



# PAUL PETER PIECH

# pressing matters

CELEBRATING MODERN PRINTMAKING



ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

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## Paul Peter Piech

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# PAUL PETER PIECH



Paul Peter Piech (1920-1996) was a humanitarian, a propagandist and a prolific printmaker who used his artwork to express his political opinions and also his love of literature, poetry and music.

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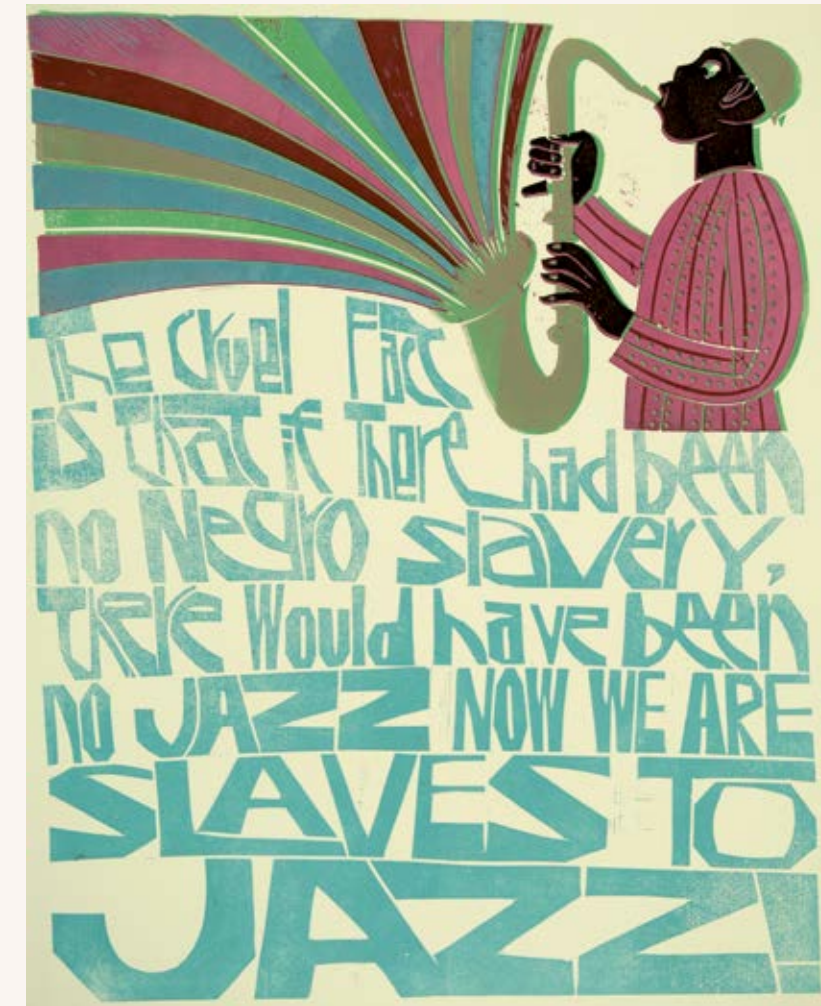
Words by **JIM CREED**

At the time of the release of the original article, Jim Creed was Coordinator of the Regional Print Centre at Coleg Cambria in Wrexham, North Wales. He was responsible for the promotion, display and handling of the college's Paul Peter Piech collection which is the largest in Wales with over 200 prints. He also conducted extensive research into the artist and co-curated a major retrospective exhibition *Dedicated to all Defenders of Human Freedoms: The Art of Paul Peter Piech* at the People's History Museum in Manchester in 2017.  
[www.regionalprintcentre.co.uk/the-paul-peter-piech-collection/](http://www.regionalprintcentre.co.uk/the-paul-peter-piech-collection/)

*Linocut prints by Paul Peter Piech (from the Collection at Region Print Centre/Coleg Cambria).  
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*Parr 1995 77/91*



## JAZZ

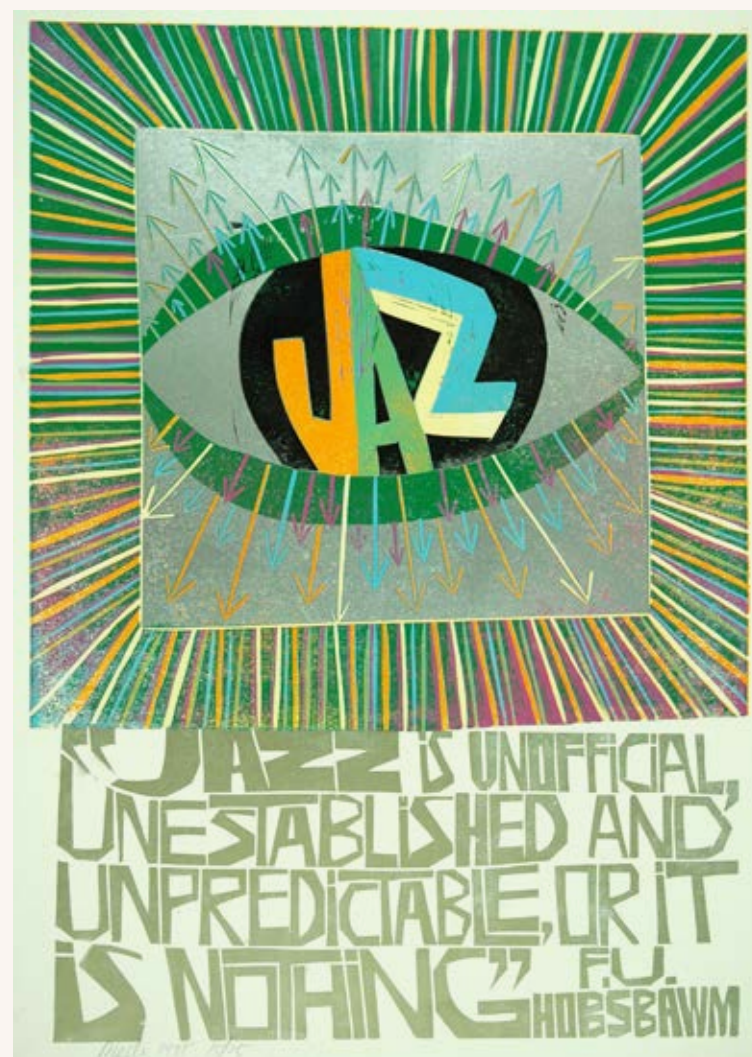
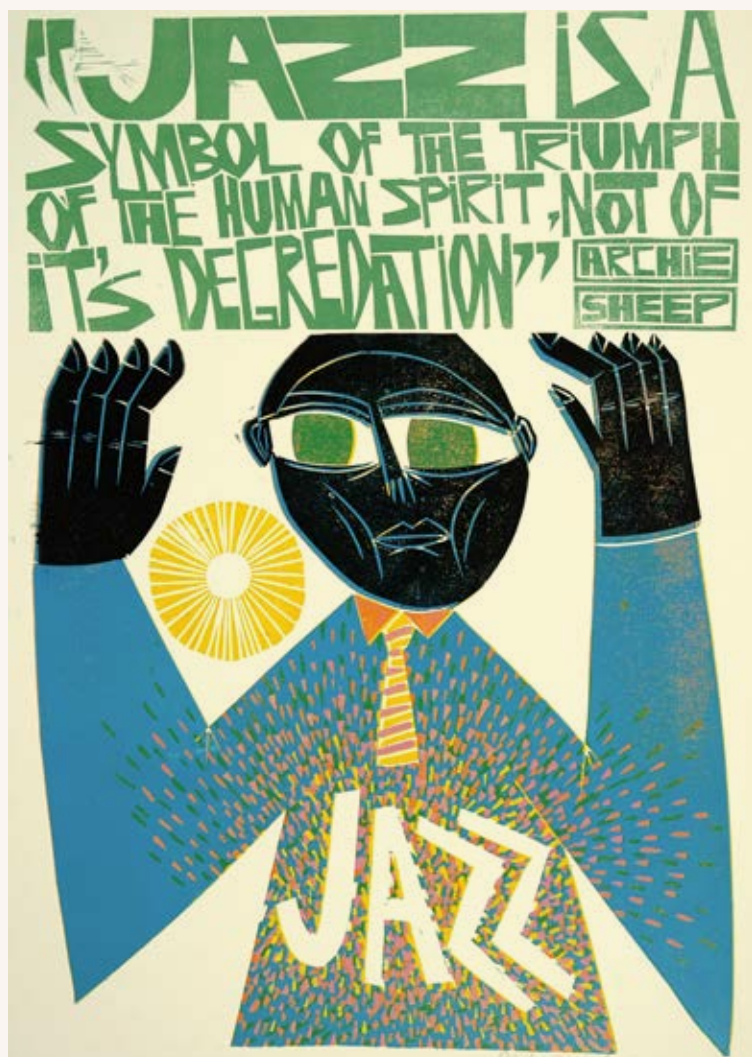
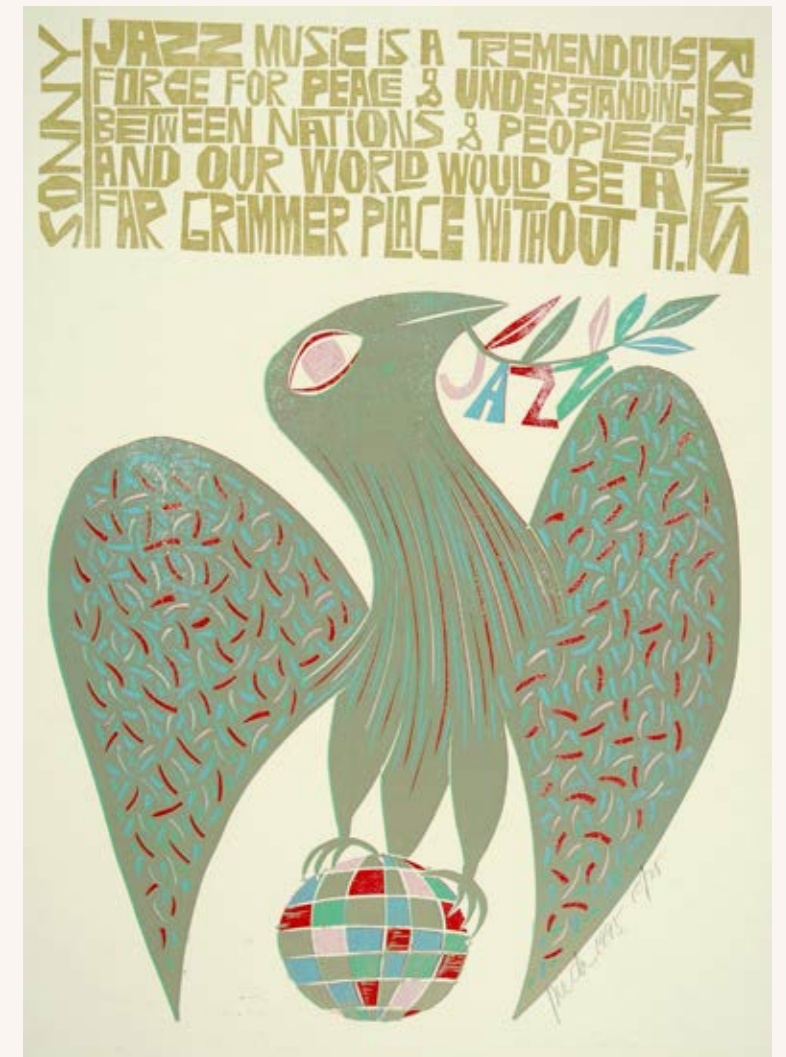
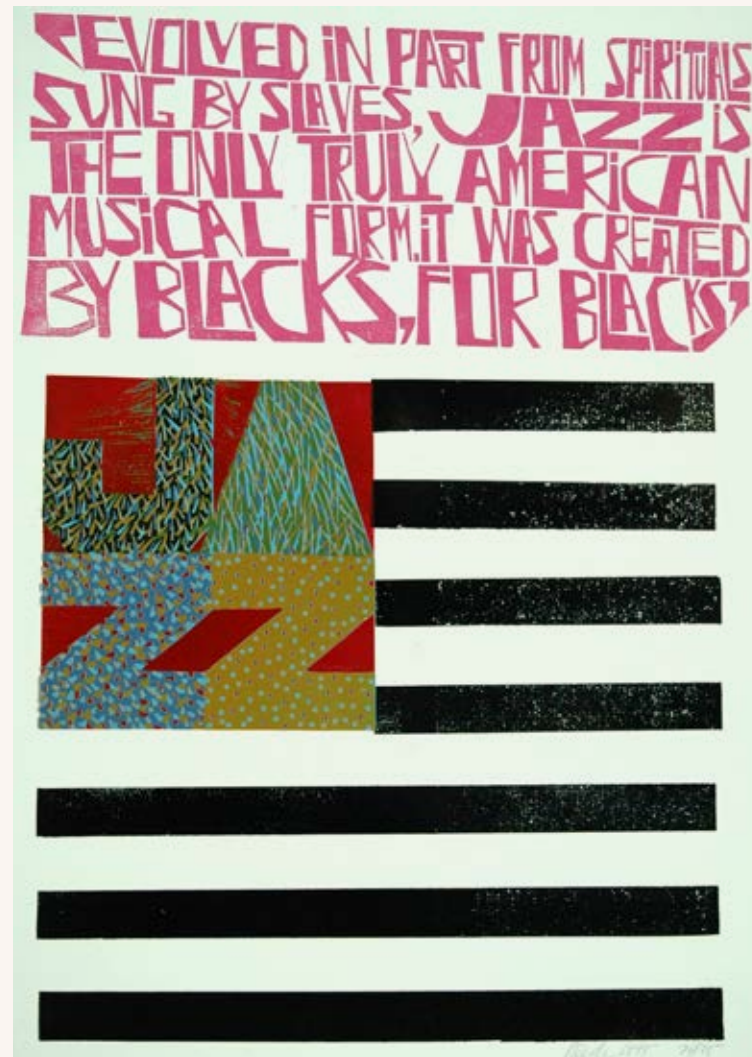
Piech was a massive fan of jazz music and was commissioned to produce a series of prints for the Brecon Jazz Festival which were shown at Brecknock Museum in 1995. These pieces were created using Piech's beloved linocut printmaking technique, a process he continued to utilise, develop and explore ever since establishing his private press (Taurus Press) in 1959. The works feature Piech's jazz heroes including Miles Davies, Sun Ra, Charlie Parker, Louis Armstrong, and Archie Shepp (which he misspelt). They also comment on notions of apartheid and slavery, highlighting the roots of the genre and its development throughout the twentieth century.

The jazz prints were probably the last complete series of work Piech produced and are very reflective of his lino cutting style. He would cut his text plates using a freestyle method without drawing the design on the lino, this resulted in the occasional misspelling or letter reversal. Piech also used his own hand

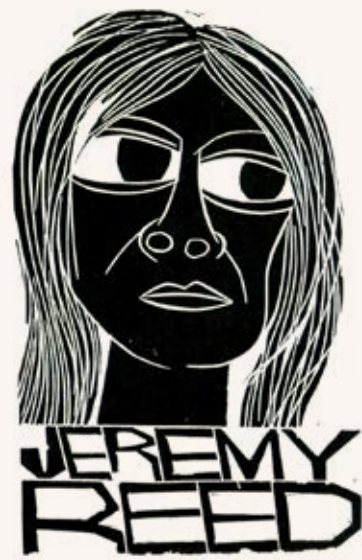
and arm prints alongside woodblock letterpress to develop some of the jazz pieces, playfully combining relief processes.

When printing in full colour Piech would use composite pieces to create the prints. The text would be cut in one piece and then he would cut the illustration in up to five individual lino plates. Piech took great care positioning the pieces on the bed of the press before proofing them onto paper.

Piech mixed his inks at the beginning of each printing session and this occasionally resulted in different shades of the same colour in each print of the edition. Therefore, no two prints were the same and in some editions the colours varied significantly, making each print an individual piece. This is visible in the Jazz series due to their complex compositions and use of multiple colours and lino plates to create the prints. **T**



“The jazz prints were probably the last complete series of work Piech produced and are very reflective of his lino cutting style. He would cut his text plates using a freestyle method without drawing the design on the lino, this resulted in the occasional misspelling or letter reversal. Piech also used his own hand and arm prints alongside woodblock letterpress to develop some of the jazz pieces, playfully combining relief processes.”



## SMALL MARKS

Most of Piech's printed posters were created using traditional linocut printmaking techniques as it was cheap, adaptable and easy to manipulate. He would cut the plates by hand in any location using a broad-headed engraving tool (at friends' houses, on holiday, in the garden or in front of the TV) and would work on almost every day of the year including Christmas day.

He would print the editions at home in his garage studio using his 100-year-old Thompson Gem proofing press, letting them dry on a nylon washing line in the conservatory. He was prolific in his output, creating thousands of prints and posters throughout his career.

Piech wanted his work to have impact and be easily read by a mass audience. His high-flying career

in advertising in the 1950s and 1960s certainly influenced his personal artistic output, helping to develop the way he combined images and text. Piech loved to use black and red ink to create a sense of drama and impact in his work. His monotone prints also highlight his skills as an illustrator and draughtsman using characters and stylised imagery to portray an idea, event, exhibition or brand.

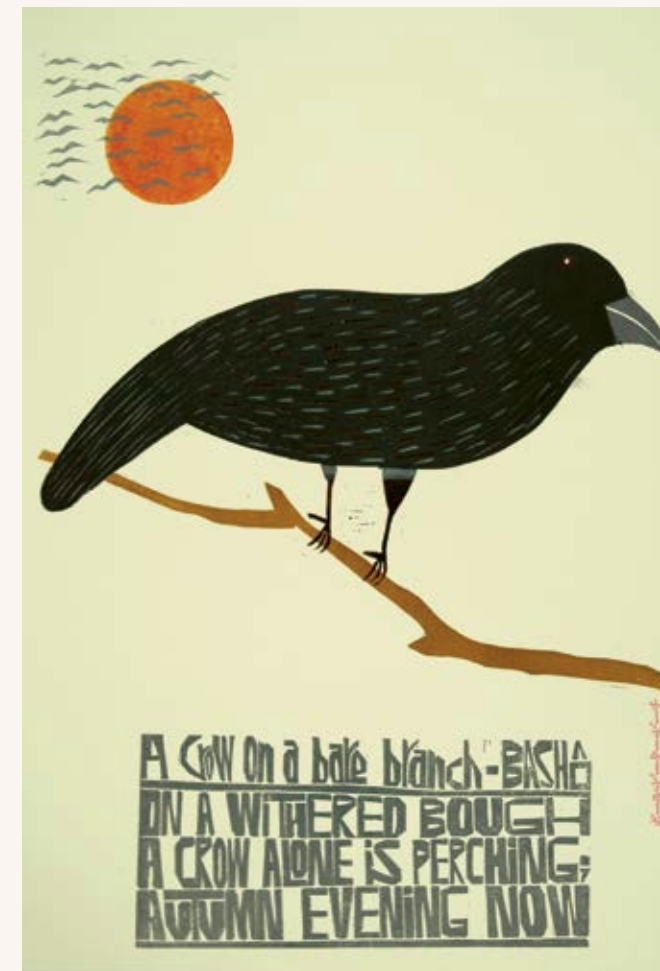
His stylised use and combination of words and images were key to his approach. By offering a quote, phrase, or comment alongside a visual image Piech utilised both written and visual language within his work and printmaking. As a printmaker, he operated as a one-man-band producing work at rapid speed with less concern for consistency of imagery and print quality.



“His stylised use and combination of words and images were key to his approach. By offering a quote, phrase, or comment alongside a visual image Piech utilised both written and visual language within his work and printmaking. As a printmaker, he operated as a one-man-band producing work at rapid speed with less concern for consistency of imagery and print quality. Communication was Piech’s main aim.”

JIM CREED





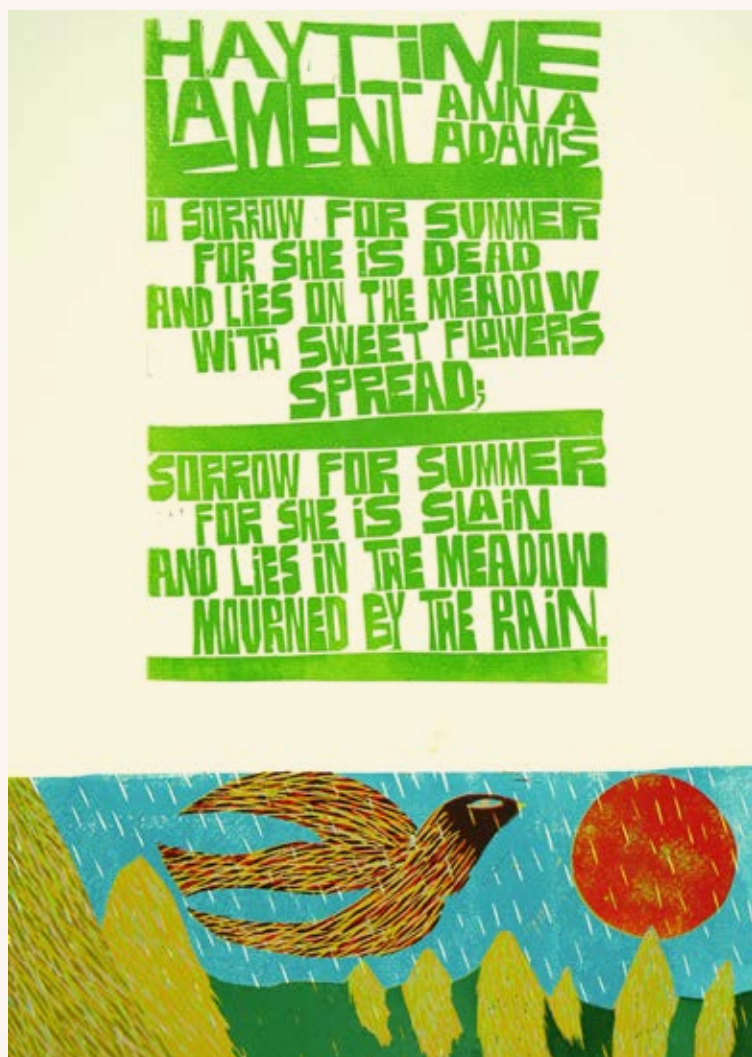
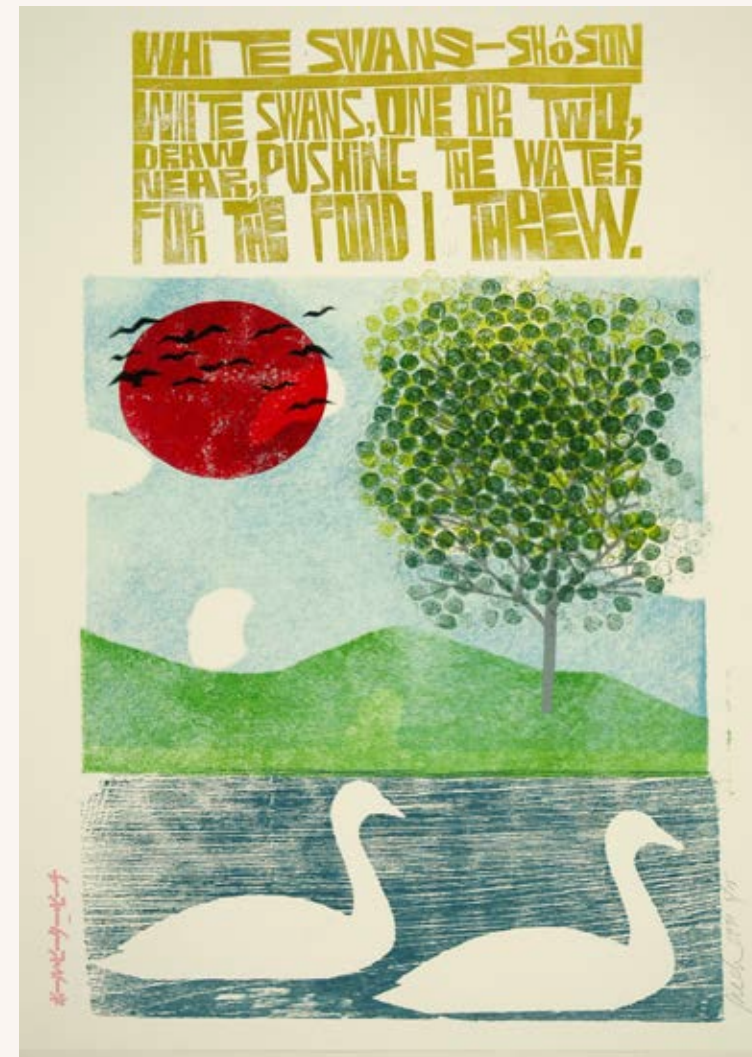
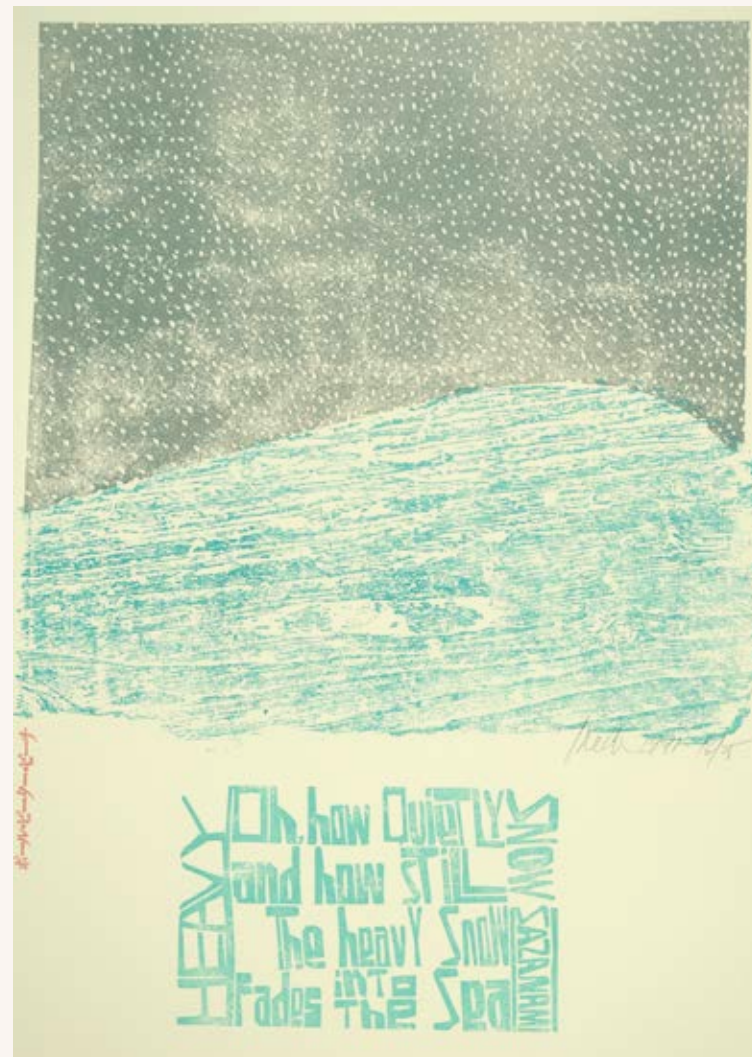
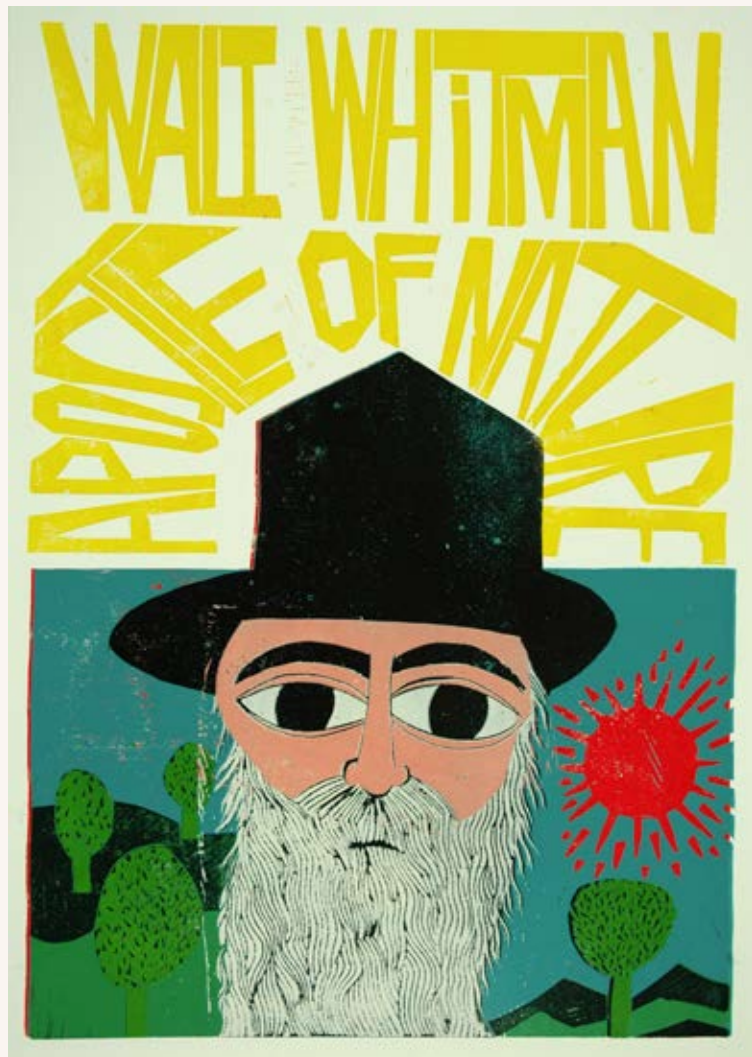
## NATURE

Poetry and literature had a huge impact on Piech's work and he was inspired by writers, poets and musicians, regularly quoting from literary sources in his prints. These included; Pablo Neruda, Hugo Manning, Dylan Thomas, Walt Whitman, William Blake and Tan Taigi. Piech was an avid reader and passionately believed that it offered everyone the opportunity to be gain knowledge, find escapism and be inspiration, he even read on the loo.

Unlike most of Piech's work, these pieces use a variety of materials to create the prints, combining his striking use of linocut lettering to form the text with an array of calmer, less conventional materials to develop the images. For example, using found materials, bubble wrap, pieces of carpet, fast food forks, and card surfaces to develop collagraph like landscapes.

Piech was also a prolific beachcomber and loved experimenting with objects he had gathered from Newton Bay near Porthcawl, where he retired to in the mid-1980s. From this point on his output increased dramatically and he became very interested and involved in Welsh art and culture. He even created several prints using Welsh language even though he couldn't speak it.

During this period Piech produced a series of Haiku prints influenced by both traditional Japanese poetry and modern-day versions from the British Haiku Society. In these pieces Piech captures the simplicity of nature in an almost abstract form to compliment the beauty and simplicity of the poem they accompanied. **T**



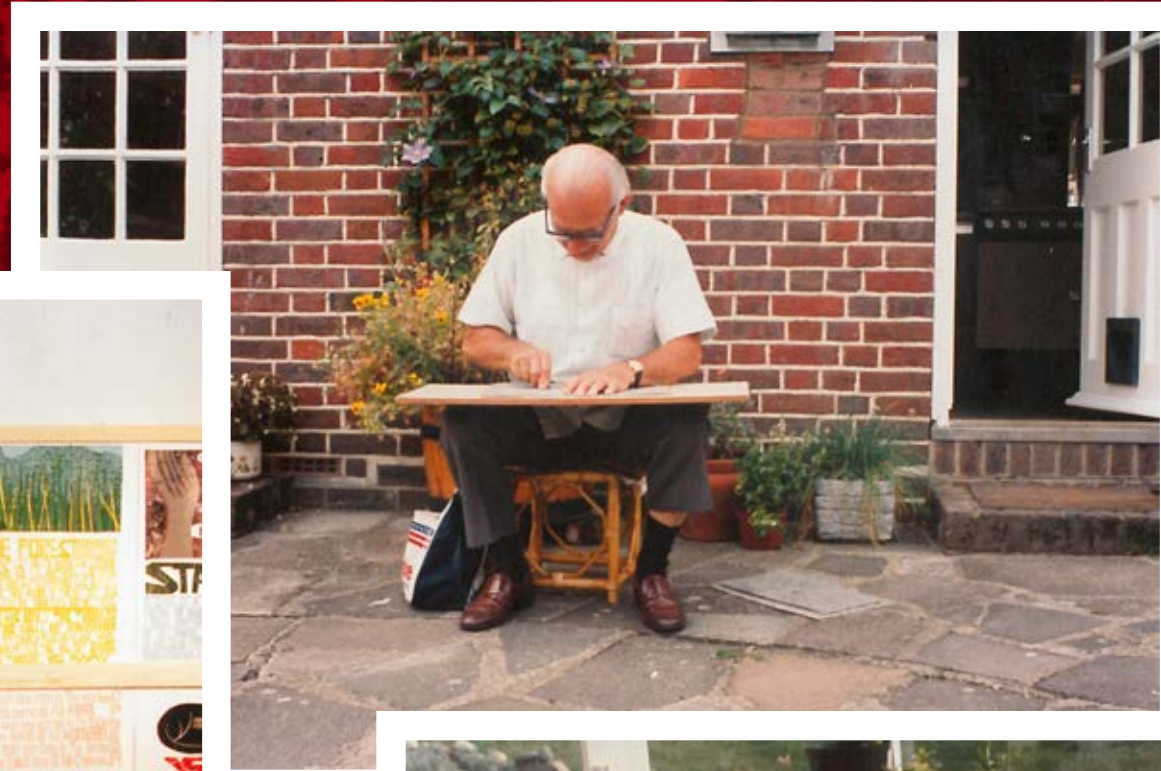
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# Gallery.

AN ARTIST AT WORK (AND PLAY)



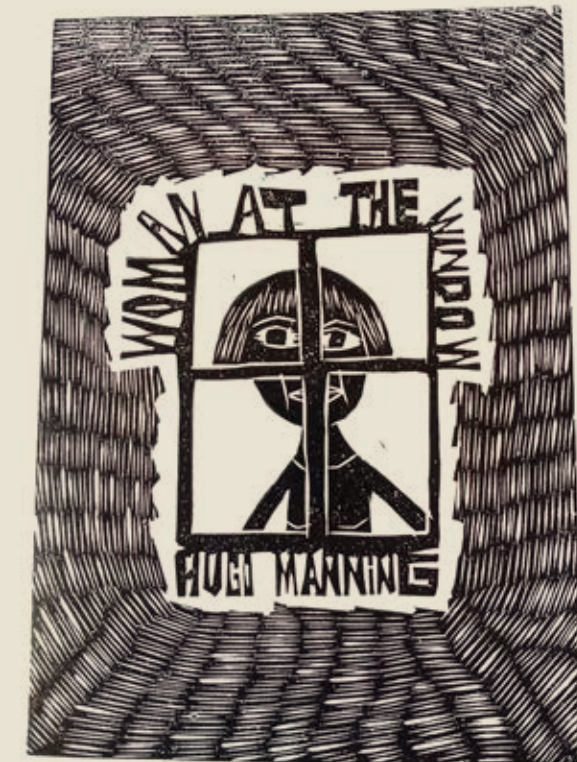
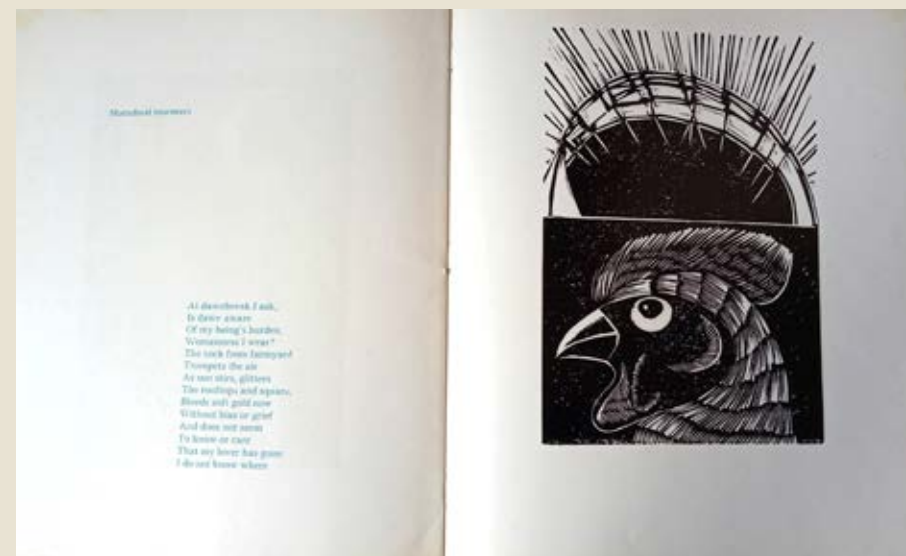
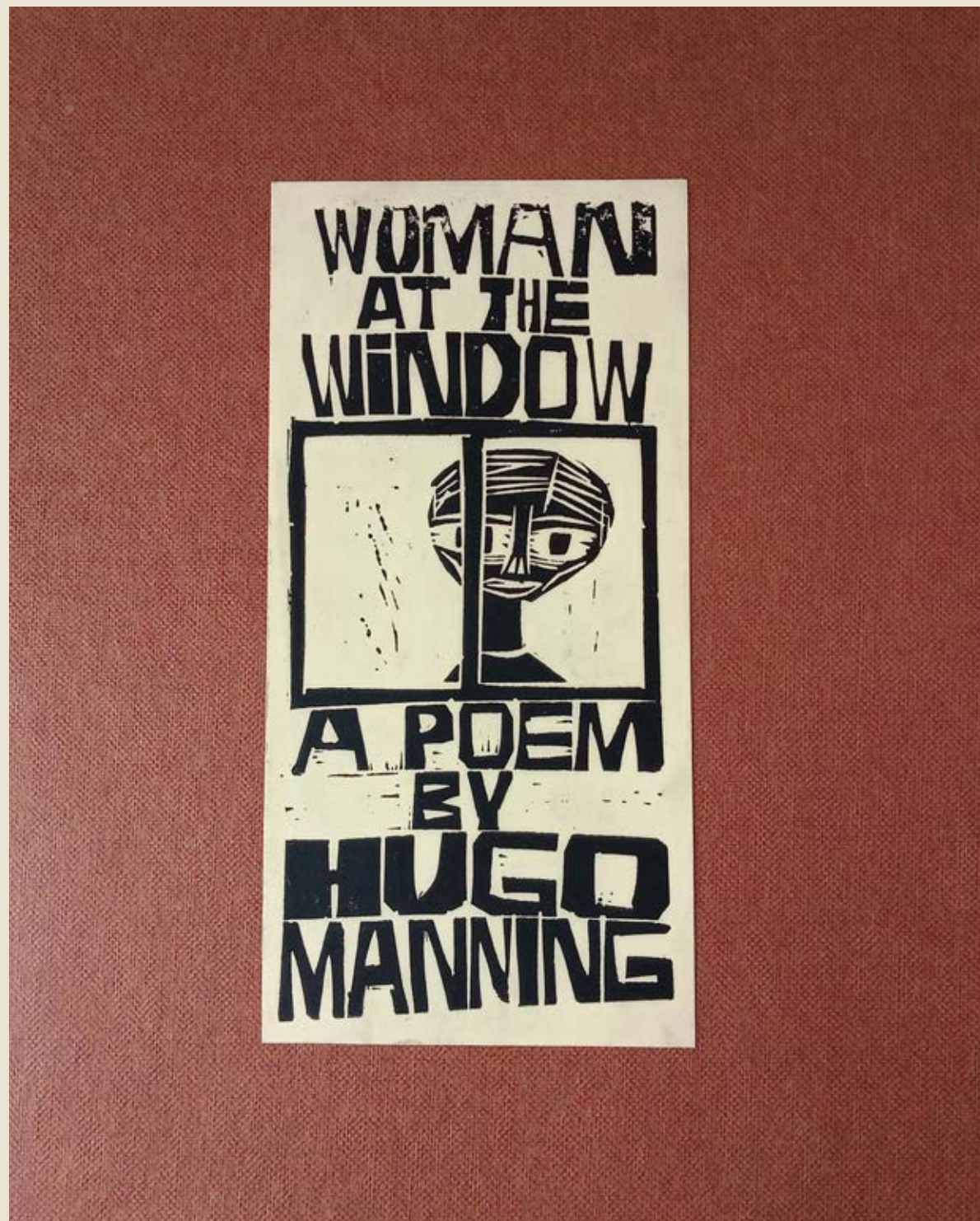
“Piech mainly worked at home in his garage turned studio using a Thompson Proofing Press – he produced every print himself and often hung them to dry in the conservatory or on the patio in the garden.”

JIM CRED



# Artist Books.

JIM CREED HIGHLIGHTS SOME OF PAUL'S ARTIST BOOK PROJECTS.



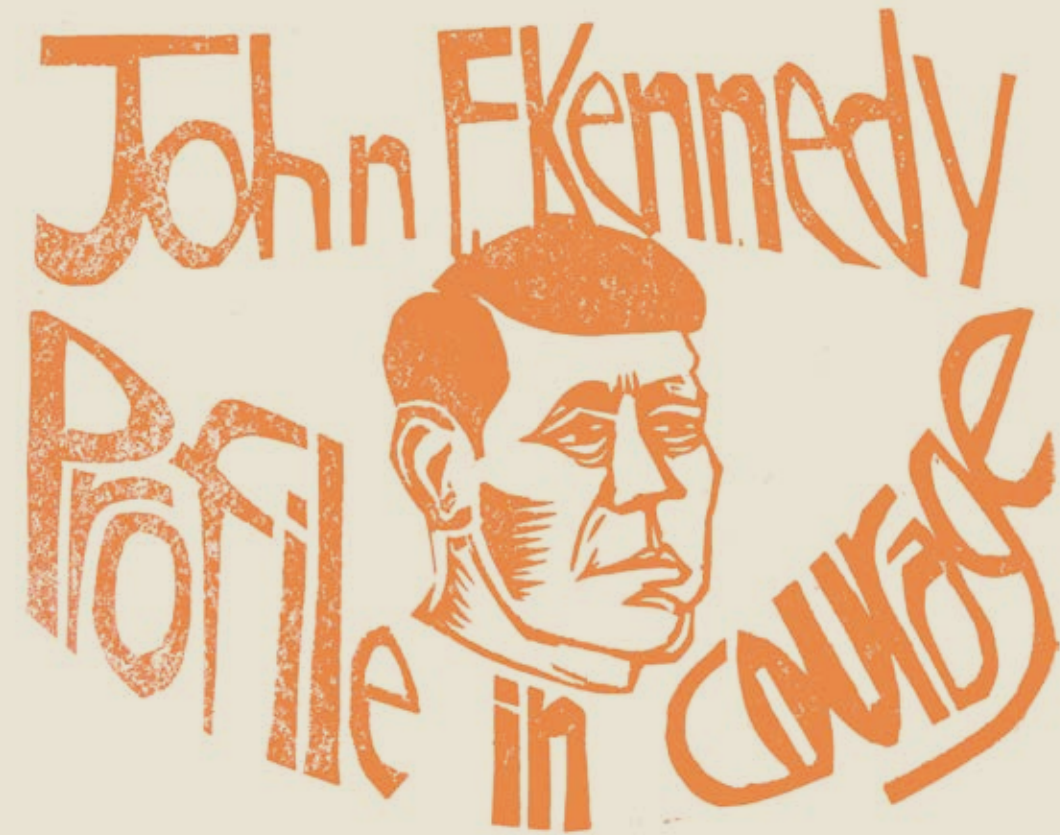
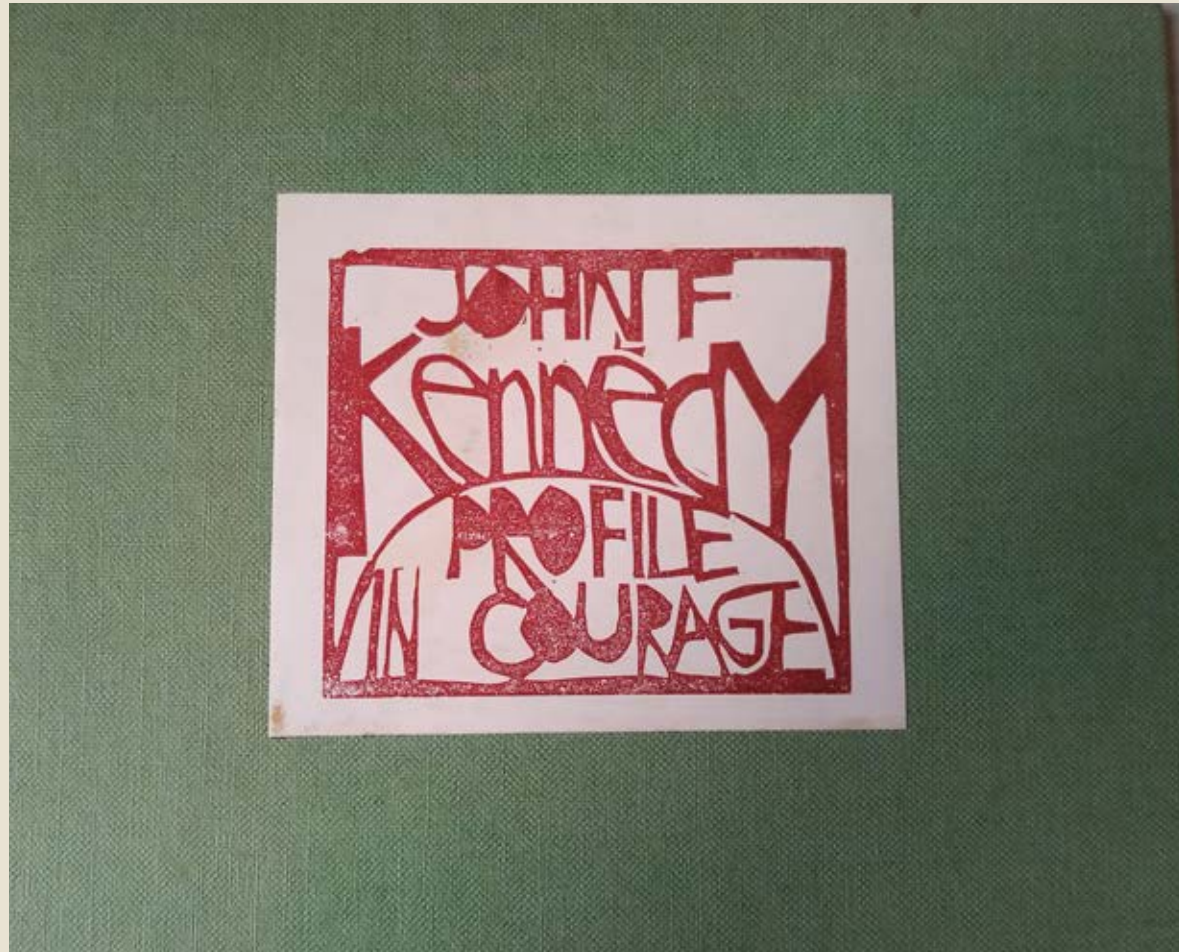
## WOMEN AT THE WINDOW A poem by Hugo Hanning

- ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL PETER PIECH
- LIMITED EDITION OF 125
- SIGNED AND NUMBERED BY HAND
- FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1974
- DESIGNED, ILLUSTRATED & PRINTED BY PAUL PETER PIECH
- TAURUS PRESS
- TAURUS POEM 25

A hardback book featuring three linocut illustrations by Piech printed in black ink which works beautifully against the blue letterpress text. Piech would have created all elements of the book including the construction. The illustrations really capture Piech's mastery as a linocut artist through his detailed use of marks and fine lines.

# Artist Books.

JIM CREED HIGHLIGHTS SOME OF PAUL'S ARTIST BOOK PROJECTS.



## JOHN F KENNEDY Profile in Courage

- ILLUSTRATED, DESIGNED AND PRINTED BY PAUL PETER PIECH
- TAURUS PRESS
- LIMITED EDITION OF 300
- SIGNED AND NUMBERED BY HAND

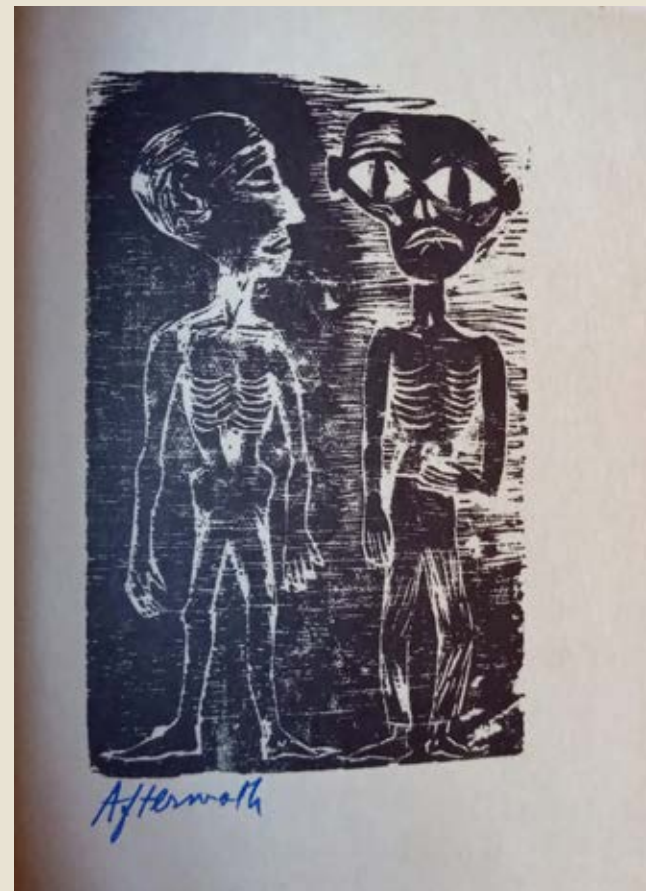
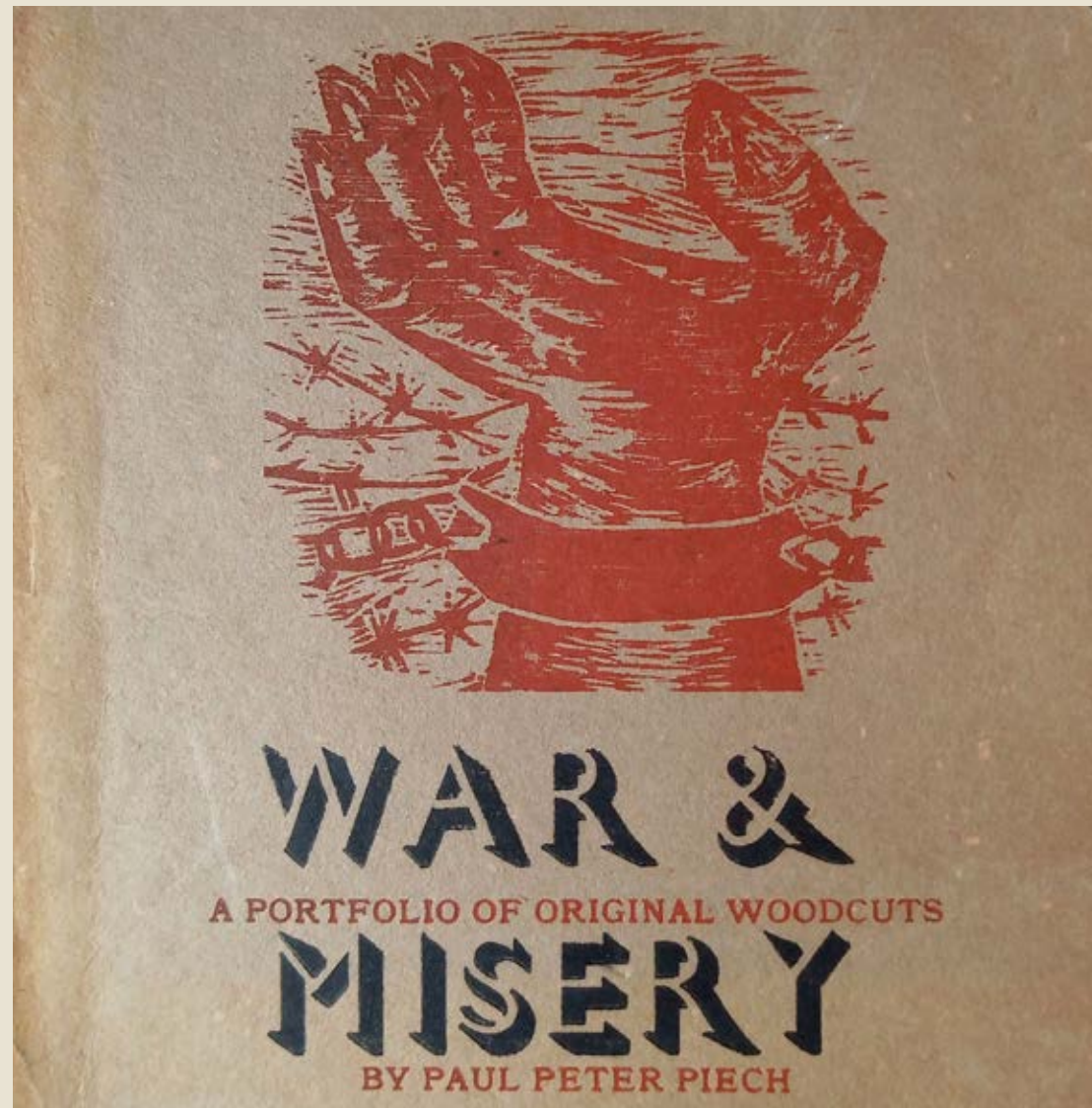
This is one of my favourite Piech books and a real gem in my collection.

Piech's political views were always a motivation for creating new work and he really admired John F Kennedy and his political outlook. It is a great example of how art can be used as a means to communicate a message. The book has linocut quotes from JFK alongside Piech's rather playful and very colourful illustrated images. It really shows his creative and playful side and some of his lovely linocut portraits.



# Artist Books.

JIM CREED HIGHLIGHTS SOME OF PAUL'S ARTIST BOOK PROJECTS.



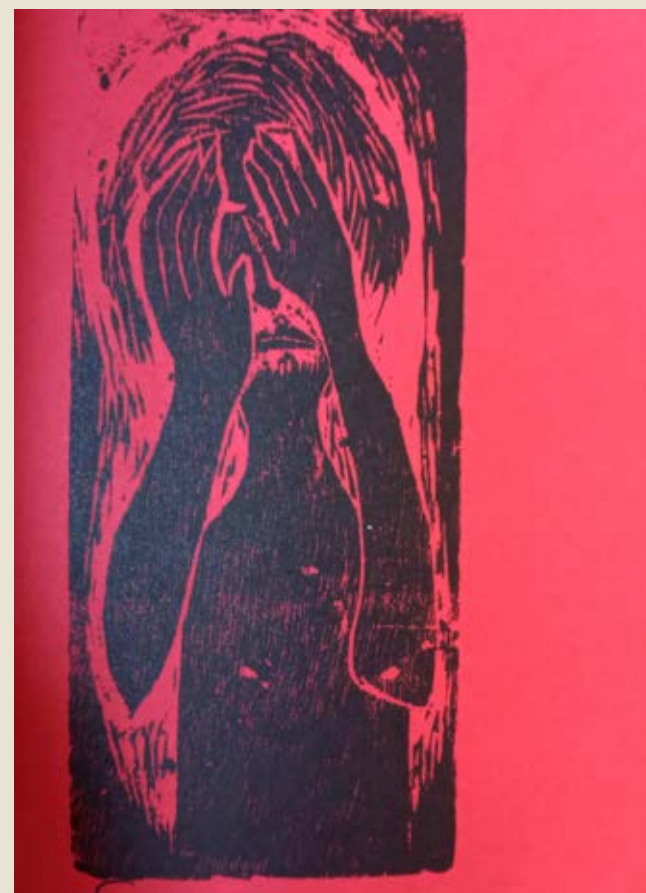
## WAR & MISERY

A Portfolio of Original Woodcuts by Paul Peter Piech

- LIMITED EDITION OF 200
- SIGNED AND NUMBERED BY HAND
- THIRD EDITION 1969
- DESIGNED & PRINTED BY PAUL PETER PIECH
- TAURUS PRESS

This book of Piech woodcuts was originally published in 1959 as a portfolio of mini-prints (which I also have in my collection). The images show the horror of war and the impact it can have on us. All of the prints are titled by hand giving a description to the hard-hitting images.

As Piech states in the book 'these woodcuts are a potent reminder that man must be brother to his fellow man otherwise hope for a better world is abstract.' It is also printed on really cheap paper (sugar paper and brown parcel paper) as it was readily available.



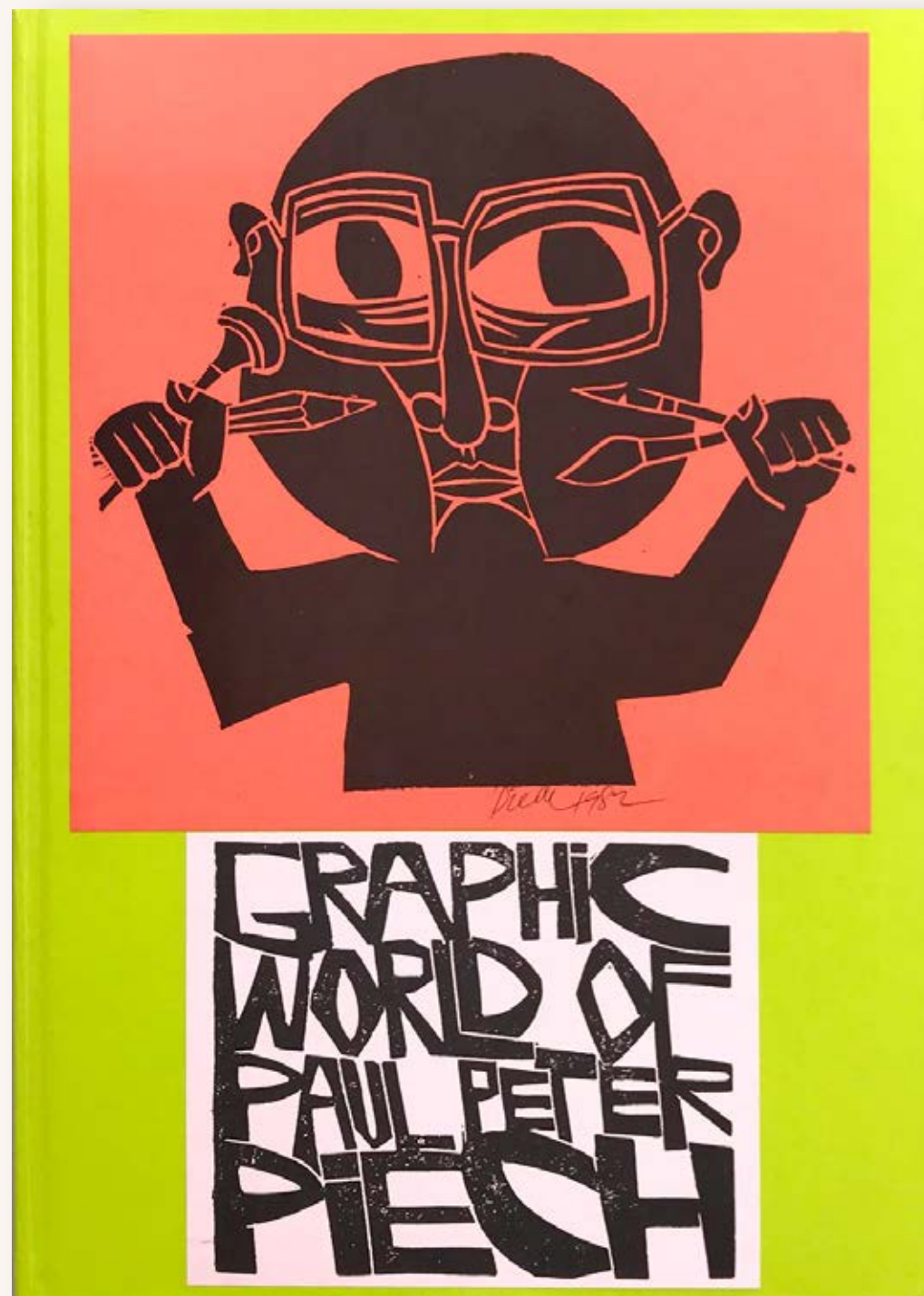
# Further Reading.

MORE EXAMPLES OF THE ARTIST'S WORK.

## THE GRAPHIC WORLD OF PAUL PETER PIECH

BY ZOE WHITLEY

PUBLISHED BY FOUR CORNER BOOKS  
IN ASSOCIATION WITH V&A PUBLISHING, LONDON



# Update.

CATCHING UP WITH JIM CREED • APRIL 2020



## WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO SINCE WE FEATURED YOUR ARTICLE ON PAUL PETER PIECH IN ISSUE 2?

In 2019 I took on a new challenge by becoming the Arts Development Officer at Qube – <https://qube-oca.org.uk> – in Oswestry which is an arts and community focused charity in rural Shropshire. My remit is to develop projects and engagement opportunities that make the arts accessible to our community audience.

We have a gallery, art studio and conference space which are used to offer a range of exhibitions, workshops and activities. We are always looking to work collaboratively and have a number of printmaking exhibitions coming up in the next 18 months including touring shows and exhibition by locally based artists and printmakers.

## HOW DID YOU FIRST COME TO KNOW ABOUT PAUL PETER PIECH?

It was about 15 years ago that I first came across the work of Paul Peter Piech whilst working as the Gallery Officer at Yale College in Wrexham, North Wales. The College has a lovely collection of Piech's work which includes around 200 poster prints which were donated to the institution in 2005/06. From that point on I was really struck by Piech's work and his bold striking images, use of text and social messages.

In 2010, I became the Coordinator of the Regional Print Centre, which is based at the college, and I got more involved in managing and promoting the Piech collection.

Over my eight years at the print studio I had some amazing opportunities to develop projects and exhibitions featuring his work. My highlight was co-curating a major retrospective of Piech's work at the People's History Museum in Manchester (see next page for photos of the show) that featured over 90 artworks included some of politically charged Piech prints and books from my collection.

## CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE MORE ABOUT THE ARTIST'S BACKGROUND, WHERE HE WORKED AND SO ON?

Piech was born in New York in 1920 to Ukrainian immigrant parents and lived in a tough neighbourhood in Brooklyn. His parents' strong work ethic combined with his huge sense of determination led to him being accepted to train at the Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and arts. Piech's studies were suspended in 1942 due to the Second World War when he was enlisted into the US Eighth Army Air Force and posted in England.

When on leave he visited Cardiff and met his future wife Irene Tompkins, who he later married in 1947. After the war he studied printmaking at Chelsea College

of Art under Ceri Richards and went on to work as a designer and illustrator in commercial advertising for firms such as Dorland Advertising Agency (UK and USA) and Crawford Advertising Agency in London.

In 1959 Piech set up his own private press called the Taurus Press and started to produce limited edition artists books, leaflets and portfolios. In the early 1970s Piech left advertising and taught at various art schools across the UK (including London College of Printing and Leicester College of Art & Design) whilst creating and exhibiting vast numbers of political and socially motivated printed posters, many of which combined his trademark hard-hitting imagery with heavy cut linocut lettering.

Piech spent the last ten years of his life living in Porthcawl, South Wales, where he continued to print and have an influential impact on the Welsh art scene. Piech embraced life, notions of identity and social issues throughout his artistic career.

## I UNDERSTAND YOU HAVE A COLLECTION OF YOUR OWN OF HIS WORK - CAN YOU TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT IT?

I have been collecting Piech's work for about 15 years now and have quite a large collection of his work including around 60-70 of his artist books and probably between 120 and 150 of his larger linocut poster prints. My collection has developed over time and I am always on the lookout for more Piech pieces. I am also very happy to loan them out to museums and galleries for exhibitions and projects. Piech was a generous artist and he often gave work away and exhibited in unusual places. As a huge fan and collector of his work, I feel that it is essential that I continue to promote and showcasing his work whenever and wherever possible. I love to share my knowledge and passion for Piech and will continue to do so. If anyone is interested in finding out more or has an idea for a project please get in touch.

## WHAT TECHNIQUES DID HE USE IN HIS WORK?

Piech used a range of printmaking techniques throughout his career including lithography, woodcut, wood engraving and linocut. The earliest pieces I have in my collection are two lithography prints which were produced in the late 1940s which were probably created whilst he was a Chelsea School of Art and had access to the materials.

Most of his early printed books from the late 1950s/early 1960s were illustrated with woodblock or wood engravings combined with letterpress. Piech moved onto using lino in the 1960s as it was cheaper, more portable and easily accessible. Piech mainly worked at home in his garage turned studio using a Thompson Proofing Press (which is still in use at Aberystwyth University) to produce his large broadsheet posters. He produced every print himself and often hung them

to dry in the conservatory or on the patio in the garden.

## CAN YOU POINT US TOWARDS SOME ONLINE RESOURCES FOR PAUL'S WORK OR ARCHIVE?

Throughout April I am posting a daily Piech print, book or rare item from my collection on Instagram and Twitter - @Jim\_\_Creed. Please feel free to follow me and add to the conversation.

**The National Library of Wales** currently has a Piech exhibition on celebrating his love of literature, The Literary World of Paul Peter Piech (available online and on-site until January 2021). Explore the digital exhibition online here:

<https://www.peoplescollection.wales/collections/1366366>

There have been a number of museums and collections that have digitising their Piech collections in the last few years including:

**The Regional Print Centre in Wrexham** has a short article I wrote about Piech on their website:

<https://www.regionalprintcentre.co.uk/the-paul-peter-piech-collection>

**National Poetry Library** has 50 great Piech poetry prints online.

<https://www.nationalpoetrylibrary.org.uk/search/paul%20peter%20piech>


**V&A Museum** is home to the largest Piech collection

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/search/?q=Paul%20Peter%20Piech>



# Exhibition.

CLICK ON AN IMAGE TO EXPLORE >



**DEDICATED TO  
ALL DEFENDERS OF  
HUMAN FREEDOMS**

**THE ART OF  
PAUL PETER PIECH**


**01.10.2016  
— 12.02.2017**

Co-curated with the Regional  
Print Centre, Wrexham.

People's History Museum,  
Left Bank, Manchester, M3 3ER

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