

TYPA, INNOVATION IN A MUSEUM CONTEXT

TYPA, INOVAÇÃO EM CONTEXTO MUSEOLÓGICO

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ABSTRACT

How do print museums develop an innovative approach to their collection while providing their visitors with historical context? Using artistic printmaking to keep the heritage of print alive, many 'working museums' promote the global knowledge of letterpress, relying on international collaborations to generate innovative and creative approaches. The the International Council of Museums' guidelines, only refers to a 'working museum', but does not offer a clear definition of what this is. How can an operational print museum demonstrate innovative practices and retain the existing knowledge of letterpress? This paper will examine the 'working print museum', how it can be not only a site for reimagining the past but provide new forms of research and pioneering adaptations of old technologies. This research is inspired by the concept that as the initial infatuation with certain technologies has passed, we have entered a relationship with them in expanded artistic adventure. The paper promotes the idea that printmaking and letterpress allow for a collaborative approach which not only serves to strengthen communities but can be more than a mere reproduction of a historical process and allow for expanded experimentation. Through an in-depth look of the contemporary practices, ethos, and developments of printing museums in Europe, this paper raises questions surrounding the role of museums in this post-digital world. It will look at the future of the 'working print museum' and suggest how letterpress practices can extend through international and European collaborations.

Keywords

Collaboration. Heritage. Innovation. Museum. Printmaking.

RESUMO

De que forma os museus de arte impressa podem propor uma abordagem inovadora da sua coleção e, ao mesmo, tempo fornecer um contexto histórico dessa prática aos seus visitantes? Fazendo uso da gravura artística para manter vivo o patrimônio cultural relacionado às técnicas de impressão tradicionais, muitos "museus operativos" promovem o conhecimento da tipografia e apostam em colaborações internacionais com a intenção de gerar novas ações criativas. As diretrizes do Conselho Internacional de Museus fazem referência à noção de "museus operativos", mas deixam em aberto a sua definição funcional; o que leva a pensar como um "museu de arte impressa operativo" pode estimular práticas inovadoras e, ao mesmo tempo, preservar o conhecimento existente de tipografia? Este

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artigo examina de que maneira um “museu de arte impressa operativo” pode deixar de ser apenas um local onde é possível visualizar como as coisas eram feitas no passado para se tornar também um espaço para o estabelecimento de novas formas de pesquisa e inovações a partir de técnicas tradicionais. Esta investigação é inspirada pelo conceito de que, como a atração inicial por certas técnicas já foi superada, o relacionamento com elas acontece com um interesse artístico ampliado de exploração. O presente artigo defende a ideia de que a gravura e a tipografia permitem uma abordagem colaborativa que serve para fortalecer comunidades e cuja potência de experimentação ultrapassa a mera reprodução de um processo histórico. Através de um olhar profundo sobre as práticas contemporâneas, o ethos e o desenvolvimento dos museus de arte impressa na Europa, este trabalho levanta questões sobre o papel dos museus em um mundo pós-digital. Ele analisa o futuro do “museu de arte impressa operativo” e sugere como as práticas de impressão tipográfica podem ser ampliadas através de colaborações internacionais e europeias.

Palavras-chave

Colaboração. Herança. Inovação. Museu. Gravura.

INTRODUCTION

Collaboration is widely acknowledged as a key model in the tradition of printmaking, (Antreasian, 1980). The possibilities of the print studio as a space for mutual learning can enforce individual empowerment, collective education, and generate skill-sharing across communities. Many open printmaking studios have demonstrated this power and how visual art can even contribute to political change (Berman, 2017). Print as an industrial process has always relied on some form of collaboration, the work was historically divided into many factions and areas, in which each individual had their own role. In book printing, you would have the designer, the compositor setting the type, the printer, the paper-hand, the proof-reader, and the binder. Each individual had their own part to play in the process. Today, more often than not, printmakers must extend their interdisciplinary muscles, and be able to work across these numerous specialities.

There have been several research projects which look at the collaborative and innovative nature of contemporary letterpress. One such example was the widely referenced 6x6 Project, by Alexander Cooper, Rose Gridneff, and Andrew Haslam. This was a collaborative letterpress research project which connected six leading UK Higher Education design schools with active letterpress workshops. The project combined a traditional understanding of letterpress composition with a contemporary approach to design education. The work led to several multi-disciplinary outcomes, such as a book, exhibition, and numerous publications. Firstly, it documented the nature of the letterpress studio, with participants documenting their own experiences and connections to the practice. Secondly, in its multiple outcomes, through its publication of both text and design, it demonstrated the practical nature of letterpress printing and the need for this vein of practice-led research. In order to gain a true understanding of the relevance of the print process, it must be collaborative, experience-led and physical.

Employing collaboration and hands-on activities are equally important when exploring historical processes. *Bristol Set in Print* was a two-year project documenting the letterpress print industry. It combined oral history and archival research with the practical dissemination of knowledge and skills. Firstly, it was an attempt to map the historical, geographical, and ecological impact that the industry had on Bristol, conducted through oral history and empirical research; and secondly, it aimed at evaluating the contemporary and relevant lessons of letterpress through workshops and hands-on re-enactment. The research began with a collection of interviews with a range of participants including ex-journeymen, union members, managers, paper-hands, readers, and ink sales representatives. Inspired

by the participants' enthusiasm, the project generated numerous creative outputs and a series of intergenerational workshops open to the public, which explored the value of traditional letterpress print in a contemporary setting. It not only passed on the skills of these people but gave participants an immersive experience of a traditional print house (Figure 1).



Figure 1 – Bristol Set in Print.
Source: Joe Alduous's photo (2016).

This form of collaboration described in these and many other printmaking research projects is inherited from its industrial roots. The historical print house was a united yet fragmented body, in which each individual put their own mark on the final publication; from the paper-hand to the proof-reader, all bound together in the same goal. The act of print or printmaking relies upon the atmosphere of the studio, the conversations which lead you to a certain colour choice, or the many (clean) hands who help manoeuvre a crisp sheet of cotton paper out of the etching press. It is a space in which even the most veteran printmaker can pick up a new approach to a time-honoured technique.

THE PRINT MUSEUM IN THE DIGITAL AGE, WALKING THE LINE OF OLD AND NEW

In a similar vein to the printmaking studio, this need for a hands-on approach to knowledge can be found in the printing museum. "There is only so much visitors can assimilate by looking and reading as they walk round [...] better still are live demonstrations of techniques, the nature of which is difficult to discern by simply looking at artefacts" (Marshall, 2019, online). Contemporary museums strive to find ways of making their exhibits more interactive, attracting new audiences in with screen-based exchanges and moving displays. Museum studies focus on this interactivity of museums, looking at why audiences visit and what they take from the experience. The concept of demonstrations, workshops, and an educational program is commonplace across various museums. However, it is not so common to find museums utilizing their collection to produce new material; printing books, posters, tickets, and invitations on hundred-year-old tools. This is the space which the 'Working Museum' occupies.

Contemporary audiences have new needs and priorities when it comes to museums. Whereas the baby boomer generation traditionally used the museum as an educational space, millennial audiences crave experience over education (Bello; Matchette, 2018). Cultural centres, museums, and galleries all have to work these rapidly changing ideals. Often referred to as the 'experience generation' millennials are more focused on hands-on activities which connect individuals together. According to a recent survey, "3 out of 4 [millennials] choose to buy an experience rather than something desirable" (Eventbrite, 2017, p. 4). Museums globally are having to adapt their programming to accommodate these new values and demands. To break into new audiences, target groups of young adults, and compete with the democratic and instant experience of digital technologies, a museum must rethink its methods; it is no longer enough to put up a few interactive screens or moving videos. To engage with these audiences, a certain level of creativity is needed.

Print museums have a special responsibility for engaging with new audiences. Historically, print was the keeper of communication and global knowledge; publishing only the winner's story, the printing press was typically reserved for the relatively wealthy; a crucial concept for new audiences to understand and appreciate. As the baton of global knowledge has been handed to what could be considered as a more democratic form of communication, it is important to understand where we come from, and how we have been shaped by previous forms of technology. Especially now, when we can see the pitfalls with the internet and its open form of communication, bringing about fake news and extremist views, we should learn from lessons within print history to move forward. However, even though print was a single-authored entity, it does not mean that those who harbour its relics must follow suit. There is much to learn from the contemporary discussions found in new media and forums. We as educators, heritage-holders, artists, and researchers have the responsibility to keep this history alive while adopting contemporary lessons, through adaptation and innovation.

TYPÄ; WORKING MUSEUM? CULTURAL CENTRE? PRINTMAKING STUDIO?

TYPÄ is a small privately-run museum and cultural centre in Tartu. Defining its operations has always been a struggle for the institution, which tried to find a classification for its multi-disciplinary actions while maintaining a professional and certified position. It has been in operation for ten years, previously known as the Estonian Print and Paper Museum, before changing its name in 2019 to cover its bindery, printmaking studio, residency, publishing house, and paper kitchen. Akin to the contemporary approaches of many millennials in the creative industries, TYPÄ has had to adopt this millennial, 'Jack of All Trades' style to its philosophy, operating as a publisher, running an international artist residency and delivering an engaging education program. In the coming year, in preparation for the 2024 Tartu, Capital of Culture Award, the museum hopes to connect with international practitioners and heritage specialists, in order to extend the innovative possibilities of printmaking and its historical roots (Figure 2).

Its activities began in 2006, in The Polymer Factory in Tallinn, an arts centre with a collection of print equipment used for printing posters for musical events. The museum was born out of the need to rescue this historic equipment, which would have been otherwise scrapped. The founders managed to acquire a relevant range of printing equipment across Estonia. This is a common story amongst many print studios and museums, with the demise of print and the permanence of its machinery. Whenever possible, the equipment has been restored to working conditions, allowing the museum's display to act as a fully functional print studio. The ethos here is that only through experiencing printing in action, visitors can fully comprehend the process and relevance of historical print. TYPÄ's unparalleled and unique collection means visitors can try operating an antique, iron hand-press, modelled in 1837 and based on the operating



Figure 2 – Collection in TYPA.
Source: Mana Kaasik's photo (2019).

principle of Johannes Gutenberg's press. It is as close to printing in the 15th century as you can find it. In contrast, their Soviet-era cylinder press, Victoria Polygraph V 1040-2, demonstrates the rapid, industrial, power of print in the 20th century. This eight-ton-press is currently in operation and was used recently to produce a letterpress edition of the 'Little Prince'.

In addition to the vital work of preserving the heritage of industrial print and papermaking, the museum continues to promote its activities on an international and European platform. Through hosting a dynamic artist-in-residence, its support of the European Solidarity Corps and delivering a comprehensive education program, the TYPA promotes artistic and community collaborations. The museum strives to strengthen a European Network, such as its membership of the Association of European Print Museums, which has allowed for greater collaborations, and to further its knowledge of equipment maintenance and usage, sharing key-ideas and knowledge across the European field.

CASE STUDIES OF INNOVATION IN ACTIO

TYPA has always delivered an artistic program which seeks to combine print heritage with art and innovation. During its eight years in operation, the residency program has seen numerous artists come through its doors and experiment with the machinery in new and compelling ways. Through these artists, TYPA has gained new knowledge and understanding about their collections while finding modern ways to promote its heritage to their audiences. The following case studies document the innovative ideas which these artists have brought to the space.

PETER VANCE: AN AUDIO EXPLORATION OF THE ALPHABET

Peter Vance was an artist-in-residence for three months at TYPA in 2016. Vance is a multidisciplinary artist from the United Kingdom and he draws

inspiration from the various transmissions of data and notably by the earliest type of computer program, built in 1801. (Vance, 2018) The program was created for the Jacquard Loom device and formed a binary code, presented on punch cards to tell the loom what to weave. These punch cards were not solely found in textiles but also used in the letterpress process; TYPA's monotype caster uses a similar punched memory to determine which letters to cast. During his residency he combined coding, audio, weaving, and print to innovatively explore the link between language, communication, and technology. 'Alphabet' was on display at TYPA's gallery in January 2018.

A set of personal instructions left by the artist reads:

(1) Weave a single length of ribbon onto itself to form a grid; (2) Print a letter on the grid; (3) Unweave the ribbon; (4) Wrap the ribbon around a length of wood; (5) Admire the new formation of marks and patterns derived from the original print; (6) Think about the length of wood's similarities to Edison's Phonograph; (7) Repeat steps 1, 2, and 3; (8) Wrap the ribbon onto a frame into a series of horizontal lines; (9) Repeat Step 5; (10) Assign each row of ribbon a note from a scale; (11) Measure the length of each mark on a given row; (12) Create a piece of music from this information; (13) Play the music; (14) Admire that what you hear is derived from the marks made by the original print; (15) Repeat for each letter of the Alphabet; (16) Think about how each and every word, sentence, and book could be turned into sound; (17) Smile.

Bringing this interdisciplinary technique to the museum setting helped TYPA understand the link between codes and communication. The sound and data manipulation provided us with new ways to display this connection through an experience-led exhibition. It connected the code of language with binary code and audio, creating a multi-sensory event for audiences which presented a different side of print history (Figures 3 and 4).

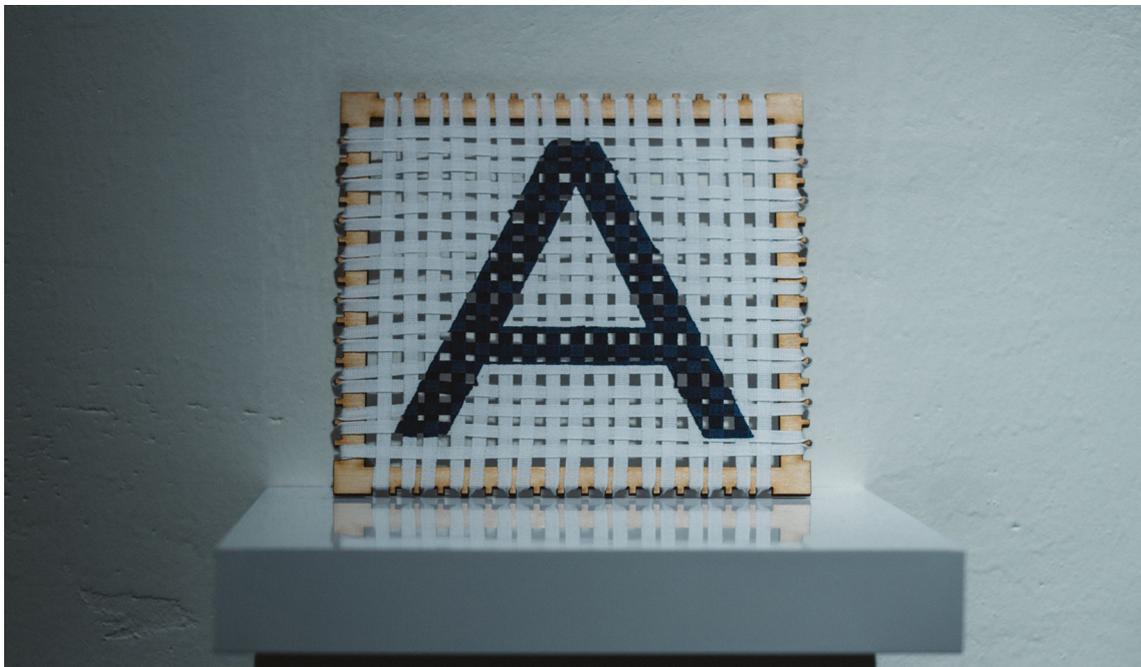


Figure 3 – Alphabet Print.
Source: Mana Kaasik's photo
(2018).

BONNIE LOUKAS AND DANIEL SCHNEIDER: ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE TYPE-CASE

In September 2019, TYPA hosted visual artists Bonnie Loukas and Daniel Schneider from Michigan, USA, for a three-month residency. Schneider is an industrial archaeologist, letterpress printer, and book artist. His



Figure 4 – Coded Prints.
Source: Mana Kaasik's photo
(2018).

archaeological research focuses on mechanised work environments in manufacturing and extractive industries, particularly wood printing type manufacture in the United States and native copper mining in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. Loukas is an interdisciplinary artist focusing on letterpress printing, book arts, drawing, and oil painting. Her work depicts the natural world and human impact on it, focusing on the lives of animals and plants.

During this residency period, they were interested in documenting the collection of fonts at TYPA. In this period, they highlighted an interesting occurrence within their collection of which the museum staff were unaware: the appearance of Twofers, an American term, often associated with tickets (meaning two for the price of one). In this case, it is with wooden type when one block has two letters on it, the original letter on the front and the new letter which was carved into the back. This was usually found when a print shop had limited resources and needed a certain letter, the end-grain pieces of hardwood being in limited supply and costly. Many of the print shops where their collection came from were operating under the occupation of the Soviet Union, and so this information helped us to paint a wider picture of Estonian print heritage. It was through these new artists who came from the other side of the world, with fresh approaches and knowledge, that TYPA was able gain this understanding of their own collection. This approach again highlights the significance of practice-led research and collaboration when it comes to exploring print history (Figure 5).

CHARLOTTE BISZEWSKI: ANALOGUE PRINTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Here, I wanted to include my own practice as an example of heritage-led innovative practice, having come to TYPA as an artist in residence two years ago. (Biszewski, 2019) The current collection of prints explores hidden narratives by combining the historic print processes with digital



Figure 5 – Daniel Schneider and Bonnie Loukas working.
Source: Mana Kaasik's photo (2019).

technology. Printed electronics, as the name implies, is a type of electronics that are created by printing technology. It can be an unfamiliar phrase to many (Cui, 2016). The use of paper and printed electronics is currently being researched for a number of purposes, such as medical devices and printed antenna. In the graphic design area, there are many of those working on the possibilities of using paper advertisements, or combining paper with augmented reality and audio (Corrigan-Kavanagh et al., 2019).

This work seeks to explore the heritage of print through contemporary technology, using conductive and thermochromic inks with traditional print processes to create devices such as paper speakers. The *Embedded in Print project* considers the possibilities of physical computing in conjunction with craft and traditional practices. Conducting this research within a museum setting means being able to embrace a manifold of technologies which span multiple temporalities and geographies. It is to dip in and out of time and space, to bring a knowledge of our own history of communication into the work. The work combines papermaking, a Chinese invention of the first century AD, letterpress from the fifteenth century, and speakers which were designed in the nineteenth century. These multi-disciplinary prints combine audio and interactive components with the haptic qualities of printmaking (Figure 6).

These three case studies only touch upon the few instances of innovation within a museum setting. They demonstrate the fresh ideas and new understandings to heritage which artists and outsiders can bring to an institution. It has been through this residency program that TYPA has been able to keep an aura of fresh experiences and innovation within the museum setting. The artists have been able to explore our equipment and, within reasonable possibilities, adapt it to their needs. It has become a mutual learning encounter between museum staff and these artists. These three case studies are only the start of a wider research project into print heritage and the potential of printmaking and artistic collaboration within a museum setting.



Figure 6 – Paper Speaker.
Source: Gosia Kujda's photo
(2020).

FURTHERING THE KNOWLEDGE, FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

The future will join museums and print studios across Europe with researchers, artists, and technicians in a quest to define and refine the working museum. Through a program of international skill-sharing, artistic residencies, and events, the project will develop the conceptual and theoretical framework of working museum and outline methods to leverage industrial heritage for educational and outreach purposes. For any institution of industrial heritage, especially regarding print history, the operation of traditional equipment poses a series of challenges and raises substantial questions regarding preservation, maintenance, and contemporary health and safety standards. Although operating machinery and offering hands-on activities using antiquated equipment can undoubtedly be a powerful attraction and offer valuable insights into history, the technical, ethical and safety-related issues do not have clear-cut solutions and thus merit further research.

There is an increase in studios or museums interested in historical print processes and at the same time, we are experiencing a change in the audiences' demands and inquiries. On the one hand, there is an increasing awareness of how technology impacts society and the environment. We propose that by re-examining technological developments from a historical perspective, we can further understand and propose solutions regarding issues surrounding climate impact and democratising communication. Alongside these new audiences are artists who seek access to post-industrial technologies. By means of free experimentation, they can remediate history to offer novel insights into where we have come from and consequently – where we are heading.

It is precisely based on these ideas that TYPA launches a new research project. It is their goal to invite several teams of artists, technicians, and educators to work together at locations across Europe to develop site-specific tools for audience development. During each exchange, a research group will document these interactions, hesitations, choices, and solutions encountered by the teams. Based on these studies, an umbrella policy will be suggested that could be a model for the next sites or further studies. In this manner, the project benefits the maximum amount of participants from the local audiences all the way up to specialist's networks. Transient activities will likewise be complemented by a legacy in the form of increased local as well as international know-how.

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