

Short technical glossary of printmaking

This is in no way intended as an exhaustive glossary, and only relates to the techniques used in the prints found in the collection.

Aquatint

Deriving from etching, the aquatint process produces tint effects of varying density. The plate is covered with a thin layer of rosin, which is heated so that it adheres. The acid will later etch into the unprotected areas, between the particles of rosin powder. Depending on the size of the rosin particles and the length of time that the plate is exposed to the acid, different effects and darker or lighter shades are obtained.

Etching

The term refers to both the technique and the prints obtained from the process. The distinctive feature of an etching is the fact that the metal is etched by acid rather than cut with a tool. On a plate previously covered with a protective ground, the printmaker draws his or her motif using a metal needle. The plate is then submerged in a mixture of nitric acid and water, which attacks or 'bites' into the metal exposed where lines have been drawn by the needle. The time taken by this etching stage varies according to the intensity of the blacks required. The ground is then removed from the plate, which is inked, dried and passed through the press. The technique produces a much freer line that is close in its effect to a pencil line.

Intaglio printing

In intaglio processes, the motif to be printed is cut directly into a metal plate. In contrast to relief printing, the motif to be printed is hollowed out, and the surfaces left in relief correspond to the areas of white.

The pressure of the hand determines the depth of the cut and therefore the density of the lines that are printed: so a deep cut produces lines of an intense black, whereas a light scratch creates grey lines. Intaglio processes are divided into two groups: direct processes in which the metal is incised with a tool (such as the burin used in engraving or a drypoint needle) and indirect processes (hard-ground or soft-ground etching, aquatint, etc.) in which the metal is etched by an acid. These different processes can be combined or used one after another.

Linocut

This technique invented in the 19th century applies the principles of a woodcut to linoleum, which has the advantage of being a soft material that is more homogenous and can be worked more freely than wood. Its low cost made it a popular medium amongst artists in the twentieth century.

Lithography

A technique invented between 1796 and 1798 by the German printer Alois Senefelder (1771–1834), which is based on the natural repulsion between water and greasy or oily substances. Lithography is a flat printing process, because rather than being engraved or etched, the composition is drawn onto limestone. The design is drawn with lithographic crayon, chalk or very greasy lithographic ink, which penetrates the slightly porous stone. The lithographer then moistens the stone with water, which only penetrates the areas where no marks have been made. The stone is then inked with a roller: the ink adheres to the greasy surface but is repelled by the damp surface. When the print is made, a sheet of paper is placed on the stone and they are put through a lithographic press. After each impression,

the stone must be moistened and inked. The technique produces the effect of a crayon drawing.

Print

An image printed from a prepared and inked matrix, which when passed through a press, transfers the ink it holds onto the paper (or another equally pliable support). The term applies to engravings, etchings and woodcuts, in which case the technique involves the preparation of a matrix by cutting into a wooden block or metal plate. However, it can also refer to lithographs, silk screen prints, or images produced by photomechanical processes. Whatever the process, the subject must be reversed, so that it appears the right way round when printed.

Relief printing

The motif to be printed is obtained by cutting away all the areas around it that will not be inked. When printing, the areas in relief are black and the very deep cuts are white, but it is not possible to obtain shades of grey, because each scratch on the plate will appear in white when printing.

Soft-ground etching

In this technique, the artist draws directly onto the metal plate, which is then etched with acid. The plate is covered with a soft ground formulated to remain soft and sticky rather than drying out completely. A sheet of paper is placed on top of the plate, and the artist draws on the paper, pressing hard with the pencil. When the paper is removed, the ground adheres to the back of it: the lines that are uncovered as a result will be etched by the acid. The etched line retains the structure of the paper and resembles a pencil line.

Woodcut

Woodcuts belong to the category of relief printing techniques. The woodcut developed in the West from the fourteenth century and uses a block cut in the direction of the wood's grain. This is carved with gouges, knives and chisels. The related technique of *wood engraving* was invented in the early 19th century and uses end-grain blocks cut across the grain of the wood, which are engraved with tools such as gravers, spitstickers and scorpers.