General Notes by Bernard Courtis

These are general notes on techniques and terminology used in the production of art works.

Bernard Courtis - June 2008 - 2011



The Arts

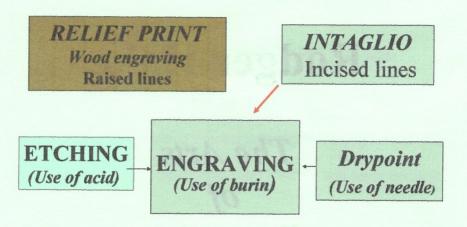
of

Engraving

&

Etchings

The main methods of making Prints used by Dürer



Engraving entailed incising a line with a burin while pressing it into a plate to the required depth to create the desired shade and line width

MAKING AN ENGRAVING

STAGE ONE

Using a sharply pointed instrument called a *burin*, the engraver incises his design into the surface of a metal plate, (which was usually made of highly polished copper) placed on a sand cushion in order that the engrave could turn the plate as he incised

STAGE TWO

The design is carefully burnished and if required adjusted with a drypoint needle

Ink is applied with a cloth, filling the grooves. The surface is wiped and the plate is ready to print

MAKING AN ETCHINGING

STAGE ONE

To begin an etching, a copper plate is coated with wax

- ▶ With a steel etching needle the intended picture is drawn through the wax and onto the metal.
- ▶ The metal is then submerged into a bath of acid

▶ The acid eats away at the copper that has been exposed by the needle to leave grooves, marks and textures in the metal.

▶ The plate is then taken out of the acid bath and the wax is cleaned off.

This can be repeated again and again by rewaxing the plate

STAGE TWO

The next stage of the etching process is to apply printing ink into the lines of the plate.

Once the plate is wiped again with a stiff cloth, it will leave ink in the lines and grooves

The following stage was similar for both procedures

The inked plate was then placed in a hand-printing press with two heavy rollers.

Damp paper is placed on top of the plate and squeezed through the rollers using great pressure

When the paper is carefully peeled off, the image will be printed onto it.

The Arts
of
Drawing
&
Woodcuts

FOUR MAIN STEPS

STEP ONE



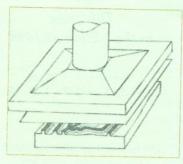
A woodcut begins as a design sketched on a block of wood that has been covered with a white ground. All wood not part of the design is dug out with a sharp gouge.

STEP TWO



The raised design is coated with ink by rocking a leather-covered wooden tool called a *dabber* over the block.
The gouged areas are thus kept inkfree.

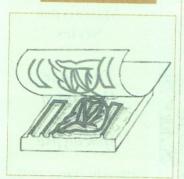
STEP THREE



A sheet of paper is next placed on the inked block and imprinted on it by means of a vertical press.

Pressure is applied gently so as to avoid damaging the wooden relief work

STEP FOUR



The finished print is peeled from the block.

A single wood block, if carefully handled, can yield a few hundred clear impressions before the raised design begins to chip.





The Revelation of St John Title page to the edition of 1498

Woodcut, 39 x 28 cm Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe

German title:

Die heimlich offenbarung iohnis (The Revelation of St John).

Latin title:

Apocalipsis cum Figuris



Apocalypse Series

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse

Albrecht Dürer 1498 Woodcut, 39 x 28 cm

Aide Memoire No G01

PAINTING - GLOSSARY

ALLA PRIMA Literally means "at first" and is a direct form of painting made in one session or while the colours remain wet. {As opposed to "indirect" painting in which the painting is built up in layers}. (alla prima technique is employed by artists when they want to paint spontaneously. It is, however, a difficult style to master as it requires fluent brushstrokes and a skilful manipulation of the paint.)

BINDER In paint this is the substance which holds the pigment particles together and which acts as an adhesive to the support (see also extender).

BLENDING A soft, gradual transition from one colour or tone to another. A clean dry brush should be used to make gentle strokes in the same direction to join separate colours. (Blending may involve slightly softening the sharp outline of a single object against a background, or working on the whole painting, so that it takes on a rounded, seemingly three-dimensional effect.)

BODY COLOUR When associated with prints, drawings, or watercolours, the term body colour refers to a water-based, opaque painting medium (such as gouache or tempera). In

¹ Compiled from various sources including from Royal Academy of Arts glossary contained in The DK Art School

broader usage, body colour can refer to a pigment that is naturally opaque (such as opaque *chromium-oxide* green), as opposed to one that is naturally transparent (such as transparent *chromium-oxide* green, called *viridian*). Body colours can be used as opaque middle tones when creating the illusion of form; shadows are added with transparent darker *glazes*, highlights created with opaque lighter *scumbles*.

BRISTLE BRUSHES Hog hair bristle brushes are used extensively in oil painting. They have coarse hairs which hold plenty of thick paint and yet retain their shape. (Bristle brushes are useful for covering large areas with a uniform tone and for blending.)

BROKEN COLOUR Colour that has been broken up by mixing with another colour or is affected optically by the juxtaposition or superimposition of another colour. (Broken colour can be created using a dry brush or scumbling technique.)

CHALK Natural calcium carbonate, used in the preparation of chalk/glue grounds for its whiteness and opacity and as a cheap *extender* in oil-based paints in which it is translucent. "Chalking" is the powdering of the paint surface due to the breakdown of the binder as a result of ultraviolet radiation.

CHARCOAL Carbonized wood made by charring willow, vine, or other twigs in airtight containers. Charcoal is one of the oldest drawing materials .(If charcoal is used for a preparatory drawing, the excess dust can be rubbed off the surface using a large soft hair brush or apiece of doughy bread).

CHROMA The intensity or *saturation* of a colour. **Chromatic** is the term used for an image that has been drawn or painted in a range of different colours.

CHIAROSCURO The Italian words chiaro (light) and oscuro (dark) are conjoined to describe the effects of light and shadow in painting, particularly when the contrast between the two is very pronounced. The term is most often associated with the lighting found in the paintings of Caravaggio and his followers, and of Rembrandt. This dramatic illumination is often characterized by a shaft of light like that produced by a spotlight, which results in strong highlights and sharply cast shadows.

DAMMAR A soft resin soluble in turpentine and used to make a gloss varnish. (An acceptable varnish can be made by dissolving some dammar resin in a jar of turpentine or white spirit).

DARKS Those parts of a painting that are in shadow.

DIRECT PAINTING See alia prima.

DRAGGED Describes brushstrokes that are made across the textured surface of canvas or paint or at a shallow angle into wet paint.

DRAWING GRID A drawing grid is made up of a series of squares that enable an artist to transfer a sketch proportionately on to a large scale support.

DRY BRUSH TECHNIQUE A method of painting in which paint of a dry or stiff consistency is stroked or rubbed across the canvas. It is picked up on the ridges of the canvas or by the texture of paint on the surface, leaving some of the colour on the canvas still visible and producing a broken colour effect (see also *scumbling*).

EXTENDER A pigment which has a limited effect on a colour. It may be added to control the properties of a paint or to reduce the cost. Examples are chalk and china clay.

FAT-OVER-LEAN The rule applying to oil painting in layers, in which each superimposed layer should have a little more oil in the paint than the one beneath. This ensures that each layer is more flexible as a dried film than the one below it, with less risk of the paint cracking.

FIXATIVE A surface coating which prevents charcoal, chalk, and conte crayon from becoming dusty and from mixing with overlaid colour.

FRESCO See below

GESSO A traditional ground for tempera and oil painting on panel comprising animal glue (rabbit skin glue) and plaster of paris. In northern Europe chalk and glue were used for the same purpose. (Not to be confused with the product acrylic gesso (primer), which is also commonly available as a primer for acrylic painting.)

GLAZE A film of transparent or translucent oil colour laid over another dried colour or under-painting. The oil paint is

usually mixed with an oil painting medium to make it more malleable

GOUACHE An opaque, matte, water-based paint made from gum arabic and a chalk-like filler. The term gouache can refer both to the paint medium as well as to the technique of using watercolours (which are also made from gum arabic) in an opaque fashion.

GROUND The surface on which colour is applied. This is usually the coating rather than the support. A coloured ground is useful for low-key paintings where the ground provides the half tones and the unifying element for the different colours. A coloured ground can also be applied as an *imprimatura*, or as a primer that has been coloured.

HALF TONES Transitional tones between the highlights and the darks.

HATCHING Making tonal gradations by shading with long thin brushstrokes. Often used in under-painting.

HEEL OF BRUSH The base of the hairs near the ferrule.

HIGHLIGHT The lightest tone in drawing or painting. In oil painting techniques, white constitutes the lightest tone.

IMPASTO A thick layer of paint, often applied with a painting knife or a bristle brush, which is heaped up in ridges to create a heavily textured surface and a look of fresh immediacy. (Artists often scrape the paint off the surface of

the support and apply the colour again if it does not retain the crispness of the effect required.)

IMPRIMATURA A thin overall film or stain of translucent colour over a white priming. (This is applied before the artist begins to paint. It does not affect the reflective qualities of the ground, but it provides a useful background colour and makes it easier to paint between the lights and darks)

LAY IN The initial painting stage over a preliminary drawing where the colours are applied as broad areas of flat colour. This technique is also known as *blocking in*.

LIGHTFASTNESS The permanence or durability of a colour

LINSEED OIL A vegetable drying oil from the seeds of the flax plant used as a binding material in oil colour. Linseed oil is the most commonly used of oils and it dries more quickly than "semi-drying" oils. The oil does not dry by evaporation but form a solid film.

MARL STICK A bamboo or aluminium stick about 4ft (1.25m) long with a ball-shaped end. (Right handed painters hold stick with the left hand, with the ball end touching the canvas so that the right hand can rest on the stick while painting. This helps him or her to work with a steadier hand when working on a particular area.)

MEDIUM The binding material or "vehicle" for pigment in a paint system. In oil paint a vegetable drying oil such as linseed oil is the medium. (An oil painting medium is used to modify

the consistency of oil paint in techniques such as glazing. A typical oil painting medium is made up of a mixture of stand oil (linseed oil that has been boiled) and turpentine)

OIL STICKS A type of oil paint blended with waxes in the form of sticks and applied directly on to the canvas {A 20thC invention although Edgar Degas invented a form of oil stick by adapting crayons} (. Colours can be modified with a piece of cloth or a finger. Oil sticks, unlike other drawing materials, are extremely creamy in texture and are good for working wet-in-wet.)

OPAQUE PAINTING Paintings that use predominantly opaque paints and the techniques associated with them.

OPTICAL MIX When a colour is arrived at by the visual effect of overlaying or abutting distinct colours, rather than by physically mixing them on a palette.

PERSPECTIVE The method of representing a three-dimensional object on a two-dimensional surface. Linear perspective makes objects appear smaller as they get further away by means of a geometric system of measurement.

PHYSICAL MIX When a colour is created by pre-mixing two or more colours together on the palette before application to the support. *Wet-in-wet* and *wet-on-dry* techniques refer to mixing paints on the support itself.

PIGMENTS: A solid coloured material in the form of discrete particles which forms the basic component of all

types of paint crystalline and amorphous substances which generally appear as very fine coloured powders.

- If disposed in watery or oily mediums they can be transferred on to objects as a permanent layer of colour.
- In oil painting, pigments are bound together with semi-drying or drying oil, such as linseed oil.
- Pigments come in different forms and the amount of oil used to coat each type of pigment will vary.
- Generally classified under two categories: organic pigments and inorganic or mineral pigments.
- The organic pigments divide itself into two subgroups: one of vegetable and the other of animal origin. The inorganic pigments are also divided into natural and artificial pigments.

PLEIN AIR This term refers to painting in the open air. Alla prima techniques are normally used in this situation.

PRIMING This refers to the preliminary coating laid on to the support prior to painting. A layer of priming protects the support from any potentially damaging components of paint and provides the surface with the right key, absorbency and colour before painting.

REFRACTIVE INDEX A measure of the degree of refraction of a substance. The ratio between the angle of the incident ray in air with that of the refracted ray in the substance produces this measure.

SABLE BRUSH Mink tail hair used to make fine brushes. Normally used in watercolour techniques but which can also

be used in oil painting for fine detailed brushwork or final touches and highlights.

SATURATION The degree of intensity of a colour. Colours can be saturated i.e. vivid and of intense hue, or unsaturated i.e. dull tending towards grey.

SCUMBLING A painting technique in which semi-opaque or thin opaque colours are loosely brushed over an under-painted area so that patches of the colour beneath show through. (in principle, scumbles are the reverse of glazes; whereas glazes are dark and transparent, scumbles are light and opaque. The presence of the darker under layer will, as a rule, shift the appearance of the scumble towards a blue or cooler tone.

SGRAFFITO A technique, usually involving a scalpel or a sharp knife, in which dried paint is scraped off the painted surface so that the colour of the surface or a dry colour painted previously, is visible. (*This is often used for textural effects*).

SIZE Rabbit skin or other glue used to protect canvas from the potentially damaging effects of oil in the paint before priming and to seal or reduce the absorbency of wooden panels. (Also the binding material for gesso).

SOFT HAIR BRUSHES These are used mainly in watercolour painting but are also suitable for precise brushwork in oil painting. They can hold a great deal of thin paint while still retaining their shape.

STRETCHER The wooden frame on which a canvas is stretched.

SFUMATO The imperceptible gradation of tones or colours from light to dark in modelling, often giving forms soft contours. The early development of the technique is tied to the naturalistic goals of the Renaissance. It is particularly associated with the paintings of Leonardo da Vinci, who wrote that light and shade should blend "in the manner of smoke" (fumo).

SUPPORT The material on which a painting is made. Almost any surface can be used, but artists tend to use either a wooden panel or a canvas to work on.

TONED GROUND Also called a coloured ground. An opaque layer of coloured paint of uniform tone applied over the priming before starting the painting.

TRANSPARENT PAINTING A technique that relies on the transparency of the paints used.

TURPENTINE (DISTILLED) Used to thin oil colour and to make resin varnishes such as dammar varnish. Turpentine is also used as an ingredient in a number of oil painting mediums. White spirit can be used instead of turpentine.

VARNISH Protective surface over a finished painting imparting a glossy or matt surface appearance to a painting. The varnish layer plays a dual role: it has a profound effect upon the final appearance of the painting and also serves as a protective coating for the paint surface. On a microscopic level, a varnish coating fills in the tiny gaps and spaces in the upper layer of a paint film, providing a uniform surface for the

reflection of light. As a result, the pigments within the painting become deeper, or more saturated, in appearance. Variable aspects of varnishes, such as level of gloss and thickness of coating, are controlled by the artist or restorer. The Impressionists preferred to leave their paintings unvarnished, as they believed that a resinous coating interfered with the freshness and spontaneity of the paint surface

VIEWFINDER A rectangular hole to the scale of the artist's support cut in a small piece of cardboard to act as a framing device. This is held up at arm's length so that the scene to be drawn or painted can be viewed through it and the most pleasing composition can be found.

VISCOSITY A measure of the flow characteristic of a colour or medium (e.g. stand oil is more viscous than alkali refined linseed oil). Oil paint with some viscosity is described as having body.

WET-IN-WET Working with wet paint into wet paint on the surface of the support.

WET-ON-DRY Applying a layer of wet paint on to a dry surface.

FRESCO

Fresco is wall paint in which lime proof pigments are mixed with water and applied to lime plaster that is still wet. The plaster serves both as ground and binder. In addition, it provides the lights and highlights for the finished work, being

the only source of white. Fresco painting was used in many of the early civilizations including the Minoan in Crete and throughout Europe..

The technique was further developed in Italy from about the thirteenth century and perfected at the time of the Renaissance. The term comes from the Italian word for fresh because plaster is applied to the walls while still wet.

Coats of plaster are applied to a wall and allowed to dry. On the penultimate layer called the *arriccio* the design is drawn in outline. To make the painting, an area of the wall corresponding to a day's work is freshly plastered and the design retraced joining up with the uncovered parts. This area is then painted on while still wet, using water-based paint. The paint is absorbed into the wet plaster becoming an integral part of it, thus making it a durable mural technique. Some touching up can be done when the plaster is dry but a whole fresco painted on dry plaster is liable to flake off.

There are two methods of carrying out fresco painting: buon fresco and fresco a secco. For both methods layers of fine plaster are spread over the wall surface. The final layer of very smooth plaster is called the *intonaco*

In *buon fresco* the paint is applied to wet *intonaco*, and only as much plaster as can be painted in one day is spread on the wall. This method bonds the fresco to the wall. Each day's work is called a *giornata*.

In fresco a secco the paint is applied dry, either on top of the buon fresco, which has dried, or on a dry intonaco.

Aide Memoire Nº 2

GLOSSARY of Terms used in printmakingⁱ

PRINT An impression made by any method involving transfer from one surface to another.

Aquatint -- An etching technique that creates areas of tone through the use of powdered resin that is sprinkled on the etching plate prior to being bitten by the etching acid. The result is a finely textured tonal area whose darkness is determined by how long the plate is bitten by the acid.

Chiaroscuro woodcut -- A form of woodcut involving several blocks in which one or more of the blocks is used to print large areas of tone. Typically, a chiaroscuro woodcut will involve a line block to indicate the outlines of the composition and tone blocks with areas carved out to create highlights by allowing the white of the paper to

¹ Mainly based on extracts from the glossary by Max Kade-Erich H. Markel, Department of Graphic Arts Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas and Tate Britain's Glossaries

show through. The final effect is similar to an ink wash drawing with highlights and line drawing.

Drypoint -- Similar to etching, but the lines are simply scratched into the plate manually, without the use of acid. The hallmark of a dry point is a soft and often rather thick or bushy line somewhat like that of an ink pen on moist paper.

Engraving -- A form of intaglio printing in which lines are incised into a metal plate with a carving tool called a burin. The characteristics of burin engraving differ from that of etching in that engraving, requiring considerable force, is done from the strength of the arm and eliminates the quavering autographic qualities of etching, which is done more from the finger tips like fine drawing. The hallmarks of engraving are often elegantly swelling and tapering lines.

Etching -- A means of incising lines in a metal plate with acid for printing in the intaglio technique. The plate is first covered with an acid resistant ground through which the artist scratches a design with a stylus or needle, revealing the bare metal below. This plate is then immersed in an acid bath that cuts the incised lines into the plate. Etched lines often betray the subtle motions of the artist's fingertips.

Intaglio -- Any of the techniques in which an image or tonal area is printed from lines or textures scratched or etched into a metal plate (engraving, etching, drypoint, aquatint, lift ground, soft ground). The plate is covered with ink and then wiped clean leaving ink in the incised lines or textures of the image. This plate is then printed in a

press on moistened paper. The paper is forced down into the area of the plate holding ink, and the image is transferred to the paper.

Lift-ground aquatint -- A form of intaglio printing in which the artists draws with a specially formulated ink on a metal plate. The plate is then covered with an acid resistant ground and immersed in water. The characteristics of the drawing medium (which may be applied with a pen or brush) allow it to dissolve and work through the acid resistant ground. When bitten in acid, the final result resembles pen or brush work

Lithograph -- A printing technique in which the image is drawn on a very flat slab of limestone (or a specially treated metal plate). This stone is treated chemically so that ink, when rolled on to the stone, adheres only where the drawing was done. This inked image can then be transferred to a piece of paper with the help of a high pressure press.

Metal Cut -- A form of relief printing from an intaglio plate. In the fifteenth century metal cuts often employed drill holes that printed as white dots. Engraved lines will print white rather than black in metal cut since the surface, rather than the marks in the plate, is inked.

Mezzotint -- An intaglio process invented around 1650 that allows the printing of rich tonal areas of black and grey. The mezzotint process begins by texturing a metal plate in such a way that it will hold a great deal of ink and print a solid black field. This is done with a tool called a "rocker." A rocker is essentially a large curved blade with very fine teeth along its edge. This blade is rocked back and forth, putting courses of fine dots into the metal plate. After this has

been done repeatedly the plate will be covered with fine stipples that can hold ink. The next step is to scrape away the stippled texture where lighter passages are needed. The more vigorously the plate is scraped the less ink it will hold and the whiter it will print. Mezzotint differs conceptually from other intaglio methods because the artist works from black to white rather than white to black. For this reason mezzotint lends itself to scenes with many dark passages

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Monotype -- A form of printmaking in which the artist draws or paints on some material, such as glass, and then prints the image onto paper, usually with a press. The remaining pigment can then be reworked, but the subsequent print will not be an exact version of the previous print. Monotypes may be unique prints or variations on a theme.

Pochoir -- A stencil print that does not involve a screen. Usually pigment is brushed across the openings of the template. Often the brush marks are discernable

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Proof - A printing term applied to all individual impressions made before work on a printing plate or block is completed, in order to check progress of the image. Also referred to as 'trial proof' or 'colour trial proof'. This should not be confused with the terms Artist's Proof (AP) and Printer's Proof (PP) which are impressions of the finished **print** made in addition to the published edition for the artist or printer impressions of a print. In the case of an incomplete print they are referred to as "working proofs."

Relief print -- Any print in which the image is printed from the raised portions of a carved, etched, or cast block. A simple example would

be a rubber stamp. The most common relief prints are woodcuts. The term "relief print" is used when it is not clear which kind of relief printing has been used (photomechanical or hand carved, for example).

Screen Print -- A form of stencil printing in which the stencil is adhered to a fine screen for support. Ink can be squeegeed through the screen onto paper. Screen printing can have a hard edged quality caused by the crisp edges of the stencil. Also referred to as "silk screen" and "serigraphy."

Serigraph -- Another term for Screen Print.

Soft ground -- An etching technique in which the plate is covered with malleable ground through which a variety textures can be pressed, allowing them to be etched into the plate. For example, a piece of paper laid on top of a soft grounded plate can be drawn upon with a pencil, and the resulting etched image will resemble a pencil line drawn on paper. To be distinguished from 'hard ground" used for simple line etching.

Sulphur ground -- A technique in which a caustic sulphur compound is painted directly on an etching plate, or in which sulphur dust is otherwise applied to a plate. The resulting marks will hold ink and can be printed like an etching. The technique typically creates blotchy expanses of grey tones. This might be compared to printing rust marks on a steel or iron plate.

Wood engraving -- A relief print carved in the end grain of a block of wood whose thickness is the same as the height as a piece of movable

type ("type high"). This was traditionally a commercial technique practiced by specialists and used in magazines and book illustrations.

Woodcut -- A relief print usually carved in the plank grain of a piece of wood. After the relief image has been carved in the plank with knives or gouges it is inked with a dauber or roller. It can then be printed by hand (in which case a sheet of paper is laid down on the inked plank and rubbed from the back with a smooth surface such as the palm of the hand or a wooden spoon) or with the help of a mechanical press.

Additional GLOSSARY

Chromolithograph -- a Colour lithograph usually involving a large number of lithographic stones to allow a complex Colour separation. The term is often used to describe late nineteenth-century Colour lithographs that emulate or reproduce paintings.

Giclée -- An Iris print, the name derives from the French for "spurt."

Gillotage -- A relief process made by transferring a lithographic image to a metal plate that is then etched to produce a relief plate. The term is also used inaccurately to indicate varieties of photomechanical relief printing.

Heliogravure - A forerunner of photogravure in which the photographic image is projected directly onto the plate rather transferred to it on an emulsion. The term "photogravure" is often used indiscriminately for both techniques.

Inkjet print -- a general designation for the large class of printers used to print computer images. Inkjet printers make us of extremely small nozzles to deliver exact amounts pigment to precise locations on the paper.

Iris print -- An type of inkjet print printed from an Iris printer.

ii Applicable after the 18thC

Letterpress -- Typographic printing from movable type.

Linoleum Cut -- A relief print carved into linoleum rather than wood.

Photogravure -- A means of printing a photographic image by the intaglio process. The photographic negative (which may be of an artist's drawing) is projected onto a sensitized gelatine emulsion or carbon tissue that is transferred to a copper plate. After washing the plate areas that correspond to the image on the negative are dissolved and the plate can be bitten by acid as in routine etching. In hand photogravure, which is most commonly used in printmaking, the copper plate is first prepared for aquatint etching. The end result can closely resemble a traditional linear etching or soft ground etching.

Photomechanical relief print -- There were many means available by the 1880s that allowed a black line drawing to be transferred to a relief printing block by photographic means. These are generically known as line blocks and the images printed from them typically share many of the qualities of woodcut. The means of transferring the image are often complex and can involve such techniques as etching photosensitised plates or electrotyping light sensitive gelatine plates.

Photomechanical reproduction -- This term is used to describe a variety of processes involving the transfer of a photographic image to a printing matrix, such as an etching plate, relief block, or a lithographic stone. The term is used here whenever it is not certain exactly what photomechanical process is involved.

Silver print -- A photographic print utilizing paper impregnated with silver nitrate (distinct from a platinum print, for example).

Zincograph -- A lithograph done on a zinc plate instead of on a stone. The term is also used to designate a photo-etched relief print.

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For more extensive definitions of printmaking terms see:

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Five regular geometric forms

- ⇒Plato identified five regular polyhedra¹, pictured below.
- ⇒The first (the cube) is made up of regular quadrilaterals, the next three of regular triangles, and the last of regular pentagons.
- ⇒ They are named for the number of faces they have. No one has ever found any other regular polyhedra than these five..











Cube Tetrahedron Octahedron Icosahedron Dodecahedron

¹polyhedron(a) = a solid form bounded by plain faces

Aide Memoire Nº G03

of ARTISTIC TERMSⁱ

Styles from end of 19th C to end of 20th Cii

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONISM A style of painting that germinated in New York during the Second World War and it emerged as the leading international avant-garde in the early 1950s. Its initiators included Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock, and Willem de Kooning, and its main critical voice was Clement Greenberg. Starting from a violent, Romantic Surrealism or Expressionism these artists came close to eliminating subject and motif, making the paint and frequently the large scale of the canvas convey the message.

ABSTRACTION The process of working from the real motif or subject towards an artistic mark or form that is no longer naturalistic or even recognizable. Any kind of stylized or non-naturalistic form can be called abstract, but abstraction is associated primarily with the twentieth century, when many modes of abstraction were tried, including the expressionism of the Blaue Reiter, Cubism, and the work of individual painters such as Paul Klee. During the twentieth

ii Green type indicates a reference to another entry

i Compiled from various sources including Tate Glossary

century a sharp distinction was often made between purely abstract or "non-figurative" art and figurative art, but this is difficult to sustain.

ACTION PAINTING Painting as action or pure action, without deliberation and as if in a trance or performing a dance; associated above all with the canvases which Jackson Pollock laid on the floor and painted without pause or apparent reflection.

BLAUE REITER A group of artists who exhibited together in Munich from 1911, including notably Kandinsky, Marc, Klee and Macke. The reference is ultimately to the non-naturalistic colours of French Fauvism. These influential Blaue Reiter artists constituted a second wave of German Expressionism, following **Die Brücke**. In particular, Klee and Kandinsky contributed greatly to the evolution of twentieth-century abstraction.

BRIT ART. British art as an international phenomenon, as it became in the 1990s. Its roots were in **Conceptual art** and it consisted mostly of graduates of Goldsmiths' College in London. Their installations and paintings successfully attracted controversy. The artists involved are also known as "**YBA**" (Young British Artists).

COLOUR FIELD A painting style within Abstract Expressionism in which the brushwork becomes invisible and the paint is frequently stained onto the support. Rothko was its greatest exponent.

CONCEPTUAL ART. Art which can be conceived, described, and recorded, but consists more in the instruction of what is to be created than in the product. More an approach than a movement, and certainly not a style, Conceptual art was initially (in the 1960s) theoretical and didactic, questioning what art was. It led art away from painting and sculpture into performance, events and the creation of environments and installations. Apart from informing the work of strictly Conceptual artists such as Carl Andre and Joseph Kosuth,

Conceptualism was fundamental to that of artists such as Joseph Beuys.

CONSTRUCTIVISM A development of Synthetic Cubism applied particularly to sculpture. From 1917 in Russia Constructivists such as Gabo and Pevsner avoided starting from nature and instead built abstract sculptural objects.

CUBISM A revolutionary style invented by Picasso and Braque in 1908 and developed throughout the next two decades. Deriving their inspiration mainly from Cezanne, these two painters began representing objects not naturalistically in the round but as the sum of their planar facets. This breaking down of the object into constituent marks is known as *Analytical Cubism*.

Around 1911 Picasso and Braque evolved *Synthetic Cubism*, which involved using marks (or even ready-made patterns) to build up a self-sufficient composition.

Strongly theoretical among its dedicated practitioners, Cubism liberated contemporary painters more generally from a dependence on naturalism

DADAISM The Dada movement began in Zurich during the First World War. A reaction by artists to what they saw as the unprecedented horror and folly of the war. They felt it called into question every aspect, including its art, of the society capable of starting and then prolonging it. Their aim was to destroy traditional values in art and to create a new art to replace the old. The founder of Dada was a writer, Hugo Ball. In 1916 he started a satirical night-club in Zurich, the Cabaret Voltaire, and a magazine which, wrote Ball, 'will bear the name 'Dada'. Dada, Dada, Dada, Dada.' This was the first of many Dada publications. Dada became an international movement and eventually formed the basis of **Surrealism** in Paris after the war. Leading artists associated with it include Arp,

Duchamp, Picabia and Schwitters. Duchamp's questioning of the fundamentals of Western art had a profound subsequent influence.

DE STIJL A Modernist movement, founded in 1917 and led by Mondrian and van Doesburg. De Stijl, meaning "*The Style*", was also the name of their journal. Mondrian, in particular, believed that there was only one possible style, founded on functional principles. A functional painting had to be abstract and highly restricted in colouring and form, otherwise it would become decorative.

DIE BRÜCKE A group of German artists, including notably Kirchner and Nolde, who from 1906 adopted this name, meaning "The Bridge". Quite from where to where the members never explained, but they sought progress and communication. Influenced by **Fauvism**, but also deliberately medievalist in, for example, their revival of the woodcut, they arrived at an anti-Classicist and distorted style that is now called **Expressionism**.

DRIP PAINTING Mark-making using drips rather than brushstrokes; a technique associated with action painting.

EXPRESSIONISM A movement in twentieth-century art emphasizing significance and feeling at the expense of naturalistic form or perspectival space. Though the term is primarily associated with German art and the groups **Die Brücke** and the **Blaue Reiter**, a similar kind of Expressionism can be seen in Gauguin and other **Symbolists** and in **Fauvism**. Many other kinds of art can be expressionistic (with a small "e") in tendency. See also **Abstract Expressionism**.

FAUVISM A movement named after a show in Paris in 1905 in which painters such as Matisse and Vlaminck shocked the public with their bright, lurid colours, and simple brushstrokes. For this **Expressionism** they were called fauves, or "wild beasts."

FEMINIST ART May be defined as art by women artists made consciously in the light of developments in feminist art theory since about 1970. In 1971 the art historian Linda Nochlin published a groundbreaking essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" In it she investigated the social and economic factors that had prevented talented women from achieving the same status as their male counterparts. By the 1980s art historians such as Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker were going further, to examine the language of art history with its gender-loaded terms such as old master and masterpiece. They questioned the central place of the female nude in the western canon, asking why men and women are represented so differently

FUTURISM A Modernist movement originating in 1taly in 1909 and also propagated through its "manifestos" in Paris and London. It prophesied a new aesthetic of the machine age, and its painters, such as Carra and Balla, developed **Cubism** to depict the excitement of speed.

GESTURE/GESTURAL A critical term of the later twentieth century referring to the marks of the painter's hand or brush, in contrast to Colour Field.

HYPERREAL: Minutely exact and particular in describing reality. **IMPRESSIONISM** New way of painting landscape and scenes of everyday life developed in France by Monet and others from early 1860s. Based on practice of painting finished pictures out of doors, as opposed to simply making sketches (actually pioneered in Britain by Constable around 1813–17). Result was greater awareness of light and colour and the shifting pattern of the natural scene. Brushwork became rapid and broken into separate dabs to render these effects. First group exhibition Paris 1874 greeted with derision, Monet's

Impression, Sunrise being particularly singled out and giving its name to the movement.

MINIMALISM Often summed up today in the phrase "less is more": Minimalism was originally, in the 1960s, a theoretical movement devoted to taking the "art" out of art, so that it became no more than the characterless object the viewer saw. In this way it was an extreme form of abstraction. The term has been used more widely to summarize a whole aesthetic of absence, requiring clean lines, seamless finish, and reduction to the essential.

MODERNISM A self-conscious effort from the mid-nineteenth century until the late twentieth century to innovate and to skirt around the mainstream. It rejected most nostalgia, decorativeness, respect, or imitation of the past and even art that was figurative. Posited on the idea of progress and achieved by successive *avant-gardes* displacing obsolete establishments, it became orthodoxy after the Second World War and was then considered to have done its work

POP ART Short for "popular" and formed by analogy with Pop music; the term refers to a liberating and fun-loving movement of the 1960s that enabled figurative art to re-enter the *avant-garde*. Pop Art's emphasised the acceptance of modern culture, and/or it reproduced artefacts as a subject matter of art, whether these were soup-can boxes or pin-ups. Ranging from the highly subtle (as in the work of Jasper Johns) to the impersonal and slick or the deliberately banal, Pop Art held the seeds of Post-modernism.

POST-IMPRESSIONISM The title invented by the British art critic and painter Roger Fry in 1910 for an exhibition of the latest French art in London. This exhibition "after Impressionism" was dominated by late works of Cezanne and paintings by Gauguin and van Gogh. The exhibition was the springboard for a Modernist emulation of the Continental avant-gardes. Fry later broadened the term to include the

work of Seurat and the Pointilists. The title remains useful as a collective term for various tendencies that emerged in France between 1880 and 1900 as departures from **impressionism**. Many of these resemble early-twentieth-century German Expressionism.

POST-MODERNISM Term used from about 1970 to describe changes seen to take place in Western society and culture from the 1960s on. These changes arose from anti-authoritarian challenges to the prevailing orthodoxies across the board. In art, postmodernism was specifically a reaction against modernism. It may be said to begin with Pop art and to embrace much of what followed including Conceptual art, Neo-Expressionism, Feminist art, and the YBA of the 1990s. Some outstanding characteristics of postmodernism are that it: collapses the distinction between high culture and mass or popular culture; that it tends to efface the boundary between art and everyday life; and that it refuses to recognise the authority of any single style or definition of what art should be.

PRE-RAPHAELITES A group of artists formed in 1848, dedicated to naturalism and honesty in painting. Like the Nazarenes before them, they rejected the lifelessness of academic imitation of Raphael and regarded earlier, "primitive" art as an example of freshness. Like their supporter the British writer, critic, and artist Ruskin, they were highly moral in their outlook, and in their search for serious subjects anticipated Symbolism.

REALISM A movement in nineteenth-century France, led by Courbet, who wished to substitute the present and actual as the greatest subject of painting in place of allegory and "history." When written with a small "r" the term usually means opposed to idealism, showing things as they really are, or the ugly rather than the beautiful.

SUPREMATISM Theory of abstract art as practised by artists such as Malevich in Russia from 1913. Like the contemporary theory of **Constructivism**, Suprematism sought to remove subject matter from art altogether.

SURREALISM A movement of the 1920s that sought to bring the unconscious mind into art, both in the making of art "automatically" - that is, without conscious manipulation and exploiting chance -and in its content, which should be the stuff of dreams. Artists such as Magritte and Dali used a highly naturalistic style to represent the objectively impossible.

SYMBOLISM A movement in art widely acclaimed as the direction forward in the late 1880s and the 1890s, but discarded soon after. Art was to be suggestive and evocative, luminous rather than clear, emotional rather than descriptive. The main practitioners were Gauguin, Puvis de Chavannes, Redon, and Moreau in France, Burne-Jones in England, and Klimt in Austria

SOME GENERAL ARTISTIC TERMS

ALTARPIECE A structure above and behind an altar in a Christian church used as a field for painting and sculpture. Also known as a *reredos*.

BAROQUE A term used to describe both a style and a period. The Baroque extends from about 1600 until the late eighteenth century. Its end is less sharply defined than its beginning, but it was certainly over by the time of the death of Giambattista Tiepolo in 1770 and the French Revolution of 1789. When applied to the styles of art prevalent during this period, the term is more problematic, because originally it characterized distortion and excess, whereas the dominant characteristic of the Baroque period is in fact its

Classicism. Starting with Caravaggio, the Carracci, and Rubens, as a deliberate return to the values of the High Renaissance as opposed to the tired Mannerism of the late sixteenth century, it was a fuller, richer, usually more exuberant and more ambitious continuation of the Renaissance style.

CLASSICISM The tradition of adherence to the rules and standards to be learned from Classical sculpture. The basis for later Classicism - embodying ideals of proportion, balance, and avoidance of excess - was formed during the Renaissance and developed in the Baroque period. Classicism was particularly strong in France, and Poussin was its greatest exponent.

COMPLEMENTARY COLOURS. Colours opposite on the colour wheel which, in combination, enhance each other - for example, red and green. The complementary to a bright colour seen by the human eye tends to remain as an after-image on the retina

CONTRAPPOSTO The spiral rhythm running through the Classical Greek and Roman standing figure. In order to give life to the statue, the parts of the body are put into contrasting movement: the head turned, one shoulder forward, one back, one leg taking the weight, the other relaxed, and so on.

DIPTYCH A work of art in two panels; the panels are often hinged, making two inner fields and two outer fields available for painting.

GOTHIC The period in Western art extending from the mid-twelfth century to the fifteenth century, during which the readily identifiable Gothic style of architecture was dominant. The term is also used to describe the associated painting and sculpture, which was eventually rejected by the Renaissance because its emphasis on rhythm and linear grace did not conform to Classical norms and proportions. ICONOGRAPHY The subject matter of a work of art, or the study of the subject matter of art.

ILLUSIONISM Giving the illusion on a painted surface of three-dimensional depth. The term is particularly applied to the elaborate stage-management of Baroque wall and ceiling frescos, which create a whole architecture within a plain room.

MANNERISM The term applied to art produced after the highpoint of the High Renaissance in Ita1y, around 1500-20, and before the initiation of the Baroque, around 1600. The name originated in the phrase *la maniera*, meaning the satisfactory achievement of a Classicist. Raphael and Michelangelo in Italy from about 1520–1600. It is characterised by artificiality, elegance, sensuous distortion of the human figure and often outright sensuality.

NATURALISM Until the early nineteenth century both landscape and the human figure in art tended to be idealised or stylised according to conventions derived from the classical tradition. Naturalism was the broad movement to represent things closer to the way we see them. In Britain it was pioneered by Constable. Naturalism combined with subject realism led to Impressionism and modern art

NAZARENES A group of early-nineteenth century German artists with medievalist ideals who worked in Italy, mainly in Rome, and founded an artistic community. They painted meticulously in the preternaturally clear style of early Raphael and his contemporaries

NABIS A group of art students who formed a secret brotherhood in 1888-9. They took the name "Nabi" from the Hebrew word for "prophet" and developed some of the implications of Gauguin's ideas. The group formed part of the **Symbolist** movement.

NEOCLASSICISM became fashionable in Europe and America at the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth was underpinned by the discovery of new aspects of the Classical past, brought about by the excavation of Pompeii and at other sites

PASTORAL A term which relates to the life of shepherds and to rural life in general, but which in the context of literature or art refers to the idealization of country life.

PENDANT One of a pair of paintings intended to be seen together.

PERSPECTIVE The illusion of spatial recession in a painting. This may be rudimentary or very poor, as in much medieval art, or highly lifelike and optically exact. During the early Renaissance there was a vogue for geometric perspective, in which the orthogonals or lines receding into space were carefully calibrated to converge on a single vanishing point. This worked well for street scenes but was too artificial for landscapes. The illusion of distance in landscapes was usually created by variations of colour (sometimes called *aerial perspective*) as well by the judicious placing of scaled markers.

POLYPTYCH A work of art in separately framed panels -two (diptych), three (triptych), or more. Altarpieces of the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance were generally polyptychs and often with opening and closing wings, painted on both sides with several scenes.

PREDELLA The part of a polyptych or other altarpiece that lies below the main image. It is usually a long, thin panel, painted with a narrative relating to the dedicatee of the main image.

RENAISSANCE This term meaning "rebirth": refers to the period, culture, and style that succeeded the Middle Ages and developed into the Baroque. It takes its name from the idea that the arts had decayed since Classical times, during the Dark Ages and the Gothic period, but were then revived. It was not a new birth but depended on the rediscovery of the Classical past.

ROCOCO A predominantly French style of delicacy and playfulness that came in with the eighteenth century, in a change of tone from the grandeur of **Baroque** that had prevailed at the court of the Louis

XIV. Watteau is the great painter of the Rococo, which also had manifestations particularly in the decorative arts in Germany and to a limited extent in England.

ROMANTICISM A cultural movement dominant in the first half of the nineteenth century, following on from the Enlightenment, Neoclassicism, and the French Revolution. It was never a style of art, nor an avant-garde, but rather a general approach which valued genius and individuality. An artist had to paint great paintings celebrating the Sublime, whether human or natural. For this he or she could range the whole of the past, not only the newly discovered ancient Greek past but also the Middle Ages, and even contemporary literature and events.

SUBLIME A term introduced into English art criticism by Edmund Burke, who published his *Enquiry into the Sublime and the Beautiful* in 1757. The Sublime in nature -for example, mountain landscapes or a terrible storm, or even the tragedy of a play by Shakespeare -would become a subject for art, especially Romantic painting.

TROMPE-L'OEIL Meaning literally "deceive the eye," trompel'oeil is a kind of illusionism, usually on a small scale, which tricks the eye into believing that the painted object -for example, a fly which has apparently just alighted –is real or really occupies space.

TRIPTYCH A work of art in three panels: centre, left, and right. **VANITAS** The Latin word for "vanity," in art it denotes a still life featuring symbols of transience and death, such as flowers or skulls. Such pictures, by stressing the passing of time, were meant to induce fear of eternal atonement after death and thus set the viewer on the path of righteousness.

VEDUTA Italian for "view" or "vista," specifically a view of a city, a landscape or a ruined Classical monument.

Aide Memoire L04

PROGRESS OF PRINTING

- 1423 Europeans use xylography (art of engraving on wood, block printing) to produce books.
- 1455 Gutenberg Bible published
- 1457 First known colour printing, a Psalter (a collection of Psalms for devotional use) by Johann Faust
- 1461 Albreicht Pfister printed the first illustrated book *Edelstein* which featured a number of woodcuts.
- 1476 •200 woodcuts were used in a edition of Aesop's Fables
 - •Firs: use of copper engravings for illustration
 - •William Caxton sets up his printing press in England.
- 1499 Print ng established in more than 2500 European cities

The Nova Reperta

A series of engravings after designs by Johannes Stradanus. Printed in 1580 it comains a series of 24 engravings celebrating the new discoveries - both technological and geographical - that made the Western European Renaissance world to 16th eyes appear modern and distinguished it from that of the ancients. Stradanus devoted no less than 9 in ages to the 'discovery' of the New World. His encyclopaedic frontispiece contained most of the other assumed Western inventions depicted in the remaining plates, including

ⁱ Joannes Stradanus [Jan van der Straet] (1523 – 1605) Flemish painter and printmaker

gunpowder, the *printing* press, the compass, the clock, stirrups, (al)chemical distillation, the cultivation of silkworms, and the treatment of syphilis with the gum of the tropical wood guaiacum.

Among the most significant developments of the age was the use of moveable type and the printing press to produce books in multiple, identical copies. The man who put together the elements that made this process possible was Johannes Gutenberg of Mainz, Germany (ca. 1397–1468). Gutenberg, like many of the early engravers, had been trained as a goldsmith, and this back ground must have helped him to devise the metal punctes used to create matrixes from which lead characters were cast. This invention made it possible to produce large quantities of type and, along with the development of a stickier ink that would adhere to the metal type and the refinement of existing presses enabled Gutenberg to produce the first full-length printed book, his famous Bible of 1456.

In plate 4 (over) of the *Nova Reperta*, the steps involved in the printing of early books are outlined. On the left side of the image are three compositors who, using the page of text pinned to the wall above them as a guide, assemble the pieces of type stored in their wooden cases (each compartment contains a different character) into lines of text on the small composing stick held in one hand. These lines will then be locked into a framework called a chase, the completed body of text, comprising all the pages that are to be printed together onto one speet of paper, is known as a *Jorme*. If the text were to include woodcut initials, tailpieces, or even large illustrations, the blocks could be fitted into the chase alongside the metal type.

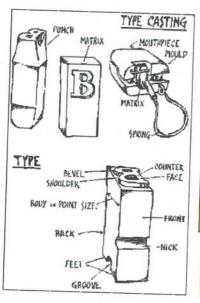


Johannes Stradanus [Jan van der Straet] Nova Reperta [New Discoveries] (c.1580)

Along the right side of the shop, in the background, we see a pressman who applies ink to the raised surfaces of the letters (and possibly woodblocks) within the *forme*, using two leather-covered inking balls. In the foreground, an inked *forme* having been moved into position beneath the platen, another pressman pulls a lever to turn the screw that increases pressure on the platen, pressing the *forme* against the dampened paper that has been aligned on top of it—the press shown here, however, is in some respects rather archaic

for the end of the sixteenth century. Since the type, as well as any woodblocks that are included, stand up in relief, not as much pressure is required as with intaglio printing. After printing, the damp sheets are hung to dry, here between the two presses.

The proof reader, wearing glasses, checks a printed proof for errors. If errors are found, the type can be reset before printing continues. A young apprentice in the central foreground assembles the printed pages in the correct order. On the table behind the proof reader we see either bundles of blank paper or books in their assembled form, before the pages are folded, bound, and cut. Books in this period were normally bound only after purchase and to order



PRINTING

The key invention was casting metal punches of individual letters that could be used again and again

The punches were moveable not the press

Aide Memoire L05 Drawings & Prints

DRAWING

A visual art that uses drawing instruments to mark a two-dimensional support. These instruments include graphite pencils, pen and ink, inked brushes, wax colour pencils, crayons, charcoals, chalk, pastels, markers, stylus, or various metals like silverpoint. The most common support for drawing is paper, although other materials such as cardboard, plastic, leather, canvas and board, may be used.

The medium is the means by which ink, pigment, or colour are delivered onto the drawing surface. Most drawing media are either dry e.g. graphite, charcoal, pastels, contéⁱ, silverpoint, or waterbased marker, pen and ink. Watercolour pencils can be used dry like ordinary pencil, then moistened with a wet brush to get various painterly effects.

Hatching. Ink drawings typically use hatching, which consists of groups of parallel lines. Cross-hatching uses hatching in two or more different directions to create a darker tone. Broken hatching, or lines with intermittent breaks, is used to form lighter tones, and by controlling the density of the breaks a graduation of tone can be achieved. Stippling, uses dots to produce tone, texture or shade.

Shading is the technique of varying the tonal values on the paper to represent the shade of the material as well as the placement

i conté - a hard drawing crayon made of clay and graphite

of the shadows. Careful attention to reflected light, shadows, and highlights can result in a very realistic rendition of the image.

Blending uses an implement to soften or spread the original drawing strokes. Blending is most easily done with a medium that does not immediately fix itself, such as graphite, chalk, or charcoal, although freshly applied ink can be smudged, wet or dry, for some effects. For shading and blending, the artist can use a blending stump, tissue, a kneaded eraser, a fingertip, or any combination of them. A piece of chamois is useful for creating smooth textures, and for removing material to lighten the tone. Continuous tone can be achieved with graphite on a smooth surface without blending, but the technique is laborious, involving small circular or oval strokes with a somewhat blunt point.

A study is a draft drawing that is made in preparation for a planned final image. Studies can be used to determine the appearances of specific parts of the completed image, or for experimenting with the best approach for accomplishing the end goal. However a well-crafted study can be a piece of art in its own right, and many hours of careful work can go into completing a study.

PRINTS

The oldest printing technique is woodcut, or woodblock printing, which was invented as a method for printing on cloth in China, and perhaps separately in Egypt in the Byzantine period. This had reached Europe via the Byzantine or Islamic worlds before 1300, as a method of printing patterns on textiles. Paper arrived in Europe, also from China via Islamic Spain, slightly later, and was being manufactured in Italy by the end of the thirteenth century, and in Germany by the end of the fourteenth.

Woodcuts

A relief printing artistic technique in printmaking in which an image is carved into the surface of a block of wood, with the printing parts remaining level with the surface while the non-printing parts are removed, typically with gouges. The areas to show 'white' are cut away with a knife or chisel, leaving the characters or image to show in 'black' at the original surface level. The block is cut along the grain of the wood (unlike wood engraving where the block is cut in the end-grain). In Europe beech wood was most commonly used. The surface is covered with ink by rolling over the surface with an ink-covered roller (brayer), leaving ink upon the flat surface but not in the non-printing areas.

Multiple colours can be printed by keying the paper to a frame around the woodblocks (where a different block is used for each colour).

Engraving

is the practice of incising a design onto a hard, usually flat surface, by cutting grooves into it. The result may be a decorated object in itself, as when silver, gold, steel, lacquer, or glass are engraved, or may provide an intaglio printing plate, of copper or another metal, for printing images on paper, which are called engravings. Engraving was a historically important method of producing images on paper, both in artistic printmaking, and also for commercial reproductions and illustrations for books and magazines

Engravers use a tool called a burin to cut the design into the surface, most traditionally a copper plate. Gravers come in a variety of shapes and sizes that yield different line types. The burin produces a unique and recognizable quality of line that is characterized by its steady, deliberate appearance and clean edges.

Etching

is the process of using strong acid or mordant to cut into the unprotected parts of a metal surface to create a design in intaglio in the metal (the original process-in modern manufacturing other chemicals may be used on other types of material). As an intaglio method of printmaking it is, along with engraving, the most important technique for old master prints, and remains widely used today by goldsmiths and other metal-workers in order to decorate metal items such as guns, armour, cups and plates. The method has been known in Europe since the Middle Ages at least, and may go back to antiquity. The elaborate decoration of armour, in Germany was an art probably imported from Italy around the end of the 15th century thus a little earlier than the birth of etching as a printmaking technique. The process as applied to printmaking is believed to have been invented by Daniel Hopfer (circa 1470-1536) of Augsburg, Germany. Hopfer was a craftsman who decorated armour in this way, and applied the method to printmaking, using iron plates (many of which still exist).

The switch to copper plates was probably made in Italy, and thereafter etching soon came to challenge engraving as the most popular medium for artists in printmaking. Its great advantage was that, unlike engraving which requires special skill in metalworking, etching is relatively easy to learn for an artist trained in drawing.