

ALISTAIR BELL

Born: Darlington, England, 1913.

Deceased: Vancouver, Canada, 1997.

Came to Ontario in 1922 and to British Columbia in 1929

Resident of West Vancouver 1941-1997.

Principally self-taught, but studied etching and lithography at Central School of Art, London, 1959.

Awarded Canada Council Senior Arts Fellowships for study and work, 1959 and 1967.

Principally a printmaker, concentrating largely on woodcuts, etchings, drypoints and engravings.
Also worked in watercolour and most drawing mediums.

Exhibited throughout Canada and USA, and in many international graphics exhibitions, including:

International Colour Woodcut Exhibition, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, 1954

II International Exhibition of Graphics, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, 1957

First International Exhibition of Graphics, Tokyo, 1957

III International Exhibition of Graphics, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, 1958

Canadian Graphics Today, American Federation of Artists, New York, 1958

VI Bianco e Nero, Lugano, Switzerland, 1960

Americano de Grabado, Santiago, Chile, 1963

Americano de Grabado, Santiago, Chile, 1965

First International Triennial of Contemporary Xylography, Carpi, Italy, 1969

Recent Prints, Canada, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1967

Exhibition of Canadian Prints, Canadian Society of Graphic Arts, Washington, DC, 1971

International Exhibition of Contemporary Xylography, Madrid, 1971

Many solo exhibitions including:

Rhythmically Repeated: Alistair Bell, Nanaimo Art Gallery, Nanaimo, BC, 2013

Expressionist Renderings: The Prints of Alistair Bell, Gordon Smith Gallery of Canadian Art, North Vancouver, 2013

Alistair Bell, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, 2013

Impressions of Nature - the Prints of Alistair Bell, West Vancouver Museum, 2008

Alistair Bell - the Boats, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, 2008

Alistair Bell Birds, Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto, 2005

Lions, Tigers & Bears - the Animals of Alistair Bell, Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto, 2002

Lions, Tigers & Bears - the Animals of Alistair Bell, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, 2002

Alistair Bell - Force of the Line, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, 1999

Alistair Bell 1913-1998, Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto, 1998

Alistair Bell, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1998

Alistair Bell - Prints and Drawings, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, 1997

Alistair Bell, Ferry Building Gallery, West Vancouver, 1996

Prints and Drawings, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver & Toronto, 1996

Banners, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, 1996

Drawings, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, 1995

Alistair Bell, Seymour Art Gallery, North Vancouver, 1994

Woodcuts by Alistair Bell, Simon Fraser University Gallery, 1993

The Birds of Alistair Bell, Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto, 1993

The Birds of Alistair Bell, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, 1992

Alistair Bell, Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto, 1990
Alistair Bell, Seymour Art Gallery, North Vancouver, 1989
A Decade of Drypoints and Etchings, Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto, 1988
Recent Paintings, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, 1988
Prints and Drawings, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, 1984
Alistair Bell - Prints, 1935-1981, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1982, plus subsequent tour of bird and animal prints (various British Columbia art galleries), 1982-83
Alistair Bell - Drawings and Prints, Bau-Xi Gallery, 1982
Alistair Bell - Watercolours, Drawings and Prints, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, 1978
Alistair Bell - Naturalist Prints, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, 1976
Alistair Bell, Odyssey Galleries, Vancouver, 1980
Alistair Bell - Two Decades of Printmaking, Bau-Xi Gallery, Victoria, 1974
Alistair Bell - Recent Drawings, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, 1974
Alistair Bell, Drawings and Graphics, 1935-1970, Burnaby Art Gallery, 1971 and national tour (13 locations), 1971-73, plus a separate tour in British Columbia

Many other group exhibitions in British Columbia and nationally, including:

The White Line, Wood Engraving in Canada Since 1945
Biennials of Canadian Art, National Gallery of Canada
Canadian Society of Graphic Art Annual Exhibitions, Toronto
Northwest Printmakers International Exhibitions, Seattle Art Museum
Calgary Graphics Exhibitions, Alberta College of Art, Calgary
BC Graphic Exhibitions, Vancouver Art Gallery
Burnaby Print Shows, Burnaby Art Gallery
BC Society of Artists Annual Exhibitions, Vancouver Art Gallery
BC Artists Annual Exhibitions, Vancouver Art Gallery

Work included in numerous private and corporate collections, as well as art galleries, museums and universities throughout Canada and in the USA, including:

National Gallery of Canada
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Ministry of External Affairs, Ottawa,
Canada Council Art Bank
Provincial Art Collection, British Columbia
Museo Ugo da Carpi, Italy

Complete opus of more than 300 prints in the collection of the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

Three fully illustrated catalogues of prints:

1935-82, published by Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, 1982
1982-92, published by Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, 1992
1993-97, published by Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver, 1998

Represented by Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver and Toronto.

ALISTAIR BELL

- 1913 Born, Darlington, England, October 21
1922 Came to Canada
1929 Moved to British Columbia
1935 Began making prints while taking night class at Vancouver School of Art
1941 Married and moved to West Vancouver
Became a principally self-taught printmaker concentrating mainly on woodcuts and drypoints, also working in watercolour and most drawing mediums; later became a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts and the Graphic Arts Council of Canada
1950 Spent several months in England
1956 CW Jefferys Award, Canadian Society of Graphic Arts
1957 LeMoine Fitzgerald Memorial Award, Winnipeg Show
1959 Awarded Canada Council Senior Art Fellowship; spent full year in England & Europe; studied etching & lithography at Central School of Art in London
1967 Retired from work to devote himself to printmaking fulltime; received second Canada Council Senior Art Fellowship
1969- Represented by Bau-Xi Gallery
1971 Major Retrospective of Drawings and Graphics organized by Burnaby Art Gallery, Burnaby, BC, and national tour
1982 Major Retrospective of Prints, 1935-1982 organized by the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria, BC
1997 Deceased, Vancouver, December 9

Solo Exhibitions

- 2013 "Rhythmically Repeated: Alistair Bell", Nanaimo Art Gallery, Nanaimo, BC
"Expressionist Renderings: The Prints of Alistair Bell", Gordon Smith Gallery of Canadian Art, North Vancouver
"Alistair Bell", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
2008 "Alistair Bell - the Boats", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
"Impressions of Nature - the Prints of Alistair Bell", West Vancouver Museum
2005 "Alistair Bell Birds", Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto
2002 "Lions, Tigers & Bears - the Animals of Alistair Bell", Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto & Vancouver
1999 "Alistair Bell - Force of the Line", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
1998 "Alistair Bell 1913-1997", Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto & Vancouver
"Alistair Bell's Prints", Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
1997 "Prints & Drawings", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
1996 Ferry Building Gallery, West Vancouver
"Prints & Drawings", Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto
"Banners", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
1995 "Drawings", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver

- 1994 Seymour Art Gallery, North Vancouver
- 1993 "Woodcuts by Alistair Bell", Simon Fraser University Gallery, and tour to 2 Vancouver Island art galleries, 1994
- "The Birds of Alistair Bell", Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto
- 1992 "The Birds of Alistair Bell", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
- 1990 Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto
- "Drawings from 3 Decades & Recent Prints", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
- 1989 "Woodcuts & Watercolours", Seymour Art Gallery, North Vancouver
- Vancouver Art Gallery
- 1988 "Recent Works", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
- "Recent Paintings", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
- "A Decade of Drypoints and Etchings", Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto
- 1986 Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
- 1984 "New Works and Selections from the Fifties, Sixties and Seventies", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
- 1982 "Alistair Bell: Prints, 1935-1981", Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, and circulated to BC regional galleries, 1982-83
- "Drawings and Prints", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
- 1980 Odyssey Galleries, Vancouver
- 1979 "Alistair Bell - Watercolours, Drawings, Coloured Woodcuts", Backroom Gallery, Victoria
- 1978 "Watercolours, Drawings and Prints", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
- 1976 "Alistair Bell - Naturalist Prints", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
- Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto
- 1974 "Alistair Bell - Two Decades of Printmaking", Bau-Xi Gallery, Victoria
- "Alistair Bell - Recent Drawings", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
- 1971-73 "Alistair Bell, Drawings and Graphics", National Tour
- 1971 "Alistair Bell - Drawings and Graphics 1935-1970", Burnaby Art Gallery, and national tour, 1971-3, plus separate travelling exhibition in BC
- 1970 New Westminster Public Library, New Westminster
- 1969 Gallery Fore, Winnipeg
- University of BC Faculty Club
- The Print Gallery, Victoria
- 1967 Unitarian Church, Vancouver
- 1966 Pandora's Box Gallery, Victoria
- 1964 BC Provincial Library, Victoria
- 1962 University of New Brunswick and Mount Allison University, NB
- 1961 "Alistair Bell - Recent Graphic Work", Vancouver Art Gallery
- 1959 Victoria Art Gallery
- 1957 "Alistair Bell - Zoo Drawings", Vancouver Art Gallery
- 1955 Lambert Gallery, Vancouver
- 1954 Hart House Print Cabinet, University of Toronto
- 1951 "Alistair Bell Drawings", Vancouver Art Gallery

Two Person Exhibitions

- 1961 "Bell - Dumouchel", touring exhibition organized by National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
- 1944 "Alistair and Betty Bell", Vancouver Art Gallery
- 1942 "Alistair and Betty Bell", Vancouver Art Gallery

Group Exhibitions

- 1999 "Generations: Five Decades of Art in West Vancouver 1912-1962", West Vancouver Museum & Archives
- 1998 "Finesse & Fortitude - The Art of Making Prints", Seymour Art Gallery, North Vancouver
"Tokens of Love - A Selection of Small Works", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
"An Underground Exhibition of Prints & Drawings", Classic Engraving, Victoria
- 1990 "The White Line, Wood Engraving in Canada Since 1945", Carnegie Gallery, Dundas, ON, travelling nationally until 1993
- 1988 "Contemporaries of Ann Kipling: Drawing from BC", Vancouver Art Gallery
- 1987 "Profiles of a Heritage, Images of Wildlife by British Columbia Artists", organized by the Centennial Wildlife Society of BC, toured December 1987-September 1988
"Elective Affinities: Aspects of Landscape", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
- 1984 "Vancouver Art and Artists", Inaugural Exhibition of the new Vancouver Art Gallery
Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
- 1983 3-person exhibition, Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
- 1980 "Anniversary Show", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
- 1978 "Aspects of Printmaking", BC Central Credit Union, Vancouver
Bau-Xi Gallery, Toronto
- 1977 10th Anniversary Show, Burnaby Art Gallery
- 1972 "Exhibition 4", West Vancouver Visual Arts Society
- 1971 International Exhibition of Contemporary Xylography, Madrid, and 8 other Spanish museums, plus European tour
Exhibition of Canadian Prints, Canadian Society of Graphic Arts, Washington, DC
- 1970 International Exhibition of Contemporary Woodcuts, Toire del Greco, Italy
"Four North Shore Artists", West Vancouver Community Arts Council
Unitarian Church, Vancouver
New Westminster Public Library, BC
37th Annual Exhibition, Canadian Society of Graphic Art, Toronto City Hall
"Contemporary Canadian Prints 2nd Collection", Department of External Affairs, Ottawa

- 1969 "BC Watercolours", Bau-Xi Gallery, Vancouver
 5th Biennial Burnaby Print Show, Burnaby Art Gallery
 First International Triennial of Contemporary Xylography, Museo della
 Zilografia Ugo da Carpi, Italy
 9th Calgary Graphics Exhibition, Alberta College of Art, Calgary
 36th Annual Exhibition, Canadian Society of Graphic Art, Robert
 McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, ON
- 1968 37th Annual B.C. Artists' Exhibition, Vancouver Art Gallery
 89th Royal Canadian Academy Annual Exhibition, Hamilton Art Gallery
 35th Annual Exhibition, Canadian Society of Graphic Art
 London Public Library and Art Museum, London ON
- 1967 34th Annual Exhibition, Canadian Society of Graphic Art
 "Recent Prints, Canada", Museum of Modern Art, New York
 4th Biennial Burnaby Print Show, Burnaby Art Gallery
- 1965 2nd Biennial Americano de Grabado, Santiago, Chile
- 1964 4th Annual Calgary Graphics Exhibition, Alberta College of Art, Calgary
- 1963 1st Biennial Americano de Grabado", Santiago, Chile
 2nd Biennial Burnaby Print Show, Burnaby Art Gallery
- 1962 "Drawings by BC Artists", Centennial Pavilion, Burnaby, BC
 2nd Annual Calgary Graphics Exhibition, Alberta College of Art, Calgary
- 1961-65 45th-49th Annual Exhibitions, Society of Painter-Etchers and Engravers
- 1961 4th Biennial of Canadian Art, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
- 1960 6th Bianco e Nero International Exhibition of Prints & Drawings, Lugano,
 Switzerland
 6th Winnipeg Show, Winnipeg Art Gallery
- 1958 25th Annual Exhibition, Canadian Society of Graphic Art,
 Toronto Art Gallery
 "Canadian Watercolours and Graphics Today", National Gallery of
 Canada, Ottawa
 "Canadian Graphics Today", American Federation of Artists, New York
 3rd International Exhibition of Graphics, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, and
 1958-59 Yugoslavian tour
 "100 Years of BC Art", Vancouver Art Gallery
 4th Winnipeg Show, Winnipeg Art Gallery
- 1957 3rd Winnipeg Show, Winnipeg Art Gallery
 3rd BC Graphic Exhibition, Vancouver Art Gallery
 1st International Biennial Exhibition of Graphics, Tokyo & Osaka
 2nd International Exhibition of Graphics, Ljubljana, Yugoslavia
 2nd Biennial Of Canadian Art, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
- 1956 "Contemporary Graphic Art", Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
 Northwest Printmakers International Exhibition, Seattle
 23rd Annual Exhibition, Canadian Society of Graphic Art,
 Toronto Art Gallery
- 1955 24th Annual BC Artists' Exhibition, Vancouver Art Gallery
 22nd Annual Exhibition, Canadian Society of Graphic Art,
 National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

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| 1954 | 23rd Annual BC Artists' Exhibition, Vancouver Art Gallery
International Colour Woodcut Exhibition, Victoria and Albert
Museum, London, circulated in Europe & North America |
| 1954 | 21st Annual Exhibition, Canadian Society of Graphic Art
2nd BC Graphic Exhibition, Vancouver Art Gallery |
| 1952 | 19th Annual Exhibition, Canadian Society of Graphic Art, Toronto |
| 1951 | 18th Annual Exhibition, Canadian Society of Graphic Art
20th Annual BC Artists' Exhibition, Vancouver Art Gallery |
| 1949-67 | 39th through 57th Annual Exhibitions of the BC Society of Fine Arts/
BC Society of Artists, Vancouver Art Gallery |
| 1949 | 1st B.C. Graphic Exhibition, Vancouver Art Gallery |
| 1948 | 17th Annual BC Artists' Exhibition, Vancouver Art Gallery |
| 1947 | 14th Annual Exhibition, Canadian Society of Graphic Art |
| 1944 | Annual BC Artists' Exhibition, Vancouver Art Gallery |
| 1945 | Annual BC Artists' Exhibition, Vancouver Art Gallery |
| 1947 | Annual BC Artists' Exhibition, Vancouver Art Gallery |
| 1933-36 | 2nd, 3rd and 4th Annual BC Artists' Exhibition, Vancouver Art Gallery |

Collections:

Air Canada
 Alberta College of Art
 Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
 Art Gallery of Hamilton, ON
 Art Gallery of Southwestern Manitoba, Brandon, MB
 Art Gallery of Windsor, ON
 Artists for Kids Trust, North Vancouver
 BC Central Credit Union
 BC Ferry Corporation
 BC Provincial Collection
 BC Teachers Federation
 Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, NB
 Brandon College, MB
 Burnaby Art Gallery
 Canada Council Art Bank
 Capilano University, North Vancouver
 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
 Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce
 Colby College, Waterford, ME
 Concordia University, Montreal
 Confederation Art Gallery and Museum, Charlottetown
 CPI Group
 Edmonton Art Gallery
 Emily Carr University of Art & Design, Vancouver
 Georgian College, Barrie, ON
 Glenbow Museum, Calgary

Kamloops Public Art Gallery, BC
Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery
Laurentian University, ON
London Public Library and Art Gallery, ON
McGill University Merrill Lynch Collection
McMichael Canadian Art Collection
Memorial University, Newfoundland
Ministry of External Affairs, Ottawa
Mississauga Public Library, ON
Mount Allison University, Owens Art Gallery, NB
Mountain Equipment Co-op
Museo Ugo da Carpi, Carpi, Italy
Museum of Modern Art, New York
Nanaimo Art Gallery, Nanaimo, BC
National Gallery of Canada
Ontario Heritage Foundation, Firestone Art Collection
Peterborough Art Gallery, ON
Queens University, Agnes Etherington Art Gallery
Sarnia Public Library and Art Gallery, ON
Simon Fraser University
Sir George Williams University, Montreal
Sudbury Art Museum, ON
Surrey Art Gallery, BC
The Gallery, Stratford, ON
Toronto Dominion Bank
University of British Columbia
University of Lethbridge, AB
University of New Brunswick
University of Saskatchewan
University of Washington, Seattle, WA
University of Victoria
VanCity Savings Credit Union
Vancouver Art Gallery
Victoria and Albert Museum, London
West Vancouver Museum
Winnipeg Art Gallery

Narrative Biography

Alistair was born in Darlington, in the north-east of England, on October 21, 1913. His English-born mother Gladys had studied the art of medieval illumination at the Hammersmith School of Art in London, while his Scottish-born father Archibald was a mechanical engineer. Alistair was the second oldest of their five children, and the only boy to survive infancy.

The Bell family emigrated to Toronto when he was 9, then moved on to Galt (now Cambridge), Ontario, and finally in 1927 to Vancouver, where Archibald had obtained a position as chief engineer for a machine works. However, the machine works soon closed its doors and Alistair's father never again found gainful employment, due to the onset of the Depression. Since there were few employment opportunities for his sisters, Alistair's parents took their only son out of school and sent him off to work to help support all the other family members.

Alistair felt very deprived by the early curtailment of his formal education, and frustrated by his inability to pursue his academic and artistic interests. His personal situation was aggravated by the hard economic times and his family's slumping fortunes, and also by his father's ongoing denigration of his abilities. As a result, Alistair began his adult life with a serious lack of confidence in himself, and a somewhat pessimistic view of the world.

While working as a shoe salesman at Spencer's Department store and other low paying jobs, Alistair managed to find the time and money to take a night school printmaking class from B.C. Binning in 1935, and he made his first few drypoint prints in the later 1930's. In 1940, he joined the weekly figure drawing sessions of the Atelier Sketch Club - coincidentally, on the same day as Betty Streatfeild.

Betty was 11 years older than Alistair, with a secure government job in New Westminster and interests that had grown far beyond her upper-middle class family and friends in Victoria. She also had the kind of worldly experience and self-confidence that Alistair sadly lacked. She quickly became his soul-mate and, in July 1941, his wife. For him, their fortuitous meeting marked the real beginning of his life and his close relationship with her did much to build his self-confidence, both personally and artistically.

For several years, Alistair eked out a living as a freelance commercial artist, doing drawings for department store advertisements and other low-grade graphic assignments. But he gave this up when he found the commercial art work was consuming too much of his creative energies, and yielding too little in return. Seeking more secure employment to support his new wife and a hoped-for baby, Alistair took a job in the drafting office of Western Bridge, a major steel fabricating company on the south side of False Creek.

In spite of extended periods of intensive overtime work during the Second World War and later, he managed to find some time for his own artistic work in evenings and weekends. Throughout this time, he also continued the process of cultural and intellectual self-education that he had started after his formal education was cut short.

Alistair's interest in printmaking was reignited in the early 1940's when B.C. Binning passed on a set of wood engraving tools, and he began to work under the influence of the English wood engraving masters Eric Gill and Thomas Bewicke. A series of delicate wood engravings of plants, executed in 1948, demonstrated his own mastery of this medium and marked the start of Alistair's career as a serious printmaker.

About the same time, Alistair also started to use wood engravings for his annual Christmas card – a

practice that he continued for the next 5 decades. Alistair's Christmas cards typically combined some stylized seasonal imagery with his love of animals, birds and plant forms and his fascination with fine typography. For a number of years, Alistair also printed a second set of his annual Christmas card in different colours for Bess and Lawren Harris, who were among his earliest intellectual friends and artistic admirers.

Alistair's first major opportunity to spend an intensive period immersed in art - both his own and that of the modern masters - came in early 1950, when Betty received a small inheritance that could only be spent in the UK, due to post-war currency restrictions. During several months in London, with his 5-year old son Alan in school all day, Alistair was free to visit the many art galleries and draw - especially in the docklands along the lower reaches of the Thames and at the London Zoo.

Following his return to Vancouver in the fall of 1950, Alistair gradually changed his printmaking focus from small, delicate black-and-white wood engravings to larger, more expressionistic colour woodcuts. In this medium and freer way of working, Alistair's major influences were Oskar Kokoshka, Max Beckmann, Emil Nolde and other German expressionists.

The drawings made in England in 1950 provided the basis for many of his prints during the 1950's. But the subject matter for his drawings and prints soon expanded to include local port-related images, dead birds and weathered totem poles from coastal B.C.; dry landscapes and plants from the interior of B.C.; and animals and birds from his periodic visits to the Seattle and San Francisco Zoos.

Alistair's second major opportunity for artistic growth came in 1959-1960, when his first Canada Council Senior Arts Fellowship enabled him to spend a year in the UK and continental Europe. This included four months of studies in etching and lithography at the Central School of Arts in London, and eight months living and working in several places in France (Languedoc, Brittany and Paris) and in southwest England (near Land's End).

In addition to his introduction to other printmaking techniques and the inherent visual stimulation of the many different places he visited, Alistair's year in the UK and continental Europe enabled him to immerse himself in a wide variety of galleries and museums. But the most important outcome of his year in Europe was his large body of mature drawings and watercolours, marking a major advance in this side of his artistic output, and providing material for many new prints over the next decade and a half.

During the 1960's and early 1970's, Alistair continued his passion for drawing birds and animals, mainly at the Seattle and San Francisco Zoos, and fishing boats, mainly along the Fraser River at Steveston and the Celtic Cannery. Alistair's printmaking output increased substantially after 1967, when a second Canada Council Senior Arts Fellowship and the completion of his son's university education enabled him to resign from his position as a team leader at the structural steel drafting office, and devote all his time to his art.

In the 1970's and early 1980's, Alistair made several shorter trips to Holland, England and France, as well as the San Diego, San Francisco and Seattle Zoos, resulting in more suites of drawings, especially of fishing boats, birds and animals, and more raw material for his prints. From the late 1960's through the mid 1980's, Alistair also made fairly frequent short trips within B.C., to draw the dry eroded cliffs near Ashcroft, and the windblown trees and sand dunes at Long Beach, which also served as the basis for later prints.

As always, he selected the most promising drawings for subsequent design refinement and translation into woodcut, etching and drypoint prints. He also undertook some limited teaching

engagements during this time – at the summer session of the University of B.C., and as a guest instructor at several colleges and secondary schools – but insisted that only drawing and printmaking skills could be taught, and the art had to come from the individual.

In the later 1980's, Alistair's drawing excursions became much less frequent, but he maintained a very steady pace of work at home, in his tiny studio, and continued making prints from his earlier drawings. He also made several series of drawings and full-bodied watercolour paintings of plant materials that were close at hand. After a minor heart attack in the late 1980's, he replaced his big old floor-mounted cast iron press with a much smaller, lighter table model which made it much easier to print his drypoints and etchings.

Much of Alistair's later output consisted of smaller drypoint prints - many with added mezzotint rocker work and an area of bold, simple colour. Birds and animals were the preferred subject matter in the later portion of his career, but there were also a number of fishing boats, plants and weathered totem poles.

Alistair continued to produce some new colour woodcuts in his later years, but he found the physical effort of printing the multiple colour blocks increasingly arduous. Since he printed additional copies only when required, and he could not imagine anyone else pulling impressions on his behalf, the editions of many of Alistair's colour woodcut prints are incomplete - some with only a handful of copies.

Alistair's output slowed in the mid-1990's when Betty's advanced age finally began to show and she had to move into an extended care facility close to their modest home in West Vancouver. During that period, Alistair adjusted his daily working schedule to accommodate two visits to Betty each day, as well as many domestic chores.

After Betty's passing in the middle of March, 1996, Alistair had little interest for anything but his art, and there was a significant increase in his output of new prints. In spite of failing health, he continued working right up to his last day at home - readying a new copper plate for yet another drypoint. Alistair was admitted to hospital with an inoperable brain tumour in October 1997, and died on December 9, 1997.

**DRAFT OF 1 FEB/1983 LETTER FROM ALISTAIR BELL
TO CHRIS VARLEY, HEAD CURATOR, EDMONTON ART GALLERY**

Thank you for your letter of January 27th; it's nice to hear from you.

Your show sounds interesting and I hope it comes off well, as it should. There was a great deal of interesting work done, certainly in the Vancouver area, in the later forties and through the fifties.

Of course I should like to be included. My better work was only beginning in the fifties though, so there are not as many things I'd like to show as there would be in the sixties or, particularly, the seventies. I do have some things at home still though and I'll list them below.

About my place in the art community of the period you mention? I'm pretty well entirely self-taught, and started drawing seriously in the thirties – tiny pen drawings mostly, of landscape and cityscapes, a few really quite decent, but with absolutely no conception of pictorial design. During the forties quite a bit of life drawing and some other things, but during the war years I was up to my ears in overtime work as a structural draughtsman working on the shipbuilding programme. After 1945 too, I continued in structural steel draughting, still with much overtime work, and consequently got relatively little artistic work done, except that I started wood engraving, which I did some evenings and weekends.

In 1949, when I was feeling pretty desperate for time to draw more, Betty had a small legacy in England which, owing to currency regulations, couldn't be taken out, so we plunged our savings into a passage round by the Panama to London, I having wangled a six-months leave of absence. While in England I drew all the time and, for the first time, began to feel I might be able to do something serious if I could get more time at it when I came back. My first really interesting drawings were done in that period, although many of them look pretty crude, if strong, now. I did dozens of London Zoo drawings then, which really got me started on that aspect of my work.

When we returned home my job swallowed me up again, but I did quite a lot of drawing at the weekends and did show a good many, becoming a member of the B.C. Society of Artists as well as the Canadian Society of Graphic Art. Kathleen Fenwick bought some drawings and prints for the National Gallery at that time which was a great encouragement. I suppose you might say I was beginning to get known as a draughtsman (I mean in art) but I certainly was not a polished artist.

Later in the decade I did do some quite decent pen and watercolour drawings which began to have more substance, and then I got promoted in my daily job and more engulfed in masses of supervisory paperwork which almost took away all my free mind for other things.

At that time (1959) I applied for a Canada Council Senior Fellowship for a year away – to study lithography in London and to work without interruption for a good period, as well as seeing a lot of good pictures abroad. We – Betty, fifteen year old son Alan and I – went away in August 1959 and returned in September 1960. In that period I really began to achieve some of what I wanted, as well as to know what there was to want to achieve. I think that from that period I had become a serious artist with something to say.

I can't tell you exactly how I was viewed by my contemporaries, but I was included in most of the exhibitions of current B.C. work in those days.

What did I find in Vancouver and what kept me here? I liked the flat tidal marshes of the Fraser delta and the fishing boats for subject matter, and at that time the security of my job was important to me after extreme economic insecurity during the thirties, which one doesn't easily forget. I didn't have the art school training which would give me any real methods which I could have imparted by teaching, so I just stuck in my, by now hated, job.

In 1966, with our son pretty well self-supporting, I applied again for a Canada council Senior Grant, this time for a year to work at printmaking, saying in my submission that I intended to leave my office job and launch out into the profession of printmaker. I got the grant, and after some initial economic trepidation, have managed, averaging over leaner and better years, to keep going satisfactorily. The big thing was to do some work that I would feel was worth while and to make some kind of living while I did so. I was nearly 54 when I took the plunge so it really was none too soon! During the late sixties and the seventies I think I have done my best drawings and certainly my best prints. I don't change enough with the times, and I don't fit categories.

Well, so much about me, probably far more than you bargained for. I'll just append a list of a few things I've thought of, and some notes about them.

I hope this gives you something to go on, and if you need any more information please let me know. In the meantime Betty and I send our warmest greetings.

Sincerely

PRINTMAKING – WOOD ENGRAVING – WOODCUT

I don't especially consider it an experimental medium – at least for myself.

The discipline involved does appeal to me – I tend, in my drawings from nature, to get excited about all the interesting forms I see, and even although I may bring the whole into a unity, I still yearn after strongly defined masses with the representational items given a much greater emotional impact by *drastically simplified treatment*. *This is an ideal I don't always achieved in my prints, and in any case, it is always worked up to by a more-or-less protracted process of gradual simplification and elimination.*

The idea of cutting away material to leave a surface which will give an impression on paper when inked with colours, I find exciting in itself. There is to me an eternal fascination about taking an impression of any kind, however trivial, and suppose this is one of the underlying root causes of my interest in *printmaking*.

The material I favour for cutting – wood – has its own qualities of interest. The very feel of the substance when being worked on, seems to have a quality of liveliness and the grainy character gives a pleasant unity (as well as variety!) to the printed image. It seems to help me achieve a little of the artificial, symbolic quality of a thing made, rather than just a transcription of something seen, a quality which is not too easy for me to come by.

In wood engraving, which I also practice, it is the precision and delicacy of the medium that I enjoy, as well as the sensation of cutting out the dense end-grained wood with small and exactly shaped tools. I'm afraid I am not a purist in wood engraving as I usually find that my designs have finished up as "black line" conceptions rather than the white line "mark of the tool" engravings which are the classic concept in the medium.

The main influence I have felt on my work in wood-cuts is, I should say, the graphic work of the so-called German Expressionist school, using this term widely to include great artists who were really marginal to that movement, such as Munch, Beckmann and Kokoschka. While I certainly in my own work stop considerably short of all-out expressionism, there is that about their approach which has yielded results which excite me more than those of any other school. I don't think I could ever go in for complete expressionism though, because I am too unwilling to jettison certain of the lovelinesses of things observed, in order to gain greater impact.

Finally, I should say that I don't think my print-making proper influences my other work, which consists principally of watercolours and drawings.

The print-making mediums of etching and lithography, which I have been studying recently, are still too new to me for my comments on them to be of any great value in the context of these remarks. They do interest me greatly in quite different ways, and I look forward to doing a great deal with both mediums.

Alistair Bell
Undated (1960's)

I suppose it sometimes takes an artist a very long time before he fully recognizes just what it is that he actually is seeking in his work, and also why he is drawn again and again to particular motifs out of all those that are available to him.

Certainly it has been so in my case. It is only in the past few years that I have come to see what all the motifs I select do have in common. What they share, in my view, is an essential linear quality. In the boats I draw, particularly in fishing boats, I respond to the thrusting, rhythmically repeated lines of the hulls and I delight in all the intricate networks of rigging. The structures of birds and animals, as of rock formations and wind-shaped trees, provide me similarly with a range of compelling angularities.

As I work I select and order such elements into pictures that I hope will communicate the excitement I feel in this play of lines. Regardless of whether tone or colour may also be present, the focus of my work is essentially a linear one.

For printmaking I derive all my ideas from my drawings. Often it happens with me that a drawing, even one not completely successful in itself, contains an idea which can be developed in a more rigid medium to achieve much greater intensity and concentration. That feeling I have for linear directional thrusts in drawing determines the character of my printmaking works and my preference for those media which involve direct cutting into block or plate.

Alistair Bell
December, 1977

Although birds and animals, working boats, and plant and landscape forms are characteristic motifs in my graphic works, I would say that the true subject in all these works is lines - linear energies and relationships. It is this sensation of the dynamic and exciting play of lines, apprehended rather than objectively seen, which is my primary subjective response to the motif - notwithstanding whatever real-life sympathies I may well have for my birds and boats.

Actually, it will always be just some such imaginative or intuitive identification which constitutes the true reality for the artist's purpose, and not the comprehensive, accurate recording of objective appearance.

As a lifelong draftsman, lines themselves have a special significance for me. The actual physical experience of drawing is a very dynamic one - I often feel as though I am actually **building** the forms and movements on the paper. This can be quite breathlessly exciting, particularly when I am working before a zoo creature which may change position any second and destroy the precise magical sensation I am attempting to realize.

I have concerned myself with drawing as such in these remarks because my drawings serve as starting points for all my works in the various printmaking media. When I come to consider a drawing for potential development as a print, a whole new series of demands faces me - demands pertaining to the design's suitability for the particular medium - such as drypoint or woodcut. Either of these media would require considerable adaptation from my conception in crayon or pen on paper, to one which respects the specific qualities peculiar to drypoint or woodcut - each with qualities that are quite different from the other, and both distinct from lines drawn freely on paper.

Further, as I am particularly fond of employing straight lines forcefully drawn - jagged, even - I tend to gravitate toward the printmaking media of which these qualities are most characteristic, and above all the media in which I can physically enjoy the sensation of direct cutting into plate or block.

Alistair Bell
April 17, 1989

In truth, my real interest is in structures; in my drypoints and etchings it is structures of lines; and in my woodcuts, of lines organizing and animating the larger masses.

I lean toward subjects in which I see possibilities for expression in these pictorial structures I speak of. Characteristically, my subjects have been boats (working boats), birds and animals and, to a lesser extent, plant and landscape forms.

In my earliest printmaking days I made drypoints on copper plates. Later I became interested in wood engraving, then in making woodcuts, particularly colour woodcuts which have made up the greater body of my total work. In more recent years I have returned to my first love, drypoint, in which the networks of scratched lines themselves are to achieve everything I'm trying to say.

Certainly the subject matter is realistic, but it is evident that once one opts for a construction in terms of lines alone the result does become an abstraction in the true sense of the word.

Alistair Bell

For use in 1994 Seymour Art Gallery exhibition??

The subjects which suggest pictorial possibilities to me are usually ones having some strongly defined directional or linear character.

In the woodcuts I aim at achieving a strong, compact design, using large areas of colour, and I intend the character of the wood and the tool marks to be an integral part of the whole texture of the design. The pattern of the cutting and the disposition of the forms provides the directional thrust.

In the more linear techniques (line engraving, drypoint) I like to build up a network of interweaving lines, and to contrast the closely-worked parts with broad tonal areas.

Alistair Bell
undated

ALISTAIR BELL
PRINTS
1982-1992



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We are grateful to the Vancouver Art Gallery for allowing Ian Thom to write an essay.

Ian Thom deserves our appreciation not only for his excellent essay, but for producing the first comprehensive catalogue on Bell's work, Alistair Bell: PRINTS 1935-1981, to accompany the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria exhibition he curated in 1982. That catalogue was so well designed that it has proved to be an invaluable resource. For this reason, we have faithfully followed his format so that the two catalogues may be used in tandem as a complete guide to Alistair Bell's prints. To this end, the numbering of prints in the present catalogue continues the numbering system of the first. The first number in the current catalogue, therefore, is number 195.

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XISA AND BAU-XI HUANG

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Nous exprimons notre gratitude au musée des Beaux-Arts de Vancouver pour avoir permis à Ian Thom de composer le présent essai.

Nous sommes particulièrement reconnaissants à Ian Thom, non seulement pour son excellent essai mais aussi pour avoir préparé le premier catalogue complet de l'oeuvre d'Alistair Bell: Alistair Bell: PRINTS 1935-1981, qui accompagnait l'exposition du musée des Beaux-Arts de Victoria, qu'il a organisée en 1982. Ce catalogue remarquable s'est révélé un outil précieux. C'est la raison pour laquelle nous avons respecté scrupuleusement sa présentation, de façon à ce que les deux catalogues puissent être utilisés conjointement comme guide exhaustif des gravures d'Alistair Bell. Cette fin, la numérotation des gravures du présent catalogue continue celle du premier. La première gravure porte donc le numéro 195.

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