

Alexandra Black Eckhardt

DRAWINGS • PRINTS • ENGRAVINGS

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## Technical Statement

Alexandra Eckhardt is one of America's foremost artists for monogram and engraving design.

Eckhardt attributes her technical knowledge and affinity for printing to her father, Master Engraver John Black, with whom she worked for many years. The artist further developed her work in print through experimentation in her own studio in Vermont. She continues to develop her work with the expert guidance of her mentor, Master Printer James Reed, at Milestone Graphics in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Throughout her career, Eckhardt has acquired top-level printing presses and hand engraving equipment for her studio and has become a master in her own right of traditional printing and engraving techniques.

Alexandra Eckhardt is well-known for her **intaglio prints**, which she achieves by incising her design on a metal plate which is then scraped with ink. The ink settles into the incisions and the smooth surface of the plate is wiped clean. The plate and paper are then passed through an etching press that applies pressure to the plate so the ink left in the incisions is pressed onto the paper.

The design work in her intaglio prints is achieved by one of four methods – engraving, etching, drypoint, or aquatint - depending on the effect the artist prefers for the final print.

In her **engravings**, Eckhardt cuts the design with a burin tool which requires a stiffer control than the other methods. Shading is accomplished through the use of parallel lines, cross-hatchings, or with an aquatint technique.



For her **etchings**, the artist coats the metal plate with an acid-resistant ground, draws through the ground with an etching needle, and then etches the design. The plate is placed in an acid bath and the scribed areas are etched away, creating the incisions to be inked. This method produces a freer movement of line.

For the technique of **drypoint**, Eckhardt pulls a diamond-point tool across the plate, leaving a ridge of metal scrapings on either side of the incised line. The ink is caught in these ridges, called the burr, lending a deep velvety quality to the printed line.





In her **aquaretints**, a powdered ground is used. Tiny particles of resin are distributed uniformly on the surface of the plate to produce a continuous area of tone. Varnish is used to “stop out” or protect the surface either from the grains of resin or from the acid bath. Aquaretints are challenging to make and perhaps even more challenging to print.

In addition to intaglio, Alexandra Eckhardt also creates **lithographs**, which are renderings printed from stone. Using a greasy crayon, or liquid tusche, the artist draws directly on a surface-ground flat limestone. When the drawing is finished, it is “etched” into the stone. This is a chemical process, in contrast to the intaglio processes which are mechanical. The stone is dampened, then inked, and paper is placed on top of the stone and run through the lithography press. As the paper is pressed against the stone, the ink from the greasy areas is transferred to the print. Eckhardt uses lithograph printing when she wants to achieve a more expressive line.



Eckhardt is also well-versed in **woodblock** and **relief print** processes, which are more direct than engraving techniques. In these processes, the artist cuts away areas of a block of wood that are not meant to be printed and ink is applied directly to the raised design and transferred to the paper. These are then printed on her Vandercook relief press.

“Etching and stone lithography are the techniques I have been employing most recently in my personal work,” Eckhardt says. “It is the process itself that moves my drawing to new places and leads to discovery.”

Eckhardt prefers to work from sketch to final plate or stone in one full day, adjusting the image as the process presents problems that need to be resolved. “It is this response to the process that I enjoy the most,” says the artist.

After twenty years of mastering a wealth of techniques, Eckhardt is now launching a new series as she expands her personal exploration of the print medium. She will continue working with James Reed on the traditional techniques of lithography and intaglio and will soon begin large-scale work with Dale Bradley, an innovator of new print techniques and the architect and fabricator of the Bradley large-scale press.