**Joy Batchelor: A Gifted Illustrator**

Joy Batchelor was born in 1914 and spent her formative years in Watford a creative community that had developed around the expanding printing industry. The prevailing smell and texture of printers ink remained ever present for Joy reinforced via her father a master lithographer at John Bale & Danielson Ltd in Clerkenwell. Her father regularly brought home off cuts of prints and paper for Joy who remembers him providing her with lots of drawing paper. It is clear that there was a close relationship with her father, one that could be described as a unity in creativity. As Joy notes:

“He was a great companion when I was small. Later on he provided endless supplies of drawing paper, taught me to plant and dig, to ride my bicycle, take it to pieces and put it back together again, to take photographs and develop and print them. Under his guidance I learnt to do lettering and to him I owe what talent I have for drawing.”

Drawing became a fundamental element and expressive medium for Joy enabling her to creatively process ideas, but more importantly interrogate what she saw. There is an analytical aspect to her work that unravels what is perceived and reconstructed for the viewer inviting them to engage and respond to the visual. It is this observational ability that makes Joy’s early drawings and prints so evocative and full of dramatic potential. Two early prints show a structural narrative that reflects an engagement with her community and environment that echoes that of Stanley Spencer’s early work. In a way they function as a commentary on an industrial and creative community. Both show a strong observational skills and a creative desire to evoke narratives on everyday life. In particular the view overlooking the back gardens is evocative of the domestic life of most households with a small cottage garden and the sense of overheard domestic conversations.

The aquatint of people ice-skating is informed by a critical understanding of the compositional and structural staging of pre-renaissance artist’s such as Giotto and British artists such as Stanley Spencer, Paul Nash, Eric Ravilious and Edward Bawden. In which the background is brought forward creating a dramatic sense of an unfolding landscape. The modeling and tonal forms of the figures present a lifelikeness that enhances the humanistic quality of their gestures. Joy shows a maturity and confidence in the expressive use of the line as a narrative form in her prints that is also present in her drawings and commercial work.

In 1913 Joseph Pennell noted the potential impact of lithography on illustration and reproducing the expressive quality of the original drawing without the mediation of an engraver/printmaker. These developments helped liberate the illustrator evidenced in the work of Edward Bawden, Eric Ravilious, Pearl Binder and Enid Marx. This lead to a shift in the visual language of British illustration in the early twentieth century informed by developments in printmaking and new forms of mechanical reproduction. This is equally visible in the expressiveness of the line in Joy’s commercial work and animation. Reflecting a conscious desire for a clear communicative image, enhanced by an expressive energy in her sketches of Hay on Wye and the landscape illustrations for the illustrated edition of Animal Farm, both produced in the 1950’s. This conscious awareness of the communicative potential of different qualities of line perhaps has its foundation in printmaking and the skills taught to her by her father.

This difference in line perhaps presents a paradox in the functionality of the illustrative and animated line that lies in relation to its reproductive ability. As Sean Cubitt (2005) notes animation required a consistent uniformity of line that functioned as both indicator of form and character to enable its repetition by key-animators and inbetweeners. The fluidity of line in Joy’s fashion illustrations and for Josephine Terry’s recipe books focuses on characterization that draws on the line as a compositional form echoing the brush marks of sumi-e painting. The contrasting width and form of the line adds weight and dynamism to the characters designs of Charley (1947) for the series of information films. In which even a frozen scene is full of dynamic potential communicated via the lines of the character, as seen in *Dustbin Parade* (1941), *Jungle Warfare* (1943), *Export or Die* (1946) and animated commercials *Polly Put the Kettle On* (1947), *What’s Cooking* (1949).

A study of Joy’s preliminary sketches for her illustrations highlight the constant reflection on the effectiveness of the drawing through the overlapping pencil marks. With each gesture and mark we are able to follow her process of creative reductionism to bring to life the essence of a woman applying perfume. The highlighted inked elements signify the completion of the line and its unity with the image. Joy used brushwork for her commercial illustrations as functional compositional guides and cues for the viewer. This is evocatively presented in the domestic naturalness of the instructive filler for an article on ‘How to bath in a bowl of water’. The domestic subject matter and settings of her commissions often presented Joy with an opportunity to evoke a joyful humour conveyed through the fluidity of the line in fillers for the Daily Mail and other publications. A woman relaxing on a chair on a floor becomes alive through Joy’s brushwork in which the simplicity of line defines the form. Morphing into a reflective observation on the thoughtfulness of a woman reading a magazine with a raised hand holding a cigarette or a woman applying lipstick.

When Joy and John Halas returned to England in 1938 they quickly became engaged in searching for work as commercial artists. One of the earliest examples of Joy’s designs from 1939 for a silk scarf with the lyrics from Harry Bidgood’s song *Run, Rabbit, Run*. The fluidity of the illustrations and design echo the energy and rhythm of the song. This is in contrast to the more personal drawings and cartoons that Joy produced about her relationship with John in Budapest in spring 1938. These light linear pencil drawings are proto-forms of illustrated motifs and forms Joy later produced for Josephine Terry’s cookery books. The drawings from Budapest represent Joy’s ability to mediate between different languages and cultures. It also presents a personal vision and expression that brings to light the closeness of their creative relationship. The translation reads;

Poor John is very sad, he has a wife who is not too pretty but very clever, his wife is a secret witch, she can make all sorts of things happen, a lovely house, surrounded by a beautiful garden, all full of strawberries, pears, apricots, oranges and black currents, a lovely lake, good wine, sunshine, beautiful moon and stars, no aircraft noise, in the small house there will be books and everything you need, a more than sensational car to motor where you like Yippee!

The overly domestic tone belies a more serious aspect to their relationship, in particular, the balancing of their creative work that was often dependent on a shared visual, rather than a verbal language. It is significant that on their return to Britain Joy became the driving force at the heart of the partnership. Often functioning as a communicative conduit and cultural interpreter between both cultures and clients that continued throughout the early years of their creative partnership in England.

Their creative partnership was cemented when they became part of J. Walter Thompson advertising agency where Joy’s career reconnected with animation. While they continued to produce some commercial art many of their commissions was for animated content. It could be argued that this was a natural course for the animated energy of her illustrations. Joy’s strength lay in being able to mediate information into visual forms that the viewer processed and absorbed into new knowledge. Her designs and storyboards for the Ministry of Information and the Central Office of Information films draws on the skills of an illustrator rather than an animator. This highlights the significance of Second World War information films; that of direct and clear communication aimed at mediating between different groups. Insuring the presentation of knowledge and information intended to provide a collective understanding.

This had its foundation in Joy’s early career and in her formative art education at Watford School of Art. Where Joy learnt that the role of the illustrator was in part to displace their sense of self-expression in order to reflect the project in relation to the needs and desires of the client. As George Him states:

‘If we call ourselves designers it is only to stress that we are artists in the old sense in that we are prepared to subordinate our personal aim-which, as for all creative people is self-expression- to the task we are given; and we believe that both can be compatible.' (Him cited Artmonsky 2012)

Significantly Joy had a sense of independence and strength during a period in which women were starting to have more freedom. In particular women artists like Enid Marx, Margaret Calkin James, Betty Swanwick and Pearl Falconer were able to develop careers. Most notably producing commercial art, including posters for London Transport and London Underground. The diversity of their commercial practice included textile design, book covers, and other printed ephemeral, contributing and enriching the visual culture of contemporary Britain. Others such as Pearl Binder produced work that documented the richness and diversity of different communities of Britain in particular the East End of London.

Unfortunately the ephemeral nature of the commercial illustration work produced from the early 1900’s has not survived and those that exist represent a body of work that lacks accreditation for the artists. Cheryl Buckley argues that: “Women's interventions, both past and present, are consistently ignored. Indeed, the omissions are so overwhelming, and the rare acknowledgment so cursory and marginalized, that one realizes these silences are not accidental and haphazard; rather, they are the direct consequence of specific historiographic methods.” (Buckley 1986:3)

As Linda Nochlin (1971) and Cheryl Buckley (1986) have commented, women artists remain historically absent from the discourse of art and design production and criticism. Joy and many other female illustrators remain unaccredited, unrepresented and not discussed in relation to their contribution to our visual culture. This in part reflects the social dynamics of the period in which limited credit was given to freelancer commercial artists. To the extent that even those that came to the forefront after much struggle, were soon forgotten by subsequent generations.

As noted elsewhere Joy is often associated with her husband John Halas to the extent that Joy’s creative output and creative practice is often seen as less important. This remains a constant issue in terms of evaluating her work yet her ability to mediate between different creative, social and domestic demands is ever present. Even when critics and reviewers discuss her work, there is a distinctive bias when the creative partnership between Joy and John are discussed they dwell on gender, marriage and domestic life rather than Joy’s artistic practice, when it stands out and demands attention. As evidenced in an article in *Art and Industry Magazine* in which the author notes that both Joy and John try to avoid a style rather than try to adapt to reflect the needs of the client. Stating that “Joy Batchelor’s line sketches have an attractive sparkle and slickness of line; they have been used by such magazines as *The Queen*. She has also done folders for the G.P.O. which demonstrate an aptitude for clarity of layout and presentation.” (1938: 186) Yet much of the article is given over to John supported by a larger amount of visual examples of his commercial illustrations.

The unbalanced representation of Joy’s work and creative contribution was sustained in the 1950’s during the promotion of the production of Animal Farm. Photographs of Joy situate her in domestic settings that simultaneously represent her as a mother, wife, animator/illustrator, reinforced by the presence of Vivien and Paul. A motif of domestic life is also used in promotional photographs of Joy with a character model of Charley for the series of films. In contrast to this domestic narrative it is suggested that Joy’s ability to mediate opposing narratives and worlds is evident in her book illustrations for Animal Farm. In particular the pastel landscape romance, and fractured spaces found in Ravilious and Bawden are scraped away in Animal Farm. While the panoramic landscape is evoked, there is a dramatic and stark cut in this illusionary fabric that foregrounds the displacement of the pigs from the land. Joy expresses this through differences in horizontal and vertical compositions and lines. It is not as brutal as Paul Hogarth’s 1966 illustrations but it avoids the brightness and some of the sweetness that pervades elements of the animal designs and mise en scene of the animated feature. While this was the only novel that Joy illustrated and illustrators are often defined by the books they illustrate, it remains an example of her ability to bring to life the text of the author through the mediation of her imagination and vision. As Joseph Pennell noted: “The illustrator – the real illustrator - is an artist who can show what the author meant to say and couldn’t - an artist who can make something out of his author.” (Pennell, 1913:25-26)

References

Artmonsky, Ruth (2013) Designing Women: Women Working in Advertising and Publicity from the 1920’s to the 1960’s London: Artmonsky Arts

Buckley, Cheryl (1986) “Made in Patriarchy: Towards a Feminist Analysis of Women and Design: *Design Issues* Vol.3 No.2, pp.3-14

Cubitt, Sean (2005) *The Cinema Effect* Cambridge; Massachusetts: MIT Press

Longman, Grant “School of Art in South West Hertfordshire 1800-1950” in Jones-Baker, Doris (ed) (2004) *Hertfordshire in History* Hatfield: Hertfordshire Publications pp.237-246

Nochlin, Linda (1971) “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” *ARTnews* 69, 9 January 1971, pp.22-39, pp.67-7

Pennell, Joseph “The Coming Illustration” *The Imprint*, January 1913 pp.24-32