

Reverse Dry Point

Access your inner Rembrandt by just scratching the surface

A painting by Rembrandt van Rijn might seem like the embodiment of classical perfection. When it came to his printmaking, however, Rembrandt was a risk-taker and an experimenter, handling traditional materials in ways that no one had ever thought of before.

Intaglio printmaking was relatively new in the 17th century. While most artists were more interested in quickly reproducing their artwork than enhancing individual pieces, Rembrandt sometimes spent years on a single plate before he was satisfied with the way it looked. Using copper plates allowed him to reshape the soft metal by burnishing away imperfections, similar to erasing. He also combined processes and experimented with different ink applications and papers.

Dry point is a type of intaglio printmaking that Rembrandt often employed. It involves scratching a design into a surface with a sharply pointed tool, then coating it with ink. The ink can be wiped away, leaving just the scratched lines or selectively allowing them to remain on the plate, creating shaded areas. Prints are made on dampened paper using pressure that draws the ink away from the plate. Metal plates are still in use today, although many modern printmakers enscribe acetate and plexiglas surfaces.

Dry point is an easy, economical, and relatively safe way to transition from drawing to printmaking. The tools fit pencil-like in the hand, creating lines that resemble ink lines. The same techniques, including stippling, cross-hatching, and contour lines, are used to create shading and texture.

In the spirit of Rembrandt, this project offers a new, experimental way to make dry point prints, but in reverse. Rather than using black ink on white paper as artists have for centuries, modern materials allow students to use opaque white, gold or silver inks on black paper to produce a look that is both classical and contemporary at the same time.

GRADES 8-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.



Detail of print



Detail of etched plate



Materials (required)

Grafix Impress Monoprint Plates 12" x 18", pkg of 3 sheets (47182-1036); share one pkg across class

Artist Tape, 1/2" x 60 yd roll, White (24124-1012); share 3 rolls across class

Scratch-Art Knife, Straight, (14901-0010); one per student

Scratch-Art Standard Pen Holder, Pkg of 12 (22952-1012); share two sets across class

Blick Studio Artists' Colored Pencil, White (22063-1021); one per student

Blick Construction Paper, Black, pkg of 50 sheets, 9" x 12" (11409-2003); share one pkg across class

Akua Intaglio Ink, 237 ml, Opaque White (40309-1080), Metallic Gold (40309-9030), Metallic Silver (40309-9320); share two jars across class

Grafix Impress Inking Palette, 9" x 12", pkg of 25 (47181-1023); share one across class

Legion Stonehenge Paper, Black, 22" x 30", 90 lb (10423-2002); share four sheets across class

Art Alternatives Sandpaper, Fine Grit, pkg of 3 sheets, 3.75" x 9" sheets (34278-1001); share one across class

Akua Wiping Fabric, 19" x 10 yds (40222-1010); share one across class

Blick Econo Etch Model II Press, (45029-1001)

Matboard or chipboard scraps, cut into 2" x 2" pieces

Legion Cosmos Blotting Paper, 24" x 38" sheet (10422-1005); share one across class

Dritz Cheesecloth, 36" x 3-yds (01293-1001); share one across class

Optional Materials

Blick Sketch Pad Board, 15" x 16" (22945-1007)

Akua Pin Press, 20" (40329-1020)

Arnhem 1618 Printmaking Paper by Speedball, Black, 22" x 30", 90-lb (10485-2022)

Excel Blades Sanding Stick, 400 grit (34369-1040)



Ready to order materials?

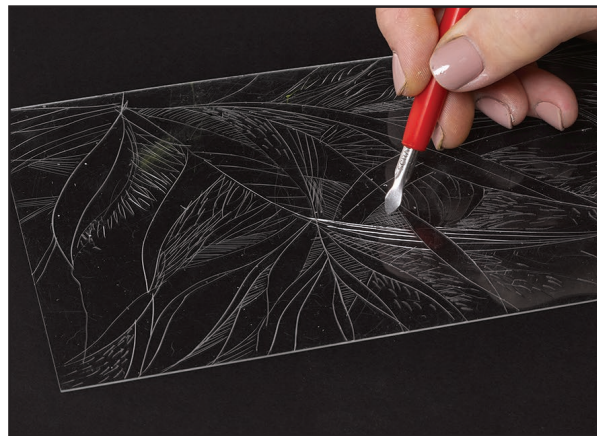
Go to www.DickBlick.com/lesson-plans/reverse-drypoint to access a product bundle for your convenience.

Preparation

1. Cut Monoprint Plates to 4" x 6" pieces using a paper trimmer or scissors. A single 12" x 18" sheet will produce 9 pieces.
2. Remove blue protective film from both sides of monoprint plates.
3. Insert Scratch Art Knife into pen holder, pushing into the holder until tip is held firmly in place.
4. Cut printmaking paper to 8" x 10" pieces. A 22" x 30" sheet will produce six pieces, plus scrap to use for test printing.
5. Cut black construction paper (for sketches) into 4" x 6" pieces.
6. Cut blotting paper into 9" x 12" pieces. A 24" x 38" sheet will produce eight pieces. Two are needed for absorbing excess moisture from printing paper. Blotting paper can be dried and used over and over again.

Process

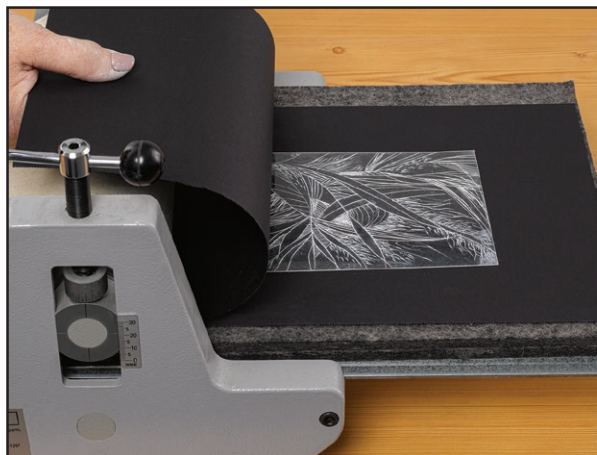
1. Prepare sketches on 4" x 6" black construction paper using a white pencil. Sketches can also be prepared on white paper using a graphite pencil with the understanding that the etching will be in reverse. The white areas where the paper is showing will need to be etched onto the plate and the dark areas created by the pencil will be left blank to reveal the black paper. Attach sketch to tabletop or drawing board with artist's tape, then tape monoprint plate over it.
2. Use the tip of the scratch knife to trace the white areas of the sketch onto the monoprint plate by scratching. Hold the tool like a pencil and apply just enough pressure to scratch the surface. Do not try to cut deeply into the soft plastic. Similar to drawing with an ink pen, shading and texture can be created by creating short, stippled scratches, cross hatched lines, or contour lines. The more texture that is created, the more ink will collect in the lines and the whiter the area will appear. View the etching by looking at it from a side angle as it progresses. The plate can also be untaped and lifted away from the drawing to view, then carefully taped back down in the same place.
3. Create broad texture, such as backgrounds, by lightly brushing small pieces of sandpaper over the area. A sanding stick tool can be used for smaller areas.
4. Place a piece of paper in a tray of water to soak for about 5 minutes prior to printing.
5. Place a dime-sized dab of white, gold, or silver ink on a sheet of inking palette paper. Etching ink may be used straight from the tube or jar: it does not need to be worked with a brayer, as one would with block-printing ink.
6. Wrap the tips of one or more fingers in layers of cheesecloth and lift ink away from the palette paper, then dab all over the etched areas of the plate, working ink into the lines. Use a small piece of matboard or chipboard as a squeegee to scrape excess ink from the plate and force ink into the scratched lines. Excess ink can be returned to the jar.
7. Wad a piece of newsprint and continue to wipe away excess ink using circular motions and medium pressure. The goal is to keep the ink in the lines, but to remove it from areas that will need to be black, such as the color of the paper. The etched artwork should reveal itself as white — it may be helpful to place a dark piece of construction paper beneath to view the inked areas more clearly.
8. Finally, take a piece of clean cheesecloth or a wiping cloth and clean up any remaining areas, using the same circular motion. Be sure to clean the edges of the plate to make sure ink has not collected there and might print as an unwanted border. The plate is now ready to print,



Step 1: Etch a plastic monoprint plate using a scratch art knife.



Step 2: Ink the plate using opaque white or metallic etching ink. Wipe away excess.



Step 3: For best results, print onto dampened printmaking paper using a press. Alternatively, hand print using a roller or baren and heavy pressure.

Ready to order materials?

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Process, continued

9. Place another sheet of newsprint onto the bed of the press and place the plate ink-side up on top of it. Mark the parameter of the plate with a pencil. Remove the plate and measure 2" from all sides of the line, making marks with a pencil to define where the printing paper will go. This will ensure that the print is centered and straight on the paper with a consistent border on all sides.
10. It's a good idea to test press calibrations by making an initial print on the scraps leftover from cutting the paper or a paper of lesser quality, so that full size pieces of paper are not wasted. Once calibrations are set, multiple prints can be made without further testing. Dry point etching requires firm pressure to draw the ink out of the lines onto the damp paper. Inking process (steps 6-8) will need to be repeated after creating test prints.
11. When ready to make final print, press the pre-soaked printmaking paper between sheets of blotting paper to remove excess water. Place the monoprint plate ink-side up on the press bed in the registration marks and position the larger sheet of paper over it. Cover with press blankets and pull through the press rollers using steady movements until the plate has passed through. Lift the paper in one corner and pull gently away from the plate
12. Repeat the inking process and pull as many prints as desired. Each one will be a little different, because they are never wiped in quite the same way - that's the beauty of dry point!

Options

- It is possible to make dry point prints without a press, using a hand roller or baren and as much pressure as possible, but the ink will not lift as well from the etched lines without the pressure of a press.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.



Print created with same plate as print on page 1; different inking and wiping process.

