

Print-Media Beyond Academia

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Abstract:

Printmaking as an art discipline has been taught in different visual and fine arts academic programs around the world for hundreds of years. Thousands of printmaking students have graduated from different Art schools hoping to continue pursuing and fulfilling their artistic aspiration and passion, however, only handful of those, mostly university-affiliated, manage to do so. Obviously many factors may contribute to that phenomenon, however; the unavailability of printmaking equipment, which exist mainly in the educational institutions, the high cost of printmaking materials and the absences of the promotion and marketing of printmaking art, may be the most conspicuous factors that drive printmaking artists to quit. This research aims to explore new approaches that enable printmaking students to continue working in the real world after leaving the confinement of their educational institution and to investigate different possible solutions that may allow Printmaking Art and Artists to survive outside the Academic institution.

Keywords: Print-Media, Printmaking Art, Printmaking Art Education, Experimental Printmaking, Printmaking Co-Ops.

1-OBJECTIVES

1-The prime goal of this research is to provide printmaking students with the needed knowledge and tools to continue practicing printmaking and utilize successfully what they learn after graduation.

2-To update the outdated printmaking practices in educational art programs by introducing the contemporary interdisciplinary concepts and techniques of experimental printmaking. This research investigates the most practical and efficient methods of printmaking that would be applicable outside the school.

3-To investigate possible venues of production, promoting and marketing printmaking, such as printmaking co-ops, that may play a great role in the continuation and promotion of printmaking art.

4-To explore small manual printing projects, that can create much needed work opportunities for underprivileged artists and communities.

2-SIGNIFICANCE

This project may represent a progression in the way we teach, practice, and even define and conceive the art of printmaking today. This project is an attempt to revive printmaking art outside the educational institution. In addition, this project may open the eyes of the printmaking students/artists on the limitless creative possibilities of the contemporary experimental printmaking, but most importantly, this research will suggest applicable alternative printing solutions for so many printmaking artists who do not have an access to a traditional printshop. This research will also investigate the structure and the work mechanism of much needed exhibiting/promotional venues (printmaking co-ops) for printmaking artists. Printmaking co-ops may also play a great educational role in introducing the art of printmaking to the public and in raising the public awareness of that art. Another point of significance of this research is, it will examine the possibility of creating work opportunities through small manual printing projects, these projects can be of particular importance for the underprivileged Middle Eastern communities.

3-INTRODUCTION

Printmaking is one of the main visual arts disciplines that has been taught in different visual and fine arts schools around the world for hundreds of years. Despite being one of the major contemporary Art disciplines, in the Middle East printmaking art and artists rarely prosper outside the academic institution. Obviously many factors may contribute to that phenomenon however; the unavailability of printmaking equipment outside the educational institutions, the soaring cost of printmaking materials and the absences of the promotion and marketing of printmaking art, may be the most conspicuous factors that drive printmaking art to diminish outside the “Box” of the academic institution.

The unavailability of printmaking equipment outside the educational institutions is one of the main factors that forces the majority of printmaking artists to quit. The unavailability of printing presses ,exposure unites ,drying rack and different printmaking chemical compounds outside the school environment , represents a fundamental conundrum that forces the majority of young printmakers in the Middle East to abandon their chosen medium of artistic expression and to look for more accessible art mediums such as painting , drawing , instillation or even video art . Even inside some Academic Printmaking programs in the Middle East, teaching

some of the primary printmaking techniques such as (Stone Lithography) has already been disrupted due to the unavailability of the lithographic stones. The inevitable results is a shrinkage in the number of the practitioners of printmaking art and a huge waste of indispensable time, efforts, resources and capabilities dedicated to teaching that art, which ultimately leads to the detrition and diminishment of printmaking art.

The soaring costs of basic printmaking materials such as (Zinc & Copper plates used in Intaglio printing) represents a tremendous financial burden that forces printmaking students/artists to work less often or to work on smaller scales, or even to completely quit after graduation. Since most of printmaking materials and tools are imported, the underprivileged printmaking students and artists can never afford them, consequently, most of printmakers in the Middle East are constantly seeking more efficient and affordable printing alternatives. So far, the main technical alternative for printmakers working outside the “Box” has been Woodcut, which is one of the most inexpensive, basic and primitive printmaking techniques that can be processed manually. Despite, woodcut materials and tools are usually available and relatively inexpensive; woodcut as a printmaking technique by its own nature can never be a valid technical choice for imagery with continuous tonal gradation, or sophisticated details.

Another factor that contributes to the diminishment of printmaking art in the Middle East is, the lack of promotion and marketing of that art. Unlike painting, sculpture and drawing which are the most celebrated and promoted art mediums by art galleries, printmaking as an art medium is usually overlooked and underappreciated. There is a widespread misconception among people working in the field of art business and among art collectors that printmaking is merely the art of making “copies”, consequently printmaking is generally conceived as an inferior art medium to other art media. Even the most enthusiastic and dedicated artist when faced with all those obstacles he/she eventually abandons printmaking.

Right now printmaking academic programs in the Middle East face an inevitable choice, either to admit the failure of printmaking art and eradicate printmaking educational programs, or try to look for innovative solutions that would allow printmaking artists to survive and flourish outside the “Box” of the educational institution.

4-THE SOLUTION

Tackling the dilemma of the widening gap of what printmaking students learn inside the Art schools and what they can actually practice outside, should start by focusing on, investigating, developing and teaching simple innovative printmaking methods that do not require special equipment or materials to execute. In addition to directing and encouraging the students to think outside the strict context of the historical definitions and practices of printmaking art and to investigate more liberal and experimental approaches to that art. That approach would defiantly unleash the full creative potentials of the student/artist and would be more philosophically coherent and more relevant to the on going massive evolution in the arena of contemporary visual arts, in which an artwork is more appreciated for its intellectual and conceptual content rather than for its visual richness and superficial aesthetical values. Meanwhile the suggested experimental approach will qualify the students to adapt successfully to work in a very different environment outside the “Box” of the Academic Institution.

The suggested criteria for determining the most suitable experimental techniques for the educational printmaking programs are:

1-The availability of the different materials used in the whole process.

(The materials used in executing the artwork should be readily and locally available.)

2-The capability of processing without the need to special equipment.

(The artwork should be manually printable without the need for printing presses or special equipment.)

3- The economic efficiency of the process.

(All the materials used in the process should be inexpensive and within the reach of the majority of the beginning unprivileged young artists.)

4-The labor efficiency of the process.

(The process should not be labor demanding or time consuming, which allows the artist to focus more on the creative aspects of the work and rather than the technical aspects.)

5-Safety measurements of the process.

(As most of the young artists work at home, the suggested printmaking techniques should be safe to conduct in the school or in the home environment.)

The suggested experimental techniques for students/artists working outside the “Box” include some academically ignored “forgotten” techniques such as Plaster relief, Collagraph relief, Chin-Colle and Stencil and some newly invented techniques such as Waterless litho., Sublimation ink transfer, Marble relief and Plexiglas relief. Recently in the US and Europe, experimental printmaking techniques have become much more acceptable as valid alternatives to the traditional printmaking techniques and are being utilized extensively and effectively by hundreds of American artists. That experimental approach forms a new perspective and definition of printmaking art and removes many traditionally applied definitive restrictions on that art, in addition to opening

the doors of creativity and imagination of the contemporary artist. By utilizing experimental printmaking methodology, many new interdisciplinary possibilities can be examined in a pursuit to unleash the full creative capabilities of the artists and to intensify and deepen the visual and/or the emotional experience of the audience. The limitless Experimental options of generating, integrating, and manipulating images and/or drawings push the creative vision of the student/artist to its limit.

Unlike the conventional processes, experimental techniques can offer the students/artists a significant degree of freedom, spontaneity and control over the design. In addition, by utilizing the experimental printing methods, students and artists can focus more on expressing the intellectual and the emotional content of their work without being interrupted by the complexity of the prolonged technical considerations and chemical calculations of traditional printmaking.

From a creative perspective, the possibility of working with readily available, accessible, safe and inexpensive materials will defiantly encourage the artistic freedom and the artistic productivity of the students /artists, in addition to eliminating the fear factor from the art-making process. The Fear factor is usually associated with working with hazardous, expensive or hard to find materials. Eliminating the fear factor from the creative process in my opinion would be one of the main advantages of introducing experimental printmaking to students.

The suggested approach is to categorize different experimental Printmaking techniques into groups that substitute the traditional Printmaking Techniques. For instance the researcher suggests (Stencil) as an alternative to Silkscreen ,(Marble relief) as an alternative to Metal relief ,(Plaster and Plexiglas relief) as alternatives to Wood engraving ,(Sublimation ink applications) as alternatives to photochemical processes and (Paper plate lithography ,Waterless lithography) as alternatives to stone lithography .

Another approach to tackle the problem is to find a solution for the production, promoting and marketing aspects outside the “Box”. One of the possible solutions is establishing printmaking co-ops, Printmaking co-ops are non-profit printmaking facilities that are usually established and operated by a group of artists. The collaborative nature of Printmaking Co-ops has been very successful throughout the US and Europe as they offer simple printmaking solutions backed with a wide array of artistic and technical experiences of the artists. Printmaking co-ops usually consist of a simple printshop (financed and maintained by the participating artists), a library and a gallery space that shows the works of the co-op members. Printmaking co-ops can also play a great role in teaching the public about the art of printmaking and at the same time represent an excellent venue for printmakers to work, promote and show their works away from the traditional commercial art galleries.

Another possibility to solve problems of printmaking art in the Middle East, is to utilize printmaking as a production tool in small manual printing projects. One great economical characteristic of printmaking that is usually overlooked in the educational printmaking programs is massproduction. Simple inexpensive printmaking techniques such as stinzel, woodcut and wood engraving can be employed to produce high quality rich hand printed patrens used in decorating textiles (Scarves, T-shirts, bed sheets, napkins ..) among many other possible applications.Those artifacts can be produced in collaboration between the artist how puts the design and supervises the production and young craftsmen (trained printing specialists) who excute the printing process. Such small printing projects can be very successful especially in the poor communities where the unemplment rate is relatively high. Also such small projects could form a platform on which young artists may reach out to help poor communities and engage in community sevice.To ensure the safty of the workers and the continuty of thoses projects nontoxic natural local materials can be utilized in the production process . Similar experinces in the US , Europe , India and in Mixico have been proven to be very successful, among the most impressive examples in that field are the works of the american artist *Lena Corwin* who has been able to establish a very successful production line of various hand printed artifacts.

5-CONCLUSION

Despite the current evolution in the arena of contemporary printmaking art, many educational printmaking programs in the Middle East still teach printmaking art in a very conventional conservative fashion that no longer qualify the students to continue working outside the school. This research investigates different possible solutions that may allow Printmaking Art and Artists to survive outside the “Box” of the educational institution. To accomplish that goal, the researcher suggests various applicable experimental printmaking methods for printmaking outside the “Box” that can be preceded manually.

The researcher also suggests the structure and work mechanism of printmaking co-ops as a valid alternative to educational printshops and gallery spaces .Co-ops may represent a valid solution for printmakers working outside the “Box” as they play a dual role, firstly as a printmaking facility and secondly as promoting exhibiting venue for the artists. Printmaking co-ops also may represent an important platform for artists to meet, share experiences and to introduce their art to the public away from the strict commercial mindset of the private galleries.

The researcher recommends examining the possibility of establishing small business projects by utilizing

simple hand printing methodologies. Such small projects can create much needed work opportunities for the underprivileged communities. In conclusion, the researcher believes the survival and the progression of Printmaking Art today depends greatly on the flexibility of Printmaking Education to adapt to and bridge the gap between the Academic environment and the Market environment

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Research Interest:

Non-Toxic Printmaking , Experimental Printmaking , Mixed Media and Graphic Design.