

SELF-GUIDED TOUR

PRINTMAKING TOUR

IOWA

Stanley Museum of Art

Welcome

This tour highlights a selection of printmaking techniques instead of specific artworks. Due to their light sensitivity, we rotate works on paper every few months. While you may not see all examples from this guide up in our galleries, we encourage you to explore the prints we do have on display and apply what you learn.

Printmaking is a unique medium, allowing an artist to create up to thousands of copies of the same image. Historically, printmaking allowed skilled artists to sell their work to a wider audience, rather than only to the wealthy. Through printmaking, art and information spread more quickly and diversely, and different techniques helped communicate different ideas and emotions.

How to use this guide

This tour is a starting point for visitors interested in learning about printmaking methods and their histories. It explores six printmaking techniques, discusses the process and tools used to create each print, and provides examples through which to compare or contrast the techniques. With each technique, this tour includes a prompt to encourage reflection and discussion with friends and family. Lastly, we want to hear from you! Write about your reactions or draw a print you would like to make and share with us.

This self-guided tour was developed by Annelies Knight (BA Art History 2025), Campus Engagement Coordinator. Annelies's area of interest in her studies is the transition from Medieval to Renaissance art in Early Modern central Europe, so she wanted to create a tour that focused on making the conversations around prints and printmaking more accessible to museum audiences.

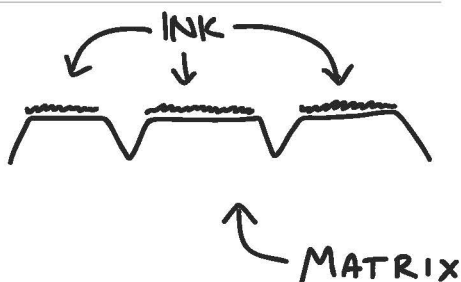
PRINTMAKING Glossary

MATRIX

The plate, block, or material that ink is applied to in order to make a print. Examples include wood, limestone slabs, linoleum, and various metals.

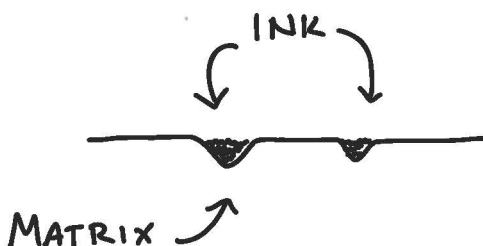
RELIEF

A method of printmaking in which the matrix is carved into, and ink sits on the raised sections.



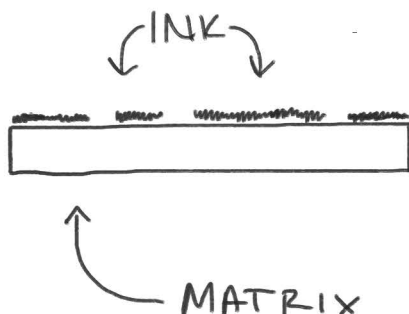
INTAGLIO

A method of printmaking in which the matrix is carved into, and ink sits in those carved out areas.



PLANOGRAPHIC

A method of printmaking in which ink is applied directly to the matrix without carving. In some cases, there is something to make the ink stick to specific areas of the matrix; in others the ink is drawn on with no fixative.



Blue Bird from Twelve Prints by Contemporary
American Artists
1919
Wood Engraving on paper
Gift of Alan January, 2024.22
Rockwell Kent
American, 1882–1971



TECHNIQUE 1 Wood engraving & woodcut

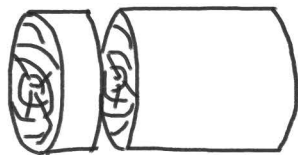
TYPE OF PRINT: Relief

PLATE MATERIAL: Wood

Woodcut printing originated in China in the 5th century and became popular in the 15th century throughout central Europe. Both woodcut and wood engraving are relief print techniques. They involve the artist carving into the wood, cutting away areas that aren't a part of the design, and leaving behind a raised image. Ink is then applied, sticking only to the raised image, and transferred to paper. The main difference between the woodcut and wood engraving processes is the wood itself: woodcut is done on wood planks (wood cut with the grain), while wood engraving is done on end-grain wood (wood cut against the grain).

WOOD

ENGRAVING



WOODCUT



QUESTIONS

Woodcut and wood engraving are very similar printmaking methods. Looking at the examples of these techniques in this guide, and any other examples you may find in the galleries, can you see any visual differences between the prints? Why might an artist use the woodcut technique instead of the wood engraving technique, or vice versa?



Sovereign

1970

Etching

Gift of Kohler Foundation, Inc., 2022.47

Barbara Rossi

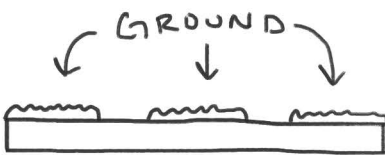
American, 1940–2023

TECHNIQUE 2 Etching

TYPE OF PRINT: Intaglio

PLATE MATERIAL: Iron, copper, or zinc

Etching is an intaglio technique with roots in armor decoration that was adopted in the early 1500s by printmakers in southern Germany. To prepare the matrix, a metal plate is covered with a layer of “ground” made of wax or varnish. The artist carves into this layer, scraping away the ground to create their image. The plate is then submerged into acid, which eats away at the exposed metal, leaving valleys for ink to fill. Ink is rolled on the plate, then the printmaker wipes the plate to remove excess ink. The plate is finally covered by a damp sheet of paper and rolled through a printing press. This process results in a print with a sketch-like quality.



BEFORE THE
ACID BATH



AFTER THE
ACID BATH

QUESTIONS

Think about the techniques discussed so far: woodcut, wood engraving and etching. What do you think would be easier—carving into wood, or drawing into ground on a plate? Why might an artist choose to do one over the other?



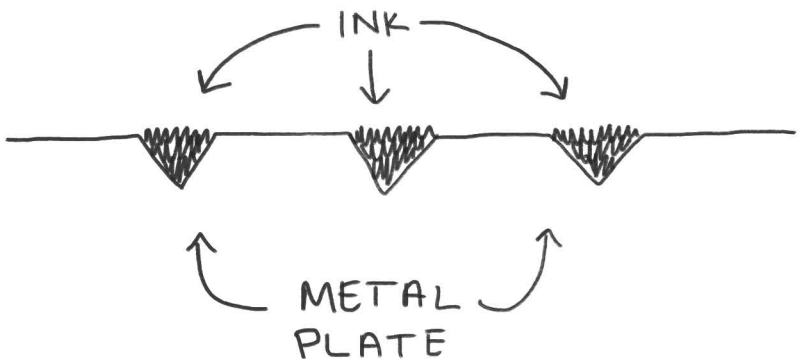
Harrowing of Hell or Christ in Limbo from The Engraved Passion
 1512, published in 1513
 Engraving
 Gift of Owen and Leone Elliott, 1967.442
Albrecht Dürer
 German, 1471–1528

TECHNIQUE 3 Engraving

TYPE OF PRINT: Intaglio

PLATE MATERIAL: Copper or zinc

Engraving is an intaglio technique, originating in Germany and northern Italy in the mid-1400s, that was popularized by prominent Italian painters of the century. The matrix, a metal plate, is first polished to ensure a smooth surface. The printmaker then carves into the matrix, cutting their image directly into the plate. Once the image is carved, the matrix is inked; the ink will sit in the carved image and excess ink is wiped off. The matrix is pressed onto paper, revealing the final print.



QUESTIONS

Both engraving and etching are intaglio techniques, but an engraving may make crisper lines, while an etching may look more sketched. What images or emotions might you want to make or convey with engraving, and which might you want to convey with etching?



Margot Wearing a Large Bonnet, Seated in an Armchair
1904

Drypoint on Japan paper

Gift of Owen and Leone Elliott, 1966.4

Mary Cassatt

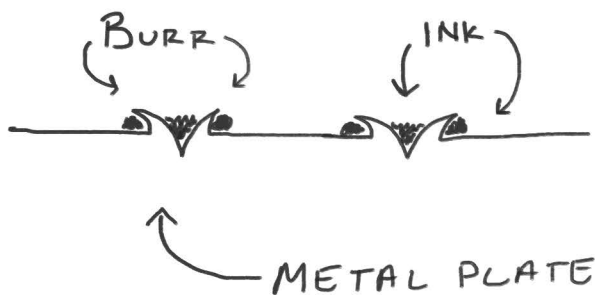
American, 1844–1926

TECHNIQUE 4 Drypoint

TYPE OF PRINT: Intaglio

PLATE MATERIAL: copper or zinc

Drypoint is an intaglio technique that emerged in the 15th century and is produced by an artist carving directly into a metal plate to make an image. This carving creates a “burr,” or a buildup of metal ridges alongside the carved lines. These burrs trap more ink, giving drypoint prints a soft or blurred effect. To create darker, more feathered lines, the artist can carve deeper and hold their tool at an angle closer to the plate to create more of a burr. After ink is applied and the excess ink is wiped off, a damp sheet of paper is set on top, and the print is run through a printing press. The matrix can only produce a few prints through this process, as the burr wears down quickly.



QUESTIONS

Drypoint produces softer or blurrier lines than traditional engraving. When an artist is trying to show different moods or emotions, when might they want to use drypoint? When might they want to use traditional engraving?

Natiurmort I (Still Life I)

1986

Mezzotint

The Alden Lowell Doud Collection, 2014.248

Konstantin Chmutin

Russian, 1953–

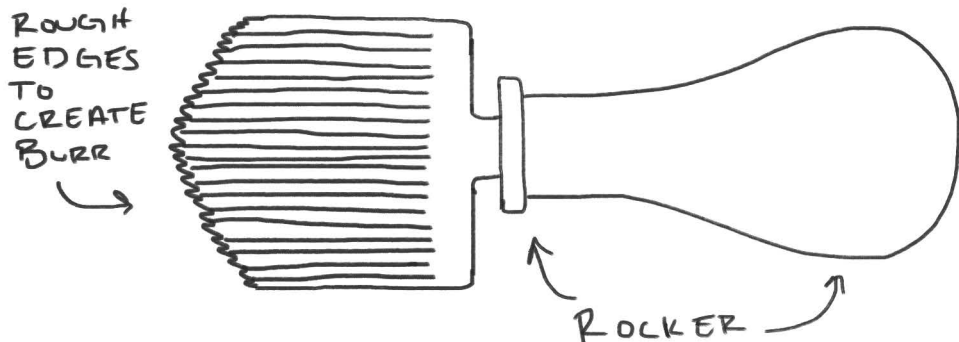


TECHNIQUE 5 Mezzotint

TYPE OF PRINT: Intaglio

PLATE MATERIAL: copper

Mezzotint is an intaglio technique created in 17th century Amsterdam that became very popular among English printmakers. Mezzotint's defining characteristic is its seamless gradations from light to dark. These gradations are achieved with a rocker tool, in a process that takes hours (or days) to create an all-over burr on the matrix surface. After the burr is built up, the artist will then go through and smooth out various areas; the smoother an area, the lighter it will appear, as less ink will stick to it. As with drypoint, only a few prints can be made from each matrix, as the burr wears down quickly.



QUESTIONS

While mezzotint print plates can only be used a few times, lithograph blocks can be used almost indefinitely. If you were to make a print, would you want to be able to make many copies of your print or only a few? Why?



The Offering

1930

Lithograph on Rives BFK

Gift of Wayman Adams, 1933.3

Wayman Adams

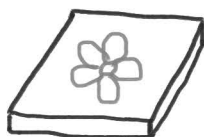
American, 1883–1959

TECHNIQUE 6 Lithography

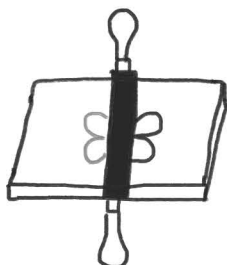
TYPE OF PRINT: Planographic

PLATE MATERIAL: Stone, zinc, or aluminum

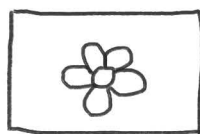
Discovered in 1789, lithography is a planographic printing process that makes use of the water-repellent nature of grease. To make a print, the artist first draws an image using a grease pencil onto the matrix. This image is then secured to the matrix using chemicals, and water is applied. Because the greasy image is water-repellent, the image remains dry while the matrix around it gets wet. Oil-based ink is then applied, and, because it is also water-repellant, sticks only to the image and not the damp matrix around it. Unlike other techniques, thousands of prints can be made from one lithographic matrix, especially when using the more expensive limestone slabs.



**WAX
DRAWING**



**INK IS ROLLED
ON THE IMAGE**



**A PRINT
IS MADE**

QUESTIONS

When comparing lithography to other techniques, what kinds of images do you think would benefit from being lithographs? What kinds of images would you make using a different technique instead? Why?

Share with us

In this tour, we explored the origins, process, and characteristics of various printmaking techniques.

- How do artists use different techniques to achieve different effects?
- What processes do you see artists using in combination to create a print?
- What surprised you about the print making processes?
- What other art processes would you like to learn more about?

WE WANT TO KNOW WHAT YOU THINK!

On the next page, write about or draw your reflections from the questions above and any other responses you have to this tour.

Tear off this page to give to the gallery hosts at the Welcome Desk or snap a photo of your response and share it with us on Instagram @uistanleymuseum or by email at stanley-museum@uiowa.edu.

Write or draw here!



COMING
HOME
COMING
HOME

LUCE HENRY
LUCE
FOUNDATION

IOWA

Stanley Museum of Art

2025.1