

Some notes on my textured backgrounds!

I use an etching press - it's possible (even likely) that the following techniques will be difficult to use without a press. I print with Graphic Chemical water-based inks onto a thick, slightly rough-surfaced Zerkal paper.

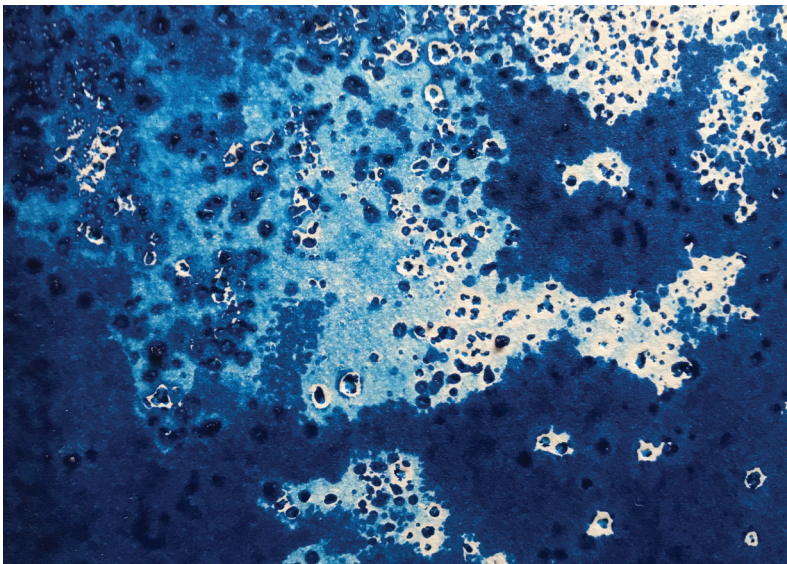
Reference print: 'Five Trees in Snow'

The 'snow' effect in this print was achieved by using an uncut lino block generously inked with a grade, darkest at top, over which I sprinkled domestic sea salt (I used salt that had quite small but noticeable crystals).

My initial hope was that the salt would combine with the ink to create interesting patterns... something like that might occur with oil-based inks, but my water-based ink only dissolved the salt a bit (that should have been predictable!)

I then pulled a print which produced large blobs of white due to the uninked top layer of the salt, and the fact that the salt pushed a larger area of the paper away from the inked block.

Next, I re-inked the surface, leaving the undissolved salt crystals in place - so this time the exposed surface of the crystals was coated with ink. The resultant print was really nice (see below) - lots of interesting textures. I was able to produce only 3 'usable' prints at small, test, size, but using a larger sheet of paper it was possible to print about 10 prints before the interesting texture was lost - so if you need more prints then you need to clean up and start over again.



Above: second test print (close to actual size)

Salt crystals will adhere to the paper. I tried to remove them after the print was dry but they were a permanent fixture - which means they will affect later print runs - but you can make use of that.

For the final print run I wanted the same effect on the trees themselves, but this totally failed - it seems you need a large flat, uncut, area of lino to get the best effect. In the end, I printed the trees without the salt but I got the effect I was after - probably because of those salt crystals that were stuck to the paper from the initial print run.

Reference print: 'Five Trees at Night'

With this print I wanted to create a starry sky. Previously, I've been experimenting with placing muslin over an inked surface in order to get the texture of the material onto the print. Then it dawned on me that I could paint onto the muslin in order to prevent the ink getting past the painted areas.

So far, I've only tried doing this with the starscape, which only required that I paint dots, rather than anything more representative (which I probably wouldn't do, as that feels like the job for lino cutting!).

Because I'm using water-based inks I needed to paint the muslin with something that wouldn't dissolve, and that would also dry quickly enough so I didn't have to wait for ages for the drying to happen. So I used nail varnish (there may be better 'paints' to use - maybe acrylics - but I haven't tried anything else yet).

Painting with nail varnish is basically a process of filling individual warp/weft 'gaps' in the fabric. Note that nail varnish is a pain to use because it dries so fast... you fill three holes and the liquid has become useless. I tried adding acetone which helped a bit, but it's not as easy a process as I was hoping... but it was ok.

In my initial test on a small area (see opposite), this technique worked really well - over a larger area the definition was not as clear - or, rather, it was different! But I was happy with the result.

You have to ink the uncut block quite generously (especially at first) and the results are not impressive for the first few prints - this is because the ink needs to work its way into the fabric in order to make it onto the paper... so don't be put off if it seems to fail at first. As with the salt crystal technique, you need to pull two or three prints before things start to work.

Reference print: 'Five Trees in mist' (detail below)

For this I used the same technique as for 'Five Trees at Night' except that the muslin was left unpainted - so it was there to provide a kind of hazy texture to the print.



Test - nail varnish blocking on muslin

Other related techniques I've been trying:

Cutting muslin into shapes and laying on the inked block. This works quite well - especially if you want to get the effect of the edge of the fabric into the image.

Offset printing with muslin. With this technique, instead of printing through the muslin, you print from the inked side of the material. So you first have to lay the muslin (maybe cut into a shape) onto an inked block - you then pull a print so that the muslin has been pressed into the ink. Next, you remove the muslin and place it on a different (the destination) block - this time, the inked side is facing up - pull another print.

This can provide a much stronger fabric texture. It's a bit of a faff though, and it takes twice the time to produce a print - although you could utilise both stages in the print process to create two different editions.

I've also been experimenting with applying ink to an uncut, or a partially cut, block, and then scraping the ink away with a pallet knife, or rubbing it away with a cloth. This has produced some really nice monoprint effects that I want to experiment with a lot more. See next page for an example.

That's it for now. Get back to me with any questions - and let me know if you come up with more ideas!

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Test - 'Offset' printing using muslin cut to shape



Test - 'Offset' method using a cut block as the ink source and deliberate 'pairing' of muslin fibres



'Moonfall' - lino monprint (the crescent is cut into the lino - the tree is a previously cut block that I overprinted onto the background containing the moon (the shape of which was made using a paper template laid over the inked surface - the circle shape resulted from the ink being partially removed using a cloth)