
Dox Thrash: Revealed

a companion site to the Philadelphia Museum of Art exhibit:

Dox Thrash: An African American Master Printmaker Rediscovered



Printmaking

Carborundum Mezzotint

Dox Thrash pioneered the technique that became known as the carborundum mezzotint. Gritty silica crystals, known by the brand name *Carborundum*, were originally used to prepare lithographic stones. In this method they are used instead to thoroughly scratch or roughen a metal plate.



Dox Thrash Demonstrating Carborundum Plate Preparation Photographed by Staats, 1945. Graphic Arts Collection, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institutions.

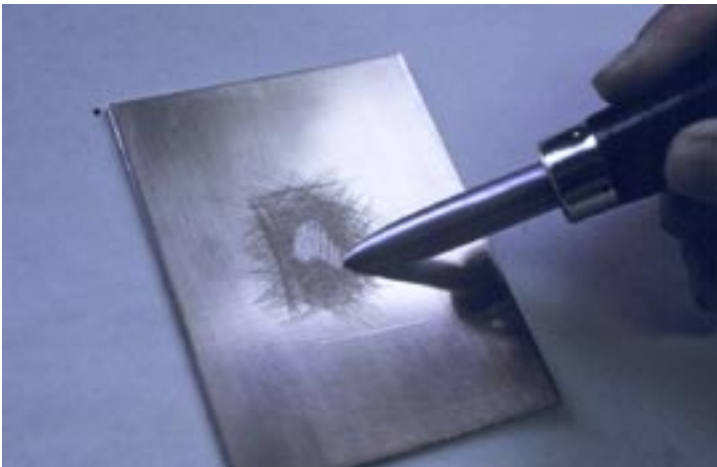


Carborundum Mezzotint. Carborundum powder and treated plate.

To make a carborundum mezzotint, an artist first roughens the entire surface of a copper plate with Carborundum, a commercially produced abrasive. The image is created by using burnishers and scrapers to remove some of the roughness from the plate. When inked, a plate prepared in this way will produce a broad range of velvety tones ranging from pale gray to deep black.



Mary Lou
c. 1939-40, carborundum mezzotint over traces of previously etched image,
9 15/16 x 6 7/8 inches (25.2 x 17.5 cm).
Philadelphia Museum of Art, purchased with the Thomas Skelton Harrison Fund.



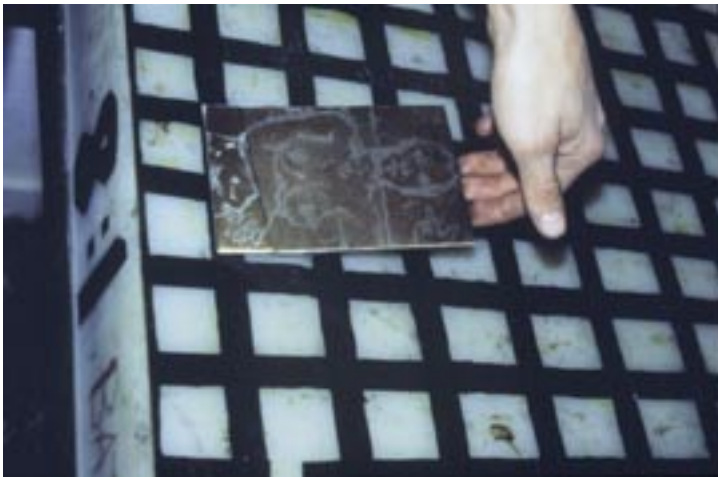
Carborundum Mezzotint. Burnisher on plate treated with Rocker.

Carborundum Relief Etching

To make a carborundum relief etching, an artist uses acid-resistant varnish to draw an image on a copper plate that has already been roughened all over with Carborundum. After the plate is immersed in an acid solution, the broad lines of the protected drawing stand out in relief above the deeply bitten background so that they can be inked and printed.



Happy Journey
c. 1939-40, carborundum relief etching,
9 15/16 x 7 inches (25.3 x 17.8 cm).
Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift of E. M.
Benson.



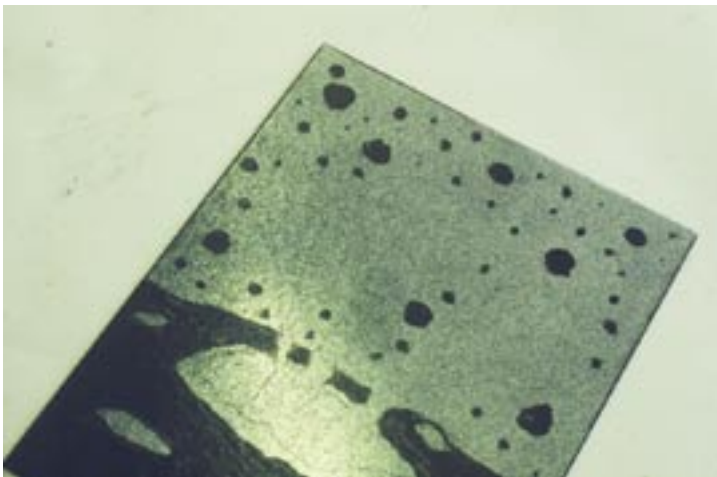
Carborundum Relief Etching Relief etching being treated in acid bath.

Aquatint

A method of etching used to create broad areas of even tone. The technique was developed in the 1760s to imitate the look of wash drawings. Different tones of light and dark can be produced depending on the density of the particles, the length of time the plate is in the acid bath or the strength of the acid.



Hobo Jungle
c. 1937-38, aquatint,
4 13/16 x 5 1/4 inches (12.2 x 13.4 cm).
Collection of John Warren, Philadelphia.



Aquatint prepared plate.

Drypoint

A technique in which a sharp, pointed tool called a *drypoint needle* is used to scratch fine lines directly into a metal plate. During printing, the fragile ridge of metal raised alongside the incised line, known as the *burr*, retains extra ink, creating soft, blurred lines.



Cat-Fishin'
c.1937-38, aquatint, etching, and drypoint,
8 1/8 x 10 1/4 inches (20.6 x 26.1 cm).
Federal Works Agency, Work Projects Administration, on
deposit at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.



Drypoint needle scratching metal plate.

Etching

Etching uses acid corrosion, rather than direct gouging, to cut designs into a metal plate. Typically, the plate is first coated with a waxy, acid-resistant material, or ground. A sharp, pointed etching needle is drawn through the ground to expose lines of bare metal. The plate is then immersed in dilute acid, which bites the metal only where it has been exposed by the etching needle.



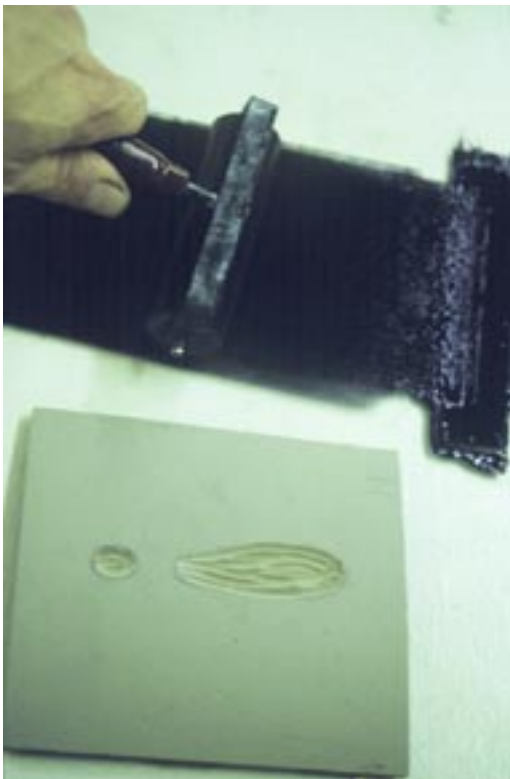
Etching tools and techniques.



Morning Paper
c. 1941, etching,
6 15/16 x 4 15/16 inches (17.7 x 12.6 cm).
Collection of John Warren, Philadelphia.

Linocut

Linocut employs knives, and gouges to cut away areas from linoleum. While it is easier to carve than wood, it is less durable when printing multiple impressions.



Carved linoleum block.



Laffin' Thru Another Year

Early 1930s, linocut.

5 5/16 x 4 1/2 inches (13.5 x 14.4 cm) irregular.
Collection of Allan H. Nowak, Sunny Isles Beach,
Florida.

Lithograph

Lithograph means, literally, stone drawing. The artist uses a greasy crayon or other material to draw on stone or metal. Relying on the fact that grease repels water, the stone is kept damp as greasy printer's ink is applied, so that the ink will only adhere to the image area.



Drawing on lithograph stone with crayon.



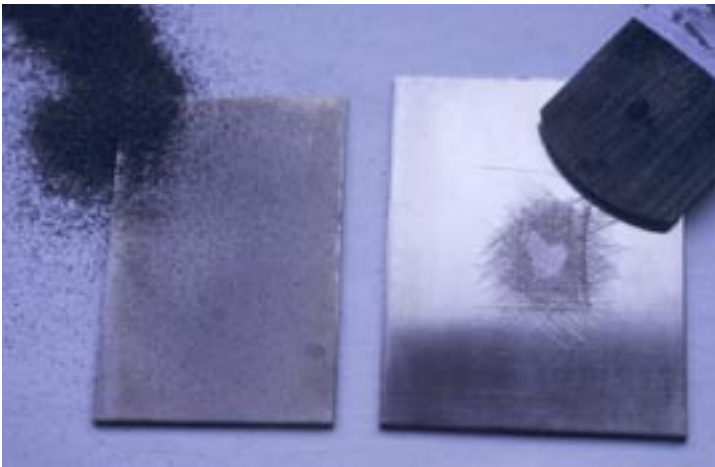
Ebony Joe
c. 1939, lithograph.
9 7/8 x 8 1/8 inches (25.1 x 20.6 cm).
Federal Works Agency, Work Projects
Administration, on deposit at the Philadelphia
Museum of Art.

Mezzotint

A tonal print made by roughening a metal plate with an instrument called a rocker, (Dox Thrash used Carborundum powder to roughen the plate). A design is smoothed out with a polishing tool called a *burnisher*. The polished portions print light, whereas the roughened portions hold the ink and result in a rich, velvety black.



Life
c. 1938-39, carborundum mezzotint,
10 7/8 x 8 13/16 inches (27.6 x 22.4 cm).
Federal Works Agency, Work Projects
Administration, on deposit at the Philadelphia
Museum of Art.



Carborundum powder prepared plate and rocker prepared plate.

Woodcut

The oldest and simplest method of printmaking, woodcut employs a chisel-like tool to cut away areas from a plank or block of wood. The raised portions that have been left uncut are inked and printed.



Cutting away wood from wood block.



*Arrangement of Musical Instruments
(Horns and Drums)*

c.1952, woodcut, reproduced on the cover
of concert program,

5 1/16 x 6 15/16 inches (12.8 x 17.7 cm).

Philadelphia Museum of Art, gift of Ronald Rumford, 1999.