



# Mainz Impulse

With the digital media revolution we are currently experiencing a period of upheaval, as Gutenberg's contemporaries had already experienced with the invention of letterpress printing. Digitalisation is rapidly changing our everyday life in all areas. Gutenberg's craft, i.e. the production, duplication and distribution of texts, has also been largely digitalised, with the computer taking over many steps of publishing automatically. As a result, the traditional craft techniques of letterpress printing with movable types – which made this second digital media revolution possible in the first place – are threatened with extinction.

## Preservation of traditional craft/printing techniques

With this appeal, the Gutenberg Museum in Mainz – as the world museum of letterpress printing – and the Gutenberg City of Mainz – the cradle of European letterpress printing – wish to draw attention to the imminent loss of these so important craft techniques. We call for the comprehensive protection of the historical technology of letterpress printing, from stamp cutting, type casting and lead typesetting to press printing.

In order to save the “engineering achievement” of Johannes Gutenberg, we need as many comrades-in-arms as possible, whom we want to win over in this way. This is why this appeal is addressed to all citizens, to the interested public, to experts, to specialist committees and printing workshops, and to all institutions that feel a connection to letterpress printing. The national and international significance of letterpress printing requires a determined and swift commitment to protect this cultural technique from forgetting and disappearing.

## Measures required

- Foundation of an international Noah's Ark for Gutenberg's technology. There, the still few practicing experts are to pass on their knowledge to younger interested parties in order to keep the practical, immaterial knowledge alive. Elements are European educational programs, but also printing workshops which cultivate traditional printing techniques, or the “Walz” (“journey”) program of the Association for the Black Arts (Verein für die Schwarze Kunst e. V.), which is accompanied by the Gutenberg Museum and combines training and the transmission of cultural heritage.

- Inclusion of letterpress printing with movable types (Gutenberg's technique from stamp cutting to press printing) in the German list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of the UNESCO (Bundesweites Verzeichnis Immaterielles Kulturerbe).
- Inclusion of letterpress printing with movable types (Gutenberg's technique from stamp cutting to press printing) in the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.
- Quantitative expansion of training and capacities at vocational and higher-education institutions for "media technologies print" with a focus on "artistic printing processes".
- Anchoring of print and media history in the framework curricula of schools and vocational schools.
- Expansion and financial strengthening of existing networks, e.g. in the ERIH (European Route of Industrial Heritage).
- Focused support of still active companies in the analogue printing sector and promotion of artisanal printing workshops, including the print shop of the Gutenberg Museum.
- Strengthening the Gutenberg Museum so that it can continue to adequately fulfill its task of conveying the significance of letterpress printing with regards to civilisation for European and global history to an international audience in a clear and vivid manner with outstanding exhibits and – in practical terms – in its workshops.

### Last knowledge centres

There are still a few printing workshops producing books by manual typesetting and press printing and pass on this knowledge. Darmstadt still has one of the last type foundries in the world. And there is still a market for handmade typefaces, for manual typesetting and press printing. But these few traditional professions are now only practised by a few specialists. The authentic sources of information of the craft enterprises are lost when these last remaining specialists retire. Their knowledge and experience would fall into oblivion, as would the numerous machines and workshop equipment that no one would be able to operate or know their meaning and function.



## The importance of letterpress printing

Letterpress has changed the world like hardly any other invention before it. It influenced scientific, political, social, economic and cultural developments worldwide for more than 500 years, right up to the 20th century. And last but not least, it is the foundation for the media revolution that we are experiencing today with digitalisation. Beyond its technical innovation, book printing therefore has a fundamental significance with regard to civilisation, which was also expressed in the decision to elect Gutenberg as “Man of the Millennium” in the USA in the year 2000.

## Gutenberg Museum

This complexity of technical ingenuity, media progress and cultural and intellectual driving force inherent in letterpress printing has been shaping the research, collection and exhibition activities of the Gutenberg Museum Mainz since its foundation in 1900.

More than any other museum, it is dedicated on both a national and international level to traditional craftsmanship, technical know-how, the transfer of information and knowledge, and cultural and art historical evidence. It concerns itself with the changes that books, their contents, buyers and producers experienced as a result of Gutenberg’s invention and thus offers a comprehensive overview of an important historical epoch of European cultural and technical history.

The Gutenberg Museum, with its extensive collection of machines and objects relating to Gutenberg and his invention, one of the largest collections of East Asian prints outside of East Asia and numerous special collections such as ex-libris, miniature books or commercial prints, has been working for 120 years to preserve this important cultural heritage.

To preserve this heritage, the museum also has a specialised library (Gutenberg Library) with works on historical printing and book-production techniques and a biennial mini press fair which provides a forum for small publishers and press printers. Another important task is the practical teaching and research of the craft in the print shop. The Gutenberg Museum is thus telling a success story that by no means comes to an end in the electronic media age of our days, but continues in a transformed form. Democratisation of access to information and knowledge through digitalisation is only one of the highly relevant aspects.

## Idea for the “Mainz Impulse”


In order to initiate this process, the Gutenberg Museum, together with the “Bild Wissen Gestaltung” (“Image Knowledge Design”) cluster of excellence of the Humboldt University Berlin, organised the conference “Transformations of Letterpress Printing II – Haptics” in Mainz on 15th and 16th November 2018. A panel discussion initiated by the Director of the Gutenberg Museum with Dr. Susanne Richter (Director of the Museum für Druckkunst, Leipzig), Franz Gröno (book designer and publisher), Prof. Eckehart Schumacher-Gebler (owner of a printing workshop, Offizin Haag-Drugulin, Dresden) and Dr. Annette Ludwig (Director of the Gutenberg Museum), moderated by Matthias Neef (speaker, Immaterial Cultural Heritage Office / German UNESCO Commission), focused

on the above-mentioned topic. The aim was to formulate a “Mainz Impulse”, initiated from the Gutenberg Museum in the Gutenberg City of Mainz, in order to create a broad awareness, to ensure the continued existence of the Gutenberg heritage and thus of one of the most important cultural achievements of mankind.

State Capital Mainz, 30. September 2020



Mayor of the State Capital



Head of the Cultural Department



Gutenberg Museum  
Director