

Assignment 5 - Developing a series of four combination and experimental prints, supporting statement

The final series of prints explore the paradoxical relationship we have with our smart mobile and digital devices, and the way we consume information that is pushed at us continuously in an ever more targeted, tailored and personalised fashion.

Almost half of smartphone users spend more than 5-hours a day on their mobile device (Reference: www.counterpointresearch.com), and whilst I don't consider myself a heavy user, (no Facebook or Twitter), my daily usage based on data from the [Moment](#) app (an app that records how a phone is used), is 1-hour and 44-minutes or 11% of my waking life. Given these statistics and a wealth of other research, the way in which we use or misuse our digital devices is materially important to the quality of our lives.

The central premise of the prints is the idea that as our consumption of digital content increases, (I pick up my phone an average of 36-times a day), our ability to discern between serious and the trivial content is reduced to the point where we are almost totally desensitised to what we're looking at. This is not surprising given the volume of tailored tweets and posts that are thrust at us every time we look at our phones. Fake news, the echo chamber effect, (unless you take particular care, you'll end up sharing opinions and digital relationships with people that share the same or similar opinions to yourself), and the proliferation of unregulated content makes the situation much worse. Perhaps it's no coincidence that the world is becoming a more polarised place.

The prints are built on two layers. A background layer consisting of an image for a news story that was current at the point the prints were being made using news imagery as reference. The foreground layer is the image of a child's doll, with open welcoming arms and vacuous fixed grin; this is a metaphor for how we view, ignore, use, or dismiss this information.

The prints are all roughly A3 sized and combine several techniques. The foreground layer is always a woodcut printed in black and carefully registered against the white base paper. The background uses drypoint and a combination of chine collé and monoprint.

Most of the printing was done on the large press in Kew Print Studio in three sessions. The paper was the studio's bread and butter heavy cartridge paper and the inks were all from Intaglio and were mixed with Extender.

There were a number of technical challenges that needed to be overcome.

- All of the printing had to be done using dampened paper soaked for 8-minutes. This is because paper expands when wet and I needed to achieve fairly accurate registration between the drypoint layer which used a mask for the front woodcut layer to fill.
- The damp paper meant it was critical to get the pressure on the press correct when printing the woodcut. Even slightly too much pressure was enough to not only

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transfer the ink from the plywood plate, but also to emboss the paper. An effect that looked terrible.

- The way I used cross hatching on Print 1 was too random and didn't work. I modified this after looking carefully at the work of Albrecht Durer.
- I found getting the right balance between over-wiping the drypoint plate, resulting in a thin ghostlike print, and under-wiping, that resulted in a very heavy dark print difficult. In the end I decided to live with a bit of ink left of the plate which seemed to give a good balance.
- I chose the different print techniques in order to emphasise the difference between the two image layers. The realistic high fidelity 'news' layer was achieved using drypoint and this was contrasted against the courser more cartoon-like woodcut.

I experimented with adding further contrast by using colour in the background that was added using chine collé and monoprint. In hindsight I think printing in just black and white is enough.

The theme was first explored in my earlier commuter prints. I noticed how much smart devices are used by most people when they're commuting for most of the time.

My job is in the area of digital development, and I'm concerned that software designers and developers are not paying enough attention to the negative impact on their customers/users from the applications they produce. So, for me this is also an area of professional interest.

Overall, I feel pleased with the series. The composition of the images leaves some work for the viewer to do to interpret meaning, and I hope this causes them to reflect on the subject rather than viewing and dismissing the images.

I also think the combination of techniques works well to achieve their intended effect with the quality of the prints improving in the order in which they were created.