

“We Print Zines!” – Letterpress Workshops

Confronting old and new media on the basis of publishing a zine.

Project overview

Letterpress workshops with the aim of designing and producing a paper zine – an amateur magazine-like publication. Every participant designs one page which, together with the pages of the other participants, is printed in a predefined amount of copies using letterpress equipment and other manual reproduction methods.

Each set of printed pages is sewn together to form a ready publication. In the next step it is digitized and published on the internet by means of free tools for distributing information (e.g. Scribd.com). During the workshops the participants get to know the basics of typography, theory of signs and history of communication and media to better understand the processes behind information exchange.

After the workshop the results of the students' work are presented on an exhibition and copies of the zine are distributed for a fixed price or through auctions.



Examples of hand-made zines from the USA.

Theoretical guidelines

The ultimate goal for the participants of the workshop is to try their strength in a public discourse both by means of traditional and new media and to gain empirical knowledge of the processes behind publishing information. The students not only get to know the traditional ways of mechanically reproducing information but also the contemporary techniques that stem directly from them. They can thus become acquainted with the evolution of mass communication from complicated, elitary technologies of local reach to user-friendly, accessible tools of global reach. The subject of the zine is chosen together with the students through open debate. The approach can be political, social and ecological as well as personal. The subject will be chosen keeping in mind that after publishing and distributing the zine its message gains a new level – it becomes an official statement of its authors.

A zine produced that way is a collection of the authors' statements and comments to reality. Through the collective character of the creation process and the open participation the zine is in itself an example of the democratization of media that contemporary societies undergo thanks to the development of new technologies and free access to information. It shows that the exchange and dissemination of information is with each day less elitary and more accessible.

On the artistic level, even though each zine is a collection of individual ideas, the overall visual level and consistency of the produced materials are looked after by the author of the workshops. He is also directly involved in the creative process composing his own part of the material together with the participants. The ultimate look of the result of each edition of the workshops will vary depending on the skills and ideas of the participants.



Technical details (will vary depending on venue and available technology)

Every zine will be produced manually on a flat letterpress. The texts are set by hand with wood and metal type and illustrations are produced by means of linocuts, stencils, transfers or other manual reproduction techniques. After finalizing the manual work the artworks are scanned or photographed to be distributed on the internet.

Every zine will be published under the creative commons license granting the right to redistribution by a third party with the exception of commercial use.

Equipment needed for the workshops:

- flat letterpress
- paper, ink
- sufficient amount of metal type
- linoleum, chisels
- heavy duty sewing machine
- scanner or digital camera

The workshops can be conducted during 2–3 weeks depending on the size of the group and on the teaching schedules of the institute. The first days are used to talk about zines and communication in general and during that time the theme is chosen and ideas and concepts for each page are developed. The second step is to start producing the illustrations. Once all illustrations are printed we proceed to working with letterpress and metal type. The ready material is bound using a sewing machine. A few copies of the works are left unbound – they are displayed on the exhibition that sums up the workshops.

The course of the workshop is documented and supported through a website that gathers useful materials, photographic documentation and the results of the work.

It is advisable to announce an open call for participation so that every person that joins the workshop is genuinely interested in the subject.

Past editions

The workshop has been conducted earlier this year in Warsaw at the Academy of Fine Arts. It was announced to students of the industrial design department who had little experience with manual printing techniques. The workshops lasted for 3 weeks and ended with an exhibition at the academy. The documentation of the process of the workshop, the results and the exhibition opening are all available on the website <http://drukujemyzin.blogspot.com>

Author

Wojtek Mejr was born in 1980 in Warsaw. Altogether he has spent 14 years abroad out of which ten years in Finland, three in Spain and one in Germany. He graduated with a BA degree in communication at the EVTEK Institute of Art and Design in Vantaa specialising in graphic design. After graduating he worked as a new media specialist at several companies in Madrid and Helsinki at the same time running his own commercial firm as a graphic designer. Since 2003 he has been involved in the Pixelache Festival of Electronic Art and Subcultures and since 2005 he's responsible of the festival's graphic design. At the moment he lives in Warsaw, Poland.

Executed projects:

Locating Helsinki (locatinghelsinki.wordpress.com), TypoTrip (typotrip.wordpress.com), Warszawa Gratis (www.warszawagratis.info), Drukujemy Zin! (drukujemyzin.blogspot.com)

Involved in projects: ClipKino (www.clipkino.info), Pixelache (www.pixelache.ac)

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