

In Between Layers of Time and Impressions: An Interview with Meydad Eliyahu

This piece shares the perspectives of Meydad Eliyahu (born 1983), a printmaker working in Israel, and Merav Hamburger (born 1997), a curator interested in exploring traditional and innovative printmaking techniques and bringing the results to wider audiences.

Eliyahu is an artist, curator, and educator who lives and works in Jerusalem. His works have been featured in art projects and exhibitions in Israel and abroad. He often creates works that relate to communities and layers of cultural contexts.

Hamburger is the curator of the Jerusalem Print Workshop (JPW) and an MA student at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Hamburger's research focuses on American Pop Art prints.

MH: You are one of the few artists in Israel who has consistently worked in print throughout the years, whether in Israel or abroad. Even when you're not working in print—say you're painting in oil, or drawing—the print medium is still present in your work, either as background noise or as part of your artistic process. I would love it if you could share your background in print, how you discovered printmaking, and how it has affected your art throughout the years.

ME: Printmaking is an essential part of what I do in terms of the creative process.

I don't consider myself a printmaker in the traditional sense, but the way I think about art—even the way that art has the potential to be more public—is all part of the essence of the print medium. The first time I used the printing press was when my school, the Jerusalem Studio School, received a donation of an etching press. The school is a one-of-a-kind educational program that allows its students to focus on intensive training in drawing and painting from observation. So

when the etching press was brought to the studio, we took it very seriously. We started to create prints in monotype, a technique that I still love very much today.

For me, printing is connected to memory in the way that the printing plate serves as a means of remembering a motion or intention and then it transfers the impression onto another surface (in most cases, the paper). Memory and loss of memory are ideas that I have been contemplating in my works for many years. The first thing I did after completing my studies was study in an etching course in the Jerusalem Print Workshop, which was a kind of heaven for me.

After I participated in the etching course, I worked for two years inde-

pendently in the workshop alongside other printers and artists. It was a very good lesson on how to be part of an art scene. I worked with established artists and ate the workshop's famous lunches with both printers and artists. One of the beautiful things about printmaking—and I see many artists worldwide speaking about this—is the communal aspect of the print workshop. It is unique in the small Israeli art scene—the ability to find a new open space to communicate with other kinds of artists. In that sense, maybe this answers how printmaking is also connected to creative and social processes.

MH: In the past, we have discussed the process of printing, the work with metal plates and results which take time



Meydad Eliyahu, *Untitled from "Little scratches,"* 2012, sugar lift etching, 56 by 56 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

and are never immediate; could you expand on that as an artist? What about the print process is interesting to you?

ME: There is an element of time in printmaking—it takes time to plan and get feedback from your actions as an artist, you never see an immediate result, and that is a powerful lesson. Even when I work with oils, I learned from printmaking that I need to take time to process and observe from afar as I work. In printmaking the time aspect is built into the technique; even if you are etching with a very strong acid, you won't see it until you apply the ink and print it.

I find printmaking an alternative to the very immediate and rushed way of life we all live today. In social media, you have to react quickly and there is constant action. Printmaking has its own rhythm and time zone. It's a peaceful zone.

MH: I think in many ways that is part of a newer movements within print; we are no longer separating the final result from the process. The final print doesn't have to be an edition of one hundred prints like it used to be. The original functional significance of printmaking, intended for texts, newspapers, and posters, is changing. There has been a shift from the functional print to the printing of art for the sake of art. After many years, print has finally been rewarded with the status of "fine art."

We can take a step back and say maybe we're not doing this for functional reasons. We're doing it because we appreciate the process of printmaking, whether it be that time that you have to patiently wait while you leave something in the acid or the thorough understanding of the different effects of the wax.

When we were working as curators on the 2023 Print Festival in Jerusalem it was something that came up time and time again—that for artists who work in print in addition to other mediums, this process of taking the



Meydad Eliyahu, *Stella's Dream*, 2018, drypoint and embossing on paper, 38 by 56 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

time to think and other elements of printmaking would all of a sudden be relevant to the other mediums they were working in at the time.

ME: Yes, absolutely.

MH: Another element that you mentioned, and I think is very important when it comes to printmaking, is accessibility. The reason that you were able to learn printing was the result of a donation and stroke of luck in the Jeru-

salem Studio School. The Print Workshop offers a built-in community and access to heavy machinery and high-quality materials needed to print. The workshop in many ways democratizes printmaking, it becomes accessible in a way that never could be in one's own studio.

ME: I think for me working in the workshop was kind of a ceremony. The first time I was invited, in 2012, I felt like I was entering a community of established artists who were invited to work at the time. I think it may have been the first time the Jerusalem Print Workshop had invited such a young group of artists.

MH: Perhaps we'll take a moment just to expand on what that project was and how the Jerusalem Print Workshop works. The Jerusalem Print Workshop invites artists to work free of charge in the workshop. We invite artists who have no background in printmaking to educate and further the medium. At the end of their residency, we keep a large number of their prints and try to sell them and of course, pay the artists a commission. You were invited as part of an initiative to invest in younger artists in Jerusalem. I think this was very important at the time because it was artists who, first of all, didn't have access necessarily to the community and



Stencils in the artists' studio. Courtesy of Meydad Eliyahu.



Meydad Eliyahu, *Hybrid creature no. 2*, 2020, silk screen on paper, 76 by 56 cm. Courtesy of the artist.



Meydad Eliyahu, *Untitled* from the "Pendulum" series, 2024, monotype on paper, 56 by 76 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

to the materials that we discussed earlier, but it also was an opportunity to catch artists at a significant time in their lives, right after they finished school and right before they began to make their mark in the art world.

ME: The first series I printed in the workshop was a recreation of memories—mostly fictional memories that were deeply rooted in the village in which I grew up.

The series of sugar lift etchings, "Little Scratches," which I created in the Jerusalem Print Workshop in 2012, reflects those fictional memories. I started with specific recollections, some of them pleasant and others dark. As I revisited them while making the plates, they morphed into dream-like images.

In many ways, the medium and the subject were very connected. I was working mainly from memory, even though I had trained in a school that focused mainly on direct observation as

the center of the artistic process. I understood something about the old masters of printmaking—there is always a combination of a few strategies. It's very interesting to think how knowledge of printmaking was used for painting and drawing as well. Today we have Google Photos but for the great masters, prints could be a source of inspiration and imagery.

MH: I'll also add that historically when we look at printmaking, printmaking was relevant when the social hierarchy was changing in Europe, and all of a sudden you had a bourgeois upper middle class. People had money and they wanted to buy art, but they couldn't afford fine art, and that's where the prints became so relevant. Printmakers would copy famous works and sell them to the middle class. From this early stage, printmaking was already democratizing art.

I think this is a good segway for us

because printmaking used to be on many levels a copy of a different work, or like you said, a way to spread visual imagery. Today when we discussed prints with artists who come to work in the workshop, some of them didn't even want to make editions. Throughout the years, printmaking has changed drastically. It was interesting to discover that many of the invited artists were acting out of respect for the print. Print is valuable enough that it is worthy of one edition, which was an interesting change of perspective.

ME: When we are talking about the Israeli printmaking scene, I should mention that it's quite young; it's not based on very long traditions. The way in which Arik Kilemnik, the founder of the Jerusalem Print Workshop, presents prints is connected to more than just imagery. It is connected to the Hebrew text and printed words. The JPW was always the center for traditional print-



Meydad Eliyahu, *Untitled from the "Pendulum" series*, 2024, monotype on paper, 56 by 76 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

ing techniques. Today there are some younger and alternative workshops as well.

MH: Could you share with us what you have been working on lately.

ME: A recent project is based on a group of stencils that I cut and created. The collection of stencils, made of used paper and copper pieces is already a kind of image-making with printmaking potential.

I have been constantly reprinting these stencils, creating different combinations of colors, textures, and layering. It fascinates me to see how the different

compositional balances and the reorganization of the images changes the ways one reads and understands it.

My research is to combine these different motifs, all connected to my identity and journeys into the same print. I want these prints to be able to hold a few different states of mind, a few different feelings. And so, for the first time in my body of work, images and inspirations are collected together from different times, places, and cultural contexts.

In the last few years, I started to piece together information about my family from my father's side, who was born in Cochin in South India. It's been a long and intense, far-reaching process. In 2018, I created a street art project, which traced and marked the remains of the Jewish community. I worked with images from the community's artifacts. One of the most interesting things was how different the images shifted between topics like poetry to the Torah ark and traditional Ketubot (Jewish marriage agreements). They were pieces of information that were hard to piece together, but slowly the original meaning resurfaced.

The last project I worked on in the JPW was in 2020. The curator Irena Gordon invited me to participate in an exhibition called "My Name is Red." Inspired by the book by Orhan Pamuk, the show was about how knowledge is preserved and how the common perspective is changing from West to East. I find it very relevant to my work. In my prints, I tried to put together pieces

that I found in archives about my heritage and identity.

In the silkscreen print series "Hybrid Creatures," I combined motifs from Kerala Jewish heritage. These motifs, which have mostly been forgotten, are put together in new ways. Sometimes the images felt like they could have come from Indian commercials and sometimes seemed to belong to the synagogues in Kerala. It was definitely a foreign aesthetic in the Israeli context.

Items in gold or bold pigments, carvings, and patterns were unpopular in Israel and were often considered primitive. The more I research I do into our cultural-geographical era in the Middle East and further East, the more I feel my art becomes rooted in the place and has a dialog with local cultures.

MH: How do you feel your work interacts with the geographical and social setting of Jerusalem?

ME: Being an artist in Israel, specifically in Jerusalem, has never been easy. Nevertheless, I found it very inspiring to work in such a diverse and complicated environment. Even in my studio, one window symbolically faces the industrial area of Talpior and the other window faces the Arab village of Beit Safafa. I always find myself in a few states of minds. A situation that with time I find a way deal with in life as well as in my own art.

MH: Thank you for sharing your work process with us. In such complicated it is a great comfort to know artists continue their important work!

MERAV HAMBURGER



Meydad Eliyahu, *The Builders*, 2024, monotype on paper, 450 x 76 cm. Courtesy of the artist.