



Etching is a printmaking process that starts with a metal (usually zinc) plate — and, of course, an idea. The zinc plate is coated with an acid-resistant resin and heated. When the surface is hard, a stylus or sharp point is used to scratch through the resin where a black line is desired. When soaked in acid, only the scratched lines are etched (or bit) deep into the plate, as the resin protects the rest. This process may be repeated with touch-up coats of resin and longer acid baths to produce line quality; that is, thickness or depth. When the line design is etched as desired, turpentine is

used to remove the coat of resin. The result is a zinc plate with an embedded line design.

If tone is desired, a special process called aquatint may be used. By spraying the plate lightly with spray paint or sprinkling it with wax chips, entire areas (not just lines) can be eaten away by the acid. This too can be done several times, varying the amount of time in the acid to produce darker areas.

For tone within tone a flat tool is rubbed on these aquatinted areas to burnish in highlights in the dark areas. These stages are shown in the above prints — the left one being pure line, the right



showing an aquatint (grey) area with certain burnished spots (highlights).

To print the plate requires heat, ink, rags, paper and a printing press. The plate is heated and spread with ink. Rags are used to gently and uniformly wipe the ink from the plate's surface while leaving some ink in the etched lines. Damp paper which absorbs the ink is placed on the plate and run through the press. The press roller forces the ink out of the lines onto the paper. A finished print is shown below.

by Jan Sullivan



*Jan Sullivan, from Chattanooga, Tennessee is a sophomore at Brevard College. She has an interest in art and its related fields. With experience as an art student and museum worker, she hopes to continue her education abroad and devote her life to a career as either a professional artist, an art historian or a museum curator.*

*Her print "Fiesta" (at left) has been in several art shows. It won a purchase award at a high school Art Scene exhibit at Hunter Museum in Chattanooga.*