

Background/Context

Screenprint is a process where ink is pushed through a screen - finely woven material stretched over a frame - onto a flat surface. In order to define an image, areas of the mesh must be blocked out to create a kind of stencil. This handout covers making stencils by hand. See other handout for stencils created using photosensitive emulsion with digital or hand drawn imagery.

Equipment needed

Screen - with a mesh count appropriate for printing onto paper

Paper to print onto

Newsprint

Brown tape (which won't stick permanently to the screen mesh)

Masking tape

Scissors

Craft knife

Pencil, ruler, drawing materials

Screenprint inks

Spoon or spatula for the ink

Printing station - can just be screen clamps on a flat surface, or a vacuum bed

Clear acetate registration sheet

Squeegee

Cleaning materials for the ink - sponge, soapy water

Printing

- Using a spatula place the ink in a line above your image
- Choose a squeegee that covers the whole image
- Hold the squeegee at about a 45 degree angle and drag all the ink down the screen across the whole image. Your first print will be onto the registration sheet
- Lift the screen slightly and flood the ink back over the screen which prepares the screen for the next print
- Slide your paper under the registration sheet and mark with masking tape where the paper will go. Push the registration sheet to one side and then continue printing

Cleaning the Screen

- When you've finished printing scrape any remaining ink off the screen. Any leftover ink can be used again
- Unclamp and remove the screen
- Thoroughly clean screen with water and little washing up liquid in the washout booth and remove any tape
- Place screen aside to dry
- Make sure all squeegees and spatulas are cleaned too

To make a tape stencil

Apply brown tape round the edges of the well of the screen (the concave side). You can keep this tape here for your entire printing session - it will prevent ink getting out around the perimeter of the screen.

On the face of the screen (the flat side) block off areas of the screen with the brown tape until you're left with an open area in the centre. This will be the design which prints.

Try to leave quite a lot of room around your design for ease of printing - at least a hand's width of space between your design and the edges of the screen.

Lock your screen into your printing bed, and print as normal.

Your tape stencil should stay on the screen while you're washing away the ink, meaning the design can be printed multiple times.

You can also cut shapes from the brown tape and place these pieces onto the face of the screen to add to your design - bear in mind that if these pieces are 'free-floating' they may come away as you rinse the ink from the screen.

To make a newsprint stencil

Apply brown tape round the edges of the well of the screen (the concave side). You can keep this tape here for your entire printing session - it will prevent ink getting out around the perimeter of the screen.

Get a piece of newsprint - preferably one that is the same size as your screen. Cut out a design from the newsprint using a craft knife. This can be quite detailed, but sometimes cutting out very thin or fine shapes doesn't work as well.

Attach this to the face of your screen - a small piece of tape at the corners will suffice.

Printing with a newsprint stencil works like normal but with one difference:

The very first time you print, skip the flood stage, have the screen flat on your printing surface, and pull the ink through. The ink will stick the newsprint stencil to your screen with this first pull, and then it will stay in place for the rest of your printing session. Flood/print as normal from then on.

Once you're done with your print run, wash the ink off your screen - the newsprint stencil will come apart at this point.

The advantage of the newsprint stencil is that you can achieve more precise detail compared to a tape stencil. The disadvantage is that you can only use the stencil for one print run/one colour before it has to be discarded.

Tips

Stencil screenprint can be a way to augment printing with a photo emulsion stencil. For example, you may want a simple hand made stencil shape as a background for a more detailed photo emulsion design.

Screenprinting using handmade stencils is very quick and cheap, since it doesn't require photo emulsion or an exposure unit.

Why not try printing with transparent inks? Stencil screenprint can be a way to print several flat layers of colour quickly, and overlaying transparent colours can make for an interesting design.

Suggested courses

Leeds Print Workshop offers a one day course in Stencil Screenprint which covers these techniques.

Following on from this, the five week Make Your Mark course will explore screenprint in more depth, beginning with handmade stencils and moving onto mark making and photo emulsion stencil.