Form, Content and Aesthetics In Ex-Libris

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Abstract

As known, ex-libris is a work of graphic design indicating the ownership of a book and contains the name of the person it belongs to along with the phrase ex-libris. While ex-libris may be designed with a typographical arrangement, they can also be designed using an illustration or symbol depending on the desire of person who requested it. Often an ex-libris is designed according to the wishes of the person who orders it while they can be produced based on original ideas of the designing artist. In this study, the focus will be on to what extent the technique, visual intensity of the illustration, style of expression, simplicity of the used visual, or use of a graphic symbol influence the determination of the aesthetic qualities and originality of the ex-libris. With this study, the evaluation will be provided a perspective through an examination of ex-libris made with different techniques and varying content.

Keywords: ex-libris, aesthetic, form/content, typography, symbol

Introduction

Books have been precious assets for centuries as an instrument of storing information and passing it on to the future generations. Being priceless as they contained the foundations of science, arts, technology, and faith, books were in the hands of the kings, churches, and the rich. It was inevitable that books so priceless would have a sign, label, or tag that show whom the book belonged to in the institutional or personal context. Labels used to indicate to whom or which library a particular book belonged to were designed. These labels designed for books were given the name ex-libris. Ex-libris "means 'from the books of...' or 'from the library of' and is used along with the name of its owner or the library it belongs to" (Pektaş, 2003:13). The history of ex-libris dates back almost as old as the history of the first printed books. "Ex-libris were born of a need to identify the owner of the book and to prevent theft of the book. Ex-libris have been a document relating to the book and its owner. The tradition of ex-libris that first appeared in the age of manuscript books flourished with the invention of printing. The method of imprinting with printing types (typography) has provided a significantly shrinking the size of ex-libris (Denli, 2006: 125).

"Today, ex-libris are a piece of work which book lovers paste on the inside covers of their books and that contain the expression ex-libris and the name of the book owner (not that of the author) along with illustrations on various subjects" (Pektaş, 2003:13). While ex-libris are generally considered art objects, they are a graphic design product for us designers. Pektaş, on the other hand, positions ex-libris as follows: "Looking at the process of creation, it appears in the art of painting. Considering its functional aspects, however, it can be considered as a product of graphic design. The only aspect that differentiates it from pictorial art may be that it also includes typography (text). Every artist and designer creates ex-libris in their own style based on their background and experiences" (Pektaş, 2003: 32). Denli states that "The ex-libris artist often creates original images as a painter and also benefits from familiar communication symbols. With this feature, it has a both introvert and extrovert messaging form. Ex-libris is also is a graphic design product. However, it is different from other graphics products" (Denli, 2006: 127).

Having been used in books as a sign of the owner of the book for centuries, ex-libris have now turned into art and design objects displayed in exhibition halls and museums. Reaching wide audiences through international competitions, exhibitions, and the internet, ex-libris has improved in quality and a fusion between artists has evolved.

Form, Content and Aesthetics In Ex-Libris

The focus of aesthetics, the general laws of artistic creation and the theoretical science of beauty in art and life, is on beauty and the impacts of beauty on human emotions and memory. Aesthetics, which can be paraphrased as "beautiful sensory", deals with the creation and evaluation of beauty. As described by the German philosopher Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, who coined the term aesthetics, "…aesthetics is the science of sensory information and its subject is sensory competence (Wikipedia, 2014). Many philosophers have had different interpretations and studies on aesthetics. According to our research topic, we will not focus on philosophy of aesthetics. Here, we will try to determine the factors that affect aesthetic qualities.

Aesthetic qualities of a work of art and design are determined by its content and formal qualities. Content is all of the items and processes that make up of an object or phenomenon while Form is the organic structure that provides the appearance of that object or phenomenon. Content without form and form without content is impossible. Content is a set of essence, idea, feelings and images desired to be reflected in art (work) and design. A work and a design being beautiful and useful is proportional to its correctly reflecting its message, the idea established. The artist examines and assimilates the culture, society and nature they live in, internalizes, reinterprets and reflects in their work. In order to communicate their message to the audience, communication designer also, just like an artist, creates a unique language in the way they understand, and transfers their message by choosing an appropriate communication tool. Formal elements also take an important place in the creation of aesthetic quality. External or formal quality of an art and design work occurs by the proper use of basic design principles and design elements. These principles are simplicity, visual continuity, clarity, balance, visual hierarchy, emphasis, rhythm, ratio and proportion, harmony and unity. The object of art and design may be that ex-libris; when organized in the light of the design principles we mentioned, the work will be both aesthetic and functional.

Subject and Originality in Ex-libris:

Artists and designers, when designing a work of art, realize their free and genuine expressions by blending the image they produce in their imagination in the regional, national and universal aesthetic pots. Essentially, freedom and originality are the discipline that artists develop their individual techniques and methods using their right of error while trying (Atan, 2014).

Ex-libris, which is an art and design object, must also be examined in terms of subject matter and originality. "While ex-libris being copied on the basis of printing techniques and its being functional in terms of being private establishes itself to be considered a graphic discipline; on the other hand it makes sense to be perceived as an art object hosting an aesthetic value" (Tomek and South, 2014: 32). Kırışoğlu states that "Looking at ex-libris from the dimension of art, their subjects reflect various objects (plants, animals, human figures or objective objects), feelings and emotions of their creator, the personality, and of course, profession of the person who orders it, their biography, also the feelings and thoughts of the artist about them"(Kırışoğlu, 2014: 19-20). In their examination, Türk Kaya states that while ex-libris are formed in terms of the subject by the people who order them, the portrait of subjects designed and people, their profession, animal and plant motifs, people's points of interest, book and library views and designs consisting of only inscriptions remain in the forefront. He further explains that many artists have created ex-libris bearing religious subjects, mythological stories, signs and symbols (Türk Kaya, 2015: 58).

Ex-libris, since they represent living people, also symbolize a particular history, geography and culture that the person lived in. Each story fiction, within the process it was produced, yields a resultant of its own socio-cultural, socio-politic, aesthetic and historical context. In this regard, storification also serves as a historical and cultural document. This is very evident in the works of ex-libris such that ex-libris also include the historical projection of the person or organization it represents (Alba, 2014: 38). Kandinsky, analyzing spirituality in the formation of abstract expressionism, states that "each work of art is the child of time, and more a mirror of our emotions" "Every civilization era creates itself an art" (Atan, 2014). Today ex-libris designers create ex-libris based both on the era they live and the culture they belong to as well as developing new forms of expression to be unique.

As known, the development of unique (original) works requires a lot of hard effort for artists. Original works are obtained feeding from multiple sources. In order to obtain artistic and designer originality, an artist must possess philosophical depth, knowledge of local and national cultural assets, as well as awareness of events taking place in the environment they live in. They should also bear in mind that simple objects of use found near them may also be a source of inspiration. In order for an artist to create an original successful work and object of art, they must have a sense, passion and excitement of discovery.

EX-LIBRIST International Journal of Ex-libris / Vol.**3** / Part **5**
Uluslararası Ekslibris Dergisi / Cilt **3** / Bölüm **5**

ISTANBUL İSTANBUL
EX-LIBRIS EKSLİBRIS
SOCIETY DERNEĞİ

As a result, like all designers, ex-libris designers also want to produce works with unique original and aesthetic assets. For this reason, in order to find a good idea for the ex-libris ordered, the designer must develop concepts in line with the foreknowledge provided by the ordering party, be flourished by various sources, analyze the works of artists producing works in the past, form syntheses, and also engage in actions to improve their technical competence.

The first stage of being able to produce ex-libris with aesthetic qualities is having an original idea. Other factors affecting the design are a beautiful composition in the light of design principles, and well resolved illustration appropriate for the content, or a graphic symbol, as well as the correct use of typography, technical competence and the choice of paper suitable for printing.

Is printing technique a factor that determines aesthetic qualities in ex-libris?

While originality in terms of quality (creativity) is associated, visual creation appropriate to the communicated message and content, and replication in a quality manner by printing techniques are also important. In the congresses we have participated, ex-libris with engraving technique attract the greatest admiration and admire the audience. Ex-libris collectors still do not think about exchanging their works of art replicated by engraving with those created via digital printing. Should the digitally reproduced work be very original, then they consent to it. Again one of the high printing techniques, wood cut and linoleum printing techniques are also among the printing techniques preferred in production. The printing technique cannot be exactly expressed to be the determinant of aesthetic qualities; as it is known, technique is a tool and what is essential is that the art work should qualify as work of art.

Choice of paper: One of the features that enhance aesthetic qualities is the paper used in printing. It is known that papers used in printing are variable based on the printing technique. The weight of paper, texture, glossiness and its being appropriate to the paint and the printing machine are all crucial both for lithography and other graphic design products. Interesting handmade papers are used in ex-libris printing. When appropriate for the visuals created, lithography artists and ex-libris designers prefer handmade papers in order to achieve different visual effects. Papers mostly used in the Central Asian traditional calligraphic works were carried to Europe through the Silk Road. European artists have also used handmade papers in illustration and printing pictures. In general, special handmade papers

EX-LIBRIST International Journal of Ex-libris / Vol.**3** / Part **5**
Uluslararası Ekslibris Dergisi / Cilt **3** / Bölüm **5**

ISTANBUL İSTANBUL
EX-LIBRIS EKSLİBRİS
SOCIETY DERNEĞİ

suitable for printing techniques are used by artists and designers. New generation ex-libris designers who have realized the importance of paper try Schoeller and watermarked paper appropriate for digital printing machines in order to reproduce their works they have designed in computer environment.

It can be seen in our research that designers with art education mostly comply with design principles in the ex-libris they design. However, in visualization where they do not use illustration with aesthetic qualities, they fail to reach technical competence. Besides, it is observed that the biggest problems are encountered in typography.

The use of typography and typographic ex-libris:

Typographic application in ex-libris can be seen in two forms. There may be only typographic ex-libris whereas it can also take place together with the illustrations used. Texts used with images should not disrupt the overall structure of the design and they should be compatible (Pektas, 2002: 2). In the choice of fonts, the balance between the open and closed parts of letters is also important. A misapplication of this in the ex-libris can make the image and text more complex (Bayens, 2002: 4). In addition, in order to reflect the content, a text form that is appropriate for the texture of the image used should be adopted. The text should not come to the fore creating a harsh and negative contrast. Offering a visual feast to the audience, in ex-libris, words are inseparable from the image. Typography may increase the aesthetic qualities or deteriorate its value. Therefore, when used in combination with an image, the location and size must be well established. Attention should be paid to the choice of fonts, different fonts should be avoided (Pektas, 2002: 2). Along with the legibility of the text because of its presence in ex-libris, the text in the composition is also a harmonious complement with its form and rhythm. This is the responsibility of the ex-libris artist / designer that the can never ignore (Denli, 2006: 131).

In recent years, the use of computers and ready fonts in ex-libris designs has facilitated the design as well as confronting us with the important problem of quality. Bayens indicates that only a small portion of the submitted letters is beautiful. Bayens also highlights that designers from the painting tradition failing to differentiate good from the bad is another problem. Again, Bayens states that computer is a tool, and there is a need of a very practical, trained eye in order to mature in design (Bayens, 2002: 4).

Text in ex-libris is an essential element since it shows for whom it was made. As of its anatomical structure, the text may qualify an emotion, an idea and a

culture; for this reason, it must be in unity with the design. In addition, when used with an image, the text element is not independent from the plastic structure of the image, but it is a part of the whole. Required by aesthetic layout, the text can be deformed by the artist, however, exaggeration in this deformation should be avoided (Denli, 2006: 129).

As seen in first ex-libris, also in typographic ex-libris formed from the name or initials of the person, principles brought by typography must be complied, attention must be paid to the integrity of the design, harmony of the fonts and their expression in a visual feast.

Ex-libris analyses:

Ex-libris of some domestic and foreign artists and designers will be analyzed with regard to the aesthetic qualities sought in ex-libris as described above. Bulgarian artist Julian Jordanov, a leading name of today's ex-libris art, created a unique content seen in his below work, with a strong illustration and successful typography, using an engraving technique, which is a very difficult reproduction technique. The font used in ex-libris was specially designed and implemented in harmony with the leaves in the work. This work is an original work with aesthetic qualities (Image 1). Looking at the work of a Japanese artist Mitsuru Nagashima, again with a lyrical illustration that is drawn by the engraving technique, the artist seems to attain technical mastery and create an original work. Also, the text they used in the lower right corner on the book is in compliance with the integrity of the work (Image 2).

Looking at the ex-libris work of Veronika Kyral created as a minimal design symbol for Buch von Ludwig, the font used and the color is in harmony with
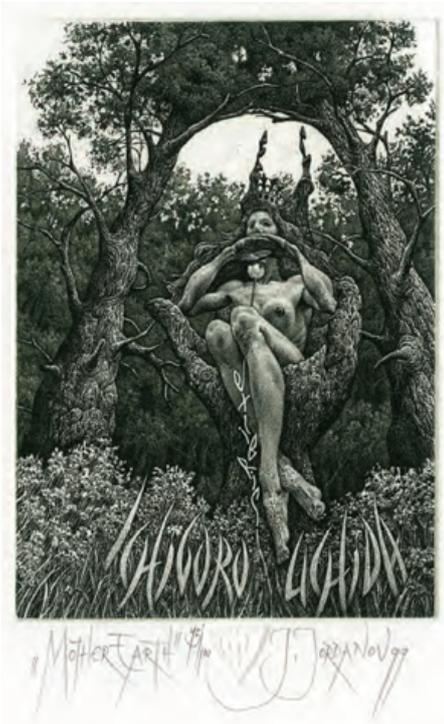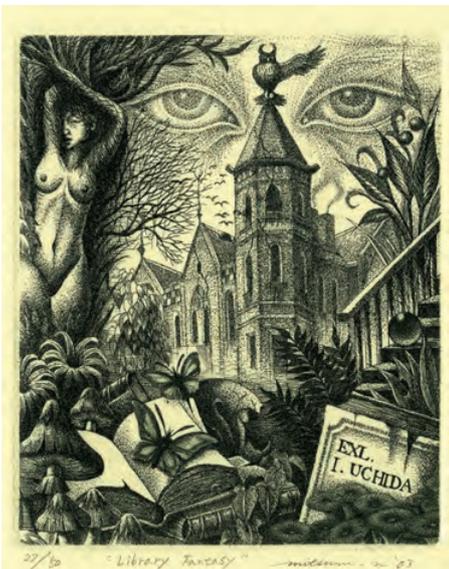
Image 1: Jordanov, Julian (Bulgaria) C3, 1999

Image 2: Nagashima, Mitsuru (Japan) C3, 2003

Image 3: Veronika Kyral (*1960), (A) 1991; X3

Image 4: Yang, Yilei (1948) X1, 2007

EX-LIBRIST International Journal of Ex-libris / Vol.**3** / Part **5**
Uluslararası Ekslibris Dergisi / Cilt **3** / Bölüm **5**

İSTANBUL EX-LIBRIS SOCIETY İSTANBUL EKSLİBRİS DERNEĞİ

Image 5 : One of the work of Alberto Lima

Image 6 :Roberto Krogh, 1931, (Italy)

Image 7: Reva Kern, 1992

the overall design. The ex-libris of a Chinese artist Yilei Yang, which was designed in linoleum printing technique, is a remarkable work in terms of its reflection of local cultural elements using a unique graphic language. Using a symbolic language in design, Yang has contributed harmony to the design by using appropriate fonts in the line language of the illustration. By likening the characteristics of Latin and Chinese languages, he prevented the rise of the text to the forefront (Image 4).

In the ex-libris works of Alberto Lima, Roberto Krogh, Reva Kern and Ovidiv Petcait, it appears that there are serious errors in typography (Images 5, 6, 7, 8). Alberto Lima's ex-libris is a bad example to the visual hierarchy, composition and the use of text. Apart from that, the works of Lima, Roberto and Reva do not bear a signature, number, and the date of printing. These four studies are devoid of aesthetic qualities, and problematic in terms of design principles and typographic aspects.

Image 8: Ovidiv Petca, 1989, (Romania)

Hasip Pektaş, cited with the word ex-libris in Turkey, in his ex-libris that he designed for his scholar from the academy, Prof. Dr. Mürşide İçmeli (Image 9), makes his work aesthetically valuable which reflects the integrity with the form created by the image used, the emotional structure created and its typography. Hasip Pektas used this work in the cover of the ex-libris book to keep the memories of his scholar alive. Another successful artists in Turkey, also known as a banknote artist, is Şükrü Ertürk. The engraving technique obviously dominates his works (Image 10). In the ex-libris that Şükrü Ertürk designed for Müjde Ayan, who is also an ex-libris artist, Ertürk illustrated the portrait in style reminiscent of the coin, also used the text in an integral whole of ex-libris. Using text in accordance with the texture and form of the image within the integrity of ex-libris, Demirbaş and Pilgir are among other Turkish artists who attach significance to aesthetic qualities (Images 11, 12).

EX-L!BRIST International Journal of Ex-libris / Vol.**3** / Part **5**
Uluslararası Ekslibris Dergisi / Cilt **3** / Bölüm **5**

İSTANBUL EX-LIBRIS SOCIETY İSTANBUL EKSLİBRİS DERNEĞİ

Image 9: Hasip Pektaş, designed for Mürşide İçmeli
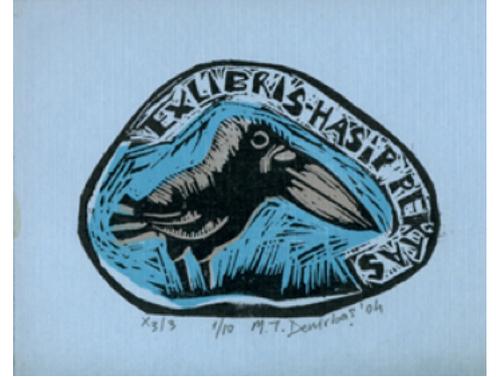

Image 10: Şükrü Ertürk

Image 11: M.T. Demirbaş, 2004, (Turkey)

Image 12: Dinçer Pilgir, (Turkey), 1999

Image 14: Cemal Akbulut, 2003, (Turkey), CGD

Image 13: Erdinç Çakır, 2005, (Turkey), CGD

In Erdinç Çakır's ex-libris above, the text/typography has been gracefully placed to the lower part of the back of a woman that turned her back in a way that evokes the culture of tattooing, however, the use of the font without any intervention, to the extent possible with a computer, reduces the aesthetic quality of the design (Image 13). Another example of the use of wrong typography is the work of Cemal Bulut. Bulut directly used a font, which has no organic structural connection with the image, without interfering at all and took the easy way out (Image 14). Such designs produced without research, analysis and experiment will lack aesthetic qualities.

Conclusion

The determining factors of aesthetic qualities in ex-libris design can be summarized as follows: originality of the design, technical competence, correct use of typography and text, choice of the right material and

EX-LIBRIST International Journal of Ex-libris / Vol.**3** / Part **5**
Uluslararası Ekslibris Dergisi / Cilt **3** / Bölüm **5**

ISTANBUL EX-LIBRIS SOCIETY / İSTANBUL EKSLİBRİS DERNEĞİ

technique, well understanding the foreknowledge of the person who ordered it, and constructing the composition in the light of design principles.

What can be done to capture the aesthetic qualities and originality:

· Mastery of technique can be enhanced with more production.
· Criticism should be taken from the master artists in ex-libris and participation in the workshops they conduct should be ensured.
· Production in many different printing techniques should be done by avoiding easy ways. Convenience provided by computers should be exploited, however, production should only be done using the CGD technique.
· Content creation and topic selection should be paid adequate attention.
· The most challenging design problem with the artists producing ex-libris in the traditional method is the text and the use of the text. To resolve this issue, works of worldwide renowned ex-libris artists should be analyzed and their critics should be referred to from time to time to learn their perspective.

Experience in ex-libris, as in all arts, is a very important phenomenon. The most important way to advance the ex-libris art in Turkey, which has been in an evolving process for the last two decades under the leadership of our scholar Hasip Pektaş, is to produce works with aesthetic qualities. Although we do not have many problems in authenticity, we need to solve our problems in technique and typography as soon as possible and we should improve and go forward.

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