History

The Printed Picture
Richard Benson
The Museum of Modern Art
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Humans have been interested in making more than one copy of an image since we dipped our hands in ochre and pressed them to the wall of a cave. “The demise of pictures in single copies” writes Richard Benson “is one of the first great innovations of printing” Benson is a MacArthur Fellow and was Dean of the Yale University School of Art from 1996 to 2006. *The Printed Picture* a remarkably informative accessible and entertaining book grew out of Bensons lectures at Yale over the last thirty years and the examines how pictures look by describing how they were made. An original pictures meaning says Benson is most certainly derived from the intentions of its maker but the meaning in a reproduction of that same picture can be extremely complicated particularly in the modern age of photography and digital technology.

The Printed Picture begins with relief printing (printing from high parts usually on wood) to intaglio (printing from low parts-engraving etching aquatint lithography) to color printing stencils silk screening the typewriter silhouettes photography and ends with the digital process (which interestingly began with the old fashioned piano roll). All along the way Benson enlightens the process both technical and creative with personal asides and surprising feats of nature like when can a tree become a camera? His discussions of the pros and cons of the different techniques as well as ways of solving problems are fascinating. For example his notes on the calibration and measurement necessary to todays artists and its danger in reducing or utterly destroying the unexpected and unpredictable. *The Printed Picture* should be on anyones shelf who believes as Benson does that “pictures are as important as language and that together they form the glue that holds society together.” (2008)

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