

## a glossary of

# PRINTMAKING TERMS

**AQUATINT** A form of intaglio in which the metal plate is dusted or covered with acid-resistant powder (rosin or asphaltum). Areas not covered by the coating when the plate is immersed in acid are etched, creating a pitted or grainy surface. These tonal areas can be further manipulated and are often used in conjunction with line etching. See *Self-Portrait/White Ink*.

**ARTIST'S PROOF (AP)** A small number of prints, reserved specifically for the artist's use, made at the same time as the editioned prints.

**BITE** The etching or corrosion produced on a metal plate when it is submerged in an acid bath.

**BRAYER** A hand roller used to apply ink to a printing surface.

**BURIN** A tapered, rod-shaped steel tool with a square or lozenge-shaped tip used for engraving metal or end-grain wood plates. Also called a graver.

**BURNISH** In intaglio printing, the process of rubbing or smoothing the raised metal surface of the plate, using a metal tool (burnisher) to compact the tooth of the printing surface. It is used in mezzotint to create the whites and is sometimes used as a method to correct mistakes. In relief printing, burnishing refers to the printing process, in which an image is transferred from an inked block to paper by hand rubbing.

**DREMEL** A motorized hand tool with different types of attachments, used for carving into wood or metal.

**EDITION** A set of identical impressions produced serially from the same plate. Editioned prints are sequentially numbered, with the total number of prints written below the individual print number.

**EMBOSSING** An inkless technique used to create a slightly raised or three-dimensional effect by using pressure on a flat surface so that the paper takes on the physical characteristics of the relief plate or block.

**ETCHING** An intaglio process that uses acid to bite an image into a metal plate. The plate is coated with an acid-resistant emulsion or ground, through which the image is drawn or scratched with a needle. The plate is then placed in an acid bath that penetrates or bites into the exposed areas, creating the depressions that will hold the ink.

**ETCHING NEEDLE** A pointed steel tool used to scratch into a metal etching surface.

**GOUGE** A tool used for cutting into wood or linoleum block. Points of various sizes and shapes can be used to create a V- or U-shaped groove.

**GROUND** A waxy or resinous substance that resists the acid used in intaglio processes.

**HANDMADE PAPER** The traditional technique of papermaking, in which a selected fiber (cotton, linen, or another plant fiber) is macerated and then suspended in water to form a pulpy liquid known as a slurry. The slurry is contained in a vat. A wood framed mesh screen is lowered into the vat. When lifted from the vat, the screen is shaken as the water drains off to achieve an even distribution of fibers.

The formed sheet is then dried by air, so the sheet contracts; or in a press, using different backings to create varied effects.

**HARD GROUND** An acid-resistant substance used in etching that contains asphaltum, beeswax, and rosin.

**INTAGLIO** The images that are produced by ink held in recessed areas of a printing plate. Intaglio methods include aquatint, engraving, dry point, etching, and mezzotint.

**LINOLEUM CUT OR LINO CUT** A relief print in which the image has been carved from a surface of linoleum, usually mounted on wood.

**LITHOGRAPHY** A printing method in which an image is drawn, using greasy ink or litho crayons, directly on the flat surface of a limestone or aluminum plate that has been treated to accept ink and repel water. The image is fixed to the surface by a coating of acid and gum Arabic, which lightly etches the stone or plate without altering the height or depth of the stone. This mixture enhances the ability of the sections of the stone or plate that are not drawn on to hold water. During printing, the plate or stone is kept wet at all times by sponging water on it. Oil-based ink is then rolled over the surface. The wetness of the negative areas of the plate rejects the ink, ensuring that the ink will stick only to the drawing. Images are transferred from plate to paper by means of a press.

**MATRIX** The physical, ink-holding base from which a print image is derived, such as an etching plate, lithography stone, or woodblock.

**MEZZOTINT** Meaning “half-tint” or “half-tone,” it is the mechanical intaglio technique in which an entire metal plate is roughened to create a burr that holds ink to produce a dark background. The artist works from dark to light, using a rocker to burnish the surface to create areas that hold less ink. This produces a full range of tones. Because this method is so labor-intensive, mezzotints are usually small.

**MYLAR** A thin, transparent plastic sheet used for registration of the print or as a surface for the image to be drawn on in order to photographically transfer the drawing to the plate. Mylar is used because it is stable and does not stretch or shrink when exposed to water.

**PHOTOGRAVURE** A photographic intaglio method using sensitized carbon tissue to produce an image on the printing plate. The carbon tissue is exposed to light to harden the emulsion, which remains softest where the image on the Mylar is darkest. Once exposed, the carbon tissue is adhered face down on the copper printing plate.

**PLANOGRAPHIC** Images produced by using chemicals to adhere ink to a flat printing surface. Lithography is an example of planographic printing.

**PROGRESSIVE PROOFS** A series of trial prints showing the progressive build up of color in preparation for a multicolor print. Progressive proofs are printed in sequence one over the other with a new color added to each successive proof. The first proof will show color A, the second colors A and B, the third proof will show colors A, B, and C, and so on.

**PUBLISHING** The relationship between an artist and publisher in which the publisher funds a print edition in exchange for a percentage of the profits. The publisher may be involved in the printing process or may hire someone to execute the edition.

**REDUCTION BLOCK** A type of relief print made by alternately cutting and printing the same block, working from lighter to darker colors.

**REGISTRATION** The precise alignment of the paper and printing plates—for example, when printing multiple colors—to ensure that each successive impression aligns correctly.

**RELIEF** Types of images that are produced on a raised printing surface. Linocut, woodblock, and woodcut are all relief printing processes.

**RESIST** Any substance applied to a printing ground to prevent adhesion of another substance, such as ink.

**ROCKER** A steel tool with a serrated, curved front edge that is used in mezzotint to abrade the surface of the plate.

**SILK SCREEN** A form of stencil printing in which an image is produced by using a squeegee to push ink through a stretched mesh fabric (historically silk). Non-printed areas of the screen are blocked off using a resist.

**SOFT GROUND** A method of etching in which a nondrying or pliable acid-resistant ground is applied to a plate to produce softer lines and textures than hard-ground etching. The artist draws on a piece of paper placed over the plate. The pressure of the drawing tool exposes the plate for etching in acid.

**SPITBITE** An aquatint method in which nitric acid is applied directly to the etching plate with a brush coated with water or saliva to help control the acid.

**SQUEEGEE** A tool with a handle and a broad, hard rubber or plastic blade used to push the ink through the screen when producing silk screen prints.

**STATE PROOFS** The series of trial prints that are made after each stage in the printing process, from start to finish.

**STENCIL** Images that are printed by pushing ink through the cut-away areas of a stencil. Types of stencil printing include screen printing, or silk screen—also known as serigraphy.

**TAPESTRY** A heavy, hand-woven, and often reversible textile used as a wall hanging, usually characterized by complicated pictorial designs. See *Phil/Tapestry*.

**UKIYO-E** The classic Japanese form of woodblock printing, historically used for making large quantities of popular images. In this type of relief printing, many individual blocks of wood are carved, often by a professional woodcutter, and then fitted together to form the printing surface. The use of water-based inks results in delicate, translucent colors similar to the effects of watercolor painting. The printing paper is placed on top of the inked blocks, and an impression is made by hand rubbing with a baren, rather than using a press.

**WOODBLOCK** The incised wooden plank or shaped woodblocks that hold the ink from which a woodcut is printed.

**WOODCUT** The oldest form of relief printing in which portions of a woodblock are cut away using knives, gouges, and chisels. Ink is rolled over the elevated areas of the block, and absorbent paper is pressed onto the surface to transfer the image.

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