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Art in the Classroom

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What is printmaking?

Printmaking is basically "mark making". It is a form of art and communication dating back thousands of years. The act of transferring an impression from one surface to another is called print-making. Print-making is not just one technique but uses many different techniques or processes that have evolved over time.



A young printmaker examines her work with Caitriona Leahy of Black Church Print Studio

The earliest newspapers and books were made using this technique. The printing press is the name given to the way newspapers and books were made.

Fine art printmaking involves the creation of what is called a master plate from which multiple images are made.

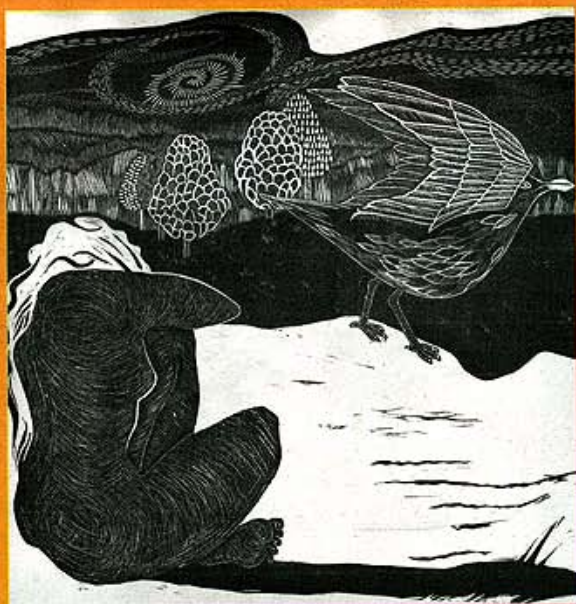
What is a master plate? The artist chooses a surface to be the plate. This could be something like linoleum, styrofoam, metal, cardboard, stone or any number of materials. The artist prepares the printing plate by cutting, etching or drawing an image onto the plate. Ink is then applied and paper is pressed onto the plate either by hand or by way of a hand-run printing press. The finished print is pulled from the plate and you can see the image transferred onto the paper.

You don't need to be great at drawing in order to create a beautiful print. All you need is an understanding of how to do it and your own imagination.

There are four major areas or principles involved in printmaking. These are called relief, intaglio, lithography and screen printing. Let's look at the processes and materials used in these techniques to learn how it influences the look of the final print...



Look how different The Irish Times looked 150 years ago!



Caroline Byrne, *Who knows what the day will bring*, 2005, Linocut, Edition of 10, 33 x 38cm



Relief

Relief is the oldest form of printmaking. The earliest relief printmaking on paper goes back to the woodcuts of China in the eighth Century. Can you work out how long ago that is? Woodcuts appeared in Europe much later, in the 15th Century.

The basic idea of relief printing is to create an image on paper from the raised surface of the block. The artist draws onto a surface, the block, which is also known as the matrix, then cuts away the areas that are not to form part of the image. The cut away areas are the known as the negative parts of the image, or the spaces around what we eventually see as the image. The ink only reaches the areas the artist does not cut away. Ink is put on the block and a piece of paper laid over it. Then the artist rubs the paper using their hand or a hard, smooth object or runs it through a printing press. The image produced on the paper mirrors that on the block.

Woodcuts and linocut are the most common examples of relief prints.

Intaglio

Intaglio is the precise opposite of relief printmaking. This time the artist carves the image onto the block and then rubs ink into these carved lines, making sure that the untouched areas are cleaned of ink. In this intaglio process the paper is soaked in water beforehand. When it is laid over the matrix and squashed through the printing press, the soft paper is pushed into the grooves of the inked lines. This transfers the image onto the paper.

Many intaglio processes involve creating the grooves with acids that eat into a metal plate. Variations of the Intaglio technique include **Engraving, Etching, Aquatint, Mezzotint** and **Aquatint**.

Arty Fact Albrecht Dürer was a very famous German printmaker and painter who was especially famed for his woodcuts which is a type of relief printing. He was from the city of Nuremberg. Try and find out about some of Dürer's famous works. How long do you think it took him to create one of his etchings?



Elaine Leader, *Untitled III*, Etching, 17.5 x 19 cm



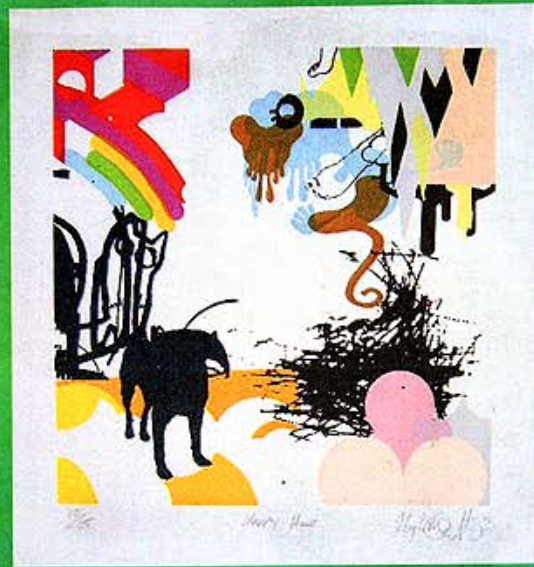
Lithography

Lithography was invented by a man called Aloysius Senefelder (1771 – 1834), in Bavaria, which is in Germany.

The idea of lithography is quite complicated and based on the fact that oil and water do not mix. Limestone is the material used in this process to. The highly polished nature of the surface is receptive to the oil that is spread over it. Senefelder discovered that by chemically treating the surface of limestone, and drawing onto it with a grease crayon, only the areas touched by the grease crayon would take the printing ink. By drawing onto the treated stone, inking it, covering it with a damp paper and running it through a printing press, the image is transferred exactly onto the paper.



Leila Pedersen, *D + Pony*, 2008,
Lithograph, of 20, 30.5 x 52 cm



Hugh Mc Carthy, *Happy Hour*,
50cm x 70cm Screenprint on paper 2006



Screen Printing

Screen prints are based on the concept of stencil. Stencil technique uses a thin sheet of impenetrable, durable material with a design cut into it. This is placed over a receiving surface such as paper or canvas. The paint or dye applied over the surface of the stencil only reaches the receiving surface where the design has been cut away. The techniques of stencil developed into screen-printing in the UK in the 1920s. It became popular in the 1960s, when Pop Art had its debut.

Screen printing is used in many day to day objects, such as posters, T. shirts, printed fabrics and wallpaper design. The most famous use of this technique can be seen in the works of a pop artist called Andy Warhol. Do you know any of his famous works?

Arty Fact Andy Warhol liked to use lots of different unusual objects in his artwork including cans of soup and fizzy drinks. Why not make an Andy Warhol style drawing of your favourite food?



Classroom Activity Object Prints - This involves applying ink to or inking up, as it is called, objects that you have found. You place paper on top to take a print. You can ink and print many things if they are flat enough and resistant to ink like driftwood, lace, a computer circuit board, crushed tin or rubber gloves. You can experiment with different objects.

Group your objects together. At this time of year you will find plenty of leaves on the ground. They work particularly well for printing because of their raised veins. These are known as organic objects.

Man made objects can also make quirky and fun images. Try bubble wrap, coins, tin foil, plastic, parts of clocks and machinery. Soft materials like cloth, lace, string, wool create interesting results.



To begin arrange students in groups of four. You should have:

- ◆ A Preparation area for preparing the objects making sure they have a flat enough surface to receive the roller.
- ◆ An Inking area which is ideally a table covered with newspaper and some acetate or plastic sheeting to contain the ink. All objects will be rolled up here.
- ◆ A Printing area, a clean, dry table where the paper is placed and printed on with the inked objects facing up.
- ◆ A Drying area where a line can be strung up and the prints hung with pegs for drying.

How to proceed:

- ◆ Decide on the theme for your print e.g. Organic, manmade, recycled, textured.
- ◆ Develop your composition by gathering objects that reflect the chosen theme.
- ◆ Spread the ink in a line at the bottom of your acetate using a piece of stiff card and roll the ink away from you using up and down strokes.
- ◆ Place the objects in the inking up area and apply ink running the roller over it several times in different directions – make sure all edges and corners are covered.
- ◆ Take the inked objects to the printing table and place with the inked side facing up. Place a sheet of paper over the objects and rub with a wooden spoon or with a flat hand.
- ◆ Pull the paper back, while holding down one edge, to check the transfer of ink. If it's too light apply more pressure.
- ◆ Tissue paper is more pliable and gives the best results. As the tissue paper is thin a second sheet of cartridge or newsprint may be placed on top of the tissue paper to prevent tearing.
- ◆ Print the objects individually or in an arrangement on a large sheet of paper.
- ◆ The objects can be re-inked and printed again the same way or differently.
- ◆ Impressions made on small papers can be cut out and pasted down on larger sheets to create a mural for hanging on your classroom wall.
- ◆ Take the print to the drying area and hang it up until completely dry.

This information on printing was provided by Janine Davison of the Black Church Print Studio, an artistic collective, supporting and promoting the development of contemporary artistic practice through the medium of printmaking. Black Church Print Studio has a number of educational programmes. If you would like to find out more please contact:

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