

**An Artistic Appraisal of works of printmaking in the
West over the 20th Century**

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Abstract

Through this paper based on art of printmaking in the West over the 20th century a theoretical background to printmaking of Sri Lanka will be laid down. This state of affairs is unavoidable because the art of printmaking in Sri Lanka is still linked with creative works of the West. Therefore, an inquiry into the history of both printmaking and print works of the 20th century created through the modern revolution of the West will be helpful to gain a clear understanding of the above. This study will be done in the form of an analysis based on the following three facts:-

- ❖ An inquiry into the art of printmaking of the 20th century.
- ❖ Concentration on the fact that print became a form of art.
- ❖ Understanding of diversified approaches expressed in the works of print belonging to the period in question.

There are several problems confronting this study. The number of artists employing multi-media is unlimited. And then there is the scarcity of written evidence of printing which define it as a form of art. As a result this study was compelled to be carried out on the basis of 25 popular artists who have chosen the printing as their most favorite medium of art and on 25 works done by them.

The twentieth century was the most noteworthy period in the history of the world in which almost in every sphere of activity there had been development. Industrial revolution brought about following the 19th century and the globalization of the same made every country in the world utilize the benefits of the latest changes introduced. Changes brought about even in the sphere of printing spread round the globe. In the case of printing creations introduced in European countries in the twentieth century were the prototypes that were followed by many a nation. So a sample selected out of the avant-garde and both their artistic creations can be treated as a mirror of socio-political variations of that period.

Through 25 works of artists selected for this study variations of modern art of printmaking will be analyzed in depth. To select only those 25 artists who exclusively and directly had been using printing as a form of art meant to eliminate so many artists from a very wide range.

It was not at all possible to identify a group of artists (printers) who exclusively depended on printing. So I was compelled in selecting these 25 artists out of visual artists to pay special attention to those who concentrated more on printing and to those who made a great contribution to printing by means of their intellectual skill and creative works. The above approach was helpful in condensing a wide subject into a small fraction.

The researcher also has attempted through his selection, as far as possible, to present art works and artists that represent various media such as lithography, screen printing etc. This kind of attempt enables one not only to gain an understanding of changes brought about in various methodologies of printing in the 20th century, but also such knowledge will be helpful for an artistic analysis which is the most prominent feature of this study. Therefore, it is quite justifiable to reduce such a voluminous body of facts to a digest.

The corpus of the subject, approaches to art of printmaking has become an essentially significant subject in the eyes of the Sri Lankan artists and researchers who take an interest in the art of printmaking. The main object of this study is to fill the academic void that exists in the subject. Though it is not possible to make available to the Sinhala reader the whole body of knowledge pertaining to art of printmaking exists in the West this study will enable to present to the Sri Lankan readers very important facts through turning point of printmaking.

Art of printmaking has developed into a level in visual arts where it is possible to hold a discourse on. But according to general reading printmaking is also treated as almost printing which is exclusively a commercial pursuit. The present study will try to alter this concept and convince the public that it is also as a serious form of visual art. By utilizing the technical knowledge which is being highly developed round the world printmaking could be made a more powerful form of visual art than painting in Sri Lanka. This study could be used as a prototype which would give a theoretical encouragement to that task. It will also help to enhance the modern knowledge of visual art.

Another object of this paper is to pave the way for a new reading of the works of western artists through an artistic analysis of their prints and of which act will in turn publicize the idea that print is more effective than painting.

Works of printmaking of the West in the 20th century clearly show how much they were concerned with methodology. For instance one form did not depend on another form. They made use of multi-media, such as lithography, screen printing etc. Their theme and expression was often independent. Accordingly the present day printmaking artist of Sri Lanka can gain immense benefits out of their works by a study done in depth.

The most important fact behind this study is to see whether the artistic use of those Western artists engaged in the art of printmaking in the 20th century is justifiable compared with the present day artist.

Yet another fact examined in this study is to see whether how did the artist use his point of view in his work.

What is expected to examine in this respect is to see whether how the art of printmaking which came to being with a multi-faceted approach spread.

Although the topic of this research pertaining to the art of printmaking in the West is very wide inscope and is suggestive of extensive study the researcher was competed to restrict it to a brief one owing to a number of practical problems. Therefore, the study was exclusively limited to a selection of artists from a group who rendered a great service to the Western art of printmaking and those who also tried to introduce a different approach in printmaking.

As this study is not set in the context of Sri Lanka it has to confront practical difficulties. Absence of visual live evidence is one of such major problems. Yet another hindrance crops up as the selected 25 artists happen to be from different countries. In consequence all the data pertaining to artists and their works had to be taken from internet and foreign texts. As a result information thus obtained had to be classified in chronological order according to their date of birth. Data and special events had to be set in order.

Then out of each artist and their works the most significant one which has made more noteworthy contribution to printmaking had to be isolated and data pertaining to the state of printing of that particular period had to be analyzed and an artistic criticism made.

Essential facts needed for the study are being collected out of texts written on Western artists of printmaking belong to the 20th century which comprises the sample. The first stage of the study is devoted to works and contributions made by artists in order to develop their creative approach and to what they did to popularize their print works.

Identification of artistic creations of these artists is of utmost importance and their print works are being collected using internet. Then again views expressed by philosophers, critics and other authorities on the subject are also of invaluable helping hand given to this study.

Primary source of a research carried out on visual art is either visual evidence or written evidence. Written evidence which comprises socio-political and cultural information is the secondary source. This research makes use of both visual and written evidence.

Selected print works are used as visual evidence written evidence which covers the fields already mentioned is multi-faceted.

A diversified society was created owing to development brought about in various fields by the beginning of the 20th century which came to being accompanied by the 2nd world War and modernism. Even the art developed in this modern society represented the variable visual figure peculiar to the age. Therefore utilization of both art works and written evidence will pave the way for a justifiable conclusion.