Printmaking: Understanding the Terminology

Mursyidah Zainal Abidin a, Wan Samiati Andriana Wan Mohd Daud b, Mohd Razif Mohd Rathi c,

**Faculty of Art and Design, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Sarawak**

**Abstract**

This research discusses about printmaking which always shows the conversational definition, meaning and practices as the remaking more than one production. Through the variety of media, it has developed to create multiple images related to things that have block as marks or images on top of the surface. The images are produced by using block as a matrix and intermediary to convey the idea. As a dynamic medium in visual art, printmaking can be described in three ways, the visual language, medium and techniques. The aim of this research is to explore the meaning of print that widen the terminology and moving away from flat two-dimensional prints to three-dimensional prints. The method of this study will encompass an observation focuses on the development of printmaking in Malaysia which the term has adopted and practice by printmakers. By understanding the meaning, the printmaking terminology will provide alternative ways to develop, explore, search and learn other means of expression in making the artwork. As a printmaker, creating an artwork as a language for communication will be widely understood and at the same time does not sacrifice artistic merits of printmaking as a truly unique medium, in creating new experiences and possibilities.

© 2013 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. Open access under CC BY-NC-ND license.
Selection and/or peer-review under responsibility of the Faculty of Education, University Technology MARA, Malaysia.

**Keywords:** Printmaking, Terminology, Understanding;

1. Introduction

Before the twentieth century, most printing was for the purpose of commercial reproduction rather than making original art. The history of printmaking evolves around the history of innovation in communication. Before the age of mass literacy, pictorial images played a particularly significant role in conveying ideas and traditions.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: 012-6357709.
E-mail address: msyida82@gmail.com
Printmaking can be described in a variety of media developed to create multiple images. The images can be produced by using plate as a matrix and an intermediary to convey the idea. As a dynamic medium in visual art, printmaking can be described in three ways, which is the visual language, medium, and techniques.

Printmaking method range is from simple to complex. There are many different types of techniques to produced printmaking artwork. An artist chooses the medium based on the effect that they looking to achieve.

Traditionally, these methods are dividing into four basic categories, which is relief, intaglio, planographic, and screen printing. In the new modern printing technology, there are other types of printmaking besides the conventional techniques, known as digital print, photographic mediums and combination both digital and conventional process. Many of these print techniques can also combine, especially within the same family.

The basic idea behind the printmaking processes is the ability to make more than one of specific image in a limited edition. The nature of printmaking requires that the entire edition be print simultaneously because the artist must print one colour at a time on each piece of paper. Prints were relatively inexpensive and many people can afford them.

Despite the importance, however, print is also one of the neglected artistic mediums, it always appears and known as a minor accessory in the making of art form. Printmaking was largely seen as a minor artform, interest in it restricted to special dealers and collectors.

Normally, when we talk about printmaking, it usually exhibit in the gallery with limited size and same style of presentation. Besides, only the certain group of people will come to see and appreciate this kind of art.

2. Printmaking: A Definitions

Print according to Oxfords Dictionary is to press a mark on a surface. The mark produced by applying inked type to a paper. In other words, the term print refers to a mould or a hollow container into which a liquid substance is poured to set or cool in a desired shape. Furthermore, the used of matrix or mould in which a thing is cast or shaped can clearly relates with the print process itself. (Oxfords Dictionary,2006)

Meanwhile, the term printmaking is referring to the process of making artworks by printing, normally on paper. Except in the case of monotypes, the process is capable of producing multiples of the same pieces, which is called a print. Each piece is not a copy but an original since it is not a reproduction of another work of art and is technically known as an impression.

Prints, according to Anthony Griffiths (1980) have been viewed as multiple images produced from a plate. The plate act as an intermediary with many characteristic, a flat, hard, rigid surface contains the picture and message. The image receives ink and the inked image will transferred to the paper by pressure. The process can be repeated many times with the same block or plate to produce almost exact copies, called edition.

This definition remained valid until now, but contemporary development have stimulated the meaning of printmaking expansively. Today, a print is more likely can be defined as two dimensional or three dimensional images or form. The artwork can be made by a process or combination of processes of printmaking that may be repeated to produce multiple copies or even unique pieces.

The definition of printmaking seems not to have arrived at its ultimate state. Nevertheless, the artist’s vision and technical innovation will definitely find their way into any attempt to defining a printmaking.

Although great advances have been made in technology of printmaking, more efficient printmaking processes have not displaced older techniques. Despite the fact that photomechanical and computerized processes can guarantee exact duplication of images, artist still employ handmade techniques because these often allow a greater range of personal expression.

The basic range of printmaking process had not expanded much beyond the relief, intaglio, planographic techniques and paper stencil until the second half on the nineteenth century, these processes are still employed vigour and variety today.
3. Printmaking Terminology

Basically, a print is a piece of paper on which design has been imprinted from a matrix made of selected medium, usually wood, metal or stone. In an original print the matrix is made by hand, as opposed to a reproduction which is made by a photomechanical method.

Throughout the nineteenth century, from the basis of contemporary printmaking there are a revolution in communication, which is the advent of photography, new media, and computer. This revolution slowly affected the printmaking art thus the range and quality of visual media added many influences and variables in the making of art.

The innovation spurred interm of materials and techniques of making the printmaking artwork. The inventions of photography, simulated monumental changes in art form, with printmaking more greatly influenced by indirection because photographic reproduction processes threatened hand printmaking methods. Combination of both techniques, utilizing the new potential of photography and handmade print process, it has remained the creative medium for artists in producing the artwork.

The arrival of television and computer has enriched the artist visual language and has been applied in the artwork. The ability of techniques makes several possibilities of making art interm of medium, performance and presentations.

Additionally the application of printed on the fabrics and textiles inspired and influenced printmaking on paper. When fabric was first rediscovered as a print base, both material fabric and paper were treated the same way. The printmaking techniques has been executed either in two-dimensional or three-dimensional and can combined with other materials.

Printmaking artworks no longer in two dimensional and printed on a flat surface. By using a fabric and wet paper, an embossed can be made when placed under pressure and it creates a relief form. As paper has become more a part of the print, the new inventions has been involved in the process of of creating it. The paper has been manipulating, controlling the paper casting, and production processes to achieve some particular effects.

Furthermore, the paper can be images in producing the papermaking while paper casting also can be a medium as unique and responsive as any other. Paper casting can cast over three-dimensional objects or collagraph plates. This makes printmaking become sculptural in quality.

Combinations between conventional print techniques with fragment of different media employing an expanded range of printmaking skills and technology. Print does not only using paper, plastics such as acrylic, polyesters, metal, clay which can be printed or embossed still be classified as a print.

Moreover, printmaking aslo can be described as multiple either its process or its product. The term multiples encompasses three-dimensional edition art objects that has been used in the making of printmaking artwork.

The diversity and variation of new materials, equipment, processes and techniques have expanded the scope of printmaking.

4. Discussion

Throughout history, the art has gone through an orderly process of change, in purpose, in content, in style and in materials used in the shaping of various forms of visual imagery. The artist believes that there is something of a value in the medium, searching, exploring and creating the ideas and techniques.

The art of printing is define as the act, process or practice of impressing letters, characters of figures on paper, cloth or other materials. The obvious point to note is that the transferred or pressed marks are exact mirror images of the originals. The area that can be useful to producing artwork by print techniques. To define the areas of research susceptible to analysis through print techniques and to indicate how the application of this technique can deepen our understanding of the structure and order of the world we live in.
Printmaking is one of a method in making a visual expression, utilizes tools and material. The basic process used in printmaking; woodcut, lithography, silkscreen and intaglio are the principles of making the artwork. Each method has its own unique qualities and possibilities. In the contemporary printmaking artwork, the explorations of new criteria to evaluating the marginalized art form. Exchange ideas and actively breakdown the artificial barriers that so often divide these subjects from each other and impede the free flow of creative ideas.

A number of artists believe in conceptual innovations in presenting their prints artwork. With instructively ways, they contribute to some of debates surrounding, introducing fresh content and re-evaluation of the expressive potential of the techniques. By expanding the definitions for art, prints are being forged.

While the original edition multiple is still a central concern of many print artists, there is a growing tendency to extend their practice into the sculptural and installation realms. This does not mean that the essential properties of, say, intaglio and planographic printing are undermined, or that the qualities and seriality and replication are denied, rather that the print medium is given more freedom than the boundaries allowed by a single sheet of paper.

The artist adopting the techniques and modes of presentation in their artwork, where they try to extending their print practice in other directions. The development in installations as a means of re-examining printmaking in terms of process and as a sequence of events. They resolve was to move the print medium away from conventional ideas of framed images and multiple serving the marketplace, where the expectation was that it would have decorative purpose and to provocatively explore the innate character of the printed image.

The artworks by Prawat titled Launching Station (1981), a Thailand artist, he placed a series of large-scale copper plates approximately parallel to the wall with various chemicals and tools were applied in his artwork. These plates served as an equivalent to canvas, where the act of etching and engraving resembled that of a highly charged expressionistic painting.

In the Prawat’s artwork, the plate that have been displayed were cleaned and inked, and impressions taken in the usual manner producing the print technique. His artwork jolted printmaking out of being a passive contemplative experience into one that directly confronted the audience.

From an observation critic Ronny Cohen (1986), he stated that:

“Freed by him from the structures of their traditional formats – and also form – and removed from the confines of the printing shop, the material and process of intaglio technique have been transformed into a sculptural ensemble, one that nevertheless retains the custom any usage of them”.

The artist has applied the principles of the print to a three-dimensional format. Postmodernism has challenged the concept of originality and connoisseurship, broken down barriers between visual arts disciplines, and allowed hybrid forms to flourish.

In addition, they have moved away from perceiving print production solely in terms of limited editions and marketable commodities, their images command the floor as well as the wall, with print materials and techniques re-evaluated according to their essential properties.

The explorations of these artists not so much subvert the field of printmaking as contribute towards rejuvenating and extending it into other dimensions. Acceptance from art community towards new dimension of printmaking also needed to make its successful intern of meaning and performance.

There is an effort from Malaysian artist trying to broaden the print definition towards making the artwork. In 1996, Juhari has produced an artwork titled Seniman yang dilupakan, he bring the new approaches in wider the print definitions. In tradition context there are a techniques of making traditional kuih using a mould like kuih bahulu, kuih loyang and kuih kapit.
According to Juhari Said (1996), he tried to prove that three-dimensional shape can be print repeatedly similar. The artist tries to make art community and public remember the techniques of reproduction shape of traditional delicacies has been known in our tradition. He used all three types of traditional delicacies that have been preserved in his artwork, named as “edible prints”.

Recently, there is an exhibition were held at Petronas Gallery entitled Go Block. The exhibitions were celebrates printmaking practices in Malaysia through new works by five artist which is Juhari Said, Ng Kim Peow, Izan Tahir, Zulkifli Yusoof and Shahrul Jamili. They have been known by their significant contributions to the development of contemporary printmaking in the Malaysian art movement.

The idea behind the exhibitions is to redefining the idea of printmaking in various and whole new ways. The artists exploring the printmaking as a dynamic and innovative medium in presenting their artwork beyond the conventional traditions. By using the techniques of casting or molding, the usage of various everyday materials have been used to produce the artworks.

The materials such as plastic, aluminum foil, concrete, wood and soil have been used as a medium to replace ink. Moreover, the concept of the exhibition is to make public understand that there is an alternative ways than conventional printmaking process. As usual, printmaking only limits to the use of ink, block, and paper and with traditional techniques to produced piece of artworks.

Go Block artist have an initiative and do a first step to pushing the boundaries of printmaking to its present-day relevance. The opportunity, able to delve into their complex minds and thought processes that can be shared by other. By understanding, the definitions and terminologies of printmaking can bring and widen the artwork in terms of techniques, medium and its performances.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that by understanding the terminology in printmaking, it can be said that the concept not only can be used in the visual art but also can be applied in other fields and area. Pola, mould, block, and recipes can be considered as matrix in the printmaking artworks.

In the future, more research, which involves the understanding of the terminology in printmaking, should be widened in other area or field. In order to open up the students mind towards the visual art especially printmaking, so that their mind will not only limited to the conventional techniques, materials, concepts and the terminologies.

More research should be conducted in other areas such as in fashion industries, automobile industries, science and technology to prove the artwork concepts can also be applied in areas other than only in visual art.

Acknowledgements

The Praise to the Al-Mighty Allah for His blessing, for this research was successfully completed within the time scheduled allotted. We wish to express our deepest gratitude to our adviser, Associate Professor Ponirin Amin for his patient guidance, unfailing support and encouragement throughout this long, challenging process to produce the research that was at first, nothing from the start. We also like to express our grateful to the members of our committee for their guides and support. A special thanks to our family for their patience, understanding and encouragement. Alhamdulillah, we have again to be thankful to Allah S.W.T. for allowing us to live and being able to appreciate the art of life.

References

Juhari Said (2003), Akal di Mata Pisau, Malaysian National Reinsurance Berhad, KL.
Muliyadi Mahamood (2001), Seni Lukis Moden Malaysia, Utusan Publications and Distributor Sdn. Bhd, KL.
Alternative Printmaking,(1995),Gallery Petronas,KL,Malaysia./Catalog
Dr. Muliyadi Mahamood, “Seni Cetak Kontemporari”, Dewan Budaya, Malaysia, 2003