

The theme for this issue is “New Eyes. My feeling and experience is that our vision in 2020 is quite different from that of 20 or even 10 years ago and an examination via essays and work would be fruitful and warranted.

For the purpose of an overview, I direct you to two seminal writings in the field of art theory/practice and how they pertain to print. The first, William Ivins Jr’s “Prints and Visual Communication” and the second Leo Steinberg’s “Other Criteria”. Briefly, a central point of Ivins: as our hand and making evolved so did our vision and visa-versa. Therefore, a woodcut of the 12<sup>th</sup> century seems awkward to the 19<sup>th</sup> century viewer/maker. In this same way, work of even the last few decades no longer sits comfortably in front of our eye’s new vision – a ReVision, so to speak. For further clarity I would like to site the postulate of Leo Steinberg’s essay “The Eye is a Part of the Mind” in his book “Other Criteria”. His central thought is that our eyes are in fact not passive organs but tactile ones – tracing and retracing outlines, color, form to the brain, coding and recoding. We see by feel.

Steinberg postulated “Appearances reach us through the eyes, and the eye – whether we speak with the psychologist or embryologist – is part of the brain and therefore inextricably involved in mysterious cerebral operations. Thus nature presents every generation (and every person who will use his eyes for more than nodding recognitions) with a unique and unrepeated facet of appearance. And the Ineluctible [sic] Modality of the Visible – young Dedalus’s hypnotic phrase – is a myth that evaporates between any two works of representation. The encroaching archaism of old photographs is only the latest instance of an endless succession in which every new mode of nature – representation eventually resigns its claim to co-identity with natural appearance. And if appearances are thus unstable in the human eye, their representation in art is not a matter of mechanical reproduction but of progressive revelation.”

With these ideas underlies a basic new formulation of print in 2020. As such, we have new eyes and we are making new things. I see this taking place across printmaking today in a way I have not seen in my 45 years of making prints.

Here are some specific thoughts relating to current prints and printmakers.

The screen: There is a broad-based desire today in print for a physical level of translucency/transparency. This is often manifested by printmakers using more than one print medium, layering in many print mediums, especially printing on the front and the back of their work, making free-hanging large partially translucent work. It is my contention that this type of vernacular is directly connected to our eyes now being at home with the backlit screen of a computer, phone and pads have fundamentally changed our vision. Examples of this work abound: I have been printing on the front and back (of Sekishu mounted on Rives BFK) for many years as has Jeffrey Dell and Jillian Sokso – on different substrates. Taryn McMahon is another example as is Keiko Hara as well as many of my former students and many book artists. Another example is the recent exchange book portfolio by Sarah Ellis and Todd Herzberg, “Chroma”, where each printmaker works on both recto and verso. And here we can also place the latest work by Peter Milton, brought to us in the essay by Brian Cohen.

The scale: I think that prints are getting larger not only because of the commerce of necessity of print publishing but because these same back-lit computer and phone screens shrink and expand images with such unheralded ease. A few years ago, when I watched a drawing student reach down for the “undo” button on an easel I knew something was up. In a way there is a disregard of scale and in another large

scale has become a new normal. There are so many examples. Jenny Robinson comes to the forefront of my mind. Also, look at the work of Abir Arafah, Sanaz Haghani and Rhea Nowak.

The surface: I saw a show of 1960's Modernist screenprints a few years ago at a museum with some students. The prints were all oil-based and not owing to the subject matter (the work was political in nature and I thought would be engaging), my students were wholly uninterested. It sparked an interesting conversation that took me a while to comprehend. It started with a student saying to me "we don't see this way anymore". In a nutshell, the upshot was that they felt the screenprints in the exhibit relied on the surface of the print (something inherent in oil-based screenprint, I would contend) and not so much on "content". Here I would like to interject a final nugget by Ivins. In his book he writes that a print is viewed the same way that text is viewed on a page. That is, that the eye "reads" a text (and a print) just off the surface. Otherwise, when looking at a page of text we would be forever distracted by imperfections in the paper and the printed word. Those days are long gone. Jeffrey Dell's work comes to mind again and I bet he'd have a lot to say. Take a look here at the work of Liz Chafin, Louise Fisher and Serena Perrone.

The stone: Fifteen years ago academics bemoaned that lithography in particular was becoming a dead medium. There were discussions around what young person would have the time or inclination to draw in this way. At the same time, I saw no hint of a slowdown. My classes were packed and I asked students about it. It, in fact, had much to do with the marrying of the medium with another practice. One student gave me his explanation: He intended to have a litho practice and a tattoo shop. It was all drawing to him. Here we come full circle – the eye as a tactile organ, making marks on stone and skin. Examples abound in this issue: look to the work of Molly Aubry, Tammy Ratcliff.

The stencil: Enter riso. Not just a pretty and slightly uncontrollable reproductive process but a new form of stencil printing with a huge following. In the vanguard are studios like Risolve Studios (Color Library and conferences like Magical Riso at the Van Eyck Center) working on spot color separations that make the CMYK dot and dither look as old as a 15<sup>th</sup> century woodcut to our new eyes. Here Henry Gepfer offers us his take on riso in context and Karen Gallagher-Iverson offers pochoir for this next decade.

I hope you read and enjoy all the entries in this issue of the MAPC Journal 30/31. They offer valuable contributions. I had a blast as the guest editor.

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