museum of arts and design

The
Print

Shop

A HISTORY OF
SCREEN-PRINTING

## After 960:

Screen-printing, also known as silk-screening or serigraphy, originates during the Song Dynasty (960–1279) in China. Other Eastern cultures, most notably Japan, further develop the process in the subsequent centuries.

## 1700–1800:

The global silk trade fosters the spread of silk as well as screen-printing within Europe and the Americas.

## 1800–1900:

The popularity of silk screen-printing grows as an industrial process as it is cheaper, faster, and less labor intensive than traditional printing methods such as lithography.

## 1907:

Englishman Samuel Simon patents the method of screen-printing as we know it today using silk gauze. His technique produces a

## Late 1970s:

Punk, hardcore and other cultural movements embrace screen-printing techniques and aesthetics in the creation of political and subversive content in album covers, concert posters, fashion and other ephemera.

## 2000:

International Print Center New York launches as the first and only non-profit exhibition space, resource, and learning center devoted solely to artists' screen prints.

## Today:

Screen-printing continues to be an innovative process in the industrial and fine arts. From local community centers to internationally recognized art schools, screen-printing classes for amateurs and professionals alike are taught worldwide.

screen with higher tensile strength and improved size stability for large-scale printing.

By 1910:

Mass experimentation with the screen-printing process begins as commercial printers employ photographic technologies such as photo-reactive materials and sensitizing chemicals, resulting in the first use of photo-imaged stencils on screens.

By 1915:

Early American screen-printing studios, such as Velvetone, Selectasine, and Vitachrome, emerge in California. Taking advantage of the technique's ability to produce high quality products in small batches as well as in large formats, these studios foster the use of screen-printing to produce destination boards and other advertisements.
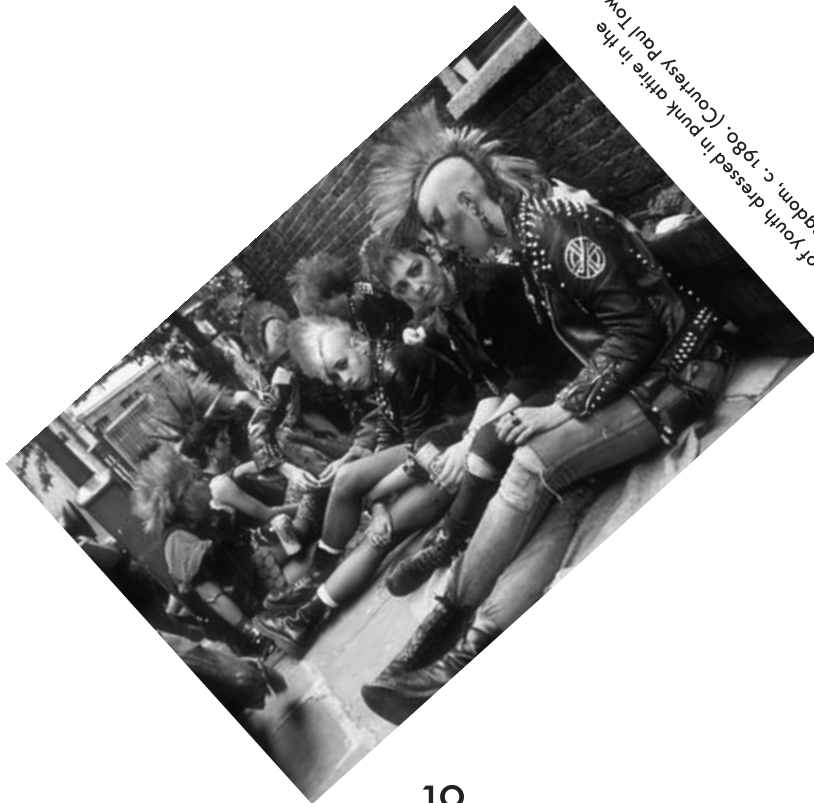
The first known photo of a screen printing shop—Velvetone Poster Company, San Francisco, 1913. Far left Joseph A. Garner, center Frank O. Brant (founder of Velvetone) and unknown man. (Courtesy Brant Family Archive)



Students at the Atelier Populaire create protest posters that read "salaires chars" (wage tanks), Paris, May 1968.



Guy Maccoy at work on a screen print in his studio, Canoga Park, Calif., c.1974. Photographer: Alan Linnemeyer (Courtesy Alan Linnemeyer)



Demonstrators march against the war in Vietnam, Berkeley-Oakland City, Calif., December 1965. (AP Photo)

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Late 1960s:

Screen-printing becomes a popular social tool for the growing global counter-cultural movements. Books, pamphlets, flyers, and posters for protests and strikes are printed on demand in Paris, Berlin, Boston, and other cities.

Late 1960s:

Across the United States, non-profit organizations establish open-access community art centers, which bring processes like screen-printing to a diverse public.

By 1970:

Distinctions between industry and the fine arts continue to dissolve as the term "serigraph" loses favor and the terms "silk screen" and "screen print" are used for all applications of the process.

1938:

In New York City, Contemporary Art Gallery features the first solo exhibition of screen prints by artist Guy Maccoy, a pioneer of fine art screen-printing.



Brookfield Zoo. "L" / Long, Long, Frank W., between 1936 and 1938 (Courtesy Library of Congress)
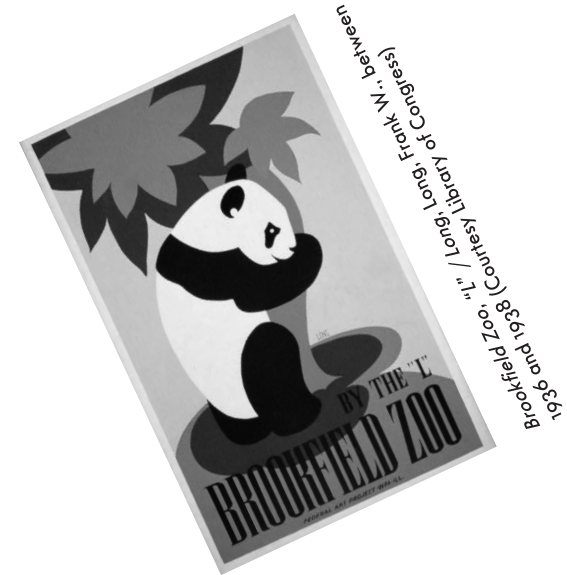
1939:

Under the Works Progress Administration (WPA), the Federal Arts Project (FAP) forms the Silk Screen Unit. The Silk Screen Unit creates over 2,000 poster designs that are used to entice the public to visit other states, national parks, and to promote community activities.

**By 1940:**

The National Serigraphic Society coins the term "serigraph" to distinguish fine art created by silk-screening from commercially-produced works.

**By 1941:**

Silk becomes less commonplace after chemists develop synthetic fibers such as nylon (invented in the United States in 1935) and polyester (invented in England in 1941).

**1960:**

Artist and inventor Michael Vasilantone designs a series of rotary screen-printing machines that print multicolor imagery, allowing for the mass production of screen-printed apparel and the popularization of the graphic t-shirt — a trend that has become a staple of today's fashion.

**Early 1960s:**

Pop artists Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist, and Robert Rauschenberg, among others engage with the screen-printing process and visual vocabulary of commercial screen-printing in their artwork.



Andy Warhol working on a screen print at his studio on Lexington Avenue between 89th and 90th streets, New York, c. 1962. (Courtesy of Photographer Paul Wallowitch) Paul Wallowitch

**1963:**

Chiron Press in New York City becomes the first print atelier in the United States devoted to fine art screen prints exclusively, collaborating with artists such as Marisol, Helen Frankenthaler, and printing Roy Lichtenstein's first screen print in 1965.