

Publish or Perish!

by Michael W. Schneider

Within the scientific community it is understood that one must have her/his work published to be recognised, and to be considered relevant.

Within the world of fine art, the need to publish would seem obvious but contrary to this, publications seem to be going unnoticed.

While nobody denies the fact that successful art first has to succeed in the competition for attention to become relevant within the discourse, the more obvious source of this attention, publications, are typically overlooked.

While we perceive Art History as the record of development within art, culture and society, which is illustrated by the fine examples of visual art we see today, perhaps we must accept that there is a more appropriate reading of this notion.

Art History might not be the history of Art but rather, the History of Published Art.

Art that has not been published has perished from the collective memory.

Printmaking as a medium has long served us as a means to publish and to be recognised. To spread ideas, to enter into the social discourse and political arena. To influence and to move. Andy Warburg thought of Art History as the history of images at a time when the reproduction and publication of images was far from being sufficient in quantity and quality.

Today we see the influencer courted by businesses because they publish their ideas and reach a larger audience on their own, which is a vivid example of the impact publications have on society.

While publications, targeted mass communication and other social networks get more and more obscure and complicated, printmaking has become the petri-dish for analysis, critique and innovation of the age of communication, which started when the first print was pulled.

The long history of printmaking in Asia builds a strong foundation for the work that is currently in creation at the Printmaking Laboratory of the Tokyo University of the Arts, located in a city spearheading all new forms of digital communication. Tokyo, the archetype of a post modern city is now a place to redefine printmaking within a post digital age where the competition for attention in order to place images in our heads is breathtaking, artists are again called upon to imagine new ways to create and publish images.

This theme was also a point of discussion within our department in 2018, when we invited German writer and theorist Wolfgang Ullrich to give a series of lectures and to engage in a conversation that questioned the Western concept of Art and its dissolution in a changing social, cultural and economic environment. Globalisation and digitalisation in combination with learning about machines, and shifting economic realities, have all created new paradigms for the way in which artists act and interact. In addition, artists are defining their role within this development in reference to how different social and educational elites identify with art as well as through the way in which visual culture is being shaped in the future.

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