

# AN INTRODUCTION TO MONOPRINTING

*Monoprinting is the process of creating individual prints using printing plates in combination with water-based or oil-based inks or paint. A monoprint is a single print, thus you have to re-ink your plate and recreate your image each time you want to pull a print. It is simple, spontaneous and a fun way to introduce yourself to printmaking and to produce your own original prints!*

## AN INTRODUCTION

Monoprinting is a direct and beginner friendly printmaking process. There are two basic ways to approach monoprinting – the additive and subtractive methods. Either of these methods can be used with water-soluble or oil-based paints and ink.

When creating an image using the additive method, you can add paint to your printing plate the same way you would to a canvas. This allows you to build up your image by continually adding colour, until you are satisfied. With the subtractive method, you first apply the colour to your plate in large blocks. From there, using different tools, you slowly take colour away, creating your image as you remove the colour from your plate. For both methods, a simple piece of plexiglass serves as a printing plate on which your image is created and printed from.

## WATER-BASED MONOPRINTING

### *Materials:*

- Plexiglass plate(s)
- Printmaking Paper
- Watercolour paint, water-soluble pencil crayons or crayons
- Brush(es)
- Gum Arabic
- Mylar or acetate
- Newsprint

- Spray bottle
- Blotter paper
- 280 grit sandpaper
- File
- Etching press, baren, spoon, rolling pin or brayer

To prepare your piece of plexiglass for printing, you first need to bevel the edges with a file before you remove the protective coating. Filed edges are less likely to tear your paper when you pull your print, and will make it safer for general handling of the plate. Next, remove the protective coating and lightly sand the surface of the plate with 280 grit sandpaper. This is to give your plate “tooth” for your materials to adhere to. After sanding, thoroughly wash and dry your plexiglass plate before continuing. This will ensure that you remove any dirt or grime before printing.

Drop a small amount of Gum Arabic onto your plate and using a clean cloth cover the plate in a thin, even coat. Let this dry completely before continuing. Gum Arabic is water-soluble and enables water-based colours to adhere to the plate and to be easily lifted off and transferred when printing onto a damp piece of printmaking paper.

After the Gum Arabic is dry you can create your image directly on your plate using an additive or subtractive method. Most often, artists will use the additive method when working with water-soluble materials, as these materials dry quite quickly and can make it difficult to remove colour without removing some of the Gum Arabic.

*Additive Method Techniques:* Your image can be created freehand or you can place an outline or drawing under the plate and use this as a guide to apply colour. You can use watercolour paint, traditional gouache, watercolour pencils or water-soluble crayons. Take some time to experiment with these different materials as they will all print a little differently from each other. It is also important to note that many colours or different brands of products will reproduce differently from each other.

You have a choice of using only one plate for printing, or as you become more confident you can use multiple plates to achieve a variety of colours and layers in your work. When printing with more than

# AN INTRODUCTION TO MONOPRINTING

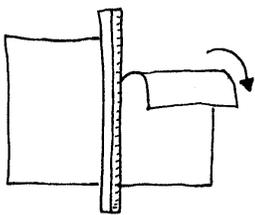
one plate, use one for washes or background colours and additional plates for the more detailed aspects of your image.

Once you have completed your image set your plates aside to dry while you prepare your paper and registration system.

*Tip: Neocolour II Crayons work well for outlines and bold, strong strokes. Watercolour paints will work best for washes, or more detailed lines when used with a small brush. Watercolour pencils are great for detail and all drawing techniques.*

## PREPARING YOUR PAPER

Printmaking paper works best for monoprinting as it has been sized to withstand soaking and the pressure of printing through a printing press. To prepare, take the time to measure out the size of paper you desire for your final print. Don't forget to include the size of the border for your image in your final calculations for your paper size. Many artists will often have a 2" to 3" border on all sides of their final image.



Tear or cut your paper to the size you want your final image to be. To tear your paper, simply measure out the size of paper you want, mark it with small pencil marks, then take a ruler and line it up in a straight

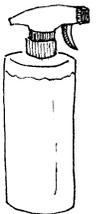
line. Pull the paper along the edge of the ruler, creating a rough, torn edge. Although subjective, the benefit of tearing your paper is that you create a rough deckled-edge along the torn side. If you prefer a cleaner edge, cutting your paper with a knife or paper cutter will work just as well. If necessary you can further trim or tear your paper after the print has dried to square it on the page or reduce its size.

When using printmaking paper, soak your paper for approximately five minutes before printing – some paper brands will require a shorter or longer soak time. The amount of time needed to let the paper soak, is dependent upon the amount of sizing in the paper. In soaking your paper, the size in the paper will be

distributed into the water leaving you with a more absorbent paper for printing. Paper which is heavily sized will not as readily accept colours, as paper without sizing, or paper which has been soaked.

After you have soaked your paper, let it drip for a bit, then lift it onto a piece of blotting paper. Lay another piece of blotting paper on top of your printing paper and use a rolling pin over it to enable the blotter paper to absorb the excess water from the printing paper. Your paper should be evenly damp, not soaking wet and not too dry.

Soaking your paper is also important when you are working with water-soluble materials. As these materials will often dry on your plate before you are able to print with them, soaking the paper re-activates their solubility and allows for the colours to be transferred from your plate onto your sheet of paper. When printing on a lighter weight paper, you can often mist your paper with a spray bottle, rather than soaking an already delicate sheet of paper.

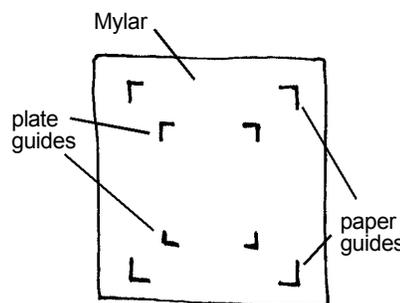


## REGISTRATION

Registration is important when you want your image to print on your paper in a particular area. Registration is essential when printing with multiple plates, as this will ensure that your plates line up to produce an accurate final monoprint.

To register your paper, place a piece of mylar or acetate on the printing bed or your work surface. Make some quick measurements to determine your border and where the center is on your paper. Place your printing plate on the mylar and then use a pencil or marker to mark an outline of the corners of the plate.

Next, place your paper on the same sheet of mylar and mark off the corners where you want your paper to be placed. When you begin printing you can place your plate and paper in the same place every time by simply lining each up with the registration marks you



# AN INTRODUCTION TO MONOPRINTING

previously made. This simple step will go a long way to ensuring that your final print looks the way you intended it to.

*Tip: Either use light pencil marks or a non-soluble marker, as you don't want your registration marks to transfer onto your final print! You can also place an additional piece of mylar or acetate over your registration page, to protect your final image.*

## PRINTING

When using a printing press, adjust the press to allow the blankets and plate to pass through tightly, but not so tightly as to "snap" when the plate passes through. Next, lay the first plate on the press bed, image side up and aligned with your registration marks.

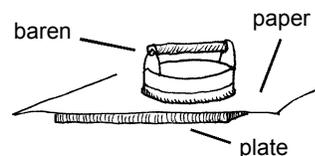
Then, place your pre-soaked printing paper on the press bed, again aligned with the registration marks. If you are not using a registration system, simply eyeball where you want your paper to be and place it onto the printing plate.

From here, place the printing blankets on the press bed over top of the plate and paper and gently and continuously turn the wheel of the press to run the plate, blanket and paper through. After you have rolled your plate through, lift the blankets and gently pull your paper off the plate.

If you are using more than one plate for a single print, remove the first plate and place the second plate in its place, making sure to align it with your registration marks. Your first print is then carefully laid back down on the second plate – using your existing paper registration marks. If your paper seems dry, simply mist it with a spray bottle, which will re-wet your paper slightly. The blankets are then laid back down over the paper and plate, and the wheel is turned in the other direction and the press bed is run back through. Continue this pattern until you have printed all of your plates. Your print is now complete!

If you do not have access to a printing press, you can also use a baren, spoon, rolling pin, brayer or the

back of your hand to pull your print. Note that these methods will not give you the same results as a



printing press however, they can still produce beautiful results. If you are printing an image with more than one layer, set up a registration system and place your plate and paper in the same order. Then, using your body weight, apply pressure to the back of the paper with any of the tools listed above to transfer the image to your piece of paper.

## OIL-BASED MONOPRINTING

### Materials:

- Plexiglass Plate(s)
- Oil paint
- Odorless Mineral Spirits
- Brayer
- Brush(es)
- Rags
- Burnt Plate Oil or Stand Oil
- Etching Press, Baren or Rolling Pin
- Printmaking Paper

The techniques used for making a monoprint with oil paints are quite similar to painting on a canvas. You can use many of the same materials including mediums, brushes and palette knives. Since oils take longer to dry than water-soluble mediums you have more "open time" with which to work on your image. You can also use some of the same mediums to slow or speed up the drying time of oils if you choose.

With regards to paper, there has been much debate on the archival stability of oil paints and paper. Julia Ayres addresses this question in her book, *Monotype: Mediums and Methods for Painterly Printmaking*, "It is important that the oil vehicle in the paints dry before the colours spread and "bloom" outside the intended brush-stroke, leaving oil stains." As with many processes the quality of the materials you use and the

# AN INTRODUCTION TO MONOPRINTING

consistency and application of the paints will have an effect on the archival qualities of your finished print.

Stand and Burnt Plate Oils are preferred over other traditional oil painting mediums, as the process to create them has changed their molecular structure and eliminated their acidity. Other mediums such as linseed oil have a slight acid condition and are not recommended for oil-based monoprinting, as this will damage your paper over time.

Many artists will also use Odorless Mineral Spirits to thin and speed the drying time of their oils. This method is often preferred as it allows your oil paints to dry without having the oil from the mediums or paints bloom on your page.

## CREATING YOUR IMAGE

When creating monoprints with oil paints, you can use a wide array of materials for a plate because your plate doesn't require the same "tooth" to hold the colour as it does with water-based materials. Some examples of materials which can be used are: plexiglass plates, glass plates, aluminum foil, and zinc or copper plates. Each of these materials will give you a different texture from which to create your image.

When using any plate which has sharp edges, always be sure to bevel the edges. Glass plates are not

recommended if you will be printing with a press, as the pressure can cause them to break.

When creating an image using the subtractive method, oil paint is applied to the surface of your plate with a brush or a brayer. If you desire a smoother background area to work from, a brayer will give you great results. You can use palette knives, rags, brushes, Colour Shapers, etching tools, chopsticks or toothpicks, just to name a few, to remove a reas of the colour and create your image.

After you have created your image, print your work in the same manner as you would a print created with water-soluble materials. However, you are not required to soak your paper as you are using a medium which is already wet and will transfer without the extra moisture needed.

Monoprints, whether oil or water-based are also great when used with collage, drawing or incorporated into final paintings. Good luck and have fun!

*Tip: After you have sanded the surface of your plexiglass plate, run water over it. The water should run off, however if the water beads, these areas will need more work.*

*Tip: Try sealing watercolour paper or matboard and using this as an inexpensive option for a plate.*



**OPUS**  
Framing &  
Art Supplies

*'where artists prefer to shop'*

OPUS Vancouver  
1360 Johnston St  
604-736-7028

OPUS Kelowna  
1357 Ellis St  
250-763-3616

OPUS Langley  
5501 204 St  
604-533-0601

OPUS North Vancouver  
120 Lonsdale Ave  
604-904-0447

OPUS Victoria  
512 Herald St  
250-386-8133

OPUS National  
Mail Order Service  
1-800-663-6953

[www.opusframing.com](http://www.opusframing.com)