



CREATE

# *Pressing* MATTERS

WORDS BY MERCEDES SMITH





*A unique collection of etchings, on show  
this December, asks the questions we  
are all talking about.*

**T**his December, Polzeath's Whitewater Gallery presents Twenty Twenty, a unique collection of works by printmaker Sarah Seddon. Printmaking is one of the most complicated and misunderstood of all art mediums; it is also one of the oldest, dating back to the fabric prints of 5th century China, and to the early 1400s in Europe, when wood or metal plates were first carved, inked and pressed to illustrate religious texts at a time when the new and widespread availability of paper made printing possible.

Today, the term 'printmaking' is often confused with the mass production of industrial or digital print, where thousands of images are created instantly by machine, all of them identical, impersonal and disposable. In the arts, however, printmaking is a skill that has remained relatively unchanged during its thousand year history, and involves the labour intensive process of carving a wooden block or metal plate, or cutting a paper or fabric stencil by hand, before inking it up and pressing it onto a surface, sometimes many times over in

subtly adjusted layers, to create an image. It is a skill that takes patience, and years of study to perfect.

Sarah Seddon studied Fine Art printmaking at Falmouth University. Her exquisitely detailed prints are developed using traditional metal plate etching techniques, and reflect the depth of detail possible in contemporary handmade print. They also demonstrate her extraordinary ability as a printmaker, achieving fine drawing and delicate tonal qualities through the skilled application of aquatint.

"Etching is an exciting medium," says Sarah. "It is a method that evolves from a drawing, through thinking about tones, process, texture and sometimes colour." Sarah works using the traditional 'Intaglio' process, where lines are etched into a metal plate and then filled with ink, before the surface of the plate is wiped clean, and dampened paper is pressed against the plate so the paper picks up the ink held in the etched cuts. "I enjoy the process of pressing the ink into the etched plate," she says. "I love the wiping away of ink to produce each



TOP  
'A Winter Night'

ABOVE LEFT  
'Misbehaving'

ABOVE RIGHT  
'Sleep Overcomes Them'





## CREATE



image, and the anticipation of putting your plate through the press to see what evolves on paper. My particular interest is in the aquatint process, which means putting tones into the plate, giving depth and atmosphere to the final image.” While Intaglio lines are cut into a plate by coating it with acid resistant wax, scratching away the wax to form a drawing, then immersing the plate in acid, the tonal qualities of Aquatint are achieved by exposing the plate to acid through a fine layer of granulated resin. “It can be very rewarding, but it is also very challenging. Each plate is unpredictable, and the puzzle is to work out how to achieve the effect you want.”

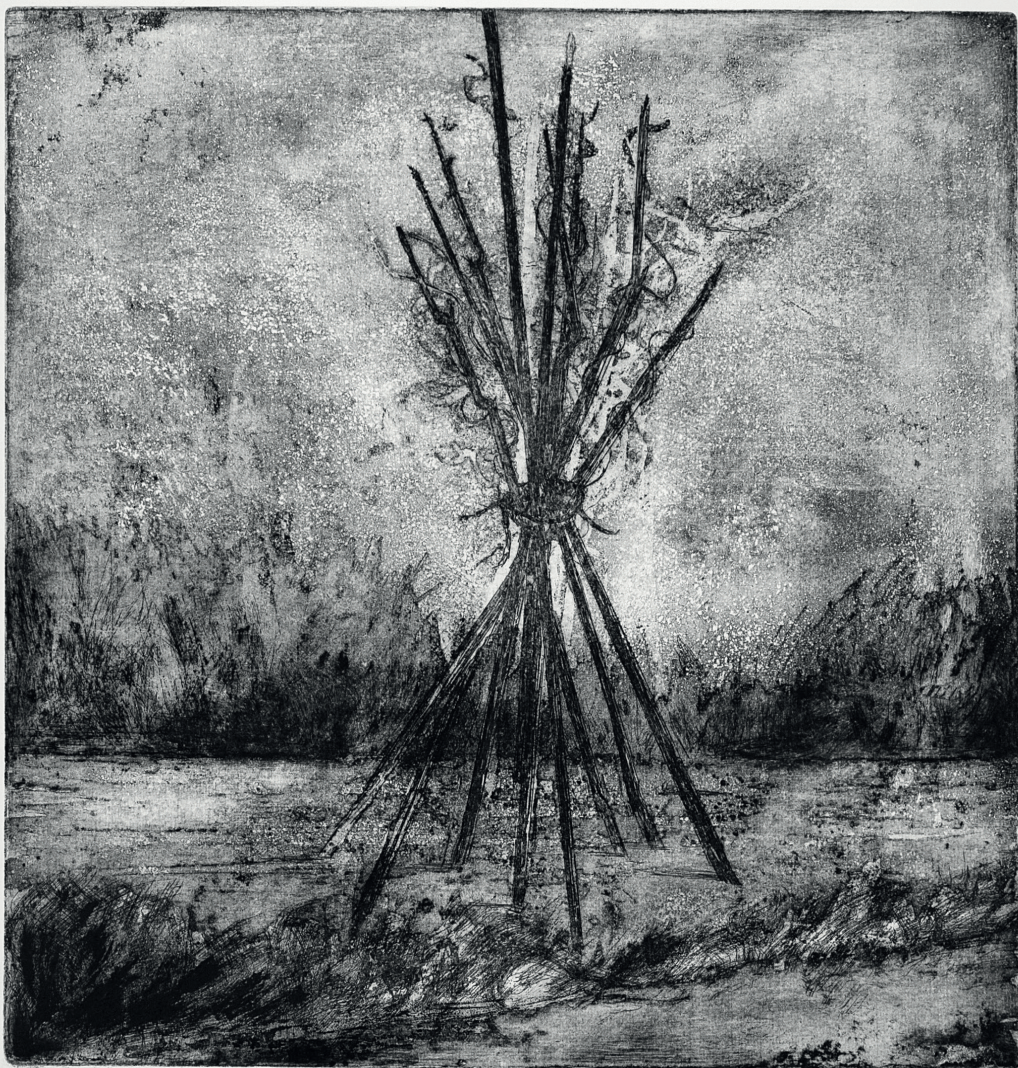
The collection Sarah will be exhibiting in December has been created over the last twelve years, and is inspired by Francisco de Goya’s Los Caprichos series of satirical etchings and aquatints, which the Spanish artist created between 1797 and 1798 in response to the political corruption and social ills of the time. Paralleling Goya’s collection in spirit, and in

some cases responding directly to individual works, Sarah has created a series of etchings that address our own time in history. Set in the innocuous setting of an allotment, her images use wit, drama and visual metaphor to expose the social predicaments we are facing in the early 21st century. “Goya was a pioneer in the development of aquatint” says Sarah, “and he is still considered one of the best artists of the technique. I visited the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid, where I saw Goya’s plates and his press, which was very inspiring. His use of tone in Los Caprichos, and his compositions and use of atmosphere, gave me inspiration and a way of expressing my own thoughts and reactions to everyday life. All these prints have been a reaction - in a very personal way - to events that have affected me and are not always easy to express in words. Some of these include a close friend’s marriage break up, issues regarding respect for the elderly, allusions to power, or the problem of teenagers and alcohol. These are just a few of my inspirations.”



TOP  
‘Sarah Seddon’ - self-portrait

ABOVE  
‘Evening Temptation’



8/10

Can't anyone untie us?

Sarah Sedda 2010

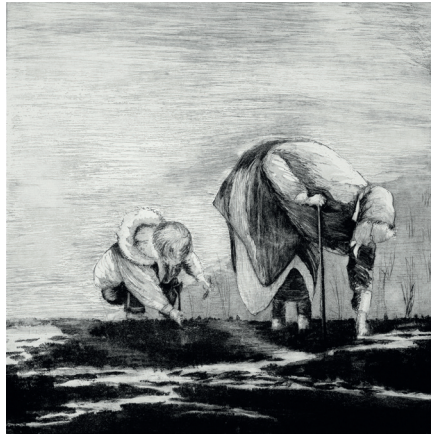


ABOVE RIGHT  
'Can't Anyone Untie Us'



## C R E A T E

Some of these works, inevitably, respond to Brexit and the challenges it has thrown up. With regard to the pandemic, however, associated works have yet to be resolved, or even begun in this ongoing collection. “At first, during lockdown, it was difficult to concentrate. The situation was unsettling,” explains Sarah. “I did make artwork related to the pandemic, but this was more experimental. Also, I don’t have acid at home for etching a plate, as it needs to be used in a safe environment and at a certain temperature. For this I go to the John Howard Print Studio in Penryn, but that simply wasn’t possible at the time.” Twelve years of work on this collection, however, has meant constant commitment and constantly staying open to inspiration. “I am always thinking about my art,” says Sarah, “and I try to be creative as often as possible. Putting on an exhibition like this involves a lot of preparation. My aim was to show the twenty Goya related images in 2020, so I felt I needed to have as much prepared as possible by the end of last year.”



As part of the exhibition, in a way that illuminates the link between Los Caprichos and Sarah’s collection, reproductions of selected Goya works will be on show, defining the close association between individual works. Sarah’s etching *Hear, Hear*, for example, which uses

donkeys and newsprint to satirise the handling of Brexit, directly parallels Goya’s *Bravisimo!*, in which a donkey can be seen being applauded by onlookers and serenaded by a guitar playing monkey. Similarly, Goya’s *Can’t Anyone Untie Us?* which alludes to the negative social impact of arranged marriages in 18th century Spain, is paralleled with Sarah’s *Can’t Anyone Untie Us?* which poses any number of questions related to the idea of social or political ‘union’

today. A limited-edition catalogue, created to accompany the show, further makes sense of these connections, though Sarah tells me: “I prefer the viewer to make their own interpretations. I hope people will enjoy my exhibition on many levels, as a body of work that makes an unusual contrast to the gallery’s other pictures. I hope the depth of content, in both mine and Goya’s

work, will give the viewer an opportunity to explore their own interpretations of what they see. I also hope the exhibition will give visitors a greater understanding of the processes that are involved in printmaking.”

*See Sarah Seddon’s exhibition ‘Twenty Twenty’ from 1st to 10th January at Whitewater Gallery and on the gallery website.*

 [whitewatergallery.co.uk](http://whitewatergallery.co.uk)

ABOVE  
‘Teaching and Learning’