

# DISPLACEMENT, PAPER AND ENAMEL WITHIN A PRINT BASED PRACTICE

Marta Bełkot

## ABSTRACT

The concept of *displacement* and its consequences are permanently present in my practice, either in the narratives explored in light of the personal stories that have a wider psychological impact, or in the archaeological approach to tame raw, organic materials through the reconstitution of technological, 19th-century procedures considered obsolete and commercial. The approach to paper based on multiple experiments led to reconstructing feasible alternatives to the traditional techniques of obtaining images, including photographic and non-photographic processes. Revision of *gillotage*, reconstruction of lithographic drawing, painting and printing tools and working *in situ* directed the research into more immediate work with raw materials like resins, plasters, organic glues, and pigments. Preliminary tests of image development with *dichromate dusting* methods established satisfactory surfaces for traditional photo-enamel. In my PhD proposal, *displacement* meets with the obsolete techniques and the fusion of printmaking, photography, and glass as a haptic medium that corresponds to my heuristic approach.

The concepts of changeability, fluidity, and emotions form the sub-themes of my works. I target empathy, which often rocks one's position towards the participant. I become a part of what concerns and interests me. I believe that printmaking techniques can be used as a reflective form at any creative stage from the choice of content, combined with the chosen materials, to the quantity, variability and role of the prints. It is the phenomena of printmaking, such as image repeatability or its unique form, the presence, absence, or ephemerality of the matrix, the multilayer of the print itself and the processualism of image production that often manifests the changeability and fluidity. Parallel narratives occur when it is impossible to present one story. Printmaking allows me to explore these boundaries without limits and to comment on the

world as I see it. The combination of technological research and contemporary print-based creation can flourish in a unique artistic practice where I can move or displace myself between fields.



Figure 1



Figure 2

### Figure Titles and Information

Figure 1: Marta Bełkot, *Water*, 2020. Proofs from chosen gillotage plates, size 21 x 28 cm, printed on bond paper, arranged to reflect their quantity (49), ENSA, Limoges, France, 2022.

Figure 2: Marta Bełkot, *Flash*, 2022. Series of photo-enamels, size 12 x 9 cm, FBAUP, Porto, Portugal.

## **DISPLACEMENT: TRACKING FEELINGS OF ALIENATION, ISOLATION AND LONELINESS**

*Displacement*, beyond the literal meaning that indicates the action of moving something or someone from one place to another, is a multidimensional concept, vast in meaning, crossing the grounds of several disciplines<sup>1</sup>. From a social standpoint, it often refers to the movement of people from their home or country of origin in a seemingly endless list of causes and scenarios such as foreclosure, environmental disaster, eviction, gentrification, and/or conflicts like wars. The consequences of such circumstances might have a great influence on one's well-being and mental health.

As an inspirational subject, pursuing topics of movement, I try to deal with specific feelings that accompany the process of one's dislocation. By focusing on this subject more locally than globally, I try to explore *displacement* in light of physical, spatial, temporal and cultural realms where unheard stories may be heard. One way of doing this is by searching for possibilities to work with displaced people living in institutions such as mental hospital or retirement, nursing home, provoking questions on home, place, and belonging. These tactics lead me to see the topic from a different angle and in a wider range of circumstances, connecting my own physical and mental experience.

To draw from this meaning and seek inspiration, it is necessary to disassemble *displacement* expressively. *Displacement* as a movement or passage between two points could therefore be described as a moment in between, which may be exactly a moment or, often, a lifetime.

In his book *Les rites de passage* (1909), Arnold van Gennep introduced the term *limen* (threshold) to distinguish specific connections between movement, change of social status, and the shaping of identity. *Limen* refers to certain changes in the period of life, like a passage from youth to adulthood, or from an accustomed place to the unknown. This touches physical and mental spheres such as changing territory, social status or age, moving house or even travel. The rituals of passages he describes have three stages: (1) *rites de separation*, meaning the separation of the participant from the community and his current living situation, (2) *rites de marge*, meaning a marginal phase, being beyond, which is fulfilled by liminal rites, and finally, (3) *rites de aggregation*, meaning the phase of reintegrating after crossing the threshold, returning to the community or organism of origin with one's new status. The second liminal phase is certainly in my interest; the individual is no longer in their previous state but has not yet acquired a new identity. They are no longer who they were or what they will be; it is a state of transition, being betwixt and between (Turner, 1987). Agnieszka Bron (2000) developed categories that describe a sense of betwixt and between as floating (drifting-suspension-balancing) using the methods of (re)constructing the biographies of emigrants in a changing time, taking into account the

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<sup>1</sup> Dictionary, <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/displacement> online access 30.07.2022.

consequences of an individual's displacement between cultures:

*Floating can mean different things but generally, it may conjure a metaphor of being on the sea in the boat that one cannot steer or is unable to do so. The boat can go in several directions, controlling it is difficult as one drifts all the time, but also because a person is being unable to decide what direction s/he wants to take or choose. One cannot escape from the boat, as the deep water is everywhere. One is condemned to drifting unless the solution or decision will be reached.*  
(Bron, 2000, p.7)

To be displaced often means exhibiting a sense of floating, difficulties in integration, and displaying a sense of alienation, isolation, and loneliness. From a psychological point of view, in *On the meaning of alienation*, Seeman (1959) distinguishes five types of alienation: a sense of powerlessness, a sense of senselessness, a sense of anomie, a sense of self-alienation and a sense of loneliness (isolation). The subjective sense of alienation should be clearly distinguished from its objective one (e.g., anomie, a lack of a clear hierarchy of values, the inability to express one's views and fulfil one's needs, loneliness), although they can often co-occur (Seeman, 1975). Clinical observations indicate that most psychiatric patients in a hospital context manifest a deep sense of alienation and a very narrow range of social connections. This mainly applies to patients with schizophrenic psychoses (Jakubik & Piaskowska, 2000). In *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, Schreber (1903) comments that his struggle greatly assisted developments in psychiatry and psychoanalysis (Freud, 1911-1913).

*Water* (fig. 1) is a project in process that focuses on mental health. In his publication *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (1961), Michael Foucault, among informative detailed historical descriptions, provokes contemporary moral considerations toward the excluded. The ship of fools from the 15th century was an initial inspiration for this work, as a literary version of one of these foreclosure practices. During the time of COVID-19 quarantine, feelings of isolation, alienation and loneliness naturally drew my attention. From the garbage collection of tetra-packs, I started creating matrixes representing water, which I printed onto zinc and etched as *gillotage*<sup>2</sup>. I wanted to create a specific pattern that while surrounded by an installation would induce the feeling of being in the middle of the water, floating. Around the same time, I lost a close friend. The topic of death and *displacement* is very present in this work, also feelings of alienation and loneliness. These plates are very problematic to print, provoking a constant feeling of losing the image, the specific negotiation, or a kind of compromise. I concluded that I chose this difficult medium to speak about hopeless situations. The plates were created as a pattern that, put together one after another, creates an impression of continuity. This also reflects life patterns and the human perception of time. This project was intended to be an installation, using the prints on textile to construct a tent or room inside the room that would induce a sense of isolation, a

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<sup>2</sup> Gillotage is a 19th-century commercial relief print on metal obtained by several deep etching stages.

feeling of solitude. At this moment, the project is redirected to obtain a porcelain artist's book from the matrixes using the technique of *lithophane*<sup>3</sup>. This technique will change the aesthetics of plates. By using light underneath the porcelain page, the plate has a resemblance with light crossing ice.

Exploration of *displacement* and its consequences as a leitmotif brings together an enormous range of issues towards humans and their condition (Fromm, 1968). I am trying to investigate *displacement* as a binder between technological features entangled in research practice and narrative components defined by its theoretical and psychological territory.

Technically, it is an archaeological approach to tame raw, organic materials through the reconstitution of technological 19th-century procedures considered obsolete and commercial by bringing them to contemporary print based practice, where I move or migrate between fields.

## PAPER AND ENAMEL

Once photography was invented and became widely available, people searched for cheaper methods of photomechanical reproductions of representations in prints (Gernsheim, 1986). In the commercial sphere, transfer or prepared surface papers were important to the process. These papers are specially coated for a wide range of purposes (Gascoigne, 2004). They come from a printmaking practice owed to Alois Senfelder, the inventor of lithography. Providing the opportunity to construct the image naturally without mirror-thinking, and as its name suggests, transferring the image or text from one surface to another is a key element for combining techniques. Paper and enamel, so opposite in the sense of resistance and fragility, seem to have the same features of producing surfaces. While the enamel technique is known from ancient Egypt, enamelled photography began in the middle of the 19th century, aiming to prevent damage in images, and soon after was converted as an exclusive product for the aristocracy (Harker, 1982). What unites ceramic, glass, photography and printmaking, and is crucial for this research, is the technology that allows the transfer of images from one surface to another.

In addition to the strong haptic, palpable form in the photo-enamel process and the resistance of the matrix, the tangible representation of time is rather elusive. The photo-enamel technique is quite difficult to pursue. A great secret of Portuguese masters the disappearance not only of the image but its heritage, is a fascinating factor of this research.

*Flash* (fig. 2) is a series of photo-enamels based on some photographic film I received by mistake from Photoshop. The use of enamel photography for the development of these photos, made by an unknown author, taken during a trip, from somewhere I have never

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<sup>3</sup> Lithophane is a unique three-dimensional image moulded in very thin porcelain. The image changes depending upon the exposure to the light. Under certain lighting conditions and different angles, the image becomes more visible and reveals more details.

been, lets me repeat the conventional usage of this process in a commercial sphere where enamellists who worked with images were not the authors of the pictures. This project is based on the topic of *displacement* touching on the issues of movement, the importance of objects, and real and fictional borders.

In the series *The family tree* (fig. 3), I mix photography taken from my homeland and the oldest garden in Porto: Bela vista. In creating a so-called family tree, I use the same 19th-century photographic method as in the *Flash* project, which is supposed to prevent the picture from fading, commonly used for preserving memories of someone who has passed away. I can cover the image with glass to ensure its existence exceeds its life in our memory, but can this succeed despite our great contribution to the destruction of nature, the long existence of our forests, our planet, and ourselves?

## PRINT BASED PRACTICE

Within my artistic practice, the urge for physical contact with others, its tangible trace or touchable form, directed the research towards problems considering the current pandemic and the limitations on institutions. The situation forced me to follow the topic from a different angle, working with different means: the series *Waiting, Cartography of waiting* (2019-2020) (fig. 4) was based on written correspondence aiming at people´s stories, inspirations, fortuitousness, uncertainty and distance. Photosensitive papers and their intermediary results are an important feature of this work: the delay, the unforeseen, and the absence of absolute control.<sup>4</sup> In *Reflection* (2020) (fig. 5), I refer to the remoteness of relations, seeking satisfaction in online encounters. By using *gillotage*, a 19th-century commercial relief print on metal plate obtained by several deep etching stages, as opposed to fast and easily accessible digital procedures, I mirrored not only the movement of fingerprints in contact with computer keyboards but also the way we communicate the coldness of things we touch to say how much we care.

In contrast, *Correspondence*, an ongoing project at a very early stage (currently in abeyance), forced me to establish face-to-face contact. It is dedicated to meeting the mentally ill or elderly, housed in institutions, and displaced. *Correspondence* is therefore a multi-stage project involving not only talks, walks, and workshops, but also the exchange of letters. Writing letters traditionally has similarities to the analogic photographic process, where time becomes a component of the process itself, a practice that contrasts with the instantaneous character of today's communications in time but also in reflection. The confessional aspect of writing a letter to someone, the waiting and expectations, and the wondering are all components that favoured the required intimacy to gather personal stories.

In *The Painter of Modern Life*, Charles Baudelaire (1863) says that an artist must be the spiritual citizen of the universe. That meant the

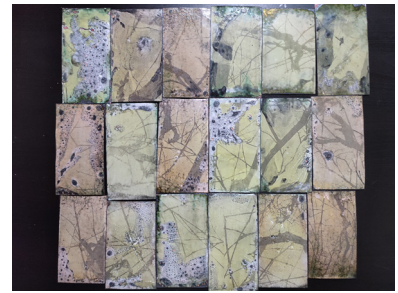


Figure 3

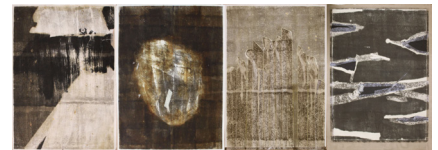


Figure 4

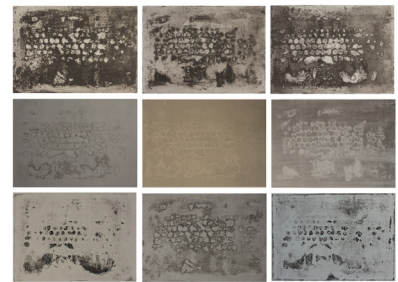


Figure 5

<sup>4</sup> These series might still be affected by light. As referred by W.H.F. Talbot: These papers would darken in sunlight in much the same way as our skin acquires a tan. Larry J. Schaaf, (2000): *The Photographic Art of William Henry Fox Talbot*. Princeton University Press, United Kingdom. (P.14)

Figure 3: Marta Belkot, *The family tree*, 2022. Series of enamels based on photography and painting. The sizes differ, averaging 11 x 5 cm, FBAUP, Porto, Portugal.

Figure 4: Marta Belkot, *Waiting, Cartography of waiting* (2019-2020).

Figure 5: Marta Belkot, *Reflection*, 2020.

modern artist had to have necessary qualities, such as constant observation, deep interest in contemporary subjects and a genius of curiosity comparable to that of a child. The impressionist artists were much less cynical than Baudelaire, but Degas, with his rare curious mind, was the extraordinary one, evoking himself into experiments considered strange to his colleagues. What seems to have motivated Degas was something more fundamental: *a fascination with the technical as such* (REFF, 1976). Long before Degas, an extremely experimental approach taken by the visionary 17th-century painter and printmaker Hercules Segers<sup>5</sup> led him to produce mysterious landscapes through unique printing techniques, based on prepared surfaces creating original works centuries ahead of his time.

It feels necessary to expand the visual ecology of the XXI century in an academic context where only more established forms of traditional processes are readily identified as printmaking. By blurring the boundaries between photography, printmaking, drawing, installation, glass, video and sculpture, the content of contemporary printmaking can thrive.

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Born in 1989, interdisciplinary Polish visual artist and researcher (i2ADS – Research Institute in Art, Design and Society, and VICARTE – Glass, and Ceramics for the Arts). Graduated with an integrated Master's degree in printmaking and drawing from the Academy of Fine Arts in Katowice, Poland (Diploma in 2016). She studied also at the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Porto and the Academy of Fine Arts in Łódź, Poland. With an FCT–Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (SFRH/BD/149042/2019); scholarship is currently attending PhD studies at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Porto, where she teaches Relief Printing and Silkscreen. As a visual artist, she created objects, drawings, photos, movies, and graphics.

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Presented at IMPACT 12 Conference, Bristol, The Printmakers' Voice, 21-25 September 2022 UK

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## IMAGE GALLERY



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Figure 1: Marta Bełkot, *Water*, 2020. Proofs from chosen gillotage plates, size 21 x 28 cm, printed on bond paper, arranged to reflect their quantity (49), ENSA, Limoges, France, 2022.

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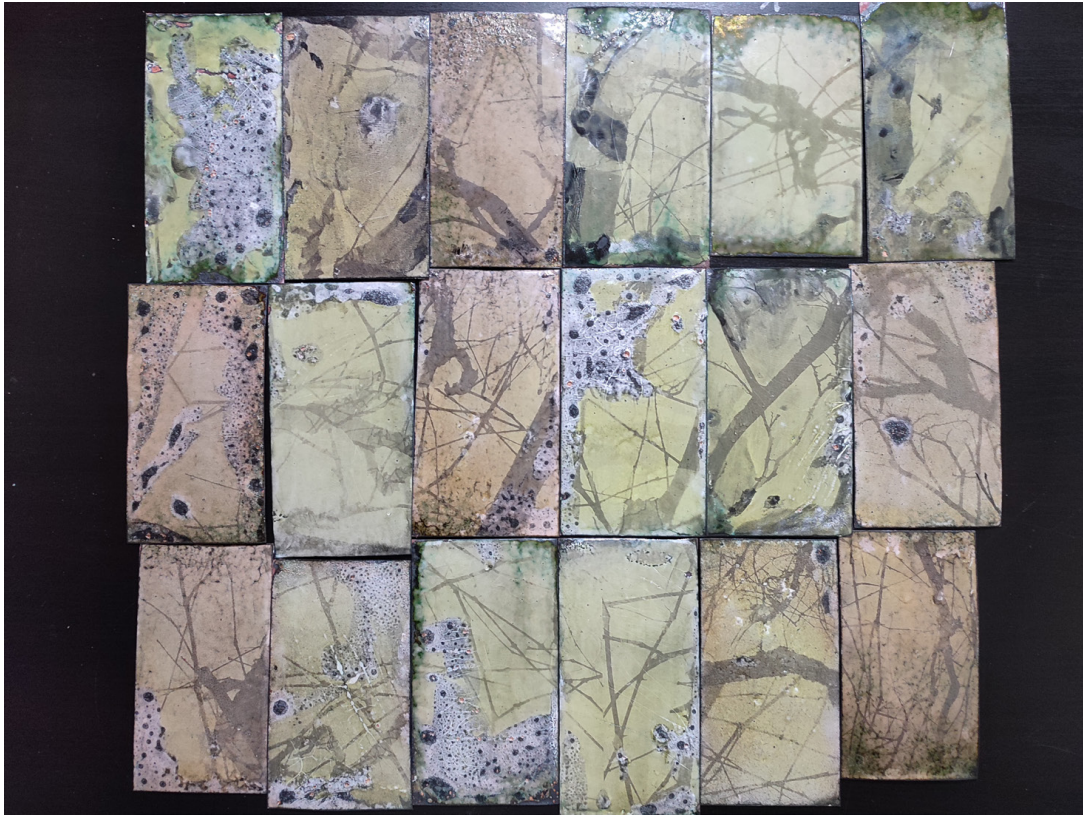


Figure 3: Marta Belköt, *The family tree*, 2022. Series of enamels based on photography and painting. The sizes differ, averaging 11 x 5 cm, FBAUP, Porto, Portugal.

Figure. 4: Marta Belköt, *Waiting*, *Cartography of waiting* (2019-2020).



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Figure 5: Marta Bełkot, *Reflection*, 2020.