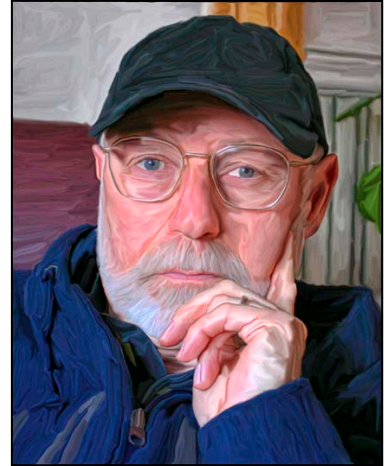


INTERACTIVE LUMINOUS ART - NEXT GENERATION

Short Biography

I was a Division Manager at the National Gallery of Canada for nearly 20 years and worked with artists from around the world. I mounted exhibitions, designed installations and managed key divisions while helping build the new NGC many years ago. I have been an artist for most of my life and a family man with six wonderful children. Today I live in both Nova Scotia and Ottawa where my wife and I spend six months a year respectively.



What is a Master Printmaker?

A master printmaker's work is comprised of two distinct properties, mechanical and intellectual. Mechanical in this case means technique, technology, materials and the tools used to create each work of art. When these properties are brought together with shape, form, composition and subject, we have the most original and affordable art form available today. If the reflectivity of my pigments is also kept very high along with sufficient play of light and shadow in their composition, each work will have the power to touch the human soul in just one gaze effecting us in an ethereal and or spiritual way. Only then may I call myself an Illuminist.

Creativity as a Printmaker

Creating something from nothing is not easy. When we see a Picasso hand made lithograph some people might say, "anyone can do that", **but always after the fact**. The real art lies in the artists ability to create something from nothing and to do it with skill and technology combined in a way that takes literally years of complex development. I am a painter, stencilist, photographer and printmaker. If I am remembered for anything it will have been my unique ability to have blended these four techniques together for the first time into a single work of art as well as being an illuminist. Each work is a screened impression directly to canvas in my studio and their pigments will not fade for at least 150 years. There are no reproductions in my gallery. I must screen more than one to keep my art affordable as I was only able to develop 200 works in my whole life using this technique. Originality comes from being made by the artist as opposed to a mechanical reproduction of an already existing work of art. Dan

CLASSIC TECHNIQUES

Graphite Pencil

One of the first and most fundamental techniques I taught myself was drawing with graphite pencil. Everyone who starts out wanting to be an artist at some point uses graphite to test their draftsmanship. This is where my creative expression was first realized. There is little to say about this technique other than it was my first. I used textured matte board as a canvas with a series of soft to hard leads and a kneaded and or gum eraser.



Old Pine Barn – Graphite Pencil

Pen and Ink

After a few years graphite no longer satisfied my craving for expressiveness and I began to experiment with pen and ink and the simple line. I wanted to see if it was possible to create pen and ink images using different styles that bordered on impressionism. I wanted the line to be completely expressive and the negative space between them to offer as much information. I did not produce many works in this genre but each are unique and were part of my artistic style development.



Chalk Pastels

Colour entered my life in a big way with pastels. I had tried other classic mediums but nothing came close to the luminous power of chalk. Its raw colour sat high on the paper reflecting light in all directions. Colours were extremely rich yet soft. I worked in this medium for a year or so and found financial success quickly. Contrary to how most artists used this medium, I would grind it into the paper's surface forcing a smooth oil like finish to emerge. It was here I had my first profound revelation in art. I had finally found the luminosity I wanted and all I had to do was find a printing technique or technology capable of offering the same thing.



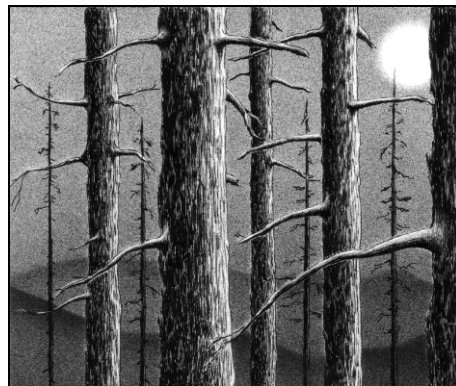
Viola – Chalk Pastel

THE PRINTMAKER WAS BORN

I now was entering what would prove to be a life long passion. As a printmaker I found gratification not only in the art but also in the complex techniques used to transfer images from one surface to another. For the next 30 years I would spend my life testing medium after medium and technique after technique trying to find the right one for me while at the same time developing my art form.

Plastic Engraving

This technique sounded simple enough until you tried it. I took a piece of acetate, and in my case I used a wall paper knife to cut grooves into its surface. If the scratches were deep enough, and because of the hardness of the clear acetate, it would hold India ink that was rubbed into its surface and then buffed away revealing the scratched lines only. What I loved about this technique was its ability to proof in real time without printing. You could see the image immediately as you worked due to the clarity of the plastic when laid over a white sheet of paper. To get the final print I then rubbed etchers black ink into the scratches and buffed the excess away. I then passed this through my etching press transferring the inked lines to paper. Again this was a short lived technique over a one year period at best.



Night Pine - Plastic Engraving

Intaglio Printmaking

It was time to enter the big leagues of printmaking called intaglio, meaning working with metal. Copper was the choice at the time. This period would prove to be the most profound in my career and the lessons learned here would later give me the creative knowledge I needed to persevere to the end.

Glass Bead Blasting

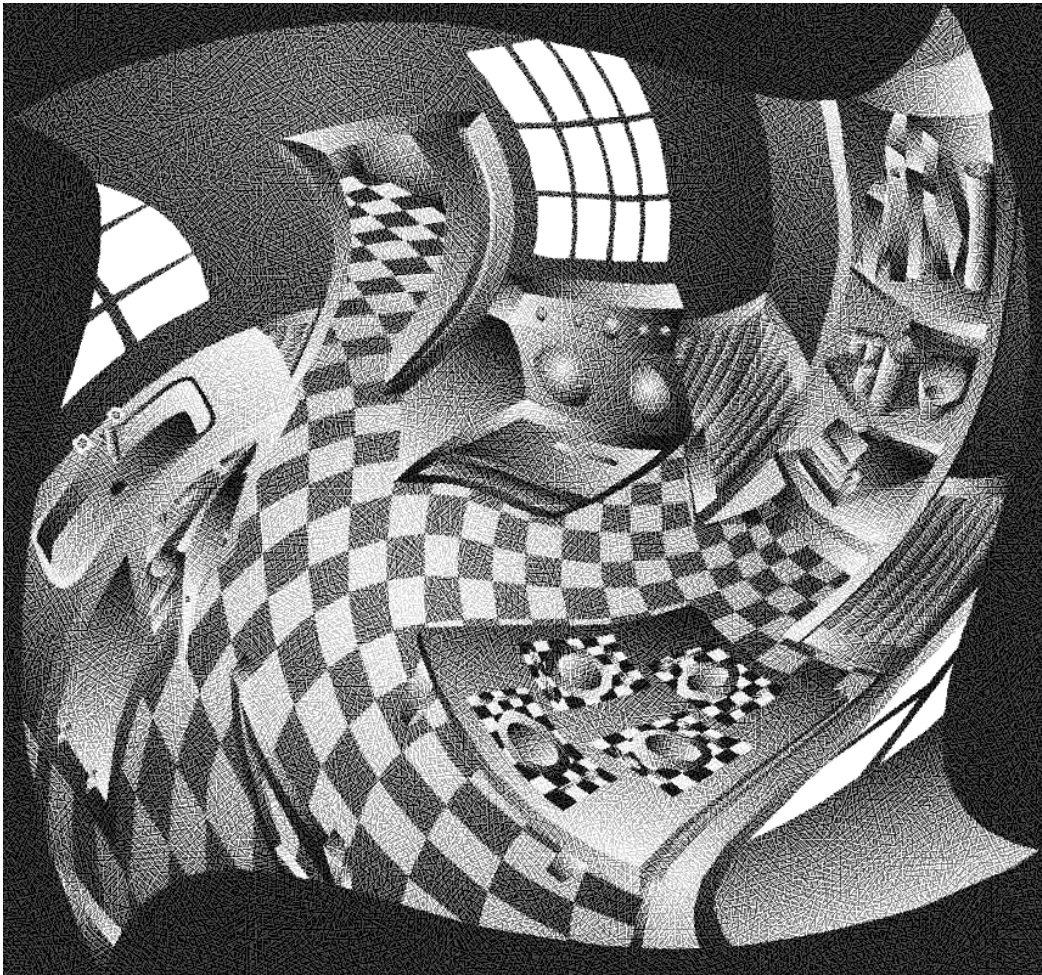
I cannot remember exactly how this idea came about but I took a piece of thin roofing copper and glass bead blasted its surface at our local garage leaving millions of soft subtle dents on one side. I then rubbed etchers ink into this and pulled a print. What a surprise. I got a lovely soft middle gray tone. Next I drew an image on its surface using a graphite pencil and scratched over the pencil lines with a wall paper knife leaving groves in the copper's surface. This technique is known as Dry Point. It was time to proof the image by passing it through my press. I was able to create my son's ball and glove and today it stands as a testimony to a remarkable technique that I would never fully develop to its full potential.



Ball and Glove – Glass Bead Blast

Aquatint and Engraving Combined

Aquatint is a texture that is created from rosin that is melted onto a copper plate's surface. The rosin dust is floated down slowly in an aquatint chamber onto the plate's surface and then heated in an oven causing it to melt and pool into millions of tiny worm like shapes that protect about 50% of the copper. This is then dipped into acid and the exposed copper is eaten away leaving tiny holes where the ink will remain trapped until printed. A tool shaped in a V was used to cut clean strait and curved lines deep into its surface. This was engraving. Here I combine both techniques building an arsenal of skill and talent that I knew would bring me closer to my goal.



Twisted Kitchen – Aquatint and Engraving

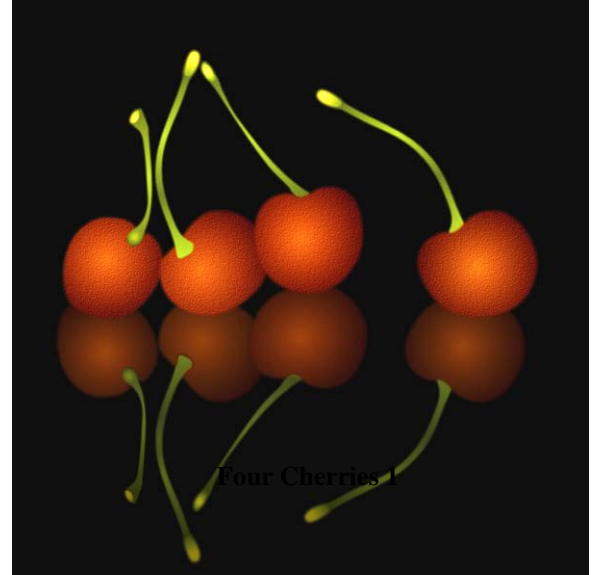
Aquatint and Etching Combined

To produce this print I used aquatint again on the copper this time combined with etching. I mixed what is known as a ground which is bee's wax and naphtha that is then poured evenly over the copper's surface to protect it completely. I took an etchers needle and drew this image through the ground exposing the copper plate. Periodically I would dip this in acid allowing it to eat away the copper creating etched lines that later would hold different amounts of ink depending on their depth. This was my first etched aquatint and will remain my favourite for this very reason. Up to now I had not found a printmaking technique that could give me the gratification of chalk pastels. Colour clearly became a priority at this point leading me to my next challenge.



The Mezzotint

This Japanese technique was the most painterly and yet remained a classic intaglio print. A mezzotint starts with a copper plate whose surface is pitted with a rocker. This tool looks like a half moon chisel with 100 or more tiny teeth along one edge. It is carefully walked across the plate's surface leaving tiny pits in its wake along with a metallic raised burr designed to trap and hold ink. To achieve an even texture from which to work, I would need literally millions of these tiny holes to be randomly placed on the copper's surface. To do this I had to rock each plate from one side to the other moving forward slowly from different angles so that the dots never created a discernable pattern. Rocking took about 12 hours for an 8 x 10 inch plate which was not for the uncommitted. Once the surface was rocked, I would gingerly burnish an image into its pitted surface slowly polishing the burr away using a burnisher as well as other specialized tools. Eventually I had every shade of gray possible between absolute black and pure white. What separated the mezzotint from all other forms of printmaking was its velvety deep black finish, soft image and saturated colours almost impossible to achieve in any other way at the time. For the first time I had discovered a technique that was much closer to luminous pastels than ever before.



Lithography

Most printed matter today, outside of photocopies, uses modern lithography. In the beginning classic lithographs were made from quarried stone from German lake beds. They were flattened or levigated so one could draw an image on their surface using a grease pencil. This was then treated with acid and Gum-Arabic to create a non-printable area around the grease. Water was applied to the surface and then the greasy image was inked with a roller. The grease would trap the ink while the water soaked stone repelled it resulting in a printable image. This technique is well known for its wonderful grain. This image came from 10 ball grained aluminum plates and was printed in my studio on a two ton lithographic press. Again I did not produce many images from this period but the lessons learned here were part of things to come.



Wild Birches

Stenciling and the Silk-screen

It was now time to move away from metal and onto a more painterly way of working as a printmaker. I was fascinated with the fundamental aspect of serigraphy or silk-screening which was a simple stencil supported by a fine screen from which ink could be squeegeed through onto any surface. Stenciling was something many of us enjoyed in grade school when the teacher would have us cut small shaped holes out of paper. By placing them onto another sheet and dabbing colour through the open holes we were able to create a printed impression of our stenciled shape. For many years I developed stenciling into a fine art form that is now at the heart of my current collection. I incorporated airbrush as well as many of the previous techniques I discovered giving me a creative freedom I had never known before.



To this point nearly 25 years had passed and I had collected and mastered several more artistic techniques along the way building an arsenal of some 15 styles I could call on. There were many artists at the time attempting to develop their own distinctive look by working in mixed media but few if any were attempting what I called mixed technique. If I could only find a medium that allowed me to bring all my techniques together into one work I would have achieved my dream. In music this would be the equivalent of not only playing the songs but playing all the instruments too.

Photography

As a master photographer in charge of the photo division at the National Gallery, I was more than familiar with the ever encroaching digital dark room and was not surprised the day it moved into fine art printmaking. I was once again producing new art called Photo Impressionisms which were a blend of printmaker thinking and fine art digital photography. This was a wonderful experience but not yet where I wanted to be. I was still searching for the ultimate painterly print.



The Old Farm – Digital Photo Impressionism

Bringing it all together

It was not until the digital press immersed that I found the exact control I needed to convince me to retire my etching press. It was the final tool I needed to bring all my years of technique development together into one work of art. For the first time it was possible to take my base stenciling technique and merge any or all of the styles I had mastered onto its surface. Today each work of art you see is comprised of 30 or more layers each holding different colours, shapes and techniques. I then merge them all downward into one layer called a matrix. The matrix is the last level before the image is screened to canvas and this is the first time I see the work of art. There is no painting before what you see on the wall as each impression is an original work of art created directly from the matrix which is created from layers of different information. From this point on I continue going back and forth proofing countless times over a period of weeks or even months making changes to each layer as I go. Only when I have the ideal blend of technique, shape, form, composition and pigments along with perfect luminosity can I say I am finished and that I love it.



Pebble Beach – Layered Mixed Technique Stencil Screened to Canvas

Daniel Richards Nova Scotia Gallery, Lunenburg Nova Scotia, 902 634 3117 www.danielrichardsgallery.com