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## What is a monoprint?

Also known as the most painterly method among the printmaking techniques, a monoprint is essentially a printed painting. The characteristic of this method is that no two prints are alike; although images can be similar, editioning is not possible.

The appeal of the monoprint lies in the unique translucency that creates a quality of light very different from a painting on paper or a print, and the beauty of this media is also in its spontaneity and its combination of printmaking, painting and drawing mediums.

If the goal is to produce a single painted image, why make a monotype instead of a painting?

It would certainly seem pointless to make that image as a unique print. However, monoprints combine the spontaneity of printed inks and paper, creating a surface that is unlike any other art.

### Monoprints and monotypes

Although these two terms are used interchangeably, there is a big difference between one and the other.

A **monotype** is essentially ONE of a kind: mono is a Latin word which means ONE and type means kind. Therefore, a monotype is one printed image which does not have any form of matrix. On the other hand, a **monoprint** has some form of basic matrix.

The process of creating a **monoprint** or a **monotype** is the same, but when doing monotypes, the artist works on a clean and unetched plate; with monoprints, however, there is always a pattern or part of an image which is constantly repeated in each print. Artists often use etched plates or some kind of pattern such as lace, leaves, fabric or even rubber gaskets, to add texture. In this case, having a repeated pattern, we have a monoprint.

Monoprints and monotypes are created by manually adding (additive method) or removing (subtractive method) ink from a plate which is then printed using a printing press. Many effects can be achieved in monotypes that are not possible with any other technique.

In the **subtractive method** you cover a surface (metal or plastic plate) entirely with colour (usually with etching or litho ink), then you remove the ink partially or wholly to expose areas of the picture being made. This process can be carried out using brushes, toothpicks, cotton swabs, foam rubber, fingers, rags, etc. With the **additive method**, you start with a clean plate and apply the ink or watercolor media in various ways, but as etching ink is a fairly unmanageable substance it is hard to achieve the intended effect. If the ink is applied too thick, it will spread from the pressure when printed, forming a blot. If too thin it won't show up at all.

When the picture on the plate is finished, it is run through an etching press with dampened rag paper to form a unique one of a kind print. Almost all the ink transfers to the paper so it is not possible to make more than one print, hence the prefix mono. However, when a decent amount of ink remains on the plate, it is possible to strike another print without even adding any more ink: this is called a ghost image of the original print since it is much lighter than the first one, but has its unique character.

Before cleaning the plate, it is also possible to add more ink or watercolor to the ghost image left on the plate. In this case, your second image, which is based mostly on the previous one, will be a monoprint and not a monotype, since its matrix will be the remaining color left by the previous print.

Technically, you would be able to create a series of works which could be editioned - it would be a Varied Edition, so it would be numbered EV 1/10, EV 2/10 etc.

### A simple etching transformed into a monoprint

Using an already etched plate, the artist first rolled a thick layer of ink over the entire surface of the print, then using brushes, cotton swabs, sponges and fabric, the artist worked over the image, wiping off or adding ink.



Basic etching, printed before additional ink was applied with brushes



Final print Rapsodia, 2001 © Colleen Corradi



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**There are three main methods for making a monotype:**

- The **additive** or light-field method, in which the image is painted by adding or building up pigment onto the plate
- The **subtractive** or dark-field method where the entire plate is covered with a thin layer of pigment, which the artist then works out his image by removing some of the pigment with brushes, rags, sticks, or other tools.
- The third method is a **combination** of the two.

**monoprints:** [click here to learn more about the technique](#)

							
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