

“When I see something that just gets me, I want to work with that artist,” Jacob Samuel has said. “And if they’ve never made prints, all the better. . . . Because then it becomes a real process of discovery.” As a master printer, Samuel has been creating etchings for five decades; as a publisher, he introduced the five-hundred-year-old printmaking technique to some of the most influential artists of our time. Samuel began his career as a printer in Santa Monica, California, where he worked with the Abstract Expressionist painter Sam Francis, a prolific printmaker. In 1988 he began inviting other contemporary artists—painters, sculptors, photographers, and even performance artists—to collaborate with him, assisting them in adapting etching to their own artistic visions. He published the resulting projects under his own imprint: Edition Jacob Samuel.

To prepare an etching, an artist makes marks on a copper plate; the printer, harnessing acid, ink, and a powerful printing press, transfers those marks to paper, creating distinctive works of art. The projects Samuel published all share the same modest dimensions, they are generally printed in a single color, and most are serial, unfolding across multiple sheets. Rather than restricting artists’ creativity, these limitations were profoundly generative, as shown by the diversity of visual styles and approaches presented in this exhibition. Selected from the complete set of more than seventy Edition Jacob Samuel publications in MoMA’s collection, the works on view each tell a unique story of collaboration between an artist and a printer. Together, they are compelling evidence of the beauty and versatility of etching and its relevance for future generations of creators.

Organized by Esther Adler, Curator, and Margarita Lizcano Hernandez, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Drawings and Prints.

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