

Printmaking in Ireland

Printmaking, as an art form full of potential for experimentation (as the Surrealists or the German Expressionists proved), was late arriving in Ireland. Ireland was primarily an agricultural country and Dublin was not a cosmopolitan centre of culture compared to London, Paris or Berlin. Printmaking was not taught in art colleges. It was purely a reproductive medium with only isolated examples of artists creating original prints. In 1960, Graphic Studio Dublin, the first open access printmaking workshop, was founded by artists Patrick Hickey, Liam Miller, Leslie MacWeeney, Elizabeth Rivers and Anne Yeats. They brought back technical knowledge and passion for traditional printmaking from Italy and France at a time when printmaking was dying as a trade and being replaced by technological advances. Even worse, there was essentially no market in Ireland for the art of contemporary printmakers.

In Italy, France, Germany and England today there are traditional print workshops that continue to edition and publish original prints for invited artists. You might still meet a master printmaker who prepared Picasso's sugarlift solutions. In Ireland, Stoney Road Press is the only print workshop with the sole purpose of producing original print portfolios for artists. Every other print studio in Ireland is an artist led organisation for printmakers who are primarily their own technicians. The Graphic Studio Dublin, uniquely for an open access workshop, also has a highly regarded in-house editioning programme for invited artists.

Each of Ireland's main cities has an art college with a printmaking department. Graduates of these colleges in Belfast, Cork, Dublin, Galway and Limerick all have printmaking workshops available to them on their doorsteps. Dublin City is the home of Graphic Studio Dublin and the Black Church Print Studio. These workshops are connected to all of the main print organisations in the country via a project known as the National Print Studio Network. The main objective is to share information amongst printmakers around Ireland. There is also a Members' Access Programme enabling free access to another workshop's facilities for a week. The National Print Studio Network includes: Belfast Print Workshop, Cork Printmakers, Leinster Print Studio, Limerick Printmakers, Lorg Printmakers, Seacourt Print Workshop, Courtyard Printmakers.

Many of the print studios regularly provide members with opportunities to exhibit their work, publicizing international print fairs and biennials while also initiating group exhibitions in collaboration with cultural institutions. There are two exceptional galleries in Dublin dedicated to selling and exhibiting prints and most of the print workshops spread across the country also have a gallery space.

In order to help and encourage printmaking graduates to carry on with their careers as artists the majority of the afore mentioned workshops select a graduate from their local art colleges each year, awarding them with introductory memberships of their print studios.

Print workshops and the art of printmaking in Ireland today are thriving. There is a constant battle by printmaking departments for traditional methods to be maintained in art colleges since multi-media dominates the Arts. However printmaking graduates regularly crossover between the two rather than fully rejecting traditional printing methods.

By Maev Lenaghan 27th feb 2011