

From time to time Peter Ford has been approached by students asking for information about his work. The following questions were sent by Rachel Moran after she had seen the exhibition *What is Big?* at the Royal West of England Academy in Bristol, July 2005. For this exhibition Peter Ford was curator and an exhibitor.

Questions from Rachel Moran to Peter Ford.

- How did you become an artist? Were you trained, or are you self taught?

The short answer to this question is : I am both trained and self-taught. I was trained as a teacher with a specialism in Art and English.

After qualifying as a teacher I studied at Brighton College of Art and was able to try many different activities – for example, ceramics, bookbinding, fabric printing, weaving, printmaking. I was a teacher in secondary schools for about 10 years then I worked in special education for 4 more years. During that time I became strongly interested in etching and bought my own equipment. At this point I resigned from teaching and tried to make a living as an independent artist (this was nearly 30 years ago)

- What kind of materials and equipment do you like using?

I am strongly interested in many materials and it is often the materials themselves that are the source of my artworks. About 11 years ago, after short courses from Maureen Richardson in Herefordshire, I began to experiment with papermaking and now paper is at the top of the list for me. I am also a printmaker and use steel, zinc, copper and aluminium.

I also use wood, lino and many less conventional materials such as string, wire, various kinds of found items picked up in the street or found in charity shops or anywhere that I happen to be.

- Has your style of work changed during your career, if so how?

Yes. I used to make mainly figurative images – landscapes, portraits of imaginary people, flower studies. But sometimes I made abstract etchings and paintings. Since 1994 nearly all my work has been more abstract than figurative but often it still suggests landscape – maybe landscape seen from the air. (My son lives in Vancouver and I have done a lot of travelling)

- Which artists (if any) inspire you, and influence your work?

I find this a difficult question. I have visited many exhibitions and I am constantly seeing art in reproduction via books and magazines. I like the work of many artists, past and present, that is very different from my own. Often the things that I like and that influence me are not made by famous artists so there is not much point in listing names. Amongst famous living artists I would name the German artist Gerhard Richter for his diverse paintings and also his writings. I was recently in Berlin and saw a retrospective exhibition of the work of Käthe Kollwitz (etchings, woodcuts and drawings). These made a strong impression on me – but I don't think they will influence me directly.

I like to look at contemporary and traditional art of the Far East – from Japan, China and Korea. I have a strong interest in the range of things you can see in the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum. Fabric design, photography and ceramics, book illustration. I am also ‘inspired’ by verbal things – poetry, radio programmes, words seen in passing on car journeys...

- What is the most interesting assignment that you have been involved in?

From the beginning of the year 2000 up to the autumn of 2001 I worked as the curator of an exhibition with the title ‘Made in Japan’. This included two working trips to Japan and many visits to artists’ homes and studios. The task was very difficult but also exciting and inspiring for me. The exhibition opened at the Bristol City Museum in September 2001 and toured for nearly 2 years in England.

- How did you become a Curator for the R.W.A?

I was on the organizing council of the RWA for 3 years and when in this position artists have the opportunity to organise an exhibition for the gallery (voluntary unpaid work). I have been curator of two exhibitions for the RWA – The Open Print Show 2004 and Size Matters 2005.

- Could you explain the process you went through when organizing the exhibition; ‘Size Matters’?



**What is Big?
in the Royal West of England Academy Gallery**

I think it will be difficult to explain this briefly. *Size Matters* was in fact three separate exhibitions and I was coordinator of all three but actually the curator of only one of them, ‘What is Big?’ I invited 13 artists to contribute to this exhibition and I discussed with all of them which works could be shown. I included some of my own too. As 8 of the artists were not resident in Britain this was complicated. During my travels since 1998 in Japan, Korea, Canada, Russia and Poland I had met all of them at some time but most of the discussion was carried out by e.mail or telephone. This is really only the beginning of the story and you could ask me some more specific questions about this if you want to. Organising such an exhibition requires persistence and determination. Preparing text panels, making decisions about prices, obtaining photographs of the artists - so many things are more complicated than you expect them to be.

- What inspired you to produce your piece of work 'Street Language'? I have been collecting metal scraps from the streets and skips of Bristol and other cities during the past ten years. Sometimes I had to hammer them to make them thin enough to go through an etching press. I also find unusual shapes of metal by taking apart discarded machines and removing the separate elements. As my collection of metal pieces accumulated I got the idea of making something really big but which would be assembled from small sections.

There were 128 sheets of my own handmade paper fixed onto 8 separate panels that made the whole design. The first title was suggested to me by my partner, Christine. It was Things Fall Apart. (This is a line in a poem by W.B. Yeats.) Then I started to find the forms of letters of the alphabet amongst my metal scraps and made some words from them. Hence Street Language became the first part of the title.