(Re)discovering Vicki Penfold's linocuts
(Re)découvrir les linogravures de Vicki Penfold

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Electronic version
URL: https://journals.openedition.org/estampe/4285
DOI: 10.4000/estampe.4285
ISSN: 2680-4999

Publisher
Comité national de l’estampe

Electronic reference
Noelia Oliva García and Elisa Díaz González, "(Re)discovering Vicki Penfold's linocuts", Nouvelles de l’estampe [Online], 269 | 2023, Online since 15 April 2023, connection on 21 April 2023. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/estampe/4285 ; DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/estampe.4285

This text was automatically generated on 21 April 2023.

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Introduction

1 Vicki Penfold stands as one of the most significant artists of the Canarian artistic and cultural scene of the last century. Born in Krakow (Poland) in 1918, she was lucky enough to live an eventful life that would take her from her native Poland to places as diverse as Siberia, Iran, Tanzania, Cyprus, Istanbul or Paris, until she ended up in Tenerife in 1964, where she finally resided until her death in 2013. Since her arrival she became a remarkable character and quickly integrated into the society of Tenerife, opening her atelier in a short time and evidencing the firm intention to continue developing her own work and the desire to share her knowledge and strengthen teaching as a complement to the sale of her works.

2 With her, one of the few initiatives for the alternative plastic art education in Tenerife is born, the Atelier Tacoronte is thus reported as a unique and modern initiative that introduced the working dynamics of the Parisian free schools to the Canary Islands and managed to bring together under the same roof numerous creators and artists of very different disciplines for their sessions of painting nude models. In fact, Vicki Penfold would be one of the first artists to work with nude models, while the Canary Islands and Spain were still immersed in Franco’s dictatorship, which was almost a transgressive and revolutionary act in a rural environment such as the northern island of Tenerife.

3 Penfold quickly became a renowned artist, both for her education in European avant-garde art and for a rich visual culture reflected in her works. Her fame as a portraitist, her fluency in different languages and her good relations with the island’s elites and the many international communities that resided in Tenerife brought her very good
contacts, and she soon acquired an important portfolio of clients that allowed her to develop her artistic activity without major inconvenience throughout her life.

5 During her artistic career, she always paid special attention to her graphic work, which she cultivated throughout her life, using different techniques and procedures. Silent witnesses of this work are numerous proofs and frames as well as several wood and linoleum plates that are preserved today in the artist's personal collection held by the IEHC.

6 The main objective of this article is to propose a first approach to the study of these materials, in particular the various linocut plates that are preserved. The aim is to establish an initial classification that would facilitate the cataloguing and analysis of these materials for later study and comparison with other elements. The purpose is to study the materials and artistic procedures and to document more widely this lesser-known facet of Penfold in order to value her figure as a multidisciplinary artist and a reference of the artistic and cultural movements of the second half of the twentieth century in the Canary Islands.

Background

7 The donation made to the IEHC is the opportunity to work directly on the artist's personal background, which provides us with a unique testimony to know and reconstruct her life and artistic career.

8 The study of the different materials allows us to approach the artist and her work from a transversal perspective, building a new narrative that seeks to highlight the importance of Vicki Penfold in the artistic and cultural panorama of her time and her influence on later generations.

9 Perhaps the most outstanding aspect of her portraiture, a genre that has given her a great reputation, since she was in charge of capturing the faces of numerous illustrious characters and of the crème de la crème of Tenerife society of the time, all of whom had a predilection for her particular way of interpreting reality and transferring the psyche of the person portrayed onto the canvas. In the same way, she also cultivated the landscapes and the details of flora, protagonists of many of her paintings, in which the insular nature always occupied a prominent place.

10 However, perhaps her least known and publicized facet is that of graphic artist, an aspect that she cultivated in different ways, from serigraphs to linocut, and that remained constant throughout her life, even in the Christmas cards she sent to her acquaintances and for which she used to create prints that she later reproduced.

11 Her prints always present an original aesthetic, of great plastic strength, in which textures and colors are the obvious protagonists. In her prints, one can read the love for the landscapes of the islands and for flowers such as strelitzias, but always from the perspective of the close spectator, who lives and participates in those landscapes. As she herself stated, in these works "una importante influencia del arte folklórico polaco, de los grabados populares...".

12 The broadest list of her graphic work can be found in the catalogue of the exhibition La estampa en Canarias: 1750-1970 curated by Leandra Estévez and which was held in the exhibition hall of the Centro Cultural CajaCanarias in Santa Cruz de Tenerife between January and February 1999 and at the Casa Colón of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.
between March and April of the same year. In the chapter dedicated to Vicki Penfold, Estévez gives a brief overview of her graphic work, distinguishing the changes in style that coincide with the changes of the decade, thus giving some details of her style from the sixties to the nineties.

According to a footnote in Estévez’s, at least until 1999, Penfold exhibited prints only twice, in 1994 at an exhibition at the Dreieich House of Culture in Frankfurt and in March 1989 at the exhibition she organized at the Círculo de Bellas Artes for the occasion of her appointment as a Full Member of Real Academia Canaria de Bellas Artes de San Miguel Arcángel.

There’s also a brief reference to her work in the graphic arts field in the volume of the Library of Canarian Artists dedicated to Vicki Penfold by Álvaro Ruiz Rodríguez, in which he himself emphasizes that the technique that the artist has developed the most is woodcutting. For her part, Leandra Estévez says of her in the chapter dedicated to her work: “A la señora Penfold le gusta grabar como le gusta pintar y esculpir, para ella ésta es una faceta tan principal como las otras dos” making it clear that for Vicki Penfold this was not a minor art form, but another form of expression to cultivate.

This sheds light on the artist’s penchant for experimentation in the graphic arts, reflecting her particular style in engravings and serigraphs throughout her life and never ceasing to be interested in new techniques and methods as evidenced by the numerous books, manuals and catalogs found in her personal library, such as Linocuts and Woodcuts: A Complete Block Printing Handbook by Michael Rothenstein.

In the same way, among the documents that she treasured in her personal archives, we also find catalogs of companies dedicated to the manufacture and sale of inks or utensils for engraving or serigraph, such as a catalog of Charbonnel’s inks or clippings from German publications for the purchase of gouges and presses. In these same catalogs appear handwritten notes from the artist, references or color selections. We even find letters in which she asked her daughter to send her some materials that she cannot find in the island, a sign that the graphic arts were also for her an alternative vehicle of expression to painting and sculpture, where she worked in a differentiated way, as Estévez points out:

No simula pintar Vicki Penfold cuando graba. En sus estampas la pintura y las artes gráficas mantienen un ritmo, un tiempo diferente. Exigente con el resultado de sus estampas, mantiene una intención de experimentar con el alma de la cromía en un intento por conseguir el acorde del color, y no la música que ocupa el tiempo.

Perhaps because they are more popular with the public, her paintings and portraits are better documented and there are many examples in specialized manuals. The same cannot be said for her graphic work. Although it is known that the artist produced a large amount of artwork using various printing and engraving techniques, the references that can be found are rather scarce.

**Materials and methods**

As a starting point we took the 22 linocut plates that are preserved in her personal collection and that will use to study the artist’s working methods. We will also take into account other materials related to her graphic work such as prints, condition tests and
author’s proofs which we will need to compare with the images constructed from the plates we keep.

20 The first objective is to classify and order these materials by articulating a classification proposal through a quantitative and qualitative analysis that will serve us for analysis and comparison. To do so, we will attend first to the technique used, which in this case corresponds to linocuts to several inks, and secondly, to the frame used and the material in which the plate was made.

21 Besides from that, the qualitative analysis will consider each of the elements according to their theme, image represented, the relationship with the pieces we know and the colors of the plates.

22 With the aim of analyzing the artist’s procedures, we wanted to complete this first classification and description by carrying out applied image studies that have allowed us to a better understanding of the artistic procedures which is considered fundamental for the conservation-restoration of artwork work of art. In this sense, we proceeded to the technical study of linoleums using RTI technology (Reflectance Transformation Imaging), a method that captures the incidence of light on a surface from different angles, allowing to document widely the properties of the surface of an object and that achieves excellent results in materials that present a minimum variation of depth, as it is the case of linocut boards.

Results

23 In total, we have twenty-two plates, five of which are small, and the other seventeen of a format size slightly larger than a DinA4 where we can clearly observe the way she constructed her work from several superimposed prints of different colors that provide more plasticity to the textures drawn from linoleum. As Ruiz commented in her book dedicated to the artist, “en la obra gráfica de Vicki destaca el juego y la experimentación en una constante búsqueda de texturas con materiales diversos y un decidido recorrido por el color”\textsuperscript{10}.

24 Most of the plates are easy to relate to works that we know, as is the case of Anaga Mountains, a work for which all the three plates used in its composition are preserved. The personal archive also contains two prints made on lower quality paper, in which the artist used a much warmer color combination than that found in the photographs of this work reproduced Álvaro Ruiz’s book or in Leandra Estévez’s catalog\textsuperscript{11}. These samples also serve to bring us closer to the creative processes and allow us to carefully analyze issues such as the order of printing.

25 Along with these three linocut plates, the fund has another 19 original plates, including those corresponding to the works: Verodes, El Calvario, Drago and Strelitzias, and others with details of flowers and a peacock. Following Estévez, there is four examples, Verodes, El Calvario, Drago and Montañas de Anaga correspond to her first stage of graphic work, in the second half of the sixties, after she acquired her first direct manual press in 1965, with which she printed these first linoleums. Currently several prints corresponding to these plates have been found in the collection:

- 2 proof prints on paper of Montañas de Anaga
- 4 proof prints on paper El Calvario, Tacoronte
- 1 Strelitzia test stamp
- 16 Drago test prints, in different supports (colored cardboard)

26 Several Christmas cards were also found in which the artist used some of the plates, such as the plates with queens of the night or peacock motifs.

27 The following table represents the 22 numbered plates as they were found, the theme that is represented in each of them and the correspondence with the works we know today:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1. Plate n° 1.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Multi-ink Linocut</td>
<td>Chipboard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 2. Plate nº 2. 2 Multi-ink Linocut Chipboard

Figure 3. Plate nº 3. 3 Multi-ink Linocut Chipboard
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure 4. Plate nº 4.</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Multi-ink Linocut</th>
<th>Chipboard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5. Plate nº 5.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Multi-ink Linocut</td>
<td>Chipboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6. Plate nº 6.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Multi-ink Linocut</td>
<td>Chipboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 7. Plate nº 7.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Multi-ink Linocut</td>
<td>Chipboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 10. Plate nº 10.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Multi-ink Linocut</td>
<td>Chipboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 11. Plate nº 11.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Multi-ink Linocut</td>
<td>Chipboard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 14. Plate nº 14. 14 Multi-ink Linocut Chipboard

Figure 15. Plate nº 15. 15 Multi-ink Linocut Chipboard
Figure 18. Plate nº 18. 18 Multi-ink Linocut Chipboard

Figure 19. Plate nº 19. 19 Multi-ink Linocut Chipboard
Figure 20. Plate nº 20.

20
Multi-ink Linocut
Chipboard

Figure 21. Plate nº 21.

21
Multi-ink Linocut
Chipboard
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Thematic</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Order No.</th>
<th>Color Remains</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Linoleum occupies the entire center of the board, leaving irregular edges of a few centimeters around the entire material. The image depicted occupies practically the entire matrix. In the lower left corner, the linoleum is very low, leaving it to a lower plane. The rest of the motif is worked with fine gouges.</td>
<td>Flower</td>
<td>Flower</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The linoleum occupies the entire surface of the board and is completely removed in several areas revealing the support. Around these voids shallow incisions are made.</td>
<td>Landscape with Teide</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Linoleum occupies the entire surface of the board. Only a thin line remains unworked in the upper area. Small areas of vacuum are observed where the frame is visible. The rest of the linoleum is worked with shallow incisions. In the lower right area there are traces of filler material.</td>
<td>Mountain landscape</td>
<td>Montañas de Anaga</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The linoleum fits the shape of the mountainous landscape showing the support at the top. There is also an empty area in the middle left area. Linoleum is worked on its entire surface with shallow incisions.</td>
<td>Mountain landscape</td>
<td>Montañas de Anaga</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Linoleum occupies the entire surface of the board</td>
<td>Mountain landscape</td>
<td>Montañas de Anaga</td>
<td>1969</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Plate worked directly on the conglomerate board, using the texture of the material itself as a complement to that created by the incisions. The motif occupies practically the entire surface.</td>
<td>Verodes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Collagraph worked directly on the board adding material.</td>
<td>Strelitzias</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Collagraph worked directly on the board adding material.</td>
<td>Strelitzias</td>
<td></td>
<td>Handwritten note: First Print</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Linoleum is used only for the depicted form, exposing the board. The internal details of the flower are worked with small incisions of different width and depth.</td>
<td></td>
<td>6 images (Queen of the Night)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>On the board are cut six rectangles with a few centimeters apart and surrounded by a border around. The wider, deeper incisions are combined with some very fine details that barely touch the surface of the linoleum.</td>
<td>Texture</td>
<td></td>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Incisions are worked directly on the frame to create textures.</td>
<td>Strelitzias</td>
<td></td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Linoleum occupies the entire surface of the board. Wide and very deep incisions are predominant and show the frame in some places.</td>
<td>Religious motive</td>
<td><em>El Calvario, Tacoronte</em></td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Linoleum occupies the entire surface of the board. The incisions are deep and of different widths.</td>
<td>Religious motive</td>
<td><em>El Calvario, Tacoronte</em></td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>In this plate large areas of linoleum are combined with others in which the board has been completely exposed. The incisions are deep and of different widths.</td>
<td>Religious motive</td>
<td><em>El Calvario, Tacoronte</em></td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Black * Green</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Linoleum occupies the entire surface of the board. In the middle-lower right area, traces of filler material are observed.</td>
<td><em>Drago</em></td>
<td><em>Drago</em></td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Linoleum occupies the entire surface of the board. In the middle-lower right area, traces of filler material are observed.</td>
<td><em>Drago</em></td>
<td><em>Drago</em></td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Linoleum occupies the entire surface of the board. It works both as shallow and wide incisions in the dragon tree, and with deeper and thinner ones in the upper right area.</td>
<td><em>Drago</em></td>
<td><em>mismatched elements</em></td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Red</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Linoleum occupies the entire surface of the board. The whole motif is worked through deep fine incisions that give the impression of a drawing. Filler material is observed in small dots all over the linoleum.</td>
<td>Queen of the Night</td>
<td><em>Christmas greeting</em></td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Dark blue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Linoleum is used only for the depicted form, exposing the board. Small areas with filler material are observed around the motif.</td>
<td><em>Small sterlitzia</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Green</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Linoleum occupies the entire surface of the board. The floral motif is worked with very fine and superficial incisions.</td>
<td>Queen of the Night</td>
<td></td>
<td>60s</td>
<td>Blue</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this first classification, we observe how the artist used conglomerate boards for her printing-matrixes with a layer of linoleum, but also experiments with other textures and finishes, sometimes scratching the board directly or working with some material on it to create more voluminous areas (collagraph).

In several plates, we can also observe the use of the fillers to cover holes previously made in the linoleum, which, along with the enormous amount of condition tests, speaks to a constant search for improved results.

It is worthy noting the large number of pieces she kept in her studio in which she constantly changes the colors of the different prints. This makes clear the eagerness to experiment with color and her constant search to achieve the result that convinced her the most. On the plates themselves it is difficult to distinguish colors of the ink, due to the overlapping of several of them.

To analyze in more detail the way the artist acted on the materials we have used image analysis through the use of RTI. This technique offers us the possibility to create interactive lighting effects of the object and its visualization, allowing to analyze in detail complex surfaces such as these plates. It should also be added that on many occasions, this interactive lighting game lets us observe details that, in most cases, would go unnoticed with the usual photographic studio.

This technique allowed us to record the imprint of the tools used in the execution of the prints from the reading of the different mirror images and to know the *modus operandi* of the artist.

| 21 | Linoleum occupies the entire surface of the board. The central motif is left in a higher plane and the bottom is worn out. In the tail details, deeper incisions are combined with shallower incisions. | Peacock | Blue |
| 22 | Linoleum occupies the entire surface of the board. Several points of filler material are observed in the center of the composition. | Peacock | Red |
Conclusions

Vicki Penfold’s graphic work is presented as one of the most unknown aspects of the artist’s work despite the fact that she has dedicated a good part of her life to cultivating its imprint. This is why the study of her career and artwork from her personal archive is presented with a dual function, on one hand, to better understand her creative process, history and influences and, on the other hand, as a source of decisive information for her conservation-restoration.
Therefore, starting from a specific material, such as the different linocut plates that are preserved in her personal archive, we wanted to make a first approach to the graphic work of the artist while developing applied image studies that allowed us to better understand the artistic procedures, which is considered fundamental for the conservation-restoration of an artwork.

A first classification has been made taking into account qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the linocut plates that have provided us with an overview of the different materials we have to continue our analysis.

This preliminary analysis allowed us to establish relationships between the different plates and prints, both with those we can find in the collection and with those we find in bibliographical references.

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NOTES


5. Within the collection are preserved at least six copies of the Catalogue of this exhibition.


7. “Mrs. Penfold likes to imprint as she likes to paint or sculpt, for her this is a facet as important as the other two”. Leandra Estévez, op. cit., p.151.


9. “Vicki Penfold doesn’t pretend to paint when she engrave. In her prints painting and graphic arts maintain a rhythm, a different timing. Demanding with the result of her prints, she maintains an intention to experiment with the soul of chromia in an attempt to achieve the chord of color, and not the music that occupies time”. Leandra Estévez, op.cit., p.151.


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**ABSTRACTS**

Vicki Penfold (Krakow 1918 - Tenerife 2013) was a Polish-born artist who arrived in the Canary Islands in the 1960s after a long pilgrimage to places as disparate as Kenya, Paris and Israel, among others. She also traveled to Austria to become a student of Oskar Kokoschka in his Salzburg studio. Her personal archive, recently donated to the Instituto de Estudios Hispánicos de Canarias (hereafter IEHC) on the island of Tenerife, preserves a wide variety of materials that are currently being inventoried and catalogued. This collection presents a huge potential for study and cross-sectional analysis to address the methodology of the artist and the materiality of his work. This article proposes an initial analysis of the various matrices, relating them to the pieces currently preserved and establishing relationships with the documentation contained in his personal archive. It also aims to highlight Vicki Penfold as a graphic artist, perhaps her most overlooked facet, but one that highlights her enormous sensitivity and versatility in working with a wide variety of techniques.

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Vicki Penfold (Cracovie 1918 - Tenerife 2013) était une artiste d’origine polonaise qui est arrivée aux îles Canaries dans les années soixante du siècle dernier après un long pèlerinage dans des lieux aussi disparates que le Kenya, Paris et Israël, entre autres. Elle s’est également rendue en Autriche pour devenir l’élève d’Oskar Kokoschka dans son atelier de Salzbourg. Ses archives personnelles, récemment données à l’Instituto de Estudios Hispánicos de Canarias (ci-après IEHC) sur l’Île de Ténérife, conservent une grande variété de matériaux qui sont actuellement en cours d’inventaire et de catalogage. Cette collection présente un énorme potentiel d’étude et d’analyse transversale pour aborder la méthodologie de l’artiste et la matérialité de son travail. Cet article propose une première analyse des différentes matrices, en les mettant en relation avec les pièces actuellement conservées et en établissant des relations avec la documentation contenue dans ses...
archives personnelles. Il cherche également à mettre en valeur la figure de Vicki Penfold en tant qu’artiste graphique, peut-être sa facette la plus méconnue, mais qui met en évidence son énorme sensibilité et sa polyvalence à travailler avec une grande variété de techniques.

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Mots-clés: Vicki Penfold, arts graphiques, linogravure, art contemporain
Keywords: Penfold, graphic work, linocut, contemporary art

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