

“The Artful Disposition of Shades”
The Great Age of English Mezzotints

HOOD
MUSEUM OF ART
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Velvety Prints Reveal the Artistry of Reproduction in the Eighteenth Century



Mezzotints were once the favored medium for publicizing English paintings. First invented by a German artist in the mid-seventeenth century, this tonal, rather than linear, printmaking process lent itself extremely well to an almost painterly re-creation of light and shadow. Printmakers adapted it chiefly to portraiture or history paintings—compositions that took the most advantage of the medium’s delicacy and expressivity—and soon mezzotints were disseminating affordable and accessible images of celebrated figures and pictures to a broader audience than ever before.

On view from January 19, 2010, through March 14, 2010, *“The Artful Disposition of Shades”*: *The Great Age of English Mezzotints* presents forty-three mezzotints dating from 1694 to 1831 from the Hood Museum of Art’s permanent collection and two private lenders. The prints were executed by nineteen different artists and represent the compositions of twenty-five painters, many of whom deliberately chose this type of printmaking to translate their compositions, including Sir Joshua Reynolds, J. M. W. Turner, and John Constable.

The Hood’s exhibition includes masterful examples of this technique, such as the exquisite work by John Dixon titled *The Tigress*, after George Stubbs’s acclaimed painting of 1769. Dixon recreated the soft appearance of the animal’s fur and the moody atmosphere of its wooded abode, evoking the awe inspired by such a creature. After the print’s initial exhibition in 1773, one reviewer later referred to it as “the finest mezzotint that was ever made.”

T. Barton Thurber, Curator of European Art and the exhibition’s organizer, is quick to point out “the variety of subjects highlight the precision and brilliance of this particular medium.” Despite the passing of centuries, he observes, “We continue to admire these prints for the richness of the rendering and depth of tone. Mezzotints remain a powerful means of expression, drawing from darkness into light countless inspired interpretations.”

Carol Wax, mezzotint artist and author of *The Mezzotint: History and Technique*, will present the exhibition's opening lecture, "Art and Industry: History of Mezzotint Engraving," on Wednesday, January 27, at 5:30 p.m. in the Arthur M. Loew Auditorium. Other programming will include gallery talks and tours as well as a hands-on adult workshop titled "Velvety Prints." An accompanying booklet by Dr. Thurber documents the historical and cultural significance of the mezzotint in eighteenth-century England and highlights many of the important works in the Hood's mezzotint collection.

About the Hood Museum

The Hood Museum of Art is dedicated to teaching and promoting visual literacy for all of its visitors. This dynamic educational and cultural facility houses one of the oldest and largest college collections in the country, with more than 65,000 objects acquired since 1772. Among its most important works are six Assyrian stone reliefs that date from around 900 BCE. The collection also presents art from other ancient cultures, the Americas, Europe, Africa, Papua New Guinea, and many more regions of the world. The Hood seeks to inspire and educate through direct engagement with works of art and offers access to the rich diversity of its collections through ongoing highlights displays, special exhibitions, an online collections database, and a wide array of programs and events.

Image credit: John Dixon after George Stubbs, *A Tigress*, 1773, mezzotint. Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College: Purchased through the Julia L. Whittier Fund and proceeds from "One Night in November," 2008; 2008.33.

Additional images available upon request.

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