

## Margaret Condon - Contemporary Alchemist



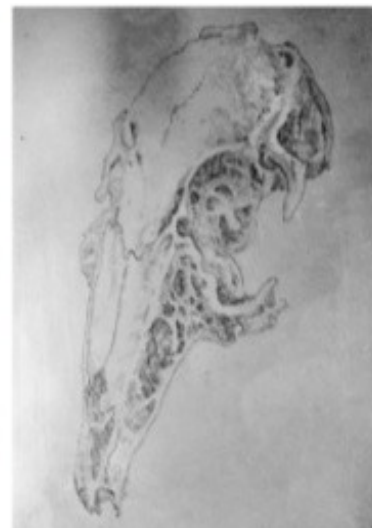
Margaret (right) with Victoria Smith

Through her prints Margaret tries to show us unspecified points in the past, often linking up her own history with those of historical figures or even animals. This interest in the past is of course not surprising as she is a medieval scholar by trade, just recently having published her research on the adventurous Cabot and his journeys.

Margaret uses all kind of mysterious chemicals and puzzling techniques to conjure up her intriguing images. Although she can give you some handy tips for printmaking at the kitchen sink with the help of coca cola and gin! Her knowledge of printmaking techniques is incredible but as she revealed in her talk 'her hands know things that her brain doesn't' when she is creating her work. By saying that, she means that for her, 'making' is an intensely

instinctive and spontaneous process. Her hands are guided by her passionate interests in memory, metamorphosis, death and music.

The talk was the perfect opportunity for her to show the audience that she also makes big work. A statement can be made through lithograph; one of the most complicated techniques which makes use of large stones. She needs assistance with lifting these heavy stones but loves drawing on that kind of natural tactile material. In her own words, 'I relate to the stone'. One of the lithographs is inspired by visits as a child to Shakespeare plays such as, A Midsummer Night's Dream in the theatre in Regents Park, London. Margaret emphasizes that the idea is not to depict that scene literally from years ago but moreover to give a sense of the mood; atmosphere and suggestion of what she then felt.



Margaret Condon 'Skull'

'In my own mind I had a dialogue with the etching acid' is how she comments about one of her most popular etchings, "Where the Bee Sucks", which has almost sold out. The subject matter of her other works might be seen as more sinister as she loves drawing skulls - 'some people call my work weird'. She doesn't shy away from having cow heads in her studio and spending many hours studying them. She compares drawing and printmaking as two mediums which share different spaces in her head but sometimes they can produce the same images.

She feels sheer joy by working with objects and subject material that she likes. For example, Margaret was 'bonkers' about a little owl she encountered on Avon Dassett . There was not deep intellectual motivation when she was drawing him; he was just a nice little chap. Sadly, she couldn't make numerous prints of her feathered friend because she used a dry point method and when you draw directly onto metal, it doesn't last. She made the plate; cleaned it and then the plate was no longer usable. Printmaking can sometimes be so cruel.



Margaret Condon 'Lithograph'

The fact that Margaret's work has been part of the Royal Academy's Summer Show in the past, proves that she is a superior artist. The successful print was a depiction of her cat. At first sight a straightforward portrait but nothing could be more deceptive; the ideas behind it were dealing with time and loss. She was 'drawing' her cat that had passed away using numerous lines, the first ones making the plate darker, progressing, in time, to lines which got lighter, so visualising the passing of the time.

Once when she was extremely bored during a lecture Margaret doodled a portrait of the lecturer and a cockerel. The cockerel was of course the superior! But other times rather something deeper is going on. 'How did you do that?' is regrettably often the question asked of a printmaker and not 'Why did you do

that?' Despite that Margaret is happy for viewers to have their own conversation with her pieces.

She is not a prolific printmaker, 'it has to come from somewhere'. Like the time that she came home from University and her family had moved to a rather bleak location. She drew the backyard later on because of her strong connection with it and to make a critical social point. It resulted in an image that is not a photographic reproduction but an impression, a sketch from her childhood memories.

Margaret mixes the past with the present, taking us on two-dimensional time travel journeys. Like Cabot's journeys, Margaret's are exotic adventures as well!

Tammy Woodrow