

HOW WILL PRINTMAKING LOOK IN TWENTY YEARS TIME?

Is there some sort of radical transformation awaiting the print in these "few" years? What use would prophetic vision be to us, foreseeing its extinction or elevation? If the prophecy should be unpropitious, would we save the print from extinction for fear that its inventive and skilled procedures might be forgotten in the current predominance of dematerialised and contact-free media? Does this centuries' old craft we love so much really have its enemies?

Contemporary art seems to love disguises. Architecture disguises itself as a sculpture, a sculpture as a building, a print as a poster, a photograph as a painting, a painting as a print... and all of them like to disguise themselves as installations. Moreover, they share these clothes around between themselves and invite further "interpreters" of the contemporary world to the exchanges: sociology, political science, biology. Is there anyone who doesn't want to share in this exciting and entertaining ronde where everything is connected with everything else, where the educated and informed can dress themselves as amateurs, the academic statistician as a witty storyteller, and an inconspicuous man as an exhibitionist?

It sometimes seems to me that the print has problems with this widely-shared obsession with disguise. As though some of the clothes were simultaneously too large and too small for it. It handled the dictate of the large format on the whole successfully, even though its original "challenge" was in a more intimate format. No one bothers about the range of black and white, on the contrary; this is what the print lends to others. Colours are not too much of a problem, even though it is a very laborious process for the print to acquire them if it wants to multiply its images as well. It's that laboriousness that no one likes any more! It will clearly show itself to be one of the innate "handicaps" which in this atmosphere of technological lightness will not help the print to increase in popularity over the next twenty years.

Then there is some sort of unexpressed duty to reproduce pictures. Why? Aren't there enough original pictures whichever way you look? There are, but they're over-priced and unavailable. I want to believe that the print will not lose its charm in this field over the next twenty years. This is where media strategies should change through the artists' active attitude, even going as far as some kind of marketing offensive.

A big question mark will possibly hang over mechanically equipped studios and their expensive maintenance which symbolises the weight and obsolescence of the craft. The beautiful big Karl Krause Leipzig lithography press versus the notebook. The ecologically unacceptable chemistry of etching agents and solvents versus Photoshop, that eternal aspirant for the Nobel Prize. But let us be just; even digital print can smell pretty disgusting compared with the water of diluted intaglio colours, which are splendid, just like photopolymers.

Another attribute of the print – transference – may survive, because it bears a dimension of mystery and surprise and is not about the print alone. A worse future awaits the traditional duality of the matrix and the transfer, which curators and theoreticians are already having trouble in understanding, let alone being able to understand it in twenty years time.

And that is still without mentioning the images the print brings. I believe that in twenty years they will be different, because nothing can stop their continual transformation. It will not of course be a question of completely new images, because retreating into the past is also one of the possibilities for this transformation. Those good old times, when the paths of art were not yet so well worn as today, and when there were not so many interfering meddlers, still hold an attraction. New images will aim to be more entertaining, because there is nothing left to shock us. And because art will continue to usurp elements of the visual language of other fields, everything which is not yet art will gradually become so. In some cases the print will perhaps even leave the fully-equipped print studio to set out on an adventurous path of improvisation unhampered by technological imperatives, after new discoveries in the gaps between fields, after new content. It is however possible that when it returns from its travels, studios – especially those in schools – will have new owners and different equipment. However, it is possible everything will converge quite differently. And as far as the day will come when all imaginable disguises of art are once and for all purchased by a multinational, something tells me that the print will be left its "elegant" dungarees, whilst most of the others will wait till those designer models appear in the outlets.

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