

Glossary of Printmaking Terms

Aquatint

A tonal method of etching in which a plate is coated with an acid-resistant, powdery resin and heated, so that the grains of resin adhere to the plate. Aquatint produces a grainy surface which, when etched, will print non-linear areas of tone.

Burr

The ridge of displaced metal at the end of or along an engraved or drypoint line. In engraving, the burr is generally removed with a scraper. The burr in the drypoint process absorbs ink and produces a characteristic soft, velvety line when the plate is printed. Drypoint burr wears down quickly in the printing process.

Drypoint

A primary intaglio technique in which an image is scratched manually into a plate using a sharp tool, such as a stylus. The burr builds up along the sides of the line and absorbs the ink, producing a softer, velvety line when printed.

Engraving

A primary, and the earliest, intaglio technique in which the image is manually incised on a metal plate, usually copper, using a burin (metal tool), which produces a crisp, V-shaped line. Width and depth of line are dependent on the pressure of the artist's hand and arm on the burin; typically, engraved lines swell in the middle and taper toward the ends.

Etching

A primary intaglio technique in which lines (or, in aquatint, tones) are chemically established on a metal plate by means of acid solution or mordant. An image is drawn through an acid-resistant coating or "ground" to expose the metal underneath. The plate is immersed in the acid bath, in which the lines or tones are "bitten." The width and depth of the lines are controlled by the length of time the plate is in the acid; the plate may be rebitten in some areas, while other areas are protected by "stopping-out" with an acid resistant varnish.

Impression

Any individual print taken from a plate, block, stone, screen, or other printing surface.

Intaglio

One of the four basic categories of printmaking, including the individual graphic media of etching and engraving. The key trait of intaglio is that the ink rests in linear incisions or areas beneath the upper surface of the plate, which must be wiped off before printing. Intaglio prints are printed in roller presses under great pressure, which forces

the paper into the incisions and produces an indented border or platemark around the image.

Lithography

The chief planographic technique, invented by Alois Senefelder in the late eighteenth century. An image is drawn or painted with a greasy medium on a flat surface, usually fine-grained limestone, but also on zinc or aluminum plates. The medium may range from chalklike to liquid. The stone is treated with nitric acid and gum Arabic to set the image, dampened, inked, and printed, traditionally using a press with a bar that scrapes across the back of the paper laid face down on the stone.

Mezzotint

One of the primary tonal processes of intaglio printmaking. The plate is worked with a mezzotint rocker, scoring it all over. If printed in this stage, the mezzotinted plate would be totally black. It is then worked by scraping and burnishing to produce lighter areas.

Planographic

A printmaking technique in which the image is produced on a flat surface rather than by incision or cutting of any kind. See Lithography.

Reproductive Print

Any print whose main purpose is to reproduce, although sometimes with significant changes, a work in another medium, usually painting.

Soft-ground

A form of etching in which the plate is covered with a soft, waxy ground. The design is established on the plate by drawing on a sheet of paper placed over it, and the plate is then etched. Various textures like cloth can also be impressed in soft-ground and etched.

Woodcut

The oldest printmaking technique and the primary relief technique, in which the design is carved into a fairly soft wooden block with gouges, chisels, and knives.

All definitions are derived from Linda C. Hults. *The Print in the Western World: An Introductory History*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.