

PETER HOWSON

A SURVEY OF PRINTS

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6 July - 6 August, 2016

Private View Tuesday 5 July, 6-8pm

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Flowers Gallery is pleased to present a retrospective of prints produced over two decades by Scottish artist Peter Howson, a focal member of the group of young artists to emerge from the Glasgow School of Art during the 1980s dubbed the New Glasgow Boys, and one of his generation's leading figurative painters.

Printmaking has proved to be a highly significant aspect of Howson's output over the years, often using the compositions formed within the prints as preparations for major paintings. The relative speed of production of techniques such as lithography, and the chance effects of the monoprinting process have lent an urgency and vitality to his practice, at times providing the catalyst for the development of new ideas.

Amongst the works mounted in this exhibition are significant preparatory works produced while commissioned as the official British War Artist during the Bosnian War. The 1994 *Bosnia Series* includes the lithograph *Rape* which formed the basis for his controversial *Croatian and Muslim* painting, purchased by David Bowie following Howson's solo exhibition at the Imperial War Museum in the same year. Despite the well-documented difficulties Howson faced during his witness of the conflict, he has described these prints as among his best, prizing their simple, almost primitive qualities arising from the scarcity of time and resources on the ground.

Howson's unflinching response to the atrocities of war and the depths of the human psyche, seen clearly within the Bosnian work, was honed from his earlier experience of life on the inner-city streets of the Gallowgate area of Glasgow. *Saracen Heads*, a suite of prints published in 1988 that led to the development of a series of paintings under the same title, were inspired by the characters he observed in a pub near his studio called The Saracen's Head, a world as he described it "full of gangsters, boxers and prostitutes". The portraits in this exhibition, typically titled by their first names such as *Al*, *Mac* or *Billy*, accentuate the grotesque features of the occupants with unforgiving chiaroscuro, evoking the eternal half-light underworld of the public bar. Many of the etchings from this series were acquired by museums including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Tate Gallery, London.

Outsider personalities, often shown drunk or derelict, have figured prominently in much of Howson's printmaking, and can be seen within the later portfolio of etchings titled *The Underground Series*. Produced in 1998 from rapid sketches rendered whilst driving the streets of London, and titled after tube journeys which allowed for closer unobtrusive observations of passing individuals, they portray a continuing fascination with a forgotten class of humanity.

Howson's despairing depictions of modern life have been identified by Donald Kuspit as "allegories of vice", with particular reference to the early *Scottish Trilogy*, one of two painted triptychs that Kuspit described as "tour de force allegories, grandly summarizing Howson's interests".¹ Based on *The Scottish Bestiary* a series of poems by George Mackay Brown, the series is represented by two prints in the exhibition titled *The Fieldmouse* and *The Stag*, depicting Howson's vision of the perils of alcohol and his sense of a general moral and social decline.

Amid the marginalised subjects on the outer edges of society, Howson has always counterbalanced the wretched with a heroic spirit, seen most prominently in his paintings and prints featuring the figure of a boxer, a breakthrough motif for Howson, which first emerged during his residency at St. Andrews University in 1985. Echoes of the boxer's giant, distorted muscular frame can be seen in *The Noble Dosser*, a two-part woodcut portraying a Glasgow street character whose proud stance appears undefeatable, regardless of his circumstances.



The Noble Dosser, 1988, Two part woodcut, 183 x 121 cm



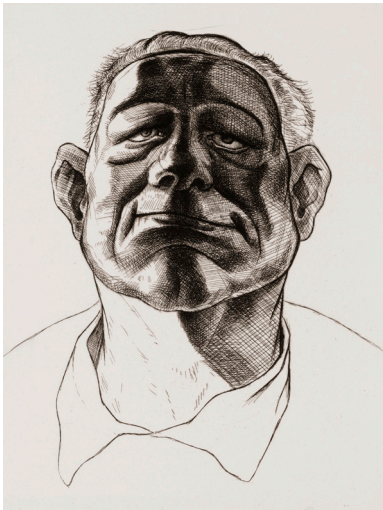
Caledonian Road, 1998, Etching, 50 x 45 cm



Stratford, 1998, Etching, 50 x 45 cm



Sloane Square, 1998, Etching, 50 x 45 cm



Al, 1988, Etching, 56 x 38 cm



Mac, 1988, Etching, 56 x 38 cm



Martin, 1988, Etching, 56 x 38 cm

1. Donald Kuspit, 1989, *Peter Howson*, Exhibition Catalogue, Flowers Gallery, London.

ABOUT PETER HOWSON

Howson was born in London in 1958. He studied at Glasgow School of Art from 1975 - 1977, and returned in 1979 to complete a Masters degree. In 1985 he was made the Artist in Residence at the University of St Andrews and also a part-time tutor at Glasgow School of Art. From 1993-94 Howson was appointed by the Imperial War Museum as the official British war artist for Bosnia, culminating in a solo exhibition at the IWM in 1994. In 1996 he was awarded Doctor of Letters Honoris Causa, University of Strathclyde. Howson has exhibited extensively in the United States and Europe.

His work is represented in public collections including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Tate Gallery, London; the Victoria & Albert Museum, London; the British Museum, London; Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow; and the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh.

NOTESTO EDITORS

Exhibition Opening Hours: Monday - Saturday 10am - 6pm

For further information and images please contact Hannah Hughes - Hannah@flowersgallery.com / 0207 920 7777

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