

Materials in Practice

Printmaking – overview

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video series here



Printmaking is a transformative medium for students, allowing them to translate drawings into prints. It involves methodical processes that open new creative avenues.



Relief printing is a printmaking technique where a design is carved into a block, typically made of wood or **linoleum**, and the ink is rolled on the raised surface creating a positive image with carved areas remaining white. In relief printing, images are traditionally transferred onto paper or fabric. It is one of the oldest printing methods, known for its bold, textured results.



Intaglio printing is where a design is incised or etched into a surface, such as metal, and ink is applied to the recessed areas. Ink settles into incised or scratched grooves and the ink on the remaining surface is wiped away. The inked plate is then pressed onto dampened paper, creating prints with fine detail and rich texture.



Monotypes are unique, one-of-a-kind prints created by painting or drawing on a smooth surface, then transferring the image to paper or fabric. Unlike other printmaking techniques, each monotype is different as it cannot be reproduced.

Materials in Practice

Printmaking – relief printing (lino block)

Materials and equipment

- Table protection such as newspaper
- Two separate workspaces, one for inking and a clean area for printing
- Printmaking paper such as litho, cartridge, rice, multimedia paper
- Water or oil-based ink
- **Palette knife** or spatula
- Retarder to slow drying process for water-based ink.
- Smooth, flat surface for rolling out ink such as perspex, bench top or metal tray
- **Brayer** or roller
- **Printing press**, baren or clean roller
- Linoleum plate
- **Gouges**
- Printing press
- Masking tape
- Cutting board

Top tips

- Remember all lino block images will print backwards and any text needs to be written in reverse.
- Clean the plate after all printing is complete to prevent dried ink creating a textured surface and affecting future prints.
- Oil-based ink provides the best coverage and stays on the surface without seeping into grooves.
- Water-based ink dries quickly and may require a retarder for better coverage.
- Use cartridge or litho paper for best results, as relief printing works well on thinner paper.

Safety

- Use cutting boards to prevent accidents when carving.
- Always cut away from your body and hand.
- Encourage the use of gloves to protect skin from inks, including non-toxic inks.
- Ensure sharp tools and implements are handled and stored carefully to avoid injury.
- Safety is crucial during printing — long hair should be tied back and scarves or jewellery should be removed.



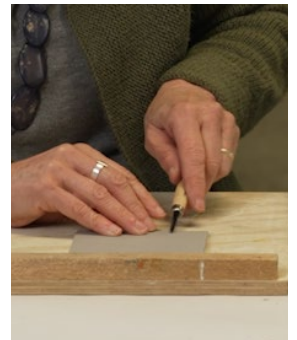
Materials in Practice

Printmaking – relief printing (lino block)

Processes

1. Transferring the image

- Use red chalk or graphite to transfer your image onto the plate.
- Secure the image with masking tape at the top to act as a hinge, preventing movement while drawing.
- Use a sharp pencil or pen to trace the main parts of your composition, defining key lines for clarity.



Using a gouge to carve lino plate

2. Carving the plate

- Carve away areas that should remain white or blank using a variety of **gouges**, lines and marks.
- Create a proof print to check the design and make necessary adjustments before final printing.



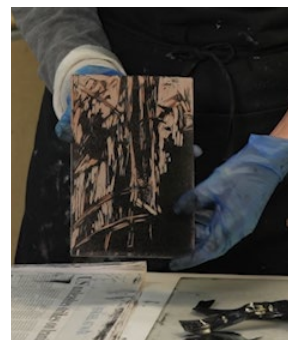
Inking up carved lino plate with roller

3. Applying ink

- Use a smooth surface (glass, board or acetate) for inking.
- Apply ink at the top of the inking area (bank of ink), rolling it out evenly by lifting and changing roller direction.
- Properly rolled ink should have a mandarin peel texture and sound tacky when rolled out.

4. Printing process

- Lino** absorbs some ink, making subsequent prints darker and the image stronger.
- Ensure ink is applied from different directions for even coverage of the raised surface.
- Prepare paper in advance to prevent ink drying before printing.
- Adjust the press for the correct height and pressure of the lino block before inking the block.



Inked plate

5. Proofing and adjustments

- A proof print helps identify areas that require more carving.
- Adjust the block and proof again before final printing.
- Use a **registration** sheet to ensure proper image placement on the paper.

6. Final printing

- Once carving and proofing are complete, create multiple prints for an edition.



Lino print

Materials in Practice

Printmaking – intaglio

Materials and equipment

- Table protection such as newspaper
- Two separate workspaces, one for inking and a clean area for printing
- Printmaking paper such as cartridge, rice, multimedia paper
- Water or oil-based ink
- **Palette knife** or spatula
- Retarder to slow drying process for water-based ink
- Printing press
- **Etching scribe** or similar needle tool
- **Drypoint** plate – metal etching or **acetate plate**, alternatively packaging materials like cardboard milk cartons can be used
- **Tarlatan** cloth for removing excess ink
- Cardboard offcuts to apply ink
- Masking tape
- Cutting board

Intaglio technique

Drypoint is a printmaking technique where a sharp tool, or **scribe**, is used to scratch into a hard surface, traditionally metal, to create images.

Safety

- 
- Use cutting boards to prevent accidents when carving.
 - Always cut away from your body and hand.
 - Encourage the use of gloves to protect skin from inks, including non-toxic inks.
 - Ensure sharp tools and implements are handled and stored carefully to avoid injury.
 - Safety is crucial during printing – long hair should be tied back and scarves or jewellery should be removed.

Materials in Practice

Printmaking – intaglio

Processes

1. Scratching the surface

- A scribe (needle or custom tool) is used to scratch into the plate.
- Various marks can be created, including **stippling** and **crosshatching** to create tone and texture.



Incising acetate plate with a scribe

2. Inking the plate

- Ink must be evenly distributed to ensure a clean print.
- Avoid contamination with particles like **burrs** from the plate.



Removing excess ink with cloth

3. Wiping the plate

- Ink the plate by spreading the ink with small cardboard offcuts.
- Excess ink is carefully wiped off, leaving ink only in the grooves.
- Materials like tarlatan or soft cloth are used for precise wiping.



Acetate plate inked up and ready to be printed

4. Paper moisture and handling

- The moisture content of the paper is crucial for print quality.
- Thicker papers require careful dampening and handling.



Revealing the print

5. Proofing the print

- Use a **registration sheet** to centre your print on the paper.
- The plate is run through a press to transfer the ink onto dampened paper.

Top tips

- Prints create mirror images and if the direction of an image or text is used, transfer design to the plate in reverse.
- Drypoint** is a versatile printmaking technique that can be used on various hard surfaces like metal, **acetate** or even repurposed packaging materials such as milk cartons.
- The drypoint print can be modified with additional techniques, such as **ghost prints** or adding relief printing over the intaglio print.
- By using different inks, the artist can create varied effects and the prints can be further developed with additional layers.
- After printing, the press pressure and plate alignment must be adjusted carefully to ensure a clean print. The resulting prints often have a distinctive texture and depth due to the way the ink settles into the etched grooves.

Materials in Practice

Printmaking – monotype

Materials and equipment

- Table protection such as newspaper
- Two separate workspaces, one for inking and a clean area for printing
- Printmaking paper such as cartridge, rice, multimedia and paper
- Water or oil-based ink
- Palette knife or spatula
- Retarder to slow drying process for water-based ink
- A flat surface
- Brushes, cloths, pointed tools for mark making
- **Brayer** or roller
- **Baren** or wooden spoon
- Masking tape

Monotype techniques

Unlike plate-based printmaking where multiple prints can be made from a single plate, a monotype produces only one unique impression. Monotypes are known for their painterly quality, as the artist manipulates the ink or paint directly on the plate, creating a spontaneous and expressive image.

Subtractive and additive mark-making

- Use cloth to remove ink, creating highlights and detail in the image using the **subtractive** technique.
- The **additive** process allows you to build up the image by adding ink or paint to the plate.
- Paper can be pressed onto the inked plate, allowing for drawing through the back.

Controlled inking process

- Excess ink can cause smudging; too little leads to weak impressions.
- A gentle, light inking technique is used for precision.

Final printing process

- A protective sheet prevents ink from smearing on the press blanket.
- Running the paper through the press or using a baren or wooden spoon on the back of the paper transfers the image.

Expressive possibilities

- Monotype printing allows for creative, experimental mark making.
- It can be combined with other media for mixed-media artworks.

Safety

- Encourage the use of gloves to protect skin from inks, despite being non-toxic.
- The press pressure needs to be adjusted carefully to avoid squashing the ink or damaging the drawing. Safety is crucial during printing — long hair, scarves or jewellery should be removed to prevent accidents with the press.



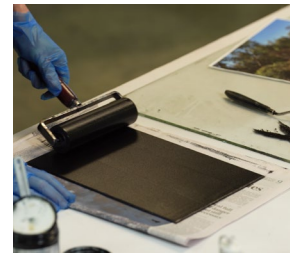
Materials in Practice

Printmaking – monotype

Processes

1. Inking the plate

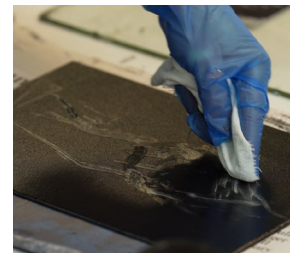
- Roll out ink using a brayer onto a hard surface (such as acetate) to create a thin layer of ink.
- If required, use retarder to prevent water-based inks from drying too quickly. This is not an issue for oil-based inks.



Rolling ink out

2. Creating the image

- Soft cloth or drawing tools are used for mark making removing areas of the ink prior to laying the paper. This is a subtractive process.
- Lay the paper gently onto the inked surface and press onto the inked plate, at this stage you can make an impression of the subtractive drawing or draw on the back of the paper using a variety of mark-making tools increasing pressure for darker tones.



Subtracting ink using a soft cloth to make marks



Carefully laying paper onto the prepared acetate

3. Printing the image

- Printing can be done using a press or by hand with a baren or wooden spoon.
- Paper selection (for example, thin rice paper) affects the final atmosphere of the print.



Peeling back the paper to reveal the print

Top tips

- Remember all images will print backwards and any text needs to be written in reverse.
- The technique allows for expressive experimentation and can be combined with other materials and processes.
- A variety of pens of differing tip sizes will add variety to marks as well as paint brush handles. Kitchen utensils and other objects can be used to create different marks.
- Excess ink can cause smudging; too little leads to weak impressions. A light inking technique is used for precision.

Vocabulary list

Printmaking

Term	Definition
Acetate plate	A transparent plastic sheet used as an alternative to metal for drypoint etching.
Additive method	The artist builds up the image by adding ink or paint to the plate.
Baren	A handheld, circular tool used to apply even pressure when printing by hand.
Burr	The rough edge created by scratching a surface, which traps ink for printing.
Brayer/roller	A hand tool used to apply ink evenly onto a printing surface.
Crosshatching	A technique using intersecting lines to create shading and depth.
Drypoint	A printmaking technique where a sharp tool (scribe) is used to scratch into a hard surface to create an image.
Etching scribe/ needle tool	A sharp tool used to scratch or etch fine lines into a surface.
Frottage	A technique that involves rubbing pencil, graphite, chalk or crayon onto a sheet of paper that has been placed on top of a textured object or surface. The raised portions of the surface are translated to the paper.
Ghost print	A faint second print made using the residual ink left after the first impression.
Gouges	Carving tools with V- or U-shaped blades used to remove material from a print block.
Intaglio printing	A technique where the design is etched into a surface, and ink settles into grooves before being pressed onto damp paper.
Linoleum/lino	Soft surfaces used for relief printing; designs are carved into them. Made from cork and linseed oil.
Monotype	A one-of-a-kind print created by painting or drawing on a smooth surface and transferring the image to paper.
Palette knife/ spatula	Used for mixing and spreading ink evenly before rolling.
Printmaking	The process of creating multiple copies of an artwork by transferring ink from a surface to paper or fabric.
Printing press	A machine used to transfer ink from an etched plate onto paper with high pressure.
Registration	A guide used to align paper and printing plates for accurate prints.
Registration sheet	A tool with marks or guides that help position the printing plate, block or paper consistently across different prints as multiple prints are layered.
Relief/block printing	A technique where a raised surface is inked and pressed onto paper.
Scribe	A sharp tool used to scratch lines into a surface, creating a burr that holds ink.
Stippling	A technique using small dots to create texture and tonal variation.
Subtractive method	The artist starts with a full plate of ink or paint and then removes areas to create the image.
Tarlatan cloth	A special cloth used to wipe ink from the surface while leaving it in the incised grooves.