

OCA Printmaking 2 Parallel Project
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Picasso the Challenger, Challenging me!

How did Picasso affect the development of Linocuts?

Can his influence be extended to other Printmaking mediums?

Picasso the Challenger, Challenging me

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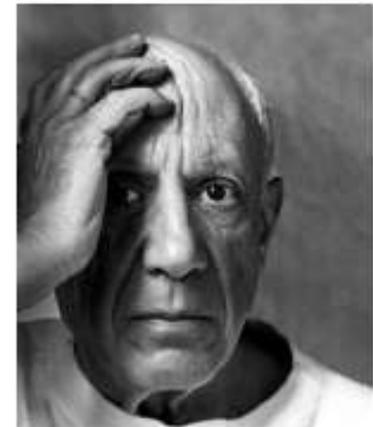
(Timeline of Life Events and Place; Timeline of work/phases/periods; Influences/ Place in Art Development/ Influence on others)



"When I was a child my mother said to me 'If you become a soldier, you'll be a General. If you become a monk, you'll end up as the Pope'

Instead I became a Painter, and wound up as

Picasso



INTRODUCTION

Picasso Biography and Timeline

To explore Picasso the man, I have researched on line, read about him, watched TV and listened to Radio programmes, keeping notes. I have used Chronologies of his life in "Picasso :Challenging the Past "(1) and "Picasso: Life and work of the artist" (2) and studied his place in Art History using Gombrich's "Story of Art "(3). The Radio Programme was a week's worth of daily readings about life in Montmartre (4) and gave a vivid picture of Picasso's life and friendships during his early development and during his Blue Period at the beginning of the 20th century, when he was still in his early 20's. Also very enlightening was a BBC Documentary "Picasso: Love, Sex and Art" (5) which related his relationships to his different art periods and demonstrated how his art style changed and advanced with each loss or love affair. There were interviews with his children (the now adult Paul, Maya , Claude and Paloma) and his surviving mistress - Francoise Gilot. There were film clips of Picasso and of his wives, friends and interviews with his Biographers. I have also repeatedly used a small book Picasso "In his Words" (6) which has been revealing about Picasso's attitude to life and work. All this has been reinforced by reading and note-taking chapters in "Je Suis le Cahier "(7) which has verified the story and allowed me to look at his artistic journey alongside his social one.

The man who has emerged from this is a determined, focused artist with a passionate and irrepressible nature. It would be easy to call him a megalomaniac since many women fell prey to his charms and were later discarded in favour of the next muse (only one survived him, two committed suicide after his death) but the title would be misused because his greatness and genius were fact, not a personal delusion. He was just totally absorbed in working, looking, experimenting and discovering. His personal emphasis was not on searching but on "finding" and he was relentless. Picasso was almost born, and certainly died, with a pencil in his hand - art was his life long, hungry passion.

Methods, Materials and subjects were there to be stretched to their previously undiscovered limits. I have been impressed at the quantity of work he produced - sketches and paintings in their tens and hundreds e.g. In his reworking of Monet's "Luncheon on the Grass", Picasso produced 27 canvases and over a 100 drawings by way of study and preparation. (Challenging the Past page 109 (1)). This was during Picasso's Old Master Period 1954-62 - a stage usually conducted early on but for Picasso it was something he did not get round to until his early 70's. So he was an independent and original investigator - well placed in history to follow on the Impressionists - Manet, Monet, Degas, Morisot, Sisley, Pissaro, Renoir and the Post Impressionist work of Gaugin, Cezanne and Van Gogh.

Continued...

Biography continued

Picasso fully used his place in Art History to continue the quest. His mantra was “If you know what you are going to do, what’s the good of doing it? There’s no interest in something you know already. Its much better to do something else.” in doing so he earned the respect and admiration of many and became a pivotal character in the development of art alongside theatre, poetry, love and friendship and large life.

Therein lies the attraction for me. A character who is my complete opposite - able to be selfish in pursuit of his art - single minded letting nothing and no-one stand in his way. Impossible !! I am not made like that, and yet I understand the desire to search and uncover, to be creative and original and let what is inside of me out. My brother, recently graduated with an MA in Fine Art , along with a shattered life, an attendant string of mental health problems, divorces and children who he does not see. My mother, now in a home with dementia, but a classically trained superb water colourist, who can turn her hand to oils and pastels easily and excels in landscapes and portraits. And now me... I’ve brought up my family, built my home , cared for parents, am living in and working out an unsatisfying relationship. Where will Picasso take ME? What can I learn from this man about technique and above all, his attitude? The biggest challenge he puts before me is how far to be single minded in art, work and relationships.





Extract from Will Gompertz' map "What are you Looking at? Showing how Cubism influenced other art movements that followed. (Bauhaus/Modernism is missing from the top of the picture, but the links are traceable there too.) I believe Picasso's influence has extended beyond perhaps his most famous period though. His Cubist period took place only over the six years up to and during WW1. Surrealism which followed in the period between the wars, and Neo Classicism have continued to influence other artists.

History of the Linocut and Picasso's approach

HISTORY OF THE LINO CUT The Relief Printing technique for most of its history has been based on Wood. With the development of new materials during the late industrial revolution and into the 20th Century linoleum (sheet flooring made of oxidised linseed oil and ground cork) became available. It was invented by Frederic Walton in England in 1860 and Matisse and Picasso are among the artists who exploited its qualities. It is easy to cut, cheap, can be any size, and is printed by press or by hand, using oil or water based ink. It is simple to print different colours, which can be registered by plate or by eye. Durability is not as good as wood and Lino can be mounted on wood blocks to extend its life, but on the whole small editions can be expected. Neither will the artist get the grain effect that many woods provide.

Lino was first used in 1890 in Germany for printing wallpaper. An Austrian artist and teacher Franz Cižek promoted its use in schools throughout Europe. The earliest linocut by Heckel, the first major artist to adopt the medium, is dated 1903. He and the other artists of Die Brücke regularly used linocut through the next dozen years. Matisse executed 70 linocuts between 1938 and 1952, using a fluent white-line technique. In Russia Popova produced Linocuts where a poorer culture was less inhibited about 'fine printmaking'. In London, Claude Flight taught Linocut techniques at the Grosvenor School of Art. Locally to me in Suffolk, Sybil Andrews and her good friend Cyril Powers, were famous and talented lino cutters of the between the war years.

Picasso's explorative approach:

It took Picasso's personality and way of working to develop lino-cutting fully. True to form, having understood the technique he was not content to do as he was told. As in all things he pushed the materials to their limits, raising them to a new level (Picasso Linocuts - 9). The technique of reduction printing was developed by Picasso and he also experimented with affecting the surface of the lino, using combs and metal brushes, pricking the surface to make it more porous and being inventive with the tools he used for cutting and mark making. He combined plates to print different colours and produce new ones. It was these innovations that lifted the lino cut from "poor relation" and "childhood play" to a recognised fine art form.

Although Picasso's first known Lino cut was made in 1939 (Homage a un pays martyr) he did not come back to the form fully until 1954 and then followed 10- 12 years of development during which time he made just short of 200 pieces on themes such as bullfights, still life, portraits, Mediterranean and mythical creatures.

History of the Linocut and Picasso's approach

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There are two major issues in any piece of work - the message and the medium. Picasso's strength was in manipulating and mastering the medium in order to make it do what he wanted with the message. He was relentless and aggressive in his approach to his materials accepting nothing as a given.

“With Picasso there was no turning back. He took a sort of aggressive delight (delectation) in meeting, overcoming and defeating obstacles. Actually, difficulties often served him as a testing ground, an orientation point for new things... he was always trying to get the maximum out of a craft as he advanced in the mastery of his tools”

Hildago Arnera, Picasso's linocut printer in Vallauris

“An artist never defers to the material, to the substance. He makes it the instrument of his will”

Helene Parmelin, Confidante and Biographer of Picasso .

My own experiments - Lino

My own exploration of the Linocut:

My chance to continue this explorative approach for myself came in April 2015 when I attended a Painterly Lino cuts course at Gainsborough's House in Sudbury – Tutor: Carl Borges. The techniques being offered were working with caustic soda, chine colle, textures and masks. I had worked with Carl before at an evening class last year (not my best time - I was unwell, awaiting surgery and too tired at the end of a day being a carer to be of much good in the printshop!) What I had gained then was a good appreciation of how to manipulate the inking and pressing so that even an uncut piece of lino could produce a multitude of effects. I dabbled with caustic soda at that time but had not produced anything significant.

I thoroughly enjoyed the course even though going back to oil based inks was hard. I spent the first two days with my concern on materials and techniques. I chose three Picasso portraits and tried to emulate the style using linocut, but let the materials take the lead and suggest what to do and how to progress. I tried not to plan beyond the first stage so that the image grew out of the capability and character of the materials. On the third day, I used some of my own photos to suggest an image and tried to interpret it using the methods I had been practising, again trying to let the print lead, so that each stage was decided on only as the previous one was completed. I was pleased with what emerged at the end of the day and **the biggest compliment was that one of my course members told me I was “one of those uninhibited people”**



My own experiments with materials – Lino



Fernande with a Black Mantilla – reproduced using caustic soda and reduction cuts; Portrait of Dora Maar – caustic soda, reduction cutting and chine colle; Male figure – caustic soda, one cut and texture from anaglypta wallpaper mask.

My own experiments - Lino

Anemones 2015

Stella Davis

*Lino cut made in three stages:
Caustic Soda and paper masks (grey);
cutting, partial inking and back
drawing (green); further cutting and
partial inking (white)*

*Size A4 on Japanese Moon paper using
oil based inks.*



My own experiments with materials –Japanese Woodblocks

I went on a three day Course at Gainsborough's House, Sudbury with Jude Lockie who was teaching Japanese woodblock techniques. I learnt a huge amount about papers, cutting tools, inks, waterbased colours, nori paste etc and practised applying them. Apart from the cutting, there was much skill in inking up and brushing the block to control the quantity of ink. I also improved my registration skills

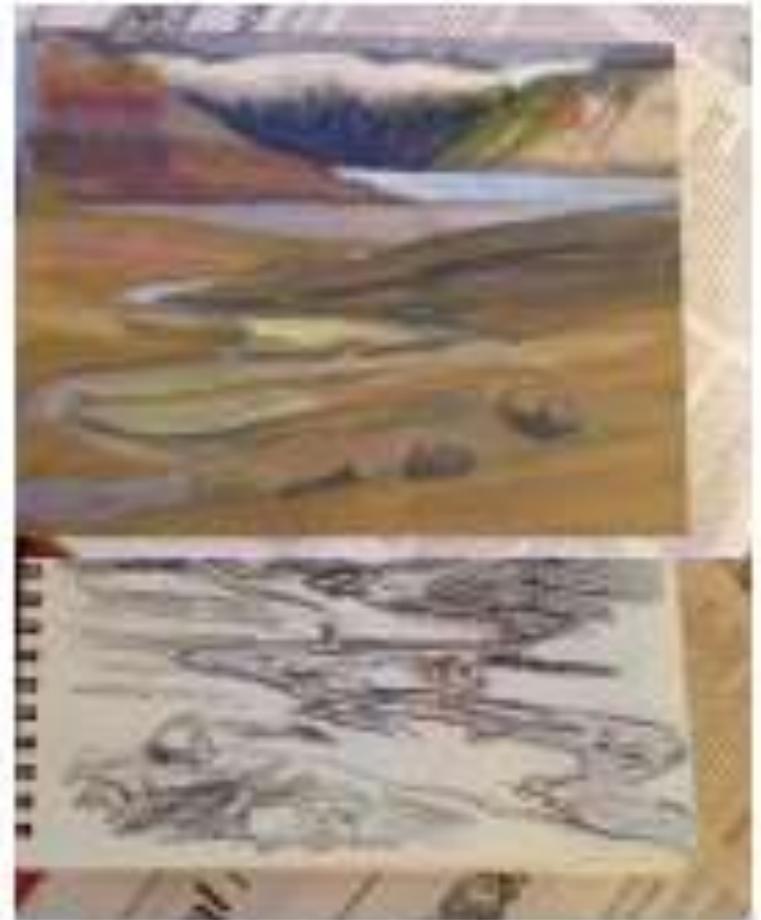


Akua Ink on Ho Sho paper – one colour plate; one colour plate hand coloured and three colour – two blocks.

My own experiments with materials –Japanese Woodblocks

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At the same time, I had come across a technique called white line woodcuts being done by an artist at Birdfair (Lisa Hooper “First Impressions” Chapter 6) (8). With the help of Jude and other course members we were able to trace this technique back to Canada and find a variety of examples of work. I made prints using reduction cutting and the white line technique of pinning and reapplying the paper. Working in this way, I found I was able to avoid the white lines altogether and just keep layering up and painting the image to produce a monoprint. The view of Loch Muick in the Cairngorms I produced from a drawing done on location.



My own experiments with materials –Alginate

I was delighted with the result of an afternoon's playing March 2015. My brother who is the creative and original one in our family had been doing an art project casting with Alginate - a substance that dentists use to make denture moulds. I started playing with the left over mix, it was like a firm opaque jelly and I discovered I could cut and shape it with a knife, a cheese grater, a peeler, make holes with a straw etc. The biggest compliment was that my brother was astonished at what I had done. He thought he had pushed the material to its limit himself. I brought the things I had made home on a board and over several weeks they have dried out to become a third of the size (another surprise), lightweight, and pure white. There is a delicacy there that wasn't present when I made them. They make beautiful shadows which was one of the things that first attracted me. I have been able to photograph them, and by losing the sense of scale they take on a whole new life.



Working “after Picasso” during Assignment 5



Picasso shells:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0lW7trBrrYo>

First thoughts and Picasso
beaches:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQz9S8YMvgs>

Still life

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7toJ4zYJD-s>

Picasso and Still Life

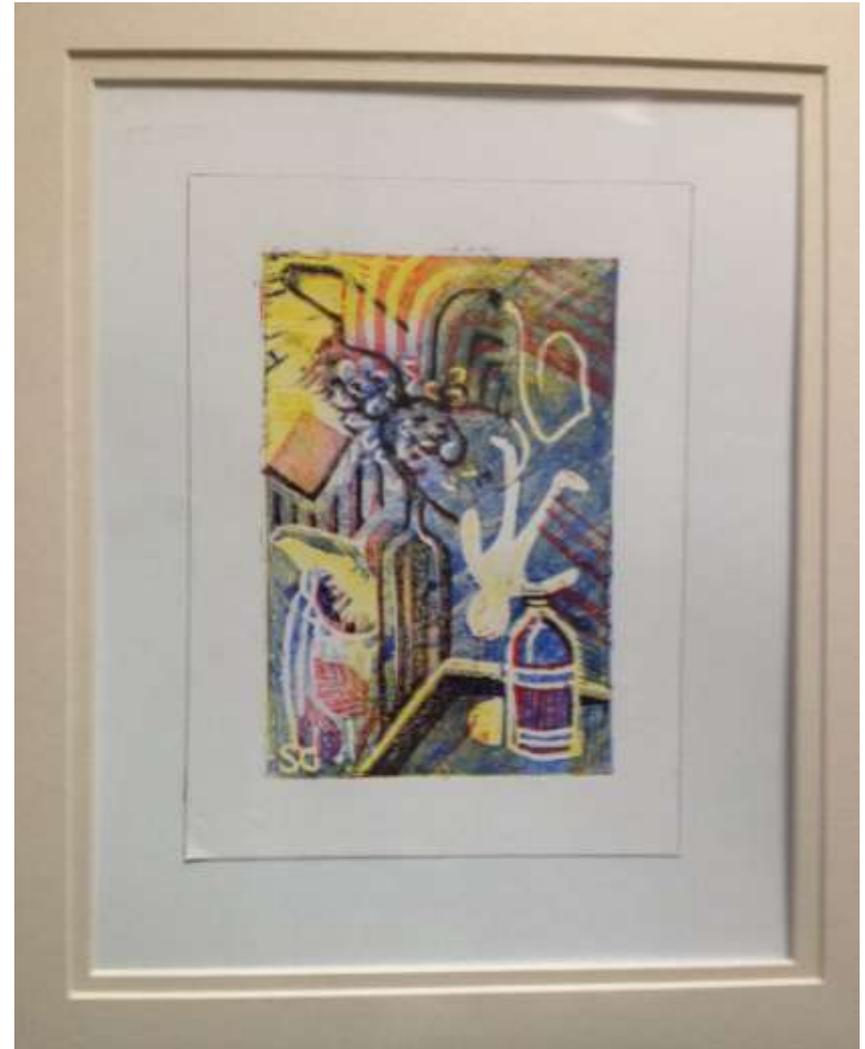
I have looked at numerous still life pictures. This one was interesting because the newspaper article broke down the colour plates used and allowed me to see how it had been constructed.

Picasso was someone who seized the new materials available to him. In my case this led to new experiments with cutting Plastic lino – it is so soft and responsive to the cut that you can adjust the depth of the cut and produce “strings” of removed material. I found that these have a flat surface and can be turned over and glued to the plate. You can also easily leave the cut pieces still attached, creating further texture. I made my own reduction lino cuts using four plates. I also experimented with collage, pearlised paint, making a very simple plate but wiping or otherwise adjusting the ink used. It was more hit and miss but I also got some very interesting results which I was pleased with.



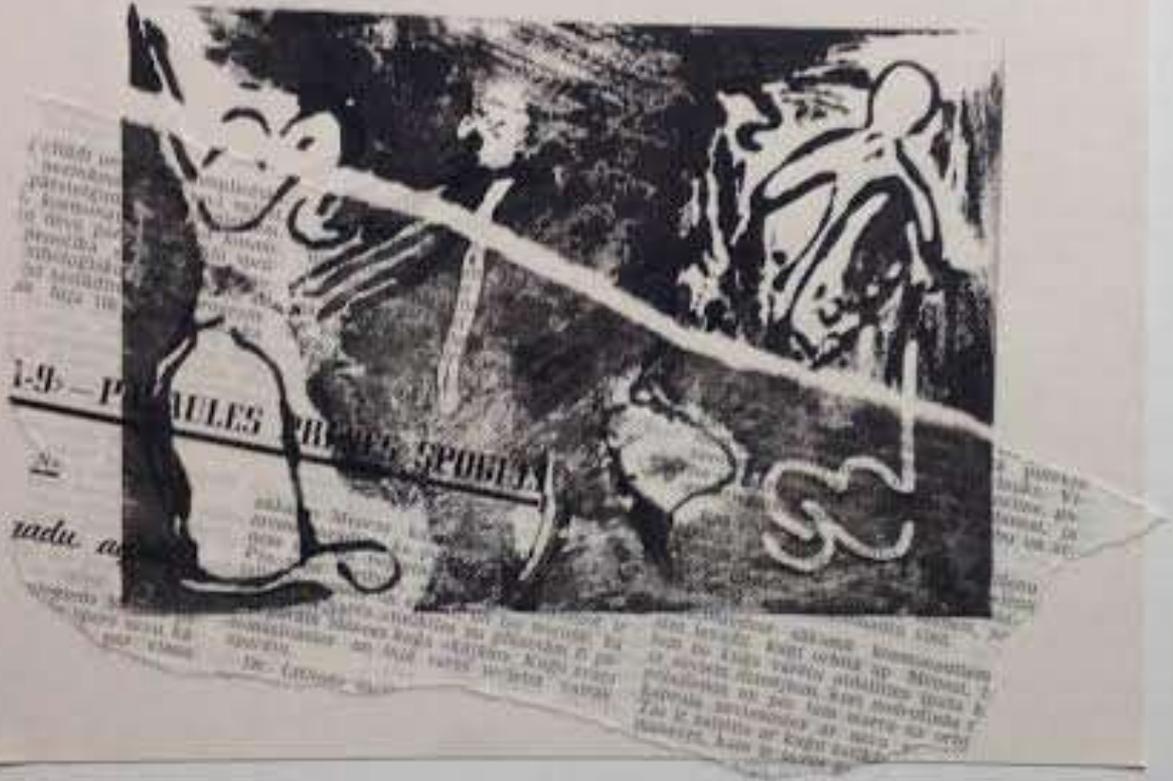
4 PLATES AND RESULT

Reduction linocut after Picasso – the colours need to be stronger and flatter, but I think I have captured the mood.



Working with soft lino, glue, collage and wiped plates.





Picasso Quotes showing his approach to work.

“If you know what you are going to do, what’s the good of doing it? There’s no interest in something you know already. Its much better to do something else.”

“Forcing yourself to use restricted means is the sort of restraint that liberates invention. It obliges you to make a kind of progress you cant know in advance”

“when you begin a picture, you often make some pretty discoveries. You must be on your guard against these! Destroy the thing! Do it several times... “ (in destroying a ‘beautiful discovery) “ you do not suppress it, but transform it condense it and make it substantial.”



In the course of this study I have become so much more adventurous. I have lost the sense of “instruction” that would not allow me to embark on a piece of artwork until I had worked out what the final result would be. I am playing more. I’ve also lost my inhibition about working in public spaces. I have become much freer at setting up a random piece of collage or patch of colour and then working into it to create more depth to my work. Some of my best results have been with limited materials too. The discipline imposed in that way makes for greater creativity.



Picasso's effect on me

From the Introduction "Therein lies the attraction for me. A character who is my complete opposite - able to be selfish in pursuit of his art - single minded letting nothing and no-one stand in his way. Impossible !! I am not made like that, and yet I understand the desire to search and uncover, to be creative and original and let what is inside of me out. My brother, recently graduated with an MA in Fine Art , along with a shattered life, an attendant string of mental health problems, divorces and children who he does not see. My mother, now in a home with dementia, but a classically trained superb water colourist, who can turn her hand to oils and pastels easily and excels in landscapes and portraits. And now me... I've brought up my family, built my home , cared for parents, am living in and working out an unsatisfying relationship. Where will Picasso take ME? What can I learn from this man about technique and above all, his attitude? The biggest challenge he puts before me is how far to be single minded in art, work and relationships."

The emphasis of this study has been on exploring possibilities and making myself start things without knowing what the outcomes would be. I have grown in confidence at being able to do this.

The other thing it has taught me is to listen to my own voice, to hear the things I want to say and to respond to my own needs as well as that of other people. I have spent 35 years as a wife, 29 as a mother and three years intensively as a carer. That role ended ten months ago, coinciding with the period that I have been doing my parallel project. I have seen a man who knew his priorities and was single minded in achieving them. He appalled me and attracted me. My own voice has grown stronger – through this study, through counselling , through sharing with friends, through starting to get back to work and formulating my own future – not as an employee, but looking at ways to live by my art and teaching skills and mental health knowledge. It has taken me a long time to do it but in the last few weeks I have taken on the lease of a rented property and left my marriage. It is a beautiful, artistically satisfying space to live and a house that gives me a “hug” and a lift. I reached a point where I could not live in a vacuum and have said what I need for the marriage to be able to continue. Interestingly, it is working – the relationship is improving already. Work and experience is beginning to come in and my business is starting to take shape. I have a new confidence and enjoyment in art and life and feel poised to do good things.

Summary

*How did
Picasso affect
the
development of
Linocuts?*

*Can his
influence be
extended to
other
Printmaking
mediums?*

First and foremost Pablo Picasso was the pioneer and inventor of the reduction lino cut technique which has become an established method of working by printmakers ever since.

Behind the discovery of Lino's possibilities was Picasso's unique style of work with a relentless exploring of possibilities and potential. He was an artist who pushed the medium to its limits and then beyond. He was naturally impatient with repetition because he was a constant learner. Whereas some might thoughtfully reflect and think through possibilities I learned how prolific Picasso was – drawings, paintings and prints for a theme of work would run into the hundreds as he followed a process of do and discard, do and discard. He learnt by doing and adjusting. As a result his work has a very direct quality to it as he worked straight into his materials. He was someone who mastered each medium that he worked with and would not rest until he had wrung out of an idea all that it had to offer. He said that his emphasis was on finding – which suggests that he excavated his materials.

Picasso's personal life echoed his work. He frequently moved on in relationships – in restless pursuit. If a relationship had nothing more to offer – he had no qualms about moving on. He was someone who was entertained by what he found in people as well as materials, but lost interest once all their secrets had been revealed., or when another source looked more fruitful.

With hard work, Picasso's approach can be applied to any piece of work. Relentless investigation, constant dissatisfaction, experimentation can be applied to both the subject and the materials. He had the ability to do and destroy in order to do better.

EVALUATION:

How effectively has my chosen study answered the question?

Academically, I feel that my study is lightweight. I have looked at a lot of Picasso's work and absorbed his style, but not analysed or written much about individual pieces of art. I have developed a feel for his work, but have not learnt about specific pieces of work. I could have done more on looking at the work of other artists – the ones who influenced Picasso and those who later followed his ways. In one way – there has been too much to do within the constraints of limited word counts – Picasso's influence is vast. I had to constantly adjust my plans to limit the areas I looked at in order to get any depth. It would have been easy to skim the surface of a much wider range of work.

What has been valuable has been attempting to emulate his approach. Working directly and quickly with ideas, moving on to the next successive evolution of a piece of work, trying out new materials and techniques. I feel that I have managed to distil a way of working that will add depth and interest to my own work. I have proved that this explorative approach can be applied in several printmaking techniques – and know it will stretch to more

My personal situation has changed hugely – and I can trace some of the thought processes back to the way I have developed as a person over the course of this Parallel project.

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