

The Dual Concept of Sustainability of Printmaking Art in the Middle East

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Abstract:

Printmaking is a major art dripline that is being taught worldwide and in different art programs in the middle east, however for several reasons printmaking graduates usually face several obstacles that prevent them from pursuing their art outside their educational institutions. The sustainability of printmaking art in the Middle East depends greatly on the possibility of creating a system that allows printmaking to excel outside the educational institutions either on the production or on the promotion levels. Unfortunately, the concept of sustainability of printmaking art outside the educational institutions is not necessarily consequential for most art programs in the Middle East. Despite the current evolution in the arena of contemporary printmaking art, many educational printmaking programs still teach printmaking art in a very conventional conservative fashion that no longer qualify the students to continue working after graduation. This research investigates different possible solutions that may allow the sustainability of Printmaking Art and Artists in the Middle East. To accomplish that goal, the researcher suggests various approaches that may allow the enhancement of Printmaking art and ensure its sustainability outside the educational institution including , investigating, developing and teaching simple innovative printmaking methods that do not require special equipment or materials to execute. Printmaking by nature is an experimental art and printmakers throughout the course of history have pushed the boundaries of technical exploration. Another approach to tackle the problem of sustainability of printmaking art in the Middle East is to find a solution for the production, promoting and marketing aspects of printmaking outside the educational institutions and one of the suggested models for that is printmaking co-operatives. Another possibility to solve the sustainability problem 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 is mass production. Printmaking can be utilized effectively as a mass production tool for small printing projects such as T-Shirt printing , fabric printing , and even in walls decoration .

Keywords:

*Sustainability,
Experimental Printmaking,
and Printmaking Co-Ops.*

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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. Theoretically as an academic art discipline, printmaking art education prepares the students with a massive set of skills and technical abilities that enable the student to prosper as an artist.

The stronger argument for teaching printmaking is the contribution it makes to the ability of students to learn and understand new skills. Printmaking enables students to experience an indirect method of working. When making a block, the artist has to predict how changes in the block will change the final print. The exact effect is not known until the block is printed. Based on the new information

from the print, the artist revises the block and prints again. This is the ‘scientific method’ embodied in an expressive art. It also models a good life skill – your actions have a direct effect on outcomes and you can achieve success by modifying your actions based on previous experience (Kreiger 2003).

Of course defining the art of printmaking as a mere, technical practice is a widespread misconception.

It is limiting to reduce the concept of printmaking down to a set of technical process. Exploring the relationship of thinking and making allows a re-examination of the traits that define print practice. (Fick B. & Grabowski B. 2015)

Despite being one of the major contemporary art disciplines, in the Middle East printmaking art and

artists rarely prosper outside the academic institutions. 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, maybe 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 force the majority of printmaking artists to quit. The unavailability of printing presses, exposure units, 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, installation or even video art. Even within 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 result is a shrinkage in the number of 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) represent 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 the printmaking materials and tools are imported, the underprivileged printmaking students and artists can never afford them, consequently, most of the 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 academic environment 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 the 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.

Objectives:

1. The prime goal of this research is to provide printmaking students with the necessary knowledge and tools to continue practicing printmaking and apply successfully what they learn after graduation.
2. To investigate small manual printing projects, that can create much-needed work opportunities for underprivileged artists and communities.
3. To investigate possible venues of production, promoting and marketing of printmaking art, such as printmaking co-ops, that may play a great role in the continuation, and promotion of printmaking art.
4. To update the outdated printmaking practices in educational art programs by introducing 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.

Significance

This research paper may evolve the way we teach, practice, and even define and conceive the art of printmaking today. This research is an attempt to sustain printmaking art and applications in our society. Besides, this research 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 access to a traditional print-shop. This research will also investigate the structure

and the working 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.

The Solution

Tackling the dilemma of the widening gap of what printmaking students learn inside the Art schools, and what they can 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. Printmaking by nature is an experimental art and printmakers throughout the course of history have pushed the boundaries of technical exploration.

A key factor in understanding the development and evolution of printmaking throughout history is the enormous experimental potential it offers. This is not only something that has contributed the most recent history of this art since the first avant-garde of the twentieth century, obviously immersed in an intense experimental dynamic, but can be identified already in the very birth of the medium. It would be thus possible to trace a long history of printmaking composed mainly of authors and schools that at a given moment break with tradition or innovate new technical and expressive solutions. (Moro J. 2018)

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.

Contrasting handcraft techniques with computer graphics software 'unsettles' rote graphic design practices. The meaning that lies in the physical act of making, the materials that are used and the contexts with which particular handcrafts are associated can support, as well as carry, visual rhetoric in design works (Van Kampen, 2014).

That approach would defiantly unleash full creative potentials of the student/artist and would be more philosophically coherent and more relevant to the ongoing massive evolution in the arena of contemporary visual arts, in which 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 Academic Institutions. 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 for 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 beginnings 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 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 the home environment.)

The suggested experimental techniques for students/artists working outside the academic institutions include some academically ignored "forgotten" techniques such as Plaster relief, Collagraphy 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 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.

A re-definition of historical craft processes requires new pedagogical debate on the rediscovery of handcraft printing methods. Defining the format for the practice of printmaking in the higher education print studio of the future, the pedagogical and practical processes which are facing changes due to current financial, technological and physical pressures and establishing the significant part that computers play as a vehicle for expression and production in

digital, hybrid and now, traditional printmaking. (Livingston D 2018)



**Fig.1- The Temptation- Ross Zirkle-
Waterless Lithography – 36.5x26.5- 2000**



**Fig. 2 -Marks from Memory – Saleh
A.Sabour – Marble Relief Print –
140x140cm- 2007**

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. Besides, 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.



Fig.3- Food Time -Yasmin Abdelkarim –Polyester Plate lithograph-35x50cm-2016



Fig 4.Taxi - Reham A Elghany – Polyester Plate Lithography & DryPoint - 30x40 cm - 2014



Fig.5-Double face - Nada Asem- Plexiglas Engraving - 21x29cm- 2014



Fig.6-Revolution within - Mohammed Ramadan – Plexiglas Engraving - 30x40cm - 2014

Another approach to tackle the problem of sustainability of printmaking art in the Middle East is to find a solution for the production, promoting and marketing aspects of printmaking outside the educational institutions. One of the possible solutions is to form Printmaking groups

that establish 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 print-shop (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 mass production. Simple inexpensive printmaking techniques such as stencil, woodcut, and wood engraving can be employed to produce high quality rich hand-printed patterns 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 who puts the design and supervise the production and young artisans (trained printing specialists) who execute the printing process. Such small printing projects can be very successful especially in poor communities where the unemployment rate is relatively high. Also, such small projects could form a platform.

Conclusion

To ensure the sustainability of printmaking art, art programs should revise the educational content. Students should be qualified to work without the need to access traditional print-shops. The researcher also suggests to form printmaking groups and embrace the structure and work mechanism of printmaking co-ops as a valid alternative to educational print-shops and gallery spaces. Printmaking Co-ops may represent a valid solution for printmakers working outside academic institutions 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 introduce their art to the public away from the strict commercial mindset of the private galleries.

The researcher also 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 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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