

Printmaking tools

Baillieu Library Print Collection, University of Melbourne



American and German makers
Needle, rocker, burnisher,
woodcutting knives, roller and
dabber, 20th century
manufactured wood and metal
Baillieu Library Print Collection
University of Melbourne
0000.1156 – 0000.1163

Two types of printmaking processes are represented by these tools: intaglio and relief. The oldest of these is relief, which is used for woodcuts (and later for linocuts). 'Intaglio' derives from an Italian word meaning to incise; incising occurs on metal plates to create engravings, etchings and mezzotints. In both intaglio and relief prints, a roller is used to apply ink to the block or plate before it is run through a press. A dabber is typically used to push ink into the incised lines of an intaglio plate.

The image printed from the block or plate appears in mirror image on the sheet.

To create a woodblock relief print, a variety of woodcutting knives are used. This process requires all non-printed areas to be cut away so that the image is left standing in relief, ready to receive the ink. Wood engravings are also relief prints, but are cut into the end-grain of the wood, whereas a woodblock is cut on the plank-side of the wood.

Metal plate engravings are made by cutting directly into the plate with a tool such as a needle or burin. Different tones (variations of light and dark) are created by varying the line, and by cross-hatching.

In etching, a ground, usually wax or shellac, is spread all over the plate. The artist scratches into the ground with a tool, and when the plate is submerged into a bath of acid, the drawn lines and tones are bitten into the metal.

For mezzotint, the rocker tool is used to pit the plate's surface, which will take up ink and therefore print black, while the burnisher is used to smooth out areas to print white.

Teaching ideas

The University of Melbourne's curriculum is rich and varied, and changes from year to year. For more teaching ideas, [contact a collection manager](#).

The Print Room

Understand the techniques and media of printmaking in developing an exhibition and online catalogue.

Printing, Collage and Social Engagement

Visit the Baillieu Library Print Collection to explore the history of different printmaking processes and their diverse purposes as forms of communication and social engagement. Explore and reflect critically on diverse approaches and purposes of printmaking techniques.

Introduction to Printmaking Processes

Visit the Print Collection – in the Baillieu Library and online – to gain knowledge and understanding of a range of methods and materials, in order to build your confidence in exploring and experimenting with a variety of printmaking processes.

Cosmic Pandaemonium in *Paradise Lost*

Explore genre, theology, sex, politics, militarism, education, science, censorship, architecture and aesthetics in John Martin's mezzotint illustrations for Milton's *Paradise lost*.

Internship I

Gain practical vocational experience in an industry setting under the guidance of a senior staff member, with additional support from the subject co-ordinator, at the Baillieu Library Print Collection.

Renaissance Art in Florence and Venice

Visit the Baillieu Library Print Collection to explore critical interpretations of works of art, spectatorship, patronage, the place of art in daily life in Renaissance Italy, the scientific analysis of works of art, restoration history, and workshop practice related to Renaissance prints.

Baroque Art in Polycentric Europe

Visit the Baillieu Library Print Collection to develop a broad understanding of the technical and stylistic achievements of the major practitioners of the Baroque period.

Knowledge, Learning and Culture

Visit the Baillieu Library Print Collection to explore historical, social, political and cultural influences on knowledge and the analysis of information and ideas from multiple perspectives. Encounter objects to show how direct experience can lead to better understanding and knowledge.

Intersecting objects



Unknown artist (German)

Calvary, c. 1460

woodcut

26.7 × 18.7 cm (sheet trimmed to image)

Gift of Dr J. Orde Poynton, 1959

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1959.4277



John Martin (English, 1789–1854)

published by Septimus Prowett

Creation of light from *Paradise lost*, 1825

mezzotint

19.0 × 27.9 cm (image)

25.3 × 35.3 cm (plate)

29.6 × 40.8 cm (sheet)

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1993.2148

To learn more, visit the website of the [Baillieu Library Print Collection](#).

Further reading

Bamber Gascoigne, *How to identify prints: A complete guide to manual and mechanical processes from woodcut to ink jet*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2004.

Antony Griffiths, *Prints and printmaking: An introduction to the history and techniques*, London: British Museum Press, 1996.

Linda C. Hulst, *The print in the Western world: An introductory history*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.

William Mills Irvin, *How prints look: Photographs with commentary*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1987.