



Matisse's Printmaking Techniques

Aquatint

Aquatint is a variation on the etching process that allows the artist to add passages of tone to the print. To create an aquatint, an etching plate is dusted with a fine rosin powder and heated to bind the rosin onto the plate. The particles of rosin dust are resistant to acid and so when immersed in acid the metal is bitten in small areas around the particles. The result is a plate etched with fine recesses that hold onto ink and print as a network of small, irregular dots. The depth of the recesses, and hence the darkness of the tone can be controlled by varying the amount of time that the plate is exposed to the acid. Aquatint plates can be burnished, or rubbed with a smooth metal tool to modify or to add highlights to areas of tone.

Drypoint

Drypoint is an intaglio process, meaning the design (image) is actually incised in a metal plate. This is a class of printing techniques that also includes aquatint, engraving, etching, and mezzotint. To take an impression from an intaglio plate, ink is forced down into the incised lines of the plate and excess ink is wiped from its surface. A sheet of paper is placed on top of the plate, and it is passed under the roller of a printing press. Under the pressure of the press the paper is pushed down into the lines to receive the ink. To make a drypoint, the artist scratches lines directly on the plate with a sharp instrument such as a needle or a knife point. The process of scratching the plate displaces metal and creates a rough burr of metal along the edges of each line. The burr holds extra ink which, when printed, create lines that have a soft, feathery quality.

Etching

Etching is an intaglio process in which the lines of the design are etched or bitten into the metal plate using the corroding action of acid. To make an etching, the plate is covered with a ground layer of an acid-resistant material such as wax or resin. The artist draws through the ground with a needle to expose areas of bare metal. When the plate is brushed with or immersed in acid, the artist's drawing is etched into the metal. The ground layer is removed and the plate is inked and printed using an intaglio press.

Lift ground aquatint

Lift ground, also known as sugar lift, aquatint is an intaglio process that allows the artist to create prints that have the fluid appearance of pen and ink or brush and ink drawings. In this process, the artist draws or paints on the plate with a sugar-based (water soluble) solution. After the solution dries, the plate is coated overall with an acid-resistant varnish and the plate is immersed in water. As the water-soluble solution slowly dissolves, it lifts the varnish from the areas of the plate where the artist drew. Then, as with a standard aquatint, the plate is dusted overall with rosin, heated to fuse the powder in place, and etched with acid.

Linoleum cut

Linoleum cut is a variation on the woodcut in which a sheet of linoleum is carved instead of a plank of wood. Linoleum was introduced in the late 19th century for use as floor coverings. It was originally produced from solidified linseed oil mixed with wood dust and adhered to a burlap backing. Because linoleum is strong but relatively soft and has no directional grain, it can be more easily carved than wood and is not susceptible to splitting during carving or printing.

Lithograph

Lithography is a planographic process, meaning that the ink design is impressed on paper from a flat surface that has been chemically altered rather than from an incised, carved or otherwise irregular surface. The process is based upon the chemical incompatibility of oil and water. To make a lithograph, the artist draws with an oil-based crayon or ink on a smooth porous surface such as a limestone block or a specially grained metal plate. The stone is then prepared in order to hold ink in areas of an artist's design and repel ink in non-image areas. Once the image is fixed on the stone, the artist can add highlights and detail to the design by scraping the surface of the stone with a needle or a knife. Printing a lithograph requires a special flat-bed press that forces the paper in contact with the inked stone at high, even pressure.

Monotype

A monotype is a print made after an artist paints or draws with printing ink directly on a flat smooth surface such as a sheet of glass or an otherwise unprepared metal printing plate. Normally, only one good impression can be taken from a monotype. Monotypes generally fall into two distinct types groups, those made in the “white field manner” where the ink is built up on the plate in the same manner as an ink drawing, and those made in the “dark field manner” created by removing ink from a fully inked plate.

Transfer Lithograph

Lithographs do not need to be drawn directly on the stone. Drawings done using lithographic crayons on another surface, such as paper, can be transferred by pressure onto a stone and prepared for printing using the standard techniques. The advantages of transfer lithography include the convenience that the artist can draw on a surface that is more portable and familiar than a lithographic stone and that the printed image will be in the same orientation as the original drawing.

Woodcut

A woodcut is created by carving into a plank of wood with knives, gouges and other cutting tools. Since woodcut is a relief process, the areas carved away from the wood define the highlights, or non-printed areas. To take an impression, the raised areas of the block are rolled with a layer of ink and then the image is printed on paper with pressure applied by a printing press or through rubbing.