

COLOUR ETCHING, A CRAFT*by Anneke Visser – Somsen*

*At our request the artist Anneke Visser - Somsen [59] from Zierikzee tells us something about her activities as a **colour etcher**.*

It is fascinating to get acquainted in this magazine with Somsens with a special talent, or an interesting profession, or a cherished hobby.

Anneke has already had several expositions as an etcher and she also showed her work at the great Somsen Reunion in 1997. Some people may still remember.

Anneke tells about her work and reveals particulars and backgrounds.

Anneke, colour etcher

Let me begin to tell you that I was born in Kampen on 12 March 1938 as Anna Harmina Willemien Somsen. My pet name was Anneke.

As a child I loved tinkering and I positioned all sorts of object in my bedroom in such a way that they fitted well, it had to be aesthetically correct. From early childhood colours attracted me. I put them side-by-side to see the effect of the interplay. I wanted to experience how colour changes because of the colour next to it.

Something totally different, which I loved to do as a child, was playing outside, going out into the world on my scooter. This characteristic has never disappeared for I still love going out, but now with my husband and by car, for long camping trips with a tent.

Education

During my education as a kindergarten teacher in Zwolle I learnt from my art teacher to picture images in a simple way in *gouache drawings*. He fancied my drawings. 'It has got something', he used to say, 'go on with it'. This happened much later, for at that time I got acquainted with my husband Hans Visser. We got married and soon we had four children. There was no time left for art then.

First we lived in Kampen, then we lived in Peru for some years and then we came back to The Netherlands and settled in Lelystad.

In Lelystad I took up painting lessons again. When we moved to Zierikzee after four years there was more time for me. After having done several art courses I learned etching from an artist in Zierikzee. It appealed to me because of a deeply felt desire to be manually active. Etching turned out to be very satisfying for me. Just do whatever you like. I feel very much at home with the technique of etching. I have been doing this since 1983 and from 1984 I have been taking etching classes at the Free Academy in Rotterdam with a small group of people. In this group everyone is engaged in totally different subjects and etching techniques. It is very enjoyable and relaxing. You have to work hard and the afternoon goes by like magic.

I am an observer and during a bicycle trip to town I can see so many things that I can already envision the etch. Also the games of my youth, like playing



Anneke Visser-Somsen [59] shows one of her line etches

at ball, skipping and playing hopscotch, resulted in etches later on. Our stay in Peru and travelling, another of my favourite pastimes, also led to etches of enchanting landscapes and people in different cultures.

Consolation prize

At my first exhibition in Kampen in 1984 I received a consolation prize in a national contest. After that there were quite a few solo and group expositions in Zierikzee, Sommelsdijk, Giessenburg, also in cooperation with the group of the Free Academy in Rotterdam.

Our group has published a book - fifteen impressions - in which there is an etch of each of us. A bookbinder has bound this for us by hand.

In July and August six of my etches about a roundtrip in Poland in 1997 were on exhibition. Some of the titles are: *A Jewish cemetery, Interior of a Synagogue, The Church Shelters, etc.* The title: 'The Church Shelters' referred to a small church in an open-air museum. Around the church there was a canopy offering the churchgoers shelter from rain and snow. Artists of the reformed churches in Zierikzee took part in this exhibition with subjects on religion. The exhibition was open on three afternoons a week. The contributions of the other artist consisted of quilts and paintings.

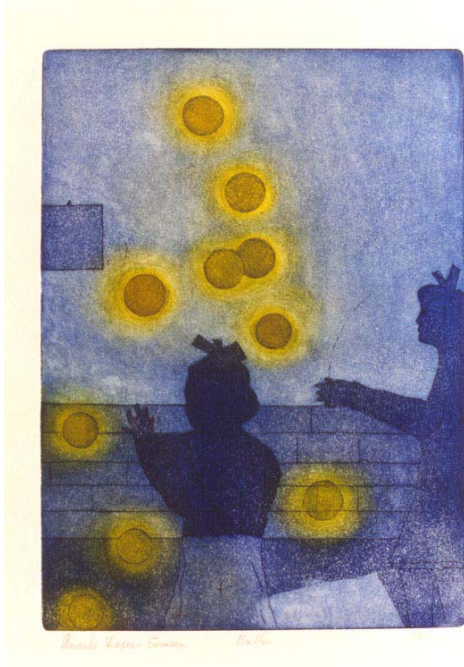
Being together with people fascinates me and I try to express what it is that keeps them together for some period of time. What it is that motivates them in their togetherness and how they form an entity as people. People, for instance, who I saw in New York in 1973 and in Nepal in 2000. Their images are on my retina. About New York I made an etch entitled: *Conversation in New York*, representing a group of two women and two men talking together. I made three etches about Nepal of three women approaching with huge bags on their heads and then disappearing again to their fields. Or to their houses?

I take a lot of pictures when I am on a journey and they serve as a mnemonic device when I want to make an etch of what I saw afterwards.

How does an etch come into being?

The technique I use is adapted to what I want to show. I work on zinc plates. These are filed and sandpapered first and next the front side is sealed with a coating. Then the draft is put on the plate - in mirror image – by means of carbon paper and then the drawing is engraved with an etching needle. Then the backside is coated and the plate is put into a basin with acid. In the engraved lines grooves arise because of the acid. Subsequently the plate can be cleaned, be covered with ink and be printed. This is the least complicated form: the *line etch*.

I work a lot with aquatint, though. Then resin is scattered on the plate and burnt away and after that the plated goes into the acid several times. In this way you can achieve light and dark areas.



A 'sunny colour etch'

I also like to work with the sugar aquatint technique. Everything looks much more lively then. The structure of the drawing is defined by the way in which the molasses dries on the plate. It is very nice work. I also apply the varnish-mou-technique with dried plants. Ochre hues, red, yellow, orange, lilac etc. Quite regularly all the basic colours and the mixed colours get a chance when printing the etches.

It is a lengthy process and I do not see the result until the etch is printed.

In any case I will never be a past mistress!



Anneke working at her press

Travelling

At the moment I collect pictures of our trips of old doors that show the wear and tear of time.

Hans and I go backpacking in the *Grand Randonnees* in France, for example.

In the autumn of 2002 we made a trip by car from Seattle to Idaho to a brother and sister of Hans. On the way back we took a different route. Next we flew to Toronto, Canada, and visited my cousin Teun Hunse [68] in St. Catherines.

Then we walked a small part of the 500-mile *Bruce Trail*. We always do bring our small tent and our rucksacks from The Netherlands.

It was a beautiful trip that gave me lots of inspiration for now and later.

My etching needle is waiting for me. ■