

Printmaker's Diary

Professor Jan Petterson, Head of Print at Oslo National Academy of the Arts on a series of trips researching historical print archives

For the past 25 years, I have researched old photomechanical processes where my main focus has been photogravure or heliogravure on copper.

Paris, the Chalcographie du Louvre: Since 1797, the Intaglio Print Studio at Louvre has preserved around 15,000 plates consisting of different types of engravings including line etchings, burin engraving, aquatints, photo-etching and heliogravures. In their collection are 837 copperplate engravings of the description of Egypt commissioned by Napoleon and published in 10 volumes between 1809-1829. Their large collection of plates continues to grow through new acquisitions, donations and work by contemporary artist who visit. The print team at the Louvre intaglio print studio has expert knowledge and carries out in-depth research into different types of inks needed to match previously printed plates. Their specialty is different types of blacks, ranging from warm to cool and transparent to tinted inks. This knowledge allows them to produce these historical prints. My visit here was focused on a discussion around the photogravure /heliogravure media how it is named and perceived in different forums of discussion such as in books, on the Internet and in the realm of printmaking. As well as an in-depth conversation on papers, inks, felts, oils, varnishes and wiping materials and printing of plates.

Atelier-Musée Imprimerie (AMI) at Malesherbes: The museum takes you through the history of printing all the way from the invention of movable type up to the digital revolution. It is an impressive sight to walk into the 5,000m² museum, filled with objects relating to the concept of print. There is everything from a copy of Gutenberg's wooden press to the start of digital technology. They run workshops for making paper, marbling, traditional type-setting and book binding. There are several machines that have been restored and are fully operational for printing. With more than 100 machines on display, it is a must see for anyone who is interested in the history of the print and its machines.

Musée Arts et Metiers Paris: A museum for the preservation of inventions and technical pioneering. Walking through the many rooms of the collection there I arrived at the room for photography, film and print and discovered that they actually had the cradle of the French development of photomechanical process there.

London, St Bride Foundation Library: The St Bride Foundation was set up in 1891 to serve the print and publishing studios that were beginning to grow rapidly on Fleet Street. Over more than a century it has established itself as an extremely important archive concerning graphic design, printing and publishing. The library is without doubt the largest concerning the concept of print in the world. It has over 100,000 items. My visit was to their reading room which is open twice a month or by appointment.

All information collected at these archives have been put into different actions, such as in publications, seminars, workshops, lectures or in-person discussions.

Jan Petterson convened the seminar Printmaking in the Expanded Field:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL-rUoNwZQ25e9ErbOM4xGwsDV3QdtLDt9>

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Diarist Jan Pettersson recommends other possibilities:

With the possibilities of the Internet, we can now also dive into and buy books from various sources, such as those removed from library collections, second-hand bookstores and privately-owned books which have now surfaced on the free market on websites such as Amazon and Ebay. These two editions of a book which I recently acquired of which I consider of great importance: Photogravure A text book on the Machine and Hand -Printed Process By H.Mills Cartwright 1st & 2nd edition, 1930 & 1939. Simply by comparing the content pages of the two books you can see the developments in the relatively short period of time. I have gone through the books thoroughly for my research for relevant information that can be transferred and re-worked in the contemporary setting of my research. Resources such as these allow the constant recycling of history to continue.