

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54937/ssf.2022.21.2.100-105>

Terminologické východiská v nomenklatúre vnímania grafického média a štruktúry hodnotenia grafického listu

Terminological Background in the Nomenclature of Perception of the Graphic Medium and the Structure of the Evaluation of the Graphic Letter

Martin Ševčovič

Abstract

The paper focuses on the content of selected definitions from the field of graphic media, which set the stage for a better understanding of the process of making an impression. The aim is to set the stage for revealing the structure in the evaluation of a graphic letter created using selected graphic techniques, focusing on the constitutive techniques we use in the educational process.

Keywords: Printmaking. Graphic techniques. Matrix. Graphic letter. Evaluation.

To begin with, it is necessary to define what we mean by graphics. Böhmerová writes about an important factor that has to be fulfilled in order to be able to talk about printmaking in its full sense: *"The representation of a subject in such a material from which a certain number of prints can be purposefully made - graphic letters, subsequently numbered and signed"* (Böhmerová, Jančár, 2007, p. 6). We can agree with this definition if we consider the so-called artistic printmaking, using technical and craft skills, the output of which is to be the aforementioned graphic letter, to which the author confesses by signing it and for better identification /important especially for collectors/ marked with numbers to make it clear in what order this graphic letter was printed. It is legitimate to ask, then, what can we consider unsigned prints that are part of objects, installations, or other media to be? Where is the fine line where we can speak of a graphic letter, or of graphics in general? Especially nowadays, when we often encounter terms like computer or computer graphics, or structural graphics? We can read about these in the literature as *"techniques expanding the possibilities of graphic creation by new aesthetic dimensions"* (Böhmerová, Jančár, 2007, p. 6). The Interpretive Dictionary of Painting, Printmaking and Restoration offers us the following definition: *"Printmaking is, from a technological point of view, a specific*

artistic discipline using one of the hand-crafted printing methods (techniques) for the realisation of a work and its reproduction. The actual artistic motif is first processed on a graphic plate - a matrix. The matrix is later applied with paint and the motif is printed from it onto paper (or other material), either by direct printing or by using some type of press" (Kubička, Zelinger, 2004, p. 79). The term printmaking comes from the Greek word "grafein", which means to draw. In a broader sense, the term means the transportation of seen or experienced forms into a system of lines, points and surfaces. In a narrower sense, it is the creative rethinking of the artist's free drawing by crafting it in the appropriate material, in order to create one or more prints. Printmaking is the conscious creation of points, lines and surfaces, in our case into a matrix, with the aim of creating an impression, or multiple impressions. Here we come to the heart of the issue and it is appropriate to ask questions. What is a matrix and what can it be? How can we enter or even exit the space it offers us in the creation of a form that bears the author's legacy? Perhaps the second question already subtly reveals the answer to the definition of the matrix by telling us about space. In the terminology of printmakers engaged in traditional craft printmaking techniques, the matrix is also referred to as a block or a graphic plate. The Interpretive Dictionary of Painting, Printmaking and Restoration defines a matrix as: *"a negative so-called mother print mould for casting or pressing, or various types of moulds made of a variety of suitable materials for casting letters and entire printing pages. In graphic arts, the term is used for a graphic plate that is being processed or is ready for printing"* (Kubička, Zelinger, 2004, p. 79).

For a better orientation in the issue, it is important to clarify the division of graphics as such. Because it was only in the 16th-17th century that it was set apart as an independent artistic discipline, thanks to the personalities who used its possibilities to create works (Kubička, Zelinger, 2004). For a long time, it was dependent on painting. In the past, its importance was mainly connected with the reproductive sphere. Especially with books, where it fulfilled a decorative and illustrative role (Krejča, 2010). That is why we refer to it as reproductive or utilitarian, which is nowadays to a greater extent mechanized. The object of our interest is mainly the so-called original, free or artistic graphics. In the unobtrusive publication *How to make linocut and other graphic techniques*, the author writes that *"we speak of original art printmaking only when the artist himself reproduces by printing his design from a matrix made by his own hands"* (Emler, Kotrba, 1964, p. 7). This statement is overall accurate, except that one should be aware of the fact that it is not always the artist himself who prints the entire edition, but usually he entrusts the finished graphic plate to the printer. The latter prints the required number of graphic letters, which are considered to be originals. They are originals thanks to the process of ink application and subsequent printing, where small differences arise. Therefore, we can safely say that no single print is exactly the same as another apparently identical print. The important aspect

is that the author himself modifies the matrix - the graphic plate. He uses various processes, so-called graphic techniques, to modify it.

Nowadays, the set of graphics does not only include the results that preceded the use of individual graphic techniques, but this dimension has also been extended to other stimuli that operate on the principle of imprint. In our opinion, it is the imprint that connects and defines the set of graphics. It is not bound by form, be it artisanal, electronic, or other, experimental.

Although graphic techniques have been used in the past mainly for utilitarian reasons. It did not take long before they began to be applied to the creation of free works of art (Zápalková, 2003). Woodcut is considered to be the oldest technique. Due to the influence of development and the needs of society, other techniques were added. Nowadays, we can say that traditional printmaking techniques have been completely transferred to the sphere of free visual art by the improvement of new image reproducing technologies. They serve as a medium through which the artist conveys his ideas to the audience. It follows that the role of graphic techniques has not changed, only the form and, above all, the content that the author puts into the graphic letters. As Michálek notes, *"graphics can be called artistic designs and realizations that use graphic means. Graphic means, however, are understood not only as an image, but also as text or other elements of visual communication. Highlighting the internationality of the word graphic, we can state that there are significant differences in the way this word is viewed, causing some confusion. Based on this fact, contemporary publications often distinguish not only between free and utilitarian graphics, but also its other shades of meaning, as we can see, for example, in the name of one Belgian museum of graphics, as the Museum of Graphic and Printed Image"* (Michálek, 2016, p. 8). Another feature of graphic is the print form i.e. the matrix. The importance of the matrix is expressed by Brun by stating that *"the essence of graphic art is the existence of the matrix, in its myriad modifications, and its projection in a certain final form"* (Benca et al., 2011, p. 29). The above definitions might help art educators to better understand what all we include in the subject area, on what basis we can afford to claim it, and how the medium itself has been able to transform itself into different forms. A claim we share for the definition of graphic is: *"Graphic is a preferentially named field whose signifier is the imprint and multiplication of the work with the supporting element of the matrix"* (Benca et al., 2011, p. 32). The very first statement suggests that we do not nowadays speak of graphic as merely the art of printing, which was rather based on the assumption of the craftsmanship of particular techniques, but rather we are looking for the signifying features of graphic, on the basis of which we are able to include, whichever, works in the field of the graphic medium. These are the definitions of the *"actual form-expressive categories of the medium of printmaking"* (Benca et al., 2011, p. 24), as defined by the art theorist Alena Vrbanová, a long-term researcher of the development of graphic in Slovakia. The first is a definition grasping the set of classical graphic techniques as we

understand it today after its transformation over several centuries. *"Graphic based on classical techniques - an autonomous art form based on the author's creation and processing of a matrix using various techniques ranging from drawing, painting, through traditional intaglio or intaglio techniques, to the creation of an author's electronic "immaterial" matrix, from which the author subsequently mechanically prints or manually prints multiples - author's copies of the original work"* (Benca et al., 2011, p. 24). In this set we include all technological processes that have evolved over centuries to reproduce the content embedded in the matrix and subsequently printed, mostly on paper. We divide them mainly according to the printing method, realized by hand, into gravure, surface printing, surface printing and screen printing. In gravure printing, the matrix is usually a metal plate, which the printmaker processes as required by graphic techniques. These are divided into linear and flatbed. Or into dry, i.e. chemical, and wet, i.e. mechanical, it depends on whether an etching agent is used. The best known are dry needle, engravings (linear, dry - mechanical technique), mezzotint (flat, dry - mechanical technique), line etching (linear, wet - chemical technique), grain etching - aquatint (flat, wet - chemical technique). Techniques printed from above are usually designated according to the material in which the matrix is created (woodcut, xylography - woodcut, linocut, linocut, stone engraving, cement engraving...). Printing from the surface works on the principle of water and grease repulsion. A special kind of limestone serves as a matrix, which is why this technique is called lithography or stone printing. Screen printing is also referred to as screen printing or serigraphy, or screen printing. Since the middle of the last century, thanks to the development of technology, offset printing (printing with the help of rollers) has been used in the commercial sphere for printing. This vast array of different technological processes, which has evolved in parallel with the needs of society and new technological and material possibilities, has been developed with the sole aim of reproducing text and images. The art historian William Ivins aptly summarized this entire phase of graphic's development as follows: *"Without graphics, we would have little of our modern sciences, technologies, archaeologies, and ethnologies today-for they all depend on information conveyed through precisely repeatable visual or pictorial claims."* (Sturken, Cartwright, 2009, p. 198).

The subject of our interest from this structured set are the constitutive printing techniques and processes that are most often used in the field of free graphic and serve as a basis for teaching this medium in schools. The importance of their inclusion in the educational process is crucial, as the way of thinking when working with graphic techniques is different than with other artistic media. The knowledge and skills from them have to go through procedures whose synergy leads to an imprint in the form of a graphic letter. We will deliberately deal only with the form of the print on paper with the necessary requisites required of it. Thus, the set of qualities and technological skills towards which the author naturally tends in order to be able to evaluate his result positively. The evaluation of the output in the form of a graphic

letter, with emphasis on its requisites, can be included among the basic competencies expected of an art educator after the first stage of his/her studies in the art education program. To bring the issue closer, we will mention three basic areas of assessment from the results of which we will get an overall view of the output. The first area of assessment is the choice of graphic technique to achieve the desired final effect. The second area is the evaluation of the achieved level of technological (craft) mastery of the chosen graphic technique for the realization of the image. The third area is the artistic treatment of the chosen issue. The fourth is the selection and mastery of the chosen printing method. The fifth stage is the final evaluation of the submitted graphic letter after the process of signing or possible retouching.

Choosing the right graphic technique is a key factor that determines the whole process. The right choice is preceded by an intention, usually in the form of an artistic proposal or an idea of the result of the imprint. The choice is naturally limited by the possibilities of technological equipment, but mainly by the ability to implement the chosen technique. If the technological possibilities narrow down the choice of graphic technique, we also adapt our ideas of the result, which we must be able to fit into the range of possibilities of the chosen technique. The richer our craftsmanship in the medium, the freer we can move within the possibilities of realising our ideas of the result. In an educational process that focuses on the constitutive knowledge of the printmaking medium, the range of choices is usually narrowed down to the two basic principles of printing, namely printing from the top, or the more demanding intaglio printing. Other printing principles require more advanced knowledge and mastered craft skills, but especially the full technological capabilities of the graphic workshop equipment. The evaluation of the achieved level of technological (craft) mastery of the chosen graphic technique for image realization consists in the ability to compare the levels of the realized relief matrix. Each single technique requires the achievement of the necessary minimum mental and craft level for mastering them, in order to be able to start the process towards the creation of an imprint. The whole process is very complex and requires the evaluator to have the necessary level of knowledge in the area being evaluated. By including a number of graphic techniques in the aforementioned set, it is necessary to be familiar with the process of their implementation and to be able to point out specific possible shortcomings already during the teaching process. The evaluation of the technological mastery of the graphic board implementation is also closely related to the third area of evaluation, which is the artistic processing of the planned design using the selected technique in the form of relief in the matrix. For the level of assessment in this area, the general knowledge in the field of artistic media, referring to the mastery of the issues of composition, working with light and elementary means of artistic expression, which are point, line and surface, are key. The assessment area focusing on the selection and mastery of the chosen printing method follows issues related to the application of ink, setting up

the printing equipment (press), selecting and preparing paper for printing, placing the matrix in the paper format and more. It is a key area, as if the process failed, we would not be able to evaluate the previous areas. When it is successfully implemented, the print is created, in our case in the form of a graphic letter, which requires further processing depending on the choice of technique. Drying, stretching, cleaning, trimming, retouching, signing. The signing authorization is the last stage of the realization of the print, which is especially important for collectors, in our case it serves as a confirmation of the author with the acknowledgement of the fulfilment of his original ideas through the graphic techniques and the printing process. Which can also be considered as the completion of all the processes of its realization and thus an agreement to legitimately start the evaluation process of the presented result.

Bibliography

- BENCA, I. et al. 2011. Trans/media space of graphics, Assimilation vs. Original. 1st ed. Banská Bystrica : FVU AVU. ISBN 978-80-89078-88-2.
- BÖHMEROVÁ, Z., JANČÁR, I. 2007. Slovak Graphic Art of the 20th Century. Bratislava : GMB and Roman Fečík. ISBN 978-80-88762-90-4.
- EMLER, F., KOTRBA, E. 1964. How to do linocut and other graphic techniques. Praha : Mladá fronta. 23-007-64 14-5.
- KUBIČKA, R., ZELINGER, J. 2004. Interpretive dictionary of painting, printmaking and restoration. 1st ed. Prague : Grada Publishing, a.s. ISBN 80-247-9046-7.
- KREJČA, A. 2010. Graphics : Art techniques. Praha : AVENTINUM. ISBN 978-80-7442-003-0.
- MICHÁLEK, O. 2016. The Magic of Imprinting, Graphic Techniques and Printing Technologies. Barrister & Principal, 1st ed. Brno. ISBN 978-80-74851-098-1.
- STURKEN, M., CARTWRIGHT, L. 2009. Studies in Visual Culture, Prague : Portál, s. r. o. ISBN 978-80-7367-556-1.
- ZÁPALKOVÁ, H. 2003. The art of Graphic : Graphic techniques over six centuries. Olomouc : Olomouc Museum of Art. ISBN 80-85227-54-1, 71.

The text of the paper was written within the project KEGA 003UK-4/2020 Evaluation in Art Education.

Mgr. Martin Ševčovič, ArtD.

Department of Art Education

Comenius University in Bratislava, Faculty of Education

Račianska 39, 813 34 Bratislava

sevcovic@fedu.uniba.sk