Penny Plain, Tuppence Colored

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On May 4 a summer exhibition of color prints will open in the lobby of the Grace Rainey Rogers Auditorium. It shows the development of color as applied to every medium of printmaking from the mid-fifteenth century to the present time.

When paper became readily available after 1400, wood blocks, long used in printing textile patterns, were applied to multiplying pictorial images. Saints and other religious subjects were made and distributed at monasteries, pilgrimage shrines, and cities along principal trade routes; playing cards and, after the middle of the century, block books and book illustrations appeared.

The woodcut line, as direct and simple as in a child's coloring book, showed the illuminator where to brush on the paints. The coloring was usually slapdash, and very rarely as fastidious as in the German fifteenth century Virgin and Child (page 249) from Mr. Warburg's gift. In the earliest single-sheet woodcuts, the figure usually appears alone against a blank ground, while a few brilliant colors cover large areas of the design. In the south of Germany, gum was mixed with the red to make it shiny. Parisian woodcuts were often colored in a close harmony of strawberry, mauve, and pale blue, while the Dutch liked orange, spring green, and sepia. Each locality had its distinct color box. Though colored prints are more usual in the fifteenth century, cheaper uncolored versions may have been sold. The Nuremberg Chronicle of 1493 appeared "penny plain and tuppence colored." The Schatzbehälter of 1491, printed by Koberger as was the Chronicle, gives directions for illuminating one of its illustrations.

To save labor, stencils were used to color playing cards, book illustrations, and single sheets. Figure 1, showing a dissection from Fascicolo di Medicina, printed in Venice in 1493, is stenciled in black, yellow, green, and red. The right hand of the figure in the pulpit is colored red because it lies in the middle of the hole cut out for the color.

For big editions it was more practical to print each color from a separate wood block. Fust and Schoeffer of Mainz in their Psalter of 1457 printed red and blue initials, but the first illustration printed in two colors and black occurs in Erhard Ratdolt's edition of Sacrobosco's Sphaera Mundi (Venice, 1485) to clarify a diagram of the phases of the moon. The method is carried to

COVER: The Rhinoceros, 1515, by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528), German. Chiaroscuro woodcut. 8 3/8 x 11 3/8 inches Rogers Fund, 1922


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its most elaborate extent in Albrecht Altdorfer’s Virgin of Ratisbon, dating about 1519, printed from five color blocks and a black outline.

In the fifteenth century the various procedures in the production of color prints were divided according to guild regulations. Generally the original designs on paper were transferred to the block by the Maler, or painter. The woodcutter, or Formschneider, who belonged to the carpenters’ guild as did the cutter of textile patterns, cut the

wood blocks. After printing in black, the sheets were turned over to the Briefmaler, a document or epistle painter, who was in a class lower than the manuscript illuminator.

The fifteenth century colored print was a cheap substitute for an illumination. Shortly before 1500, prints began to imitate drawings on colored paper in pen and ink, wash, or chalk, heightened with white, which were popular in Germany at the end of the fifteenth and during a great part of the sixteenth century. It was Mair of Landshut who first abandoned the bright local colors fashionable in woodcuts and spread a uniform tint, usually green or brown, over the whole paper, sometimes heightening it with white. This led to the invention of the chiaroscuro woodcut, in which the outline was cut on one block and usually printed in black or the darkest tone, while three or four tint blocks were printed in separate colors or separate shades of a single color. Here and there the tint blocks were cut to let the paper show and make highlights.

A document of 1508 says that Lucas Cranach had printed in the previous year knights in armor of gold and silver, which can only refer to his Saint George, where, on a paper still
tinted blue by hand, the black outline block was printed and surcharged with highlights in gold from a second block. (Application of small fragments of sparkling metal on a basis of paste was used in the fifteenth century.)

The date of 1508 occurs on two prints designed by Hans Burgkmair and cut by Jost de Negker: a Saint George and an equestrian portrait of the Emperor Maximilian. In the earliest versions each is printed from two outline blocks on white or hand-tinted paper. In another state one of the outline blocks, with the date, is retained, but the second block is replaced by a tone block which tints the whole paper except for the highlights.

By 1510 Hans Baldung Grien was using the process with spectacular results, such as The Witches' Sabbath shown as frontispiece.

No chiaroscuro woodcuts seem to have been made in Nuremberg in Dürer's time. The Rhinoceros (Cover) when first published in 1515 already had a crack across the lower part of the block. Perhaps to hide this defect a tone was added when the block was reprinted in Amsterdam a century afterwards.

Italy seems to have made chiaroscuro woodcuts later than Germany. It was not until 1516 that Ugo da Carpi obtained a copyright for his process from the Signoria at Venice, claiming the technique to be his own invention, and he did not date any of his prints until 1518. He worked for the most part after Raphael's designs, but the draftsman who inspired the greatest number of chiaroscuros was Parmigianino (see page 250). Himself an etcher, he was used to printing on tinted paper and heightening the design with white. In his own chiaroscuro after Raphael's
Saint Peter and Saint Paul at the Beautiful Gate, an etched copperplate prints the line and two woodcut blocks give the tones. Vasari says that Parmigianino taught his pupil Antonio da Trento the method of making prints from three blocks. About 1530, when both were in Bologna, Antonio absconded with all the prints and Parmigianino’s drawings besides, and never was heard from again.

Italian chiaroscuros render forms by flat areas of tone, or by long sweeps of line and broad open crosshatching as in the work of Antonio da Trento. Many of them reproduce wall paintings with that uncluttered spaciousness which makes the beauty of Italian prints in general. Each block of tone acts like a segment of a jigsaw puzzle that composes a picture only when all are assembled. German chiaroscuros almost always have a complete black outline which carries the whole design and is merely enriched by the addition of color.

After about 1575 many of the blocks produced by Ugo and Antonio da Trento found their way into the hands of Andrea Andreani, who re-issued them with his own monogram added. In his own work Andrea specialized in the mammoth. He reproduced sections of Beccafumi’s designs for the marble intarsia floor of Siena cathedral. The story of Moses from this group is in ten blocks and measures about four by six feet. He also sought the uncommon effect, printing at least one of the nine blocks after Mantegna’s Triumph of Julius Caesar in black on black satin, elaborately painting in details in gold.

In the 1590s the Netherlander Hendrick Goltzius made the chiaroscuro express the sumptuous, eccentric elegance of mannerism. Especially beautiful and individual are his landscapes, in which masses of sweeping, close lines are supported by deep greens, blues, and ochers.

Parmigianino’s chiaroscuro method of printing line from an etched plate and tone from wood blocks was revived by Abraham Bloemaert in the seventeenth century, and reappeared in the eighteenth in France. Nicolas Le Sueur produced prints in which the sketchy feeble line, etched by others such as P.P.A. Robert (see Figure 2) is often supported by pastel tints. In this technique thirty plates after works in the collection of the famous connoisseur Crozat were reproduced, Crozat himself etching some of the line plates. Le Sueur’s ambitious Recueil d’estampes d’après les plus beaux tableaux et d’après les plus beaux dessins qui sont en France dans le Cabinet du Roy, dans celay de M. le Duc d’Orléans et dans l’autres Cabinets never got beyond two volumes.

Contemporaneously in England Arthur Pond and Charles Knapton, partners in the 1730s, were reproducing drawings in collections such as Jonathan Richardson’s. These prints, after the Carracci, Guercino, Claude, and others, were usually in a monochrome brown. Pond achieved breadth in the etched line by composing it of a multitude of tiny strokes.

John Baptist Jackson made a slender claim in 1754 to have rediscovered chiaroscuro. What he did was to spare no effort, using as many as
fifteen blocks, to reproduce the complex tonality of the paintings of Titian, Veronese, the Bassani, and others. In large format, these prints were published in Venice in 1745. He returned to England from Italy in 1746 and entered the wallpaper business. In his book of 1754, wallpaper showing classical sculpture is recommended to "the Person who cannot purchase the Statues themselves [who] may have prints in their Places and may as effectively show his Taste and Admiration of the ancient artists in this manner."

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries invented several novel techniques of printmaking which first established themselves in black and white and then made a splash with color. Each new technique had to refine its procedure in single printings in monochrome before it could go into the difficulties of superimposed printings in color.

Fig. 6. View of Rome with Saint Peter's in the Background, by Johan Teyler (1648-after 1697), Dutch. Etching. Diameter 9½ inches Whittelsey Fund, 1956
Mezzotint, invented by Ludwig von Siegen about 1640, was introduced into England by his pupil Prince Rupert and achieved enormous popularity when applied to reproducing in black and white the paintings of Lawrence, Gainsborough, Romney, and Reynolds. It is a technique well suited to the reproduction of oil painting because it eliminates line and blends tone.

Color was applied to this fragile process by Jakob Christof Le Blon, who worked in England. Le Blon used one mezzotint plate for each color—red, yellow, and blue—plus a black line plate. The theory was good, but the results are nearly always marred with garish streaks which have failed to combine as intended.

Chalk and pastel drawings, popular in France in the eighteenth century, were probably first imitated by Jean Charles François in 1740 by pricking an etching ground to suggest the effect of chalk on grained paper. Gilles Demarteau, who was working in Paris from about 1746, refined the technique to reproduce drawings by Boucher. Occasionally working with two colors, he also produced many prints after Eisen, Fragonard, and others (see Figure 5). Louis Bonnet, applying the process to the imitation of pastels, used a plate for each color, and printed white to give a light higher than the tone of the paper. He often printed gold frames and even gilded teacups.

Wash drawings inspired yet another graphic technique, aquatint, popularized by Jean Le Prince in 1768, to imitate the flat tones of diluted ink brushed onto paper. Soon after its invention, François Janinet used the process for color. Ultrarefined technically, he printed in five or six colors, each from a separate copper-plate, and succeeded in approximating the subtle coloring and enameled surface of Fragonard and Boucher. Philibert Debucourt was equally skilled technically but had a greater personal invention. With an exquisite color sensibility and a refined and delicate drawing style, his printed color has a luminous transparency (see Figure 4) compared with the opacity of Janinet’s.

The greatest development of aquatint took place in England, where Ackermann and other publishers illustrated books or issued sets of views and sporting scenes that were printed in blue or brown with colors brushed on by a production line of girls. Humphrey Repton, author of Observations on Landscape Gardening, recorded with satisfaction in 1803 that “The art of coloring plates in imitation of drawings has been so far improved of late that I have pleasure in recording obligations to Mr Clarke, under whose direction a number of children have been employed to enrich this volume.”

The eighteenth century was able to imitate colored chalk drawings and water colors because there were so many skilled craftsmen who

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*Fig. 7. Napoleon, 1825, by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864-1901), French. Lithograph. 22 3/4 x 17 3/4 inches Gift of Mrs. Bessie Potter Vonnoh, 1941*

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*Fig. 8. La Partie de Dames, by Édouard Vuillard (1868-1940), French. Lithograph. 13 3/4 x 10 3/8 inches Dick Fund, 1925*
worked in close co-operation under the dominance of a unified style. All color printing is so complex that most color prints were made by specialists who copied a painter's invention. Nevertheless it took more than skill to translate the original chalk drawing by Huet (Figure 5) into a print. To capture the grace and subtlety, the printmaker needed as much artistic sensibility as the designer.

But now and then an inventive artist made his own designs and printed them in color himself. Such a solitary genius was Hercules Seghers. Born about 1590, he was appreciated by few of his Dutch contemporaries, with the notable exception of Rembrandt. His landscapes, of a lunar fantasy, are intensified by a somber or misty color. Seghers's method is hard to determine, but he probably printed an etched plate in colored ink onto tinted linen or paper, and added further coloring by hand.

Abraham Bosse, who made unadorned and realistic etchings of the manners and costumes of the periods of Louis XIII and XIV, patented in 1633 a process of printing color from copper-plates onto all sorts of materials including cloth. But although he described the process in his Traité des Manières de Graver en Taille Douce of 1645, no examples of his color work are extant. It is possible that his efforts might have helped to start the great eighteenth century industry of printing from engraved plates onto cloth, to produce the fabric known as toile de Jouy from the main factory in France.

In the latter half of the seventeenth century

Fig. 9. Genetic Field #3, by Boris Margo (1902—), American. Cellocut. 16½ x 19¾ inches
Gift of John B. Turner, 1954
Johan Teyler inked intricately etched plates so neatly that six or more colors meet without bleeding into each other (see Figure 6).

Another solitary, William Blake, searching for a way of printing his verse without the expense of typesetting, developed a method of writing his text and painting the marginal illustrations on a metal plate in a varnish that resisted acid, then biting the plate so deeply that the letters and design stood out in relief. After printing from the plate, probably in one color only, he applied water color by hand or else stamped on opaque color from a millboard.

Blake carried the stamping technique further in his printed drawings, such as in the color plate on page 251. After outlining the design on millboard in a pigment mixed with copal varnish and glue, he took an impression by pressing paper against the board. He then colored the original further, stamped this onto the paper, and added finishing touches in water color.

Blake’s contemporary, the playwright Senefelder, was also searching for a cheap printing method in the 1790s and more or less accidentally discovered lithography. In 1819 he advocated the process as a cheap imitation of oil paintings. The difficulties of registering colors exactly, however, kept color lithography from becoming commercially feasible until the 1870s, when a flood of garish chromolithographs came out of France and Germany. Manet’s Polichinelle of 1876, printed in seven colors, is an isolated example of an inventive printmaker’s use of color lithography.

Fig. 10. Dark Wings, 1953-1954, by Sylvia Wald, American. Silk screen. 18 1/4 x 23 3/4 inches
Gift of the National Serigraph Society, 1956
By 1889 Jules Chéret, who created modern poster design, developed a graphic vocabulary blending crayon, tusche, and spatter areas of color. Besides Chéret's influence, that of Japanese prints in their composition, space, line, and color is evident in the early color lithographs of Toulouse-Lautrec. He achieved wit and freshness by making the drawings on all the stones himself. He often went to work in the early morning straight from a late party, arriving at the lithographer's in evening clothes, before the printers themselves appeared.

Pierre Bonnard, a spare, subdued colorist, and Édouard Vuillard, whose colors are luscious and sensuous (see Figure 8), have brought into color printing the postimpressionists' studied casu- alness and their erudite sensibility applied to the background of daily life.

A tradition of co-operation between printer and painter exists in France so that color lithographs by Cézanne and Renoir, for example, are masterpieces of the printer's art. The painter, who may have made the key drawing, later tinted a proof from which the printer prepared a stone for each color.

In the past fifteen years the technique of printmaking has been extended by the introduction of contemporary materials such as aluminum and plywood and by new adaptations of traditional ones. Boris Margo, for example, has evolved the cellocut (see Figure 9) by applying plastic dissolved in acetone to wood, metal, or other rigid support and then working it with engraving or woodcutting tools. Wire mesh has been tacked to traditional materials such as the wood block, and metal forms have been soldered into metal plates to press a relief design into the paper. On a lithographic stone covered with tusche, areas intended to print white are ground with pumice stone or burned with nitric acid. Silk screen, like lithography, was originally an inexpensive method of printing but has been developed into a fine art (see Figure 10).

In the United States the main impetus to technical experimentation has come from Stanley William Hayter, who has given our printmaking its first major change of direction since Whistler. A chapter in his book New Ways of Gravure tells how he made Five People (page 252). He engraved the calligraphic line on the copperplate, then pressed cloth into a soft ground for the etched tone. Finally he cut holes in the plate to make uninked paper stand up in relief here and there. To print, he inked the incised lines in black, colored the copperplate with silk screens, and rolled the copper through the press only once. This anguished, explosive print is a far cry from the serene Queen of Heaven of fifteenth century Germany, but the development of color printing that lies between them is a continuous story that reflects man's vicissitudes during the past five centuries.
Virgin and Child. German School, xv century. Woodcut with water color. 13 x 9 3/4 inches
Gift of Felix M. Warburg and His Family, 1941
Surprise, after Parmigianino. Italian School, xvi century. Chiaroscuro woodcut. 10 3/4 x 7 3/16 inches
Dick Fund, 1939
Pity like a naked babe, by William Blake (1757-1827), British. Outline and color transferred from millboard to paper, with water color added. 16 3/4 x 20 7/8 inches
Gift of Mrs. Robert W. Goelet, 1958
Five People, by Stanley William Hayter (1901—), British. Engraving and soft-ground etching, with colors applied to plate by silk screens. 15 x 24 inches
Dick Fund, 1947