

Colour Linoprinting

In this workshop we will be using 4 blocks. These can be used as 4 overprinted blocks or as a series of reductive blocks. However we do have restrictions.

- It would be impossible for me to bring every colour that each person might need or like. So I have brought a red, a blue, a yellow, black and white.
- Another reason for not having too many colours is the number of inking slabs that would be needed. I have brought 5 slabs (and even with only 5 we will have to restrict our working areas) which should be enough for the basic colours and a left over for specials.
- There isn't really an effective "portable" hanging system that we can use, especially not for 10 people. So we need to store our prints wisely.
- We do however need to create a small run and I would say a run of 10 should be enough.
 - This run should be long enough to end with 5 good prints, using 5 as the proofs.

The next problem is how the two days will proceed.

I am a great believer that in printmaking nothing should be an accident, even those elements that look like mistakes should be part of the work.

Some people merrily cut away at the block and then print in the hope that "something interesting" will happen. They hope to create a print that is unusual or has an "effect". To me printmaking is not a matter of trial and error. Errors should be anticipated and an attempt to work them out made beforehand. So even what looks like an error is not. A major part of printmaking is making an edition and a relatively consistent edition. Also the ability to repeat any effect at a later date.

So the first thing to do is look at the drawing you have made and see how this can be moved into a lino-print. It is at this stage that we determine what type of print we will make.

Determining what type of print to create

We have a total of four blocks each which means there are a number of ways to tackle colour printing.

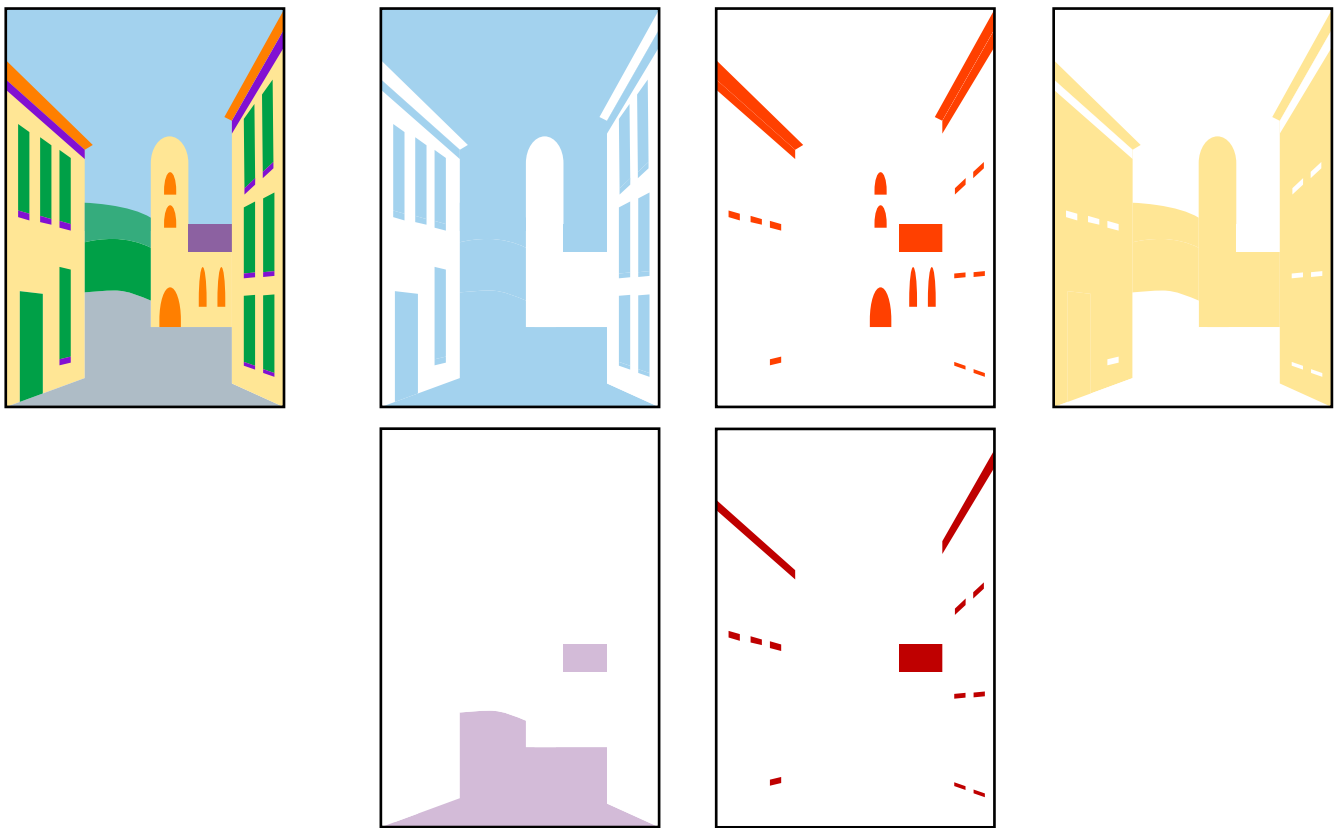
- The simplest method is the keyline based block, which is in effect a typical single colour block, but cut to its extreme as a line drawing.
 - This block defines the line artwork and is used to enclose and describe objects made by the colour blocks, think of a stained glass window.
 - This keyline block is then used to register all the other blocks.
 - This series of blocks can now overprint each other, they can be as few as 2 that print in yellow and blue, to create a 3rd colour, green.
- You can advance this simple method by inking a single block with separate colours.
 - Or you can ink up the blocks more than once and overprint the same area with a new colour.
- This method leads directly onto the "reduction" method when the block is cut each time a new colour is printed.
 - This could be done using only one block, cutting white areas, inking yellow, cutting yellow inking, ochre, cutting ochre, inking orange - and so on.
- The most complicated type is multi-block reduction, when 2 or more blocks overprint but also reduce as above. This method creates the most interesting prints, but is also the one most likely to go wrong!

Drawing the drawing

The next task to consider is how to recreate your drawing ready for print. Whatever methods described above that we use, we still need to break down the drawing's elements into its constituent parts. Dependent on the type of print method we choose there are a number of things to consider.

- Which parts will overprint others creating a third and fourth colour.
- Which parts of blocks need to overprint the first colours, but not overprint all the underlying parts so retaining underlying colours.
- Which parts, if any, need to retain the white of the paper, and how easy will it be to do that when overprinting several colours.
- Can we create the darkest (keyline) colours from overprinting.

Reduction prints are more complex and introduce more complications and as such the drawing needs to reflect this. In fact the drawing becomes a series of thumbnail sketches which attempt to describe each step in the process. Which colours print first and how the reduction will progress.



This may sound quite unnecessary and you may feel that the final print will end up being too technical and staid. I can assure you it won't. As the cutting progresses and the proofing process continues many unforeseen problems will arise and you will need to resolve them as you go.

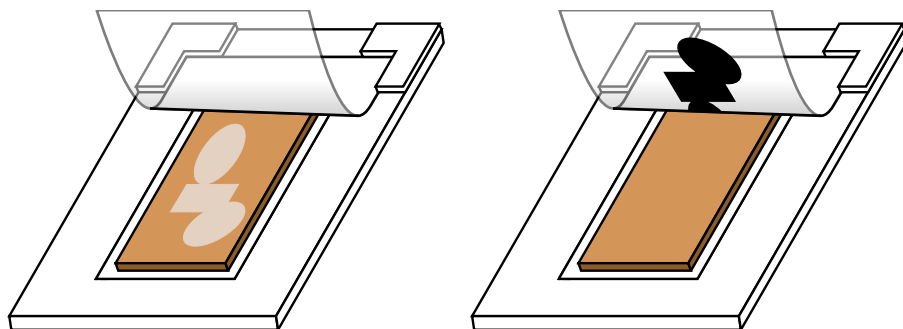
As usual the greatest length of time should be spent on drawing and preparation. If you rush into the cutting you will end up wasting both your time, your lino and ink, as you'll have to start new blocks and recut because of errors.

All the blocks are attached to mdf bases which should fit into the template block, but they haven't yet been rubbed down with wet and dry. If you are producing a reduction print then it is best to transfer the drawing after rubbing down. If you are making a multiple overprint I think it best that they are rubbed down when the registration process is completed.

Transferring your artwork to blocks

This can be a problem when dealing with the reduction process as by its very nature the line artwork is removed as the print progresses, but it is easier when producing the simpler type of multi-block print.

- As mentioned above for all types of print you need to redraw your original as an outline, like a stained glass window.
 - This will help you see which areas should be which colours and how they should overprint each other.
 - This new outline drawing should contain as much detail as you will need.
- Once created each coloured area from the drawing needs to be transferred to each colour block.
 - Bear in mind that some colours are created by overprinting and as such have no block of their own.
- The easiest way to transfer your drawing is to use carbon paper, ensuring your drawing is registered to each block.



1. Ink the block quite thickly and take a print from the keyline.
2. Place a new block into the template.
3. Use the print from 1 and “print” onto the new block.
 - When doing this create a second, parallel line, that is outside the “actual” line.
 - This will make the actual printing area of say the blue block larger than necessary.

It is always better to cut larger and then cut back from that than initially cut too much.

Notes on cutting and proofing

- Take great care when cutting any colour block. Always start timidly, cutting away small amounts. A lot of time and effort can be lost by cutting too much and revealing unnecessary parts of the paper.
- Maintaining a consistent colour over a large area is tricky, if possible try to avoid large expanses of colour.
- After inking, but before printing, always ensure the block is clean, not only do small, stray inked areas look messy they can affect the overall work and ultimately reduce the edition length.
- Transfer one colour block image to another (see my notes on this) to check that they are producing the right effect.
- When possible try to create progressive proofs, these will help show how colours relate to each other, where cuts need to be made and gaps that need attention.
 - The progressive print will also show errors in the outline registration - how squarely the blocks come together.
- When possible always overprint to create a 3rd colour rather than cutout to print a 3rd block.
 - Of course this can create problems when some colours overprint others in ways you might not like or want. A blue sky and an orange/yellow sun. This needs to be sorted in the drawing before cutting.
- Bear in mind the way colours react when overprinted.
 - Various red and blues create different purples
 - A red printed over blue, and the same blue over red, are different again.
- Overprinting colours runs can often run contrary to the norm, ie. starting with light working toward dark. It is often the case that you need to print the darker, less transparent colour first then overprinting with lighter, transparent colours.
- Printing wet on wet will create different effects and will blend colours more effectively.
- You can effectively merge two colours using a brush rather than a roller.
- Sometimes printing a lighter coloured “line artwork” (a descriptive line) over a darker base works well.
- When using a limited number of colour blocks you can create more colours by overprinting, but remember you can also ink up separate areas of the block in two colours, or printing the same block twice.
- Try to avoid “thin” lines as they tend to bleed ink. Try to overprint instead.