

Printmaking Survival Guide

Intaglio – Drypoint



Shaun McCallum, Invasive Species 93, Etching, Drypoint, and Aquatint, 2015

Shaun McCallum

Contents

Process Overview

Tools and Materials

Plate Prep

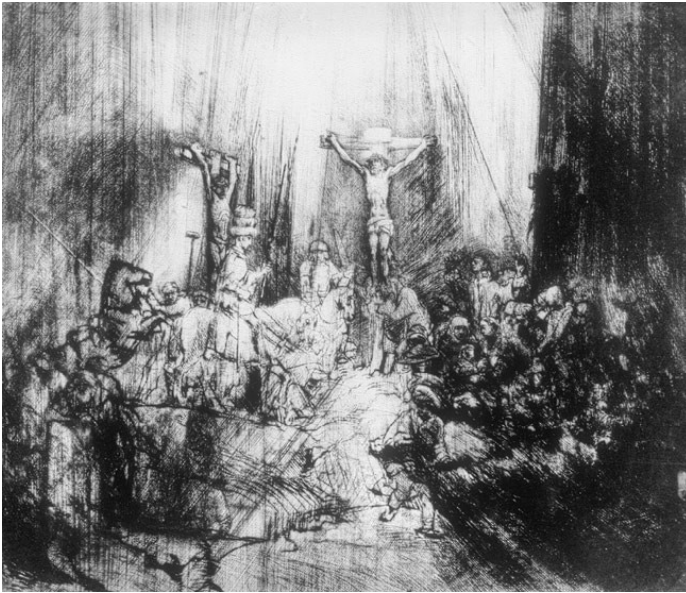
Mark Making

Paper

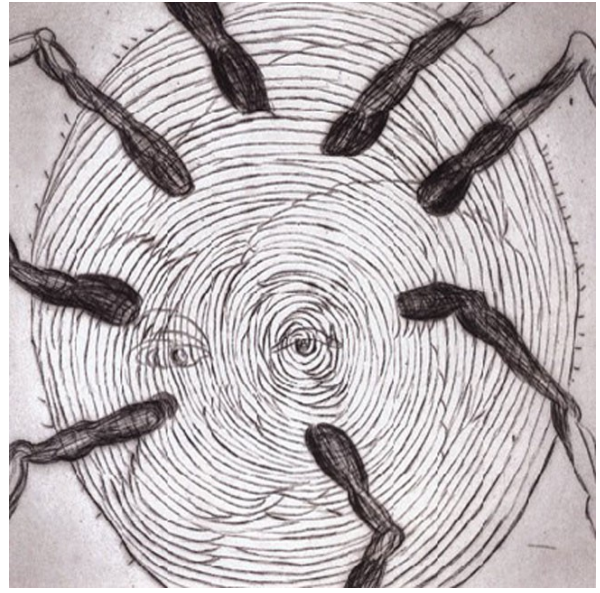
Printing



Process Overview



Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn, *The Three Crosses (State 5)*, drypoint, 1660



Louise Bourgeois, *Ode a Ma Mere (plate 6)*, drypoint, 1995

The term *intaglio* simply means “to engrave” or “cut into”, and it refers to the process by which an image is created by scraping, biting (with acid), or gouging lines into the surface of a metal plate. The final print is then produced by filling the recessed marks and lines in with ink in order to transfer the image to a dampened piece of paper. The final piece will print a reverse image from the original design on the plate, and the ink will stick to the surface of the sheet of paper .

Drypoint refers to a sub section of *intaglio* in which a hard needle is used to create scratches across the surface of the plate. This scratching action creates a burr (bits of metal that fold back from the edge of the scratch). It is these pieces of metal that hold the ink, and allow the image to be printed. *Drypoint* images are easily recognized by the softer more furry line produced in comparison to the clear controlled engraved line. Rembrandt, Max Beckmann, and Louise Bourgeois all produced works using drypoint that are exceptional examples of the capabilities of the medium.

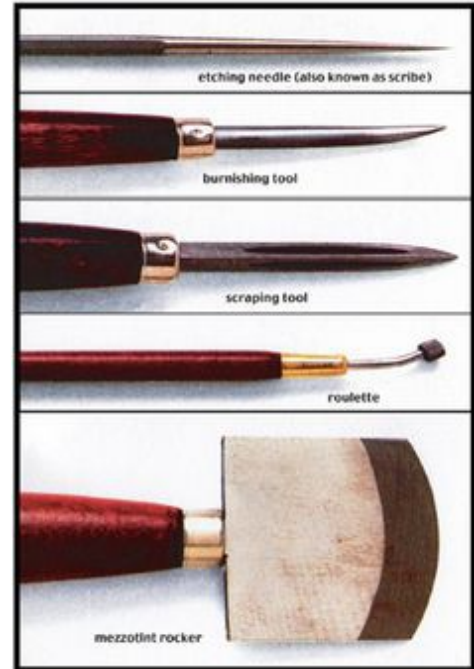
Tools and Materials



Copper Plate



Rives BFK Paper



Tarlatan



Akua Intaglio Ink

The basic tools and materials needed for *drypoint* printmaking are depicted above. The *copper plate* is your drawing surface, and the mark making tools are the means by which the drawing is transferred to the surface. The most frequently used tool is the *etching needle* or *scribe*, and it acts as your pen or pencil. The lines you create by scratching into your plate with the scribe will print as a shade of black on your final print depending on how hard the tool is pressed into the surface. The *burnishing tool* is the eraser, and it is used in combination with a little oil to take focused areas of the plate to a bright white polish. The *scraping tool* is used to scrape away deep marks from black to a muted gray. The *mezzotint rocker* is a plate preparation tool that can be used to turn an image completely black, and then the scraper and burnisher can be used to pull an image out of the black surface. The paper we will be using is *Rives BFK* a fairly heavy weight, textured, versatile printmaking paper. The *tarlatan* is used to wipe the ink away from the surface of the plate leaving only your scratched image behind. It is essentially just starchy cheese cloth. Lastly, but certainly not least is the *ink*. We'll be using *Akua Mars Black*, a water based non-toxic ink, to produce our prints.

Plate Prep

1. So you've received your shiny new plate. Now what? The first step is to remove the plastic cover from the polished side of your plate. The polished side is easy to identify. It should be bright and scratch free.



2. The next step is to transfer your drawing or photograph to the plate. Remember your image will print in reverse! Use masking tape to attach a piece of graphite paper (black side down) onto your plate. Then trace your image with a ball point pen.



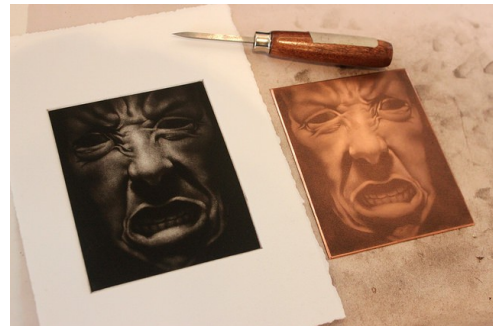
3. Define your graphite transfer with a fine point sharpie on your plate, so that you can clearly see your image. Keep in mind that these lines will be drastically thinner when you scratch them into the surface with your scribe.



4. Use your scribe to scratch in the lines of your drawing. Keep in mind that the deeper you scratch the darker your black lines will be. Also, remember to utilize cross hatched lines and contours to create the illusion of tone and depth.



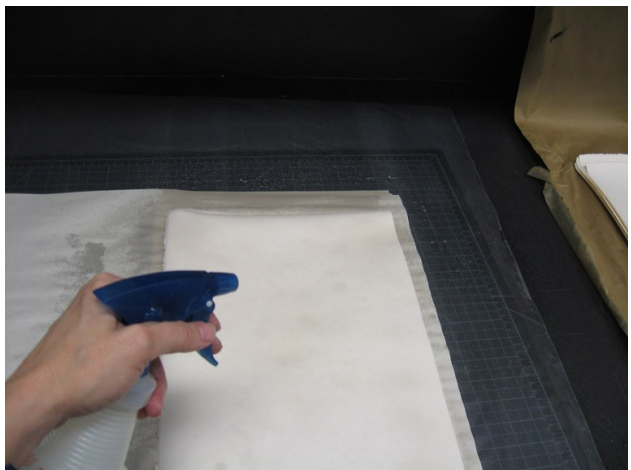
Mark Making



Marks can be made on the plate with anything that can scratch the metal. We'll be using a carbide tipped scribe as our primary means for making lines. Different sizes and materials are used in the construction of scribes and etching needles, and they will make slightly different marks as a result. We can also apply tones with sandpaper or a roulette to create subtle shades of gray. The sandpaper creates light scratch patterns, while the roulette creates dots. The scraper and burnisher can also be used in combination to erase lines and tones to varying degrees. Lastly we'll have a mezzotint tool available that can be used to completely black out the surface of a plate.

Paper

1. Paper should first be measured and lightly marked on the back side with your desired dimensions. A good rule of thumb is to have at least a 1" border on all sides and a 2" border on the bottom edge.
2. Take a metal ruler (the heavier the better) and while bracing it with one hand pull the paper to tear a rough edge in a straight consistent line.
3. Lightly mark center lines on the top and bottom of the back side of your paper with a pencil.
4. Use the green spray bottle to spritz your paper with water on the plastic paper prep surface.
5. Put your stacked sheets inside a plastic bag and leave them under a textbook for a minimum of 30 minutes.
6. This paper can be used for a maximum of three days before becoming moldy.



Printing



1. Before we can print our plate we need to ensure that we've damp packed our paper. This is accomplished by spritzing several sheets of paper with water, and stacking them inside a plastic bag under weight (text books), and allowing them to acclimate for 30 minutes.
2. We also need to ensure that the edges of our plate have been beveled. This is done by clamping our plate (image side up) to a table and using a file to take our edges from a 90 degree angle to a 45 degree angle. Lastly we'll use the file to round the corners to ensure our plates don't cut through the paper or our felts.
3. We then heat up the plate on our class heating element for about 3 minutes, and take it to the inking station where we roll on ink using a brayer. If you don't want inky hands now is a good time to put on gloves.
4. Next we roll the tarlatan into a tight ball and apply light pressure while making small quick circles on the surface of the plate. Begin with a very inky tarlatan, and move to a cleaner one after you are able to see your image clearly. Continue circular wiping until the copper is completely exposed and looks nearly as bright as it did when it was freshly polished.
5. Now place your plate image side up on the press bed, and put your damp paper on top of the plate. The pressure should be hand tight, and the wheel should be fairly difficult to spin, but you should not have to put your body weight into it. If this is the case simply loosen or tighten the pressure as needed.
6. Spin the wheel ensuring that you have a printing partner holding the felts. Then peel off your paper, clean the press bed, and store your print under a textbook with a sheet of newsprint on either side.