

Juror's Statement

I am an artist who makes prints but I am not a printer. What I mean is that all my prints are collaborative. I show up at a print studio with a concept or sketch and then throw myself at the mercy of the master printers who then execute my ideas. These master printers have been my teachers, both technically and aesthetically. They bring their technical expertise to every project and I bring my vision. That's what collaboration means. But the real creativity rises when my ignorance crashes into their expertise. And when it does, that's when I know I'm really doing my job. And what is my job? My job is to push them beyond their scope of knowledge, and to challenge them to employ unorthodox and innovative approaches to printing.

With that said I will go on to say that, from the pool of entries for this year's Boston Printmakers 2015 Biennial, I selected the pieces that inspired me the most. They were the ones that showed the broadest range of possibilities of what printmaking can be. They were the ones that triggered full scenarios in my mind in a single frame without the use of words. They were techniques brilliantly executed. They were stories well told and emotions deeply expressed.

In a world where any and all things are possible, it was surprising that narrative story-like images seemed to dominate this year's entry pool. In a way it felt as if I were selecting films for a festival rather than prints for an exhibition, and that all my selections had to be made based on viewing just one single frame from each film. The parallels with film and print were obvious to me not just in the subject matter but also in the lighting techniques, perspective, and point of view of many of the entries. Surrealism, German expressionism, film noir, Italian neo-realism, magic realism, and photography in general were and apparently still are big influences on how we view and represent the human experience in printmaking, and maybe even in art in general.

All the entries both confirm and emphasize that printmaking is the missing link between the so-called fine arts, i.e. painting, drawing, and sculpture, and commercial or graphic arts, i.e. photography, film, type, and illustration. Perhaps that's what pop art is, too. And if you agree with that then Andy Warhol, arguably the most famous printmaker of the 20th century, must have been Moses. We can blame or thank Andy for taking printmaking to new heights, at least in the marketplace. But the number of print editions he left behind dwarfs the number of technical innovations he achieved. And it's technical innovation that, in my opinion, makes real winners and really moves a medium forward.

With so many entries moving in the direction of storytelling, all or any entries slightly less representational or narrative stood out most. They, more often than not, reflected popular movements in western or European abstraction, and a clear understanding of art history, while at the same time (pursued or not) offered the greatest possibility for the employment of innovative techniques. And new techniques, not just in storytelling but in image execution, in my opinion, is what it should really be all about. I recognize that this is not any easy task. But think about the differences between classical music and jazz. Ask yourself how swing became bebop, and maybe you will get closer to an answer. Mastering existing techniques and practices in any art form is just the beginning.

Willie Cole