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A Creative Project in Printmaking Dealing With the Production of a Series of Original Prints Using Multiple Plates Printed in Relief and Intaglio Techniques

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A CREATIVE PROJECT IN PRINTMAKING DEALING
WITH THE PRODUCTION OF A SERIES OF
ORIGINAL PRINTS USING MULTIPLE PLATES
PRINTED IN RELIEF AND INTAGLIO TECHNIQUES

A Thesis
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty
Central Washington State College

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Gregory Wallace Hawkins
August, 1967
APPROVED FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

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Louis A. Kollmeyer
I would like to gratefully acknowledge the guidance of the thesis committee, Mr. J. John Agars, Dr. Louis A. Kollmeyer, and Mr. Donald P. Tompkins, in the production of this thesis. To Dr. B. Stephen Bayless I also am indebted for frequent advice and assistance.

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CHAPTER I
THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

"The deliberate making of images is one of the attributes of man; one of those functions that distinguish his species from those of the beasts" (5:3-5).

Since the development of printmaking, the communication of ideas has been one of the primary concerns of the engraver, etcher, and woodcutter. Technical skill and great craftsmanship were a necessity in the physical production of their prints. Looking at the work of these artists, we are confronted with a vast array of marvelously executed, aesthetically involved pieces, the endeavors of artists and craftsmen that were directly concerned with the integrity of their art. Of the contemporary print, however, this may no longer be entirely true. Although there are many fine craftsmen making prints, too often their work is overwhelmed in an exhibition by more dramatic pieces.

As we go through the galleries and exhibitions of prints being made today, we view a quantity of possibly theatrical and experimental images and techniques. Are these new techniques a positive inquiry or are they merely experiments for the sake of experimentation? Are they gaudy to startle or theatrical to draw attention from a lack of content? If printmaking is to survive and flourish as a major art form, a positive, vital direction is necessary for the contemporary printmaker.

The concern of this writer with the direction of the current aesthetic as so discussed has prompted a personal investigation within
the area of the fine art print. Pursuit of an ideal based on personal means relating to these current attitudes is the causitive factor determining this study.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study to explore and develop technical and aesthetic possibilities resulting from the use of multiple plates in printmaking:

1. by relating the content of separate plates through the combination of shape, color and implied narrative qualities;

2. by developing the contour of the total composition as a secondary visual effect of the multiple plates with no limitation as to media, material, or color within the production of the print.

Importance of the study. Through the development of the aesthetic values of the investigator, great enjoyment and enthusiasm has been fostered in study of the early Renaissance Dutch and Flemish masters.

When the candidate's earlier work came under analysis, the influence of Northern Renaissance artists seemed to assert itself in a number of ways. Inspiration for the investigator seemed to lie in the positive inquiry of these early European artists into subject matter and content. Through a positive attitude toward their art, they formed an aesthetic ideal that depended greatly on synonymity of technical virtuosity and aesthetic effectiveness (3:330-41).

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

Content. That quality in a work of art that either states or
implies the meaning of the work. The substance or essential matter that is resultant from the combination of texture, space, form, line, color or subject matter within the work. The essence of the work.

**Edition.** The total number of a series of prints pulled from a single plate or set of plates that describe a single work.

**Intaglio.** A process of printing in which the design is engraved, etched or incised so that it is below the surface of the plate. Ink is forced into the grooves or textured surfaces, while the surface of the plate is wiped clean. An impression or print is taken when the plate, a felt pad and a sheet of dampened paper are run through a double roller-type press under great pressure. The pressure forces the dampened paper into the depressions containing ink, thus producing an image on the surface of the paper. See Appendix for photographs of presses.

**Plate.** An etched, engraved metal sheet, a collagraph, or wood-block from which the print is taken. As in the case of the collagraph, an assemblage and construction of different materials which form the plate. See Appendix for photograph of plates used in study.

**Print.** A multiple-original work of art on paper which comes in direct contact with a plate that was worked upon by the artist and was personally controlled throughout the entire printing of the edition. Reproductions of other works of art by mechanical means, no matter how esthetically pleasing, should not be confused with fine prints.

**Limitations of the study.** Since the purpose of this study is to explore the possibilities inherent in the use of multiple plates in the construction and production of prints, the attempt will be made to
utilize more than one plate in the composition of each work.

All work produced in conjunction with this thesis has been done on an intaglio printing press. The format of these prints is restricted by aesthetic considerations and by the size of the available press.

Editions will be limited to ten prints, with allowance for one signed studio proof and two signed artist's proofs.

All prints will be made on twenty-five percent rag content papers. Inks used are either regular commercial offset inks or etching inks intended for the fine art printmaker. In some cases raw pigment will be added to increase the tooth of the ink.

The primary concern of this study is with coherency of content and aesthetic standards necessary to achieve this. As a result, the study is to be structured by the above factors, conforming to an ethical set of procedures set forth by many generations of master printers.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Statement of Sources

The obvious ability of the print to assert itself as a prime method of visual communication is easily explained when the viewer considers Goya's aquatints, Daumier's lithographs and Whistler's etchings. These giants of the art of gravure held a special place in the history of printmaking. We find in their work an essence that supercedes skill and enters into the philosophical.

"Their philosophy...led them to believe art was something more than a reflection, however subtle, of the phenomenal world--that it is in some sense epiphenomenal" (6:16).

Their work then, is encompassing their total experience as Stanley Wm. Hayter states:

"I want to distinguish the pursuit of reality from the pursuit of objects and to combine immediate experience with experience of the imagination" (6:23).

This has added importance as it relates to the artist's search for an expression of personal means. The realization that imaginative experience has a depth and dimension that extends not only into the work but into the life and expressive powers of the artist makes one cognizant of the necessity of a strong personal philosophy separated from technique and external motivation.

In the example of Stanley Hayter, the investigator finds such a situation. Hayter and his pupils at Atelier 17 have done a great deal in
the development and revolution surrounding contemporary printmaking. Through their academic search for expanded means of expression, the craftsmen in the various Ateliers have discovered new methods and possibilities within existing processes, extending the values of line, texture, dimension and color. A point has been reached in the development of printmaking that begs for new direction. As Gabor Peterdi theorizes in reference to intaglio prints:

"We have reached the crucial turning point, the period of experimentation for its ownself is over, now we have to digest what we know in order to express what we are" (9:12).

The physical determinant, technique, now seems to cease to exist. Media and materials are so diversified and highly developed that the technical procedures of printmaking have come into their proper perspective. No longer is experimental technique and color the single valid reason for proofing a plate aimed at becoming an edition. From Suzanne K. Langer:

"A work of art...is an expressive form created for our perception through sense or imagination, and what it expresses is human feeling."

She goes on to explain:

"The word 'feeling' must be taken here in its broadest sense, meaning everything that can be felt, from physical sensation, pain and comfort, excitement and repose, to the most complex emotions, intellectual tensions, or the steady feeling tones of a conscious human life" (8:15).

If this attitude is to be taken, then it behooves the artist to be aware of his responsibilities to himself and his viewers. This responsibility must not be construed as the necessity to please the viewer but only as one of being totally honest in statement.
Keats states, "What the imagination seizes as beauty is truth" (2:21). This is plausible if what is being viewed is beauteous to the observer, but it is also imperative that this hold true if the viewed object is not beautiful or intended to convey any connotations of beauty. In art, beauty cannot be a determinant in any consistent definition. Truth of statement is of the prime importance. As Aldous Huxley is quoted, "Art is a kind of super truth, more real, more believable than life itself" (11:76).

It is therefore concluded by this writer that the responsibility of the artist and thus the printmaker of today, lies in the discovery of a personal means of expression, not determined by superficiality of technique, but developed through identification of self-oriented values, and egotistically motivated devices.
CHAPTER III

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS OF THE INDIVIDUAL WORKS

The nature of the printing process might well bring an accusation that it negates the spontaneity of the creative process. The technical complications of the process seem to inhibit immediate works of art. It is the demand of care and time, however, that helps to lend meaning to the individual work, to give a feeling of depth to the artist in the development of his composition.

As a result of the works produced in this study, an attitude was developed by this investigator that seemed to strike at a compromise between more immediate media, such as drawing and painting, and the traditional etcher and engraver's art of patience and deliberation.
In Figure 1, the first work of the thesis problem, the investigator was attempting to imitate the appearance of the metal plate print by using flat collagraph techniques. The usual collagraph construction is one of heavy textures and materials glued and pasted together to form a thick, encumbered surface. By developing a plate utilizing garnet paper for the dark areas, cut shapes of cardboard for the medium tones, and smooth lacquered areas for the light surfaces, a wiping technique similar to that used on a copper or zinc plate could be used to give
greater sensitivity of tone. Various incised and carved lines were carried through the composition to create points of interest and to add another common point of reference between the separate plates. The division of the plates itself acts as a kind of stop sign to lend order to the tumbling of the somewhat organic shapes.

FIGURE 2

"Pakistan I," 30" x 20"
"Pakistan I," Figure 2, found its beginning in a discussion of the different forms of symbolic visual communication. The lower plate involves itself with the lovely shapes of Bengali script intertwining in a self-contained atmosphere. This tends to separate it from the stark purity of the geometricized shapes of the plate above, which stand out against, yet become a part of, the large red area that hangs above the entire composition. The red area in turn acts as a massive weight, forcing the composition together, uniting the three separate plates.

The desire of the investigator to express the ideas that presented themselves in the form of recognizable subject matter began to assert itself into the thesis work at this point. To deal with subject matter from a representational viewpoint became second only to the thesis problem itself as a guide for the investigator's work. The specific subject matter within each print is nevertheless incidental to the study and will be mentioned only in passing.
The problem of working with divided and separate plates is approached in a modified form in Figure 3. Although physically one plate, the attempt is made to give the illusion of two separate and distinct spaces. Using the proximity of the figures and different planes of perspective, the composition breaks into two individual areas as if the plate was actually severed. The content of the plate is such that the three figures support each other yet imply their individual reasons for existence within the work.

Figure 4 shows the beginning of departure from the standard format in plate shapes, meaning the rectangular. The square form is retained in the assemblage of the square plates in the lower section. The contour of the race car becomes the determinant of the contour of the middle plate, and the upper plate is pure color defined only by the shape of the cloud contours.
FIGURE 4

"Super Duper, Thermo Nuclear Race Car," 30" x 21"
The cloud that hangs above the heads of the four girls in Figure 5 also is a shape defined by a line-like contour, but this time broken by the intrusion of a single white embossed area. The girls, outlined by their own contour, in the same manner as the race car in Figure 4, are suspended in effect in front of a stark sky of pure white paper. The lower plate this time hangs from the upper sections, containing a small landscape that optically moves the eye back into the plate alluding a depth of field to the otherwise flat composition.
FIGURE 6

"Basking In The Splendour Of A Cloud Shaped Like Mickey Mouse," 32" x 21"

In Figure 6, the contour of the plate is beginning to dominate and determine much of the total visual effect of the composition. The large dark cloud gives a feeling of ominous space that somehow threatens the three small cloistered plates. Relating to each other through their relationship to the overhanging cloud and by their individual shape and subject matter, the figures and landscape are subject to and affected by
the cloud. The contour of the cloud allows white areas to protrude into
the composition and tone down the strength of the brown plate. See Appendix
for actual print of lower right hand insert plate.

FIGURE 7
"Maiden," 20" x 12"

Aware by now of the importance of the contours of the plate, the
investigator evolved a plate with the specific intent of confining space
and subject matter. In Figure 7 two aquatinted copper plates were sur-
rounded by pure white embossed framing. In the first state no color was
used, but in the second state a colored plate was added that surrounded the "window" embossing, in effect confining the composition even further within itself. As a result the figure in the window becomes more completely confined and withdrawn.

Figure 8 now shows a complete excursion from the rectangular, single plate. The contours and shapes defined by them become important in their own right. Figures protrude from the plate as a natural consequence of their action. Through the related subject within the different units of the print, they become a single expressive work. Sprawling across the paper, the content of the work is projected without the confines of the artificial window format of the rectangular plate.
CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

I. SUMMARY

In viewing the works of the contemporary printmaker, we are often confronted with techniques that leave us wondering as to the intent and purpose of the artist. With the development of many new methods and the expansion of the old, printmaking is technically limited only by the scope of the artist's imagination and craftsmanship. With this loosening of the technical boundaries of the craft, the question of ethical direction might well be considered. The theatrical and gaudy aspects that are possible could easily be used to draw attention from compositional and technical weaknesses. The survival of the medium can no longer be based on the use of proper subject matter or technical skills. The contemporary printmaker finds himself in the position of searching for an ideal based on personal means relating to an identification of self-oriented values.

II. CONCLUSION

Throughout the study the investigator was aware of a sequential development of an attitude and approach to the print that alluded to possible further studies. Varying the plate in conformance with conventional technical procedure, the candidate dealt basically with content and forms resultant from the use of the multiple plates. The shape, or contour of the potential plate became increasingly important, however, as a sub-determinant of content.
In the works, figures protrude past the edge of the plate, forming new lines or contours as they break the expected confines of the composition. The contour of the plate, as so formed, takes on its own value and subsequently influences the composition. Due to this influence complete departure was made in the final stages of the study from the artificial "window" of the square plate. The candidate determined from this study that in his own work, experimental approaches, such as the multiple plate concept, were legitimate and meaningful procedures. With the consideration of processes performed in a logical and ethical manner the intent of the artist can then be based on a personal discovery of means relating to ego-oriented and determined ideals.
BIBLIOGRAPHY
A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


FIGURE 9
Meeker Etching Press

FIGURE 10
Old Style Direct Drive
Cast Iron Etching Press
FIGURE 12

Plates of Prints Used in Study