A Year in the Life of a Resident Artist

By Vicky Oldfield
Ochre Print Studio Artist in Residence 2019

I am making new work in Lockdown and reminiscing over the fabulous year I had at Ochre. I learnt so much there and it's interesting how it is feeding into the work I am doing now. I have not gone in a completely new direction but I am also revisiting old work in a new way; some of the tips and tricks I learnt during my year are starting to creep in and influence my way of working. I am back to working in Intaglio and the courses I did with Ruth Barrett- Danes, Charles Shearer, Katherine Jones and Mai Osawa really inspired me. I already knew a lot of what was taught but there was always some little gem that appeared and has stayed with me.

Beginnings

There is something undeniably special about giving yourself time to explore new processes when you're a practicing artist. And this was one of my main aims during my residency, to push myself out of my comfort zone and to try new ways of working.

Art stands on the shoulder of craft and to get to the art you must master the craft …. and so my journey into new techniques began in January 2019 with the amazing Jule Mallet's 'Turbo-charged' screenprinting course and a break for a holiday meant I did the course twice! This made me realise how much goes into learning a new process, having the time to master it and question why, having done courses previously at Ochre, I did not take them further. It was because I had not given myself the time to develop, I am so grateful for having the residency at Ochre; for this time to play and explore new possibilities.

Jule was greatly entertained with my inability to get my head around NOT '*printing in reverse'* and I made almost every mistake possible with my first print, but I got there in the end after many cuttings of stencils and complications.

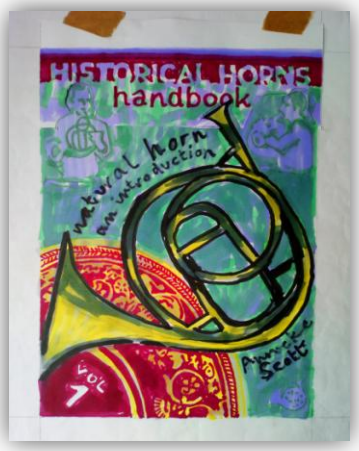
Jule had said 'keep things simple for your first print', why did I not listen to her?!

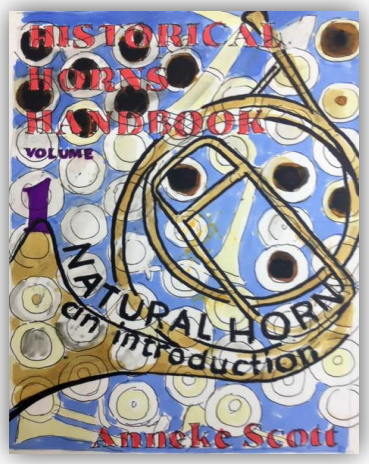
I was hopeful that I had learnt by my mistakes (thinking that I wouldn't make them again) only to discover there are many things that can go wrong in screenprint and my plaintive wail of 'Jule!' would be heard many times over the months to follow.

A few more of my early screenprints

Juggling A Commission With My Residency

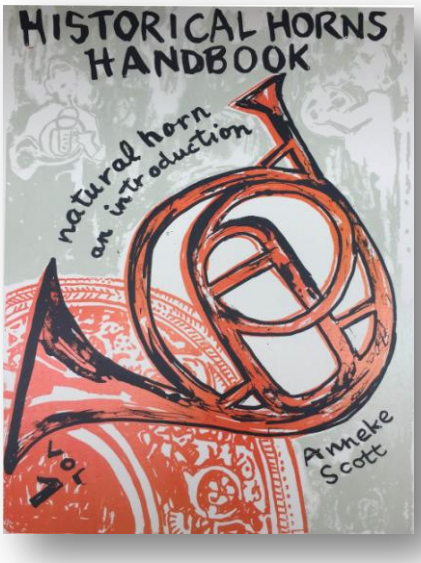
I am a working artist and when a commission comes in after years of freelancing I find it very hard to say no, like buses they come together and then not at all! This was a hard one for me; a collaboration with another artist on a book cover about French horns.





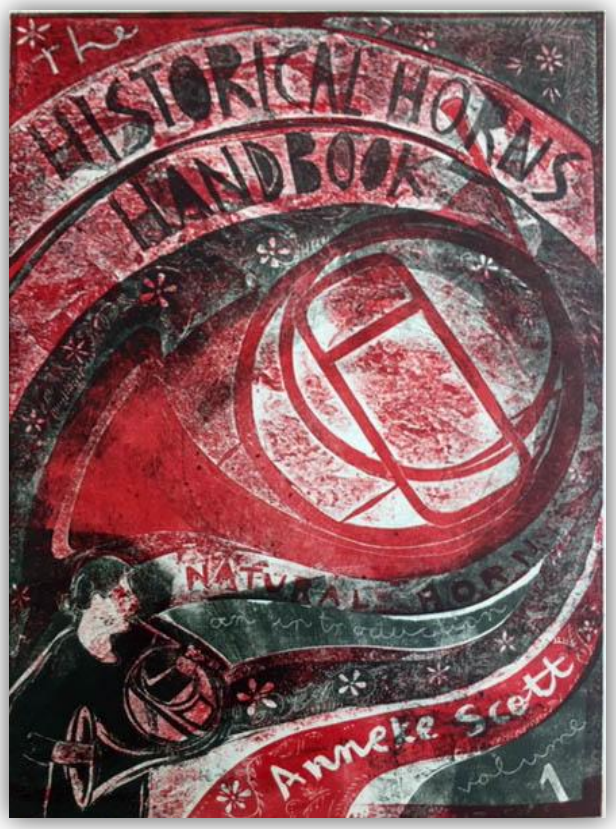
Here are some of my early layout ideas

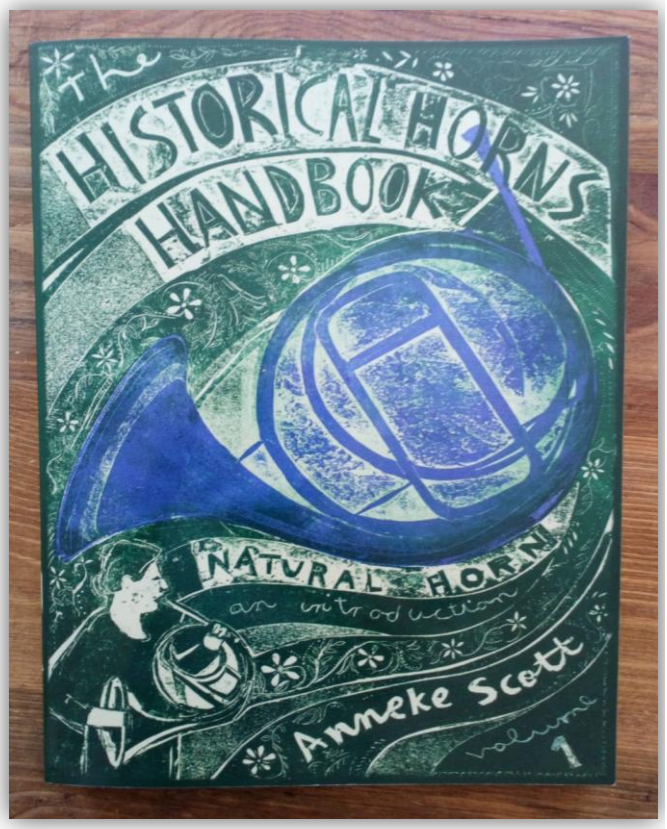
Then I began with some screenprints, exploring all I had learnt during Jule's course



With no definitive idea in place I decided to use ‘french horns’ as a theme during the courses I attended at Ochre, so it popped up in Ruth’s collagraph course (left), then again with my exploration of screenprinting and also during Alan Shearers relief collagraph course (below)

This was the image the client and my co-collaborator liked best and so we worked on this to make the final piece, a difficult inspiration for me, quite challenging but I did learn! Here’s an exploration of colour and the final book cover…..

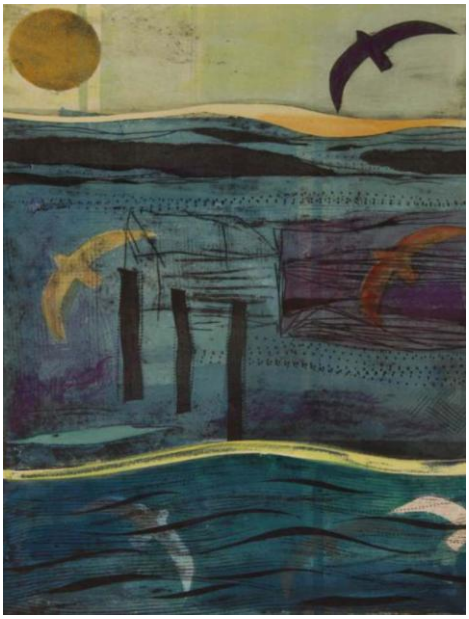




Further Inspiration

By the second day of Ruth's collagraph weekend I was fed up with horns and decided to play with different imagery.

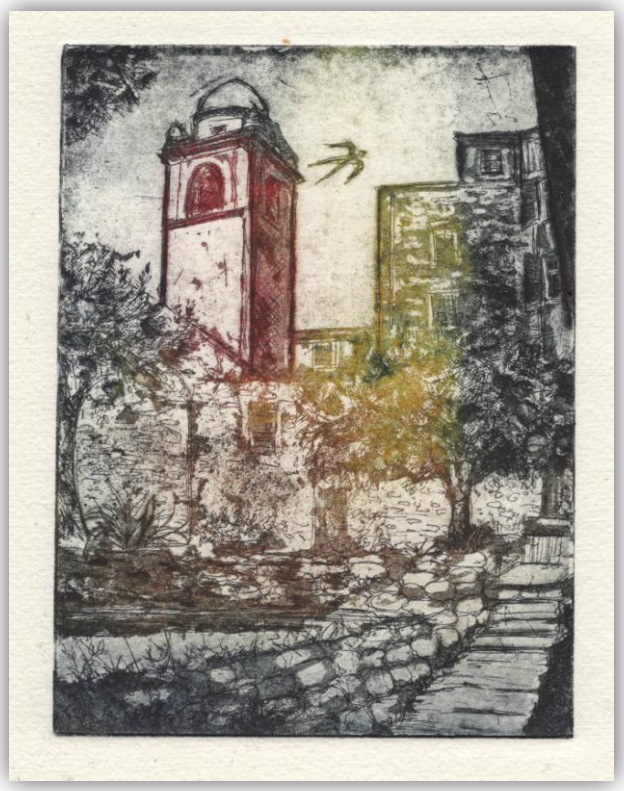
The course was truly inspirational and, although collagraph is something I know well, we all do it differently.



I really got to grips with viscosity printmaking and working with textures that I had not used before. It was wonderful to work with Ruth; she made the experience very playful and some wonderful work was made by students over the weekend.

Summer arrived and I revisited an early love of mine from my art school days during Mai's Summer School on drypoint and etching……

I loved the drypoint and made some more bee pictures. The etching was a very different process from the more toxic days of my youth but the results were gratifying and I used the church from a two week drawing residency in Italy as inspiration. I enjoyed the course but I don't think the etching room is the place for me, another lesson learnt!



During the summer months I tackled more screenprints, trying to find my own way and what spoke to me about the opportunities of screenprint.

Again I used inspiration from my residency in Italy and decided to work from one of my drawings of an abandoned building.

I had a great time playing with line and texture, making marks on mark resist and exposing screens but for the colour it's silkscreen monoprinting that I found really exciting.

So I had a lovely play with colour, learning about the inks and opacity of the medium.

I like the painterly qualities of this work.

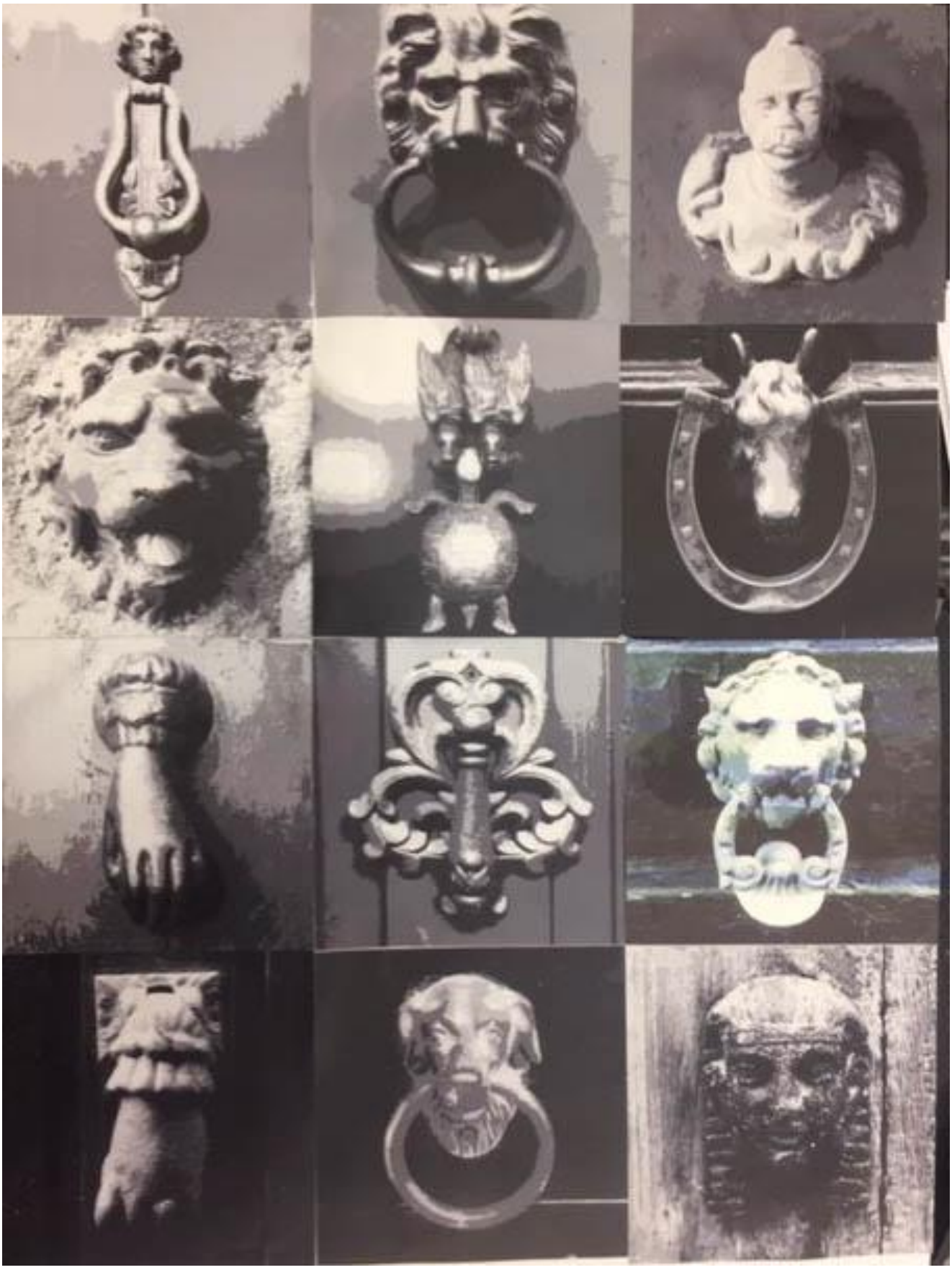
Still working from the Italian drawings, I attended Katherine Jones' Collagraph course. I took the swallows that we saw so much of there and made some prints.

I was back in my comfort zone but with a twist, Katherine likes to use multiple plates, making stencils and rolling them up in relief, something I will definitely be including in future work.

4/10 unique 'life and love' Vicky Ott

4/10 unique 'Swallows' Vicky Ott

One of the things I loved in the Italian village was the door knobs, I had made several drawings and taken lots of pictures and decided I should make work using these and the swallows.



I thought I had grasped the screenprinting processes but I soon found out I still had a lot to learn, my first image was photographic but I had not saved it as a bitmap and so lost all the detail

I tried again in a different scale but the image just bled out as I had the exposure time wrong. On the third attempt I decided computer imagery was just not for me and drew the knobs on Mark Resist.

Poor Jule, every time she walked through the door I had another question for her!

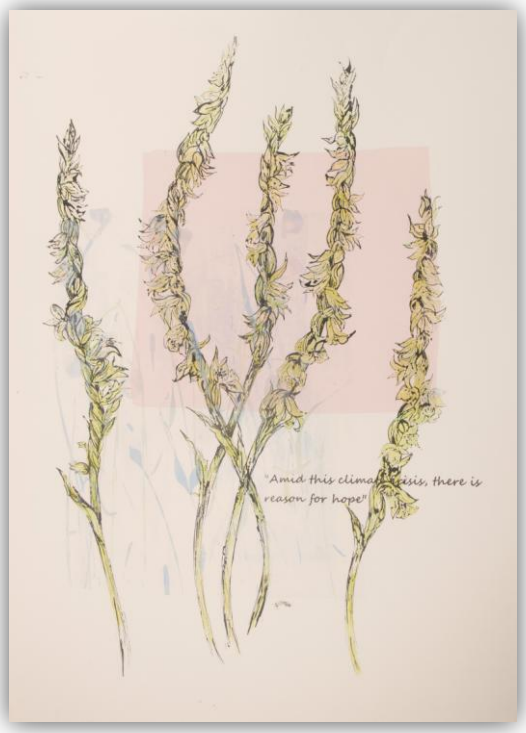
The next screen worked well but I felt it needed to be reversed, so I washed out the screen and did it all again.

I added the swallows and then decided that actually the whole thing was just too flat and called it a day.

The question was where to next?

Pictures start as a wonderful idea in your head, my love for them at this stage is supreme, all I have to do is get the ideas onto paper, and this is where the procrastination begins! Finally when I can no longer think of another stall, I start. The beginnings of new work are often hard, you think ‘that is not what I meant to say, it does not represent what I see in my head’ and the desire to crumple the paper is strong, that’s when you have to let go and see where the medium takes you and just trust and try to enjoy the process.

I decided maybe I should stick with imagery I knew well and see if I could produce a screenprint that I was happy with. I follow some blogs on nature and climate change and decided to draw ‘Summer Lady’s Tresses’, a plant now extinct in the UK.



I had a lovely time playing with the screens, the first attempt came out looking a bit like the wallpaper I used to design, pretty enough but just not interesting.

So I decided to add collage. Still not happy and feeling there was something missing I went round to my mentor, artist Tessa Pearson, and we had a play on her screenbeds. Tessa is much bolder with the colours and shapes than me and things were starting to get interesting!

I also had a fancy to add some text, which is something screen print is perfect for.

However it still took a few attempts to get the colour and opacity correct in the text and, if I do this again, I think I will have more practice runs before putting on the final image.

During this time I also did Mary Daltons Drypoint card course, which was great at giving us all space to just play with textures with no end image in mind. This final piece was made in just thirty minutes after a walk around the garden at Ochre with a pair of scissors and some drypoint card, incredibly liberating!

One of the things I learnt during the residency is to try to keep the part of my brain that makes art and the part that judges separate, while making work it helps to not judge, just to follow where it leads, put it away and then when you look again at a later date, see what you would like to take away from that piece. Making art can be frustrating and demoralizing, so the procrastination is natural, this is complicated because I love to make art and am very driven, it's just **not easy** and when it gets easy it's time to shake things up and that's what I hope I achieved during my residency.

Ochre Print Studio is a wonderful place to be and I learnt so much in my year there as Artist in Residence; the management team and tutors were always open to help and the wonderful people who work there encouraging and inspirational. It's been a fabulous journey; I just want to thank everybody for giving me this amazing opportunity.