

# Fernand Mourlot's Lithographic Studio

## The Significance of Lithographic Studio in Poster Design

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**Abstract**—Fernand Mourlot was synonymous with the resurgence of lithography. A lot of exquisite lithographic posters were created with the joint efforts of artists and Mourlot lithographic studio, and chromolithography completed by the copy to the artistic creation gorgeously. This paper clears up the communication process between Mourlot's print studio and artists, analyzes the significance of Mourlot studio for poster design and lithograph art, discusses the relationship between artist with technician and studio and further discusses the value of traditional lithographic studio in the digital age.

**Keywords**—*Fernand Mourlot; lithograph; studio*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Fernand Mourlot is almost the representative of the resurgence of lithograph creation. Under the joint efforts of artists and Fernand Mourlot's lithographic studio, many exquisite lithograph posters were created, and the lithography completed the gorgeous turn from simple copying to artistic creation. This article combs the communication process of Fernand Mourlot's lithograph studio and the artists, analyzes the significance of the studio for poster design and lithograph creation; explores the relationships between artists and technicians, studios, and further discusses the value of traditional lithograph studios in the digital age.

### II. THE BEGINNING OF MOURLOT'S LITHOGRAPHIC STUDIO

Francois Mourlot<sup>1</sup> (1828-1902) ran a lithography workshop in Saint-Maur, one of the most prosperous communities in eastern Paris, France in 1852. The workshop mainly printed war posters during the period of the First World War. His son, Jules Mourlot (1850-1921) inherited his fathers and ran this slate-printing workshop. One day in June 1914, Jules wandered around Chabrol (de Chabol) and saw a poster with the words of "printing workshop for sale", he immediately sold his stock of the Russian bank to buy this workshop. In addition to the previous business, he began to design and print the drama and ballroom posters. In just two years, Jules had opened two sub-printing workshops in Paris and Jitter (Créteil) and expanded his business into more commercial fields, such as the trademark design for the chocolate company Chocolat

<sup>1</sup> The first founder of Mourlot's studio, the grandfather of Fernand Mourlot.

Poulain. At the same time, he also designed and printed maps, letter paper, stationery, etc. Jules's son, Fernand Mourlot (1895-1988), began to change part of the printing business into assisting artists in the production of lithographs, which had since created a historical upsurge for lithograph art. Jules has nine children: Like other brothers, Fernand had been in the lithograph workshop since his childhood and had the opportunity to directly know about lithographs. After the end of World War I, Jules Mourlot had passed away, and his two eldest sons, Georges Mourlot (1889) and Fernand Mourlot, returned here and renamed the workshop as "The Mourlot Brothers"(Mourlot Frères). George was in charge of the management of the workshop; Fernand was responsible for art work; later the third son, the landscape and still life painter Maurice Mourlot, joined the workshop and was mainly responsible for drawing.

### III. LITHOGRAPH POSTERS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

Poster design is an important contribution of Mourlot Studio. During the Fernand Mourlot period, the studio's main business was all turned to designing and printing artists' exhibition posters, illustrations, and subsequent assisting artists to complete their lithograph creation. During this period, the lithography as a means of printing had been gradually eliminated with the advancement of printing techniques. However, because of the special printing effect of lithography, it had gradually developed into a means of painting creation with independent and expressive artistic language in artists' cooperation with the studio.

Because the hand-made model and the artists' direct participation was preserved in the poster design, the lithograph posters of Mourlot Studio in collaboration with the artists achieved high artistic level, which has a profound impact on modern poster design.

In 1923, Mourlot received a contract for the production of posters for the French Modern Art Exhibition in Copenhagen, Denmark; in the late 1930s, the studio produced a large number of illustrations including illustrations for "Artistic review Verve". Through this kind of cooperation, Fernand Mourlot got acquainted with many of the artists of the time like Leger (Fernand Léger) and Georges Braque. A landmark event happened in 1930 was the establishment of a long-term cooperation between Mourlot Studio and the National Museum of France. In the same year, the studio had not only designed

and printed posters for the Romanticism Centennial Celebration, but also for the Delacroix work review exhibit in the Louvre. When preparing posters for the work exhibition of Delacroix, Fernand had keenly proposed: "The posters of the exhibition also have independent significance just as the artworks". Immediately afterwards, Mourlot Studio produced posters for the exhibitions of Manet (Édouard Manet) at the Orangerie Museum in France in 1932 and at the French National Library (Honoré Daumier) in 1934. By 1937, Mourlot Studio had become France's largest art poster design studio, and was often employed by foreign art galleries and museums to produce high-quality posters for their upcoming art exhibitions.<sup>2</sup> Mourlot Studio produced two historic posters for the solo exhibition of Pierre Bonnard and Henri Matisse at the Petit Palais, which contributed to an important meeting of Mourlot and Matisse, and this also ushered in a new stage in the development of Mourlot Studio<sup>3</sup>.

In 1937, the Mourlot lithograph studio began to cooperate with Ted (Tériade<sup>4</sup>), the founder and editor of the famous magazine "Artistic review Verve" at that time. The studio produced a lot of illustrations for Ted's two magazines, "Artistic review Verve" and the later "Grands Livres".

#### IV. LITHOGRAPH ART

The early artists' lithograph creation was mainly limited to illustration creation, which was a secondary creation based on the texts. The French poet, essayist and philosopher, Ambroise Paul Toussaint Jules Valéry (1871-1945), commented that among the different technical means to print illustrations, the lithograph had the best effects in the interpretation of his poetry. With the deep cooperation between the studio and the artists during the Fernand period, lithographs gradually emerged as a kind of artistic creations with independent painting language and thoughts.

An important contribution of Fernand Mourlot's studio is the creation of lithograph paintings, that is, to create limited lithograph artworks. Lithography, since being invented by Aloys Senefelder (1771-1834) in the 18th century, had begun to become famous as a means of painting until being used by Jules Cheret, Lautrec, Pierre Bonnard, and Utrillo in their

<sup>2</sup> Fernand Mourlot: *Art in Poster* A Sauret 1959.

<sup>3</sup> Fernand Mourlot's Studio designed two beautiful posters for the "Independent Art of Masters" exhibition of Bonnard and Matisse in 1937 at the Petit Palais (now the Palace Museum) (the overall design of the posters is based on the paintings of Bonnard and Matisse), and the posters had reached a very high level.

<sup>4</sup> Ted is the pen name of Stratis, who was born in Mytilini, Greece. He went to Paris to study law at the age of 18 in 1915, but eventually became an art critic, patron and an excellent publisher. Ted died in Paris in 1983. In 1979, the Ted Museum was built in suburb of Mytilene, south of Variá, Portugal. The books and magazines published by him are displayed in 16 rooms on two floors in a chic building. In Le Cateau-Cambrésis, north of France, there is also a donated Tériade museum branch. *Verve* was the most prestigious art magazine in Paris from 1937 to 1960, which was published by Tériade. In the first half of the century, from 1937 to 1975, Mourlot successively invited the top artists, philosophers such as Picasso, Matisse, René Daumal, etc. René Daumal (1908.3.16-1944.5.21), French surrealist writer, poet, is known for his novel published in 1952 named "Similar Mountains" (Mount Analogue), and is also known as an early metaphysical scholar.

paintings. This should be attributed to the artists' bold attempt to paint with new techniques and the unique charm of the lithograph itself. And then in the 1930s, Fernand Mourlot began to introduce a group of artists to paint directly on the stone plates (just as producing posters). This new medium and method of painting had started an unprecedented cooperation between artists and technicians. The cooperation has been remained until now. In current lithograph studios, there is still a good communication between technicians and artists, and the labor of technicians has become an irreplaceable and indispensable part of the art works.

For half a century, Fernand Mourlot has been synonymous with the resurgence of lithographs. The joint efforts of Mourlot and the artists have made lithographic printings have a personalized and creative language, which has made it possible for lithography to develop in the field of artistic creation. After the Second World War, Picasso, Matisse, Chagall, Miró, Braque, Dubuffet, Léger, Giacometti, etc., like many contemporary artists, with the help of Fernand's studio, enriched their art creation with lithographs, the novel and experimental expression way at the time.

Fernand Mourlot's genius is to introduce artists to directly paint on the stone plate to make posters. At the same time, he carried out experiments on lithographic inks and colors, experimented with fine varnishes or other materials, and analyzed the mediators of light and shadow on the tones.

Throughout the 20th century, the earliest artists to paint lithographs at Mourlot's Studio were the French faurist Maurice de Vlaminck (1876-1958)<sup>5</sup> and the French landscape painter Maurice Utrillo (1883-1955). Born in Paris, Maurice Utrillo died in Dax, Landes, and his mother was the painter Susanne Valadon (1865-1938)<sup>6</sup>. In the 19th century, they were the artists that were beyond the reach of later generations in the field of lithograph creation. And they were the few great artists who had broken the tradition mode.

In 1945, Picasso, a highly talented and creative artist, walked into Mourlot's Studio, and his arrival was about to open a new chapter for Mourlot's Lithograph Studio and his own art career. "He looks like coming to a fight", Mourlot stressed. This "battle" lasted for more than four months, and in the next few years, this kind of "battles" were launched again and again in different ways of creation. A corner of the studio soon became Picasso's private territory. From 1945 to 1969, Picasso completed nearly 400 lithographs at Mourlot's Studio<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> He was born on April 4, 1876 in Paris, died on October 11, 1958 in Rue-La Gardillo. He claimed he was a "rebel of traditions", and threatened to destroy the academic art with cobalt blue and vermilion. He loves to use strong color contrast in his paintings, and thinks that the colors themselves have a strong appeal. In the early days, he adhered to the fauvism of painting, and after 1908, he gradually abandoned fauvism and accepted the influence of cubism.

<sup>6</sup> Suzanne Valadon (1865 -1938), formerly known as Marie-Clémentine Valadon, was born in Bessina, France, and died in Paris. The female painter Suzanne was beautiful, fanatical and debauchery in her youth. She was once a smash hit in the painting studio of ballroom in Montmartre.

<sup>7</sup> In 1945, after the end of World War II, Picasso chose Mourlot's Studio to conduct his art work, returning to art creation by creating lithographs. In October 1945, under the instigation of Matisse and Braque, Picasso had a meeting with Fernand Mourlot. After several meetings, Picasso

This kind of cooperation not only brought a new situation for the development of the lithograph studio, but also expanded a new dimension for Picasso's own artistic creation. At the time, although the exquisite albums exhibited on the rue Chabrol in Paris and painted by the contemporary artists were said to be lithographic, they were not true lithographs. Until the revolutionary work of Mourlot's Lithograph Studio, they seemed to be just the prototypes of lithograph creation<sup>8</sup>. In collaboration with printing technicians Tutins and Célestin, Picasso worked frantically, creating a variety of very complex, open and superb techniques that integrated the inspirations of him. Before meeting him, the printing technicians had never seen such bold and free expression ways. The masterpiece of him created in this period was the *La Colombe de la Paix*.

#### V. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ARTISTS AND TECHNICIANS AND STUDIOS

- From the cooperation process between Mourlot's lithograph studio and the artists, it can be seen that the studio is an important and indispensable link for lithograph creation and poster design. The studio could be regarded as an instrument for art creation. The studio's own development and its inheritance and breakthrough of techniques provided possibilities for artists' creation. At the same time, the studio provided a platform for technicians and artists to make innovations and researches.
- Although artists may have a certain mastery of the lithographic printing technique, in order to achieve large-scale and large-number printing, the artists' mastery of the printing process is obviously not enough, and it requires professional technicians and studios to intervene. The emergence of lithograph studios with state-of-the-art equipment and skilled technicians has greatly increased the chances for the artists to participate in poster design and promoted the interactive development between artists and poster design.
- The emergence of the studios not only solves the technical problems in the interaction between artists and poster design, but also encourages more artists to participate in the designing of posters. So that during the "New Art" movement, "having distinct and diverse personalities" became a major feature of the poster design. In the field of lithograph creation, the emergence of studios and technicians has enabled artists to liberate themselves from the complicated printing techniques and to fully engage in artistic creation.

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began his creation in Mourlot's Studio, with the state of "taking the studio as home" and being in the corner to conduct art creation for several months.

<sup>8</sup> The lithographs at the time could not be accurately called creative lithographs; the more accurate name should be illustrations or copies. It is because in the works, the painters' thoughts were still limited by the texts and the copying of previous works.

- Lithograph studios<sup>9</sup> in the digital age still retain the means of painting and pressing plate. This is different from the digital printing of air brushing and outputting digital images, and it has therefore become an important means of painting creation and an important part of the diversified printing ecology. The main responsibilities of the technicians are: to try their best to realize artists' design of posters. The studios just need to focus on the research of techniques, which can not only achieve artists' design ideas, but also provide a broader creative space for artists by achieving technological breakthroughs.
- An important difference between digital image processing and output and the traditional printing is that the digital method does not require a real "plate". In this sense, the workflow has also changed, and artists' reliance on technicians has also changed. In addition to the traditional means and media for creation, artists can also use digital products to create artworks. The copying of the artworks is also different from the copying process of previous lithography, which becomes air brushing or printing. The British artist David Hockney has used the Apple iPad for painting. For the collection of works, we can not only collect the paper prints, but also download the paintings on the Internet and print them. The royalties can be charged when we download the paintings. The collection method is also different from that of the traditional prints.

#### VI. CONCLUSION

Recognition of the value of traditional lithograph studios from the perspective of today's diverse printing ecology

Today, with the continuous development of printing techniques, our understanding about printmaking is not single any more, but diverse and open. However, the concept of "print making" is still different from that of "print copying", which determines the artist's core position in the creative process and the value of artists' ideas and labor contained in the prints. Similarly, other traditional printmaking methods like the method of Fernand Mourlot's lithograph studio such as the woodcuts, copperplate prints, silkscreen prints, etc., are

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<sup>9</sup> Today, lithograph studios in China are mostly in the academies of fine arts such as the Printmaking Department of China Central Academy of Fine Arts, the Printmaking Department of the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, and in colleges of fine arts in some art universities and a few comprehensive universities such as the Department of Printmaking, Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University, the Department of Printmaking, Academy of Fine Arts, Shanxi University, etc. In addition, in recent years, with the development of the printmaking market and the research and creation of prints, the Guanlan international print base, studio and printmaking museum have been built in Shenzhen, and in Beijing there is a Xuyuan printmaking studio. The Xuyuan studio is run in a similar way to the Guanlan studio, providing artists with free time and space for creation, and is equipped with professional technicians and first-class equipment. Similar studios in foreign countries are traditional. For example, the TAKACH print studio in the United States is not only a first-class printmaking studio, but also engaged in the research and development of printmaking materials and equipment, which has made a very important contribution to printmaking, the art form with an ancient identity and a new look.

also irreplaceable because of their unique printing effects. They have been remained in current numerous and complicated art creation ways and working methods, continue to play an important role and become the basic language and aesthetic connotation of printmaking.

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