



Aquatint

PRINTMAKING

WRITTEN BY: [The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica](#)

Aquatint, a variety of [etching](#) widely used by printmakers to achieve a broad range of tonal values. The process is called aquatint because finished prints often resemble watercolour drawings or wash drawings. The technique consists of exposing a copperplate to acid through a layer of melted granulated [resin](#). The acid bites away the plate only in the interstices between the resin grains, leaving an evenly pitted surface that yields broad areas of tone when the grains are removed and the plate is printed. An [infinite](#) number of tones can be achieved by exposing various parts of the plate to acid baths of different strengths for different periods of time. Tones can also be altered by scraping and burnishing. Etched or engraved lines are often used with aquatint to achieve greater definition of form.





Dancer of the Hidatsa Dog Society, aquatint by Karl Bodmer, 1834. 38.7 × 53.3 cm.

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In the 17th century a number of attempts were made at producing what later became known as aquatint prints. None of the efforts was successful, however, until 1768, when the French printmaker Jean-Baptiste Le Prince discovered that granulated resin gave satisfactory results. Aquatint became the most popular method of producing toned prints in the late 18th century, especially among illustrators. Its textural subtleties, however, remained largely unexplored by well-known artists except for [Francisco de Goya](#). Most of his prints are aquatints, and he is considered the greatest master of the technique.





called sugar lift, was another method that came into widespread use in the 20th century owing to the work of artists such as [Pablo Picasso](#) and [Georges Rouault](#). Many contemporary printmakers also use pressurized plastic sprays in place of resin.

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