

Intaglio: Etching, Aquatint & Dry Point

An intaglio is a print created by incising or etching a line or texture into a metal plate. This line or texture will hold ink that can be transferred to another surface (usually paper). My prints are created from copper plates and incorporate line etching, rosin aquatint, dry point & chine collé.

A line etching is produced by coating a plate with a very thin layer of a liquid ground (or resist). Once the coating has solidified, it can be drawn through. The lines drawn expose the metal beneath the ground and the plate is submerged in a corrosive liquid. For my work I use ferric chloride to etch copper plates. The amount of time the plate is left in the corrosive determines the depth of the etched line or texture and the intensity of the mark when printed.

Dry point lines are incised directly into the plate with any kind of sharp tool. It can be a single scratch, a continuous line or an entire abraded area. The resulting marks have a soft, feathered feel to them and depending on the depth of the mark can evoke the feeling of a ghost image or be incredibly intense.

Rosin aquatint is used to produce shaded areas and texture. The bare metal plate is coated with a very fine dusting of rosin that is then melted onto the plate until fully adhered but not burnt. Ground is used to block any areas of the plate that are to remain un-etched. The plate is etched in the corrosive, which eats away the tiny areas of exposed metal between the rosin dust. This gives the plate a very fine, pitted texture much like sandpaper. When inked, it will hold the ink to varying degrees depending on the depth of the etch. Darker shading is obtained with a longer etch time and gradations of tone can be achieved by blocking out the area in stages.

One of my favorite ways to produce an aquatint is by using the sugar lift method. The sugar lift I use is a mixture of simple syrup, India ink and gum arabic. The solution is applied to the plate with a brush, stick, or any tool the artist chooses, to create a variety of painterly marks. When the solution sets, a thin layer of liquid ground is applied over the plate, dried and then submerged in a bath of warm water. The sugar lift will release from the plate, exposing the metal but retaining the quality of the mark made. Rosin is then applied to the area and etched to create form, tone and shading.

The finished plate is printed by wiping ink over the surface and embedding it into all the fine lines and textures. The surface ink is completely wiped off so that what remains is the ink in the etched areas below the surface. Very minimal amounts of ink (more like a haze of color) can be left on the surface to create "plate tone." Intaglios are traditionally printed on damp, cotton rag paper to facilitate both the transfer of the ink and the embossing of the marks.

Chine Collé

Chine collé is the application of a second paper layer (usually fine, Japanese rice papers) to the main paper used for printing the image. Typically, the chine collé paper is the size of the plate while the main paper body is larger, allowing for a margin. It can also be used to accentuate specific areas of the plate or to create a greater "collage" like effect. There are several ways to adhere the chine collé paper but I use a dusting of wheat starch powder to the back of dampened rice paper. The clean side is laid over the plate and the rag paper is laid over that (from bottom to top of the layering would be: plate etched side up; chine collé paper clean side on plate, dusted side up; rag paper on top). When run through the press, the chine collé paper will be adhered to the rag paper with the etched image imprinted to it. This allows for added tone, texture and depth to the resulting print.

Monotype

A monotype is a unique, printed image created by drawing or painting directly onto a plate with any transferable media, including watercolor paints, many varieties of printmaking inks and loose pigments. The marks and brushstrokes created on the plate are exactly mirrored on the printed image and result in very painterly, translucent, luminous images. Chine collé can be used in conjunction with the monotype for another layer of depth and interest.

Woodcut

A woodcut is a type of relief print created by carving away areas from the surface of a woodblock. The type of wood used will greatly determine the quality of the marks and image, from very precise, refined images, to aggressive, ragged marks and shapes. Many different kinds of tools can be used to carve the block, from traditional Japanese woodblock knives (each with their own unique shape and purpose) to chisels, gauges and even dremels and other power tools.

In a relief print, the ink sits on the surface of the block so the carved areas become negative space. Generally, one color is printed at a time. Additional colors can be achieved by carving another block for each color desired or by creating a reduction block print. In a reduction print, the block is carved with the image for the first color and then carved some more for each additional color. Since the block changes with each carving, you cannot go back and reprint the edition from the start.