

**INTRODUCTION BY IAN RITCHIE FOR THE BOOK 'STRATTON
STREET SERIES' BY NORMAN ACKROYD, PUBLISHED BY
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IAN RITCHIE

Norman Ackroyd's work is exceptional. He has been described as "a truly remarkable artist who is to etching what Turner was for watercolour." by William Packer in the Financial Times.

Like Alan Bennett, his father was a Leeds butcher, and because his natural talent is so evidently strong, it provided him with a passport out of Yorkshire. Nevertheless, his origins are never hidden - an accent, a passion for playing and breathing cricket, cooking and strong family ties.

Norman is fundamentally an untamed spirit, and like Turner before him, loves to explore his art in the landscape itself, not being confined to his studio. For Norman, this involves taking both acid and copper plate, as well as watercolours and graphite into the environment he wants to capture. He searches for the essence and as a result there is a spontaneity rather than literal representation, despite his acute ability to make evident the physical landscape he is capturing. His character portrays the vast and dramatic wilderness that is so hard to find in our islands. Maybe, it is in the light and water of the sky with the merest hint of land, that he best feels the scale of both his ideas and work.

If the word master still has any meaning in our increasingly shallow world, then Norman is a master artist and a master etcher. He knows his methods and materials, his processes and printing presses as second nature, but nothing inhibits him from stretching his knowledge through exploration and experimentation. Watching his instinctive inventiveness over the last decade in his studio or on a boat in the Atlantic Ocean off Ireland, has given me great pleasure. There is drama in thinking of him working copper plate directly with nitric acid at sea - the acid safe in a plastic bottle, the copper plate in a tray to catch any errant acid and salt water to hand as first aid. It is quite magical to watch, discuss, feel and capture the same land or seascape with him. He learned from past masters such as Julian Trevelyan, but he also searched out Picasso's ink manufacturer, and not simply for the ink! And like most masters, they are at ease and generous in passing on knowledge. I have learned from him.

He asked my advice when tendering for the work at Stratton Street - cautious and canny enough to limit the risks of being 'damaged' should he win. He bid, he won and he delivered. This and the finished work reveal much about him, but also demand that we applaud the client and his architects. For these panels are not art add-ons, but a

contemporary interpretation of a dado rail placed to help define an architectural perspective along the streets. Only when we slow down in this faster-faster world do we first notice, and then get drawn into the art that surrounds us. This work, albeit subtle, is more evident by its scale and encourages us to pause and look in an unexpected place at unexpected landscapes.

The Stratton Street stainless steel plates is Norman jumping out of his studio yet again - etching them in Cambridgeshire, and then placing his work in the open air of the west end! He has experimented outdoors before - a small stainless steel work at the Accumulator Tower in Limehouse Basin.

I believe that his work places him in the Yorkshire pantheon of truly great artists of the 20th and 21st centuries - among Henry Moore, David Hockney, and Alan Bennett.

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