

L' Art de Pochoir

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Matisse pochoir *Odalisque au tambourin*

Many outstanding 20th century artists such as Van Dongen, Matisse and Picasso chose to use the pochoir technique for the reproduction of their favourite works of art. This was said to be the closest thing to an original work of art.

Everyone is familiar with the colourful prints Kees van Dongen (1877-1968) made to illustrate the work of famous French writers. For the six books for which Van Dongen produced drawings, watercolours and engravings between 1918 and 1931, he chose the pochoir technique as the most suitable reproduction method. Kees van Dongen illuminated *Conte de 1001 nuits*, *Les plus beaux contes de Kipling*, *Venise seuil des eaux*, *La Garçonne*, *La Parisienne* and *Deauville* with 75 colourful pochoirs.



Van Dongen pochoir *Rimmel*

The most valuable *Livre d'artiste* (artist book) of the 20th century, which Henri Matisse (1869 - 1954) produced at the age of 74, consists only of pochoirs. The beautiful drawings which Matisse published as a book through Tériade, was given the title '*Jazz*'. It appeared only three years after Matisse had been looking for the most suitable method of reproduction. Lithograph, woodcarving or colour-etching methods were not satisfying to Matisse. It was only after he had seen the pochoir version in the atelier of Edmond Vairel that Matisse gave permission for the publication to Tériade. Finally Matisse saw the colours again of his favourite gouache paint Linel, which he used for his collages. The complete book *Jazz*, consisting of twenty pochoirs, was produced in an edition of 370 copies. It is now estimated to be worth about € 600.000



Matisse pochoir *Jazz*

Picasso and pochoirs

Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) chose to use the pochoir technique over two-hundred times, both at the beginning and the end of his career. In 1920 Paul Rosenberg published a book *Tricorne*, including 31 of Picasso's costume designs, which he made for the *Ballets Russes*. At the end of his career Picasso ordered eight large portfolios with pochoirs at the atelier Daniel Jacomet (1894-1966). Picasso was determined to show his early works to posterity in the best possible way. For example the portfolio *'Les Bleus de Barcelone'* exists of twelve drawings, which he made at the age of 18. Picasso was already 83 when he finished the portfolio



Picture from 1960, taken in Paris.
Picasso (left), Daniel Jacomet (middle) & publisher P.A. Weill.
Picasso is judging a portfolio of pochoirs made by Studio Jacomet.
Pablo Picasso is 79 years of age then.



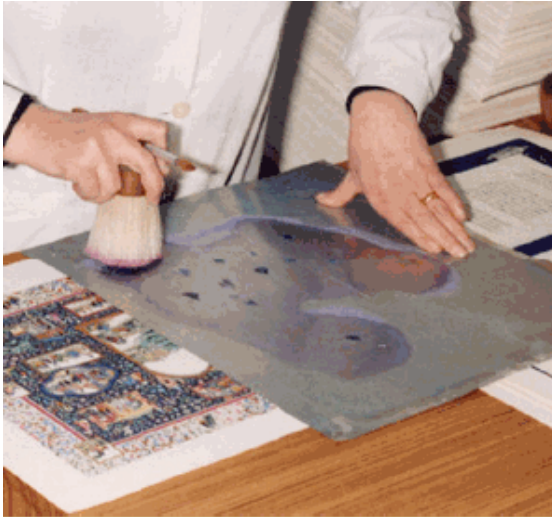
Picasso, pochoir 1955, *Chat avec oiseau*, on show at Renssen Art Gallery.

Apart from Van Dongen, Matisse and Picasso, many other artists and illustrators of the past century - Braque, Chagall, Delaunay, Derain, Dufy, Laurencin, Léger, Miro, Modigliani, Mondriaan, Rouault, Utrillo, Villon and De Vlaminck - used pochoirs as a method to reproduce works in order to resemble the original works as much as possible.

Therefore some explanation about the usage of pochoirs may be useful. Just to be clear, the word pochoir is used for the *technique* and the *actual reproduction* as well.

The Technique

The method of making pochoirs is a graphic technique to reproduce a work of art. But both method and result differ considerably from etching, wood-carving or stone press. With the pochoir technique, the staff, or *coloristes* in the atelier, use different paints such as water paint, gouache or pastel, as well as gold or silver foil and apply these on a large piece of paper by hand. This colouring is done using *patrons*, which are also called *templates*, or *stencil-plates*. *Patrons* are negatives, which are carved from an ultra thin metal foil.



The ‘Maître Coloriste’ decides, having made his analysis of the composition, how many and in which shapes the *patrons* have to be carved for a particular artwork. Subsequently, these are placed in a particular order and position on the paper, after which the paints are applied, using different brushes, sponges and tampons.

This is done until the result matches the original artwork as much as possible. Sometimes between forty and a hundred *patrons* were needed to produce a single pochoir. It was a very expensive and labour intensive method, indeed too expensive for modern times. Fortunately thousands of beautiful pochoirs have survived in the collections of museums and collectors.

Each pochoir is a unique piece of art. Each edition however consists of several copies. The differences are often hard to find due to the fine craftsmanship of the colourists. Compared to other reproduction techniques, the realism of the colours is the most striking mark of the pochoir. They seem much clearer than, for example, a lithograph or a screen print, because the paint is applied in a three dimensional way rather than just being stuck on.



André Derain, pochoir 1959, *Paysage à l'arbre bleu*

Paris as a centre

The phenomenon of pochoirs is a typical French one. Even more so, an exclusively Paris phenomenon. How is this possible? There are several reasons for this. In Paris, the right cultural climate ruled in which art and literature bloomed. There has always been a bibliophile culture. Artists, writers and designers from all over Europe went to Paris, a city with a magic attraction, where it all happened. Besides, Paris saw great prosperity in the beginning of the 20th century, of which the extravagant fashion was a clear sign. Dozens of fashion magazines appeared.



Georges Lepape (French, 1887-1971) - Pochoir print, *Les choses de Paul Poiret / vues par Georges Lepape*, 1911, The Metropolitan Museum of Art - The Irene Lewisohn Costume Reference Library, Special Collections

To fight competition some magazines, including the *Gazette du Bon Ton*, *Mode et Manieres d'aujourd'hui* and *Monsieur*, attracted famous illustrators: Janine Aghion, Leon Bakst, George Barbier, Paul Becat, Albert Dubout, Edouard Halouze, Georges Lepape, Umberto Brunelleschi, Andre Dignimont, Paul Iribe, Andre Marty en Sylvain Sauvage. They illustrated women and men's fashion magazines with fine pochoir drawings. (*rehaussé au pochoir*). In France there was also enough knowledge of the technique. The pochoir pioneer Jean Saudé wrote a guide in 1925: *Traité d'enluminure d'art au pochoir*, (Treatise on the illumination of art using pochoirs). In this book, he provided understanding on the production process using numerous examples, illustrations and technical details. By providing his knowhow he created the possibility for the creation of about fifty ateliers in Paris. At the peak, during the Art-Deco period, there were six hundred employees operating in this branch. Some ateliers were completely devoted to the art reproduction: Jean Saudé, Edmond Vairel, Guy Spitzer and especially the family business Daniel Jacomet. The last one made 586 productions with pochoirs starting in 1902. Assuming an average issue of three hundred pieces, this atelier produced at least 175.000 pochoirs.

Labour intensive and expensive

The period in which pochoirs were made was from early 1900 until the 1960's, with its peak in the 1930's. The production of pochoirs was expensive and labour intensive. It demanded at least a month to produce a smaller version of the original, carve the 'patrons' and experiment with the paint. Afterwards, a proof sheet was made, which was presented to the original artist for approval. For an average production of three hundred pieces, another two months of work were needed. The working conditions (see photo) were extremely primitive. Slowly but surely, the pochoir technique was replaced by other, mainly photographic, reproduction methods, such as screen-printing.



Atelier Daniel Jacomet, Paris.

Renssen Art Gallery: the place for pochoirs

If you would like more information on pochoirs, I suggest you refer to Renssen Art Gallery in Amsterdam. Last year the young Renssen Art Gallery held an exhibition with the title: *Hommage à Picasso*. Fifty Picasso pochoirs were on show and mostly sold to collectors from all around the world. Currently, the gallery is preparing a new pochoir exhibition named *Hommage à Picasso II*, combining yet another selection of pochoirs by Picasso with the paintings, lithographs and sculptures by Dutch artist Erik Renssen.

The exposition will be opened during the event **Spiegelkwartier OPEN!** on September 29/30th, and shown till the end of the year 2012.

For more information: www.renssen-art.com