

How to hide Georgi in a Linocut

It was in January 2015 when Georgi and I visited the "Basel School of Design", Switzerland, a very renowned institution, existing in different forms and appellations since the year 1796. Our visit was on the occasion of an invitation from Linda, an artist and teacher of the school. She had offered to show us the printing-workshop.

The fabulous equipment of the printing-workshop and the the wide range of options provided for the students were really impressive. And because I love coloured Japanese woodblock prints in particular those made by Utamaro and Hokusai, I put a supposedly foxy question: if there are even lessons in Japanese woodcutting, too? The answer: yes, of course. Wow!

At this point: Dear Linda, thank you so much for the interesting and instructive guided tour through the printing workshop of the "Basel School of Design"!

Well, Georgi and I were a kind of tourists, so we took - like tourists usually do - photos for nostalgic memories. The result was, among others, a photo that would get some importance for me later.

Inspired by our visit to the printing workshop and anticipating the upcoming Mini Print 2015 in Sofia, at which I had planned to take part, I read a book called "Werkstatt kreative Drucktechniken", written by Sonja Kägi, a Swiss artist. In this book you find all possible printing techniques, be it potato-print or serigraphy.



After having studied the book thoroughly, I chose linocut, because this technique seemed to be manageable, feasible and financially affordable. Well, as a result I bought all what was needed and finally looked proudly on all the equipment lying before me. But, alas, something was missing! Something very important, not to say decisive: the subject!

Do you know the feeling, when you are high-motivated to draw a picture, sitting before a white sheet of paper, chewing on one end of your pencil and having no idea what to draw? This was, how I felt at this time. Fortunately I remembered the tourist-photo of Georgi standing in front of the "Basel School of Design", beside him the "Bausteinsäule", built by Hans Arp in the year 1961.

There it was - my subject! But then the real problems started. I suppose, you all know the difficulty to transform the chosen subject into an artwork?

I began with the column, because of its clear geometric forms. Having chosen a linocut block in A5-format (14.8 x 21.0 cm), I had to enlarge the photo accordingly, easily done with my "Compy" (that's the pet-name of my beloved computer); then screen-shooting, cutting out the column with the 'scissors' of a special software and making a hardcopy of the image. The print was transferred on the surface of the lino block by carbon-paper without any problems.

The trial to do so likewise with the façade of the school failed miserably. The façade was definitely too detailed to be transferred by carbon-paper and furthermore there would be no glimmer of hope to master the cutting, even, if the transfer would succeed. I reluctantly renounced on the background!

Next I wanted to integrate Georgi into the linocut. The proportions between column and Georgi were changed generously to his advantage (I made him greater - photographically only, of course).

Now, where should I place Georgi in the linocut? There was a larger space on the left side of the column, but not large enough to let Georgi stand beside the column. So he had to be partially hidden behind it.

A characteristic element contained in the photo, which I necessarily wanted to be seen on the lino print, were the documents Georgi held in his hand. But he held the papers in his right hand (from the view of a person looking on the image), so that they would be hidden behind the column!

The solution of this problem was a kind of "poor-people-digital-artwork". Georgi's photo was placed on a PowerPoint-slide where it was flipped horizontally, so the papers were now on the left side of him and in particular on the left side of the column. I used carbon-paper again to transfer the print of my PowerPoint-manipulation onto the lino block.

The preparations were finished, the time for cutting had come and - from now on I experienced a time of unspeakable frustration, making all the mistakes you can make when working on a linocut: destroying narrow ridges, digging to deep etc. - well, you know all that yourselves. But the worst thing was, that my index finger became sore from pressing down the cutting tool!

Finally, cutting was done and I could take an "épreuve artiste" using a pastry roller. Well, technically this was relatively easy and I must commit that I was a little bit proud of my work - but it was not really satisfactory. I sorely missed the planned background, I had to renounce on, because of the above mentioned difficulties - the façade of the school.

So I had the idea to combine digital printing and linoprint. The façade could be printed on a paper and the lino onto the print on the paper. The problem was solved - I thought! Yes, but this procedure only worked with the whole photo! And Georgi with the column were on it, too.

But we are creative, we artists, aren't we? It was no 'must' that the whole façade was depicted. I took another photo which showed more of the façade. But the column and Georgi remained.



Another solution was needed and the solution was to cover the column, using "poor-people-digital-artwork" again. At first the photo was imported into PowerPoint, where it had to be adapted to an A5-size to be congruent with the size of the lino block. Then the column had to be covered in a way that made her size correspond with the column on the lino. You understand, what I mean? I needed an empty area on which the lino-column could be printed on. That was not easy, believe me!

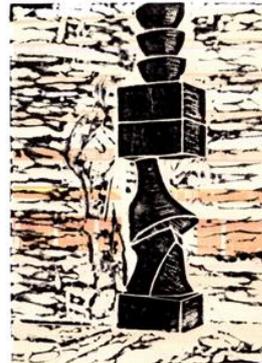
The image-editing tool in PowerPoint made it possible to give the so manipulated photo different colors and so I printed my background in orange, blue, green and shades of gray (not 50!). The next step was to print the linocut exactly and congruent on the manipulated façade-printout, again using my pastry-role.

It was a very exciting moment, when I withdrew the first print from the lino block.... But - All's well that ends well!

The other prints were successful, too, and finally I had my contribution ready for Sofia - surely no masterpiece, but analogous to what Ralph Waldo Emerson once said "life is a journey, not a destination", for me the process was more important than the result. Or to say it more simply: I had really much fun - except the sore index finger, of course.

Here are the results of my process. The first three prints went to Sofia, the green one stayed at home, because I failed to produce equal greens for the background, the façade, and the parts covering

Georgi and the column. But in the sense of this essay it may be interesting to see the difficult artisanal aspect I described above.



Epilogue:

Some time after the opening of the Miniprint-exhibition I asked Georgi, if he had discovered himself on the linoprint, but he didn't. So I marked him with a highlighter.

And here he is: - tadaaa! - Georgi hidden in my first linocut! 😊

Wolfgang Liebelt, Switzerland

