

# PHOTOGRAVURE



P.S. Myers, "Dancing Nude," Copper plate photogravure  
February 2016, Image: 13 x 9 in, Sheet: 18 x 24 in, Edition: 15, proof 1

by Pieter S. Myers

Photogravure has one foot firmly planted in the past. We are familiar with the work of Steichen, Stieglitz, Strand, and other 20th century photographer/artists who took advantage of the rich tones that characterize the medium. But photogravure is a chameleon, capable of many looks. It is the complexity of the process itself that paradoxically gives it this versatility. I will explain why this is so and give some examples of modern treatments that push the boundaries of this venerated, but perhaps a little dusty, medium. For simplicity, I will confine my comments to copper plate photogravure.

Photogravure is a hybrid, a wonderful blend of photography and intaglio printmaking. At the outset, the process requires darkroom (or computer) skills to create the full size film positive that will allow the image to be transferred to the copper plate. This is the first opportunity to creatively engage the original subject matter, allowing the full range of darkroom or digital techniques. The positive, itself, can then be combined with other images, be drawn on directly, or modified in a number of ways. After the positive has been exposed to the transfer tissue and then adhered to the copper, etching provides further creative latitude. The copper plate can then be altered during the printing process, a

creative medium in itself.

All this opportunity for creative manipulation can spawn some very un-photogravure-like results. Lately, I have been working on a method for publishing my figure sketches as photogravure editions. Bypassing darkroom or digital manipulation, I discovered that clear laser print film can create a full-size positive from the original art work in one step. Simply find a friendly copy shop that will allow you to play with the adjustments on their laser printer. I use the film "Kimodesk."

In my "Sketch" series of ten figure studies, I have used the photogravure process to add color, add a background here or there, modify the images slightly, and best of all, create editions from single works.

While feeling a little smug about my "innovation" in the medium of photogravure, I discovered that it had all been done before. Rouault's famous "Miserere" series of drawings, chronicling the horrors of WW I, were reproduced in photogravure by his publisher Ambroise Vollard. The sketches were conceived during 1914-1918, but Rouault was not content with Vollard's results, and continued to rework the plates himself from 1922-1927. Although not actually published until 1948, this

another look

work was recognized as a milestone in expanding the technical and expressive range of the print. This spirit of innovation is alive and well in the print world today, even in the stately medium of photogravure.

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Pieter S. Myers received his degree in studio arts from Colorado College with a specialty in printmaking at the Colorado Springs Fine Art Center. Principal influences include photography study with Ansel Adams, portrait study with Joyce Temeson, and photogravure training at Crown Point Press in San Francisco.



## Sketches

a portfolio of ten copper plate photogravures by

### PIETER S MYERS

An edition of fifteen, image size 9x13 inches, hand-printed on Fabriano Rosaspina, Avorio sheet size 14 x 18 inches \$2,000 Includes shipping & handling

Images can be viewed at

[www.psmyers.com](http://www.psmyers.com)

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