

Glossary of Printmaking Terms

print An image that has been impressed on a support, usually paper, by a process capable of being repeated. Most printmaking techniques (a major exception being digital prints) require the previous design and manufacture of a printing surface. The five primary types of print techniques are **relief, intaglio, planographic, screenprint, and digital.**

aquatint An **intaglio** process by which tones may be achieved in an etching; used primarily for the creation of large areas of tonal shading. In aquatint, small grains of resin are sprinkled on the surface of the plate, which is then heated to affix the particles to the surface. When the plate is immersed in the acid bath, the resin protects its surface, so that the acid only “bites” the spaces between the grains. This leaves (depending on particle size) a fine or coarse network of lines and crevices which hold ink, creating an area of tone. When printed, the tonal effects are similar to a watercolor wash.

artist’s proof/épreuve d’artiste In printmaking, these impressions are printed especially for the artist and excluded from the numbering of an edition, but are exactly like the editioned prints in every other respect. Usually appears as “A.P.” or “E.A.”

blindstamp The embossed, inked, or stamped symbol used by printers and print workshops, usually in the margin of the paper as a mark of identification. Also called “chop.”

bon à tirer (right to print) The proof approved by the artist which establishes the standard for all of the other prints in the edition.

burr In printmaking, when a drypoint needle or other engraving tool is used to draw directly into a metal plate, small, fine pieces of metal are raised up on both sides of the scored line. This burr holds additional ink during the printing process and gives the lines a velvety or fuzzy texture. Burr is very delicate and consequently is easily worn down during the pressures of the printing process. Early pulls or impressions taken from such plates are characterized by rich burr. In the case of Old Master prints especially, the quantity and evidence of burr can sometimes be used as an aid in determining how early the impression was pulled.

cancellation proof In printmaking, when the edition is complete, the matrix - a block, plate, stone, Mylar or other - is effaced, crossed out or otherwise “cancelled.” An impression is then taken from this matrix, showing that the plate has been “cancelled.” This ensures that no further uncanceled impressions can be pulled.

Carborundum The trade name for silicon carbide, Carborundum began its use in printmaking as an abrasive which was used in effacing lithographic stones. The particles, when mixed with glue, can also be used to draw on a plate-sometimes creating a raised surface-which is then inked and printed with the ink being held in the spaces between the particles. The resulting prints are often textured due to the raised areas of the printing surface.

chine appliqué Chine appliqué or chine collé is a method of papermaking characterized by affixing a thin sheet of smooth white paper, also called china paper or chine, with glue or water, to a sturdy woven paper, which acts as a support sheet. When the paper is run through the press during the printing process, the two sheets are firmly bonded together.

chop The embossed, inked, or stamped symbol used by printers and print workshops, usually in the margin of the paper as a mark of identification. Also called “blindstamp.”

collagraph A hybrid technique in which various elements (cardboard, metal plates, natural materials, etc.) are adhered to a printing plate, which may be inked and printed in a **relief** or **intaglio** method, or even printed without being inked for a purely embossed impression

colophon A note, usually at the end of a book or portfolio of prints, giving all or some of the following information: name of work, author, printer, place of printing, date, size of edition. Also called Justification.

deckle edge The natural, untrimmed edge of handmade paper usually slightly uneven and sometimes slightly thinner than the rest of the sheet.

dimensions (prints) “P” denotes measurements taken from the platemark, “S” records the size of the sheet of the print.

digital print, inkjet print An image created or manipulated on a computer and printed by a linked printer, using inkjet or laser technology. “Iris prints” and “giclée prints” are among other terms for digital prints.

drypoint A type of **intaglio** print in which lines or tones are scratched into the surface of a bare metal plate with a sharp metal point, sometimes tipped with a diamond. However, in contrast to engraving, the displaced copper is left in narrow furrows flanking the groove. Called “burr,” these areas catch and hold the printer’s ink, creating a halo of tone on the print. Burr wears out very quickly in the printing process so these tonal halos are found only on the earliest impressions.

edition A number of printed images, or *impressions*, from the same master plate or block using the same ink colors and printing methods, as established by the artist and/or publisher. The process of numbering individual impressions from an edition only became widespread in the twentieth century. The impressions in such a “limited” edition are usually signed and numbered progressively, for instance 1/50, 2/50, etc., for a total edition of fifty impressions; after the total is reached, the plate or stone is “cancelled” or destroyed. Often a few impressions will be printed outside the regular edition for the collaborators (artist, printer, publisher). Impressions printed during the development process to test the printing or try out color variations are called “proofs” or “progressive proofs”.

embossing A printmaking process used to create a raised surface or raised element, but printed without ink.

engraving An **intaglio** process in which a plate is marked or incised directly with a burin or other metal-marking tool. No acid is used in this process since the design is dug out by hand. An engraved line can range from very deep and wide, to lighter and thinner and is often characterized by a pointed end signaling the exit of the “v” shaped burin from the metal. An engraved plate is inked and printed in the same manner as other **intaglio** prints, in which the engraved lines are filled with ink and the surface is usually wiped clean. When put through a roller press under great pressure, the paper is forced into the engraved lines, transferring the ink and creating a slightly raised line in the printed impression, along with an embossed platemark, caused by the pressure of the edge of the metal printing plate.

etching In contrast to engraving, in this type of **intaglio** print the artist uses acid to cut into the plate. Lines and/or tonal areas of an image have been corroded, or “bitten”, into the surface of a metal plate by the action of a corrosive agent, called a mordant. Traditionally nitric acid has been used, but increasingly less toxic materials are being introduced, such as ferric chloride. A metal plate is first covered with an acid-resistant substance (ground) through which the image is drawn with a needle or other tool, exposing the bare metal. When immersed in the mordant, only those exposed areas are subject to its action. The metal plate is therefore “carved” or “etched” by the acid rather than by a tool directly in the metal. Recently, photopolymer etching has been developed, whereby a drawing, photograph, or digital image is transferred to a photosensitive polymer plate and processed into a relief or intaglio printing plate.

foul-biting In printmaking, when the acid-resistant ground on a metal plate does not keep the acid entirely out, irregularities can appear. These “bitten” areas will, when the plate is printed, catch ink and appear as spots or oddly inked areas.

frontispiece Illustration in a book opposite the title page.

heliogravure A printmaking method of making a photo-etched or photogravure plate using an aquatint texture directly on the plate to create tone.

Hors-Commerce (H.C.) – Meaning “outside of the commercial edition”. In printmaking, these proofs, not originally intended for sale, are excluded from the numbering of an edition, but are otherwise exactly like the editioned prints in every other respect.

impression A single printed image (usually on paper) from a printing surface. Multiple impressions may be printed from the same etching plate, woodblock, lithographic stone, or other surface.

intaglio (from the Italian word *Intagliare*, to carve or incise) A category of printmaking in which the surface of a printing plate has been incised with a design by one or a mixture of techniques. In order to print the image, ink is applied and wiped across the surface of the plate, filling the recessed areas. Usually the excess ink is then cleaned off the unworked surface of the plate. When printed under great pressure, the paper is forced into those incised marks, thus picking up the ink and often creating ridges and raised areas in the final printed impression. Types of intaglio prints are **engraving, etching, aquatint, and mezzotint**.

justification A note, usually at the end of a book or portfolio of prints, giving all or some of the following information: name of work, author, printer, place of printing, date, size of edition. Also called Colophon.

Linocut/Linoleum Cut – A relief process in printmaking, like a woodcut, where the artist carves the design out of the linoleum or linoleum mounted onto wood. What remains is printed, rather than what is cut away. Because linoleum is a softer material than wood, artists generally cut (carved) their own blocks, rather than relying on the services of a professional cutter. The technique was developed at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Lithograph – A planographic (or flat) printing process based on the principle that oil and water repel each other. The lithographer creates a design directly on a stone or smooth plate with a greasy material, such as crayon, and chemically fixes it to the surface. The stone is dampened with water, which, repelled by the greasy medium, only settles in the blank spaces where there is no design. Thus the printing ink adheres only to the areas where the design was drawn. It is considered the most draftsmanlike of printmaking processes for its ability to preserve the artist’s gestures so accurately.

Master Printer – A highly skilled printer who works very closely with the artist to produce the edition.

Matrix – The base from which the print is made. This can be anything - a standard metal plate or lithographic stone, a potato or vinyl record, a stencil - anything from which you print.

Mezzotint – Literally “half-tint.” An **intaglio** process closely related to engraving, but used primarily for the creation of large areas of tonal variation rather than for sharp lines. The entire surface of a plate is roughened by a spiked tool (“rocker”) so that, if inked, the entire plate would print in solid black. The artist then works from dark to light by scraping (or burnishing) out areas to produce lighter tones. The more an area is burnished smooth (in order to carry less ink), the brighter the highlight. This process creates very soft, velvety gradations of tone.

Monoprint – A print which has as its base an etching, lithograph or woodcut and which is then uniquely altered by monotype coloring, unique inking, or choices in paper color.

Monotype – A type of print in which a drawing or painting executed on a flat, unworked printing plate or other surface, sometimes glass, which is then transferred to a sheet of paper through pressure. As most of the image is transferred to the printing process, only one strong impression can be taken, hence the term monotype (unique, single impression). Sometimes a second, weaker impression can also be printed from the plate. A monotype is distinct from a **monoprint**, which is a uniquely inked and printed impression from a traditional print matrix, such as an etching plate or woodblock.

Offset Printing – Method of printing in which the inked image from a lithographic stone, a metal plate or other matrix is first transferred to an intermediary such as a rubber cylinder or blanket and then to paper, thus creating an image in the same direction as the original.

Photo-Etching/Photogravure – An intaglio printmaking process in which an image is produced on an etching plate by photographic means (see also Heliogravure)

Photo-Lithograph – A process in which an image is produced on a lithographic plate by photographic means.

Planographic Print – Printing from a flat surface. Planographic processes include lithography and some forms of commercial printing.

Plate Mark – The imprint in the paper resulting from the edge of a metal plate being pushed into it during the pressure of the printing process.

Plate Tone – A veil of ink intentionally left on the surface of the plate during printing which creates delicate areas of tone or shading.

Pochoir – A printing process using stencils, originally used to simulate hand-coloring.

Printer's Proofs (P.P.) – Impressions printed especially for the printer(s) and excluded from the numbering of an edition, but exactly like the editioned prints in every other respect. Usually appears as "P.P."

Progressive Proofs – In printmaking, a series of proofs taken to show each individual color plate and each combination of them culminating in the final, complete version.

Publisher (prints) – The person or entity who subsidizes and often initiates the making of a print edition or portfolio and who also disseminates the prints.

Relief – A category of printmaking in which a design on a flat surface is carved with a knife or chisel, removing the areas that the printmaker does not want to be printed. When the surface is then rolled with ink and printed, the resulting impression will only show the lines and shapes of the design left on the unworked surface by the artist. The most common types of relief prints are **woodcut**, **wood engraving**, and **linocut**.

Screenprint – A printing process using stencils to block out areas which are then printed through silk, other fabric or metal mesh (screen). Several different screens may be used to print an image in several colors. Also called Silkscreen or Serigraph.

Silkscreen – A printing process using stencils to block out areas which are then printed through silk, other fabric or metal mesh (screen). Several different screens may be used to print an image in several colors. Also called Screenprint or Serigraph.

Soft-ground Etching – In printmaking, an etching technique where a soft ground is laid on the metal plate. The artist draws onto a piece of paper which is laid down on top of the ground. The ground adheres to the paper where the pencil or other tool has pressed down into it through the paper and pulls away when the paper is lifted. The resulting "marked" plate is placed in an acid-bath where the acid "bites" into the more exposed areas where the ground has been "lifted". The line created is often soft and grainy.

State – Any intermediate change made by the artist while creating an image fixed on a plate, stone, or block, as reflected in **impressions** or proofs printed during the development process of a printed image. The “final state” is the state from which editions are generally pulled, although some artists pull several impressions in each state.

Steel Facing – When a metal intaglio printmaking plate is covered with a thin deposit of steel using electrolysis creating a much harder surface which can accommodate larger numbers of printings before wear becomes evident.

Trial Proof – An early proof in printmaking, often incorporating artist’s revisions and changes and generally not identical to the numbered, editioned prints. Also called Working Proof.

Tusche – Grease in stick or liquid form used principally for drawing in lithography.

Watermark – Design in the paper seen when held against the light. A manufacturer’s mark, it is used to trace the origin and date of the paper.

Waxtype – A process like screenprinting where pigmented beeswax is used rather than traditional printer’s ink.

Woodcut (or Woodblock) – A **relief** process where the image or design is left raised above what is carved out of the wood. In order to print impressions, ink is rolled onto the surface of the cut block, printing only the areas left on the surface; the cut-away areas do not print. A printing press may be used, or the impressions may be printed by hand, using a wooden spoon or other tool. What is not carved is printed.

Wood Engraving – A process similar to woodcut, but a much more finely-grained type of wood is used, and the block is carved from the end of a plank, rather than its side. As a result, much more detailed engraving tools may be used to create the image. Often, wood engravers have worked from dark to light, i.e., creating highlights from a dark (unworked) background, rather than cutting away larger areas around lines to be printed against a lighter background.