

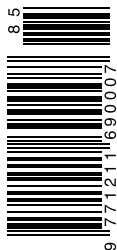
Grapheion

21st issue 2008

EUROPEAN REVIEW OF MODERN PRINTS, BOOK AND PAPER ART



Zdeněk Sýkora, Ingrid Ledent, Kiki Smith, Jiří Šalamoun, Grapheion's theme:
The Memory of the Future, Andrzej Bednarczyk, Zygmunt Januszewski, Kubin - Goeldi





Cover: **Zdeněk Sýkora**, *Phase No.31*, 1989, screenprint, 70 x 70 cm,
paper 71 x 71 cm

GRAPHEION No. 21
INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF
CONTEMPORARY PRINTS, BOOK
AND PAPER ART

YEARBOOK 2008
TWENTY FIRST ISSUE

Published by the Central European
Gallery and Publishing House Ltd.
Melantrichova 5, 110 00 Prague 1
Czech Republic

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print:

Decibel Production, Chotouchov
printed on Hello silk 115g/m²

orders accepted at:

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www.ikg.cz

ISSN 1211-6904

Dear Friends,

The future of the print and its identity – key questions which have been on the agenda since the 1990s, and which interest everyone who has at heart the further development of this artistic discipline.

They became the starting point for the project “Memory of the Future” in which Richard Noyce addresses 46 artists from 22 countries with the question: “If the print survives till the year 2028, how will it look?” Richard Noyce has put together a specialised and unique set of texts, flavoured with the spice of science fiction and created exclusively for this edition of *Grapheion*, on the basis of long-term correspondence and personal meetings with printmakers, and reshaped it into an unusually effective mosaic of answers. This living flow of words, images and texts, offers in its aggregate valuable evidence of how contemporary artists in various places, but at the same moment in time, reflect and are inspired by this idea against the background of their own artistic work and daily creative experience. The spontaneity, the personal engagement and the authenticity of their opinions has its counterpart in the intellectual overview of Andrzej Bednarczyk, whose no less remarkable essay “The Afterlife of the Print” examines with great precision academic analyses of the paradigms of the present transient time and offers a specific way out of the contemporary conceptual marasma. However, the works of personalities such as Kiki Smith, Ingrid Ledent, Zdeněk Sýkora..., confirm the eternal truth that true art solves its own themes in its own way, and with the intuitive strength of internal visions responds to the challenges of its time.

Even though *Grapheion* no. 21 is – as emerges from the above – more of a collection of papers than a year book, we have kept the section on the exhibitions and competitions of 2008 and included the calendar for 2009. And when we mention 2008, it brings back to us the great loss suffered by the world of printmaking with the death of Prof. Zoran Kržišnik, the founder of the Ljubljana biennial, the oldest in Europe, in his time an important “diplomat”, bringing together through art the ideologically irreconcilable worlds of East and West.

There remains only to say that you hold in your hands the last published edition of the journal which, with a variety of hiccups as far as its periodical appearance is concerned, has survived for 12 years, and even though published in a relatively small edition has attracted a broad range of readers. It is not altogether ruled out that at sometime in the future it will appear in the form of an irregular publication; however, we see its future in internet form, offering the latest information on the world of the print. WWW.GRAPHEION.CZ meanwhile appears in Czech, and from September 2009 we plán its English version, oriented toward the international stage. I am therefore not saying farewell to you and, in the name of our small team, thank you for the good will of all our readers who, as we believe, will not only enjoy the new internet publication as much as the old, but will actively cooperate in its creation.

Yours, Simeona Hošková, editor-in-chief

If I were to give you an update on the history of the future of printmaking!

There is no way to deny that I am a “science aficionado”. In fact for many years I have been contemplating a SF novel that I intend to write. Surprisingly art has never been part of my considerations for the setting in which the story would be told. A reason for this lies in the fact that I contemplate this novel as way to free my mind from thoughts that are related to every day problems. To think about art in the future would in this case remind me of all the recent and pressing problems that I have to contend with right now and would not help me much to relax and find refuge in an imagined world. For the occasion of this text and the chance to contribute to a larger discourse about the future of printed art I will divert from my routine and make an honest attempt to describe the situation of printmaking in 20 years. Imagine that you have travelled through time and that I have the chance to inform you in brief about what has happened in the meantime and what is going on right now.

What had been called printmaking for centuries is now generally thought of as published art. The theory was discussed for a while but became accepted only after the art market understood its potential. The idea was clear and convincing. To ensure that a work of art is valued it has to be made known. This is a task that can be fulfilled when information about the art work is published, when reproductions are published or even after reactions to it have been published. In the best case, the art work itself is published.

From the time of the invention of the woodblock print the printmaking universe became, over the centuries, the very base of our culture and communication. The idea of being able to publish art and free it from the exclusiveness and control that it was subjected to before, created a revolution that remained unnoticed for a very long time. The potential to free this communicative process from the necessity of gathering around one object at the same time, and the empowerment of the artist to be in control of the production process of multiple images, was very liberating.

Two things changed the way we look at printmaking today. First, the widespread adaptation of marketing strategies in the world art market led to the desperate need for a new and unifying theory. You will no doubt remember the first successful attempts of brand building and merchandising. The very object that constituted the art work became almost obsolete. It was the fact that, once enough information and

images were published in media old and new, and these images found their way into the private networks where they became objects of identification and started to stick in the minds of the people, it was possible to sell almost everything that bore the name of the art brand. It worked just like the business of Adidas, Converse, Apple and Meese worked twenty years ago. The second factor was the rise of visual communication to the leading position in global cultural development. In this situation it was printmakers who understood that the very concept of printmaking, the creation of art to be published, was able to explain what was going on in the world of art. It was realised that even art merchandise produced in Mongolia and Siberia, would be of almost no value unless the brand it carried started to make sense again. Paintings were not done anymore to create an image on its own and for its own reasons. Paintings were done to be reproduced in the art e-zines, the networks, and through the *individuanels*, those individually arranged network interfaces that today make you believe you are once more in control of the flow of information. Performances were no longer performed for an audience that was present to live through the experience. In fact the practice of having a live audience is very rare today, except for the data that can be published.

Thanks to the new 3D printers and the cheap polymers that are available today, sculptures are a very popular download. You can print them in any size you like and because of the possibility of recycling the polymer material you do not waste too much of your resources if you decide to change your mind and your collection. Printmaking was the explanation of why all the printouts are valuable art works, because the value was not created by the fact that the object was materialized, but by the fact that it was published.

Of course this did create a fundamental change in the art market itself and the crisis of the market coincided with the collapse of the financial networks. That was when the only money you could still trust to be in existence was the old-fashioned paper money. At least this would not just disappear within an overstretched networking system of generating value out of nothing, in order to back virtual credits. Even though it seemed to be a disaster at first, it turned out to be the best that could happen to printmakers and their credibility.

The merchandising of art now works on different levels. The most expensive and

rare objects are the art works that actually involved the artist in their production. These things are the collectors' items and are usually those that are on display in exhibitions of the big flagship museums. They are as horribly expensive as you can imagine. Today, if you get an authorized print, done under supervision of the artist, signed and certified, you have got your hands on what is closest to that which was considered for a long time to be an authentic piece of art. If you get a certified download, you can at least be sure that the data is not corrupted. If you are not willing to spend money on the art work, you can just use the data that is floating on the net to produce something to display. In fact you can find very interesting things there. Since the Creative Commons License has become standard, so many people, especially the young, are publishing their work, joining the ever growing number of printmakers. When they are successful they can start to market their brand and be recognized and therefore start earning money.

The increase in the percentage of illiterates all over the globe, as images finally became more important in our communicative structures than written information, was extremely unfortunate. This was especially tragic as the educational systems had nowhere adjusted for this, nor had they gained the ability to teach critical skills on how to communicate using images, or to understand how the manipulative power of images can be controlled. Many civil groups today work hard to further empower people and make sure that the number of illiterates and visual illiterates alike go down, but it will be a long time until we fully adjust to and understand this new situation.

Sorry that I have to leave you here. There is much more to tell and explain, but I have to finish an edition of woodblock prints. Since the first proof was digitized and published it became a very popular download, and made it into several most popular lists. It was even presented within the Published Graphics Network as pick of the week, sparking a lot of visual comments. Now is the perfect time to offer the real thing to collectors and auction some of the certified data packs online. I should not miss this window of opportunity as my marketing adviser has reminded me; especially as the investment in that hand-made paper was a huge commitment.

Michael Schneider
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