

Repetition

“Printmaking” is a broad term that encompasses a variety of mediums and technical processes. It’s dynamic, always shifting between traditional techniques such as woodcut and etching to current media like digital print and video. At the most fundamental level, printmaking involves creating a matrix, whether a woodblock, litho stone, or digital file, that can be transferred or “printed” onto a support such as paper, fabric, or even three dimensional objects.

Printmaking exists in a community. Print shops grew out of a need to share equipment and technical knowledge as well as to have a creative environment to work in, where work can be discussed and ideas can be exchanged. Until recently, these facilities have not existed in Saskatchewan. In 2010, students and recent graduates from both the University of Saskatchewan and University of Regina formed Ink Slab Printmakers in Saskatoon and Articulate Ink in Regina to provide publicly-accessible printmaking studios and to build the printmaking community. The formation of Studio 4417 in Melfort extends this beyond Saskatoon and Regina.

With a few exceptions, printmaking is largely not taught at the elementary school level and, other than silkscreening, not at the high school level either. As a result, many people do not have the opportunity to encounter the processes and intricacies involved. This often means a lack of understanding of the motivation and work behind the prints.

Through workshops, demonstrations, and studio tours, both Ink Slab and Articulate Ink have made education and community-building foundations of their collectives, incorporated as part of exhibitions and as stand-alone projects.

Though there has been collaboration among the groups before, this is their first joint exhibition, showing the depth and span of printmaking in the province. Members chose the theme of *Repetition*, both to signify the process of making a print and that of building the collectives.

The repeatability of printmaking is an important part of building this community. Print exchanges and competitions give artists the opportunity to show their work and to see the work of other artists on both a local and global level. Multiple images can be sent to various locations at the same time, and sending work to another country is often a simple matter of rolling up a print in a shipping tube and mailing it away.

Historically the art of the print evolved through artists’ desire to communicate with a broader audience; from the invention of woodblock printing in China to the development of electronic and digital technology, the printed image has enabled artists to disseminate their ideas widely. Printing multiples enabled the ability to share knowledge on a scale that was previously not possible.

The repeated images that make up a print edition should not be confused with making copies or reproductions of an image. An edition represents a considerable amount of dedication, technical

knowledge, and time. Each print in an edition is carefully created and should be regarded as a work of art that uses the unique materials and processes involved in printmaking to express a concept or idea.

The repetition found in a print edition is also present in the print shop. Learned techniques are put into practice when creating prints and technique is refined through repetition in the studio. Resists are applied and reapplied onto etching plates that are placed in a chemical bath for multiple durations. Multiple screen prints are created by the repetitive motion of a squeegee forcing ink through the fabric of a silk screen. Press beds move back and forth as pressure transfers ink from printing plates onto paper. Even when the prints are finished, there's the satisfying repetition of signing and numbering the edition.

The repetition present in printmaking is not intended to be monotonous and wearisome. Yes, hard work is involved and there can be moments of frustration and tedium, but that stems from careful attention to detail and genuinely caring about what is being created. The repetition found in printmaking, whether it's printing in the studio, existing in a finished edition, or present in the community is essential. Without repetition, the art of printmaking simply wouldn't work as a whole.