

Blooms & Beats Block Party:

REFLECTIONS ON PRESSURE PRINTING

Initial Observations:

On Public Engagement:

The public seemed interested in and curious about the process. Most people approached the tent asking first, "What is going on?", then "Why are we doing this?", and finally, "How do I do this?"

The colorful paper and inks as well as the bold shapes were effective in drawing people towards the tent. When there were less prints hanging on the clothes lines, we tended to have less people coming up to the tent for print.

Being situated at the end of the row seemed effective in drawing people into the event as a whole. After people learned that there were more things to do and a scavenger hunt with prizes, they were excited to take their "score card" down to other tents. This also speaks to the effectiveness of the scavenger hunt in engaging people.

Overall, people seemed proud of the work they created and excited to share their prints with others. There were at least two people that made prints specifically for someone else in their life. On the other hand, about 1/3 of the people that made prints, never came back to collect their prints. While they didn't take their prints with them, the prints will be a valuable part of the record of the event.

On Effectiveness of the Medium:

The process was easy enough for everyone to understand quickly. It made it easy for people to walk away with an artwork quickly and made it easy for anyone to facilitate the event. Both students that helped run the press were so clear in how they communicated the process.

People were most drawn to the music notes and the animals.

On Printing Process & Logistics:

Using Provisional Presses presented great benefits, but also significant challenges:

One of the challenges in the design process was successfully communicating the pressure printing process to students. Since the students hadn't had experience with the process or with using a letterpress, it made it difficult for them to understand the types of shapes that would work well and why. It also made it difficult for them to understand nuances of how the Provisional Press would be put together.

While the first press presented a lot of challenges, and needed significant proofing to level out, the second press worked fantastically. The students clearly learned a lot from constructing and testing the first press and successfully applied that knowledge to the second press.

We had way more materials than we needed.

Some people wanted to have just 2-3 shapes in their print, but the process works better when there are more shapes.

The wind blowing the paper away was a challenge, but the bright sun helped the prints dry faster (in less than 10 minutes).

The ghost prints presented a lot of challenges. Many of the ghost prints were not high-contrast and a lot of information was lost.

Critical Questions:

- What is the relationship between the prints and the architectural models? Could there be a way to use the prints to record people's ideas about the arrangement of models and the use of space? The function of the model (moving 3D pieces around a board) is very similar to the function of the prints (moving 2D pieces around a page). Could the teams work together to create a printing project that embraces that idea and works with the model team's goals?
- How could the shapes be used to more effectively connect people with their community? We initially chose shapes based on the mural, the theme (blooms & beats), and local animals (fish & turtles). Could those shapes be even more intentionally connected with the place? Could they be shapes inspired by the shops on the block?
- What information can we learn from the shapes chosen in the prints? Is there anything there that would be valuable to the community? If we were to refine our selection of shapes, would the information in these prints be more valuable?

Suggestions for Future Events:

To address the challenge of students' lack of exposure to pressure printing or letterpress, it could be interesting to make a visit to a letterpress shop during the design process. That way students could at least see a letterpress in process.

To address the excess of materials, we should more realistically plan for a MAXIMUM of one participant (2 prints) every five minutes. For a three-hour event, that would be a MAXIMUM of 60 participants (120 prints) per press. We would therefore need only one can of each color ink and one ream of paper.

To address the poor ghost prints... the ghost prints may have to be printed with dampened paper and a different (thicker) paper. This could easily be done by making a damp book the day before.

Experiment with other materials for the pressure printing. Especially things like string, textured fabric, stencils with details/patterns cut into them, etc. would be great to explore.

Personal Conclusions:

This experience helped me see the potential value of printmaking in both community engagement and placemaking.

Considering that I joined the team a month before the event and was only able to meet with the students in person twice, I am proud of the work we created. The students were receptive to the idea of pressure printing and learned the process quickly. We created something that visitors enjoyed and were excited to participate in. In the process, we gained a lot of valuable information about how we could improve the process in the future.

The process also leaves us with two valuable pieces to move forward with. First, the prints as a record of the event which can be bound into a book or some other type of presentation. Second, the Provisional Presses which can now be used for other events and courses. In addition to pressure prints, these presses can be used to print linocut, letterpress, woodcut, or alternative relief printing processes such as Lego prints.

Personally, this experience opened my eyes to the potential for printmaking in recording people's experiences, ideas, and feelings about a place. The variability of printmaking allows for the expression of multiple different realities from a discrete number of pieces. Of the prints created on May 3, no two prints are alike. Each print is different, just as each person's relationship with place is different. I am excited to explore these ideas in future prints and will look for opportunities to collaborate with other community events and organizations.