

LOOKING CLOSELY AT

Printmaking

Printmaking

There are several different ways of making prints. Whatever the technique, the process generally begins by drawing - either on paper, which is then transferred to a block or plate, or by drawing directly onto the printing surface which is then treated ready for printing.

Multiple plates in register are used for multicolour effects and occasionally prints are hand coloured after printing. Whilst many artists choose to print their own works, others rely on a skilled printmaker to produce a final image.

Woodblocks

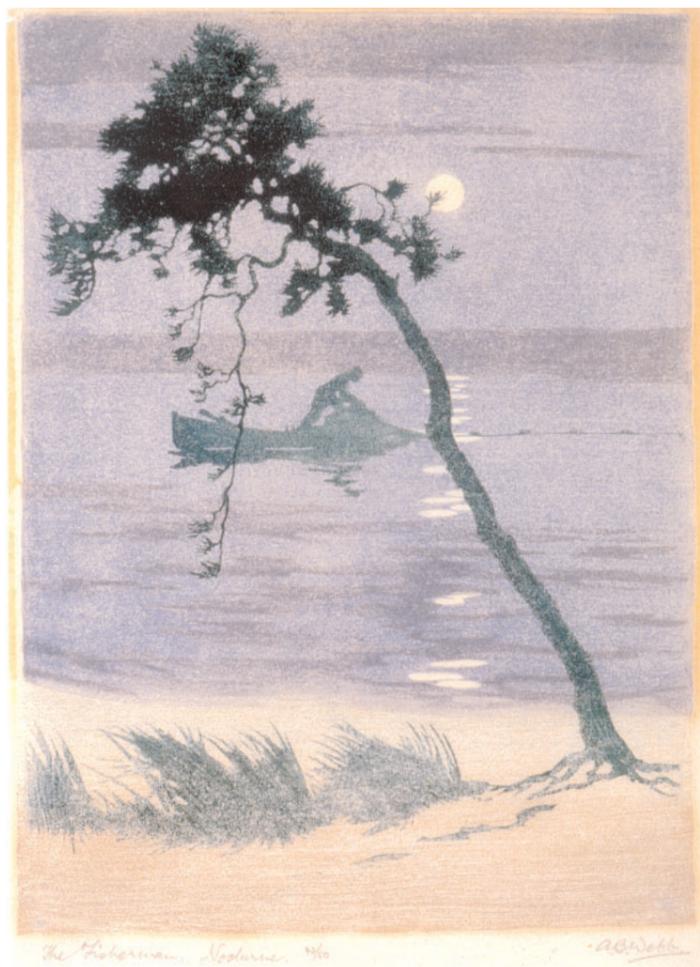
One of the simplest techniques is the relief print which employs the same principle as the potato cut used by school children. To make a relief print all parts of the printing surface not meant to carry ink are cut away, so that the surface to be printed remains proud of the surface or *in relief*. This raised surface is inked and the paper, or material to be printed on, pressed on to it to transfer the image.

In the case of wood blocks the image is carved into a piece of wood. When the wood to be carved is taken with the grain running along its length it is termed a wood *block*. If the piece uses a cross section, cutting across the grain this is called a wood *engraving*.

Printing from woodcuts originated in China and became highly developed in Japan in the 17th to 19th centuries. In general the process lends itself to bold black and white designs.

Lithographs

Lithography is based on the principle that grease and water do not mix. To make a lithograph



A B Webb, *The Fisherman, Nocturne*, c1921-1922. Colour woodcut

Printmaking

Printmaking refers to the variety of processes by which multiple copies can be made of an image or text. Much in our everyday lives, from newspapers, books, posters, leaflets, junk mail and so on, is reproduced by a printing process of one kind or another. Before 1415 however, books and manuscripts were hand written and hand illustrated. They were unique objects, highly prized as works of art, collected, and sometimes commissioned, by great families.

Mechanical printing and papermaking was developed in China and by the 15th century printing was being employed in Europe, to satisfy the demand for cheap religious icons and playing cards. Printing today has become a commercial enterprise, however many artists continue to draw and etch by hand and hand presses are still in demand for the making of fine prints which are highly collectable.

the image is drawn directly onto a sensitised, flat surface using a greasy substance such as crayon. The surface may be stone, paper or metal.

Once processed the surface is coated with a film of water. The greasy, drawn image repels the water which clings to the remaining undrawn surface. Oil based ink, which adheres to the greasy image but not the damp surface, is then rolled onto the plate and the print is taken.

The development of lithography in the 19th century had a major impact on society because prints could be made quickly and easily.

Screenprints

This is a form of stencil printing whereby areas of a fine fabric screen, stretched taut across a frame, are masked off and ink is squeezed through the mesh onto a surface beneath. There is no reversal of the image, unlike other printing processes.

Photographic stencils, where the image is transferred to the screen photomechanically, are now widely used by artists.

Etching

The first step in the making of an etching is to prepare the metal plate with acid resistant material. The artist then draws directly onto the plate with a pointed tool which exposes the metal. Once dipped in acid the lines of the drawing are *etched* into the plate's surface. Ink is pushed into these indentations, and the surface of the plate is wiped clean. Damp paper is pressed onto the plate to "pull out" the ink to make the print. Etched lines are generally more relaxed and irregular. Aquatinting creates a tonal effect by the placement of acid resistant particles to areas of the plate.

Art changes the way we see the world

Produced by the Art Gallery of Western Australia with the aim of making art more accessible for visitors

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Prints in the State Art Collection

There are approximately 4000 works on paper classified as prints in the State Art Collection. These are stored in flat drawers, out of the light, in climate controlled conditions.

When required for display they are carefully checked and framed. The Gallery has a collection of standard size frames which are used for this purpose.

Lower light levels are required for the display of prints and they are rotated on and off display (rested) regularly to minimise stress. This process also applies to other works on paper such as watercolours and photographs.

What is a Reproduction?

Any work produced photomechanically, without the involvement of the artist throughout the process is a *reproduction*, not a print. By making this distinction, the veracity of original prints is protected and it becomes possible for people to purchase high-quality art at affordable prices, whilst also having the opportunity to purchase cheaper reproductions.

The development of sophisticated and rapid methods of printing allows for the widespread distribution of reproductions of great works of art. It has also meant that images have become familiar through their reproduction on everyday objects such as T-shirts.

A B Webb, *The Fisherman, Nocturne*, c1921-1922. Colour woodcut. Detail



Editions

The edition is indicated on the bottom of the print, outside of the printed image area, in pencil.

Thus 43/50 for example indicates that the print is the 43rd of a finite edition of 50. There will be no more than 50 "copies" of this print made. The purchaser knows that their copy, number 43, comes towards the end of the run.

Slight differences may be detected between the first and the last of a print run which are approved by the artist and printmaker.

End of the Run

On the completion of a print run, the plate, block or screen is generally destroyed to ensure the integrity of the work. In some countries, laws require the artist or printmaker to provide a cancellation proof showing that the surface has been permanently altered. This protects both artist and buyer from abuse of the edition system and ensures the value of a work is maintained by preventing the flooding of the market with unauthorised copies.

Several woodblocks and metal plates corresponding to prints are held as part of the State Art Collection. They will not, of course, ever be used to make more prints, but are of considerable value in their own right, illustrating how prints are made. They are occasionally shown in the Art Gallery when the matching print is on display.

Original Prints

How can a print be an original if there is more than one copy of the same image? Original prints are those made by the artist, or under the artist's supervision or in collaboration with a printmaker. *Original print* indicates the artist's intent to create multiple originals, rather than copies of a single, pre-existing original. The artist will place a limit on the number of prints made and each copy is numbered and signed by the artist.

Different Colours

You may see the same image in different colours, but still classed as an original. This decision is made by the artist who may experiment with colours during printing.