



Paul Cesar Helleu, *Madame Helleu Convalescing*, drypoint, signed, 22.5 x 39cm. Charterhouse, Sherborne. Apr 07. HP: £1,800. ABP: £2,117.



Doyly-John, *Continental Harbour Scene with Boats and Figures*, signed, 16.5 x 22.5in, framed. Hartleys, Ilkley. Jun 06. HP: £700. ABP: £823.



Matthew Darly, coloured engraving, *'Long Corks or The Bottle Companions'*, caricature of 2 women with ornate hair styles, 12.25 x 8.75in, pub'd April 1777, mounted, unframed, another caricature entitled *'Man of War giving chase to a Margate Hay'*, 8.75 x 12.75in, and 8 other political caricatures, mounted but unframed. Canterbury Auction Galleries, Kent. Apr 06. HP: £360. ABP: £423.



Whittle & Laurie, Publ. coloured engraving, *'South West view of Sydney in New South Wales'* 1814, 10 x 16.5in. Gorrings, Lewes. Sep 07. HP: £340. ABP: £399.



After Thomas Rowlandson 1756-1827, *'Miseries Of Human Life'*, after Woodward, publ. by Thomas Tegg, No 111 Cheapside, plate 257, hand-coloured engraving, 24 x 35cm, After Richard Earlom 1743-1822, *Pan dancing in classical landscape*, publ. Aug 1st 1774, by John Boydell engraver in Cheapside, mezzotint, 28 x 42cm. (2) Rosebery's, London. Jan 07. HP: £170. ABP: £199.



Manner of James Gillray, *'A Wellington Boot'*, hand-coloured engraving, publ. Thos McLean, 26 Haymarket London, 34 x 23cm with *'A Half Crown-Ation'*, hand-coloured lithograph, initialled 'HB' within the plate. (2) Rosebery's, London. May 06. HP: £160. ABP: £188.



C Schoneus 16/17thC, *Portrait of Bacchus half-length*, after Hendrik Goltzius, engraving, 24 x 17.5cm, Claude Duflos 1665-1727, *'La Toilette de Venus'* after F Boucher, engraving, 49.8 x 37.2cm. (2) Rosebery's, London. Aug 06. HP: £160. ABP: £188.



L Mansion & St Eschanzier, 3 hand-coloured engravings, *'Costume of the Royal Navy Marines - Lieutenants, Subalterns, Surgeons'*, published by Andrews & Co. and 3 smaller engravings of *The Victory*. Gorrings, Bexhill. Dec 05. HP: £150. ABP: £176.



William Pether, 1731-1821, *Stabling Horses*, after George Garrard, publ. May 15th 1787 by T Simpson, *St Paul's Church-Yard*, hand-coloured mezzotint, 48.3 x 60.7cm, P C Canot, *'The Great Bridge over the Taffe'*, after Richard Wilson, publ. July 17th 1775 by John Boydell, engraving, Schavonetti, *Milk Cow maids*, after F Wheatley, publ. by July 1793 by Colnaghi, stipple engraving. (3) Rosebery's, London. May 06. HP: £140. ABP: £164.

## Engravings, Mezzotints and Drypoints

by Chris Murray

Because metal engravings have been produced in huge numbers, and on so many subjects, they provide something for all tastes and pockets. As a form of reproduction that can be finely detailed, subtle in its effects, and inexpensive to produce in large numbers, for centuries it played the role that photography does now. In science, art (until the end of the nineteenth century art works were known largely through engravings: Bartolozzi), map making, scholarship and journalism it was the principal means of conveying visual information. Even a lowly Victorian cottage would have had a few engravings.

After the woodcut, metal engraving is the oldest form of print-making; the earliest date from first half of the fifteenth century, the main centres of production over the next century being in Germany (Martin Schöngauer, Master E. S., Albrecht Dürer), Italy (Maso Finiguerra, Andrea Mantegna) and the Low Countries (Theodorus de Bry). It almost certainly developed from metal chasing and niello work, with incised designs being recorded (for future commissions or to be shown to potential customers) by being inked and then pressed on to paper. So it's not surprising that several early engravers, such as the Frenchman Jean Duvet, were also gunsmiths.

Metal engraving soon became very popular for it allows far greater detail than woodcut, and also longer print runs.

### Technique

An engraving is made by cutting fine lines into a metal plate with a burin (a very fine chisel) or a special needle, a process that takes a firm and steady, but also sensitive, hand. Tone is created by cutting parallel lines very close together, or by cross-hatching. The depth of the cut determines whether a line is strong or fine. When ink is spread across the plate and then carefully wiped off, it remains in the incised lines until the plate is pressed, under considerable pressure, on to a sheet of damp paper.

For the plate, copper is ideal as it is (comparatively) soft and so cuts well; but, being soft, it also wears down quickly and so has a limited print run. So in the 1820s engravers began to use steel. (If a print is from before 1820 it will be a copper engraving; if after, very probably a steel engraving.) This allowed longer print runs, and also led to a subtle change in style: because steel is harder, the lines can be finer and closer together and so steel engravings tend to have a more precise, controlled, sometime even mechanical appearance. Copper engravings, by contrast, usually have a more expressive line and a 'warmer' feel. Comparing the two closely with the help of an eye-glass, an essential tool for the print collector, is an excellent way of developing a sensitivity to the medium. Even steel, however, wears down gradually and late impressions from a plate lack a clear definition, so early pulls are the most desirable. Colour is generally added by hand-painting the prints, and is often subtle, especially with natural history engravings, but can also be expressive, as in caricatures. Weak late impressions were often coloured to improve them, so colour prints should be examined closely.

In a stipple engraving the engraver cuts not only lines but also small dots or flecks, a technique that produces a range of textured effects. Stipple can be created using a burin or a roulette (an implement with a small, sharply ridged cylinder that is rolled over the plate to create fine indentations).

**Mezzotint**

Mezzotint, which developed in the late seventeenth century, brought a completely new tonal range to engraving. Instead of having lines cut into it, a mezzotint plate is entirely covered in very small, closely packed indentations made with a finely-toothed tool known as a rocker. At this stage, the inked plate would produce a deep, even black if printed. Light tones are created by scraping the plate smoother. Noted for its rich, velvety tones and soft gradations, mezzotint can be combined with line engraving.

**Drypoint**

When a line is engraved on a plate, a fine burr is created; in the standard engraving process this is cleaned away, but in drypoint it is precisely the burr that's important - it retains the ink and so creates a wonderfully dense, rather furry line and tone (Hankey) but is also capable of a light, very delicate effect (Helleu). Copper is used as it is soft and produces a good burr, but the burrs wear away very quickly and so drypoint is restricted to 'art prints,' with a short print run; the very earliest impressions are naturally the best. Drypoint can be combined with other printing techniques, notably etching.

**Collecting**

For collectors, engravings fall into two broad categories: art prints and illustrations. It's not an entirely sound division, but it's useful.

Art engravings, which include very early prints, and prints by such artists as Hogarth and Blake, can be expensive, and some hugely so (Nevinson). However, as engravings were produced in large numbers, it is possible to find fine seventeenth or eighteenth century engravings at very affordable prices. Artists rediscovered drypoint during the late nineteenth century, when line engraving was giving way to photography, and a great many art engravings are in this technique. If you are buying in this category, remember to check for authenticity and quality: reproductions and poor quality impressions abound. Low prices for works by major artists should make alarm bells ring. If the engravings are twentieth century, then a pencilled signature and number will make a great difference to a print's value.

'Illustration' engravings, which come in an enormous variety, are often collected in terms of subject and are generally inexpensive. Popular categories include natural history (particularly plants and birds), canals, railways, maritime and military subjects, views (a category that can itself be subdivided many times), horses, caricatures, ruins (actual and imagined), buildings, street life (such as hawkers and beggars, a genre known as vagabondiana), classical mythology...

**Issues to consider here are:**

- Subject (some are more collectable than others)
- Condition (prints are particularly susceptible to damp)
- Quality of design and execution
- Quality of printing (late impressions can be weak) and colour.



Francesco Bartolozzi 1727-1815- 'Flight Into Egypt', stipple engraving printed in colours, after Carlo Maratta 1625-1713, 48 x 38cm. (unframed) Rosebery's, London. Jan 07. HP: £140. ABP: £164.



William Lee Hankey RWS RE 1869-1952, drypoint 'Mother and Children' monogrammed on the plate and signed in pencil and with the artists blindstamp, 17.5 x 17.5cm. Great Western Auctions, Glasgow. Aug 05. HP: £110. ABP: £129.



After Carlo Antonini, 'Prospetto Degli Orti Farnesiani Sul Monte Palatino', after Francesco Panini, engraving, Publ.1780 Rome, 47 x 68cm, unexaminated out of the frame, After Michele Giovanni Marieschi, 'Mangi Armamentary Veneziarum Portoe Duce, Artificibus Altera Nauibus Daplex Aditus', engraving. (2) Rosebery's, London. Jan 06. HP: £100. ABP: £117.

**Further reading:**

Walter Chamberlain, *Thames & Hudson Manual of Etching and Engraving*, 1972.

Ronald Russell, *Discovering Antique Prints*, Shire Publications, 1982.

Bamber Gascoigne, *How to Identify Prints*, Thames and Hudson, 1986.



Carington Bowles, publ. 25 March 1784, No. 69 in St. Paul's Church Yard, London, 'Death and Life contrasted, or an Essay on Man', hand-coloured engraving, 35 x 25cm. (unframed) Rosebery's, London. Jun 05. HP: £130. ABP: £152.



Johannes Sadeler II, c1611-1665, Portrait of a nobleman on a rearing horse with a battle scene beyond; engraving, 1635, 38.5 x 28.7cm, with a quantity of other prints and reproductions. (a lot) Rosebery's, London. Aug 06. HP: £90. ABP: £105.



After James Seymour 1702-1752, 'A New Collection of Several Noted Horses, As Well As Hunters.....', publ John Bowles at the Black Horse Cornhill, engraving, with three other engravings from the same suite. (4) Rosebery's, London. Jan 07. HP: £130. ABP: £152.



After William Hooker, late 18thC, 'Indian Squirrel and Tamarind', hand-coloured engraving, publ: James Forbes, Bombay, 1769, 29 x 21cm, European School 18/19thC, 'Saurus Fulvus', hand-coloured engraving, with five other 19/20thC engravings, lithographs, etchings and an oleograph by and after various hands. (7) Rosebery's, London. Jan 07. HP: £20. ABP: £23.