

Gwen O'Dowd's recent explorations of print techniques, on show at the Graphic Studio Gallery, alongside some of her painted studies, demonstrate that she continues to take advantage of the opportunities that experimentation provides. In this series, she pushes the boundaries of her established familiarity with carborundum print methods, and explores the potential of etching for the first time. For commentators to grasp the complexities of print techniques really requires, at the very least, the opportunity to witness the processes involved. They are not only surprisingly labour intensive – necessitating a team of professionals who, as artists in their own right, appreciate not just the technical requirements of the practice, but also both the pitfalls and, especially, the creative opportunities. The creation of a print is far more complex than might be assumed by anyone unfamiliar with the intricacies of the medium.¹ It involves working in layers of overlapping colour, the effects of which must be anticipated and imagined. It requires an understanding of the physics of such matters as the moisture retention of both the colour (using specialized paints or inks) and the particular paper, in turn affecting how the layers of the composition co-ordinate, how the colours blend or resist, and how the support itself will change shape and scale as it dries. The perils of the process add edge to the excitement of revelation as the image emerges from the rollers and plates.

As O'Dowd's endeavours display, the distinction of the different techniques, and how she conscripts them to convey the distinctive atmospheric conditions she addresses, are evident: while etching enables subtle veils of vaporous rain, as in *Brown Rain* (Fig 4), carborundum's grittiness facilitates the tactile immediacy of spray detonated by thundering seas, as in *Tom II* (Fig 1), the latter evolving from her recent *Tom* series of paintings. If the language of objective analysis tends to dissolve here into poetic description, it is because this is how her work confronts and moves the observer. But it would be a mistake to assume that Gwen O'Dowd's imagery is simply about the delights of nature and the thrill of the sublime. If it is seductive, it effectively draws the viewer into the very real and cogent issues that underpin her subjects.

Like many artists, O'Dowd's first concern is with the image – to use her visual skills, her technical ability, and her experience with the

Ocean narrative

It would be a mistake to assume that Gwen O'Dowd's seascapes are simply about the delights of nature, writes **Yvonne Scott**



1 *TOM II* 2017 carborundum
84x117cm

2 Gwen O'Dowd at Graphic Print
Studio, Dublin