

A strategy for the learning of printing techniques and styles

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Abstract: *Engraving is definitely the most democratic form of the plastic arts.*

The two courses, namely from traditional to modern, and from modern to traditional, can only be approached after carefully observing beginner artists in the engraving secrets. We find a solution depending on the individual, and the artist's abilities and temperament. However, the final result will be the same, only the method of persuasion is different!

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My personal experience in the field of visual arts makes me say that the methods of approaching new learning strategies are imperative in order to learn printing techniques and styles.

“...Nowadays, after the emergence of clickography, engraving, freed from typographical obligations, awoke an ever-increasing interest among plastic artists, and determined its assertion as a distinct genre with a great personality, a kind of major art.

Present-day engravers have surpassed the condition of that humble craftsman who only reproduced the works of other masters, and are themselves established and admired artists, fully recognised in the pretentious guild of the fine arts. (Florin Stoiciu / Materialitatea în gravură – tehnici și maniere, Ed. Tehnică, Bucharest 2007/ISBN 978-973-31-2322-4)”

By reiterating the above, I believe that there is no point in reliving an experience that may seem obsolete or even ancient for young students and others.

In today's society, the speed of information in the form of images makes us change classic classroom strategies. We adapt to the given conditions. Experience forces us to be wiser, and to find resources to return to the traditional primary forms, where contemplation time was the main driving force of the creative act.

Today, people no longer have the time to meditate. Everyone wants to learn fast, and if possible, with immediate results.

Because of the above arguments, I will try to convince as many of my colleagues that classical learning through chronology is no longer topical. As long as young artists do not master the language of the graphic signs, they cannot start the learning process with a technique that requires an abstraction of recognizable elements.

One cannot start by making a literary synthesis of an unannounced text.

The apparent ease of some techniques such as xylography (wood in fibre) or drypoint often makes instructors in this field teach them to their students as a learning starting point. This is incorrect, because we ourselves violate the principle of “minimal means, maximum effect”. In order to synthesise, one must have had a rich imaging experience of the figurative

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signs. Or, the two signs, the line and the point, imply a great balance and high technical accuracy in the execution of a mould that will later be transformed by a technical printing process in a print. The final imprint or stamp of the creative state gesture can be easily recognized in the great masters in the field. It can be seen in Mircea Dumitrescu or Aurel Bulacu's works. The clumsiness that is common for young apprentices is not accidental for the two artists. That is why we need to learn how to make mistakes, and use them intelligently in the final economy of the print's image.

I kept thinking how to best return to traditional learning. This desire has made me more attentive to the behavior of young artists who no longer have the time to meditate through a quantitative and qualitative work experience accumulated in time. These are experiences that require by their structure a long exercising period. The young artist must realize that native talent through intuitive skills cannot be used without the sustained effort of individual work. Thus, if we use the phrase "Nulla dies sine linea" (no day without a line) that I personally have learned, thanks to my teacher, Master Gheorghe Tofan, by writing it for the studio work for the graphic department of the N. Tonitza High School in Bucharest, we can realize on this practical occasion what composition means in terms of layout, proportion, construction, value, and expression of the forms. With the semantics of that phrase, I had to learn the mathematical and logical construction of an ancient writing, the antiqua writing. The game that my teacher created, after translating the text, showed me that what I was going to write would follow me my entire life as an artist.

What do I want to convey to the young generation of artists?

Sometimes a seemingly simple exercise, but professionally learned, through systematic repetition in time, can make you more methodical and aware that, what profane observers consider a game, for you, is hard work. What I want to emphasize is that the skills necessary for a creative act can only be acquired by constantly exercising in time. What many wish, that a profession which is essentially contemplative to be done quickly, causes them to minimize or even skip work stages. One cannot write a novel without learning the alphabet. As we can see today, the speed of technological information makes us believe that we do not have the time to go through all the stages necessary for the correct learning of a creative approach. This is a false perception. The world forgot to carry on a dialogue, to meditate, considering that, if information is absorbed virtually and non-selectively, the result will be a solid volume of practical aesthetic skills. Just as a house starts with the architect's project, followed by the builder finding the necessary materials to erect it, we similarly learn to develop a drawing in stages. Therefore, in the first year, what is important is how you do it. For engraving, this would translate into line, point, and spotting exercises. Each exercise with the three means of plastic language must be done according to engraving techniques and styles to discover what can expressing abstract forms communicate to untrained spectators. On this occasion, we can see how each of these signs used in easel graphics can find its correspondent in a technique or style of traditional or modern engraving: easel painting in monotyping, drawing on paper in lithography, charcoal drawing using a pencil, emboss filter for the embossing stamp, etc. To compare, at this stage we are learning to ride a bicycle. In the second phase, in the second year, it's important to know how you do it. Specifically, in engraving this means finding the technical correspondent of the personal project executed in a traditional or modern studio technique: a photographic image by aquatint, mezzotint, photographic printing or photogravure, a work where we use a pen, marker, pencil, charcoal,

pastel in lithography, and so on. This brings us to the third stage which would be called: “What is important is what you do? But also how you do it?”. The transposition of this stage in engraving is the final result – the print. Here we find different supports, sizes, sometimes allowed by the machines used (presses, sieves, lithographic stones, etc.). All of this is due to a selective compositional thinking for the pursued purposes, such as a work for a parietal exhibition, for the ornamentation of a book, for a three-dimensional packaging, a laser print or ink-jet, etc. I have often been asked what comes next. Half-jokingly, I answered that it does not matter what you do, or how you do it; what matters is the sponsors or financial means you have to continue your professional activity. That is why the correct and continuous learning of a fabulous craft such as engraving can give you, in the current society, the possibility to have your works exhibited in 10 or 100 different places on the planet at the same time, and this due to its multiplication specificity.

Engraving is definitely the most democratic form of the plastic arts.

The two courses, namely from traditional to modern, and from modern to traditional, can only be approached after carefully observing beginner artists in the engraving secrets. We find a solution depending on the individual, and the artist’s abilities and temperament. However, the final result will be the same, only the method of persuasion is different!

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