

Burroughs on Burlap

Printmaking on burlap results in a beautiful rusticity

Margaret Burroughs (1917-2010) was a poet, visual artist, educator, and arts organizer. She was born in St. Rose, Louisiana, near New Orleans. At the age of five, Margaret was brought by her parents to Chicago, where she grew up, was educated, and where her long career unfolded. Burroughs was known nationally as a visual artist and as an arts organizer. Her extensive exhibition record as a painter and printmaker began in 1949 and has included exhibitions throughout the United States and abroad. It was her founding in 1961 of the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago that placed her among the outstanding institution-builders of her generation.

Burroughs was an avid storyteller and incorporated this talent into her artistic portrayals. She devoted her life's work to African American history and culture but also saw her art as a catalyst for bringing people together and improving life for all humanity. She said her inspiration could come from anything, at any time, without notice. However, most of her work deals with social commentary, oppression, and race-related themes. Her energy is best felt in the vitality of her many prints, including lithographs, woodcuts, and linocuts. The black-and-white format helps to further emphasize her strong subject matter.

GRADES 3-12 Note: instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Study the prints of Margaret Burroughs.
2. Cut burlap into 10" x 14" pieces (nine per yard). Note: laundering the burlap helps to tighten the weave, but is not necessary and will create a large amount of fiber residue.
3. Cut Soft-Kut pieces into quarters (6" x 9" pieces).



Materials

Natural Burlap, 10-oz, 46" wide x 1-yd (63202-1436); share three yards among class

Blick[®] Water-Soluble Block Printing Ink, 16-oz, (40305-2006); share one among class

Soft-Kut[®] Printing Blocks, 12" x 18" (40401-1006); share one block among four students

Inovart[®] Soft Rubber Brayer, 4" (40121-1004); share four among class

Speedball[®] Linoleum Cutters, set of two handles and six cutters (40203-1029); need one handle per student (share cutters among class)

Wooden Inking Plate, Melamine/Pine (42906-1002); share four among class

Yasutomo[®] Bamboo Baren, Large (40120-1001); share four among class

Blick[®] Economy Golden Taklon Brushes, Flat, set of 6 (05151-0069); share four sets among class

Optional Materials

Crescent[®] Regular Surface Matboard, Raven Black, 20" x 32" (13007-2453)

Wooden Bead Assortment, 1-lb (60706-1006)

Darice[®] Hemp Cord Cards (62986-)

Elmer's[®] Glue-All[®], 7.63 oz (23887-1007)



Process

1. Sketch a portrait or other image lightly in pencil onto the Soft-Kut material. Focus on simple, strong lines and areas where patterning can be used.
2. Using carving tools of various widths, carve into the Soft-Kut until all areas that are not meant to receive ink are carved away.
3. Using a brayer, evenly spread Blick Water-Soluble Block Printing Ink onto an inking plate or any other smooth surface.
4. Roll the inked brayer evenly over the Soft-Kut design, moving both ways across the image.
5. Place the inked Soft-Kut block face-down on the burlap, carefully turn the burlap over, and go over the inked area with a baren or wadded up piece of paper toweling. If there happen to be areas where the ink is thin on the finished print, use a damp brush to even out and darken the ink.

Options

1. Embellish the edges of the burlap using wooden beads, or hemp cord to form a frame.
2. Place the burlap print in a black mat to display.

National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes.

- K-4** Students know the differences between materials, techniques, and processes.
- 5-8** Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.
- 9-12** Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.

Content Standard #5 — Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

- K-4** Students describe how people's experiences influence the development of specific artworks.
- 5-8** Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry.
- 9-12** Students reflect analytically on various interpretations as a means for understanding and evaluating works of visual art.



Step 1: With a pencil, sketch a portrait or other image on the Soft-Kut printing material, then carve the design.



Step 2: Roll the inked brayer over the Soft-Kut and press the printing block onto the burlap.



Step 3: If there are any thin areas in the final print, go over them with a damp brush to even out and darken the ink.