

Masters of the Pochoir: A tour d'horizon

by Paul Zwartkruis (Netherlands)

Pochoir: *"the most versatile and luxurious reproduction process in modern time"*

John Bidwell, curator of the Graphic Arts Collection at Firestone Library, Princeton University.



Picasso, Braque, Van Dongen, Miró, Matisse, Dufy, Léger, Modigliani, Rouault and many other artists worked in Paris in the first half of the 20th century. They asked other people to make hand-crafted illustrations of their work – pochoirs. The artists had rediscovered this technique, which is of Japanese origin. They thus added an unparalleled quality to contemporary colour illustrations.

Pochoirs are highly realistic, manual reproductions of works of art. But it was not the artist himself who made the pochoirs. The technique was far too complicated. In about 50 specialized workshops in Paris female colourists produced these gems, which are characterized by a marvellous vibrancy of colour. Various templates, brushes and paint (water-gouache, silver or gold paint) were used in order to achieve this effect. For a simple pochoir, some figures or texts were cut from thin metal foil or plastic. These stencils were then placed on paper or some other surface. Nowadays, street artists such as Banksy and Vhils frequently use this

reproduction technique when creating their art.

Herman Brood

On Queen's Day in the Netherlands, for example, Dutch artist [Herman Brood](#) (1946-2001), together with a few friends, would cut 20 yards of vinyl into pieces in the street near his home. Then Herman would arrive with a few sprays. First, he would squirt a Beatrix orange-crown, using a template that he had cut from the lid of a cigar box. Then, with a letter template, he would apply the text "Respekt."

Finally, holding various aerosols, he would quickly finish twenty works of art and thus delight the audience with unique paintings by the artist himself.



Herman Brood at work

In order to reproduce a work of art in all its hues and paint thicknesses, countless figures and shapes were cut from thin metal (copper, zinc, or aluminum foil).



Hand movements with the pompom at the Jacomet atelier

Usually twenty or thirty such moulds were needed for a simple reproduction and over a hundred(!) for a complex work of art. With these tools incredible results were achieved in a small number of specialized workshops under harsh working conditions, well below the standard we know today. The trick of the trade, which each studio safeguarded, was in the specific hand movements with the "pompoms" (tassels), the correct order of operations, the types of paint used and the iron discipline that was required. Later, photographic techniques ("collotype") and traditional graphic techniques were employed, such as lithography and etching, combined with the manual addition of colour.

This tour d'horizon discusses several applications of the pochoir technique:

Decorative Art

Templates were first used to embellish interiors, that is, for imitation marble, wallpaper and murals, etc. Jean Saudé, the pioneer of the Paris pochoir technique, demonstrated in 1910 that the decorative pochoir had possibilities. He and the

painter-decorator Charayron distributed a portfolio, *"La Décoration Moderne au Pochoir"*. Based on 32 pochoirs produced by Saudé, they showed the many possibilities for decorating the interior of a bathroom, dining room or wallpaper.



Charayron, a wall decoration: *"La musique et la peinture"*

Costume design

In the early 20th century Paris was the magical centre of the world. Numerous artists and writers, many from Eastern Europe, came to Paris. In particular, the arrival of the Ballets Russes, led by Serge Diaghilev (1872-1929), caused quite a stir in the traditional Parisian art world. Diaghilev sought a form of total theatre: choreographers, composers, painters and writers were employed in his design of visually stunning performances. Much needed to be changed: dance was to combine both modern and classical ballet. There was also a strong desire for innovation in the field of costume and set design. Artists such as Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró and André Derain designed the most fantastic scenery. In *"Décors de théâtre"* (1930) by Raymond Cogniat, thirteen pochoirs of these theatre designers are represented. The impresario Diaghilev saw his compatriot Léon Bakst (1866-1924) as his main costume designer for his Ballets Russes. In the book *Leon*

Bakst, by Carl Einstein (1927), nineteen colourful pochoirs are displayed. Here is one of them:



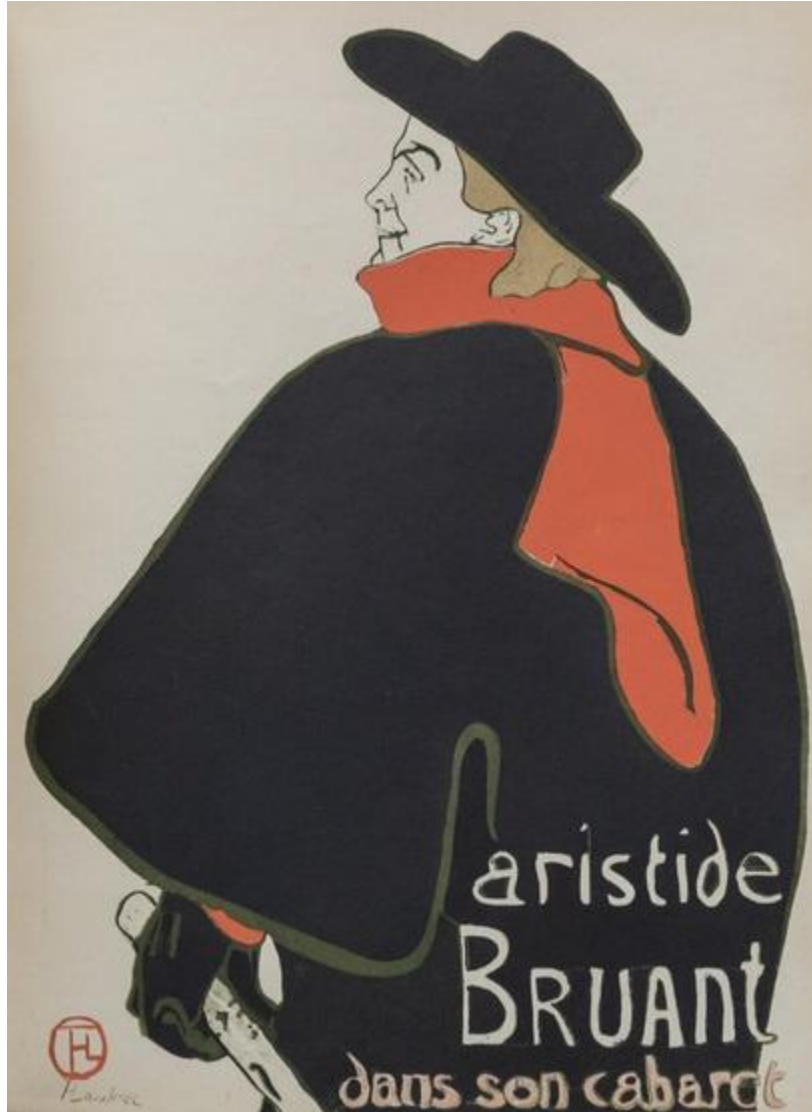
Leon Bakst design for the opera "Sadko"

The pochoirs were produced by the Daniel Jacomet studio (1894-1966), which had become by far the most important, innovative and productive workshop of the pochoir period, which lasted from 1910 to 1965. Artists like Picasso, Chagall, Miró, Foujita, Braque, Dufy and many others asked Daniel Jacomet to make reproductions that were so real that they were often considered to be original watercolour, gouache, pastel or ink drawings.

Artists' monographs

In 1926 the definitive "*Henri de Toulouse Lautrec 1864-1901*" appeared, compiled by his art dealer Maurice Joyant. It is not only one of the best reference books on

Lautrec but also one of the most attractively illustrated. Publisher H. Floury decided how he could best present Lautrec's work. For 106 drawings, Floury chose engravings. In two cases, Floury decided on original etchings and 22 times he preferred pochoirs to represent Lautrec's famous posters.



Pochoir Toulouse Lautrec (Affiche Aristide Bruant)

Facsimile

To bring works from earlier centuries to the attention of a wider audience, the pochoir was often chosen as a medium. A good example is the "*Dix Oeuvres: portfolio de maîtres français*", published in 1928 by *l'Art Vivant*. The ten pochoirs in this folder were also produced by Daniel Jacomet. The realistic art display from ancient times, in large format and colour, allowed many more people to enjoy works, such as Géricault's (1791-1824) "Horses,"



Jean-Louis-André Théodore Géricault: Chevaux attachés au piquet

or the famous self-portrait of Jean-Baptiste Chardin (1699-1779), from 1771. The original of this manufactured pastel portrait hangs in the Louvre now. An excellent reproduction by Jacomet done with pastels(!) can be admired in this portfolio.



Jean-Baptiste Chardin: pastel drawing (self-portrait)

Art styles

In the first half of the last century various artistic experiments were captured in the term "modern art." This concept was then subdivided into numerous "isms" such as Fauvism and Cubism. Publishers responded to this trend by producing books and portfolios which gave more content to these movements. In meetings between Georges Braque (1882-1963) and Pablo Picasso (1881-1973), Cubism was born. Many years later two standard pochoir works were issued about Cubism: "*L'Art cubiste*", by Guillaume Janneau (1929), with twelve pochoirs, including Braque,

Picasso, Herbin and Marcoussis, and "*Témoignages pour l'art abstrait*", by Alvard Julien and R.Gindertael (1952), with thirty "planches au pochoir" of artists such as Magnelli, Arp, Delaunay, Herbin, Poliakoff and Vasarely.



Louis Marcoussis (1883-1941) pochoir, after a 1926 painting

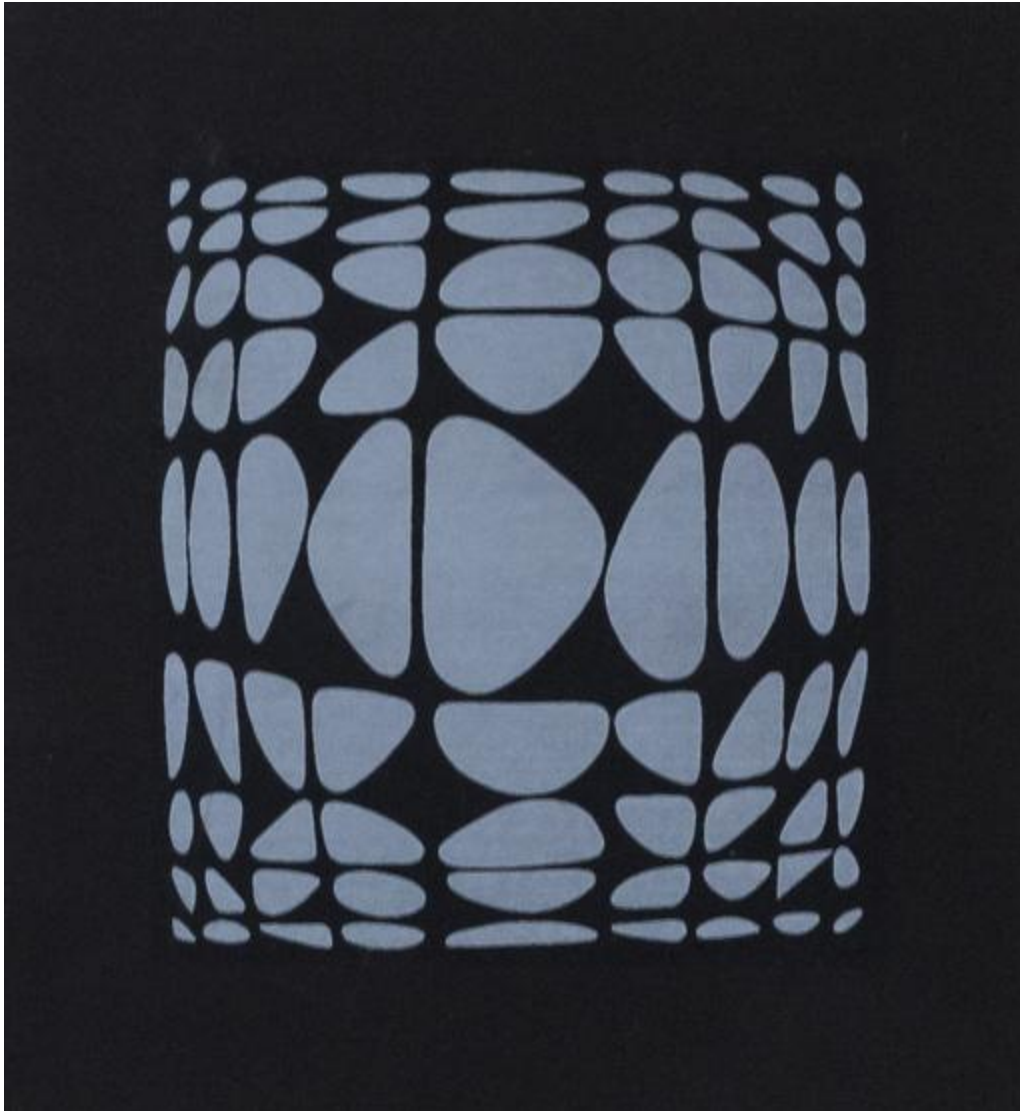
Exhibition catalogue

The successful art dealer Pierre Matisse, the youngest son of Henri Matisse, introduced America to modern European art, by organizing dozens of exhibitions. Thus, in 1959 and 1967 the Pierre Matisse Gallery organized exhibitions of the work of Joan Miró (1893-1983) in New York. These exhibitions were supplemented by two beautiful catalogues, each with six pochoirs of Miró's paintings. Remarkable is a pochoir of the colour palette used by Miró himself, cut in the shape of a palette.



Pochoir of Miró's palette

These pochoirs, which are counted among the finest ever made, were produced by Daniel Jacomet. In 1962 the Parisian gallery *Le Point Cardinal* organized an exhibition of the work of the French-Hungarian artist Victor Vasarely (1908-1992). Vasarely is considered the founder of geometric art, also known as Op Art. For the occasion Jacomet produced a very special catalogue, only 12 x 13 cm, with nine(!) pochoirs – a small masterpiece.



Victor Vasarely catalogue

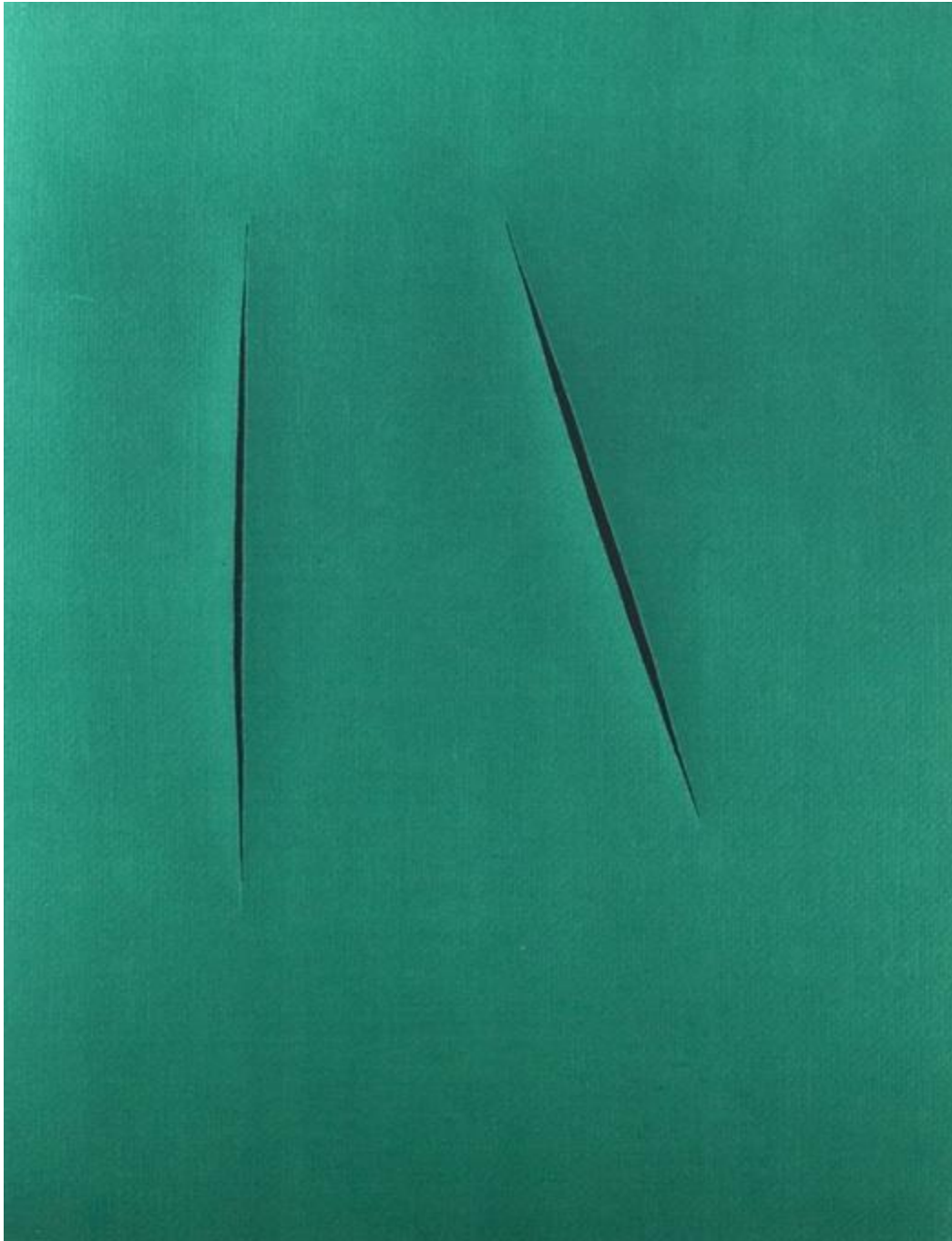
Art magazines

The French art magazines from the middle of last century, especially *XXe Siècle* and *Verve*, represented a world of extraordinary spiritual and artistic wealth. Some magazines illustrated their texts with original lithographs and pochoirs.



Miró: *L'été*, "Verve" 3 (1938)

Verve, published by Tériade, was launched in 1937 and retained its high quality until the end of 1960. Many of the major modernists, artists and writers found a stage here. Two editions were enriched with famous pochoirs: "L'été" by Miró (1938), and "La chute d'Icare" and "De la couleurs" by Matisse (1945). *XXe Siècle*, published by G. di San Lazzaro, first appeared in 1938. *XXe siècle* set the tone by beginning with two pochoirs of Pascin. A total of nine issues appeared, including pochoirs of Picasso, Mondrian, Miró and Fontana.

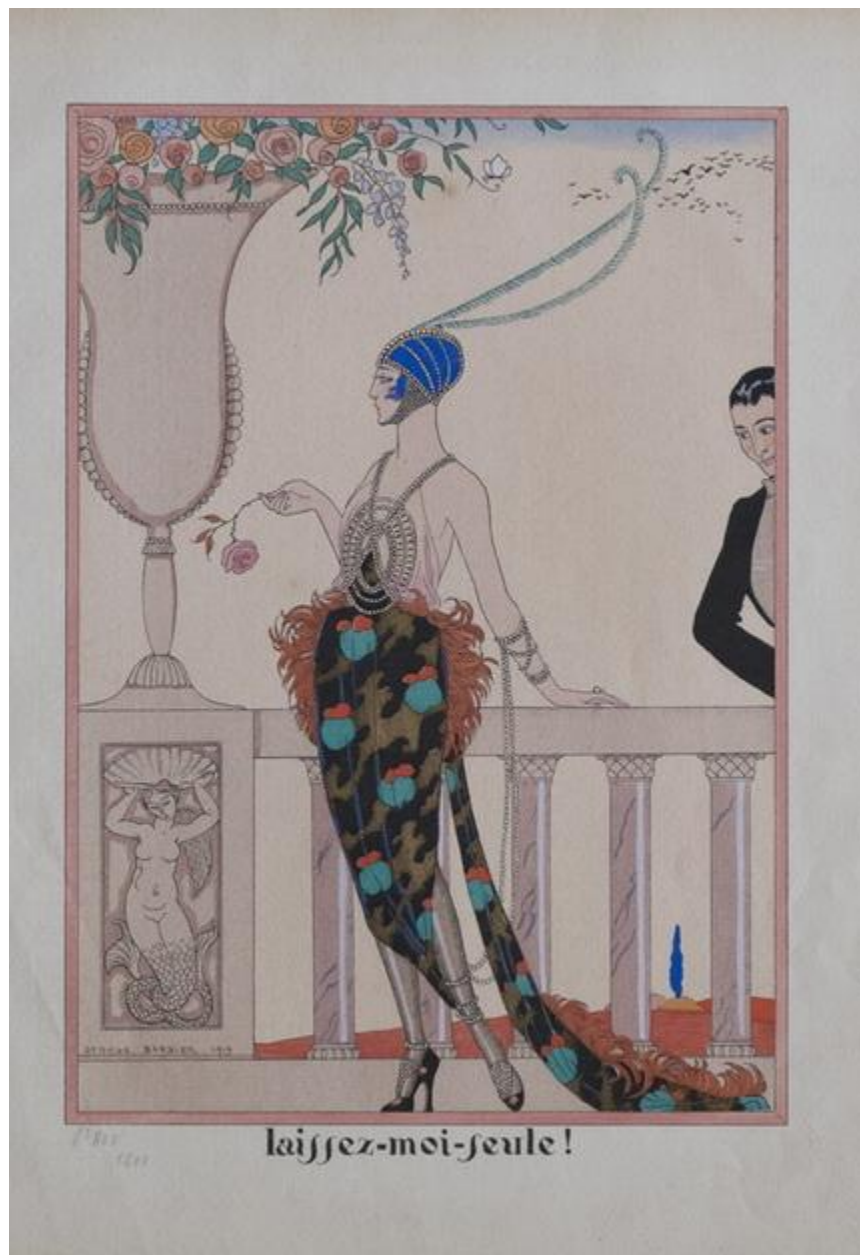


Pochoir Fontana "Concept Spatial " (1959)

Fashion magazines

In the years 1912-1925 Paris was the centre of haute couture. Dozens of fashion magazines appeared: *Journal des Dames et des Modes*, *Costumes Parisiens*, *Modes et Manières d'aujourd'hui* and *Gazette du Bon Ton*. The *Gazette* was the most influential fashion magazine of that period. Fashion trends were determined by the *Gazette* and its vibrant hand-coloured pochoir prints are forerunners of the Art Deco period. Commercially, the *Gazette*, founded by Lucien Vogel, was also

successful: in the 1920s the magazine had a circulation of more than 2,500 copies. Illustrated with several hundred pochoirs, the accent was on the lifestyle of the "leisure class": theatre, travel, sport, haute couture and perfumes. It also attracted important Art Deco artists, such as George Barbier, Léon Bakst, George Lepape, Raoul Dufy, André Marty, Charles Martin and Pierre Brissaud. Nowadays these magazines are becoming increasingly popular with collectors. Complete editions have become extremely rare and expensive. However, the artistic highlight in fashion is still the exclusive *Les Feuilles d'art*, a glossy symbol of the Art Deco period.



Georges Barbier: *Les Feuilles d' Art*, "Laissez-moi-seule!"

Again it was Lucien Vogel, who made his mark on the times. From 1919 to 1922 he brought together the crème de la crème of the literary, artistic and musical worlds in Paris in an effort "to find in the taste of the time all that is traditional and durable." At the end of each edition was a "hors texte" (supplement) – two beautiful pochoirs, one as a *Feuillets de la mode* and the other as an ad, *Feuillets de la publicité*. Georges Lepape, George Barbier, Édouard Halouze and Charles Martin participated in *Les Feuillets d'art*.

Erotica

Erotic prints are an interesting part of the books that were issued a century ago. Often these volumes had velvety covers. The spicy scenes were further enhanced by using the pochoir technique. At the end of 2012 an exhibition was held at the Singer Museum in Laren, the Netherlands, under the title "Rodin Erotique." What could not be shown openly because of the disreputable nature of the illustrations a century ago, are nowadays a great crowd puller. Those Rodin water colours (1840-1917) were partly redone by Jacomet as pochoirs and sold by the Rodin Museum in the 1950s. They are identical to the prints in the exhibition at Laren, including the monogram MR (Musée Rodin). The Rodin Museum demanded that on the reverse side of each print it should be stated that it was a facsimile and not an original!



Auguste Rodin: "Deux femmes qui s'aiment"

Portfolios with pochoirs

Avidly sought by collectors are the portfolios containing the work of one, or sometimes several, artists. Their interest stems from the fact that the artist himself attached great importance to the selection. A good example is the collection "*Les Bleus de Barcelone*" by Picasso (1963). The twelve artworks Picasso selected were painted when he was about twenty years old. When he was already 82, he wanted to expose his early paintings and drawings to a wider public. Another example is the "*Douze contemporains*" folder, a superior work containing the art of twelve contemporaries: Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque (1882-1963), Marc

Chagall (1887-1985), André Derain (1880-1954), Raoul Dufy (1877-1953), Fernand Léger (1881-1955), Henri Matisse (1869-1954), Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920), Georges Rouault (1871-1958), Maurice Utrillo (1883 - 1955), Jacques Villon (1875-1963) and Maurice de Vlaminck (1876-1958).



Georges Braque: "A Varengeville" from "Douze contemporains"

Increasing interest in pochoirs

Pochoirs are rare because they are not produced anymore. The only workshop known to me where pochoirs are still made is *Atelier de Coloris à la Main* (Ploubazlanec-France), staffed by former employees of Studio Jacomet. Production is too labour-intensive and has therefore become too expensive. Also, there is a dearth of expertise available. The emergence of alternative methods of reproduction, such as screen printing, ushered in the finale.

Because pochoirs of the most famous artists of the first half of the twentieth century have increasingly become collectors' items, they have of course become more valuable. More and more people are perplexed by the incredible quality of the results obtained by this technique.

In 1948, the *Times* wrote:

"Facsimiles by M. Daniel Jacomet of eight water-colours of bathers by Cézanne deserve attention. Because of the extraordinary fidelity with which they produce the artist's colour, the vitality of his touch, and the texture of the transparent paint"



"The Bathers," by Cézanne

A growing number of universities and libraries have started collections of pochoir books and reference works, as well as workshops on the pochoir technique.

Examples:

The Australian Library of Art (Queensland),
Smithsonian Libraries (Washington),
Rhode Island School of Design,
University of Cincinnati Libraries.,
University of California, Santa Cruz,
The Newark Public Library (Newark),
Stoddard Design Library, part of the Glasgow School of Art Library and
The Firestone Library (Princeton University).
The Royal Library The Hague, the Netherlands , (Koopmans Collection),

Since Jan Juffermans Sr. published a complete documentation of the pochoirs and lithographs of the Dutch- French artist Kees van Dongen ten years ago, prices of these illustrations have gone up tenfold. When in 2011, an exhibition of 50 pochoirs of Picasso was organized in Europe for the first time by the *Renssen Art Gallery* (Amsterdam), these works of art were sold out to collectors from all over the world in no time.

In 2010, at the TEFAF Art Fair (Maastricht, Holland), the famous book "*Jazz*", by Henri Matisse, containing twenty pochoirs, was offered by an English antiquarian for € 300,000. A year later, this figure had risen at another bookstore to € 450,000, and if you wanted to buy the book in 2012, it would have cost you € 600,000!

Text re-edited from the following sources:

- "[Masters of the Pochoir](#)" on Stencil Archive, Submitted by Russell on Thu, 02/01/2018 - 18:12.
- "[Masters of the Pochoir](#)" on The Writer's Drawer (link no more active)
- "[Masters of the Pochoir](#)" on PochoirWorld (link no more active)
- "[Masters of the Pochoir](#)" on Wayback Archives (part of the text)