This year, 2020, in Plymouth UK and in the USA events are taking place to mark the anniversary of the voyage of the Mayflower four hundred years ago, carrying pilgrims to the ‘New World’. The world has shrunk considerably since 1620 when it took sixty-six days to cross the Atlantic and months for a letter to arrive back in England. Now the sea trip can be accomplished in six days, by plane in six hours and communication takes a nano-second.

Mayflower has become an iconic word by association. A name given to a plant that heralds spring and new hope and yet as a name given to a ship it encapsulates so much else: suffering pilgrims, hardship, struggle and in today’s context, refugees. This is the baseline chosen by two groups of artists from different continents, the Tamar Valley Printmakers and the Printmakers of Cape Cod, who have come together to stage a series of exhibitions around this subject. The Mayflower was their jumping off point, the concept of journey their point of reference, and printmaking their choice of process.

Printmaking is a journey with an uncertain outcome. However experienced, a printmaker’s ideas are filtered by something that is ultimately beyond their control, they are at the mercy of the intervention of a machine. Hence those heart-stopping moments when the print emerges from the press and they tentatively lift the corner of the paper.

There is a wonderful synchronicity in the alignment of two groups of printmakers on the opposite sides of a vast ocean creating images about journeys and concerning themselves with the uncertainties experienced by the people who crossed that water four hundred years ago.
For the pilgrims the outcome was far more crucial than the success or failure of a print. The forty artists, 20 British and 20 American, inevitably link to different heritages enriching the cultural diversity of this project. As a paean to contemporary printmaking this exhibition offers an insight into the extraordinary vitality of current practice.

There are complex experimental combinations of processes, and the range extends from etching, which pre-dates the Mayflower, to digital printing. Historically the visual references move in time from a 1200BC goddess figure to the classical Janus head facing in both directions, Nelson Mandela referencing his journey from incarceration to freedom.

The concept of journeys is broadly interpreted and connections emerge between twenty-first century world concerns of migration, the environment and individual experience with the emotional pull of seventeenth century pilgrims escaping persecution. The simplest of images can carry huge impact. The passage of time marked by lines struck through, a huddle of faceless figures led by a child, a foetal scan that highlights the human tragedy of the only baby born during the voyage and who survived less than a year. From the personal to the political to the universal these powerfully emotive works address the human condition, identify with the mythologies of the sea and acknowledge the significance of place.

The relevance of this exhibition extends beyond the confines of a particular anniversary. The work shown addresses enduring themes: the human condition; human endeavour; resilience, determination and fortitude. Immigration is a common thread. There is so much to mull over here. Four hundred years on these artists ask the question, has the world really changed and are people really very different? Essential concerns still rest with safety, shelter and nurturing as many people in our present world are displaced, risking their lives, fleeing from persecution and cruelty. But filtering through the sadness and poignancy is strength and a sense of hope and this collaboration proves that people still stretch their hands metaphorically across the sea in welcome.

Fiona Robinson
President
Royal West of England Academy

Printmakers of Cape Cod
The Printmakers of Cape Cod was founded in 1976 by a group of five artists dedicated to the art of creating original prints. Today their membership has grown to more than fifty artists. The purpose of the Printmakers of Cape Cod is to foster and expand knowledge of printmaking in its members as well as in the general public. To that end, the group sponsors workshops, demonstrations, and group exhibits which are open to the public. They offer social and educational opportunities for all interested in the production, enjoyment and acquisition of original prints.

Their current members practice traditional printmaking techniques, such as relief printing, intaglio, lithography and silkscreen. Many also incorporate innovative digital and photographic processes into their original prints and create unique prints, known as monotypes and monoprints. For the past several years they have also awarded an educational scholarship to two deserving local high school students who will be pursuing an art major in college. This is done through an annual portfolio judging open to all Cape Cod High school seniors.

www.printmakersofcapecod.org

Tamar Valley Printmakers
The Tamar Valley Printmakers is a newly created collective that has sprung from Tamar Print Workshop. Founded in 1992 by Mary Gillett, the workshop is situated on the edge of Dartmoor near Tavistock. It is within easy distance of Plymouth and has come to represent a broad network of printmakers working in Plymouth, West Devon and East Cornwall. It has established itself in the area as a unique central resource for professional artist printmakers and aspiring amateurs alike. They show annually at the Limekiln Gallery in the heart of the valley.

Members regularly collect together to benefit from tuition and gain access to the printmaking facilities, and a vibrant hub has evolved from sharing expertise, talent, support and generosity. The Tamar Valley Printmakers is an example of how unique friendships and alliances have formed at the workshop over the years; it is now distinct from the workshop itself, and we are hoping that it will continue in its own right as an autonomous group.

“The astonishing and inspirational quality of the work which continually emerges from Mary Gillett’s Print Studio absolutely mirrors the diverse, adventurous and historical spirit of the Tamar Valley”

Bernie Hawes, Limekiln Gallery tamarvalleyprintmakers@gmail.com