Research Project: Creating the visual book through the integration of the divergent technologies of photogravure and digital processes.

Funded by a Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada Research/Creation Grant and Sir Wilfred Grenfell College/Memorial University of Newfoundland
sillis:
sequential imaging
laboratory/laboratoire d’imagerie séquenciel

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What is the impact of the integration of digital and analogue technologies on image-making and the creation of sequentially based work?

How does media-related decision making influence outcome?
Presentation topic: The impact of the interplay of contemporary and historical processes as a catalyst in the generation of content and ideas

Marlene MacCallum
Background context: earlier book works that use photogravure and other hybrid processes
Domestic Arcana is a series of word and image triptychs using letterpress and photogravure. The hybrid nature of photogravure and its ambiguity of media, lends itself to a metaphoric translation of imagery.
Townsite House

Hand bound book work with embossed leather covers including fourteen photogravure images and three lith film images. The text and house plan image are screenprinted. Made in 2006.

The Townsite House Project consists of a book work and 34 photographs.
I live in Corner Brook’s Townsite area and photographed in five homes, all the same model.
This piece sets out to provide the visual equivalence of the uncanny experience of being in homes that are the same yet not the same as mine.
By using photogravure, the images function simultaneously as a document, or a photographic record and a constructed memory, the printed artifact. This creates the dynamic of disjunction that is key to this piece.
Recent work done in conjunction with our current research project: Creating the visual book through integration of the divergent technologies of photogravure and digital processes.
In my new work, I maintain my fascination with the dynamic of perceived opposing forces. The strong technological focus of our research led me to consider the tools of historical and contemporary technology as my image source. This image was generated by scanning two lenses, balanced on top of each other.
In order to investigate how media-related decision-making influences outcome, I used the same image source to make three prints. Each provides a distinct translation, confirming that the image is not external to its form of presentation, but rather the media is instrumental in creating the meaning of the piece.
Stacked Lenses
Photogravure variation

Colour separation photogravure creates an amalgam of a historical photographic process and current digital technology, maintaining the specific qualities of ink on paper process while taking advantage of digital capabilities. We are using digital processes to generate the four-colour separations. We then output these files onto transparent inkjet media, instead of the traditional wet darkroom and lith film process.
Quadrifid

A two-section hand bound experimental book work. The interior images are printed in photogravure. The covers, title and colophon pages are digital prints. Made in 2009. The digital technologies are used early on in the creation of the images.
Quadrifid

And then the analogue methods re-assert themselves. The first section is an accordion structure of the four colour-separation plates, each printed in black.
Quadrifid

This book work is an exploration of the four-colour separation plates. The second section is a folio structure with the four-colour photogravure.
The potential of the process lies not in the creation of a seamless colour reproduction but in the printing permutations that can deviate from the preconceived use of a colour-separation method.
I wanted to subvert the convention of information as text block and created a cover that is the most didactic element in the piece informing the viewer of the methods used to create the image.
Quadrifid means “divided or deeply cleft into four parts”.

Marlene MacCallum

sillis Press

2009
The cyan and yellow plates are printed in black.
The magenta and black plates complete this spread.
When the accordion section is expanded, it reveals the landscape created by the sequence.
In this image, the colour logic is internal to the object and the process. Because I was engaged in a steep learning curve there were many failed attempts along the way. An issue that arose was the role of work ethic and time investment. I struggled with the perconception that newer technologies are faster or more economic and historical methods are inherently more labour-intensive.
My conclusion would be to refute that perspective as I have also been engaged in the learning curve of controlling digital printing, which has taken an equivalent investment of time and resources. In addition, a large part of the significance of this research is the process and therefore the labour must be valued.
The back cover of this work uses the same components as the front, but reorganizes them to create a new image, echoing the operation of the internal sections.
The final work that I will show you is the first of a four-volume work entitled In Camera. This series uses disassembled and defunct camera components as its image source.
In Camera: Lens

The covers are glass with leather quarter-binding.

Our research has given me the context to create experimental works that are made with multiple producing methods but not limited by material or edition constraints.
In Camera: Lens
Digital images and photogravure plates are printed on two-sided Entrada and then bound into a codex structure.
Digital and analogue photogravure technologies are juxtaposed and layered in this work.
Consistent throughout all my work is my interest in the perceptual process. My focus now is the phenomenology of seeing and the role of the old and new camera in visual interpretation.
Scans from my notebooks provide clues to the image-making methods and process.
The components of defunct optical instruments are represented through two simultaneous points of view: the machine (the flatbed scanner) and the eye (the side-on view of the camera). Through these means, the architecture of the camera is loosely represented.
The colour image shows you the scanner’s translation of two stacked lenses and is a digital inkjet print while the black and white image is a medium format film camera translation of the same situation, printed in photogravure.
On the recto page, the digital and photogravure prints are layered together. The verso page diagrams the four different ways to stack the two lenses.
The historical tool, the film camera, and the contemporary tool, the digital scanner became my forum for experimentation and I was surprised by the resulting images.
The technological focus of this research project provided the space where the poetic and practical converged and were the catalyst for the creation of work.
We have become inured to the camera eye and mistake it for the only version of the truth. The contrast between these two translations reminds us of the role of mechanical devices in our interpretation of the world.
Our relationship with technology is discussed in Does Technology Drive History? The Dilemma of Technological Determinism. The editors, Marx and Roe Smith, suggest
“Instead of treating “technology” per se as the locus of historical agency, the soft determinists locate it in a far more various and complex social, economic, political and cultural matrix.”
In this book work, each process is integral to the final result and as such, the boundaries between media become blurred. This provides a challenge to the historical practice of describing the visual arts as a series of discrete processes.
The book work offers a receptive format to the issues being explored. In “The Century of Artists’ Books”, Johanna Drucker describes how the artists’ book operates “at the intersection of a number of different disciplines, fields, and ideas – rather than at their limits.”
Colophon

In Camera: Lens is volume one in a four-part series of experimental book works that represents the architecture of a virtual camera. It is printed using photogravure and digital output and presents the intersection of digital & analogue imagemaking methods.

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