

# the artist's studio

Collaborative etchings by Ron McBurnie and

- |                  |                      |
|------------------|----------------------|
| Yvonne Boag      | Euan Macleod         |
| Judy Cassab      | Daniel Moynihan      |
| John Coburn      | Stephen Nothling     |
| Tony Coleing     | David Paulson        |
| Kevin Connor     | Jan Senbergs         |
| Ray Crooke       | Anneke Silver        |
| John Firth-Smith | Ian Smith            |
| Helen Geier      | Madonna Staunton     |
| John Honeywill   | Ann Thomson          |
| Therese Kenyon   | June Tupicoff        |
| Colin Lanceley   | Robin Wallace-Crabbe |
| Bruce Latimer    | Guy Warren           |
| Alun Leach-Jones | Margaret Wilson      |



## WHAT IS ETCHING?

**Etching is an art medium in which the artist works directly onto a metal plate to create an engraving used to print multiples of the same image. Each etching is considered an original fine art print.**

In etching, the "drawing" is done with a pointed tool, on a zinc or copper plate that has been covered with an acid-resist ground. The work on the plate is always done in mirror image to the final print. The plate is then immersed in acid ("etched"); it is the etched line that will later hold the ink. This is repeated many times to achieve the varying tones on the piece, for it is the amount of time the plate is left in the acid bath that determines the volume of ink the lines will hold, or the tone they will print. The plate will be cleaned, reground, and reworked several times. During the working of the plate, many proofs are "pulled" to check the progress of the image.

When the plate is finally ready to be printed, the edges are bevelled and burnished by hand. At this point a 100% rag paper is moistened to the right softness. The plate is inked and carefully wiped clean by hand, leaving ink only in the etched lines. The softened paper is then forced into the inked lines as it passes through the steel rollers of the etching press.

Since the plate must be re-inked by hand for each print pulled, no two prints are ever exactly alike.

The prints are dried for several days. Finally they are given approval by a number and the artist's signature. When the edition is complete, the plate is cancelled and a cancellation proof is pulled.

### Images

- FRONT & BACK: Guy Warren's studio (detail) hard-ground etching, lift ground and roulette on rag paper 53 x 80.8 cm 2001/02  
 Ann Thomson's studio (detail) hard-ground etching, roulette on rag paper 56.5 x 116 cm 2001  
 Bruce Latimer's studio (detail) hard-ground etching, aquatint on rag paper 42 x 105 cm 2001  
 Daniel Moynihan's studio (detail) hard-ground etching on rag paper 54.8 x 82.3 cm 2000  
 Helen Geier's studio (detail) hard-ground etching, roulette on rag paper 83 x 50.3 cm 2002  
 Ray Crooke's studio (detail) hard-ground etching, aquatint on rag paper 53.5 x 81.5 cm 2000  
 Stephen Nothling's studio (detail) hard-ground etching on rag paper 81.5 x 53.5 cm 2003

## RESEARCH AND QUESTIONS

### Method

RESEARCH the art of etching and describe in 6 steps the process of creating a print from a metal etching.

1. How can you tell the difference between a metal etching print, lino print and silkscreen print?
2. Why is it important for artists to number their prints? (Have a look at the bottom corner of a print to find its' series number)

### Materials

RESEARCH the art of etching and list as many materials you can find that an artist may use to create a metal etching and print.

1. Why would an artist use a copper plate, rather than a steel plate to make an etching?
2. Why does an artist need to use a moist, heavy weight paper to make a print from an etching plate?

### The Artist's Studio

1. On an A2 sized piece of paper draw a floor plan of your perfect studio. What important things did you consider when designing your studio?
2. Choose an etching in The Artist's Studio exhibition and explain how Ron McBurnie has captured the 'atmosphere' of the room.
3. Find the artist's work and write a description of how the artist's environment (studio) has influenced their artistic style.
4. What similarities can you find between the artist's studio and the artist's artwork?



## AN EXCERPT FROM — RON McBURNIE AND THE ARTIST'S STUDIO

Artists have always made drawings or paintings of their studios, the most famous of which is undoubtedly Gustave Courbet's monumental *The painter's studio* (a real allegory summing up seven years of my artistic life) 1854-55. Ron McBurnie's approach is more matter-of-fact. Nonetheless, his etchings of various artists' studios are remarkably evocative of their occupants. There is also an interplay between him and the artists whose studios he seeks to recreate on his etching plates. In fact, with a gift for visual narrative, McBurnie's approach presents an insider's experience and understanding.

A printmaker of considerable accomplishment and achievement, Ron McBurnie has extended his artist studio theme to some twenty-five fellow artists to date, producing his large copper or zinc etching plates *in situ*. By encouraging each artist involved to contribute to the image (if only to recreate images of their own work as they appear in McBurnie's etchings) he ensures that each studio has its artist's personality.

For those not familiar with artists' studios, McBurnie's etchings provide an uncommon insight into a private domain. He invests each image with his understanding of artists' studios — the importance of windows for light for example, or walls, the value of tables, shelves, plan-chests, benches, chairs, easels, stoves and fans, trolleys

and ladders. For McBurnie, exploring studios other than his own, is more than the privilege it is for the rest of us. Access to the workplaces of fellow practitioners has given him a variation to a theme that has occupied him from the start of his creative life — the study of human behaviour. By studying his etchings we can, like him, delight in his observations and share in what amuses and interests him. Attracted to the idiosyncratic and surprising, his is an infectious, unpretentious, down-to-earth everyman's view of the world, shaped by the urban/suburban environment, interior or exterior spaces, landscape, and the unpredictable tumble of individual experience.

In his artist studio etchings Ron McBurnie is our guide and interpreter. Studying them doesn't create unwelcome disturbance for the artists involved, or awkwardness for viewers — who may look at them as hard and long as possible. In liveliness, variety and invention they are amongst his most ambitious and sustained series of etchings to date, rivalling his own remarkable *Rake's progress* 1988-89 with which he first established his reputation as a vigorous new talent in contemporary Australian printmaking.

### Hendrik Kolenberg

SENIOR CURATOR OF AUSTRALIAN PRINTS,  
DRAWINGS AND WATERCOLOURS  
ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

## EXCERPTS FROM RON McBURNIE'S DIARY



### ANN THOMSON

The studio itself was once an old jam factory. Ann has suggested jokingly that she hoped that they once made lemon butter there. When I was working in the studio I would often hear the reassuring clink of bowling balls after they made their way along the freshly mowed lawn of the Bronte Bowling club or the loud bark of Ann's small dog Thelma as she chased birds or returned home after illegally eating the next-door dog's dinner.



### BRUCE LATIMER

Bruce is presently involved in building a studio in the back yard of his Sydney home. When the etching was made he worked partly at home on the kitchen table and partly at the Meadow Bank TAFE College where he currently teaches printmaking. For this reason the etching is divided into two quite different parts. I drew Bruce as he worked in these two different studio spaces and we discussed ways in which we could relate the two sections of the etching using a small bridging central strip of metal. Bruce came up with the idea of the strip of parrots in the centre dividing the plates. The strip used was a section cut from a much larger plate titled *Parrots on the Grass*. He then drew more parrots over the studio images I had previously drawn. After the plates were returned to me I drew more parrots so they could be seen exiting the studio window.



### DANIEL MOYNIHAN

Danny lives in a terrace house in Richmond originally built in 1876 which from the outside looks quite small. Through his ingenuity as a builder he has extended the walls and the ceiling of the original house to form a large living area and an even bigger painting studio with a high open web truss ceiling. I enjoyed the way the light from the far end glass wall illuminated the studio as well as keeping it warm. I set the image at night to give the etching a more mysterious atmosphere. For many years Danny has been working on a series of etchings and paintings which feature the Tasmanian tiger and its permutations, such as the tiger man (who hunted the tiger in Tasmania). In the etching Danny's drawing of a tiger head can be seen metamorphosing from my drawing of him at work in the center of the studio.



### HELEN GEIER

Helen's studio is a purpose built structure and is situated a small walk from the main home. From the inside it has a church-like quality, with high walls leading up to an A-shaped roof revealing exposed wooden beams. The inside rooms are painted white. High windows on each side of the building allow light to flood the inside. On its downward trajectory the light hits the floor in a geometric pattern partially abstracted even further after shining through the storage racks which Helen designed. The floor gleamed with facets of light on the morning I began the plate. I tried to bring out the beauty of the formal arrangement between the architecture and the shadows. In the etching the figure of the artist is stationary. She is seen seated as if meditating on a large painted screen in its final stages of completion. Even the dog Marta who continuously canters round the yard becomes quiet when inside the hushed studio space.



### RAY CROOKE

As with most of the etchings I tend to begin work by sketching the architectural structure of the image moving to the back of the picture plain to the foreground. The distant image of Ray was cut by the vertical section of the door. Ray was drawing on an etching plate the same size as one of my individual plates. He was using as reference an image which he had painted. I gave Ray a number of different etching tools and he experimented with each one to make a variety of different marks. When he had learned etching at Swinburne many years earlier his teacher took so long to get through the technical aspects of the process that many students including him lost interest. I found it exciting to watch Ray make his own etching while I made one of him.



### STEPHEN NOTHLING

Stephen walked from home to the studio every morning and diligently worked a 9 to 5 day. His main painting room had windows on one side. Light from them illuminated the far wall where his large home made and designed easel stood. Stephen was quite proud of this easel. It could be successfully adjusted to carry large and small canvasses. When I worked on the plates I sat in his comfortable reclining chair near the window. There was so little space for my feet that if I moved them forward too far they would have tripped him.