

SILVERPOINT AND METALPOINT DRAWING

A COMPLETE GUIDE TO
THE MEDIUM

SUSAN SCHWALB
AND
TOM MAZZULLO

A Focal Press Book



SILVERPOINT AND METALPOINT DRAWING

Silverpoint, and metalpoint more generally, is the practice of marking with soft metal on a specially prepared drawing surface. Experiencing a resurgence in recent years, contemporary metalpoint art is realist and abstract, traditional and conceptual.

Silverpoint and Metalpoint Drawing is the essential manual of metalpoint technique, written by Susan Schwalb and Tom Mazzullo, contemporary masters of the medium. This book is the first treatise on the subject for artists and art teachers, with chapters on early history; materials, including grounds, supports, metals, and tools; techniques for working in metalpoint and artwork in mixed media; and care of metalpoint artworks. Not only is it beautifully illustrated, this book also demonstrates how to photograph and exhibit metalpoint art. Featuring a gallery of drawings by contemporary artists, along with their tips and insights, *Silverpoint and Metalpoint Drawing* is a perfect introduction for students of the medium and an inspiration for those already more familiar with it.

Susan Schwalb is one of the foremost figures in the current silverpoint revival. She was born in New York City in 1944 and studied at Carnegie Mellon University. She has had over 50 solo exhibitions in galleries and museums worldwide, and her work is represented in most major public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, the Yale University Art Gallery, and the British Museum, London. Schwalb was one of only three living artists included in the historical metalpoint exhibition *Drawing in Silver and Gold: Leonardo to Jasper Johns* at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. She lives in New York City.

Tom Mazzullo was born in Williamsport, Pennsylvania in 1968 and attended Tyler School of Art, where he was awarded a BFA in Printmaking in 1990. He earned an MFA from Syracuse University in 1993 and has taught drawing at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, the University of Denver, and the Art Students League of Denver, and he has lectured and demonstrated silverpoint all over the country. He has exhibited his silverpoint drawings in museums and galleries nationwide, has work in several notable collections, and is a member of Spark Gallery, Denver. He lives in Westminster, Colorado.



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A Complete Guide to the Medium

Susan Schwalb and Tom Mazzullo

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CONTENTS

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>Foreword</i>	<i>xi</i>
<i>Bruce Weber</i>	
<i>Preface: Why Metalpoint Now?</i>	<i>xiii</i>
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>xv</i>
<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>xvi</i>
Introduction: What is Silverpoint and Metalpoint?	1
Overview and History	1
Distinguishing Characteristics	2
1 The History of Metalpoint as a Drawing Technique	5
<i>Thea Burns</i>	
Introduction	5
The Origins of Drawing in Metalpoint	5
Medieval Metalpoint	5
Italian Renaissance Metalpoint Drawings	6
Metalpoint in Late Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe	9
The Eighteenth Century and the Waning of Metalpoint	11
The Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries	12
Conclusion	15
Bibliography	20
2 Tools, Metals, and Tarnishing	23
Introduction: Making Marks with Metal	23
Types of Metals	24
More About Tarnishing	28

Tools: The Metalpoint Stylus	32
Other Tools for Metalpoint Drawing	37
3 Grounds, Preparation, and Supports	41
Introduction: What is Prepared Paper?	41
Metalpoint Grounds	41
Mixing Preparations	47
Making Tinted Grounds	48
Application of Preparations	49
Metalpoint Supports	52
Commercially Prepared Papers	56
4 Drawing with Metalpoint	60
Introduction: Drawing with Metalpoint	60
Planning, Sketching, and Preliminary Work	60
Tonal Drawing: Hatching, Tonal Layering	62
Application of Unique Tools and Unusual Techniques	69
Drawing on Tinted Grounds	69
Erasing and Correcting	72
5 Mixed Media	75
<i>Carol Prusa</i>	
Dry Media	75
Wet Media	80
Additional Media	89
Further Examples of Metalpoint Mixed Media	93
6 Storing, Framing, Photographing, and Shipping Metalpoint Work	96
Handling and Storage	96
Mounting and Framing	98
Photography and Processing Images	101
Packing and Shipping	104
7 Contemporary Metalpoint Drawing	108
Introduction	108
Figuration	108
Abstraction	126
Conceptual Work	133
Conclusion	138
<i>Appendix: List of Sources for Materials</i>	141
<i>Index</i>	143

FIGURES

0.1	Jean Fouquet, <i>Portrait of an Ecclesiastic</i>	2
0.2	Tom Mazzullo, <i>Ruff</i>	3
0.3	Susan Schwalb, <i>Currents I</i>	4
1.1	Pietro Perugino, <i>Head of a Man with a Short Beard</i>	7
1.2	Filippino Lippi, <i>Two Nude Men, One Sitting with a Book to Left</i>	8
1.3	Raphael, <i>Studies for the Christ Child in the 'Madonna di Loreto'</i>	9
1.4	Thomas Wilmer Dewing, <i>Head of a Girl</i>	14
2.1	Metalpoint tools	24
2.2	Detail of a metalpoint drawing showing <i>verdigris</i> tarnish	25
2.3	Examples of metalpoint colors	26
2.4	Susan Schwalb, <i>Harmonizations VIII</i>	29
2.5	A fresh drawing in silverpoint and one that has tarnished	29
2.6	A silverpoint drawing and a dish of liver of sulfur in a container with the lid off	30
2.7	The fresh silverpoint drawing and after 24 hours of exposure to liver of sulfur	31
2.8	Wire for metalpoint	33
2.9	Metalpoint styluses	33
2.10	Pointing the metalpoint stylus with a file	35
2.11	Polishing the point with emery paper	35
2.12	Pointing the metalpoint stylus with a sharpening stone	36
2.13	Metalpoint tip shapes	37
2.14	Unique metal tools, including sheets of silver, copper, and brass	38
2.15	Marks made by uniquely-shaped tools	38
2.16	Wire brushes and wools	39
2.17	Marks made by wool and wire brushes	39
3.1	A selection of paints and preparations	42
3.2	A selection of materials needed to make homemade ground	44
3.3	Heating rabbit-skin glue to 120° F (49° C) in a double boiler	46

3.4	Straining fluid preparation through layers of nylon	46
3.5	Thinning paint with water to make ground preparation	47
3.6	Mulling pigment	48
3.7	Preparing light-weight paper taped on all sides to a rigid board	49
3.8	Preparing heavy-weight paper with a pre-mixed ground and a wide, soft brush	51
3.9	Preparing a cradled panel	51
3.10	Sanding a finished panel	52
3.11	Paper, paperboard, and paper-like metalpoint supports	53
3.12	A cradled hardwood panel	55
3.13	Carol Prusa drawing with silverpoint on a custom-made acrylic sphere	56
3.14	A selection of metalpoint-ready commercial papers	57
4.1	Transferring a sketch to prepared paper with silverpoint using a light box	61
4.2	Hatching away from the contour to “feather” strokes into the paper tone	63
4.3	Tom Otterness, <i>Rabbit</i>	64
4.4	Tom Mazzullo, <i>Lily of the Valley</i>	65
4.5	Holding the stylus in different positions for different marks	65
4.6	A smooth, round point for tonal layering	67
4.7	Tonal drawing of a sphere on smooth and rough papers	67
4.8	Artist Michael Nichols demonstrating his tonal metalpoint technique	68
4.9	Michael Nichols, <i>Smaze</i>	68
4.10	Example of areas of different metals in one drawing: Susan Schwalb, <i>Strata #295</i>	70
4.11	Artist Linda Hutchins using silver thimbles on all fingers	70
4.12	Example of metalpoint hatching on white vs. toned ground	71
4.13	Charles Schmidt, <i>Ms. Hunter: Sibyl</i>	72
4.14	Carefully lifting metalpoint marks with a kneaded eraser	73
5.1	Test samples of various grounds and media	76
5.2	Deepening the value range of metalpoint with addition of graphite pencil	77
5.3	Robyn Ellenbogen, <i>On the Membranes of Mountains</i>	77
5.4	Silverpoint with carbon dust	78
5.5	Example of metalpoint and colored pencil	79
5.6	Chiaroscuro metalpoint with white conté crayon	79
5.7	Soft pastel with metalpoint	80
5.8	Example of watercolor over silverpoint drawing	81
5.9	Watercolor over acrylic gesso ground and Golden Silverpoint Ground	81
5.10	Victor Koulbak, <i>Lynx</i>	82
5.11	Dale O. Roberts, <i>Dissolving Still Life</i>	83
5.12	Susan Schwalb, <i>red/white/blue VII</i>	84
5.13	Silverpoint on acrylic wash and flat acrylic paint, both applied to gessoed panel	85
5.14	Materials for egg tempera and using egg tempera over a silverpoint underdrawing	86
5.15	Koo Schadler, <i>Lily & Landscape</i>	87
5.16	Andrea Sherrill Evans, <i>Union Suit #6</i>	88
5.17	Erika Winstone, <i>The Rink and Talent Show</i>	89
5.18	Metalpoint on Golden Silverpoint Drawing Ground over an inkjet print	91
5.19	Mike Lyon, <i>Jessica</i>	91
5.20	Kate Kretz, <i>Deluge II</i>	92
5.21	Carol Prusa, <i>Fearful Symmetry</i>	93

5.22	Patricia Bellan-Gillen, <i>Blind Spots/The Age of Discovery</i>	94
5.23	Gerald Hodge, <i>Sunflower</i>	95
6.1	Metalpoint drawings, matted and stored in flat file drawers	97
6.2	Talas storage box customized for a work on panel	98
6.3	T-hinged artwork attached to the backer of a hinged window mat	99
6.4	A float-mounted metalpoint	100
6.5	A float frame empty and with an artwork installed	101
6.6	A typical setup for wall photography	102
6.7	A large work on paper being imaged on a flatbed scanner	103
6.8	Two edits of the same image of a metalpoint	104
6.9	Several drawings in a folio secured for transport	105
6.10	Framed artwork wrapped in plastic, in a shipping box	106
7.1	Joseph Stella, <i>Untitled (Yellow Orchid)</i>	109
7.2	Paul Cadmus, <i>Male Nude (NM #62)</i>	110
7.3	Leo J. Dee, <i>Small Drapery Study</i>	111
7.4	Roger Anliker, <i>Pods with Patterned Paper, Pleated</i>	112
7.5	Jasper Johns, <i>Untitled</i>	113
7.6	Marjorie Williams-Smith, <i>Lines</i>	114
7.7	AJ Smith, <i>Delta Blues: Faces of the Delta Series</i>	115
7.8	Ben Shechter, <i>The Yellow Spurges</i>	115
7.9	Laura Shechter, <i>Still Life on a Red Cloth</i>	116
7.10	John Wilde, <i>Lady-Bird Series #9 (Emily Egret)</i>	116
7.11	Lori Field, <i>Freckles</i>	117
7.12	George Sorrells, <i>The Garden Time, Times and Time Again</i>	118
7.13	Lauren Amalia Redding, <i>San Soldado/St. Soldier</i>	119
7.14	Aaron Board, <i>Portrait of the Artist and His Family</i>	119
7.15	Roy Eastland, <i>Photo Booth Portrait Drawing 2</i>	120
7.16	Charles Schmidt, <i>Portrait of Larry</i>	120
7.17	Nancy Lawton, <i>Forrest Holding Oriental Lilies</i>	121
7.18	Katherine Vetne, <i>Self Portrait in a Curved Mirror</i>	121
7.19	Jeannine Cook, <i>Apoyos IV: Pine Tree Bark</i>	122
7.20	Sherry Camhy, <i>Silver Sky</i>	123
7.21	Dennis Angel, <i>Taos, New Mexico #3</i>	123
7.22	Joanne Hopper, <i>Summer Silversword</i>	124
7.23	Victor Koulbak, <i>Bat</i>	125
7.24	Kandy Vermeer Phillips, <i>Marsh Wren Nest</i>	125
7.25	Paula Gerard, <i>Vortex</i>	126
7.26	Susan Schwalb, <i>Polyphony XIII</i>	127
7.27	Sal Hunter, <i>Biofilter Series Number 19 – Specimen 19</i>	128
7.28	Shona Macdonald, <i>Ground Covering Large #1</i>	129
7.29	Fran Siegel, <i>Tracks for Overland 1.1</i>	129
7.30	Tom Mazzullo, <i>Fermat</i>	130
7.31	Cynthia Lin, <i>Itch #10</i>	131
7.32	Marietta Hoferer, <i>Feb 20, 2015</i>	132
7.33	Michael Kukla, <i>sp mx 1</i>	132
7.34	Jonathan Higgins, <i>Untitled III</i>	133
7.35	Ron Janowich, <i>Untitled</i>	134

x Figures

7.36	Lucie Beppler, <i>Untitled</i>	135
7.37	Sam Messenger, <i>Veil from Rhea</i>	136
7.38	Linda Hutchins, <i>Clapping Music Notation Study 5</i>	137
7.39	Ram Samocho, <i>Silver Sun</i>	137
7.40	Carol Prusa, <i>Thirst (insatiable)</i>	138

FOREWORD

During the course of a warm winter afternoon lunch in 1982 in West Palm Beach, Florida, I casually informed the late New York art dealer Vance Jordan that I was thinking of organizing an exhibition devoted to American artistic investigation of the medium of silverpoint. This idea was spurred on by my knowledge of outstanding work in the medium by a handful of American artists, among them Thomas Dewing, Joseph Stella, Leo Dee, and Harvey Dinnerstein. Vance responded with unbridled enthusiasm, and so the investigation began.

With the encouragement and support of Richard Madigan, Director of the Norton Gallery of Art (now the Norton Museum of Art), where I served as curator of collections, and the enthusiastic assistance of several staff members, research ensued, and typewritten letters were sent to over a hundred American museum registrars, asking them to identify both European and American silverpoint drawings in their collection in preparation for a potential exhibition on the subject. This process was especially useful and rich in identifying the names of late nineteenth- and twentieth-century American artists who had worked or were currently working in silverpoint. With this information in hand, I was on my way to putting together *The Fine Line: Drawing with Silver in America*, which opened at the Norton in the spring of 1985 and travelled to three institutions in the United States.

These are heady days for the metalpoint medium, and I am in rapture. The present volume serves as a marvelously comprehensive one-step guide to learning the history and technical ins and outs of metalpoint. The publication follows in the wake of the National Gallery of Art's 2015 exhibition *Drawing in Silver and Gold: Leonardo to Jasper Johns* and its accompanying publication (for which I contributed an essay on American and European metalpoint drawing created from the late nineteenth century to today, updating and adding to my essay for the catalog of the Norton exhibition) and Thea Burns's important 2012 study, *The Luminous Trace: Drawing and Writing in Metalpoint*. In addition to the welcome proliferation in recent years of exhibitions around the country of contemporary efforts, a special highlight has been the recent retrospective at the Arkansas Arts Center (for which I authored the catalog essay), which celebrates Susan Schwalb's career-long exploration of metalpoint in multitudinously inventive ways.

A few memories draw me back in time. The amazing encouragement and support for the Norton exhibition and publication from the great art historian Agnes Mongan, who contributed

an essay on the practice of silverpoint by the Old Masters and spread the word about both the show and catalog to her wide network of colleagues in the field of drawing. Also, the lukewarm response by her old friend, the American writer, art connoisseur, impresario, philanthropist, and cultural figure Lincoln Kirstein (whose circle included a group of artists who worked in the medium, including Pavel Tchelitchew, Paul Cadmus, and Jared French), who dissed the effort as silly and no more worthy of an exhibition than plumbago. One further flashback: on the afternoon of the opening of the Norton exhibition, the deputy director of the National Endowment for the Arts was visiting with Richard Madigan. Following the visit, Dick gave her a preview of the show, whose works elegantly and distinctively glistened in the dimly lit galleries. She came over to me while I was busily directing final details on the installation and profusely apologized for the NEA's turning down the museum's request for funding.

Since the mid-1980s, I have tried to keep aware of discoveries and breakthroughs in the metalpoint medium. It is rare to discover American artists of the past to add to the roster of its practice (though just recently I learned of Dewing Woodward's silverpoints, created around 1915 in Shady, New York, outside Woodstock). Meanwhile I was informed in 2004 by the artist Jeanine Cook that the catalog for *The Fine Line* had inspired widespread interest among contemporary artists in metalpoint drawing in America. In retrospect, I understand why – I had aimed to solicit enthusiasm for the then-even-less-known medium and the fascinating ways it had been employed. I was also making a semi-unconscious call for artists to try their hand and embrace metalpoint's unique and special qualities. I do the same today – go on, try your hand. You will be surprised and delighted.

Bruce Weber
Saugerties, New York
18 May 2018

PREFACE

Why Metalpoint Now?

In 1974 one could only find a handful of contemporary artists who had heard of metalpoint, much less used the technique. Within a few years more and more artists from around the country began to work in this medium. They were located in areas where there had been a significant teacher who specialized in metalpoint. Among those early leaders, one would have to count Paula Gerard, who taught artists during her years at the Art Institute of Chicago (1962–1975) and the Layton School of Art (1945–1962); James S. Watrous, who taught John Wilde and numerous others at the University of Wisconsin (1930–1976); Roger Anliker at Carnegie Mellon University (1948–1963) and later at Tyler School of Art (1963–1988); and Charles Schmidt, also at Tyler (1967–2008). In 1957 Watrous published *The Craft of Old-Master Drawings*, an important book with some technical information, but until today it was the only book with a chapter on metalpoint technique. Many artists were inspired to try metalpoint after seeing amazing Renaissance drawings in museums such as The Morgan Library and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

In 1985 the landmark exhibition *The Fine Line: Drawing with Silver in America*, curated by Bruce Weber, opened at the Norton Museum of Art in West Palm Beach, Florida. Drawings by 40 American artists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were gathered together, and the show toured to three other venues (Pensacola Museum of Art, Florida; Arkansas Art Center, Little Rock; and Museum of Fine Arts, Springfield, Massachusetts). The works were primarily figurative, but there were also a study for an abstract sculpture by John Storrs along with several abstract drawings by Michiko Itatani and Susan Schwalb. This exhibition (and its illuminating catalogue) seems to have been the catalyst for an expanding interest in what was once a little-known art medium. Numerous museum and university gallery shows followed along with solo and group exhibitions in commercial galleries.¹ As the internet has grown, sites like Facebook, with several metalpoint groups of over 700 members, continue to introduce artists to the medium and, as they share techniques and ideas, the circle continues to widen.

As more artists begin to draw in metalpoint they have given workshops in their studios, libraries or community centers, in universities and schools like the Art Students League, and in museums during exhibitions. In 2015 the first historical exhibition, *Drawing in Silver and Gold: Leonardo*

to Jasper Johns, was held at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, and at the British Museum, London, leading to simultaneous shows in galleries in New York City, Little Rock, and London.² More and more artists were inspired to try the technique, and today there is a full range of abstract and figurative artists exploring the medium.

Margaret Mathews-Berenson, in a recent essay, has suggested another view on why silverpoint has reemerged:

At a time when art is being redefined by new and rapidly changing digital tools and technology that often deny the man-made mark, silverpoint offers artists a connection with a potent creative tradition. The fine delicate lines inevitably reveal the artist's hand: an affirmation of human presence. . . . A drawing medium made for quiet meditation, silverpoint remains a venerable instrument of intimate communication for artists today and provides welcome distraction from the dizzying pace of our technocentric world for artists and viewers alike.³

But no matter what the reason, there is an impressive revival of metalpoint drawing in the United States and the United Kingdom as it slowly reappears around the world.

Notes

- 1 Since *The Fine Line* there have been several other major museum shows of contemporary silverpoint drawing: *Silverpoint Etcetera: Contemporary American Metalpoint Drawings*, curated by Charles Schmidt, which toured to several museums beginning in 1992; *The Luster of Silver: Contemporary Metalpoint Drawings*, curated by Holly Koons McCullough at the Telfair Museum of Art, Savannah, Georgia, in 2006; and *The Luster of Silver: Contemporary Metalpoint Drawings*, curated by the artists Koo Schadler and Jeannine Cook at the Evansville Museum of Arts, History and Science, Evansville, Indiana, in 2009. Cook and Schadler used the original Telfair show as the source for the Evansville show. In addition, there have been numerous solo and group shows of metalpoint drawings in commercial galleries, plus two recent shows in non-profit venues: *Reinventing Silverpoint: An Ancient Technique for the 21st Century* at the Kentler International Drawing Space, Brooklyn, New York, in 2009, curated by Margaret Mathews-Berenson and Susan Schwalb; and *Luminous Line: Contemporary Drawing in Metalpoint*, curated by Margaret Mathews-Berenson at Scripps College, Claremont, California, in 2010. In 2013, Sherry Camhy curated a show at the National Arts Club, New York, entitled *The Silverpoint Exhibition*. In 2018, *Silver Lining: Contemporary Works in Silverpoint*, co-curated by Kristen Miller Zohn and Hannah Israel, was shown at the Lauren Rogers Museum of Art, Lauren, Mississippi, and the Illges Gallery at Columbus State University, Columbus, Georgia.
- 2 *Metalpoint Now* at Garvey|Simon Gallery, New York; *Drawing with Metalpoint* at Patrick Heide Contemporary Art, London; *National Silverpoint Invitational 2015: Drawing in Silverpoint*, coordinated by artists AJ Smith and Marjorie Williams-Smith at Hearne Fine Art, Little Rock, Arkansas and Greg Thompson Fine Art, North Little Rock, Arkansas; *Tamished*, a two-person show with Susan Schwalb and Erica Winstone at Arthouse 1, London; and *Lustrous Lines: Contemporary Metalpoint Drawing* at the Morris Graves Museum of Art, Eureka, California.
- 3 Mathews-Berenson, Margaret. *Reinventing Silverpoint: An Ancient Technique for the 21st Century* (Brooklyn, NY: Kentler International Drawing Space, 2009).

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Susan Schwalb and Tom Mazzullo

July 2018

CONTRIBUTORS

Thea Burns received a BA in Fine Arts from McGill University, an MAC in Art Conservation from Queen's University, Kingston, ON, a certificate in Paper Conservation from the Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, and a PhD, from the Courtauld Institute, University of London. She taught paper conservation at Queen's University (1987–2001) and was Senior Paper Conservator of Collections, Weissman Preservation Center, Harvard University Library (2002–2008). She is the author of *The Invention of Pastel Painting* (2007), *The Luminous Trace: Drawing and Writing in Metalpoint* (2012), *L'Art du Pastel* (2014), with Philippe Saunier, and *Compositiones Variæ: A Late 8th-Century Craftsman's Technical Treatise Reconsidered* (2017).

Carol Prusa, born and raised on the south side of Chicago, received her BS from the University of Illinois and her MFA in painting from Drake University. Known for her contemporary and large-scale use of silverpoint combined with fiber optics, she has been awarded fellowships from the South Florida Cultural Consortium, the State of Florida and the Howard Foundation. Her work is in the collections of the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, and the Telfair Museum of Art, among others. Gallery representation includes Brintz–Palm Beach, Jenkins–Johnson–NYC/San Francisco, Bluerider–Taipei, Kostuik–Vancouver, and Le Salon Vert–Geneva.