

How do you rate the color of paper after aqueous treatments?¹

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The aesthetic appeal of old master prints depends significantly on the contrast between the off-white paper and black or nearly black printing. Paper discoloration can contribute to a loss of aesthetic value, which is an issue conservators consider in evaluating aged prints in discussion with their stakeholders. To learn about some aesthetic preferences of non-conservators

concerning the paper color of aged prints, we conducted an informal survey. From our study collection, we chose ten etchings² on handmade rag paper showing the same levels of discoloration. We treated the etchings following modern conservation approaches and also included simulated historic restoration methods (Fig. 1, marked red in table).

After different aqueous treatments, some of the prints were markedly brighter (Fig. 1, B–K) than the untreated reference (A). The prints were displayed in random order on the Stuttgart Academy campus where they could be viewed during a weekend exposition.³ Thirty-three campus visitors listed their aesthetic preferences on provided paper slips (multiple choices were possible).

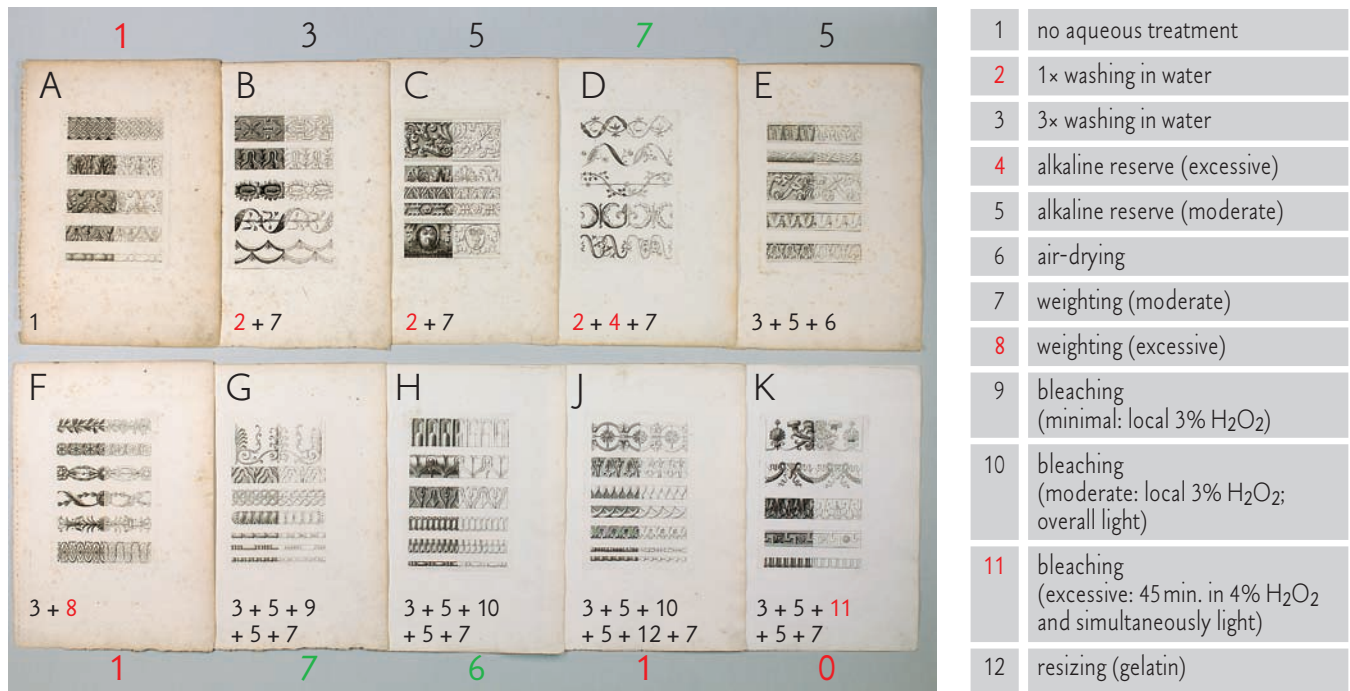


Fig. 1 Prints after treatment (small numbers = treatment steps) with number of responses indicating the most (green) and least (red) favored results

treatment steps
(red = simulating historic methods)



Fig. 2 Selected prints (see Fig. 1)

The survey indicated that neither a very discolored (e.g. A) nor a very white paper was appreciated (e.g. K) (Fig. 2). Treatments that achieved only a moderate amount of brightening were favored (e.g. G). Adjectives noted in association with the favored results were “real”, “original”, “authentic” and “antique”. The brightest print (K) was considered “fake”.

The set of prints is archived in the Stuttgart study collection.

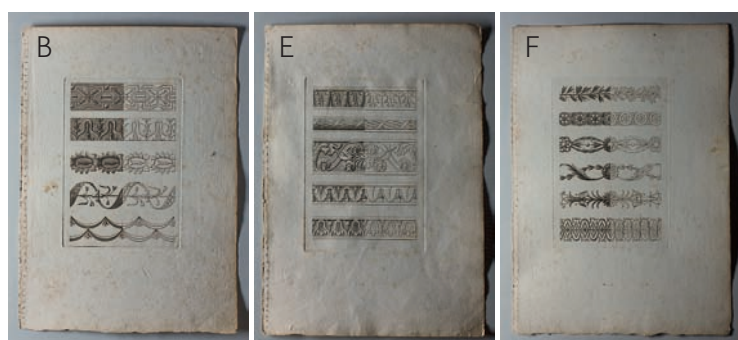


Fig. 3 Selected prints (see Fig. 1) in raking light

The dimensional paper qualities (not surveyed) are also important in the appreciation of art on paper (Fig. 3). A print that is free air-dried after washing shows cockling in raking light (E). Moderate weighting can recapture the original planarity (B) while excessive weighting flattens the print’s original textural features (F).

1 Citation format and contacting author (*): M. Husung, U. Henniges, I. Brückle*, How do you rate the color of paper after aqueous treatments? Poster, Stuttgart Academy of Art and Design, 2018. Summary excerpt, unpublished BA thesis by Marlene Husung, Wässern–Bleichen–Planlegen, Gegenüberstellung einiger Variationen in der Behandlung von zehn Radierungen, Stuttgart Academy, 2016
2 Incomplete section from *Scelta di Ornati Antichi e Moderni Disegnati ed Incisi*, Rome 1801; see: <https://archive.org/details/sceltadiornatioman00cipr>
3 Rundgang 2016, 15. 7.–17. 7. 2016