

WHAT IS A MEZZOTINT?

A mezzotint is a relatively rare form of printmaking. (Other more commonly-known original prints include etchings, drypoints, aquatints, lithographs, linocuts, woodcuts, and silkscreens.)

Like other intaglio prints, a mezzotint involves creating a design or image by incising it into a flat metal plate, inking the plate surface, positioning the paper on top of the inked plate and applying pressure to the paper, which transfers the inked design. When the paper is carefully lifted off the plate, the result is an artwork (in reverse) as you see before you – an original mezzotint.

What distinguishes a mezzotint from other (more common) intaglios is the arduous method by which the engraving plate is prepared and the image is formed on the plate.

To prepare the plate, the artist may spend weeks or months roughening the plate surface in a systematic manner using a small curved-edge hand-held tool called a rocker. The tool has a serrated edge. When the artist rocks the tool against the plate while applying heavy pressure, the entire plate is roughened so it has an appearance similar to sandpaper.

If, at this stage, the artist inks the

roughened plate, and uses a press to transfer the ink to the paper, the print would appear as a rich velvety black rectangle.

To create the art image, the artist uses metal tools to smooth out portions of the roughened plate. The smooth areas would repel the ink and therefore print with a lighter tonal quality than the roughened areas of the plate.

To achieve colors, the artist would generally use multiple plates, hand-inking them. Varying colors may be created by printing one color on top of another.

Why are mezzotints so dark?

Because a mezzotint plate starts out in a state that would print only black. The image that appears is made by softening the roughened plate so the image, when printed, appears to emerge from the darkness.

There are very few artists in the world creating mezzotints as it requires a technical skill that so few have mastered. In this exhibition you are viewing the largest collection of mezzotint artists you will likely ever see again.

Enjoy – and please ask as you have questions!