

**Alistair Crawford**  
*The Fisherfolk Drawings & Prints*

On a visit home to Fraserburgh, in the north East of Scotland, I was walking around the harbour when I saw some children playing (a rare sight) near those gigantic hulks of metal they now call fishing boats and I thought that these children would have no idea what it was like on this quayside when I was their age. That so much could change in such a short time! The seashore has always been an important part of my work and I continually return to images of the sea, to a flock of birds, a harbour wall. What is extraordinary for me, however, is the return to the figurative, after an absence of some 28 years.

The *Fisherfolk* prints are based on an amalgamation of childhood memories - augmented with information derived from recent and late nineteenth century photographs. While *Fisherwoman* is entirely based on a well known (in fishing circles) nineteenth century photograph, *Fisherlad* is more made up. It would be wrong to think, however, that they are only concerned with a historical survey of fishing on the East coast, they also embody connotations of having lived such a life. If the people in *Gutting Herring* look, at first sight, more like men than women, then that is precisely how they appeared to me when I was a child. They were strong, tough, well built. While the women gutted, none stop, those on their afternoon off, or during their break, would talk alongside, while they contributed to that other great industry, knitting. If women were not asleep, they were working. The short hair styles, done to one another, were not only cheap but a form of keeping clean, especially if you were living in lodgings, travelling the fishing round the British coastline, in the wake of the herring.

The East coast fishing industry was also steeped in religion; notions of both the heroic and the spiritual (but not the sentimental) are therefore obligatory. These images are also aware of their art historical precedents, from Giotto to Millet. the 'misshapeness' of *Fisherman*, caused by the effects of hard labour on a young body, also contains references to the inevitable passing of youth. References to life, by definition, also talk of death. It also refers to the 'misshapeness' of Michelangelo's *David*. There is throughout a continual play with ideas from the past together with the decidedly modern. They are certainly a view from, and about, *this* moment in time. Indeed, I could argue that they are not particularly concerned with ichthyology. Hence the reason that some of the fish, in *Fisherlad*, give up their need for accuracy of species. My *Fisherman* is also a dreamer, wandering in the inky night, where the night-fish sparkle in the silver moonlight. Staring out past me, like a ghost, unaware of the

intensity of my gaze, is his melancholy his or mine? All images contain various texts, some more obvious than others, purposely so. They must be capable of contemplation.

In addition to the set of drawings in pencil/graphite, there is a set of off-set lithographs which were developed from them (except for *Hauling the Nets* which was drawn 'blind' directly onto acetate sheets for printing). The lithographs were printed in 1990 on Rivoli 160 gsm paper, size 20 8/10 x 14 9/10 ins. Artists proofs (A/P) are numbered in roman numerals and indicate variations in the design. Edition numbers indicate that all such are the same. *Fisherman (Ochre) (Silver) (Chiaroscuro)* are the same 'drawing' printed in three different colourways, similarly, *Fisherlad (Black) (Blue)*. There are thus 6 different images and 9 prints in the set. They are available as a set or individually. A 4,500 word essay on the making of the prints and the autobiographical story of their background in the fishing industry of Scotland and round the British coasts in the 1950s is available on request.

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