

A brief history of the graphic arts

Many young artists today, looking for new ways to express their ideas, are using techniques that pre-date the invention of oil paint, and even the invention of paper. The desire to beautify a simple object seems as old as man. One can still see examples of line engravings on bone, horn and stone that were done by artists twenty thousand years ago. Two thousand years ago - even before the invention of paper - artists were expressing themselves in woodcut. Independent of each other, the Chinese and the Egyptians were using wood, and recreating their designs in clay and wax.

When the Chinese developed the art of papermaking, in about 200 A.D., woodcutting as an art form took a leap forward. The woodcut was increased in size, and images were transferred to paper. By the sixth century, the technique into a fine art. The major early use of woodcuts was to print textiles. When paper became readily available, it was used primarily to print playing cards, and to illustrate books and religious handbills for pilgrims. It was not until the sixteenth century that one artist, Albrecht Durer, saw the tremendous potential of the woodcut and with his dazzling technical mastery changed its character. Within the next hundred years the masters of Europe - Holbein, Lucas Von Leyden and Titian - were all using this new form.

Intaglio, or line engraving, using a copper base, dates back to Germany or the Netherlands in the early part of the fifteenth century. At first, the technique was primarily used to decorate armor and objects made of precious metals, and was a flourishing technique long before anyone thought of transferring these engraved designs to paper. It is believed that the transfer to paper was really for use as a record for the artist of his already finished work on the metal itself. The earliest dated print on paper is one from 1446 by an anonymous German engraver known as the "Master of 1446". The first artist in this medium known by name is Martin Schongauer whose expressive line and delicate shadings give his work an almost three dimensional quality, and what few works of his remain are coveted by museums.

At the same time that the engraving as an art form was developing, another art form,

similar in method - the etching - was beginning. Most of the masters used both. With the etching, a metal plate is coated with a material resisting acid. The artist draws onto this coating. The plate is then submerged in acid and the lines made by the artist are etched, or eaten away.

Engraving is done by having the design cut directly into the metal plate. In both cases, ink is put into the grooved areas, while the top of the plate is wiped clean. Dampened paper is then applied to the plate with enough force so that it is pushed into the grooves, picking up the ink. The force of pressure on the paper and the width and depth of the grooves give the picture its depth and shadings.

Drypoint, mezzotint, aquatint and collography are just some of the techniques used to achieve a variety of tone and line.

Rembrandt, even today, remains the master of the etched line. In the nineteenth century Francisco Goya, known primarily as a painter, was equally famous for his penetrating, bitter and revolutionary etchings and aquatints, and was to suffer from the Spanish court for it. After Goya, Edouard Manet, Degas and Whistler were to use this technique as a fine art.

While engraving and etching were enjoying popularity with both artist and public, the woodcut had declined steadily as an art form, although it was widely used to illustrate books and newspapers. During this period of decline in Europe, the Japanese rediscovered woodcutting as a means of expression, and an exhibit of Japanese prints, in Paris, was to influence a group of artists whose work, in turn, would change the world's concept of the meaning of "art". These were the impressionists. Gauguin began by experimenting with color. The traditional means had been to add color to each individual print. Gauguin's technique was to ink the block, and then re-ink in different colors, or to use different blocks for different colors. He and others also utilized the grain of the wood as part of their design. Years later, using linoleum rather than wood, Picasso gave still another dimension to this oldest of graphic techniques.

An accident in 1796 gave the graphic arts still another form - the lithograph. Alois Senefelder, a Bavarian actor and playwright, had placed a newly inked piece of

music manuscript on a stone. When he picked it up he saw that the music impression had remained in very clear detail on the stone. When he put a fresh sheet of paper on the stone and rubbed it, he had another clear impression. Senefelder was also in the right place, because the qualities needed for the lithograph stone are rarely found anywhere but in that area of Bavaria.

The principle on which lithography is based is that water and grease will not mix. The artist draws his picture on the stone with a grease crayon, or with a brush with an oil or grease base. The color of this base is of no importance. Ink is then applied to the stone. It adheres only to the treated area. The paper is then rolled across the stone, picking up the color impression. It is extremely important that each time the paper is put on the stone to receive an additional color it is in exactly the same position, or the colors and design will be out of register.

As with other graphic techniques, lithography was not at first used as an art medium. The process was patented in London and Paris, but it remained for Goya, who began his experiments in 1819, to see lithography's potential. Later Degas and Gauguin, using zinc as a base, as well as the hard-to-come-by stone, explored the many effects of lithography for its own sake, rather than as a substitute for an oil painting.

Honore Daumier is considered by many to be the greatest lithographer of the nineteenth century. His drawings were savage in their wit, satire, and caricature. Appearing as they did in the daily newspaper, "Le Charivari", and weekly "La Caricature", they were seen by a wide public. His drawing of King Louis Philippe as Gargantua gorging the wealth of France, caused him to be sent to jail.

Later in the century, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec added his genius to the artists developing this medium. Picasso and Miro are but two of this century's masters of the form.

The most recent graphic art technique to be explored evolved out of Chinese and Japanese stencil printing, one of the oldest of all printing is the more widely used description. Samuel Simon was granted a patent for a silk-screen process in 1907 in

Manchester, England. Seven years later John Pilsworth, a commercial artist, developed a silk screen method for printing banners and pennants. Commercial artists made good use of the technique, especially for posters and work requiring bright colors.

Based on the stencil theory, a design is drawn on silk. All areas but that of the design are covered, and the paint is pushed through the silk onto the paper. Unlike the graphics forms before it, the paint used here is thick and opaque. Even house paint can be used. As with the lithograph, each color requires its own screen, and the

artist must be very careful that the paper receiving numerous different color impressions is always in exactly the same position.

Because silk screening was being used to print everything from advertising posters to clothing, serious artists were not considering this method to express themselves. It wasn't until 1936, under the leadership of Anthony Velonis, that a group was formed, sponsored by the WPA of New York City. Today the Pop and Op movements are adding an extra dimension to this graphic art, led by Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenber, and Larry Rivers, among others.



INB Ballet will be at the Fredericton Playhouse, Oct. 6 and 7. There will also be a matinee performance on Oct. 7.

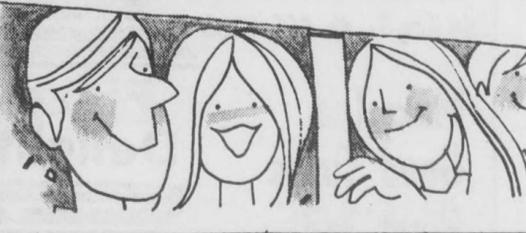
CHSC General Meeting

Tuesday, Oct. 17, 1978
in Room 203 of the SUB

at 7:00 p.m.

All CHSC Members Welcome

1. 2 Board members to be elected
2. New club policies to be discussed



Capt. Submarine

Mon-Thurs 9:30-2:00am

Fri-Sat 9:30-3:00 am

Sun 12: noon-1:00am

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