



MASTERCLASS

Losing and finding the image

Edward Robinson juxtaposes striking contrasts of colour, texture and newsprint to achieve atmospheric acrylic and mixed-media compositions, as Caroline Saunders discovers

Often choosing to draw the viewer in with directional light, Edward Robinson translates the ambience of a scene at a particular moment in time. Incorporating collage and mixed media as well as his key technique of manipulating printed type and newsprint, he creates an exciting interplay of textural effects. Edward became a professional artist late in life. The early work of Sir Peter Blake, particularly the artwork for the iconic 1967 album cover *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* for the Beatles, led Edward into graphics and illustration. Edward's typographic and graphical painting style first emerged in the 1970s and was at the time used in

publicity for ICI and WHSmith. It is no surprise therefore that typography continues to feature significantly throughout his work.

Bustling markets

The vitality of bustling markets is perfectly suited to Edward's style. 'I worked in Soho, a stone's throw from Berwick Street market, Covent Garden and further afield at Butlers Wharf and Shad Thames. They are very inspiring areas, although much has changed over the last 40 years. I find most people seem to relate to London scenes.'

Edward derives as much from the abstracts of Picasso or Braque as he does from the compositions of Degas or

▲ *Fishermen's Huts, Aldeburgh Beach, Suffolk, acrylic and mixed media on board, 16½×22½in (41×56cm).*

'This vibrant scene was created with bold primary colours standing out against a cool tinted background and vivid blue sky. The main colour palette was cerulean and phthalo blue (green shade), buff titanium and light red. Bright sunlight guides the viewer up the steps and onto the beach. A combination of printed type denoting the fish trays, bubblewrap for the netting and corrugated card for the shed add interesting textures. Caran d'Ache oil pastels were used on the blackboards. For the finer detail I applied outlines by dipping the edge of card in acrylic.'

MASTERCLASS

Walter Sickert. 'Like the Impressionists, Sickert focused on the contemporary urban world. His deft dabs of paint, exuberant brushwork and particular attention to the quality of light in a scene are phenomenal. Dull greys and greens are used as a backdrop with a hint of pink to add spice – an effect that I often adopt.'

Occasionally Edward uses the effect of *contre jour*. Silhouettes are created and lines and shapes become emphasised. Drama and interest are created by the sun which is often seen as a bright spot or as a strong glare behind the subject.

Materials and working methods

Edward prepares his own gesso by mixing equal quantities of Polyfilla and Dulux water-based undercoat paint to a double cream consistency. He applies this sealer to 4mm MDF board, which is rigid enough to withstand the treatment of scalpel blades, sanding, scraping and rolling. 'Generally two coats are sufficient. The finish depends on the subject matter and mood I want to depict. Sometimes I prefer rough brushstrokes of gesso to be visible. If I am going to use card and newsprint I create a smooth surface by sanding between coats.' A mid-tone warm or

cool background, depending on the theme, is applied to the gesso-coated board.

The idea for Edward's next work will usually be triggered when out by the sea. On-the-spot expressive drawings to simplify shape and form provide a firm starting point. Observations are recorded and tonal values established. His drawings are accompanied by notes and digital photographs. 'I use a 4B pencil and A4 smooth cartridge paper. The soft lead glides across the page to fill in solids. I smudge wherever necessary.' Ideas are explored and promising compositions selected for further development back in the studio. 'I regard my sketches as a guide and am flexible when balancing areas of the composition. At first I apply areas of collage or colour with no particular reference to sketches or photographs, deliberately to avoid making any firm statements. I treat the painting in a similar way to a design layout by providing many avenues of interest and by balancing pictorial, typographical and coloured elements.

'Elements of an abstract nature emerge as a consequence of simplifying the subject with a variety of effects and a limited palette.' Edward responds to chance effects and ideas as

a painting develops. Broad washes of layered acrylic allow the composition to evolve. Strong and subtle textures are produced with anything that makes a mark: bubble wrap, corrugated card, sack material, foam, cling film and rollers. 'The working process involves losing the image and then having the challenge of finding it through the mixed-media techniques that I employ. This continues throughout the development of the painting.'

PVA glue fixes the lightweight collage but Golden Soft Gel (matt) medium is used for heavyweight materials such as corrugated card, textured wrapping paper and fabric. Printed images made on an ink jet printer onto standard 80gsm paper are incorporated. Edward seals the layers of collage throughout the process to guarantee longevity. 'I use a mixture of Winsor & Newton matt and gloss medium, which prevents disturbance of the underlying surface.'

While at art school and during his early days in advertising, Edward came across a technique of transferring printed type by adding lighter fluid to the weekend supplements, turning the pages over and applying pressure on the back. This was all made possible by photogravure, the printing process at that time. 'I have now discovered an acrylic medium, Golden Soft Gel (matt), gives a similar result. Using a rubber spatula I place the gel onto the printed text, flip it over and apply pressure using a roller. Leaving it to dry for a few minutes I then peel away the paper. This process is a bit like using Letraset.' For creating highlights Edward introduces small areas of inverted text, for example white text amongst an area of black text.

A limited palette

Using a mixture of Golden and Winsor & Newton acrylics, Edward mostly works with a limited palette that enables him to keep a unity within the picture. Reds consist of light red, cadmium red and red oxide. Yellows consist of Naples yellow, buff titanium, yellow ochre and hansa yellow. Blues include cerulean blue, phthalo blue (green shade), ultramarine and blue black (indigo) by Atelier, which he claims is wonderful for rendering shadows. Wherever possible yellow is used to lighten colours and to achieve a range of tones he mixes colour with titanium white, burnt sienna, burnt umber and violet oxide, olive green, Payne's grey or carbon black.

Edward finds acrylics can be built up but the colour still remains fresh. 'Acrylics dry quickly and can be used



▲ *Borough Market, London, acrylic and mixed media on board, 41×49in (105×125cm).*

'I was inspired by the strong sunlight piercing through the delicate iron work. The light source provided a great tool to link the whole composition together. Using a large 3in flat brush I applied blocks of various tones of green mixed from hansa yellow and phthalo blue (green shade). To create the pinks in the foreground I mixed yellow and light red. Thick paint was applied using different widths of card and then using a roller. Box shapes, newsprint and figures were added to the foreground to create a sense of depth and interest.'



▲ *Early Evening, Piccadilly Circus, London*, acrylic and mixed media on board, 16½×22½in (47×57cm).

'To give mood and impact, textural contrasts of newsprint, type and impasto were explored in this composition. I manipulated some of the logos in Photoshop and printed them on an ink jet printer to add as collage. I used my usual restricted palette of phthalo blue (green shade), light red and buff titanium.'

like watercolour washes or impasto, which I use to create an opaque highlight, for instance sunlight or foreground texture. To achieve some interesting runs of paint Edward sporadically sprays the board with water. He uses a wet box to prevent the acrylic from drying out and when using a roller for large areas of colour, a sheet of A3 plywood wrapped in tin foil gives an instant disposable waterproof surface. He sometimes puts quite a thick mix of paint onto varying widths of card and places it onto the painting at the desired location. He then uses a roller to achieve some extraordinary textures.

Finishing touches

The finishing touches, lines, boat masts, windows and walls are added using the edge of card dipped into acrylic. This produces a fine crisp line. When the painting is finished he uses a mixture of Winsor & Newton matt and gloss medium as if it were a varnish. Putting two coats over the artwork Edward gives the painting a satin finish. Using a barefaced obeche wood moulding, he makes his own frames in a colour sympathetic to the painting, generally grey.

'Some smaller paintings can take just as long as larger paintings. If the painting clicks it might take just days for a work 27½×31½in (70×80cm) to materialise. I cannot proceed until I am 100 per cent happy with the sky, when that is complete the remainder of the painting falls into place.

'Art is exceptionally hard work. It is essential to be marketing when working and vice versa. For just over a year I have employed an agent who has been very beneficial for sales and marketing. Above all I have been fortunate to have the support of my family and friends.' TA



Edward Robinson

completed a graphics course at Great Yarmouth School of Art before working for leading design and advertising agencies, where he won national and international design awards. He now runs local drawing and art classes and his work is held in private collections in the UK, Europe and USA. Edward's work is on show at Alexander Miles Gallery, London; The Flint Gallery, Blakeney, North Norfolk; Market Place Gallery, Olney, Buckinghamshire; Primrose Gallery, Northampton; Arthouse Gallery, London; The Lawson Gallery, Cambridge. www.edrobinsonart.co.uk