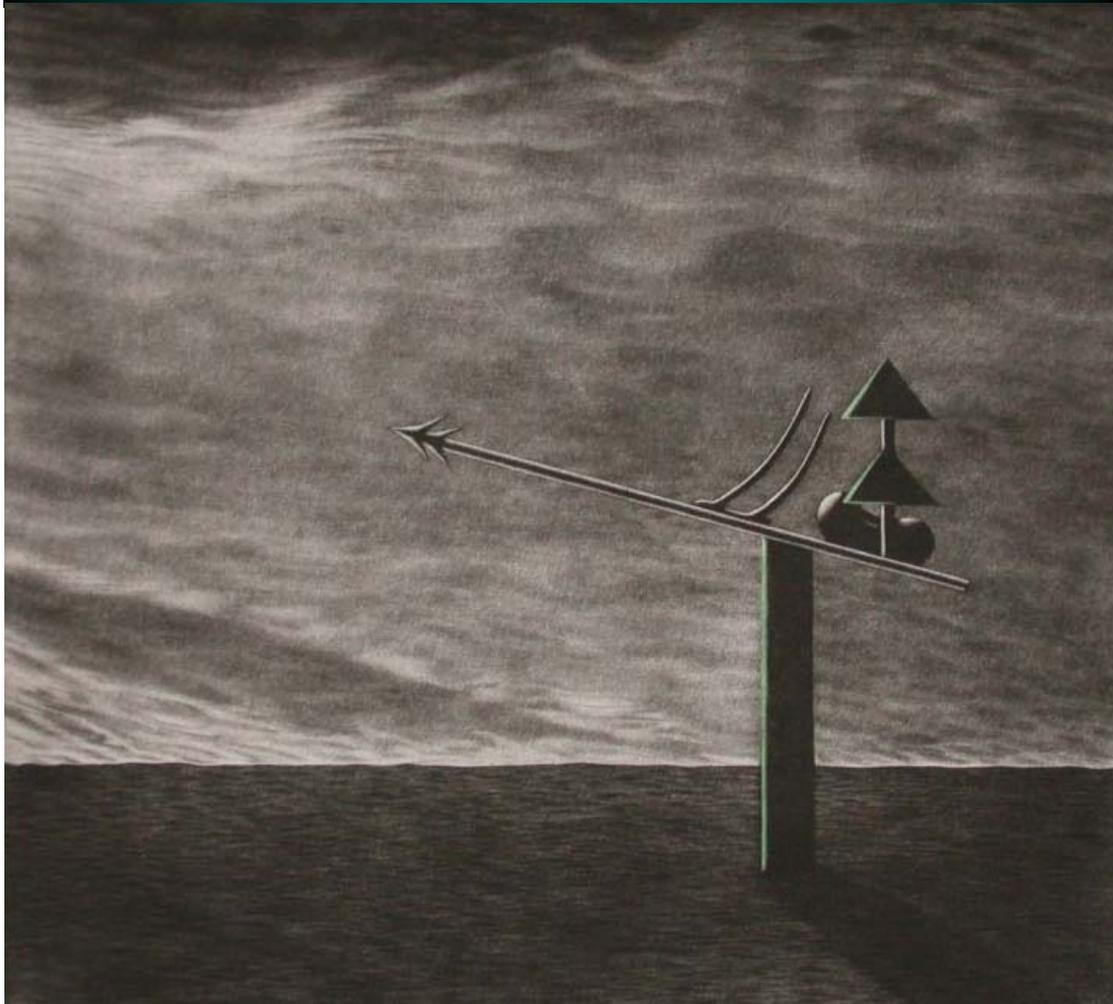


Out of the Shadows

► THE MEZZOTINTS OF GRAEME PEEBLES



Starboard marker 1994
Hand-coloured mezzotint, ed. 8/50
23 x 24.5cm
Purchased 2003

Ominous storm clouds, rugged landscapes, local tales, death, safety. Children's playthings, flotsam and jetsam, cigarette butts and burnt matches. Religious iconography, sexuality, allegory, literary inspiration, metaphysical symbolism.

E d u c a t i o n K i t

Graeme Peebles

(b. 1955, Melbourne, Australia)

Graeme Peebles is Australia's foremost artist in the mezzotint medium. This extremely time-consuming process requires a high level of skill and produces beautiful prints with tonal attributes unobtainable through other intaglio printing processes.

In 1973 Graeme Peebles began his studies at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT). Peebles initially enrolled in painting but was soon drawn to printmaking, which was strong in Melbourne at this time and many important artists were working in various printmaking media. Lithography and etching were two printmaking techniques that were particularly popular at RMIT and throughout Melbourne, but it was the archaic, velvety tonal medium of the mezzotint that attracted Peebles' attention. Since graduating from RMIT in the 1970s, Peebles has produced some 300 mezzotints. His art ranges from conceptual pieces with a basis in metaphysics through to surreal landscapes and cloudscapes. Visual puns, social commentary and humour are all elements of Peebles' art.

Areas of interest:

- Surrealist compositions and imagery
- Mezzotint process
- Religious iconography
- Symbolism
- Landscapes and Cloudscapes

Mezzotint Process

Mezzotinting is an **intaglio** printmaking process (see further below) that involves repeatedly scoring a **plate** (usually made of copper) with a **fine-toothed tool** called a **rocker**. This process creates a pitted surface of tiny burrs. If the plate is printed after suitable scoring, it will produce an image with a rich, deep even tone. Once a rocker has been used to score the entire plate, selected areas within the plate are then **burnished** or scraped back, **flattening the burrs** to produce lighter tones. Through careful control, the artist has the ability to produce a wide variety of tones.

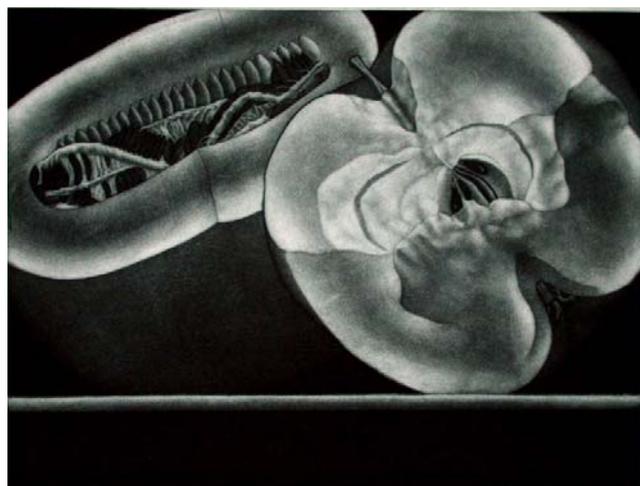
Unlike etching, the mezzotint process uses no chemical baths, and all results are a direct product of the artist's hand. As compared to an engraving, a mezzotint is more **tonal** than linear. Mezzotinting is a time-consuming and laborious process, but the results are unparalleled in other printmaking media.

➤ Activity

Use your school library or the internet to research other artists who employ the mezzotint process.

- What are the similarities between the work you have found and that of Graeme Peebles?
- What are the differences?
- Try and find a mezzotint that is mostly white. Why do you think mezzotints are usually mainly black?

Mezzotint Example



Intimacy 1983
Colour mezzotint, ed. 23/40
Image 15 x 20cm
Gift of Bill Young under the
Cultural Gifts Program, 2003

Imagery

During the 1980s and early 1990s an emblematic and **metaphysical** style dominated Peebles practice. Fruit and vegetables, domestic objects, childhood items, bones and skulls began featuring in Peebles' prints. The delicate and intricate natural forms of fruit and vegetables proved to be ideal subjects for Peebles, for their **meanings** and **connotations** suited his themes based around religion, representations of life and death, and in later works, sexual suggestiveness. Peebles used fruit and vegetables as **symbols** of landscape within a group of his prints, to transform a simple still life into an exotic landscape. Included in this group is the work **The You Yangs**, which follows a tradition of Australian art. Many artists including Fred Williams and Arthur Boyd have portrayed this group of mountains which lie to the west of Melbourne.

➤ Try and **find** this print in the exhibition. How has Peebles created the impression of a landscape? What do you think the eggplants represent?



The You Yangs 1982
Colour mezzotint
Ed. 34/40
Image 19.5 x 57.5cm
Gift of Bill Young under the Cultural Gifts Program, 2003

Cloudscapes and Landscapes

In 1986 Peebles returned from a trip to Italy and decided to move to Point Lonsdale, south of Geelong, and work full time as an artist. The new location had a noticeable impact on his work, and local events, stories and scenes began to infiltrate his prints (for example see his works ***Death of a shag*** and ***Point Lonsdale back beach*** featured in this exhibition). Peebles embraced the influence of his coastal surrounding. **Clouds** and the **sea** became key elements of his mezzotints, as Peebles moved away from the black background of his still-life work and towards landscape imagery. More recently Peebles has been concentrating on the **ephemeral** elements of his surroundings. The majesty of Kosciusko National Park, in particular Lake Eucumbene, has become Peebles' main subject and source of inspiration over recent years. One is often in or above the clouds at the lake, which is some 1,200 metres above sea level.



Storm over Eucumbene (above) is a key image by Peebles, where he has moved beyond the depiction of clouds in the context of land and has instead produced an essentially abstract image.

Storm over Eucumbene 1999
Colour mezzotint, ed. 4/50
Image 59 x 89cm
Purchased 2001

➤ *What sort of atmosphere do these clouds evoke? How do you think the artist has achieved this?*

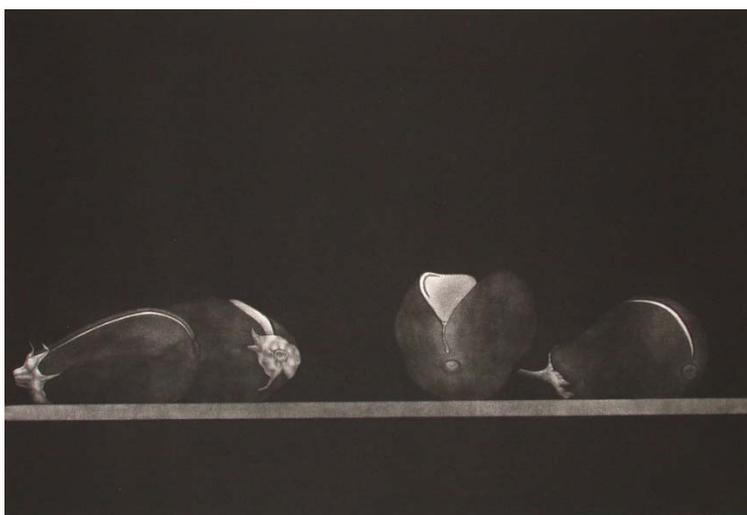
➤ **Look** around the exhibition and **find** works that utilise landscapes and seascapes as their subject matter. Has Peebles depicted the environment realistically? Is anything out of the ordinary?

Iconography and Symbolism

Peebles' prints are often full of **symbols** and **references** not always apparent to the viewer. From rocking horses to road signs to mysterious fruit and vegetables, Peebles' imagery suggests narratives to be explored.

Literary and historical references feature within Peebles' oeuvre. Peter Weiss' book *The Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum at Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* (thankfully known simply as *Marat/Sade*) was the inspiration for several works, including the series of five prints titled **The Death of Damiens I-V**. The prints refer to the torture and death of Robert Francois Damiens who attempted to assassinate King Louis XV. Sentenced to death by torture, each print symbolically represents Damiens' pain with different fruit and vegetables representing each stage of his torture.

➤ **Find** the series **The Death of Damiens I-V** within the exhibition. Can you identify the different fruit and vegetables Peebles has used in each print? What do you think each of them represents?



The Death of Damiens I-V
(III pictured)
Five mezzotints, some hand-coloured, variously numbered from editions of 40
Each image 39 x 57cm
Courtesy of the artist

➤ Activity

Walk around the exhibition and take notice of any recurring images.

- How many prints feature a rocking horse?
- What are the most common symbols within Peebles' prints? What do you think some of these mean?
- Can you think of an art movement that Peebles' work might pay homage to?

PRINTMAKING

The development of printmaking to produce works of visual art can be seen as connected to the development of movable type and the printing press in the 15th century (although woodblock printing had been used on textiles since ancient times).

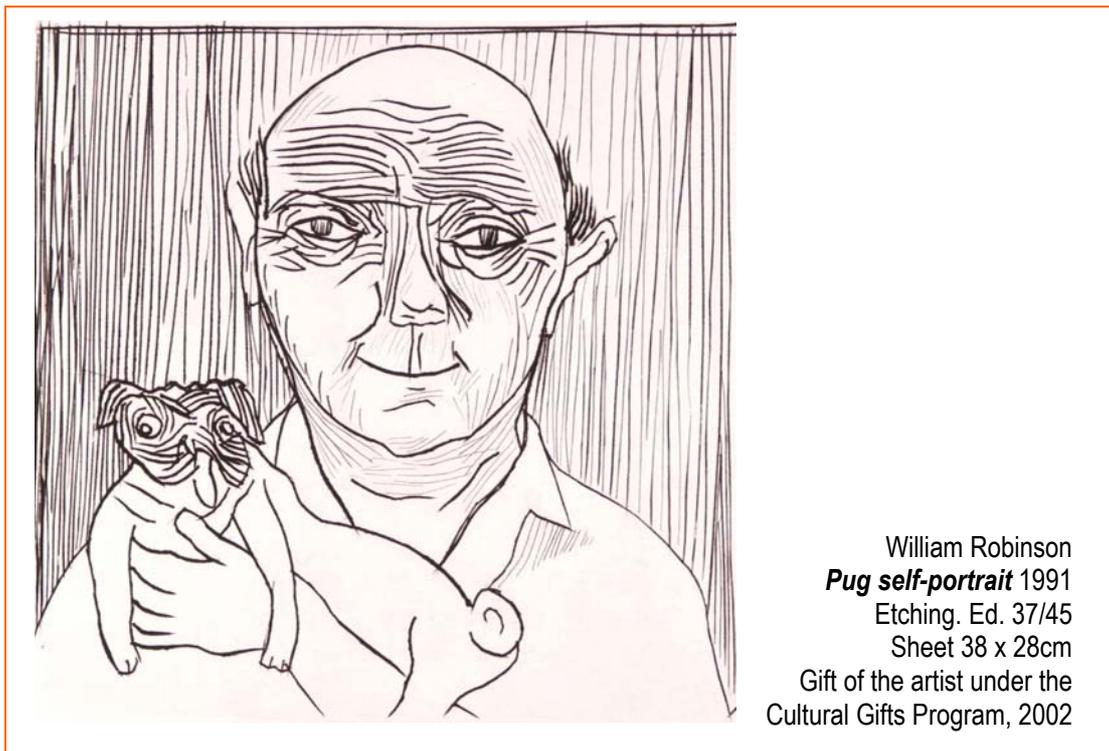
There are many different types of printmaking techniques however they all employ one of the four types of printmaking processes. These processes are defined as follows:

1. Intaglio
2. Relief
3. Planographic
4. Screenprinting

Intaglio

Intaglio printing processes involve the use of a **metal plate**. Although the individual techniques differ slightly they all involve lines or marks being cut into a metal plate and these lines/marks are the areas that hold the ink and print onto the paper. **Engraving, etching, drypoint, aquatint** and **mezzotint** are all intaglio techniques. Some artists who have used these techniques in the past are Rembrandt (etching, 17th century) and Hogarth (engraving, 18th century).

➤ *What differences can you see between the etching below and the mezzotints by Graeme Peebles?*



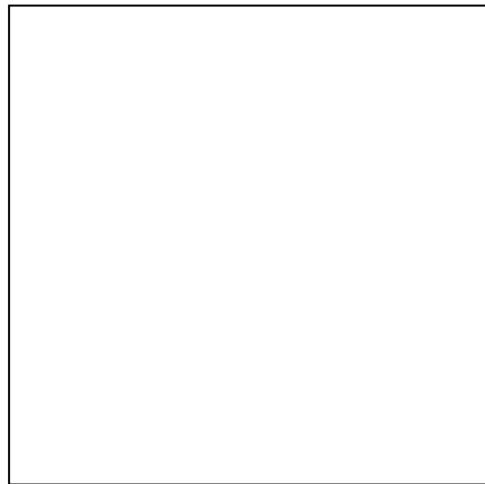
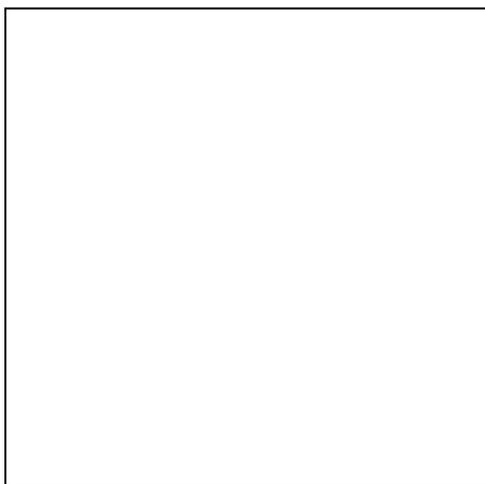
Relief Printing

Techniques which use **raised printing surfaces** are known as **relief prints**. Woodcuts, linocuts and wood engraving are all examples of relief printmaking techniques. Relief prints are created in **reverse**, meaning that areas to remain unpainted are carved out of the **wooden block** or **linoleum** (lino). For example, if you wanted to print your name, you would need to carve it out backwards, like a mirror reflection. When the artist has finished carving the design, the block is covered with ink or paint. The final print is produced by pressing the block firmly against paper using a roller or some kind of press.

Originally to create prints with many colours, several boards were required (one for each colour). However, Picasso used the linocut technique and developed his very own style. He produced multi-colour prints by cutting away more and more from one plate. At the end, the process could not be reproduced because the original plate was gone¹.



➤ Write your name in **BLOCK CAPITALS** in the square on the left. If you wanted your name to appear like this in a final relief print, what would your design have to look like? **Draw** this on the right.



¹ <http://www.artelino.com/articles/printmaking.asp>

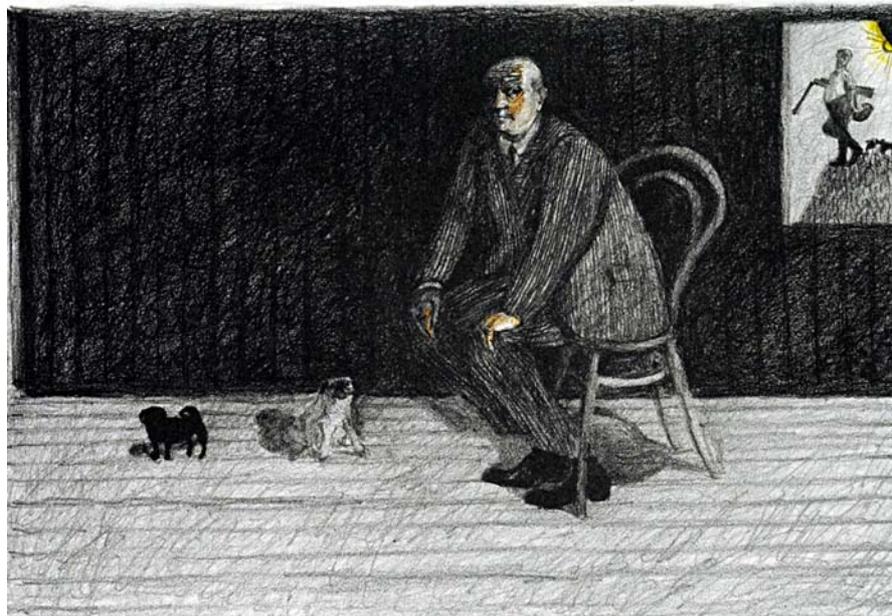
Planography

In planographic printing, as opposed to relief and intaglio processes, there is no difference in level between the inked surface and the non-inked surface². **Lithography** is a planographic printing technique which is based on the principle that water and grease resist each other. Lithography could be considered one of the most direct printmaking techniques as the image is drawn straight onto a flat surface in much the same manner as a drawing, with a wax crayon.

Steps in making a Lithograph:

1. The artist **draws** an image on a polished slab of limestone with a **greasy ink** called **tusche** or with an oil-based lithographic **crayon**.
2. The stone is thoroughly dampened. The water remains on the ungreased areas only.
3. Printing ink is applied with a **roller**. It adheres only to the greased parts (the drawing on the stone).
4. Lightly dampened paper is then placed over the surface of the image, followed by a protective sheet. Together the stone and paper are passed through a **flat-bed scraper press**.

➤ **Look** around the gallery. Can you **find** any lithographs on display? If so, what are some of the obvious differences you can see between the lithograph and other print examples in this kit?



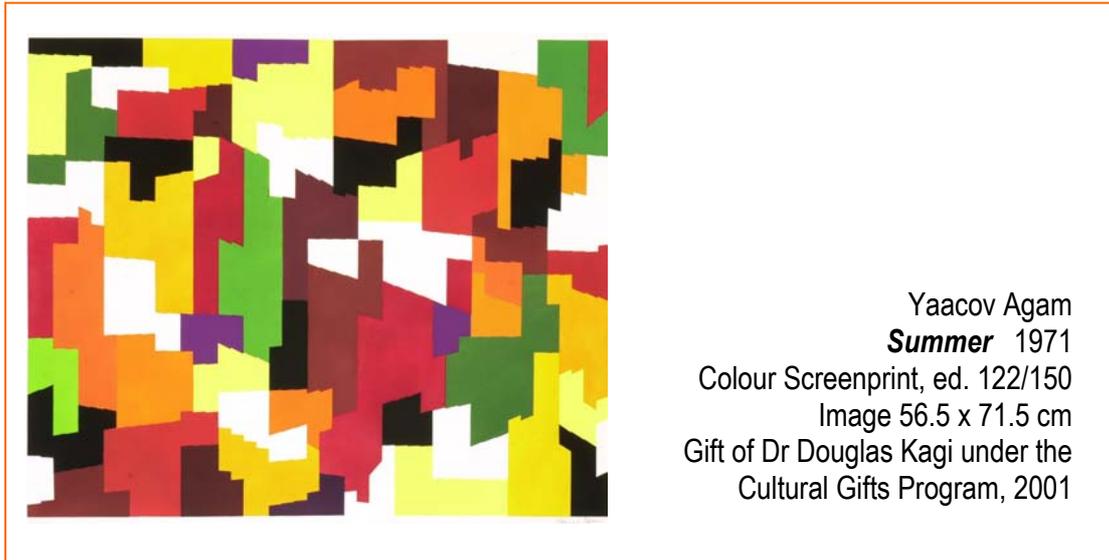
William Robinson
Self-portrait for town and country 1991
Hand-coloured lithograph. Ed. 15/35
Sheet 38 x 56.5 cm
Gift of the artist under the Cultural Gifts Program, 2002

² A. Beguin, 'Glossary of Technical Terms' in *Prints: History of an Art*, pp. 243-257.

Screenprinting

The screenprinting technique is based on applying **stencils** to a **screen** which is stretched across a frame. The screen is generally made out of **silk** or another material of fine weave. Areas of the stencil which have been cut out allow the ink to pass through and print the image on the paper or material underneath.

Artists who have used this technique are Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg. You may know the screenprinting technique best from its wide usage on textiles such as mass-produced t-shirts.



➤ **Look** around your everyday environment. Can you **find** any examples of screenprinting? Look in your wardrobe. Have any of your clothes had designs screenprinted onto them?

Sources of further information:

Exhibition Catalogue

Out of the Shadows: The Mezzotints of Graeme Peebles, by Gordon Craig.

Web Sites

www.moma.org/whatisaprint/print.html

This is an interactive site which allows visitors to activate each step in the printmaking process for woodcuts, lithographs, screen prints and etchings.

www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/mztn/hd_mztn.htm

This site provides information on the mezzotint process and its history.

www.npg.org.uk/live/mellon.asp

This site is run by the National Portrait Gallery, London, and provides a complete history of the mezzotint.

char.txa.cornell.edu/media/print/print.htm

This site provides information on the four different printmaking techniques – Relief, Intaglio, Lithography and Screenprinting.

www.artelino.com/articles/printmaking.asp

This site provides information and examples of basic printmaking techniques which are either relief or intaglio printing processes.