THE ETCHING REVIVAL
From Daubigny to Twachtman
FEBRUARY 13 – MAY 8, 2016

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Aquatint is a tonal method of printing. Particles of resin are dusted onto the plate and then made to adhere using heat. The acid bites the unprotected areas, creating pits that give the tone its grainy texture when printed. Areas to remain blank are masked with a stopping-out varnish. By varying the size of the particles of resin and the length of time the plate is bitten by the acid, a range of tones can be achieved.

Cliché-verre (literally translated as “glass-negative”) is a combination of drawing and photographic process. A cliché-verre is produced by using a drawing tool to scratch an image into the coated surface of a blackened glass plate, then placing the plate atop a light-sensitive paper and making an exposure. The print is a positive print.

Drypoint can be used independently or in conjunction with etching. The artist uses a sharp metal point to draw directly on the plate, pushing the excess metal to the sides of the furrow. The excess metal, called a burr, holds the ink, producing a soft blurry line. Because the image is printed under pressure, the burr does not hold up to large editions.

Foul biting represents an area of pitting that, because of an ineffective protective ground, has been bitten by the acid.

Intaglio prints are prints in which the image, composed of lines or tones, lies below the surface of the plate. Intaglio processes include etching, soft ground etching, aquatint, drypoint, mezzotint and engraving.

Etching Terms

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Etching is an intaglio process in which the image, composed of lines, lies below the surface of the plate. To create the image a polished metal plate (usually copper or zinc) is covered by a hard acid-resistant “ground.” The image is drawn on the plate through the ground with an etching needle or pointed instrument. The plate with the design is then exposed to the acid, which will bite a U-shaped furrow. The breadth of the line can be controlled by the size of the needle point and the length of time the plate is exposed to the acid. A film of ink is applied to the plate, which is then wiped clean, leaving ink in the furrows. The ink is transferred to the paper when the plate passes through a roller press under great pressure. The etching process can be repeated multiple times. New lines can be added, and existing lines can be made darker and bolder, with the areas meant to remain lighter masked with a stopping-out varnish and re-biting of the plate.

Etching is a technique attractive to painters, as the etching needle can be used freely like a brush. To create tone, several methods can be used—cross-hatching, manipulation of an ink film on the surface of the plate, or etching combined with other intaglio processes including aquatint, soft ground etching, and mezzotint.

Actual tools can be seen in the case with the Duveneck plate and print.