

Intaglio

Etching Start to Finish

1. File and Polish Your Plate

- 1) Clamp your copper plate to a table with a protective aluminum plate underneath.
- 2) File the edges of the plate at a bevel and sand smooth with sandpaper and a block of wood.
- 3) If needed or desired, sand and polish your plate. Work from coarse to smooth (#220-#320-#400-#600), sanding in a tight circular motion across the plate. Next work the plate with the super fine steel wool (#0000), using a block of wood on top of the steel wool to apply firm even pressure. To achieve a mirror finish use putz pomade with a felt, and work it thoroughly into the plate. Switch to a clean cotton rag and work the remaining residue turning your rag to a clean side every so often until the putz pomade is gone and you can see your reflection in the copper.

2. Degrease-Deoxidize-Degrease

- 1) Wet the plate and apply enough whiting to work into a paste with a piece of felt. Scrub the entire plate edge to edge and then rinse the plate thoroughly.
- 2) Apply some de-oxidizing solution to the plate and work around for 5-15 seconds with a clean rag. Rinse everything thoroughly.
- 3) Scrub the entire plate again with whiting and a felt and then rinse the plate thoroughly. Water should sheet off your plate rather than bead up at this point. Quickly dry your plate without touching its surface.

3. Apply a Ground for Etching or Rosin for Aquatint

- 1) Turn on the hot plate: Hard ground = 175°. Soft Ground = 140°. Rosin = 240°.
- 2) Apply the ground to your plate by melting it on your copper plate or the hotplate, and rolling it out evenly with the brayer marked for the ground you are using.
- 3) Remove your plate. Roll out the brayer on the hotplate to remove the excess ground, and wipe up with a rag.

4. Draw

- 1) Sketches with heavier graphite lines can be transferred to plates with hard ground by placing the drawing face down on the plate and running through the press. Iron Oxide paper can also be used to transfer drawings onto hard ground.
- 2) Hard ground lines can be drawn very finely, which will require a short etching time, or can be made wider requiring a longer etching time. Areas of tone must be achieved through cross hatching. Areas cleared of hard ground will open bite.
- 3) For soft ground, set up a jig for your plate and tape down a sheet of tracing paper along one edge and, if needed, a drawing or printout over that. This will allow you to keep your plate in place to check the progress of your drawing. The hardness of the pencil you use (2H-2B) will effect the final outcome of the print.

5. Back Your Plate

- 1) Use packing tape on plates up to 6 in x 9 in OR apply thinned asphaltum with a sponge brush on the back of larger plates, and dry for 20 minutes with a fan.
- 2) Apply a tape handle, with a cross piece of tape to make a 't' on the back of the plate.

6. Etch

Method A: Draw your entire image on the plate and etch for the shortest amount of time. Stop out your lightest lines using asphaltum stop-out or red stop-out varnish. Once the stop-out is dry, etch for your next longer time taking into account the time you have already etched the plate. Continue stopping-out and etching until your image is completely etched.

Method B: Draw what will be the darkest lines in your image first and etch for the longest time minus the next two etches. Draw the next darkest lines, and etch for your medium etch minus your shortest etch. Finally, draw your lightest lines, and etch for the shortest amount of time.

Soft-Ground: You only have one shot with soft ground etchings, so it is better to etch longer rather than shorter. The etching time will range from 40 minutes to an hour. Be sure to stop out areas that you do not want to etch since soft ground can foul bite very easily.

7. Remove Grounds and Backing

- 1) Mineral Spirits for grounds and asphaltum.
- 2) Denatured alcohol for red stop out varnish, rosin and Sharpie.

8. Print

- 1) Tear and soak your paper.
- 2) Make a registration template on the back of an acetate sheet with a sharpie, noting where both the plate and the paper should be positioned.
- 3) Ink, wipe, print!