

Author: Dr Paul Laidler

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Abstract

The collaborative print studio has had profound impact upon the production and realisation of some of the most innovative prints within the discipline of fine art printmaking. Historically an artist with little understanding of the print process or access to print facilities could seek the technical knowledge and craft sensibilities from a master printer. In some instances these unique collaborative pursuits redefined production methods and push the boundaries of what was previously thought possible. These historical precedents have been established through mechanical modes of production and have contributed to defining the roles, expectations, production, publication and artisanship of the collaborative print studio.

Over the last 20 years we have seen new digital tools and processes enter the traditional domain of the collaborative print studio. These developments, have to some degree, brought in to question the role of the traditional print studio in the digital age. For example, we may consider a shift from manual dexterity to automated systems or the ubiquitous nature of digital resources and their impact upon previous associations with specialist tools and facilities.

Since 1999, the Centre for Fine Print Research has explored the crossovers between art and industry by investigating new technologies and developing artist led methods in digital technologies such as inkjet, and 3D printing. Today the CFPR operates within a unique area of the print publishing art market where its activities offer insights into the shifting perspectives of the collaborative digital studio.

Introduction

The collaborative print studio and its Master Printer model is a global phenomenon that has continually adapted its role in response to the varying movements of art history. In the context of this article I will be drawing upon the western tradition of collaborative print practices and the development of the US based studios between 1960 – 1980 - a period often described as the Print Boom era. By establishing these mechanically defined precedents I will then discuss the development of this historical model in relation to the emergence of the digital print studio and its pioneers in the early 1990's proceeded by the model with the CFPR.

The Concept of the Master Printer

Prints have long been a means of creating and disseminating artists' images in multiple. The production of fine art prints by artists also has a longstanding relationship with the collaborative print studio - defined as a studio where artists work together with Master Printers to realise and produce printed artworks. Seminal American studios founded in the 1960s included 'ULAE' (Universal Limited Art Editions) and 'Tyler Graphics', a British example was 'Kelpra' founded by Chris Prater. Although the creation of artwork is often assumed to be a solitary activity, the nature of creating prints requires an artist to access the use of specialist facilities, equipment and materials. Subsequently the artist is forced to seek the assistance of another individual, not only to gain access to a process, but in the logistics of creating work through that process. The collaborative undertaking between an artist and print studio has predominantly been one of facilitation when working with artists, although the process of facilitation, what it involves and what the relationships are, has varied between print studios or more specifically, between each studio's Master Printers.

The Master Printer has been a constant figure within print history, and in particular over the 19th-20th Centuries, notably Master Printers Roger Lacourière (1892-1966) Fernand Mourlot (1895 - 1988) and Aldo Crommelynck (1931-2008). Traditionally the Master Printer was someone who attained a high degree of technical proficiency in interpreting, by hand, the work of artists through various graphic conventions dictated by techniques such as engraving, etching, lithography or screenprint. Deborah Wye, in *A Picasso portfolio: prints from the Museum of Modern Art*, extols Picasso's relationship with Lacourière, who: "became an active collaborator, giving Picasso a new understanding of the intaglio process... the result was a new level of ambition in Picasso's prints" (Wye, *Artists & Prints*, p. 47.)

It is also documented that the Master Printer's skills often extended beyond just technical proficiency and, given the holistic nature of collaborating, should also encompass diplomacy and patience: Kathan Brown (Director of Crown Point Press) describes "what I think are four keys to being a good printer: to be present and competent without being intrusive, without putting out constrictions; to feel honestly that doing this work is an adventure; to waste, if necessary, materials and time; and, most important, *not* to waste the artist's momentum, concentration, and pleasure in the work." (Brown, 'Wasting and Wasting Not', 178)

Not only has the Master Printer played a pivotal role in the creation of fine art prints, but the experiential knowledge gained by the printer has provided a rich vein of information for historians and archivists researching the field of fine art print. For example, Pat Gilmour writing in *Ken Tyler Master Printer, and the American Print Renaissance* (1986) discusses Tyler's development and influence due to his skill and innovation in printmaking at the Tamarind Lithography Workshop in Los Angeles. Tyler progressed from understudy to Technical Director from 1963-1965; and established his own studio *Gemini Ltd* in Los Angeles in 1965, and *Gemini G.E.L.* in 1966. He worked with numerous artists such as Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Jasper Johns, David Hockney and Edward Ruscha until his retirement in 2000.¹

¹ Tyler's *Gemini G.E.L. Catalogue Raisonné 1966 - 1996*, can be viewed online at the National Gallery of Art, Washington. <http://www.nga.gov/gemini>

Collaboration in Art

Artists work in many forms: individually, in co-operation with others, or as collaborators on a project. Collaboration can take many forms in itself, from joint artistic endeavours, to an artist directing a project that is produced remotely by others; or in the studio under the supervision of the artist. Within fine art practice the word collaboration has shared a close relationship with assistance or towards a division of labour.

In her essay *Collaboration in American Printmaking Before 1960*, Dr Joann Moser, Senior Curator of Graphic Arts at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, describes the distinction between the artist and the artisan, originating in the Renaissance period, as one of the main obstacles to collaboration. It was here that the artist's liberation from the restrictive guild system helped form what became the Romantic notion of the individual 'genius' and of 'originality' in art. Moser states:

Collaboration in the fine arts has been overlooked, de-emphasised, and often denigrated by those who subscribe to the notion of the centrality of the individual artist and the unique masterpiece as the highest expression of originality and quality in art. (Moser, *Collaboration in American Printmaking*, p. 10.)

However, collaboration in the fine arts has been utilised by artists for a multitude of reasons. Through both conceptual dialogues and pragmatic strategies, artists have been mindful of the collaborative act's benefits for their work.

Unlike other industries such as film for example, which is perceived publicly as highly collaborative - with status applied to cinematographers, writers, directors, producers and actors, all of whom are credited - the collaborative method in fine arts has, to some degree been de-emphasised due to its developmental origins within the traditional arts and crafts guild system and art's association with originality and authenticity.

Although this notion of the individual and originality has less influence in the Post-modern era, it has no doubt hindered the growth of collaboration in the fine arts field. In fact, it is in more recent times that alternate perspectives of art history and artistic creation have been posited. Joann Moser in her aforementioned essay describes some of the most recent prominent influences as: Marxist, Poststructuralist, Feminist and Pluralist theories. It is in the Pluralist theory of critic David Shapiro (Moser, 1995: 10-11) that Moser highlights the main opposition to the individual 'genius' theory. Shapiro suggests that art is collaborative in nature, citing the communal relationships within the movements of Modernism. Here Shapiro de-emphasises the Romantic notion of the isolated genius by offering how we could possibly:

...begin to have a van Gogh without Gauguin, a Cezanne who does not sign himself student of Pissarro, an Orphism without the marriage of Sonia and Robert Delaunay and collaborating poets, Dadaism without the pacifistic friendship involved throughout, Abstract Expressionism

without the collaboration of Gorky and de Kooning, earthworks without the fierce alliance of Serra, Holt and Smithson...’ (Moser, *Collaboration in American Printmaking*, p. 10.)

Moser suggests how Shapiro’s perspective invites us to reconsider the collaborative role in other movements in art, where it has assumed a pivotal position. Using Shapiro’s focus of interaction between artists, Moser highlights the particular collaborative exchange; where an artist relies on the hands of another to execute the work. This particular type of collaboration has been the most prominent method within the printmaking studio, for example Ken Tyler’s collaborations with Robert Rauschenberg for *Booster* -1967, and James Rosenquist’s *Time Dust* - 1992

Reasons for Artists to Collaborate

Collaboration in the fine arts may be prompted by a variety of reasons with a host of individuals from various disciplines and backgrounds. Given the endless conceptual and co-creational permutations that can exist within the collaborative venture it is important, first of all, to understand why an artist may seek to collaborate with others. In *The role of the evolving artefact in creative collaboration*,² Nancy de Freitas considers the creation of an artwork as central to the function and dynamic of a collaborative group. The evolving artefact dictates shifting roles and responsibilities, creating a collaboration where shared goals become overlapped rather than achieved independently from the offset of a project. De Freitas describes three key reasons why artists may choose to collaborate with each other or others:

Based on needs that are perceived in relation to the project or on the artist’s desire for a change in habitual practice. Artists may be looking for:

1. Support for a philosophical position through the validation that comes with agreement about concepts and consensus in relation to method.
2. Creative or practical contributions to the work that artists are unable to provide themselves.
3. Simple conversations that open up the kind of intellectual exchange or dialogue that leads to the refinement of ideas. (de Freitas, ‘evolving artefact’, 1)

The medium of printmaking is predominantly a technically led process, and historically the majority of working collaborations have been initiated through independent artists needs. Although the collaborative print process is rooted in this relationship, the overlapping of shared goals has been postulated by Master Printers

² de Freitas, Nancy. 2004. *The role of the evolving artefact in creative collaboration*, Paper, Research into Practice Conference, Hertfordshire University, [accessed 05/06/2008]
http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/artdes_research/papers/wpades/vol3/ndfabs.html

such as Ken Tyler. Within de Freitas' scheme, we can define the second and third examples in the context of the collaborative print undertaking as:

- The practical contributions of the Master Printer are associated with skill, craftsmanship, and an affinity for materials that the artist maybe unable to provide themselves.
- The refinement of ideas through simple conversations is where the Master Printer's process knowledge can resolve the realisation of an artist's idea in print.

Collaboration in the printmaking field is predominantly from a pragmatic perspective where the artist is able to access specialist equipment and technical expertise with the tools, materials and operations of a particular print studio. The facilitator role within printmaking studios is referred to as the Master Printer. "We think of ourselves [Master Printers] as guides, or perhaps teachers... We provide support, skills, sensitivity, intelligence, interest in ideas – but the ideas themselves are the artist's territory." (Brown, 'Wasting and Wasting Not', 178)

The very nature of collaboration can produce an infinite amount of outcomes dependent upon a range of circumstances, and the variables that exist within them. The artist producing prints with a collaborative studio relinquish a certain amount of control during the production of their print, to an individual they may or may not know, using a process they may have never seen or used before. When artists worked with Master Printers they not only accessed the learned craft and technical skills but also the printers' collaborative philosophies.

A Background to Artists' Early Engagement with Digital Print

The beginnings of the digital age can be identified as far back as 1801 to Joseph Marie Jacquard's textile loom. The design and operation of Jacquard's loom was the precursor of much of today's digital image-processing systems such as repetitive production, automation and storage of information.³ Today, image-processing and data-storage tools are integrated across a whole host of different disciplines. The tools and terminology are therefore cross-disciplinary, although the adoption of the technology becomes more 'user-concerned' within specific fields. As part of this study, digital technology is described in relation to the physically printed artefact and within the fine art practice of printmaking. Digital technology's historical lineage will be predominantly considered from the desktop publishing era of the 1980s; a period when digital technology became more widely available to artists and printers alike.

Technological developments and the Inkjet Printer

³ See the chapter *A Brief History of an Idea: Fax Machines, Halftones, Video Cameras, and Computers* (Lipkin, 2005: 118)

The democratisation of digital technology from the desktop publishing era in the mid 1980s provided individuals with the opportunity to develop and experiment with consumer-orientated digital technologies. Many technological enthusiasts grasped the potential of digital imaging during this early period, and for artists, the potential of digital information as a high-quality print would propel the development of digital within the fine art printmaking field. When considering specific digital processes within the field of fine art printmaking one might refer to the advent of The Graphic User Interface (1981), Adobe software (1990) or Pigmented Ink (1998) for example. Whilst these technologies contributed to the development of fine art digital print it was the Iris inkjet printer that sparked the initial interest from the emerging digital fine art print fields; bridging the gap between the digital image on screen and the digital file's high-resolution rendering as a printed image.

The Iris inkjet printer was produced and introduced in 1987 by IRIS Graphics in Massachusetts as the first high quality, continuous-tone, photographic, digital inkjet print device. The Iris printer could print digital images onto cotton-based papers making it appealing to both the printmaking and photographic disciplines. Prior to any fine art print interests, the Iris printer was originally developed and used as an industrial proofing machine in the commercial print industry. Because of its speed, by making amendments to a computer file that was linked to the Iris printer, proofs could be produced in quick succession, demonstrating to the client how the adjustments made compared to the previous printout.

By the end of the 1980s, and into the early 1990s, individuals such as David Adamson, Jon Cone, Graham Nash and Mac Holbert, who would go on to pioneer the development of digital fine art print, began using the printer within a fine art print context. Nash Editions purchased their IRIS 3047 in 1989 from IRIS Graphics and used it until 2004. In 2005 Graham Nash donated the printer alongside the first print created at Nash Editions, to the collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of American History, where the museum's director stated that: "The IRIS printer will stand as a symbol of change within the world of professional digital photography."⁴ David Adamson of Adamson editions claimed that the:

Iris printing process is essentially an accelerated version of lithography, requiring the same fluent communication between artist and printmaker that the traditional method demands. "One of the reasons artists like Chuck Close and Jim Dine are very comfortable working with me is because we're speaking on the same terms, they don't have to talk to me about color balancing, or magenta shifts. We're using printmaking vocabulary. The drawing matrix of lithography has been replaced by the matrix of the pixel. The printmaker or the artist pushes the pixels around. (Offman, 'The New Remasters', 1)

For Mac Holbert, co-founder of Nash Editions:

The IRIS was a standout compared to anything else available at the time.

⁴ *National Museum of American History Adds Nash Editions Digital Photography Equipment, Prints to Collections*. NMAH Press Release August 12, 2005: <http://americanhistory.si.edu/news/pressrelease.cfm?key=29&newskey=268>

It excelled at resolution, color fidelity and, perhaps most exciting to us, its ability to print on various substrates.... The standard papers that the IRIS printed on were appropriate for proofing purposes, but left a lot to be desired for fine-art photography output. We wanted to try thick, watercolor paper. From the factory, the IRIS 3047 would not easily accept the heavier papers. We were so sure of the printer's capabilities that we voided the warranty on our \$126,000 IRIS by hacksawing off the nozzles (I can still feel the adrenaline!) and repositioning them so that the printer would accept thicker substrates. (Holbert, 'The State of the Art', 1)

From this experimental fine art perspective (and despite the \$126,000 cost), developments with new software and hardware adjustments were made by those studios that could afford it, to meet the changing needs of the fine art printer. These refinements in printmaking technology created a benchmark for artists to begin producing Iris prints and the 'digital fine art print studio' was established.

The Unique Qualities of Digital Print

When we think of 'digital' as a process within art practice, associations with pixel manipulation, flatness, screen-based imagery, computation, speed, reproduction and simulation are brought to the fore. Digital technology has been borne out of the electronic age, and as part of its heritage the medium reflects its "transitory nature and its inherent non-object status"⁵ when compared with traditional printmaking and mechanical art mediums. This removal of the physical was what initially hindered digital technology's acceptance within the printmaking and applied arts fields. Digital technology is a highly mutable and transferable medium that has infiltrated all areas of creative practice. The potential to produce physical artefacts from digital files using a range of output devices is growing. To give a brief example: George Whale and Naren Barfield in *Digital Printmaking* describe a list of "output technologies used in printmaking" (Whale & Barfield, *Digital Printmaking*, p. 20 -21) that includes: engraving, cutting, milling and transfer methods, to name few - alongside the various inkjet and laser printing technologies, that are still the most accessible output devices to date.

Testing the notion of the master printer in the digital age

Collectively the technological developments in the 1980's - 90's and the emergence of the digital print studio in the US brought into question further specialist associations with the production of fine art digital prints and the role of the Master Printer. At present the digital Master Printer is still in its infancy when compared to the traditional conventions of the role and subsequently very little literature exists on the holistic nature of facilitating the production of fine art digital prints for artists.

⁵ Squier, Joseph. Goggin, Nan. Chmielewski, Kathleen. 1994. *The Machine Mediated Image*, New Perspectives: Art & Design in the Digital Age, Co-authored Conference Paper, CW:94, the online component of the *Tenth Annual Computers and Writing Conference*: http://theplace.walkerart.org/soapbox/digital_age/paper2.html [Accessed 18/01/10]

The main focus of my research at the CFPR stems from the close relationships that exist between technology, ideas and making in the arts and crafts - particularly in the area of digitally-assisted print and its many offshoots.

To begin engaging with the specific discipline of producing digital prints for artists, the CFPR had embarked on an AHRC-funded research project in 2003 entitled *Methodologies for the integration of fine art practice and wide format digital printing*. As part of the research enquiry, the project incorporated an artists' residency programme *The Perpetual Portfolio* that would provide the testing ground for my own research inquiry in to the role of the Master Printer in the digital age. *The Perpetual Portfolio* residency highlighted the diverse production methods required to accommodate a range of different artists concerns for the production of a digital print.

The case studies included early career and established artists working across a variety of different visuals in an attempt to explore a variety of practices and scrutinise a diversity of knowledge applicable to digital print technology. Probably the most established artist to contribute to the research was the late artist Richard Hamilton (1922- 2011). Hamilton provided a unique opportunity to test and explore the digital facilitation process as the artist had an extensive history of collaborating with master printers and a profound engagement with the tool's and processes that were used to create his work.

CFPR Editions

As previously stated the majority of prints produced at the CFPR provide the basis of process orientated research inquiries that aid the technical and collaborative production of prints for artists. Moreover the introduction and rapid development of digital print technologies such as 3D Printing and lasercutting have expanded the CFPR's print production possibilities for artists.

Up until this point the centre had not explored the possibility of publishing prints within an art market context. In response to this situation and my own research activity at the CFPR, CFPR Editions (www.cfpredictions.co.uk) has been instigated as a collaborative print studio that will specialise in the production and realisation of digital print publications for artists. By publishing digitally mediated prints using technologies such as inkjet, UV, rapid prototyping and laser cutting the emphasis on new print technologies in the field of fine art printmaking places CFPR Editions within a unique area of the print production and publishing market.

During its first year CFPR Editions has worked with nine artists toward the production of twenty-three separate editions that has resulted in two hundred and sixty-three prints being published. The following two publications are good examples of CFPR Editions interest in selecting projects that encounter print, engage with digital technologies and potentially offer further insights toward new or novel forms of making. Moreover there is a dual publishing and research focus here, in that the role of publisher brings a certain amount of responsibility and foresight when initiating projects that will eventually be measured alongside other contemporary prints and publishers. The research emphasis functions through the collaborative print

studio model as a practice led research method that provides primary evidence for; process orientated research inquires and questions about fields and contexts, such as the heritage of printmaking, its discourses and the potential broadening of the discipline and its practices.



Figure 4. Arthur Buxton, 30 years of Vogue covers, 2012, pigmented inkjet print edition series

Arthur Buxton's work incorporates data visualisations methods that use colour extraction tools to explore trends in painting and print media (fig 4). Using open source software Buxton extracts colours from images gathered online to create charts and timelines that typically display the five most common colours in each image as a percentage. In this instance the removal of figurative and formal elements from an image present a series of colour harmonies and trends, alluding to sampling methods, information graphics, automation technologies and objective forms of re-presentation.

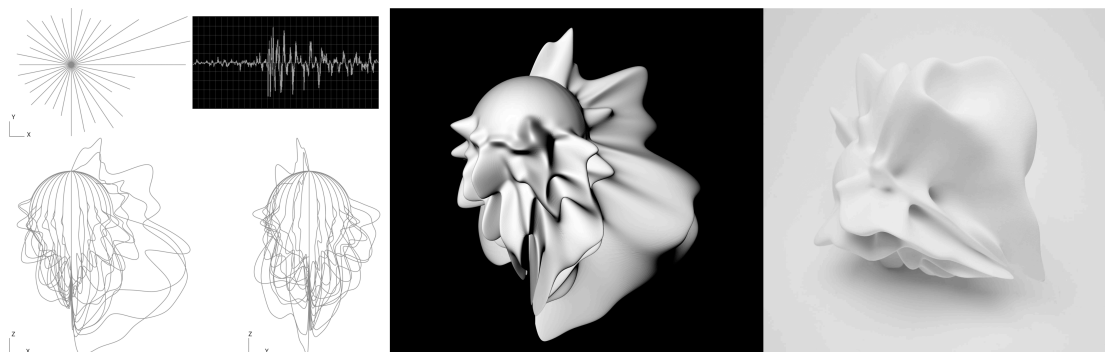


Figure 5. Katie Davis and Peter Walters, *Vela*, 2011, digital file construction and rendering as a laser sintered 3D print

Artist's Katie Davis and Peter Walters laser sintered 3D print explores similar interests in collecting and visualising data. In this instance the print entitled *Vela* uses astrophysical data emanating as a radio signal from a distant pulsar star, (some 950 light years from earth). The radio signal contains the components of frequency, intensity and time that are plotted to generate the 3D surface from which the resulting 3D printed artwork takes its shape (fig 5).

The introduction of rapid prototyping into the field of printmaking raises interesting debates around the idea of discipline specificity – is it printmaking or sculpture? Or does this even matter and if so to whom does it matter and why? This form of questioning presents the often-associated blurring effect of digital technology upon previously separate disciplines. One may also consider the inherent differences between technologically informed making paradigms as Sean Cubitt suggests in relation to the potential transformative possibilities of digital.

‘From the standpoint of the computer, any input will always appear as mathematical and any data can be output in any format. Effectively an audio input can be output as a video image, as text, as a 3D model [...]. It is this manipulability that perhaps is the defining quality of digital images - and maybe a key contributor to the differences between analogue and digital images’. (Cubitt, ‘Analogue and digital’ p. 250)

As previously stated CFPR Editions engagement with new technologies place the publishing practice within a unique area of the art market. At the same time the practice has historical parallels with previous studios and printers such as Ken Tyler's association with technical innovation and Tatyana Grosman's promotion of less established artists and processes. More importantly (and perhaps at the root of my research) the collaborative print studio practice resonates with Kathan Brown's attributing of key printer qualities and their sentiments, where one would feel that doing this work is an adventure.

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