

Imprint 2011

I am confident that I speak on behalf of the jury, that it has been both an honour and a privilege to be invited to be involved in this, the second Kulisiewicz International Graphic Arts Triennial in Warsaw. As a jury, we brought a range of experience from curatorial practice, academia and practice as artist/printmakers to the task of selecting the prize-winners. It is always difficult to make judgements about fellow artists and as a jury we took this responsibility very seriously. It is certainly problematic making comparative judgements about works that are so varied in scale, medium, intention and visual language but we were greatly helped by the format of the triennial, which allowed artists to submit up to five works. This provided artists a 'platform', enabling them to present either a group of singular related works or a multipart work where a single idea is expressed through a number of elements, i.e. in the form of a diptych. We also had the triennial's overall theme of Metropolis to consider and were clear that the interpretation of this should be one of the determining factors in our selection.

Deborah Wye, the now retired curator of prints at the Museum of Modern Art in New York wrote that *Printmaking is unusual as an art form in that technique and process are almost always mentioned when it is discussed.*¹ This was certainly the case for us. Technique and process are ways through which the viewer can enter an artist's thoughts and begin to understand how the work has evolved. But no matter how important technique and process are, they are a means and not an end. The important questions I would suggest are, how does the technique and process serve the expression of the artist's intention and do they compliment and enrich the idea? Furthermore, as with experiencing any artwork, is the image memorable, does it print itself on the viewer's memory and is there a synthesis between idea, medium and execution?

In terms of the process of selection, we were presented with artworks by 170 artists that had been selected from the initial submission of almost 400. It was necessary for us to narrow down this field to a shortlist of approximately 40 artists in order that we could view them all together and make comparisons. We were allowed as much time as required and gradually, through a process of an open ballot whereby each juror was able to secure any of the works to go forward into the next stage of selection, the number of artists was reduced until we had a shortlist of 40.

Once again we used a process of an open ballot to then reduce the number of artists down to a final 20. We then discussed each in turn, basing our judgement on three criteria, the manner in which the artist had approached the theme of the triennial, the quality of the technique and how appropriate to the ideas expressed and the final impact of the artwork. It is often assumed that viewing art is a subjective process, but what became very clear was the broad consensus as we moved through the process, getting closer to our final decisions.

As we discussed the strengths of each of the shortlisted artists and it became very clear that there was unanimous support for certain works and from these we finally selected our prize-

winners. The works of these artists reflected the flavour of the whole submission both in the Triennial's international character with prize-winners from Austria, Japan, Hungary, and Poland as well as representing traditional processes alongside digital and, in the selection of a video piece, recognising that graphic art can be seen beyond the static image printed on paper. (In order to do this we decided to change the awards, offering four prizes instead of three as allowed in the Triennial regulations)

Our first prize-winner, Krzysztof Szymanowicz was unanimously chosen by the jury for his two commanding linocuts. These works seem to take the theme of the Metropolis into the realm of the individual, the urban landscape expressed through the multitude of objects and things that we connect or consume. The architecture of these prints also suggested the city, with the grid as its organising principle, the structure that shapes the way we live as communities. The execution of these prints was very fine and assured, the drawing both delicate and sophisticated, a not insignificant achievement when using such a simple material as linoleum.

Our second prize-winner Arpad Doradics provided a direct contrast both in terms of imagery and process. These digital prints, which took early photographs as their starting point are in essence digital collages. But here, there was no attempt to disguise this layering of both time and technology, the drawn elements are clearly from a different time to the photographs and through this, we begin to sense how meanings change as time passes. There is an intense melancholy in these works, a feeling of trying to connect past lives with the present and the traumas that might lie between.

Printmaking is invariably a combination of ink and paper and while for many artists, the paper provides a neutral support, functioning as the material to receive the impression, for some artists, the paper itself is a very active ingredient. This approach was evidenced in the third prize-winner, Haruko Cho for her digitally printed images onto corrugated hand made paper.

There were a number of videos submitted to the triennial and as a jury we were open to view these works within the language of graphic arts and keen to reflect this in our awards. Stefanie Holler's video of escalators impressed us for its stark graphic quality. The looped image, a fixed frame of escalator steps endlessly moving upwards seemed like a metaphor for the modern city, a continuous motion where technology and engineering provides the heartbeat. While clearly referencing Fritz Laing's film *Metropolis*, it presented an interesting challenge in terms of determining printmaking's edge and a challenge that the jury wanted to support.

There was a very strong Polish submission to the Triennial and so it was welcomed that there were two additional prizes specifically for Polish artists. The Kulisiewicz Foundation Prize was awarded to Krzysztof Ąwiertniewski, for his series of large inkjet prints featuring facades punctuated by windows. They seemed to reflect an underlying anxiety that can be felt in the urban environment, a sense of the individual lost in the multitude. In these images of dozens of almost identical little windows, some complete with air-conditioning units, the artist represents lives struggling to survive and breath in the modern metropolis. The Mariusz Kazana Foundation Special Prize was awarded to Marcin BiaŁ,as, Poland for a set of beautiful etchings, which suggested both architectural drawings and sculptor's notebooks.

These prints reiterated the role of print as a drawing medium and if further evidence was needed, a clear example of how old technology can be used to present contemporary ideas.

On behalf of the jury I would like to thank Professor Agnieszka Cieslinska-Kawecka, curator of Imprint, Professor Piotr Smolnicki, Dean of the Faculty of Graphic Arts and the Deputy Rector, Professor Pawel Nowak for their kindness and hospitality and in making our task so enjoyable. I would also like to thank all the students and staff at the Academy of Fine Arts for all their assistance. I would finally like to thank all the members of the jury for their work and for making my role as Chairman so pleasurable.

Professor Paul Coldwell

ⁱ Wye,D.,(1996) *Thinking Print; Books to Billboards 1980-95*,New York,Harry N. Abrams, p36