

The Works  
B&A The Collection  
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The research company Behaviour & Attitudes was established in 1985. The Attitudes in the title was particularly appropriate as the company didn't just research attitudes, it had attitude. Behaviour & Attitudes arose in the time-honoured Irish tradition of the split, though without acrimony. The three founders, Graham Wilkinson, Des Byrne and Phelim O'Leary had worked for Irish Marketing Surveys, but all three shared the conviction that market surveys as they were then configured did not represent their real potential. They were, in that sense, prophets of the information age.

Now, what one might term surveys are built into every swipe and click in the online world, though the legwork is done largely by automated software programmes. 1985 was over 20 years before the advent of the iPhone and Facebook. Within the technological limitations of the time, B&A worked on the basis that information was a valuable, versatile resource, and the company built its business accordingly.

In 2010, Graham Wilkinson observed that B&A's excursion into fine art began almost accidentally, as an answer to the question of what they would send to clients as a Christmas thank-you – not to mention as a reminder of how valuable their custom to B&A had been. And it began with a gesture that might have scuppered the whole process: they sent out copies of a collaborative book, *In the Land of Punt*, by poet Paul Durcan and painter Gene Lambert. As the title hints, and as Wilkinson realised when he read it – after it had been dispatched – it “contains some pretty dark stuff, I mean very dark stuff indeed.”

Rather than retreating, they came up with a more ambitious plan or rather, formulated a plan when they got together with James McCreary and Mary Farl Powers in the Graphic Studio Dublin. Originally established in 1960 and initially located in a basement studio space on Upper Mount St, the Graphic Studio became the centre of fine art printmaking in Dublin.

In 1983 the Graphic Studio gained a small exhibition space in the Powerscourt Townhouse Centre and moved to a substantial new premises on Green Street East in Dublin's Docklands, then a remote, neglected precinct. The building had been a bicycle factory and a publishing warehouse. Spacious but extremely cold - Brian Lalor commented on the “bone-searing cold” of the double-height main space in his definitive history of the Graphic Studio to date, *'Ink Stained Hands'* – the studio was under the strict rule of Farl Powers. Wilkinson described it accurately enough as “Dickensian” when he visited it (now the studio is in a substantially more comfortable setting on the North Circular Road, and the gallery is off Cope St in Temple Bar).

Personalities came into play. Farl Powers was fearless and dynamic and McCreary unfazably calm and capable. Rather than, say, purchasing prints, B&A would commission its own prints, to be sent, suitably presented and packaged, as a gift. But it would be a work of art rather than a promotional product, produced in signed limited editions at the Graphic Studio – the promotion was in the presentation, and the presentation was devised and delivered by Killian O'Donnell, who provided apposite and witty

commentary, and designer Steve Averill, both of whom managed to set exactly the right tone and were integral to the success of the enterprise. The first commission, in 1989, went to McCreary, a technical perfectionist. He was asked to make three prints. They are dark, intense mezzotint and aquatints. The lure in their titles ('Lure I-III') refers to the fact they are fishing lures, suspended in the depths.

They may have caused consternation to some of the recipients, but generally the reaction was positive and the arrangement was continued. The playful surrealism of Tighe O'Donoghue/Ross featured the following year. In a way, the quirky narrative hints of O'Donoghue/Ross's work were a safe bet, but as if to demonstrate that they were serious about this scheme, B&A's third artist was Richard Gorman, who is an abstract painter through and through, as were the fourth and fifth, Felim Egan and Charles Tyrrell. Apart, one might note, from an emergent gender imbalance, it must have helped that all of these three artists were well established and highly regarded. And they had an established presence in the contemporary art market.

As well as the novelty of receiving a fine art print and O'Donnell and Averill's inspired presentation of the prints, both these factors, the stature of the artists and the financial value attached to their work, must have struck a chord with the recipients. Certainly, Wilkinson reported, the response exceeded their expectations. As an exercise in branding, you could say, it was brilliant. As time went by, people really wanted to be part of the pool of individuals who were on this select list. The pool of available talent, incidentally, was greatly enhanced by the Graphic Studios visiting artists programme, begun in 1980, which invited artists to work with master printmakers in producing new work.

From the artists' point of view, B&A's scheme not only meant a commission, they were also virtually guaranteed a wider, discerning audience. From B&A's point of view, they came across as an organisation with serious aesthetic credentials and a classy image. Still, it was an enlightened and by no means obvious path to pursue. From the Graphic Studio's point of view, they were profitably employing their resources, encouraging their members and associates, enhancing their organisational position and helping to promote fine art printmaking.

What was conceived as a temporary arrangement, that is one lasting five or six years, had developed a momentum of its own by that point. This did not happen by accident. Wilkinson noted that everyone involved approached it in a positive frame of mind. That is, no one was opportunistic and out for a quick profit, for example. Everyone saw the mutual benefits. The law of unintended consequences still applied. B&A had begun, without ever exactly planning it, to build a fine art prints collection.

It was consistent in its variety. In 1994 John Kindness, known for his humorously satirical work across several disciplines, produced a cod-anatomical study of a rubber duck. His duck was followed by two vibrant carborundum prints by William Crozier, well known for his adventurously chromatic landscapes inspired by West Cork, moody, engaging landscape etchings by Stephen Lawlor and strongly characterized studies of a Bull and a goat by sculptor John Behan. Just as the bull is indelibly associated with Behan, Vincent Sheridan (1999) became known for his etchings of crows, works with an allegorical dimension.

The first woman to feature, in 1998, was Ruth O'Donnell, a specialist in still life subjects and a highly accomplished graphic artist who had been a member of the Graphic Studio since 1991. Still life does recur, though not that often; notably so in Robert Russell's technically luscious 2005 set of studies of fruit in three exquisite mezzotints and aquatints. After O'Donnell, the next woman to feature was Maria Simonds Gooding – an extraordinarily gifted printmaker whose work seamlessly interconnects drawing, painting, sculpture and print - in 2000. The corner had been turned. Mary Lohan, a painter renowned for her close-to-abstract shoreline landscapes, made a series of etchings in 2002, Cliona Doyle, known for her stunning, large-scale botanical studies, followed the next year with a series of etchings of fruit trees.

Pamela Leonard, a superb printmaker (and painter) contributed a series based on hens in 2006. Jean Bardon, another outstanding printmaker, produced a fine set of 'Wallflower' etchings in 2009 ("wallflowers" in the sense of prints hanging on a wall; the flowers were in fact a peony, an amaryllis and an iris). Taffina Flood continued the theme with her lyrical series of Colour Gardens in 2011. Carmel Benson's 2007 field studies draw on the geometric patterns created on the land by agricultural activity.

Brian Bourke is well known for his vibrant landscape, and in 2004 he produced three particularly beautiful colour etchings based on two habitual subjects, the Garden at Ower and Scots Pine on Limestone. Hughie O'Donoghue's six atmospheric carborundum prints (2008) were part of a major series of works centred on the wreck of the Plassey on Inis Oirr. Donald Teskey combined carborundum with photoetching to produce three tempestuous shoreline views on the Iveragh Peninsula in 2012. In 2013, Colin Martin's three crisply articulated etching and aquatints were part of a substantial series exploring the singular environment of dormitory holiday towns.

Celebrated for his paintings of life in rural Ireland, Martin Gale made two strong character studies in his 2001 etchings. Character of a different kind formed the core of Louise Leonard's humorous linocut studies of amphibious birds in 2014. Charles Harper's 2010 etchings were part of his longterm allegorical Rovers series, exploring group dynamics in human relationships and endeavours. Two important landscape painters, Gwen O'Dowd and Pat Harris (2015 and '16 respectively) made strong contributions, and Maser, in 2017, offered a characteristic feast of colour and pattern. The most recent work, meanwhile, marking the scheme's 30th birthday, is a beautifully subdued quartet of landscape etchings of trees and sky, by Ailbhe Barrett.

In its breadth and quality, B&A's print collection is exceptional, but more than that, as a collaborative project that has thrived for 30 years, the scheme is a benchmark cultural achievement for all parties involved, especially Wilkinson and his partners, who had the vision and commitment to set it all in motion and maintain their commitment. And, of course, not the least of its virtues is that it has generated some terrific artworks and directly supported many fine artists. Sadly, Graham Wilkinson, who more than any other single person was responsible for the initiation, durability and integrity of the scheme, is not around to celebrate its 30th birthday. He passed away in 2015.