the challenges women continue to face in the current world.

Throughout the MA, I also started to apply for open calls to exhibit my work. I was fortunate to show two monotypes at the Woolwich Contemporary Print Fair 2022 and the Southbank Miniprint Exhibition,



Figure 3

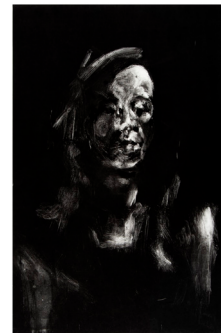


Figure 4

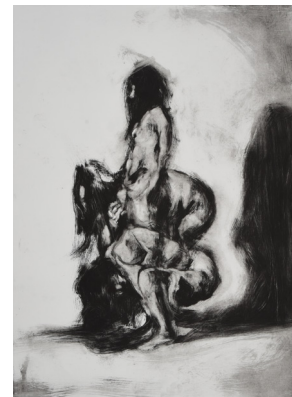


Figure 5



Figure 6

Figure 3: *'Embrace, Surrender, Worship'*, 2021. Early light-field monotype.
 Figure 4: *'Self Portrait'*, 2021. Early light-field monotype.
 Figure 5: Variation 2 of *'Self-Portrait, Three States'*, 2022 Monotype on Hahnemühle paper
 Figure 6: Variation 4 of *'Self-Portrait, Three States'*, 2022 Monotype, chalk and charcoal on Hahnemühle paper

where I won the Intaglio Award. As I reached the end of the course, I felt assured that my practice was heading in the right direction. Although I will probably evolve my visual language throughout my life, I now had the medium, skills, knowledge and platform to achieve the aspirations I set myself when I started the course.

AFTER THE MA

Since graduating, I moved to London to develop my network and pursue more opportunities to exhibit. My work has been shown at the Royal Scottish Academy, Woolwich Contemporary Print Fair 2023 and the Royal Society of British Artists Bicentennial Exhibition, where I won the Hahnemühle Fine Art Award. This year, I was shortlisted for the ACS Studio Prize and a finalist for the Margate Art Prize, judged by Tracey Emin! I am optimistic and excited for my career that lies ahead.

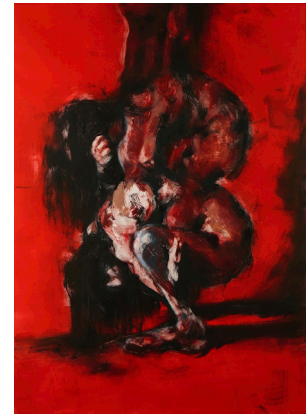


Figure 7



Figure 11



Figure 11

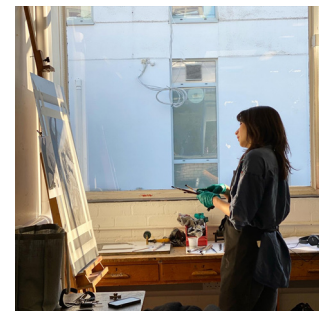


Figure 8

AUTHOR

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I am an award-winning London-based artist creating expressive, figurative monoprints about identity, emotion and the psyche. Inspired by the experience of women, including my own, I aim to empower women to see themselves in new ways, outside of the conformation of traditional gender roles, authority and power dynamics.

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Figure 9



Figure 10

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Figure 7: 'Self-Portrait, Three States', 2022 (Final variation) Monotype, watercolour, chalk and charcoal on Hahnemühle Paper
 Figure 8: Studio set-up at Bower Ashton, UWE
 Figure 9: 'Just a Couple of Witches', 2022 Monotype on Somerset Satin Paper
 Figure 10: 'Bike Ride', 2022 Monotype and charcoal on Somerset Satin Paper
 Figure 11: Photo at the PV for the ACS x Gurr Johns Studio Prize
 Figure 12: Install photo of 'Just a Couple of Witches' at Woolwich Contemporary Print Fair 2023

IMAGE GALLERY

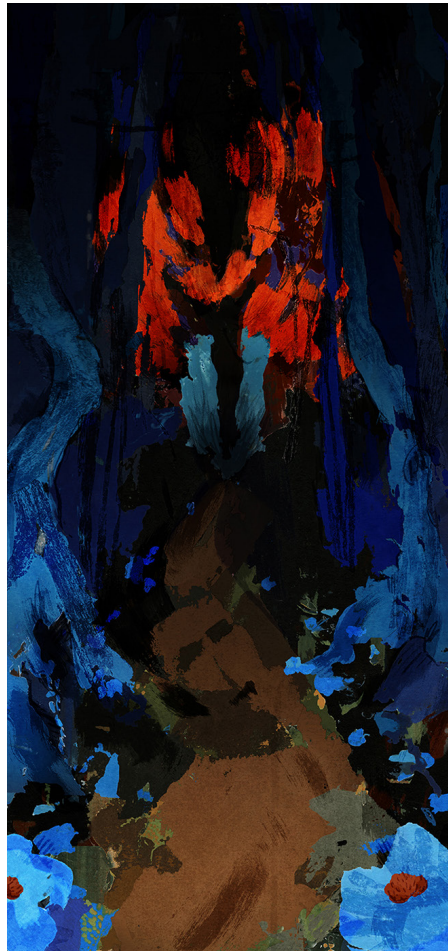


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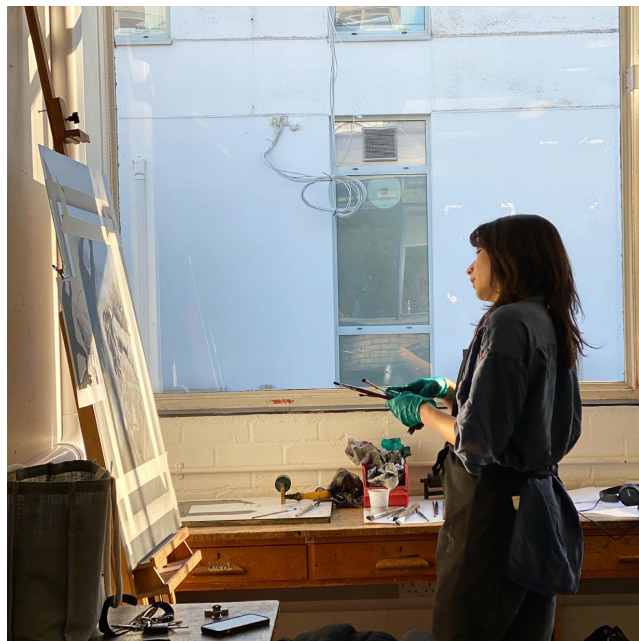


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