

BROADSHEET EDITORS

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EDUCATION AND PRINTMAKING

When the PMC was set up 20 years ago, one of its prime objectives was to press for the inclusion of printmaking as a main subject in art colleges. Since those days, the position of printmaking has improved dramatically in schools and colleges. The benefits to printmaking and to printmakers have been incalculable.

Now, suddenly, in the face of educational cutbacks, we are faced with the need to defend our position. With rumours of swingeing cuts in printmaking departments, of artists losing the part-time teaching that enabled them to live and work, we felt that we should try to find out what was really happening. As a start, we asked three people involved in printmaking courses to write about the effect of the cuts on their organisations.

We hope that this may provoke other PMC members to write with their views and experiences on this subject, and even lead to some form of campaign to protect printmaking from suffering serious reverses in the educational system.

CHANGES, DEVELOPMENTS, EFFECTS OF CUTS AT THE CENTRAL SCHOOL PRINTMAKING SECTION OVER RECENT YEARS

by DAVID GLUCK
Head of Printmaking, Central School of Art and Design

I have been Head of Printmaking at the Central for the last ten years; during this period many changes have taken place. The main changes and developments are :

Position of Printmaking within the College

The Central has a long tradition in printmaking. The printmaking section has been part of the Fine Art department for the last ten years. All Fine Art students have easy and direct access to the studios after undertaking introductory courses; Printmaking is a strong service area for some other departments of the school, including the reprographic screen printing facilities.

Re-organisation of the Studios

In 1981 the facilities in the Southampton Row annexe, housing block printing, lithography and dark room, were moved to the main building to be alongside the existing etching facilities, thus forming one printmaking section adjacent to the painting and drawing studios in the Fine Art department.

Course Developments

- The Fine Art department has offered printmaking as a major option of the BA Hons Fine Art course since September 1981, with an intake of 3/4 students. This number has been increased to 6 per year from Sept. '84 as part of the new joint BA Fine Art course with St Martins School of Art.
- A two year part-time Advanced Printmaking course was introduced in 1981, in addition to the one year full time course. I feel that the part-time course now permits a much wider range of students to study at a high level.
- Recently Fine Art Book production has been developed within the section, potentially for all students. As a

part of this the students undertake classes in book binding at the London College of Printing.

- Following cuts in teaching staff throughout the School in excess of 50%, the use of the section by students of other departments has been greatly reduced. I deeply regret this.

Equipment and Capitation

A certain amount of cuts have been levelled at equipment and capitation, but on the whole these resources have been very good. We now have well equipped studios in most aspects of autographic printmaking, including wood engraving.

Staffing

Over the last five years the total teaching staff in the section has been reduced by approximately 50%. Fortunately the technical staff have been maintained. The cuts to teaching hours have had the following effects :

- A reduction in specialist teachers of specific techniques has gradually occurred, and staff now tend to teach more than one technique. However, we still offer a significant amount of regular specialist part-time teaching in most autographic/photographic techniques. Others, such as mezzotint, are taught on short, specialised courses from time to time.
- Every effort has been made to maintain the contact teaching for students and in fact I believe we now offer a more varied programme of study to students. However, certain important aspects have had to be reduced as a result of cuts:
 - There has been some reduction in staff and student exhibitions.
 - New courses that had been envisaged have been delayed owing to pressure of other work.
 - Few, if any, permanent part-time appointments have been made recently. The length of the working year has been reduced for part-timers. Natural wastage has operated wherever possible. The section still maintains a modest visiting programme.
 - It has been my policy over many years to talk to and show around the section, most printmakers who have contacted me enquiring about potential teaching positions. I have always found that seeing artists with work in the studios is a very good source of finding interesting artists, especially the younger ones, and from time to time part-time jobs have been obtained by this method. I regret I have been forced, owing to pressure of extra work as a direct result of the cuts in teaching hours, to severely reduce the numbers of artists I see in any one year.

General

The section has been modified as outlined over recent years in an attempt to give a good education in Printmaking to students against a background of cuts. I now feel that we are rapidly approaching a situation where, however willing and flexible a printmaking section might be, if further significant cuts occur, standards must suffer.

THE EFFECTS OF CUTS ON THE WORK OF PRINTMAKING STUDENTS IN THE FACULTY OF ART & DESIGN, NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE POLYTECHNIC

by JACK SLADE
retired Head of Graphic Design, Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic

At present it is by no means entirely clear what effects the 1984/85 cuts in budget will have so far as students doing printmaking at Newcastle Polytechnic are concerned. The two courses doing printmaking are the BA Honours Fine Art and BA Honours Graphic Design. These will both, to some extent, be involved in the ripples created by the merging together of the Schools of Fine Art and Graphic Design to form the new School of Visual Studies which will have as its Head, from the 1st September 1984, Mr Carl Lazzari, who has been Head of Painting at Leicester Polytechnic.

Staff

It is not anticipated that there will be any reduction of staff in

printmaking during 1984/85 compared with the previous session, indeed there will be an additional technician in printmaking who will initially be related most closely to the needs of the students on the BA Graphic Design course. It is hoped that greater flexibility of printmaking staff will result from the merger, making all printmaking staff available to students on both degree courses.

Equipment

No new printmaking equipment has been planned for 1984/85; it is possible that some rationalisation of the 'parallel provision' situation that has existed so far (and has been justified by heavy levels of usage) may take place.

Materials

This is the area where cuts will be experienced most dramatically. The funding for routine material expenditure has been cut throughout the Faculty to only 80% of what was provided in 1983/84, and that itself had been reduced from what was previously available; at the same time all consumable material prices had risen steeply. It seems inevitable that the previous policy of allowing students to draw all printing materials (including paper, plates and lino and mesh materials) at no cost against an approved printmaking programme will have to cease. Although I anticipate that chemicals and inks will be available as required without charge, at least for the present.

In order to accommodate the previous budget reductions, the use of copper plates for etching has been discontinued and replaced with cheaper steel and roofing-quality zinc; paper has been limited to a certain number of sheets per student both for rough proofing paper and fine paper. It will be much more difficult for Newcastle students to provide their own printmaking materials than it would be for those based in London, who have a range of specialist suppliers within a bus ride, and staff will do all they can to prevent real hardship.

LESS WHERE THERE SHOULD BE MORE

by JAMES BURR

Head of Art Department, City Literary Institute, London

In the ILEA adult education programmes for London art in its many forms - painting, drawing, sculpture, pottery and printmaking - provides an essential creative outlet without which the cultural life of the capital would be much impoverished.

In the main adult centres, most art departments are equipped with basic printmaking facilities, where anyone interested can go and learn. The processes of etching, silkscreen, relief-printing or lithography are used to express visual ideas guided by a tutor and stimulated by the activity of students in the workshop.

Adult education is distinctive for the wide range of students it attracts - some will be ex-art school students who wish to continue to extend their activities, some attempting art school entry, others will be art teachers who wish to add another medium to their range of skills, and some retired, and who for the first time in their lives have the leisure to discover a dormant talent. Most, however, will be the ordinary working person who feels the urge to realise their creative potential and to seize the opportunity for self development. With job sharing and permanent unemployment an increasing number of people can now profit from their own personal imaginative growth.

One essential all these different categories of students will have in common is a latent ability and serious commitment to printmaking as an expressive medium. If opportunities were not provided by the Inner London Education Authority in its 44 Adult Education Centres this incipient talent would never flourish. For the last 30 years in London it has been easy for the enterprising to find lively groups of printmakers in their local adult education centres. This has not only produced work of genuine originality but has provided an outlook to the often boring and repetitive work forced on people which can become such a deadening burden as to destroy the natural creative energies and reduce the human potential.

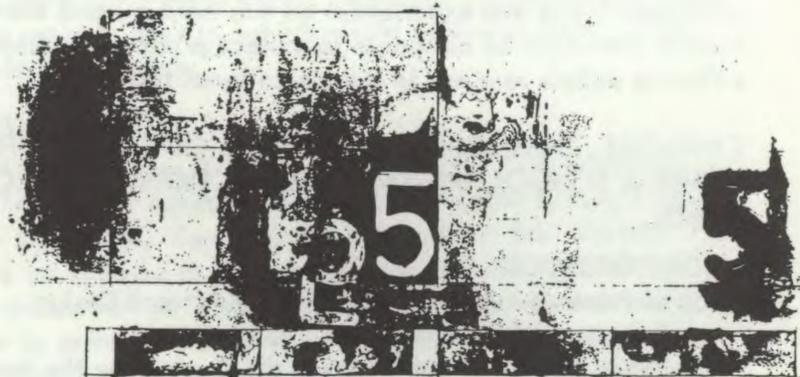
The creative opportunities are the envy of many less fortunate cities and are essential to establishing balanced, fulfilled and integrated members of society. The cost of the whole of the adult education, which of course includes drama, music, humanities, languages and a wide range of other activities, is only 1% of the total educational budget, 32 millions being spent on London's adult population. With the introduction by central government of rate capping, they dictate that only 8 millions should be spent, which to the ILEA will be a cut of 75% for adult education.

This will be a devastatingly destructive blow, which in simple terms will mean that art centres and art departments who, for example, run four printmaking classes would only be able to preserve one. Previous cuts of 16% over the last few years have already reduced opportunities, so that many prospective students eager to do printmaking are kept out of classes and as the cost will inevitably increase, the high price will mean that only the well-heeled can afford to do art. Not the most desirable situation.

A cultural and personal blow will have been dealt to the creativity of the capital which will be far-reaching, while the financial saving is negligible: a short-sighted policy implemented by philistine promptings of mean materialism. A deplorable action for a civilized capital.

IN CONVERSATION

June Berry, Inger Lawrance and Diana Sellars are the artists who have answered some questions on the way they work for this section of the Broadsheet.



Exercise on No. 5, Blue with yellow and red screenprint
by Diana Sellars
15cm x 27cm

As an artist do you work mainly in the printmaking area?

J.B. I now spend half my time printmaking and half painting. I find it stimulating to work on an idea in both media - each having its own problems and limitations as well as its own special qualities, the relationship between the two often starting a new train of thought.

I.L. I too, divide my time equally between painting and printmaking.

D.S. At the moment, yes.

How did you first become interested in printmaking?

J.B. As a student at the Slade I was in the painting school and only began printmaking years later when I met Birgit Skiold, through whose enthusiasm and encouragement I was introduced to the mysteries and excitement of etching.

I.L. As a student at Goldsmiths College, London in the sixties.

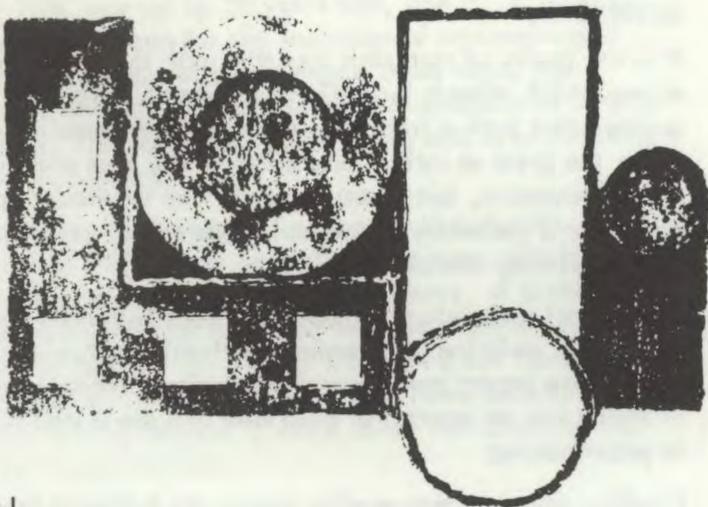
D.S. I first really became interested in silkscreen at Bradford Art College, where Denis Hawkins introduced me to unfixed stencils that allowed unpredictability on the paper, and continued at Kingston upon Thames Art College which had a growing print department. There I spent more than the allotted time on what was considered a subsidiary subject on a fine art course.

Which particular media do you work in and why?

J.B. At one point I worked briefly with silk screen, but didn't enjoy the process much. Etching seems to me the most demanding, exciting, tantalising method of printmaking. Each new plate leads to some new possibility and exploration. The more I think I have discovered, the more there always seems to be to experiment with.

I.L. Etching and woodcut primarily - it gives me great satisfaction to handle and work into the etching plate - especially steel, and the wood block. I like to combine their different qualities in one print.

D.S. Silkscreen. After college, and a few years of inactivity, Anita Ford re-introduced me to the possibilities of the medium. I was never taught silkscreen as a commercial medium, but as a fine art medium which it was up to me to push to my limits. I find also that silkscreen gives me a technical discipline, which every working artist will understand.



Circles I
etching
by Inger Lawrance
18cm x 27cm

Have you been directly influenced by any particular artist?

J.B. Very many - particularly early Italian painters, Indian Mogul painters, Klimt, Matisse, Bonnard. There are elements in the work of all these artists that I admire, especially one element common to them all, a miraculous use of colour.

I.L. I am not aware of any particular influences.

D.S. The movements of the 40's, 50's and 60's in America have been my influence. As far as individuals are concerned, Marcel Duchamp I regard as a giant, and I like and admire the work of Ad Reinhart.

How would you describe the process through which an idea becomes a completed piece of work?

J.B. I always start from watercolours or drawings made to clarify my thoughts and to make some decisions (probably changed later) about composition and tone. Once I start work on the plate, all kinds of changes take place, dictated by the working process, and the image grows as a result of working with the materials and tools. Printing is always as much of an adventure as the rest of it, especially if the print is coloured, and often the final image has changed completely from the original concept.

I.L. I start working on the steel plate or the woodblock, and I allow the print to develop out of the texture and other characteristics of the material, rather than imposing on it any preconceived design or idea. I like to use the grain in the wood to form its own design, or to use accidental rustmarks on the steel plate, and my aim is in the end to produce a strong and simple print.

D.S. I don't think I work with specific ideas: I'm not sure what is meant by 'idea'. I know I am very rigid in my approach. I work with one sheet of paper, using lots of extended colour, usually primaries or black or white. I allow the colour to mix itself on the work - I do want the whole process to be the work, building its own history. I will offset, relief and dry print, print ink residue from the screen - I will use anything that there is to use.

What are the underlying themes and preoccupations that recur in your work?

J.B. I haven't really thought about this, but I suppose I am most fascinated by colour, texture and patterning. My prints mainly come from things seen in the country, particularly in the depths of rural France, where I work for three months of the year drawing or painting. I like to work from this material recollected here, where the drawings and the watercolours bring back the initial excitement and urgency and can be used as a starting point for further work, away from the overwhelming fullness of nature. I respond to the colours and the patterns to be found in a frosty hedge, a field of maize, an overgrown garden, black and white cows...

I.L. If any underlying themes recur in my work it may be my preoccupation with nature in every form, abstract as well as concrete.

D.S. Having had to think of and answer the questions, I feel I have never thought differently, and so a preoccupation in my work is probably a very strong pre determined structure with colour and texture flowing through at random. This applied to my paintings at college and hopefully will mature with wider experiences in living.



Waiting
sugar lift etching
by June Berry
27cm x 34cm

THE NEED FOR PRINTMAKING PAPERS

BY ALAN WITT OF WHATMAN PAPER LTD

The market for printmaking paper as we know it today only emerged in the 1960's. Prior to that time artists' original prints certainly existed and fine work was executed on a variety of papers. Even today with a wide range of papers being produced especially for this sector, there is no doubt that the printmaker should still continue to experiment. So why is a papermaker specialising in printmaking papers saying this? Well, there are good reasons of course why we do produce a product to match an established market demand. These can be summed up as appearance, performance and longevity.

Before we do go into detail it would be as well to describe the various papermaking methods. Basically there are three; by hand, by mould machine and by Fourdrinier machine. All involve making a very diluted suspension of fibre in water (known as 'stock') and filtering out the fibre to form a paper web. To the stock can be added colour, sizing agents and other additives to give any desired property. Once a wet web is formed it is removed from the filtering screen known as the 'wire', by a process known as 'couching' (this latter term coming from the French coucher) and the web is laid onto felts. In hand-made papermaking this is a unit process. For any design of machine it is a continuous process. The paper is then dried by a variety of methods.

It is the actual paper forming process which largely determines the characteristics of the paper, especially as far as artists are concerned. The 'vatman' who forms a hand-made sheet, has a rare skill, which not only makes an even sheet but also shakes the stock such that the fibres take up a random orientation. It is this property which can impart to the high sheet dimensional stability and a resistance to cockling when wet. The stock which has been contained within a demountable frame forms a sheet. The frame is removed and the wet sheets couched onto felts. It is these felts that determine the surface finish of the paper which will be described in greater detail later.

Mould Made

Mould machines have a rotating cylinder covered with a wire mesh. The stock is contained in an outer vat and the water passes through the wire, leaving the wet web which is couched onto felts (which in this case are endless and continually moving). The paper is dried by passing the continuous web over steam heated cylinders. Again the nature of the felts determine the nature of the surface.

Mould machines are generally slow and small in modern papermaking terms and the slower the machine the more chance the fibres have of taking up a random orientation. Thus such machines can form a less expensive (and generally more consistent and reliable) substitute for hand-made sheets.

Machine Made

Finally the modern paper machine which actually has changed little in principles since the Fourdrinier brothers developed and gave their name to it around 1800, uses a fast moving and generally horizontal continuous moving wire, with the stock passing through the wire from top to bottom. Such machines may be over 30 feet wide and operating at speeds of 5000 feet per minute, are used for most of the papers and boards which we all take for granted. "Machine made" papers as the artists know them, have a pronounced fibre orientation in the machine direction and can never achieve the dimensional stability essential for quality painting and printmaking.

Surface Finishes

The traditional surfaces for artists papers which are imparted by the papermaking felts, are rough and cold press (CP) also known as NOT - literally not rough. Hot press (HP) is in fact a cold press product which has been glazed or calendered. In the days when nostalgia tells us that everything was better, sheets were glazed between heated platens but unfortunately all this term means these days is that the paper has been passed through a vertical calender stack. In fact as heat is developed in the chamber the net result is the same.

Appearance

Clearly this is a most subjective property. The most obvious feature is probably the surface finish and for printmaking one seldom requires too rough a surface. Conversely a surface which is very smooth looks rather 'machined'.

Next, for high quality prints, the artist often likes to see deckle edges and watermarks. Deckle edges are rather like the rind on a cheese. They are the sign of authenticity but like rind are often discarded before use. Sometimes it seems futile to me as a papermaker, but they can look nice when float mounting is used. As for watermarks, an eminent printmaker told me whilst I was carrying out market research before we decided to go back into such papers; "we like to see them, but we do not want to see them". I know what he meant. Our watermark is one of the guarantees that the paper is genuine and it can be seen by holding the paper up to the light: but one does not necessarily want to see this even in the corner of a sheet once the print has been mounted.

Performance

Beauty is more than skin deep and the consistency and purity of the sheet is not only important for the sake of

good looks, but also to ensure consistency, not only of any one print but also between subsequent prints. After all, even original prints may be subject to a run of 250 or more.

The orientation of the fibres is most important. As mentioned earlier, mould made papers tend to have a random fibre orientation approaching that of a good hand-made sheet and may be equal in this respect. This gives stability of wetting and subsequent redrying. This is clearly important when the artists uses inks (water, solvent or oil based) and paints.

This takes us on inevitably to sizing. Size is what prevents paper acting as a blotting medium. Although very lightly sized papers are desirable or necessary for certain techniques, for example, many screen printers like an unsized sheet known as waterleaf, a certain amount is necessary to prevent total absorption for printing inks, but not too much because the ink will sit on the surface. This could lead to the ink looking too glossy, might scuff or offset onto adjacent prints.

Longevity

It is the purity of materials together with the method of sizing which imparts long life to the sheet. We take it for granted that such a fragile medium as paper remains intact under the great paintings and prints of the past and even older documents, but in truth, paper can be almost ephemeral. Not only is yesterday's news out of date, but yesterday's newsprint is already discolouring.

Traditional rosin-alum is inherently acid and even chemicals used to fix gelatine (an animal derivative often used in sizing) can impart non-neutral properties. Modern methods of sizing can be neutral or acid free and are a step forward in papermaking.

Finally, many modern quality papers are buffered (generally with chalk) to prevent attack by acidic carbon dioxide and other gases in the air, which would otherwise cause atmospheric degradation.

Whatman Papers

The Whatman name first became associated with papermaking in 1743, when James Whatman converted the fulling mill near Maidstone, Kent. It was to Whatman that the first wove (as opposed to laid) papers are generally attributed. This paper without a pronounced wire mark was much sought after by printers and artists. Gainsborough once said of it, "Upon my honour I could give a guinea a quire for a dozen quires of it". It was used by Turner, by William Blake and by George Washington for personal stationery.

As the company expanded, a new mill was built in 1805; the first paper mill to be entirely steam-powered. The great beam can still be seen as can many of the original buildings which are still used. The reputation of Whatman papers continued to grow, having been used by Napoleon and Queen Victoria, and even by the Soviets for their first Five Year Plan of the USSR, after which the name Whatman passed into the Russian language.

By 1963 their method of manufacturing artists papers, though producing some of the finest, had become increasingly unprofitable, and they ceased production. However, they continued to receive enquiries, and the growth of the printmaking market persuaded Whatman to re-launch a range of Watercolour and Printmaking papers, mould-made from 100% cotton with deckle edges and watermarks. They are currently in imperial size with a weight of 250g/m², and double elephant with a weight of 270g/m², in matt and fine finishes. They are distributed exclusively by Atlantis Paper Co. Ltd., Gullivers Wharf, 105 Wapping Lane, London E1.

PRINTMAKING ODDITIES

The Victorian engraver, William Woollett, upon the completion of a plate to his satisfaction, used to climb on to his roof at 37 Charlotte Street in Fitzrovia, London, in order to fire a small cannon to celebrate the event and notify his patrons.