



Patricia Acero, *Rodeo I*,
2009, sugar lift aquatint,
18 x 24 inches (45.7 x 61 cm).
Courtesy of the artist.

4

Intaglio Printmaking Background and Basics

The term *intaglio* comes from the Italian word *intagliare*, meaning “to carve” or “to cut into.” Intaglio is the opposite of relief, in that the incisions on a metal plate are what are inked and printed; in relief, only the top surface is inked. After lines, tones, and textures have been cut or etched and filled with ink, the surface of the plate is wiped clean, leaving ink only in the incisions and indentations. Dampened paper is pressed against the plate with enough pressure to force the paper into the grooves to pick up the ink.

Intaglio processes can be divided into two categories: the non-acid techniques and the acid techniques. In the non-acid methods, tools are used to directly engrave, cut, or scratch the metal plate. Non-acid methods include the following:

- › **Drypoint.** A line is scratched in the metal with a sharp tool, displacing the metal and raising a burr. When the plate is inked and wiped, the incised groove holds the ink, producing a rough line with soft edges, unlike the crisp line of an engraving or etching. The burr is fragile and flattens after a few impressions.
- › **Engraving.** Sharp and smooth lines are cut in the metal with an engraving tool called a burin. Tonality is achieved by engraving parallel lines close together (hatching) or through intersecting lines (cross-hatching). The lines of an engraving are clean and rigid, vary in thickness and length, and are noticeably tapered at the ends.