

Making her Marx

By Susan Bennett

Enid Marx (1902-1998) developed her drawing, print and carpentry skills at Roedean School. Aged eighteen she went to Central School of Arts and Crafts before moving to the painting school at the Royal College of Art in 1922. Her classmates included Eric Ravilious and Barbara Hepworth. Their tutor, Paul Nash, who later became well known as a surrealist painter and war artist, recognised Marx's ability as a pattern maker. However, she failed her Final Diploma Assessment as her work was judged to be vulgar as it reflected popular forms and rejected the traditional definition of the fine arts. Nearly sixty years later the RCA awarded her an honorary degree. Marx then spent a year learning how to mix dyes and craft hand-blocked textiles, which soon became extremely fashionable. A review of her first one woman show in 1930 elicited an appreciation of her designs, 'somehow she manages to combine forms that are essentially in the modern spirit with large harmonies that have the most agreeable traditional suavity'. London Transport commissioned seating fabrics for their trains and buses and Curwen Press asked her to design repeat patterns on paper to bind their publications. Sir Kenneth Clark invited Marx to participate in his 'Recording Britain' scheme to capture the country's natural beauty and architectural heritage that was under threat during the Second World War. As well as writing and illustrating several books, including *Bulgy the Barrage Balloon*, to amuse children during air raids Marx produced over 30 simple, attractive and inexpensive textile designs towards the end of the war at the request of the Utility board. Despite being limited by access to only two yarn types and a limited number of looms. After the war she went on several fact-finding tours to see how the Germans and others trained designers and then received an invitation to design commemorative stamps to mark the Queen's Coronation. Working on these stamps was one of her greatest pleasures, she said. With her lifelong companion, Margaret Lambert, she collected British folk art, which formed the basis of their book, *English Popular and Traditional Art* published in 1946. This collection can now be in the Marx/Lambert Gallery at Compton Verney. The pop artist Sir Peter Blake thinks that his own enthusiasm for popular art started when she took his class to see a considerable collection of ships' figureheads. Marx continued to help students until she was well into her nineties.

In 1944 she was appointed a Royal Designer for Industry, by her fellow designers, in recognition of her excellence as a 'pattern maker'. In her response she said that 'before I was like most women artists, just considered an amateur' but now she 'felt accepted as a professional, '

A small, dark determined woman of considerable stamina Marx campaigned ceaselessly for the continuation of the direct, unaffected, but human design values that her generation had established before the war. She died at the age of 95 on 18th May 1998