



FACE TO FACE

British Portrait Prints from the
Clifford Chance art collection

PROCESS

John Bellamy (1942–2013)

Harry Thubron OBE – Artist 1982

Etching on handmade cream Arches paper, signed and numbered in pencil, titled in plate
Edition: AP, outside the edition of 30
Printed by Edinburgh Printmakers

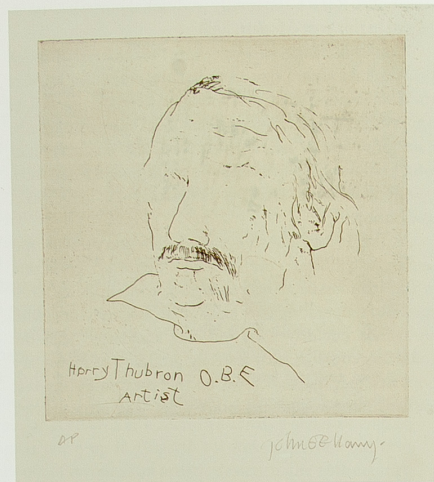
Acquired for the Clifford Chance art collection in 2014

For John Bellamy, born the son of a Port Seaton fisherman on the East coast of Scotland, Art is life, his life. Even when he was recovering from a life-saving kidney transplant operation at Addenbrooke's Hospital in 1988, lying in bed, the first thing he reached for was pencil and paper. Drawing was a means of reclaiming his life, 'drawing was an analgesic'.¹ He drew portraits of his surgeon, the nurses, the hospital room and, above all, himself, implanted with tubes and other medical accoutrements. Before long, he had turned these drawings into etchings, harrowing portraits of a life recovered, reclaimed. The reproducibility of the printed image acting like a calling card announcing his rejection of death. 'I was alive and among friends – what a feeling!'²

Bellamy came relatively late to printmaking. As a student at Edinburgh Art School he found etching 'dreary, like being taught gardening'³ and it is only after 1972 that he produced his first series of black and white etchings that have been claimed to be 'among the most memorable produced by any artist at any time'.⁴ Teaching at Winchester School of Art, the print tutor Norman Ackroyd introduced Bellamy to the medium. 'He was an obvious etcher because there was so much drawing in his painting. Good painters are natural etchers. Also he's a very spontaneous painter and etching is a spontaneous medium. I only had to suggest it to John and he just went for it. He didn't nibble about on the plate.'⁵ The disciplines of etching spilled over into his paintings. 'Because its got to be right the first time'⁶ it brought a clarity to future image making.

Since his Winchester days, Bellamy's printmaking has been the product of a series of sporadic but intense periods of activity rather than a continuous steady production.⁷ 1982–86 saw one of these spurts, the etchings characterised by a bold and definitive line. Touching portraits of his family, his children, his father on his death bed, semi-narratives, part surreal, inspired by his journeys, and a series of portraits such as *Harry Thubron* 'drawn in a clear and simple way that is almost neo-classical'.⁸

Bellamy met Thubron whilst teaching at Goldsmiths College of Art, and he developed a deep friendship with both the art educationalist and his wife Elma. Among their countless escapades was one memorable trip to France, which Bellamy remembered as 'a blend of Pernod,



watercolours, singing tributes to Oscar Wilde and Sickert, endless moules marinières and the usual hearty laughter and banter.⁹ The pleasures of sharing, being with another, is given economic expression in his quick, sketch-like etched portrait of a fellow artist.

Once asked about his approach to making prints, Bellamy responded 'I just did them. The technique was secondary – the imagery was the important thing. The technique adapted itself to the imagery.'¹⁰ Painting, watercolours, pencil drawings, etchings or lithographs, were the means to an end, to the articulation of a semi-autobiographic imagery based on a life lived. Through his prints 'the loneliness of the existential vision of the world so strongly expressed in his paintings, is given a graphic immediacy, haunting in its power.'¹¹

- 1 John Bellamy John McEwen Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh 1994, p.162
- 2 The artist quoted in Mainstream Publishing, *ibid.*, p.164
- 3 The artist quoted in Mainstream Publishing, *ibid.*, p.81
- 4 Duncan Macmillan John Bellamy Print Maker Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh 1995, p.16
- 5 Quoted in Mainstream Publishing, *ibid.*, p.81
- 6 *ibid.*, p.81
- 7 Talbot Rice Gallery, *op. cit.*, p.16
- 8 *ibid.*, p.17
- 9 Mainstream *ibid.*, p.112
- 10 Quoted in *Contemporary British Art in Print* Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, 1995, p.54
- 11 Talbot Rice Gallery *ibid.*, p.8

Glenn Brown (b.1966)

Layered Portrait (after Rembrandt) 1 2008

Etching on Velin Arches 300 gsm paper
Edition: 7/35
Printed at Paupers Press, London and Atelier Avit, France

Layered Portrait (after Rembrandt) 8 2008

Etching on Velin Arches 300 gsm paper
Edition: 7/35
Printed at Paupers Press, London and Atelier Avit, France

Acquired for the Clifford Chance art collection in 2011

Best known and celebrated for his paintings, which have seen him nominated for the Turner Prize 2000, and work acquired by museums worldwide, Brown is often described as a copyist or *appropriationist*, immaculately, but distorting copying paintings from art history. Though Brown argues 'I have exceptions to the word appropriation . . . It's much maligned and misunderstood. It's a term that seems to only express a certain conceptual framework, and obliterates any painterly or aesthetic understanding involved.' His is not the world of the 19th-century artist slavishly seeking to transmit the 'flow of the past into the present'.² For Brown, the paradigm is the artist exercising 'a capacity which is theirs alone by right; to destroy older works of art . . . The past is both elevated as a model and despoiled as a threat.'³

In 2008, Glenn Brown created the series of twenty-two etchings *Layered Portraits*, his first in the medium. Brown has explained the genesis of the project: 'Looking at etchings and being aware of the particular look and particular way that you engaged with an etching, the mostly black and white nature of it, their graphic appearance . . . the way the black line described the world or the inner workings of a mind on a bit of paper produces a particular emotion. And it was this that I wanted to play with, and couldn't do in painting.'⁴

The prints are constructed from published works by the sixteenth-century Swiss-German artist Urs Graf, by Rembrandt and by Lucian Freud. They arose from a complicated process of reproduction and manipulation: Brown began by selecting a number of prints or drawings by each artist; then digitally manipulating scanned reproductions of these, stretching each to a standard size. He then superimposed a number of these digital files to create 'laminated' images of up to fifteen different sources. Finally, new etchings plates were created from the image file.⁵ Despite beginning on a computer screen, the etching process reintroduced a handmade quality to what were photographically treated images from books. 'I think certain sort of accidental things that happen in the etching process were of benefit.'⁶ The result is an intense concentration of personality which becomes both a portrait of the source artist, but 'also of Brown himself. These are psychological portraits or anti-portraits.'⁷

Reflecting on the project, Brown concluded: 'the etchings that I've produced were somewhere in between a multiple object and the fine art singular painting image. They have too much care taken into their particular surface character and detail to be considered just multiple images . . . I want to make more etchings, I don't think I've done enough exploring.'⁸



- 1 *Last Night I Dreamt That Somebody Loved Me*, London, May 2000 interview with the artist and Stephen Hepworth, quoted in *vol. I* *Domaine de Kerguéhennec*, Bignan, France 2000, p.65
- 2 Brown, Graf, Rembrandt, Freud John-Paul Stonard in *Glenn Brown Etchings (Portraits)* Ridinghouse, London 2009, p.5
- 3 *ibid.*, p.9
- 4 Interview with the artist and Michael Taylor, *The Mechanical Hand Artists' Projects at Paupers Press* Black Dog Publishing, London 2012, p.121
- 5 The process is detailed in Ridinghouse, *ibid.*, p.6
- 6 Black Dog Publishing, *ibid.*, p.122
- 7 Ridinghouse, *ibid.*, p.6
- 8 Black Dog Publishing, *ibid.*, p.128