

## Topic Page: [mezzotint](#)

Definition: **Mezzotint (Italian mezzotinto, 'half tint')** from *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*

A process of engraving in which a copper plate is uniformly roughened so as to print a deep black, lights and half lights being then produced by scraping away the burr. Also a print from this, which is usually a good imitation of an INDIAN INK drawing.

Summary Article: **mezzotint**

From *The Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopedia with Atlas and Weather Guide*

Print produced by a method of etching in density of tone rather than line, popular in the 18th and 19th centuries when it was largely used for the reproduction of paintings, especially portraits. A copper or steel plate is roughened with a finely-toothed tool known as a 'rocker' to raise an even, overall burr (rough edge), which will hold ink. At this point the plate would print a rich, even black, so areas of burr are carefully smoothed away with a 'scraper' to produce a range of lighter tones. Primarily a reproductive technique, mezzotint declined rapidly with the invention of photography.

Mezzotint was invented by Ludwig Von Siegen of Utrecht (1609–1675). Another pioneer in the medium was Prince Rupert, nephew of Charles I of England, who was also responsible for initiating the first Englishman, William Sherwin, in the art, established by a dated mezzotint portrait of Charles II (1669). Many of the earliest practitioners were English, and by the end of the 17th century it was generally known as *la manière anglaise*.

In Britain, another pioneer was John Smith (born 1652), who engraved over 100 portraits by Godfrey Kneller and also engraved after Correggio and Titian. John Faber (c.1695–1756) who was born in Holland, the son of a mezzotint engraver, engraved hundreds of plates after contemporary artists from Kneller and Reynolds to Hogarth and Frans Hals. Lupton Goff (1791–1873) established the use of steel for copper. In 1757, Robert Strange published the famous plates *Caesar Repudiating Pompeia*, *Romulus and Remus* after Cortona, and *Charles I's Three Children* after Van Dyck. His masterpiece, a mezzotint based on Van Dyck's portrait *Charles I*, confirmed his European reputation as a master exponent of mezzotint engraving. Notable landscape mezzotints of the 19th century are those of Turner's *Liber Studiorum* and the plates after Constable by David Lucas.

Leading mezzotint engravers were John Smith (1625–1742), James MacArdell (1729–1765), Valentine Green (1739–1813) and David Lucas (1802–1881).

Some mezzotints were produced in colour, J C Le Blon (1667–1741) being the first to experiment with this technique.

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## Chicago

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## Harvard

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