

A Producer's View on Reprinting Possibilities

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Speaker

Markus Müller, recom Art, Berlin

00:04 MARKUS MUELLER: Thanks you, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, for inviting me. I would like to invite you to explore a producer's view. For us, the photographic artwork on a wall is not original; is just one part of the original. The original is the sum of all, from the artist's authorized, materialized forms of the photograph. This means the negative or the original file, the test strips, the written idea, and even the artist's intention during the production, and all the compromises that had to be made in order to show the work. All these elements together constitute the original intention of the artist and make up the original. Producers of artworks often work in close collaboration and have the direct discussion with the artist about what they really want to achieve. We as producers know very well the difference between the artist's original idea and the produced final edition copies. Also we know that there are often many differences during the production of each of the editions, because of the development and the various factors that exist in the production process. Because of that, recom Art has an open view on what the original is. For us, any reprinted motive of a damaged edition copies are also part of the original work, if they fit to all other authorized copies. It is more the question of the quality of the reprinting and whether it is authorized by the artist or by someone who really knows the intention of the artworks, rather than the question of whether reprinted copies are originals. This view accepts the nature of photography that every single print is just an authorized copy of what the artist wants to show. Recom Art is very pleased to have the opportunity to replace damaged works due to the nature of working with photography. We are fully aware this is not meant, of course, with other types of artwork making, such as paintings, sculpture, and so on. I personally think that when objects get

damaged, get older, or experience any other changes, it is a part of a normal life process. To replace the photographs for a next generation should be also a part of the normal life process.

02:41: Some collectors often think that they don't want to collect photographic artworks because of the aging problem. From our experience, we have the feeling that the issues and damages of photographic artworks occur sooner more often through external influences than due to its inherent material characteristics. The bad handling of photographs is often the reason why we have an artwork in bad conditions. We think a lot of artworks have been wrongly stored, wrongly framed, and even wrongly produced. That is why recom Art has been working for many years on the idea of the best workflow for a proper production process. To save the knowledge, and therefore the possibilities to produce the same work again, we do three important things. First, preservation of the artist's intention; second, research on material combinations; and third, taking care of the production. These parts, which I will explain to you now in more detail, were usually not done during the last decades of photographic production. What is important for a reprinting topic is to change the way of the production of new works from now on.

04:03: Keeping the artist's idea of the effect of the image, often there's a discussion how the artwork has to look. The ideal would be that what the artwork actually exactly looked like when it was created or cleared by the artist. But how do we know [how] an artwork looked at its beginning? The obvious characteristics of an artwork, even if it's damaged, are easy to identify by an expert. This basic information are measurements, applied techniques, and materials. Much more difficult to identify is how the motive was supposed to look like. Colors, feeling, contrast cannot be described in words as detail, and it would be necessarily to gain an artist's intent in photographic reprint. The usual photographic documentation which some of the museums made is not helpful,

because of the fact that they have not measured any color of the original work, and also the color chart they used.

05:11: Reference scan. Ten years ago, recom Art created a reference scan as a novelty. The idea was to make a scan from the artwork with a [inaudible] scanner, without any reflections and any distortion of the motive. For different color-management techniques, we are able to get a file with the same color measurements as the original artwork. This reference file has no aging problems, is completely objective, and could be used for reprinting the artworks if the original printing process does not exist anymore. An essay about a reference scan published in 2015 in the magazine [inaudible] was translated and is available as a handout for you here. The basic documentation of the production and the reference scan together keeps the artist's intention alive, even if producer and artist is not available anymore.

06:21: Research of material combinations. Many companies, institutions, and also producers test their own products. Unfortunately, the results cannot often be trusted. On the one hand, the products are represented better than they actually are. On the other hand, the tests lack the testing of material combinations. Therefore, in 2017, we started to work with the Stuttgart Academy of Art and Design course Conservation of Works of Art on Paper, Archives and Library Materials on a research project on large-format prints. We have been gaining support through Professor Doctor Lena Hugler[sp?] and Doctor Uta Hennigers[sp?], and student Francisca Leidig[sp?], who is writing her bachelor's thesis about it. We prepared a handout with a short summary for you. In a first step, we have been testing all recom Art applied materials. In a second step, we have been testing combinations of applied materials, especially combinations of the mounting products of our company. These tests have brought us results about more stable material combinations. With this knowledge, we have been creating a proper production with the chance to exchange parts of the production that are not

suitable. Another part of the research project is the building in of an in-house testing department, as a part of our company. The idea is to test our applied material and check them to know if the products stay always the same. We will also then have the opportunity to test new materials and material combinations in advance.

08:17: Digression splicing. The splicing of photographic work is still the best possibility to create large format sizes. Other printing techniques, such as UV direct printing on plates, are not on an equal level with photographic prints, so we concentrate on further development of the splicing seams. This means that we investigated the problem of existing splice works, in order to combine more durable elements so that the splice seams do not change obviously in a very short period of time. Currently, we have two workflows for splicing that are successful. These created techniques undergo light and climate aging to make certain that the spliced seams last longer.

09:10: Taking care of the production. Why it is so important to take care. Let me give you some examples and insights. Today, artists combine a lot of new materials that were never used before, and we have no experience about their long-term stability and their handling. In the last few decades of producing photographic works in a large part of the production output of a lab was for advertising and not for art. The lab could afford to use fresh photo chemistries, fresh water, fresh products, because of the massive output. Nowadays, labs mainly produce only for artists. I'm often surprised by the prices of other labs. In my opinion and according to my experience, they are not made to cover the cost of a proper production. Young artists at the beginning of their career have to be penny wise. This leads to a dilemma in the production of those important early works of young artists. The production is often cheap and lacks quality and documentation. Some weeks ago, I got a list of restored artworks from a museum. As so often before, I was surprised that it did not say anything about the used printing techniques of artworks. A very simple but most helpful change should be a general

interconnection between the artist and the buyer of an artwork from now on, to receive a production sheet filled in by the producer. Information from producers about a production are very helpful for the reprinting of artworks. Our advice for all young artists, labs, and producers, whether they produce for themselves or others, is to take care of the production documentation, how the artwork is done, and to leave this documentation with the artwork, and also store it as a producer's place and in the artist's studio. Since the very beginning of recom Art, we have documented all of our printing and have archived all final files and test strips for us and our clients. While growing over the last years and finding dedicated employees, we also built a database for our own demands, that keeps all details of production. All information kept in our production database helps us to compare a reprint with an aged artwork. All results kept in our research database give us the chance to realize problems with materials and material combinations that could affect the artwork. Important for a lab is to produce always the same, which is not possible without a detailed documentation. A proper documentation is also necessary for research projects, to make results comparable. recom Art was the first lab in Germany that involved the digital world in its daily analog processes. We combine both worlds to create completely controllable workflows. Every day we control our processes and document our colors. Through twenty years of experience in color management, we match the same measured colors every day. This causes a lot of daily work; but we believe this is the only way of getting perfectly reprinted artworks. To take care of the production itself is nowadays much more important for labs that it was before.

13:14: These three parts of getting well-produced artworks were usually not done for the damaged works you have in your collections. To explain which possibilities we have to replace them is certainly not possible in this fifteen-minute speech. I would like to offer you to ask me everything you want to know afterwards or by email. One more thing. The answer to the question if there is any software for getting original color back

from a scanned color-shifted motive will always be no. But you always have the chance to replace a damaged artwork, and you should use it. Thank you. [applause]