

Overview

September 21, 1991

Dear Friends,

I'm working on an interesting project that will reach its final form about a year from now. It's a show and book titled: *Ink, Paper, Metal and Wood: How to Recognize and Understand Contemporary Artists' Prints*. The show will be traveled by the Trust for Museum Exhibitions, and is projected for eight to ten venues in 1993-4. The catalog will be a handbook, 200 pages: all the works in the show will be illustrated (76 works by 39 artists).

The idea is to keep the language direct and personal. Of course, etching and woodcut will



Etching Workshop, Seasons Club, July, 1991

be emphasized, but I will describe all the major printmaking processes and point out the visual differences among them. How can you tell an etching from a lithograph? (Sometimes you can't, but there are clues.) A drypoint from an aquatint? (This you can do for sure, once you understand how each one is made.)

Besides talking about process, I'm going to try to formulate some answers to the questions people seem to ask most when they visit our studios: Why do artists make prints? When working in a print workshop, how much involvement does the artist have? If an artist does not cut the woodblocks or draw directly on the plate, does that invalidate the print? What is "quality" in printmaking?

Those of you who participated in our Seasons Club etching workshop last summer will know exactly what I'm trying to get at with this book. It won't be able to give the hands-on experience you had, but it will address the same thing and extend it. Your enthusiasm for the workshop was, in fact, what got me started thinking about doing a project like this.

Speaking of frequently asked questions,

number one these days is, "How's business?" We're not the only ones being asked it, of course. It seems pretty clear that until banks begin loaning money again the country, maybe the world, will be in recession—and the art world will feel the effects even after that. Just now, Crown Point may be in a better position than most. It's true that the earthquake and the recession gave us a double whammy at about the same time, but we were in very good shape before that, and we had a great deal of support and goodwill during the toughest time for us. The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco raised a little more than a million dollars from the community to (partially) purchase (we donated

the balance) our archive; this effectively turned the archive into a building for us.

We continue to make sales in a difficult time; it's a good time to buy and clients appreciate that. Our staff is somewhat reduced, our editions somewhat smaller, our prices somewhat lower, but we are continuing to produce and release artists' projects at the rate of almost one a month. The main things that define our position are the energy and resourcefulness of our staff and the loyalty and enthusiasm of our clients. Despite our devotion to Art, Crown Point Press is a business—we have

never sought grants or donations. It's always been a challenge to make our way as a business without compromising the art or exploiting staff or artists, but we've done it for almost 30 years and I reckon we can keep on doing it.

As I said in my last "Dear Friends" (spring, 1991 newsletter), Crown Point is in the midst of a subtle change in that we are becoming more visible, more public. To my surprise, I'm finding I am enjoying this. I loved the etching workshop for Club members; when groups come to tour the studios, I like talking with them; it's going to be very interesting and challenging to write the handbook I spoke of in the beginning of this letter. And then, there will be the show of our archive material, and a major catalog—probably around 1995. All this is good; with more people given access to our work each print will become more valuable—though that kind of value isn't *real* value, as all of us (insiders) know.

I hope we'll see you soon.

Very sincerely yours,

Kathan Brown
President, Crown Point Press

Monotype Variations

Formal repetition and variation have characterized Wayne Thiebaud's work throughout his career. He continually reinterprets a repertory of subjects: displays of food, steep-hilled cityscapes, clouds, freeways, and so on. It is not surprising that printmaking should fascinate Thiebaud, since it offers—through the process of proofing—the opportunity to see a work in several different stages concurrently. As many artists have noted, printmaking is a way of having your cake and eating it, too. Indeed, Thiebaud often chooses to edition two or more states of the same image. His etching *Lipsticks* (1988) is portrayed both in stark black and white and in primary colors; another, *Country City* of the same year is rendered in soft pastel colors and also in a darker and bolder blue and black version.

In addition, Thiebaud frequently hand colors working proofs to explore what might have been had he made other decisions. As Bill Berkson said in the catalogue accompanying a forthcoming exhibition of Thiebaud's hand colored graphics (at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor, San Francisco, from December 21, 1991 to March 8, 1992), "...these works on paper are task-specific, using the nature of whichever medium—or specifically, medium over medium—to show us more about the subject at hand."

The mutability of monotype allowed



Wayne Thiebaud, *Untitled*, 1991, watercolor monotype, image size: 10 x 14", paper size: 19½ x 22"

Thiebaud to create over this past summer a body of work which focuses on variations of images. Monotype is a direct, responsive medium that in process and appearance falls between printing and painting or drawing. Technically a monotype is a print because it is made with the aid of a printing press, but it is unique among the print media in that the image is not fixed on the plate;

(continued on page 2)

(Thiebaud continued from front cover)

there is no matrix to fill with ink as there is in etching or lithography, for example. Therefore, the image the artists paints or draws on the support (often a copper plate but sometimes a plastic sheet or glass slab) cannot be precisely replicated, although subsequent lighter or "ghost" impressions (sometimes called cognates) can be printed from the same image until all of the ink is lifted off the surface. A monotype is distinct from a monoprint which contains some consistent printed element within the edition. A woman at a cosmetic counter (a descendent of Manet's barmaid in *A Bar at the Folies-Bergères*) is the only monotype Thiebaud created during this session.

The monotype is without question the most spontaneous and flexible of any of the print media. Indeed, as Thiebaud cautioned in a recent conversation, this improvisational quality, if not tempered, can lead to what he calls "the commonplace, prototypical monotype, which you've seen before you have seen it." Many artists since Degas, an early practitioner of the medium, have been attracted to the monotype because the process lends itself to experimentation, enabling artists to move quickly from idea to idea, each version informing the next. An artist may take an image through a myriad of twists and variations in color, form, tone, from a graphic linear rendition to a fluid painterly one, while maintaining its essential continuity.

In a typical sequence of images depicting a large, billowing cloud rising over the horizon, Thiebaud reinterpreted the motif seven times. He began with a linear rendition made with black pencil, then in gouache painted a smooth, opaque, blue and white cloud. Next he placed a yellow and brown cloud against a stippled pink sky, then portrayed a more circular bright white cloud, added in the next a crest of yellow, red, and blue splashes, and so on.

Thiebaud is not new to the medium of monotype—he made his first series in 1977 at Stanford University at the urging of artist Nathan Oliveira—but this summer he and Crown Point Press master printer Larry Hamlin experimented with a variant of the technique, the watercolor monotype, initially introduced to Thiebaud by artist Wolf Kahn. Ordinarily in monotype printing, oil paint or oil-based ink is applied to a smooth surface. Dark tones can become muddy and the effect of transparency is difficult to achieve. The watercolor monotype, on the other hand, is suited to any water-soluble material

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Notes:

John Cage received the \$5,000 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Frederick R. Weisman Foundation, Los Angeles.

Richard Diebenkorn was awarded the United States National Medal of the Arts.

Janis Provisor was a recipient of a 1991 National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship.

Markus Raetz's graphic work will be the subject of an exhibition this fall at the Cabinet des estampes, Musée d'art et d'histoire, Geneva, Switzerland.

New Editions

In addition to the new drypoint, *Three Cows*, by Wayne Thiebaud (see page 3), we are releasing new etchings by Christopher Brown and Susana Solano, their first projects for Crown Point Press, and two series of woodblock monoprints made in Kyoto, Japan, by Robert Kushner.

Christopher Brown created three black and white softground etchings and one color aquatint, all of which are related to the complex, multi-figured compositions that have characterized his recent paintings.

In *Crowd at the Base of a Monument*, a casual grouping of figures surround a clearing as if waiting for some unknown proceedings to begin. Details of clothing place these people in the past. A static arrangement of figures beneath a lowering flag, their buttons glistening in the last light of day, characterizes *Under the Flag*. By contrast the mêlée in *Seventy-nine Men* is expressed through a scattering of figures in combat, some on horseback, some shooting arrows, others discharging firearms. In *Forty Flakes* the streaked yellow and grey background sets off darkly-colored ice skaters. A smattering of more colorfully clad figures and yellow, red, and orange accents of hats, gloves, and scarves create a lively scene, further activated by oversized white snowflakes.

Scenes from the American past are not new to Brown, who has based many of his paintings of recent years on 19th century photographs. His fascination with history has less to do with facts and events than with the look of historical and documentary kinds of vision. His appropriation of historical photographic devices—blurring, omniscient, high-level perspectives, and high-value contrasts, is a way of making contemporary images that look like remembered events.

Brown is a professor of art at the University of California, Berkeley. He is represented by the Gallery Paule Anglim in San Francisco and the Edward Thorp Gallery in New York. His new etchings will be on view in our San Francisco and New York galleries from October 3 to

Gallery Exhibitions

The following exhibitions will be on view in our San Francisco and New York galleries through the end of the year.

San Francisco, October 3 - November 23, *Monotype Variations by Wayne Thiebaud and New Etchings by Christopher Brown*

New York, October 9 - November 23, *Flora, Fauna, and Figures in Prints*, featuring new prints by Christopher Brown and Robert Kushner

New York, October 31 - November 3, International Fine Print Dealers Association Fair, The Seventh Regiment Armory (67th St. and Park Ave.)
Opening: October 31, 5:30-8:30 pm

San Francisco and New York, November 28 - January 5, *The Image Exposed*, featuring new photogravures by John Baldessari and Markus Raetz

November 23.

Susana Solano, who lives and works in Barcelona, Spain, is known for architectonic, welded iron sculpture. Her aquatint etchings by contrast are characterized by lyrical, landscape-related imagery. The connection lies not in the formal realm but in the personal and expressive core of her three and two-dimensional work. Solano's sculptures, though abstract and geometric, are inspired by things observed and experienced in her everyday life—the landscape, a building, a fountain, an animal. The two softground etchings, *Mirades I* and *II*, are composed of simple line drawings of the type that serve as a starting point for her sculptural works.

In *Impluvium*, a fluid spitbite aquatint, wavy forms emanate from a central rectangular form. The four works of the *Gbardaia* series, also spitbite aquatint, exploit the technique's capacity to create the subtlest of modulated tone. *Gbardaia II*, the only color work Solano created, is rendered in soft yellow-green and punctuated by solid brown and green geometric forms. The three related works in the *Marinada* series, also created in spitbite (with softground), suggest a topographical view of land.

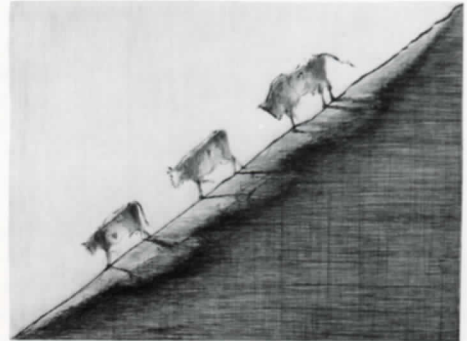
Solano is one of a handful of Spanish artists who has gained international recognition. Her work was included in such major exhibitions as the Carnegie International in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (1988); Documenta 8, Kassel, Germany (1987); and she was one of two artists representing Spain in the XLIII Venice Biennale in 1988. She is represented by the Donald Young Gallery in Seattle, Washington.

Robert Kushner worked with Japanese woodblock printer Tadashi Toda last fall to create two floral monoprint editions. Kushner and the printer varied printing, colors, papers, and fabrics within each edition. Kushner further enhanced individual prints, painting, collaging, and adding glitter or gold leaf, after he returned to his studio in New York. Kushner has made several monoprint editions at Crown Point Press in the past and has also worked previously with our Japanese Ukiyo-e woodblock printer, but this is the first time he combined the two techniques. Although a basic compositional element relates prints within each edition, the variety Kushner achieved is remarkable. *Peony* depicts a monumental, cropped blossom that seems to spill over the edges of the paper. The floral fragment is compartmentalized by heavily outlined leaves, each of which has been hand-worked. *Delphinium* is vertical in format with a long, flowering branch extending from the bottom to the top of the print. In these unique prints made of multiple layers of diverse materials and intricate hand-work, Kushner continues to explore issues of beauty, patterning, and decoration.

Constance Lewallan



Christopher Brown, *Forty Flakes*, 1991, color aquatint and softground etching,
paper size: 42 x 41", image size: 30 x 30", edition 50



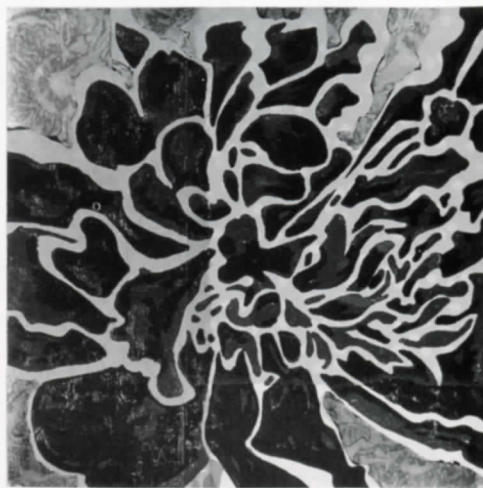
Wayne Thiebaud, *Three Cows*, 1991, drypoint, image size: 9 x 12",
paper size: 18 x 20", edition 50



Christopher Brown, *Seventy-nine Men*, 1991, softground etching,
paper size: 42 x 41", image size: 30 x 30", edition 25



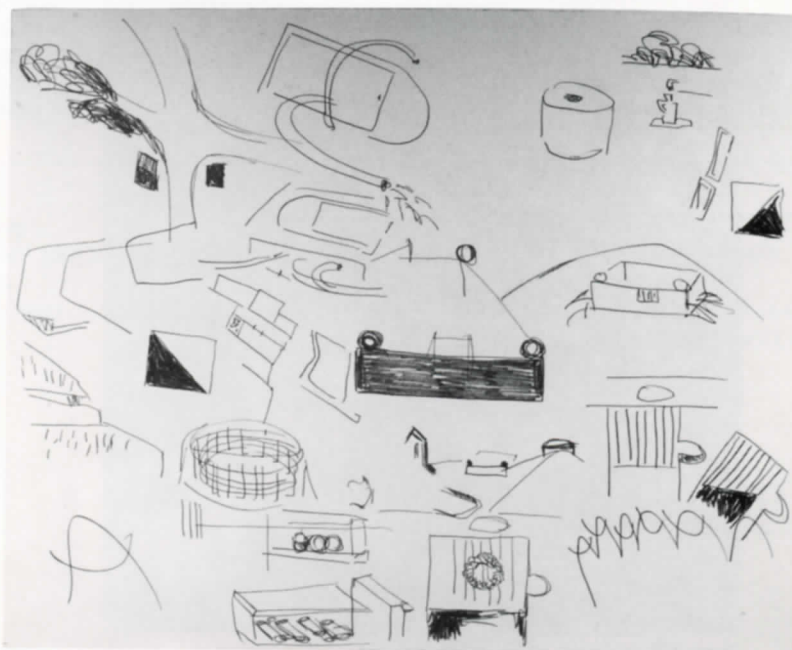
Susana Solano, *Gbardata IV*, 1991, spitbite aquatint etching, paper size: 42 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 35 $\frac{1}{8}$ ", image size: 30 x 24", edition 5



Robert Kushner, *Peony XII*, 1990, from a series of 41 unique woodblock prints with hand-painting and collage, 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ "



Robert Kushner, *Delpinium XVII*, 1990, from a series of 36 unique woodblock prints with hand-painting and collage, 36 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 13"



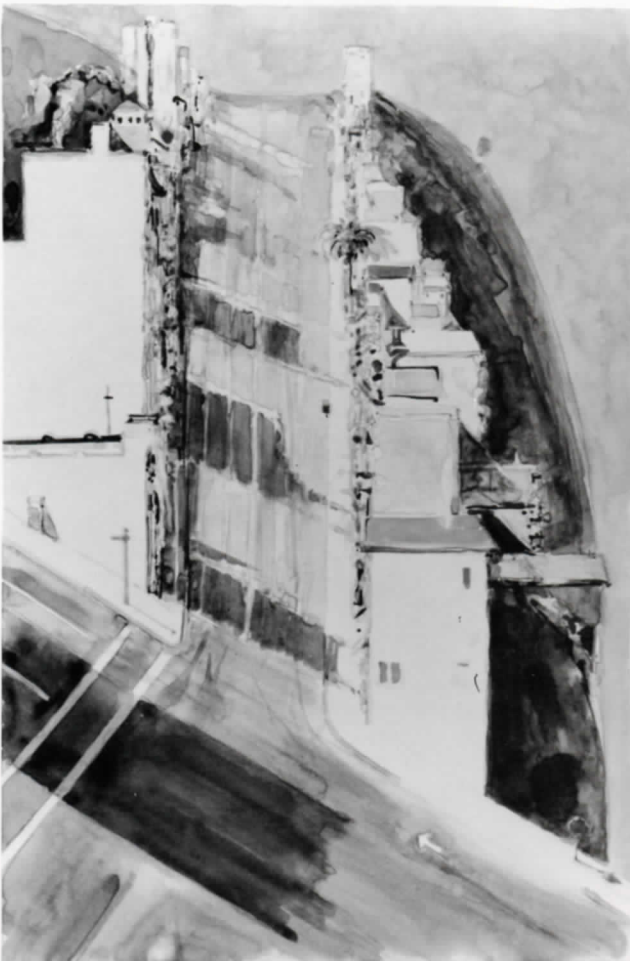
Susana Solano, *Mirades II*, 1991, softground etching, paper size: 39 x 42", image size: 24 x 30", edition 10



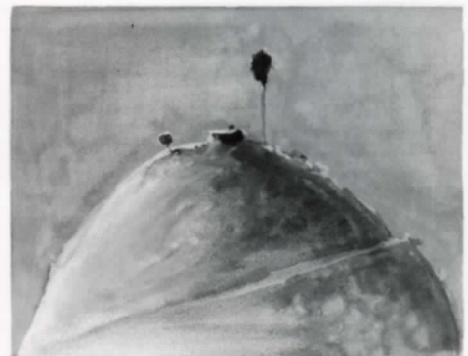
Wayne Thiebaud, *Untitled*, 1991, watercolor monotype,
image size: 11 x 11", paper size: 20¼ x 19"



Wayne Thiebaud, *Untitled*, 1991, watercolor monotype,
image size: 12 x 15½", paper size: 18½ x 19¼"



Wayne Thiebaud, *Untitled*, 1991, watercolor monotype,
image size: 36 x 24", paper size: 43 x 30¼"



Wayne Thiebaud, *Untitled*, 1991, watercolor monotype,
image size: 9¼ x 12½", paper size: 16¾ x 19"

WAYNE THIEBAUD

Monotype Variations



October 3 through November 23, 1991

Crown Point Press

657 Howard Street San Francisco, California

Color Poster: Wayne Thiebaud, *Untitled*, 1991, watercolor monotype, 22 x 32".

To order this poster, please send a check or money order to our San Francisco address for \$25 (California and New York residents please add 8.25 % sales tax) plus \$6 for shipping up to 5 posters in U.S. (\$10 shipping up to 5 outside U.S.). Please include your name, address, and telephone number.

(Thiebaud continued from page 2)

(pencil, crayon, ink, or paint) because it is printed from a plate prepared with an aquatint to give it a tooth, or texture, which holds the water-based material. Thiebaud also painted on sheets of sanded plastic or frosted mylar. Finally, the plate was put on the press and the image transferred onto lightly sized, highly absorbent Arches silkscreen paper. Occasionally, other papers were tried as well.

In this way, Thiebaud was able to capture the transparency and luminosity of watercolor or the texture of crayon or the graphic quality of pencil or pen. A single iris in a glass and a large goldfish in a bowl demonstrate Thiebaud's success in rendering the reflective and airy qualities associated with watercolor painting. The fluidity of watercolor washes is particularly effective in his depictions of a long stemmed flower placed diagonally across the page and in the richly colored flower and butterfly series. Two of the prints in Thiebaud's freeway sequence are, on the other hand, transfers of dense, multicolored crayon drawings. Quick pen sketches of an orchestra conductor demonstrate the linear capabilities of the technique.

Thiebaud is a realist whose subject matter fits within the traditional categories of figure studies, still lifes, and landscapes. But, he is also concerned with abstract formal, color, and tonal relationships, as well as the inherent properties of various media. Eager to learn what the medium of watercolor monotype was capable of, Thiebaud covered the gamut of his subjects. Exaggerated country hillsides complement vertiginous and fanciful San Francisco street scenes of the type that have fascinated Thiebaud since the 70s. Three sunbathers lying face down at the beach are lined up uniformly like the three paint bowls in another series of works. Simple line drawings of a woman walking her dog and a solitary bull are as crisp as the

colorful and painterly portrayal of young lovers is lush. The many figure studies (baseball players, figures on a beach, single figures) and cloud-scapes (according to Thiebaud "one of the most dangerous of subject matters, because it's already art") echo Thiebaud's current preoccupations in drawing and painting. Some subjects were suggested by the properties of the medium itself. The evanescent quality of watercolor washes inspired atmospheric effects, whereas the graininess of the aquatint ground suggested sandy beaches and hill-scapes.

In the end, Thiebaud found that the watercolor monotype is extraordinarily, even unexpectedly, versatile. It is to demonstrate the stunning capabilities of this procedure that he wished to exhibit many of the recent series (along with some of the copper and plastic plates used to create them). As he said, "We hope that we can instill enthusiasm in people who don't think of the monotype as a medium which offers so many possibilities."

In addition to monotypes, Thiebaud created a softly colored drypoint. The image of cows on a hillside, first conceived in pastel, and then translated into a monotype, here receives another interpretation.

Thiebaud's watercolor monotypes and the new drypoint will be on view in our San Francisco gallery from October 3 - November 23, 1991. The monotypes are not available for purchase.

Constance Lewallen
Associate Director

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MONOTYPE



Untitled, 1991, watercolor monotype, image size: 9 x 9", paper size 20 x 19"

A monotype is a one-of-a-kind print created by the transfer onto paper of a drawing or painting done on a copper plate or other surface. In process and appearance the monotype falls somewhere between a print and a painting or drawing, but technically it is a print because it is made with a printing press. The monotype is unique among the print media, however, in that the image is not fixed on the plate; there is no matrix to fill with ink. For this reason, it cannot be precisely replicated, although subsequent, lighter "ghost" images (sometimes called cognates) can be printed from the same image until all of the ink is lifted off the surface. A monotype is distinct from a monoprint which always contains some fixed element on the printing surface, a partial matrix.

Monotype printing is not new. It is generally accepted that a 17th century Italian, Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, created the first monotypes. At around the same time in Holland Rembrandt van Rijn laid printing ink on a copper plate and printed it in order to achieve a continuous tone. Edgar Degas was one of the greatest modern practitioners of the technique, creating in the latter part of his life over 450 monotype prints. He, like other artists who have worked in the

medium, was attracted by the flexibility and immediacy of the process which lends itself to experimentation. Artists are able to move quickly and easily from idea to idea, each informing the next. They can take an image through a myriad of twists and variations in color, form, and tone, merely by subtracting and adding to the plate between printings. Another attractive aspect of the medium is its portability. The artist can take a plate and sketch in plain air, for example, and then print the image when it is convenient.

The monotype provides a rare view into the thought processes of the artist. By studying a series of monotypes that builds upon an image, the viewer can track the evolution of an idea, the stages of which are normally erased in the process of painting or drawing.

Over the summer of 1991 Wayne Thiebaud created over one hundred monotypes at Crown Point Press. He made his first monotypes in 1977 at Stanford University at the urging of artist Nathan Oliveira, but in his most recent series, Thiebaud and Crown Point Press master printer Larry Hamlin experimented with a variant of the technique, the watercolor monotype, initially introduced to Thiebaud by artist Wolf Kahn. Ordinarily in monotype

printing, oil paint or oil-based ink is applied to a smooth surface. Dark tones can become muddy and the effect of transparency is difficult to achieve. The watercolor monotype, on the other hand, is suited to any water-soluble material (pencil, crayon, ink, or paint) because it is made from a plate prepared with an aquatint to give it a tooth, or texture, which holds the water-based material. Thiebaud also painted on sheets of sanded plastic or frosted mylar. Finally, the plate was put on the press and the image transferred onto lightly sized, highly absorbent Arches silkscreen paper.

In this way, Thiebaud was able to capture the transparency and luminosity of watercolor or the texture of crayon or the graphic quality of pencil or pen. His depiction of a single iris in a glass demonstrates Thiebaud's success in rendering the reflective and airy qualities associated with watercolor painting.

It has been thought that the monotype was not suited to all

artists. Most believed that those artists who preferred precision to expression, linearity to gesture, would not find the monotype compatible with their sensibility. According to Thiebaud, however, the watercolor monotype is extraordinarily, even unexpectedly, versatile. He found he could not only produce a fine line but could get "almost a one to one predictable accountability" between what he put on the plate and what appeared on the printed paper.

The monotype has become increasingly popular over the past decade, in part stimulated by an exhibition tracing the history of the medium that took place at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1981. The book that accompanied that exhibition, *The Painterly Print: Monotypes from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century*, remains the definitive work on the subject.

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