

## **An Overview of Monotype Printmaking**

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**Abstract:** Monotype printmaking cannot be exactly described as a form of printmaking, nor can it be seen within the practice of painting. It is a creative practice that benefits from the advantages of both. In monotype print engraving, scraping and depressing of the printing surface does not take place. It is separated from other forms of printmaking with the single original print that comes as a result, but with its potential for improvisation and the use of unlimited instruments it approaches to the pictorial field. Monotype and monoprint are often conceptually confused with each other. The monoprint technique, which is similar to the monotype, is separated from the monotype printing technique as it uses combination of various printing works. On the other hand, in the monotypic printing technique, the surface of the plate must be unmodified (unaltered matrix), that is, it needs to be printed from an untouched surface.

**Keywords:** Monotype printing, Monoprint, Painterly printmaking, Single print, Printmaking.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In the American Heritage Dictionary, monotype is defined as the process of one-off transfer of an image to a paper by way of pressing from an ink or dyed surface [1]. Art Terms dictionary defines it as "Graphic technique which allows a single print" [2]. We can infer that monotype prints are transferred from temporary and untreated surface that cannot be replicated, and cannot be reprinted. The monotype printmaking technique is created on an empty plate (untouched, untreated or not depressed).

In monotype printing metal, polycarbonate, stone, glass, wood, and any kind of smooth surface material can be used. The application and transformation of the paint to the surface does not require any form of set tools or implements (engraving tools, scraper, desk, brush, etc.). Almost any object that can produce the required visual effect in order to create different textures on the monotype plate surface (fabric, rubber objects, balloon, paper, finger, etc.).

In monotype printmaking, generally two different methods are used. In the first one, the entire surface is painted with a roller and then the image is formed through scraping or drawing in a subtractive method. Secondly, the image is drawn directly on the plate through printing ink using brush and similar tools. [3].

Only one print can be obtained from the image created on the monotype print plate. After the first print, there is not enough paint on the surface to produce a

second print. If the printing plate is reprinted, this print is called "ghost" or "cognate" print. In monotype printmaking, a mirror image is formed which is the reverse of the image. Painters also want to see the reverse image of their paintings in order to gain a different perspective and to recognize the errors. In addition to being used as a convenient means for providing such technical needs, monotype printmaking differs from all other printing techniques as a painterly printmaking technique that allows new inventions [4].

In John Miller's "The Art of Making Monotypes", monotype prints have been promoted with the following words: "None of the artistic creations are as satisfying as monotype printing and as comprehensive in terms of artistic expression" [5].

Monotype and monoprint are often conceptually confused with each other. The monoprint technique differs from the monotype print technique in the sense that the monoprint technique is created by mixing various specific printmaking processes. On the other hand, in the monotype printing technique, there should be no unchangeable interference on the material. Monotype is a term used to describe prints formed without renewable templates [6].

### **Historical Development of Monotype Printing,**

Although monotypes are dated back to the late 19th century, the technical knowledge and the material needed for monotype printing have been used in engraving print (intaglio) since the 15th century [7]. The earliest known monotype print belongs to the 17th

century master printmaker and painter Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione. It would not be a wrong to say that Castiglione is the first artist to discover the improvisational monotype technique. "The Creation of Adam" (Fig-1) is thought to be the first monotype print in the art world [8].

Castiglione was greatly influenced by Rembrandt's semi-erased prints and had the courage to do monotype press [9]. His artistic personality was very

well adapted to monotype printing technique. Most of his canvas paintings were created with light colors on a dark background. Castiglione's paintings and monotype prints with dark backgrounds are largely depictions of night scenes that are illuminated by a handheld light or a mystical holy light. His extant works are mostly about religious issues. "The Creation of Adam" as an illustration was made to remind that the primal darkness in the world was enlightened by god [10].

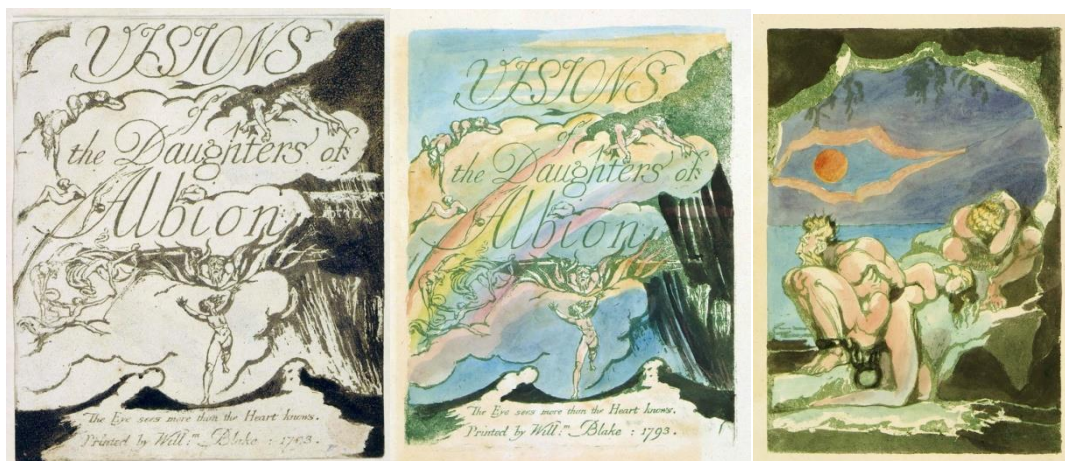


**Fig-1: Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, The Creation of Adam, Monotype Press, 30x20.5cm, 1645**

The Art institute of Chicago, Restricted gift of Dr. and Mrs. William D.Shorey and promised gift of an anonymous donor (1985.111).

After a half century passed over the monotype prints of Castiglione, it was begun to be used again by the English poet, painter and mystical visionary William Blake [11]. Blake produced the monotype

prints for the pictures of the poetry book "Visions of the Daughters of Albion" published in 1793.(Fig-2) He is one of the important artists who achieved successful painterly effects in illustrations by using different painting techniques. He printed using oil and egg tempera on cardboard or copper plates. Also, Blake accomplished mysterious results by applying watercolors and ink on his prints [12].



**Fig-2: William Blake, Monotype Press, 7.3x11.7cm, 1793**

In 1860, young impressionists began to show an interest in the creative use of ink. The creative

erasure/subtraction method was influenced by new developments in black and white photography as one of

the great technological advances of the time.

Influenced by the developments in photography, Edgar Degas monotypes were made largely with subtractive method. He has produced very dramatic light-dark areas with the subtractive method within "Three Ballet Dancers" (Fig-3) at Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute. He made hundreds of monotype prints during the years 1890-92. It is also seen that Degas uses monotypes as an effective method

to construct the infrastructure for lithography and pastel work in accordance with the pictorial character of his works, which are dominated by black ink, gouache and pastel paint (Fig-4) [13]. Degas also recognizes that monotypes can grasp the essence of modern life. One of the most remarkable monotypes of Degas, "A Man and a Woman's Heads," shows the faces of a couple in an amorphous way and out of focus. This gives us a chance to understand the characteristics of a person who spends everyday life in "stream of consciousness" [14].



**Fig-3: Edgar Degas, *Ballet Scene*, Monotype Press, 35,6 x 51,3 cm, 1878-80**



**Fig-4: Edgar Degas. *Ballet Scene*. c. 1879. Pastel over monotype on paper, plate: 8 x 16" (20.3 x 40.6 cm). William I. Koch Collection**

At the end of the 19th century, the leading artists of monotype printing were Frank Duveneck, Willam Merrit Chase, Charles A. Walker and Maurice Prendergast. The first three artists were American who

promoted the technique most. Maurice Prendergast was the only artist to integrate monotype printing technique into all his art works for 15 years [15].

Maurice Prendergast's monotype prints with a theme of umbrella and faceless ballet dancers are thought to be inspired by Degas's approach. (Fig-5) Also, the effects of Degas's approach can be seen in

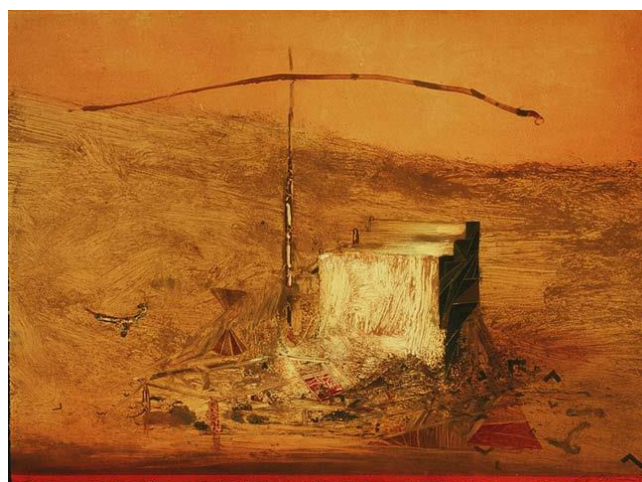
Milton Avery's textured color field landscape studies. It was inevitable for these artists to choose the monotype technique to capture the mass culture, the elements of entertainment and the rush in the city [16].



**Fig-5: Maurice Prendergast. The Rehearsal. 1900. Monotype, Sheet: 14 3/4 x 10" (37.5 x 25.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund, 1945**

Many artists began to use monotype print after having experience in traditional printing methods. Among these artists were Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, Camille Pissarro, Mary Cassatt, Marc Chagall, Jacques Villon, George Rouault, Joan Miro, Pablo Picasso and Jean Dubuffet. Matisse had about a dozen works with subtractive techniques. Nathan Oliveira was the master artist on hand-painting and deleting techniques. He was the first person to make the prints of his paintings after accidentally transferring canvas paintings onto paper.

Although Nathan Oliveira was inspired by the works of Degas, he has a unique place in the monotype printmaking in the sense of trying to discover new techniques and materials. In 1974, he made a series of prints about life and death. His method of mixing the image and monotype prints caused the monotype print to become stronger from the plastic point of view (Fig-6).



**Fig-6: Nathan Oliveira, Douro Valley II, Monotype/Painting, 55x76cm, 1997/2003**

As we can observe in the contemporary art market, artists such as Dana Schutz, Cecily Brown, Elizabeth Peyton, Carroll Dunham, Chris Officer, Peter Doig, Mel Bochner, Tracey Emin and Jasper Johns have incredible amounts of monotypes and monoprints.

Contemporary artist Jasper Johns, who is often named under Pop art, abstract expressionism and Neo-dada, owes his use of monotype printing techniques perhaps even to a coincidence. In 1954, Johns, while working as a shop assistant in a bookstore, rubbed ink

on a piece of folded paper and pressed it on another surface. The singularity of this small original print deeply affected him. From those years until the day, he has not given up on monotype printing feeling it as a necessity. He has around 200 monotype prints (Fig-7). Jennifer L. Roberts, Harvard University professor of Art History Department, introduces him as the greatest living printmaker artist in Jasper Johns' catalog. Roberts also mentions the uncategorized structure of monotype print and accordingly its availability for rapid and intensive experiments [17].



**Fig-7: Print by numbers | This 2013 work by Johns, '0-9,' a monotype on hand-torn Japanese paper, will be in the upcoming show at Matthew Marks Gallery. Photo: © Jasper Johns/Licensed by VAGA, New York (ny), Courtesy the artist and Matthew Marks Gallery**

## CONCLUSION

Summing up, monotype printmaking, which means single print, have been used by Western artists for 400 years for many purposes, and the possibilities/varieties of its technique are still being tested by artists. The attempt to explain the areas that conventional printmaking techniques cannot reach or solve with monotype printing has a great prospect in terms of the evolution of printmaking as an art form. The realm of freedom monotype printing offers is almost unlimited, unlike traditional printing techniques.

National or international fine arts institutions do not take monotype printmaking as part of their formal education in the printmaking arts sections. Also, they do not encourage students to use it. It is recognized that the rules and functions of printmaking arts need intense discipline and diligence adversely affect the art students' ability to focus. However, there are some printing techniques in which technical restrictions can be stretched. This particular nature of such a technique can enhance creativity and personal motivation. The inclusion of such printing techniques into the primary application areas of the educational institutions will help students to find possibilities for production within the field and to improve themselves.

The contemporary art environment in which art as a material production loses its value requires all sorts of encouragements to ensure its own conditions of existence and to avoid its disappearance. This encouragement will only be possible if and only if art production continues its inquiry by updating its traditional structure. Monotype printing technique is one of the flexible tools that can adapt to all temporal and cultural structures. Its rapid production, potential to adapt to personal attitudes, openness to surprises and self-transformation capacity are guarantees of using it at all times and under all conditions.

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