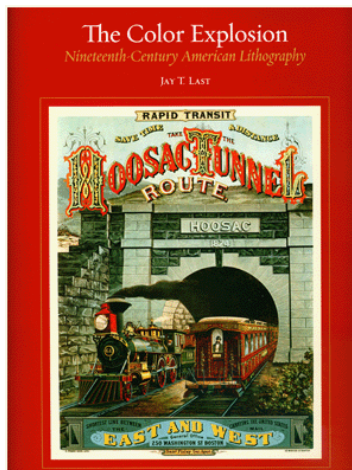


The Color Explosion: Nineteenth-Century American Lithography / Jay T. Last. — Santa Ana, Calif.: Hillcrest Press, 2005. —316 p.: ill. —ISBN 0-914589-11-3: \$65.00.



The Color Explosion describes and illustrates the histories of all documented nineteenth-century American color lithographic firms. This volume nicely complements such seminal shelf-mates as Harry Peters's *America on Stone: The Other Printmakers to the American People* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Doran, 1931), Peter Marzio's *The Democratic Art: Pictures for a 19th-Century America: Chromolithography, 1840-1900* (Boston, MA: D. R. Godine; Fort Worth, TX: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1979), and the city view studies executed by John W. Repts.

Lithography's nineteenth-century development and maturation in America ushered in an era of unprecedented access to color images. Jay Last, co-author with Gordan McClelland of *The California Style: California Watercolor Artists, 1925-1955* (Beverly Hills, CA: Hillcrest Press, 1985) traces the arc of commercial lithographic history,

from the technique's invention in the 1790s in Germany by Alois Senefelder to its American decline in the early 1900s, as photographic halftone printing technologies developed. Of particular concern to art librarians may be Last's focus on the printing companies and the printing process instead of the aesthetic considerations of the lithographs themselves. The first documented American lithograph was pulled in 1819 and the first major "true color lithography" (building an image by printing colors sequentially using separate stones) began about 1840.

Two-thirds of the volume consists of "family-tree" histories, sample illustrations, and geographic locations of the companies. Chapter three introduces, in varying degrees of detail, sixty-five major firms. Chapter four is a union list of some 900 firms active during this era; entries in this section may have a short biographical paragraph or simply a range of dates, a location, and a typical product (e.g., cigar box labels). Other brief chapters address subject material, histories by city, and lithographic technology.

The book has two shortcomings, one of content and one of quality. Last fails to compile and include a geographical index of all firms, which would be most helpful to researchers. After limited use, this reviewer found that the volume's text block began to fall away from the spine and the spine board was already loose within the fabric.

In total, *The Color Explosion* is an intelligently focused and complete resource. Its excellent full-color illustrations, helpfully captioned and accorded plenty of space, average more than one per page. It features a rich bibliography with entries that are often cross-referenced to the major firms discussed therein. It includes an excellent index of artists and printers, even those who are mentioned in passing in the text. This title is highly recommended for libraries with strong collections in lithography and printing history, advertising history, nineteenth-century American history, American urban history, and art reference.

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