

The Effect of Atelier 17 to Contemporary Art

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Abstract

20th century art movements in Paris and USA are important for printmaking processes and contemporary art. Furthermore printmaking ateliers are important for contemporary art. During the 20th century at Atelier 17 traditional and experimental techniques of printmaking with gravure that is guided by scientific approaches was used. Unlike the traditional workshops, Atelier 17 was a rather special case. Surrealist artist Stanley William Hayter, who was an English chemist, painter and printmaker, founded Atelier 17 in Paris. Atelier 17 transferred to New York then finally returned to France in 1950. As it is known in the last quarter of the 20th century, art was dynamic and rapidly changed with ateliers. The atelier is best know for many celebrity artists who worked there and were encouraged by Hayter's insistence that art need not be simply a method of reproduction but rather was a form of artistic creation. Atelier 17 artists wished to explore special techniques perfected with surrealist automatism and soon developed the technique to print multiple colors using only one plate.

Key Words: Atelier 17, Contemporary Art, Surrealism, Automatism, Stanley William Hayter and Printmaking

1. Introduction

As it is known printmaking and painting have always developed in a mutual relation to one another, throughout the ages (Araz,G.A.2006). Particularly, the printmaking atelier itself has been an important place for the development of printmaking and painting techniques. In there, the artists and technicians make printings from paintings, develop techniques in work, and often find new printing techniques during practice. With these experiences new works are affected and developed.

The mutual relationship between Printmaking and Painting was especially notable in the first half of the 19th century in the works of the Impressionist artists. The colorful printing techniques employed during this time affected the technological development and quickened its progress. The second half of the 19th century showed remarkable changes as well. The developments in the technology and industry led to an increase in printmaking, which in turn influenced contemporary printings during this time.

The 20th century was a time that saw many new art trends and vast changes in the history of art. For example; Art Nouveau, Symbolism, Expressionism, Surrealism and Dada showed up during that time. Through Dada, and then Surrealism, the experimental art and contemporary art emerged. Especially philosophy of Dadaist artists and their ateliers changed the art universe, which was for them the whole world. The reason of Dadaist artists' questioning and destruction of everything done before them was to show that source of art was life. Thus they were the forerunners of the idea that from breathing to creating a product, everything is art material. This groundbreaking approach found art practice with surrealist artists. Surrealists tried and developed many methods to expose creativity in art-life axis. Atelier 17 was the most important atelier that applied these methods. The pioneers of contemporary art came from this atelier.

2. The Universe of Surrealist Atelier 17

Atelier 17 come to fore with a rather special case and was different than the traditional workshops. Surrealist artist William Hayter founded the Atelier 17 in Paris at 1927. Hayter was an English chemist, painter and printmaker.

The Atelier 17 opened in New York at 1944 where it had three more homes, with extensions of a sort at Philadelphia, Chicago, and San Francisco; finally returned to France in 1950. Nowadays it continues with Atelier Contropuan name in Paris. The Atelier 17 is best known for the many celebrated artists who worked there.

Atelier 17 had a distinctive features for art training. In the first place the Atelier 17 used and trained old and new experimental techniques of gravure with scientific approaches thanks to Hayter's knowledge on chemistry. His main medium was gravure. All Atelier 17 artists sought to explore special techniques and they developed the technique to print multiple colors using only one plate. They get their effect from the incision of a groove on some resistant material. It included dry point and mezzotint, burn engraving, and all forms of etching.

The Atelier 17 printmaking method was Surrealist automatism. Mainly Surrealist artists worked there and they developed this method. The artists worked directly on the plate and were constantly seeking new experiences and techniques. Name of that method was simultaneous color printmaking. This etching technique involved several colors on the same plate (deep-bite etching look like relief sculpture), offers increased possibilities for experimentation and innovation (Hayter, 1975, p. 216). In addition, Hayter used screens to apply watering inks with oil inks on the etching plate, enabling him to print in various colors simultaneously (**Image 1**). He explored and taught others novel methods of color etching in which inks of contrasting viscosities were applied with rollers to an etched plate, where he explored chance effects and his fascination with waves (Hayter, 1981, p. 204). Hayter's theoretical writings on automatism and expressive abstraction of his own work were a formative influence on J.Pollock and others (**Image 2**).

Furthermore, Hayter's first book, *New Ways of Gravure* in 1949 becomes an indispensable text for printmakers and contemporary artists. Hayter encouraged a communal atmosphere at Atelier 17, where both emerging and established artists often worked side by side. His knowledge of intaglio techniques and his devotion to original printmaking attracted countless artists, from the famed Surrealist Joan Miro to the young Abstract Expressionist Jackson Pollock. In 1944 Pollock worked in Atelier 17 and through the method of automatism achieved some of the first dynamic and expressive compositions that characterize the early mode of American Abstract Expressionism. A proof of one of the larger plates communicates the frenzy and pent-up emotion that so eloquently emerged in Pollock's drip painting. His six works, which he worked in New York's Atelier 17 in 1944-1945, posthumously published by his estate and Marlborough Galleries, New York.

Jackson Pollock, like many fellow artists living in French capital and elsewhere in Europe, was seeking refuge from the harsh realities of World War II. The Atelier 17 opened in New York at 1944. Its opening in USA had great importance for post 1950's art in American art. Considering the art methods and education Atelier 17 applied, it was no surprise that artists that were educated there were prominent artists in post 1950's art. This is an important gauge of Atelier 17's place in contemporary art. Alexander Calder, Marc Chagall, Willem de Kooning, Wilfredo Lam, Mauricio Lasansky, Andre Masson, Jackson Pollock and Pablo Picasso were some of the artists that worked at Atelier 17. These members of New York's Atelier 17 dominated the field of art in the U.S.A. throughout the 1950s. The touring exhibition Hayter and Atelier 17 organized in 1944 by MOMA, New York, attracted students to Atelier 17, including many artists who later ran printmaking departments in the expanded post-war American Universities. After World War II, Hayter returned to Paris in 1950 and founded again Paris Atelier 17 and during the 20th century, Atelier 17 was used traditional and experimental techniques of printmaking with gravure.

Conclusion

During the 20th century Atelier 17 affected art and experimental techniques of printmaking with gravure using scientific approaches. The Atelier 17 is a rather special case; unlike the traditional workshops because they believed that art creativity needs only creativity.

The art-life connection criticism that started with Dadaist artists, moved to conscious-subconscious and creative art applications research with Surrealist artists. Automatism, a method Surrealists use to bring out creativity became a method modern artist often used. Atelier 17 is an important representative of modern approach with its open door policy to various art applications and its support of those instead of traditional methods.

The surrealist Atelier 17 opened up new possibilities with their emphasis on tapping the unconscious. One Surrealist device for breaking free of the conscious mind was psychic automatism in which automatic gesture and improvisation gain free rein. It can be said that early mode that characterize American Abstract Expressionism was fed by Atelier 17's art understanding.

Acknowledgement

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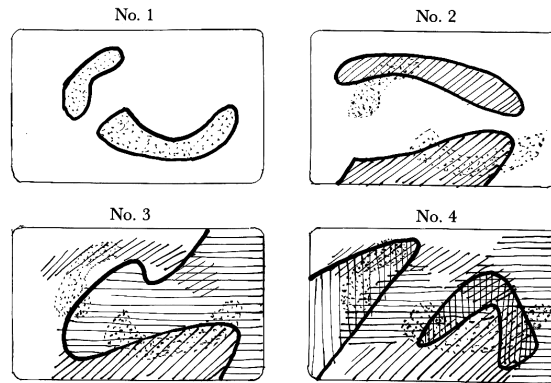


Image 1:, Using Method of multiple colors simultaneously at Atelier 17 (Hayter, 1981, p. 114)

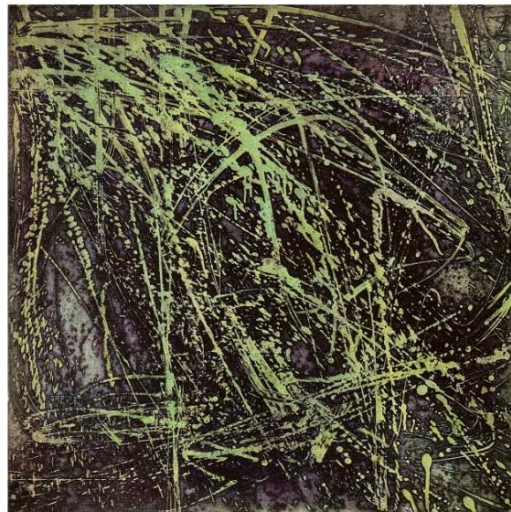


Image 2: Stanley William Hayter, 'Cascade' drain and multiply color painting on one plate, 1959 (Hayter, 1975, p. 139)



Image 3: Stanley William Hayter, 'Bouleau', Example of various color simultaneously printing, 1976 (Hayter, 1981, p. 145).

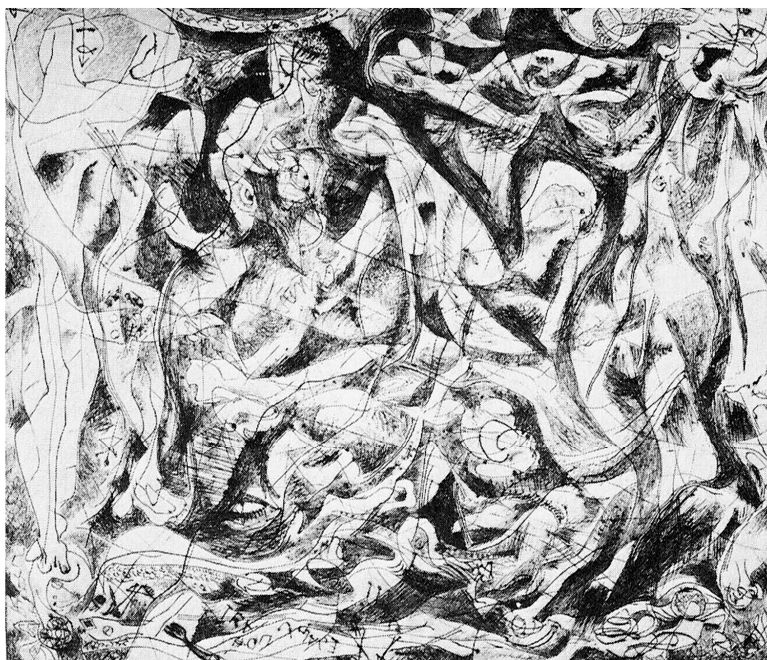


Image 4: Jackson Pollock, 'No Name 4', Gravure, 1945 (Castleman, 1988, p. 129).