



Stratagraphy

*Instructions by Tracy Honn
Examples provided by Carol Parker*

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Notes on Stratography

Image Printing on the Vandercook

What is Stratography?

Stratography or pressure printing, is the name of the technique for printing images by putting a textured flexible plate underneath the printing paper and running that through the press over an inked up flat or tint block. The pressure from the various textures displaces the ink and yields a silhouetted, halo-like effect.

Images can have a soft-edged, delicate quality not usually associated with relief printing techniques. Textures can be made from torn or cut layers of paper, tape, pressure-sensitive labels, plant material and more. This is an excellent method to use in combination with other printing techniques, and is particularly good for putting down a background texture or all-over design prior to running a line block. Plates are inexpensive and easy to make, and the set-up is simple.

The Vandercook

I have only used this technique on a cylinder press. It could no doubt be adapted for platen printing or other relief presses, but it is easy as pie on a Vandercook. The Vandercook's independent inking and printing mechanisms allow fluid adjustments that I can't imagine possible on another kind of press.



Booklet by Parker

To picture the pressure print process I sometimes tell people to imagine it's like low-relief collagraphs, but it's important to remember the matrix does not get inked up: it is registered behind your printing paper. In the press bed you will have a lino block or other flat or tint block. You can hand ink the printing block, or use the inking system on the press.

Preparing a Plate

The stratigraphic matrix (also referred to here as a plate or plates) can be prepared using paper, mylar or any smooth-finished, thin material as a base.



Plate Example

I like to use mylar or other transparent sheets to make a matrix because they make it easier to judge registration. (I also don't prepare the plate all the way to its edges so that the untextured edges of the plate can later be successfully taped to the tympan--more on this below.) Textures are built up on the plate in a variety of ways. Plates can be textured with acrylic paint or any wet medium that remains flexible when dry--PVA, for example. Various kinds of tapes will give different textures and wide packing tape can be cut into shapes and applied to the plate. Pressure sensitive label materials are perfect since they have peel-off backing and are easy to cut and apply. Textured paper or cloth can be used as well. Materials that aren't self-sticking should be applied with a flexible adhesive. (Texture on the plate from glue drops will show up in the print.) Spray mount can be used to affix oddly shaped or organic materials like leaves. The printing is sensitive enough to pick up multiple layers so you can have overlapping textures for more varied results. Rub-on letters are wonderful to work with because the plate is right-reading: since the matrix runs underneath your printing paper there is no reversal of the image. Very hard and/or inflexible materials of any depth should be avoided since they may damage the inked block.



Ink application

Choosing a Printing Block

Once you have a plate prepared, you will need to put some kind of printing block in the press and ink up. Type-high linoleum blocks or magnesium flats work well. It helps to have a variety of sizes to choose from, otherwise, if the block is much larger than your print size there will be a lot of ink offset onto the tympan and it will be difficult to keep your prints clean.

Do not over pack the cylinder. Adjust the packing to accommodate the depth of the matrix plus the depth of your editioning paper. Check the roller height and adjust as you would normally.

Selecting Paper

Printing papers that work well are smooth and thin, though you can get good results with a variety of papers. The printing of these plates is sensitive and over packing, or running soft thick papers (like BFK Rives) without adjusting the packing can flatten out the printing plate so that you don't get distinctive results. You can work with standard printmaking papers, but it will take some experimenting and adjusting of the variables to get the best results. Very thin, translucent papers work beautifully; many Japanese papers work well. If you use textured paper--laid or embedded with plant materials--these textures will show up in the final image.



Preparing for printing

Printing

Register your plate underneath your paper and run it through the press. For editioning you will probably want to attach the plate directly to the cylinder once you know your exact registration. Attach it with tape; be careful to have the tape positioned outside the printing area.

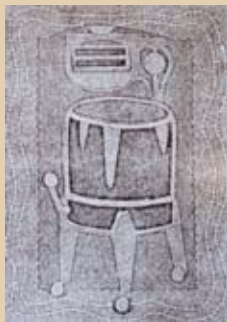


Ready for printing

Remember the Vandercook's independent inking and printing mechanisms. You can lay down ink without printing; you can print without engaging the inking rollers. For example, there are times when the ghost left on the block is worth printing. If your inking rollers are engaged they will destroy the ghost. But if you lift your inking rollers and print you will pick up what was left on the printing block. You can do this with or without the stratographic matrix running along with the paper. Being able to lift the inking rollers after applying ink, but before printing, is also useful if you want to add a second color by hand, or lay a paper stencil onto the block to stop out part of the printing area.



Printed Image



Ghost Image

Helpful Hints

When you run flats with a pressure print you get an all-over ink effect. To extend the usefulness and versatility of pressure printing combine it with other relief runs and/or have something other than a smooth block in the press. If the printing block has been cut in relief then you can get areas of pure white (or whatever color your paper is) in your pressure print (it's difficult to get pure whites otherwise). You can experiment with all kinds of line blocks, even half-tones, when running pressure prints.



Original plate

Want more?

For more information on stratography, please contact Tracy Honn for future demonstrations.



Finished Print