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MONOTYPE

The Painterly Print

Why paint on a printing element and then print it to paper? Monotype has its own unique form of expression and certain types of marks and imagery can only be achieved using the monotype process. Monotype is the most painterly method among the printmaking techniques and is often called "the painterly print" or the "printer's painting."



Koichi Yamamoto, *Beni*, monotype

Monotype versus Monoprint

Although the terms Monotype and Monoprint are used interchangeably, there is a big difference between one and the other. A monoprint is usually a variation on a series, as there is a pattern or image on the painting surface that can be printed multiple times over, in a variety of ways. Monotypes are considered one-of-a-kind and do not employ repeatable elements. For this article, we will talk about materials and techniques used in monotype printing.

History

Throughout history, painters have often used monotypes in their preparatory sketches. Like painting, monotype is very direct and can be spontaneous or deliberate. The immediacy and range of mark values work well with the luminosity that printmaking inks and procedures offer. Some of the earlier known monotypes were made by the Italian artist Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione who used a subtractive technique to create effects similar to chiaroscuro. Rembrandt used monotype to record an idea as soon as it struck him. Mary Cassatt, Edgar Degas and Henri Matisse are all great examples of artists expanding and experimenting with monotype techniques.

Rolling out Color for Printing

Gamblin relief inks are designed to suit the specific requirements needed for monotype printing. Their unique softer body and high pigment load allow them to be rolled out in thinner applications with greater color intensity, particularly as you print multiple layers of color.

Paul Gauguin, *Two Marquesans*, monotype

You can also mix Gamblin Relief ink with Gamblin Artist Grade Oils to create an even wider range of color. When mixing oil paint with relief ink, it may be necessary to add plate oil and/or tack reducer as the oil paint and ink have different viscosities. If you decide to use paint directly from the tube, we suggest that you mix the oil paint with Gamblin Burnt Plate Oil #000, to lower the viscosity and improve the printing capabilities of the paint. Burnt plate oils are raw linseed oils that have been heated to change their molecular structure so that the oil does not affect the permanence of the paper fibers. Do not use Linseed Oil to thin oil paint, as the Linseed Oil will adversely affect the paper fibers over time.

Viscosity

The viscosity of an ink refers to its flow characteristics. If an ink has a high viscosity, it will be too stiff to transfer from the printing element to the paper. An ink with extremely low viscosity will be too thin and may be difficult to control because it flows too easily. High viscosity inks can be "thinned" by adding either Gamblin's Gamsol or Burnt Plate Oil #000. Low viscosity inks can "thickened" by adding magnesium carbonate.

Printing the Image

If you do not have access to a press, printing by hand can have its advantages. Lay a sheet of paper on top of the printing element. Rub a barren, or similar tool such as a flat wooden spoon, on the back of the paper. This style of printing allows for thicker ink applications and selective printing pressure.

Paper

There are two types of printmaking papers usually used in monotype: sized and unsized. Sizing is a material, usually a starch, that is added to paper to regulate how that paper absorbs moisture.

Sized printmaking papers usually contain more sizing inside and less on the surface. In order for the paper to print properly, the paper fibers will need to be softened. This is usually done by soaking the paper in water and then blotting, prior to printing. Examples of printmaking papers that contain sizing are Rives BFK, Arches Cover, Fabriano Tienpolo, Magnani Pescia, Somerset, Stonehenge. An example of a printmaking paper that does not contain sizing is Arches 88. This paper must be printed when dry and should never get

Tack

Ink tack is the "stickiness of an ink", similar to what you would feel if you try to pull your fingers apart with ink between them.

If you notice that the ink is ripping the paper during printing or perhaps not transferring very well from the printing element to the paper, then the ink is too tacky. Add Gamblin Tack Reducer to make the ink less sticky and better able to transfer to paper.

wet.

Creating the Image

Tools

Mark making in monotype is vast and exciting. Any tool that can be used to apply or manipulate ink can produce an interesting effect. The tools used will reflect the two basic approaches to drawing for monotype: Additive or Reductive.

Applying materials directly to the printing element is called an **Additive Approach**. Ink can be applied in a painterly fashion with a myriad of tools. This is known as working into a "light field", because your direct mark making creates the positive image. When working in the Additive Method, stiff brushes such as hog-bristle and brayers can all be used to apply ink or paint to the printing surface.



Nathan Oliveira, *Tauromaquia 21 III*



Brayer marks on top of circular stencils.



R: Camilla Taylor works back into a ghost print. L: image is drawn with trace method.



The **Reductive Approach** is essentially the opposite. Known as working from a "dark field", ink is first applied to the printing element and then removed to create the image. A soft rubber brayer is best for even distributions of ink. Shop rags, Qtips, stiff bristled brushes, and silicone wedges are all great for moving ink.



Nathan Oliveira, *Improvisation III*



Ink is removed to create a negative image.



R: Qtips are great for removing ink. L: Camilla prints the negative image.



We hope the information in this Studio Note is inspiring to you in your work. The possibilities and mark making are endless! Somewhere as unexpected as the kitchen cabinet can yield compelling textures and patterns.

The best part of our work is seeing the potential of our materials realized in your hands. We look forward to hearing from you and would be honored to work with you.

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