

Making an imprint

Quality of life, low overheads and an abundance of creative talent prompt fine-art printmaker to relocate to Cornwall

Overview

D'Silva Editions produces limited-edition silkscreen prints of work by some of UK's best-known artists. The company was started in 2001 by husband-and-wife team David and Tracey D'Silva, and for its first three years was based on an industrial estate in Brentford. But in early 2004 David and Tracey swapped the grime and congestion of west London for the rugged, unspoilt landscapes of west Cornwall. As David explains, it was a move they had been dreaming about for a while.

"We'd both been familiar with Cornwall for quite a few years, and had grown to love it from family holidays. Then we started to realise that we could do what we were doing up in London just as well down here. But we also saw the move as opening up new opportunities. There are so many highly talented artists working in Cornwall, but as far as we could find out there was no-one else making prints in quite the same way as we do." David sees silkscreen as a medium that can give artists an additional platform and help open up their work to new audiences.

Far from being facsimiles or reproductions, the prints created by D'Silva Editions are hand-made works with their own integrity. David and Tracey work closely with the artists, selecting paintings to be used as the basis for prints or sometimes collaborating with artists to make entirely new images. At present, the prints are sold mainly through galleries, with both production costs and revenues being shared between D'Silva Editions and the artists themselves. But the company is planning to produce its own catalogue and a website

Workforce

The bulk of the studio work is done by David and Tracey themselves, both of whom trained as fine artists before moving into printmaking (David ran the silkscreen department at London Contemporary Arts for many years). Other personnel are brought in to work on a project basis, with training in specialised techniques being given as necessary. David and Tracey have had no problems finding people with the right skills and aptitude.

Technology

The actual printing process is all done by hand, using traditional silkscreen beds, drying racks and ancillary equipment. In over 25 years of fine art printmaking, David and Tracey have developed various distinctive techniques that give their prints a textured and translucent quality. But they are certainly not averse to new technology - in fact David says that computer software now plays a big part in some of the stages preparatory to printing, such as colour preparation.

through which to market prints directly to collectors and the wider public. They also do a substantial amount of technically demanding "long edition" prints for major fine-art publishers in the UK and the United States.

Finding the right space for a studio - in a converted farm building near the village of St Buryan - was, says David, pure serendipity: "With the sort of equipment we use, moving is quite a complex operation, so we wanted to get it right first time. In the event, it all went smoothly, and Bolitho Estates - who we rent from - have been extremely helpful in adapting the space to our needs. It's simply a beautiful place to be working, and the 15-minute drive from home is pure pleasure. And it's costing us far less than what we were paying in London - our annual business rates, for instance, are only slightly more than what we were paying each month before!"

The lifestyle benefits of moving to Cornwall have more than lived up to the D'Silvas' expectations. "It's a wonderful place for our seven-year-old son to be growing up," David says. "He's slotted into the local school extremely well, and is finding it easy to make friends. Everything is just so much more relaxed than in London, where having kids around to play involved a huge amount of organisation. Here they tend to be in and out of each others houses and gardens all the time." Just beyond the garden wall of the D'Silva's home in St Just, the fields fall away to the sea, and exploring hidden coves and beaches is a source of endless delight. "One of our favourite spots is Sennen Cove," David says. "There's a great bar there which makes a perfect vantage point for enjoying the sunset over a glass of chilled white wine."

Clients

David and Tracey have made prints of work by artists including Eduardo Paolozzi, Patrick Caulfield and RB Kitaj. Cornwall-based artists with whom they currently work include Jeremy Annear, Maggie Matthews and Noel Betowski. They also undertake contract work for fine-art publishers including Washington Green in Birmingham (part of the Halcyon Fine Art Group) and Park West of Michigan, both of which market prints worldwide.

Support

D'Silva Editions has not received any assistance from either local or national agencies, though informal networking with individuals and businesses locally has been very helpful (in finding premises, for example). Cornwall Pure Business was not up and running at the time the company relocated, but David sees the initiative as very positive for businesses contemplating a move to the county.