

# Grapheion

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EUROPEAN REVIEW OF MODERN PRINTS, BOOK AND PAPER ART



Zdeněk Sýkora, Ingrid Ledent, Kiki Smith, Jiří Šalamoun, Grapheion's theme:  
The Memory of the Future, Andrzej Bednarczyk, Zygmunt Januszewski, Kubin - Goeldi



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Cover: **Zdeněk Sýkora**, *Phase No.31*, 1989, screenprint, 70 x 70 cm,  
paper 71 x 71 cm

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*editors:*

Simeona Hošková (editor-in-chief),  
Květa Otcovská, Hana Aulická,  
Martina Pešková

*translations:*

into English: Barbara Day,  
Elizabeth Spacilova  
from German: Květa Otcovská

*graphic design:*

David Dubec  
DTP: Jan Neomillner

*print:*

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*orders accepted at:*

Melantrichova 5  
110 01 Praha 1  
Czech Republic  
tel / fax: + 420 224 212 139  
e-mail: galerie@vol.cz;  
grapheion@vol.cz  
www.grapheion.cz,  
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Dear Friends,

The future of the print and its identity – key questions which have been on the agenda since the 1990s, and which interest everyone who has at heart the further development of this artistic discipline.

They became the starting point for the project “Memory of the Future” in which Richard Noyce addresses 46 artists from 22 countries with the question: “If the print survives till the year 2028, how will it look?” Richard Noyce has put together a specialised and unique set of texts, flavoured with the spice of science fiction and created exclusively for this edition of *Grapheion*, on the basis of long-term correspondence and personal meetings with printmakers, and reshaped it into an unusually effective mosaic of answers. This living flow of words, images and texts, offers in its aggregate valuable evidence of how contemporary artists in various places, but at the same moment in time, reflect and are inspired by this idea against the background of their own artistic work and daily creative experience. The spontaneity, the personal engagement and the authenticity of their opinions has its counterpart in the intellectual overview of Andrzej Bednarczyk, whose no less remarkable essay “The Afterlife of the Print” examines with great precision academic analyses of the paradigms of the present transient time and offers a specific way out of the contemporary conceptual marasma. However, the works of personalities such as Kiki Smith, Ingrid Ledent, Zdeněk Sýkora..., confirm the eternal truth that true art solves its own themes in its own way, and with the intuitive strength of internal visions responds to the challenges of its time.

Even though *Grapheion* no. 21 is – as emerges from the above – more of a collection of papers than a year book, we have kept the section on the exhibitions and competitions of 2008 and included the calendar for 2009. And when we mention 2008, it brings back to us the great loss suffered by the world of printmaking with the death of Prof. Zoran Kržišnik, the founder of the Ljubljana biennial, the oldest in Europe, in his time an important “diplomat”, bringing together through art the ideologically irreconcilable worlds of East and West.

There remains only to say that you hold in your hands the last published edition of the journal which, with a variety of hiccups as far as its periodical appearance is concerned, has survived for 12 years, and even though published in a relatively small edition has attracted a broad range of readers. It is not altogether ruled out that at sometime in the future it will appear in the form of an irregular publication; however, we see its future in internet form, offering the latest information on the world of the print. WWW.GRAPHEION.CZ meanwhile appears in Czech, and from September 2009 we plan its English version, oriented toward the international stage. I am therefore not saying farewell to you and, in the name of our small team, thank you for the good will of all our readers who, as we believe, will not only enjoy the new internet publication as much as the old, but will actively cooperate in its creation.

Yours, Simeona Hošková, editor-in-chief

## **Ambient Printmaking**

Deborah Cornell  
Boston MA

In the past 20 years, printmaking has become a medium with a mission. Driven by the influx of digital language, the vision of artists, the development of an international community, and the revelation of pervasive print models, contemporary printmaking is engaged in an exponential expansionism.

As the growth of digital media fuels this expansion, what happens next depends on concept. Consider two models: whether printmaking remains conceived solely as an independent, discrete medium with its basis in the economics and objective tactility of paper, or whether – as seems imminent – it can also be conceived as a mindset, based in the transient digital iteration, the remotely transmitted image, and the colonized cultural space.

Past economic, social, and cultural issues point to a scenario of inclusiveness. As an independent medium, historically the print has repeatedly imbued its time with communicative power, economic advantage and societal change. Over centuries, its varied forms became part of our cultural artistic and economic capital, accompanied by the pervasiveness of paper. Most recently, these forms embedded themselves into the culture of mass production and commercialization. The cultural currency of print idioms also pervades the new digital forms – accessibility, layering, flatness, matrix-based iteration.

Historically, changing models of cultural & economic viability have foregrounded the various discrete print media – woodcut, lithography, mezzotint, etc. In 17<sup>th</sup> century Japan, an unmet demand for inexpensive images of popular theatre and fashion that could undersell commissioned paintings resulted in the ubiquity of early Ukiyo-e prints. In Rembrandt's time, the lucrative production of commissioned portrait & religious prints was supported by a lively paper trade and the recycling of difficult to obtain printing plates among artists. Among contemporary artists, the soaring price of metals and materials may soon cause a revival of inexpensive screen or relief print forms, but the traditional print will remain an actively accessible art form. Recently, multifaceted artists like Jennifer Steinkamp and William Kentridge have adopted the multiple and the print, but in new forms. Steinkamp makes multiples of licensed programs for her digitally produced light works, as well as using the light works as matrices for digital prints, to support her avowed ambition for a dispersed and accessible art. Kentridge makes limited sculpture and animation multiples as well as traditional prints, but shows the animations widely. Thus, accessibility and the culture of multiples gain ground and increased demand in our rapidly changing society.

Reciprocity and communication have characterized a new international community of print. Centering on international exhibitions and biennials, international portfolios, exchange projects, and artist blogs, a new class of works has appeared that seek a visual

language of intercultural space, easily accessed exchange techniques, and communicative inclusiveness. Examples include far-reaching efforts such as the University of the West of England's *Digital Portfolio*, The Swiss-based *Flying Carpet Women's Project*, intercultural artist residencies like the Franz Mazreel Center and ProyectoACE, the visionary "IMPACT" international print conferences, and the desire for world-based information that motivates printmaker exchanges to traditional sites in China and Japan. These projects are typified by intensity & variation, along with extremely local observations of specific sites & peoples. This international awareness, aided by digitally based exchange, is critical to the future face of printmaking as a mindset of communication.

The idioms of print and digital media correspond strongly, and have an absorptive relationship – they are closely identified at present. But where the tactile print as a medium, whether traditional or innovative, relies on a haptic substrate, the digital media do not necessarily, and are still in flux. This acceptance of malleability is partly the result of the recent forms of film, installation, internet, and digital media, which have created a new tolerance for transience in art, a new set of definitions, and with them, a new recognition for the substrate of paper (long considered too temporary and lightweight to sustain true art). Interactivity is another factor entering new print forms & practices – the direct result of concept-based forms and internet activity. It is these new forms that may augment the direction of printmaking in the future.

As described in Malcolm McCullough's book Digital Ground (MIT Press, 2004), the future face of digital information and computing may occupy an ambient space and not be tied to constant Internet or keyboard access. Remotely conceived images will be able to appear on call and intermittently. Sensors, links, and ubiquitous displays will be both arrayed and localized – what is coming is computation on demand, either situated or mobile – that could create a new field for image generation that is iterative, accessible, tied to architecture, and as pervasive as paper. Might new forms of the print - that exist as light OR paper - appear as both permanent and transient expression? If the vision of print remains open enough, digitally generated prints may be produced as part of the architecture of ambient computation, and occupy an intimate and unexpectedly new space.

Embedded as they now are in the history of art, the elegant, distilled traditional print media will most certainly continue to be practiced, within the parameters of various economic and cultural fortunes. However, the demand for new and possibly transient forms that include iteration, remote production, and digital means is increasing as new possibilities arise. Whether on paper or not, the culture of international exchange, iteration and accessibility remains squarely within the province of the print media, and of print artists. If it remains inclusive, printmaking may yet claim the territory.