

Stephen Hoskins

I run the Centre for Fine Print Research in Bristol and most of our work concerns research into print process. About a third of what we do is collaborative with artists similar to the American studio model, a third is specifically about research, into historic processes from the 19th century, digital process and computational colour for creative artists. The final third is directly working with the industry, so we as a research centre do own every wide format printer you can think of, because every company gives them to us. However we do test them and try them for the industry but also use them to print for artists. Therefore I have a real interest in digital technology and one aspect that I think we shouldn't confuse ourselves over, is the concept of where we come from as printmakers. We all use industrial technology - it might have been industrial technology in 1750 or it might have been industrial technology in 1960 but it still industrial technology, so there is going to be a problem. In fact there has always been a problem, it's not going to go away and also the other thing I would say is, if one's concerned with things like inkjet then there are other things coming along which are even more difficult. For example the pen I use is completely printed. It's not just printed in colour on the surface, the whole thing is printed in layers, it's a 3D rapid prototype printed pen and we make art works in that way as well, digitally. We also laser cut, we have laser cutters that will cut Perspex up to an inch thick so in context, all these processes, as far as I'm concerned, are part of what we should be adopting because we as printmakers have always adopted industrial processes.

One of the things that I'd like to discuss later is the notion between what autographic mark making is and where photography becomes part of printmaking, or to put it a better way the adoption of digital processes. Just to give you a couple of examples; we printed a Richard Hamilton typography print a few years ago which was a translation of Duchamp's notes for the large glass, so it's already a reproduction of somebody else's work. It took Richards son Rod six months to make the file and he transcribed every part that Richard wanted. Richard didn't necessarily have a hand in it at any point in its construction, though he's one of the toughest people you could ever work for so he knew exactly what he wanted at every stage. It took us *three weeks* to print five copies because we made constant iterative changes. I think we probably printed about one hundred and fifty versions in three weeks. The thing I think you need to take on board is that these processes require a craft skill. It isn't that you just push the button, it's really an iterative delicate process and you have to understand what is happening with each colour transfer from one piece of hardware to the next, the differences are minute but important. For example we spent a week just getting the black right, but if we were to do it now we would do it in a different way. I couldn't actually reproduce the print we produced three years ago because the technology 's changed and the ink set's changed, the software has changed and the version of the software has changed. I cannot reliably reproduce what I did three years ago so as you can see it's a genuine craft skill. So like any skill it suffers from its preconceptions and assumptions but I think the whole thing comes back to artistic integrity - to create an original work of art requires the intension of the artist and the craft skills and commitment of the collaborator. This has always been the case whether at Tamarind or in a Renaissance workshop where the artist painted the primary parts and the assistant filled in the rest. I believe at the Centre for Fine Print Research we create prints with integrity to both the artist and whichever of the gamut of processes we use to create them. I can then happily explore the boundaries of what printmaking will become in the knowledge that I'm true to myself and to my discipline.