*Translation - After Christiane Baumgartner*

Woodcut print on paper with framed engraving

Carl Rowe 2017

I was aware of there being an Albrecht Dürer print in the Castle’s collection since an initial visit to the archive in 2013. From the listed works, I chose *St Jerome in his Study*, an engraving from 1514 in which Saint Jerome is hunched over one of the many manuscripts from antiquity that he is known to have translated into Latin. This engraving, the image of St Jerome in a near transcendental state of concentration, epitomises the analytical rigour of Northern Renaissance. I wanted to make a statement about the importance of print in the dissemination of knowledge, the impact of the printing press and the making of books, plates, maps etc. I thought about metal engraving but also the abundance of wood in Norther Europe and the enduring nature of woodcut printing from the Renaissance to contemporary art.

When I discovered that the Dürer print was in fact a facsimile made by an unattributed master printer, albeit of exquisite quality and detail, but nevertheless not authentically Dürer, I was a little deflated. However, that is where my contemporary response to a layered history of an image was born. It occurred to me that ‘translation’ was at the heart of what I was presented with. Initially with Dürer imagining and translating into pictorial form a snapshot of a significant 1st century theologian and academic, from which a skilled craftsman has then endeavoured to faithfully reproduce with every nuanced engraved line from Dürer’s original work, and then there would be my response. To what extent would I attempt a further translation of this work?

Probably picking up subconsciously on some news item, I thought about Bletchley Park and the World War 11 code breakers. Looking at archive photographs of the highly secretive operations, of anonymous people fixated on the task of spotting patterns and of interpreting coded messages, resonated exactly with Saint Jerome translating ancient texts into Latin. The austere interiors of the rooms where this work took place at Bletchley Park, the harsh light made more oppressive by virtue of the grainy wartime black and white photography, made me think of Christiane Baumgartner’s use of low-resolution surveillance imagery. One photograph from Bletchley Park stood out, an image showing the Intercept Control Room with three men in a state of suspended animation (one significantly being Alan Turing). I resolved to make a mechanical photo-realist woodcut translation of this photograph using exactly the same technique that Baumgartner employs.

How might the two works combine; my woodcut print and the engraving of St Jerome? In previous works, I have exploited the fact that multiple copies of an image can be made from a single matrix, thus negating the preciousness of the copy. I have made composite pasted works using multiple copies, and have nailed objects to their surfaces, have thrown rotten fruit and vegetables at walls of printed multiples, have stacked cans in front of walls pasted with screen-prints and have played out performances with printed backgrounds. For WCHTC, I simply decided to have the engraving of *St Jerome in his Study* hung on a rectangle of my woodcuts pasted to the gallery wall. The title is not intended to be cryptic, quite the opposite. There are layers of translation evident in the composite work and multiple occasions where data has seemingly been encrypted, decoded and transcribed.