

REFLECTIVE PAPER

Maite Pinto

ABSTRACT

This article aims to investigate the changes that have been generated in archival systems through digitisation and the relevance of reactivating archives through artistic creation and specifically through printmaking. In this paper, I will present some projects from my practice to analyse the meaning of these new physical forms created from diverse archives.

Digital technology has transformed the way we communicate and store information. Today's images are virtual and fleeting; they slip from our memory, prompting the question of how much time we spend examining/absorbing an image. Why store thousands of images if we never revisit them? Archival information today is digitally stored and recorded, but can we access it and which archives do we choose to recreate? By revisiting material from the past, we might better understand our present.

The relationship between archival materials and their stories as generators of new readings through artistic practice occupies a significant place in contemporary art research. In this study, I explore different photographic archives from my artistic practice, using graphic techniques that allow me to reflect on memory and its evanescence. My interest in working with these memories is related to the desire to share materials from the past and generate new relationships within our contemporary context. Working with various temporalities is an approach to understanding the functioning of both individual and collective memory

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND INTERFACES

Archives are the raw material of history and archival services are committed to preserving and documenting the past to ensure that these histories are available to the public. Analysing the

changes introduced by digital technologies in how archiving and memory practices are conceived is of great interest in this study. Questioning the particularities of digitised information as a current storage system is therefore important: What happens with new media, and what influence do they have on the archive and memory? An archive system has to do with preserving an object and dealing with what has survived. It is a system that stores a set of data for later reference, but do we ever revisit these archives? What are the criteria used to choose which documents will be preserved?



Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure Titles and information

Figure 1: Bedtime for the boys, La Toya Hobbs, Acrylic, ink, and relief carving on cherry wood panels, 2021.

Figure 2: Abolish, Carlos Barberena, Linocut on kitakata paper, 2021.

There is no question that our way of communicating in the last decades has changed markedly, and the archives we now generate are, in most cases, virtual. We call them archives but they have no physical presence and lack materiality. The historian and professor Ana M. Guasch explains the urgent need for institutions to reshape archiving methods and the meaning of physically accessing documents. In recent decades, many archives that began as physical resources are being digitised. In that process of digitisation, certain decisions are made, such as the selection of archives to be digitised and archival descriptions, i.e., the way archives are grouped. This is where historians and archivists exercise power. According to Margaret Hedstron, archival interfaces are critical nodes within an archival system where archivists negotiate and exercise power over the constitution and representation of archives. Interfaces are structures and tools that place records in context and provide interpretative context. Hedstron (2002, p. 22) explains that “digital documents have destabilised the concept of records and challenged the ability of archives to capture, represent, and preserve digital information”. We must be aware that an archival document is simply a fragment of the past that has survived.

In that sense, the archive will always be incomplete and is no longer a physical one-way structure; rather it has adapted to rhizomatic forms, where an object or image can be part of multiple archives. That did not happen when the archive was physical because it could not physically be part of different bodies. Physical archives were rigid corpora determined by archivists and belonging to a particular place and collection. Digitisation provides more freedom to establish new relationships between archives, and this has become part of our contemporaneity.

Undoubtedly, the amount of archives we generate is immense, which means that many documents lose their value or are forgotten. Are they created to remain in time? In many cases, archives are preserved only to verify a fact, as a record of something that has happened. However, in this research, the focus will be on photographic archives that evoke events or experiences rather than specific data, in other words, archives as devices for evoking diverse memories and how they have been used by artists in recent decades.

ART AND ARCHIVE

Art as a generator of new readings of the archive has been a common practice for many artists. Many of them use archives to establish new relations of temporality between past, present and future. As Ana María Guasch (2011) argues in her research on art and archives, “When we refer to the archive, this is understood as a unit of predetermined configuration. The archive is a supplement that preserves memory and rescues it from oblivion”. Among the artists in Guasch’s review, I am interested in mentioning Boltansky, since he proposes strategies for working with the reconstruction of memory. Boltansky’s creations do not aim to reconstitute an event



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5

Figure 3: The past is a foreign country, Maite Pinto, etching and aquatint on paper, 2021.
 Figure 4: En manos de Dios, Maite Pinto, etching and aquatint on paper, 2019.
 Figure 5: Vista Alegre, Maite Pinto, etching and aquatint on paper, 2020.

from the past but to recover and confirm memory as a cultural, anthropological, and existential fact. A memory acquires presence through the fossils of “some past”, where objects are modern relics that allude to what has been lost.

As we approach the field of printmaking, artists who are inspired by diverse archives for their prints and who use the meaning of engraving related to making memory are the focus of this study. The desire to engrave to make memory and the action of archiving itself are closely connected. Concerning this theme, I would like to highlight the work of the German artist Thomas Kilpper, who goes beyond conventional printmaking and expands it into space by creating striking installations. Thomas Kilpper engraves and carves entire floors of buildings by researching the history of the building itself, using social archives from the place where he is working. His works are large; printed on canvas, he often exhibits them on façades, the skin of the building. I am interested in this artist because his work is powerful both conceptually and technically, creating images of dramatic social impact and activating the presence of abandoned buildings.

Another artist displaying the print matrix as an art object is the American LaToya Hobbs, who establishes a dialogue about the Black female body in the hope of showcasing a more balanced perception of our womanhood. I am interested in her use of printmaking as a way of archiving a day in her life as a working artist and mother at home. All her prints are carved with tiny, precise marks and cohere into a tribute to the labour and care required in the life of a woman-artist-mother. Moreover, each scene features recognisable works of art by different artists. In that sense, she uses different archives from art history to create new archives of her life.

Looking at social archives, I would also like to mention Carlos Barberena, a Nicaraguan artist who uses images from pop culture and from political and cultural tragedies. He reflects on the cycles of repression and resistance and its relationship to the diaspora in which he has lived, throughout dictatorship, revolution, erasure, renewal, hope, and repression. I am interested in the social impact that his work generates, where he increases the connection with the community by trying to reduce social exclusion. For Barberena, printmaking is a democratic technique because it can reach more people by creating multiple copies. I can trace the influence of his work in some of my projects, which I present below.

PERSONAL WORKS

In my recent artistic projects, I have worked on the themes of memory and identity through different photographic archives. In *Kindness of Strangers* (2018), I work with historical archives borrowed from the Basque Children of '37 Association UK. In 1937, almost 4,000 children travelled to Britain on the steamship *Habana* to escape the Spanish Civil War. The chosen images focus on the journey of the

Basque children and their arrival at the host camp; they have to do with notions of identity, territory, memory, and absence. Through engraving, I attempt to build collective memories that reflect the current political context. This social problem that we face every day, where refugees risk their lives crossing borders, was once our story. We were the ones who crossed the ocean to take refuge from a civil war. For this reason, the images are intended to go beyond graphic memory and generate a reflection, where the notion of time and geographical place are left in the background, to focus on a historical fact that is repeated incessantly. Furthermore, these prints highlight the power of union due to a common experience that marked these children for the rest of their lives.

Another project related to historical memory is Ilunpean (2020), where I recreated journalistic photographs related to the terrorism in the Basque Country using engraving techniques. Terrorism in the Basque Country is a complex subject that involves delving into a recent wound that has not yet healed in society. Understanding a little more about the complexity of the society we live in is a necessary personal exercise. The recreation of these painful and strong images is significant for the practice of memory and for healing and having a hopeful future. The physical action of engraving a delicate subject is a statement of intentions, about bringing uncomfortable topics to the surface, which is why dealing with these issues respectfully is one of the goals of the project. In this particular work, the process of printmaking is a tool for healing; printmaking is a coping mechanism, something that can be used to heal.

Both Kindness of Strangers and Ilunpean are works with a clear social impact that establish new scenarios for dialogue. For instance, working in collaboration with the Basque Children of '37 Association UK has made the Kindness of Strangers project more real because relatives of the contributors to the photography archive have been involved in the project by disclosing their family history. These prints have created links between generations, becoming statements about the preservation of our history and our memories. These engravings have a tangible connection with the principles of the Basque Children of '37 Association UK: to connect with their community by keeping their history alive and not forgetting their roots. Oral transmission has been part of this project, where one of the core principles has to do with the emotional bonds created with the participants of the project.

Memorias analógicas (2019) is a more personal project, where family archive photographs from the 1950s are rescued to be recreated through engraving. While the relatives and people in the circle of the photo recognise the subjects in the photographs, for the rest, the image is an open window to an imaginary without names, stories, or narrative, but where the poetics of the unconscious creates new fiction.

All of these creations have in common that they delve into the definition of engraving linked to memory and how both the

conceptual and processual aspects of graphics are associated with memory. In particular, the aquatint process has to do with the different times in which the artist dips the matrix in the acid. Each time will create a different shade, which I understand as a layer of memory. I would like to mention that the quality of engraving, transfer, or imprint is directly related to photography in its condition of indexicality, in the same way that prints will always refer to their original matrix. The generated prints could circulate as new archives that will always refer to their origin, their plate. What, though, will be the future of these new physical archives?

REACTIVATING THE ARCHIVE

As mentioned above, activating the archive in the present establishes new connections with the past. "From my contemporaneity, I am interested in history, in visiting the past to understand ourselves better." Making the archive public through art shows it in other scenarios and to a wider public that does not necessarily visit the exhibition because of their specific interest in that theme. Furthermore, the re-creation and appropriation of archives through contemporary practice give them new readings. Art takes the archive out of its dark storage, and by transforming and exhibiting these archives, they cease to be private or hidden and can be re-interpreted.

The difference between showing an existing archive and showing a re-creation of that archive is the temporality that the created object acquires. This is an invitation to see a possibility of that past, an approximation, and also an invitation to dig further into that past from our present. As Nicolas Bourriaud (2001) argues, "These creations are mere appropriations, it is no longer a question of making an object, but of selecting one among those that exist and using or modifying it according to a specific intention". The document, the original image, is a relic belonging to the past. By recreating it, you give it your perspective; you position yourself from the moment you choose the medium to recreate the colour, the size, and so on. All of these are decisions that will give it new readings and interpretations.

The conceptual and primitive aspects of printmaking also maintain a connection with the existence of the archive as a system of organisation. This one was created to organise and preserve documents, and printmaking was created as a powerful method of communication, used to cover informative visual needs. Its nature was to make editions to disclose information. Both print culture and archiving systems impose stability on the transmission of memory and knowledge. Both of them deal with memory, preserve information, and deal with the notion of the original. While printmaking allows you to make an edition of originals, an archive is a system that preserves original documents.

If I want to create an archive of my prints, would this archive be constituted by print matrixes? Throughout art history, matrixes have

been destroyed or broken after their use, to make sure that editions could no longer be extended. However, why not keep the print matrix as a raw document of that print? Both of the artists mentioned above, Thomas Kilpper and LaToya M. Hobbs, frequently use the matrix as part of their work, and nowadays this inclusion of the matrix as a work of art has become more present. Certainly, the matrix is the origin, the signifying object, and the prints will always refer to that object.

So far, I have discussed the connections between archiving and printmaking. Specifically, through some examples of my work, I observed how these new creations connect two temporalities and have a social impact that facilitates encounters and dialogues about the past and our history. I would like to conclude this paper with a final reflection by speculating on the future of these creations. How will they be archived? Luckily, they will belong to contemporary art collections. It would also be interesting if they became part of the archival collection that inspired them.

REFERENCES

- Bourriaud, N. (2001). *Postproducción*. Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo.
Guasch, AM. (2011). *Arte y archivo, 1920-2010: Genealogías, tipologías y discontinuidades*, Ediciones AKAL.
Hedstrom, M. (2002) *Archives, Memory, and Interfaces with the Past*. *Archival Science* 2, 21–4.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bocchino, Adriana A. (2013). *Colección, corpus, archivo... maneras de hacer memoria*, La Plata: VI Jornadas Internacionales de Filología y Lingüística y I de Crítica Genética, Simposio 8: Reunir la dispersión. *Edificar el archivo*.
Bourriaud, N. (2001). *Postproducción*. Buenos Aires: Adriana Hidalgo.
Catarina Pinho, A. (2021). *Reframing the archive*. Porto: Archivo Press.
Derrida, J. (1997). *Mal de archivo; una impresión freudiana*, Madrid: Editorial Trotta S.A.
Foster, H. (2004). *An Archival Impulse*, October Magazine n°110 pp.3-22.
Guasch, A.M. (2011). *Arte y archivo, 1920-2010: Genealogías, tipologías y discontinuidades*, Ediciones AKAL.
Guasch, AM. (2005). *Los lugares de la memoria: El arte de archivar y recordar*, Barcelona, *passatges del segle XX* n°5.
Hedstrom, M. (2002). *Archives, memory, and interfaces with the past*, *Archival Science*, 2, 21–43.
Ivins, W.M. (1975). *Imagen impresa y conocimiento: análisis de la imagen prefotográfica*, Madrid. Martínez Moro, J. (1998). *Un ensayo sobre grabado (A finales del siglo XX)*, Santander: Creática.
-

Martínez Moro, J. (2008). Un ensayo sobre grabado (A principios del siglo XXI), México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.
Pastor, J. (2013). Sobre la identidad del grabado, Madrid: Fundación Gonzalo Torrente Ballester.
Pelzer-Montada, R. (2018). Perspectives on contemporary printmaking, Manchester University Press.
Schaffner, I. (1998) Deep Storage: Collecting, Storing and Archiving in Art (Prestel).

AUTHOR

Maite Pinto

Maite Pinto Zangróniz (Logroño, 1993) is a multidisciplinary artist who graduated in Art (2015) with a major in painting and graphics from the University of the Basque Country (UPV / EHU).

She did an Erasmus exchange at Sheffield Hallam University (2013/2014) and in 2017 she finished an MA in Fine Arts with distinction (Master of Fine Arts) at Manchester School of Art (UK).

She has carried out artistic residencies at the Scuola Internazionale di Grafica de Venezia (2016), JOYA Arte + Ecologia, Almería (2017), and has been selected in the Basque Artist Program Grant by The Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York (2017).

In 2020, she finished the Serigraphy and Calcography modules of the CIEC Foundation. Her exhibitions include those at the Montehermoso cultural centre (2015), PS Mirabel (Manchester) 2017, Castlefield Gallery (Manchester) 2018, Open Portfolio 2019 (Bilbao), among others. In 2018 she received the Itzal Aktiboa Prize for contemporary young artists in the Basque Country. In 2019 she received a grant from the BilbaoArte Foundation and an award for her project at the FIG Bilbao with the El Correo Stand. In 2020, she received a Creation and Production Grant from the Diputación de Bizkaia.

IMAGE GALLERY



Figure 1: Bedtime for the boys, La Toya Hobbs, Acrylic, ink, and relief carving on cherry wood panels, 2021.
Figure 2: Abolish, Carlos Barberena, Linocut on kitakata paper, 2021.



Figure 3: The past is a foreign country, Maite Pinto, etching and aquatint on paper, 2021.
Figure 4: En manos de Dios, Maite Pinto, etching and aquatint on paper, 2019.



Figure 5: Vista Alegre, Maite Pinto, etching and aquatint on paper, 2020.