

Meredith Setser
mlsetser@iupui.edu
(317) 551-7777

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Panel Proposal: Superstitions and Rituals in the Print Shop

Abstract: Printmaking, a medium that utilizes rational knowledge and a concrete understanding of scientific processes and chemistry, seems like a rather unlikely field for superstitions to abound. However, it is surprising to note that this is generally not the case, as the field is chock full of ritualistic behaviors, superstitions, and “good luck” objects. Printmakers, much like athletes, tend to be a very superstitious lot. This may be due to the fact that the act of printmaking with its emphasis on process, is performance based, much like athleticism. The types of superstitious behavior and ritual associated with printmaking are wide ranging, from the ritualistic, seemingly irrational behaviors of individual printmakers to the creation of objects, such as print altars and deities, set up in different shops throughout the country.

This light-hearted panel will take a closer look at some of these superstitious behaviors associated with printmaking, examine the factors that cause superstitious behaviors to arise, and discuss the value that superstition and ritual holds for the success of the printmaker.

Panelists:

Panel Organizer and Chair: Assistant Professor Meredith Setser, Herron School of Art & Design (confirmed)

Panelist: Printmaker Brian Gonzales, a creator of many examples of printmaking altars and recent MFA graduate from the Herron School of Art & Design (confirmed)

Three more panelists are still being sought, but ideally the panel will consist of a professional from academia, an art therapist or psychologist, and a technician or print shop manager. A great deal of the anecdotes and images will be selected from an open online call for submission.

Presentation Description:

The presentation will consist of both visual and oral accounts by the panelists and their response to the solicited online information. The discussion will revolve around three basic topics:

The Power of Rituals: A ritual is a certain behavior or action that a printmaker performs with the belief that these behaviors have the power, to influence the success of their print. Many printmakers believe that performing a specific ritual before or during a printing session protects them and improves the quality of their work. Superstition is generally something that is initially developed in hindsight, almost by accident. A superstition arises when a printmaker has a particularly good (or bad) printing session and then tries to establish "cause and effect" by reviewing circumstances of the event. They will take notice things like what they ate or wore or anything unusual that happened such as hearing a

certain song. If they have a great printing session they may attribute their success to that unusual circumstance and attempt to recreate it with every print session. These rituals vary, ranging from the clothes they wear (lucky apron or gloves) to the foods they eat or drink; even the music they listen to during the printing session. An online call for submissions will be sent out in order to acquire individual accounts of superstitious activities. This gathered information will be presented in the form of a visual presentation and be compiled into a brochure that the audience will have access to after completion of the conference.

Influential Objects: Many shops around the world have objects that the printmaker can turn to in order to improve their printing karma. Print Altars, Shrines, and Deities (Print Gods and Goddesses!) are the most commonly seen, and are generally handcrafted, works of art in themselves. These objects add a certain amount of personality to the print environment and are regarded with varying levels of gravity and humor. Panelist Brian Gonzales will give a visual presentation on the many different examples that exist and lead a discussion on the value of these objects to the psychological health of the print shop environment.

The Value of Superstition and Ritual in Printmaking: Perhaps the real value in superstition and ritual is the boost of confidence and the sense of control that they provide a printmaker. If the artist believes that doing a specific action will make result in better prints, then this boost in confidence can be a determining factor. The panel will discuss the pros and cons of superstitious behaviors and relate their own personal experiences on the topic.



Herron School of Art & Design Print Altar. Created by Brian Gonzales.