

# GLOSSARY OF PRINT TERMINOLOGY

From: Griffiths, Antony 'The Print Before Photography' (British Museum, 2016)

The following glossary of terms is intended as an aide-mémoire for those who are unfamiliar with the terminology of printmaking. Writing about prints has always been riddled with ambiguous words and some terms are used in special senses in this book. For a fuller explanation of the processes, and explanations of terms for minor methods of printmaking, see Antony Griffiths (ed.), *Ismdma,\*s, 1 6*; for an exhaustive study, see Stijnman, *Engraving and Etching*, 2012.

## AQUATINT

A variety of etching that creates tone by fusing grains of rosin to the copper plate and then etching it. The acid prints in pools round each grain; these hold sufficient ink to print a light, grainy tone.

## CONSTPRENT

A term often used in early Netherlandish sources and adopted in this book to define a category of print that was sold as an invention of an artist and as a work of art, regardless of whether or not the artist also engraved the plate.

## Copy

An impression from a second plate that has been copied from the first

## COIJNTERPROOF

A 'copy' of a print in this book does not refer to another impression from the same plate; it means an impression of a print transferred in reverse to a second sheet, it is made by placing an impression while the ink is still wet against another sheet of paper, and running the two together through a press.

## DEMI-FINE

A French term used to cover the cheaper and lower-quality end of the production of intaglio prints (see chapter 24).

## DRYPOINT

The line is scratched directly into a copper plate with a sharp point; this produces a drawn line akin to that of an etching, but it is shallow and wears quickly. Its characteristic is the burr, a smudge created at the side of the lines by ink held by the ridge of displaced copper.

## EDITION

Before the nineteenth century the concept of an edition (which belongs to book publishing) had little grip in single-sheet print production; instead the 'state' has been the prime tool for distinguishing different printings from a plate or block.

## ENGRAVING

The process of cutting lines in a copper plate with a burin, a V-shaped metal tool. This is pushed by the hand and produces a clean line that is controlled both in direction and depth. The plate is printed in intaglio (q.v.). Being the standard method of producing a copper plate, the word was sometimes loosely used to cover all the methods of producing intaglio prints, and in this sense included etching, mezzotint and so on.

## ETCHING

The design is drawn with a needle through a ground of hard wax on a copper plate and the lines thus exposed are eaten away in an acid bath. After cleaning off the ground, the plate can be printed in intaglio.

## FORME

The frame within which type and woodcuts can be assembled together for relief printing.

## INTAGLIO

The generic term for the method of printing all plates (almost always copper) where the design is created by lines cut into the metal. The ink is forced into the lines and the surface is wiped clean. The plate is printed by covering it with a sheet of dampened paper and running both through a roller press. The plate needs to be re-inked for every impression.

## JOBGING

The term used in the printing trade for small-scale printing for mainly retail clients.

## LETTERING

The term applied to any letters engraved on a copper plate. See chapter 5.

## LETTERPRESS

The term used for relief printing from movable hand-set type.

## LITHOGRAPHY

A method of printing from limestone invented by Gutenberg in the late 1790s and which falls outside the area covered by this book. It relies on the chemical antipathy between grease and water and has become the method used in almost all commercial printing in the twenty-first century.

## MAC ULATL'RE

An impression taken to dean Out any remaining ink left in the lines of a copper plate.

## MEZZOTINT

A copper plate is worked over ('grounded') using a curved toothed tool (a 'rocker') so that the entire surface is roughened. In this state the plate, if inked, would print a solid black. The lighter parts of the design are created by scraping and polishing down areas of the plate so that they hold less ink in printing.

## MONOTYPE

The design is drawn in printing ink onto a smooth, unworked copper plate and printed in this form. The process usually allows no more than one strong and one weak impression.

## PLATE

A 'plate' normally refers to the copper plate that is used for printing, but it can also be used of a plate illustrating a book, in which case it is a print rather than a plate.

## PLATE

The indentation left on the paper by the edge of a copper plate after it has been printed.

## PROOF

The word 'proof' is used in this book specifically to refer to the first trial impressions from a plate before the main edition, and not to every impression taken from a plate.

## RELIEF

The class of prints printed from the surface of the printing matrix, not from lines cut in intaglio. It covers all printing from woodblocks.

## STATE

Changes can be introduced onto plates and blocks at any point in their printing lives. Such changes alter the appearance of the impressions taken from them, and each such change is said to produce a different 'state'. Much print scholarship from the nineteenth century onwards has been devoted to cataloguing these changes in state.

## STIPPLE

A way of creating tone on a copper plate by using a pointed metal tool to build up a mass of dots; the dots were usually applied over an etching ground and bitten into the plate by acid.

## WOODCUT

The second main class of image printing, using wooden blocks cut and printed in relief (rather than intaglio). The background to the block is cut away, leaving the lines standing in relief. The block is inked by dabbing the raised lines with ink, which is transferred to paper using a relief printing press, of the same construction as that used for printing movable type.

## WOOD-ENGRAVING

A variety of woodcut in a block of hard-grained wood (usually boxwood) was cut with a burin. The block was, however, inked and printed in relief. It was widely adopted in the nineteenth century, but only after the years covered by this book.