



TIPS & TECHNIQUES

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## The Open Press Project

In 2017 we noticed that intaglio printmaking is only accessible to a small group of artists, as most people don't have the option to get themselves one of the very expensive and heavy printing presses or work in one of the very few printmaking workshops in art universities or private institutions. Because we love these very old and beautiful art techniques so much, we wanted to give more people the option to use them for their art in places where printmaking wasn't possible before. We figured that the main challenge is to get access to an etching press as that's the tool you need in order to print etchings, engravings, drypoints etc.

Our solution is the Open Press Project, a tiny 3D-printed etching press that will let you use these techniques outdoors, in your living room, or small studio! In 2018 we published free plans for this press online (<https://www.thingiverse.com/thing:2841592>) and were overwhelmed by the support we received from the community. More than 50k people have downloaded the files in the past two years!

Artists from all over the world started to 3D-print their own small printing press in all sorts of colours and with their own modifications! Universities started to use them in their art classes and more than 100 international artists submitted prints to the Open Press Collection in 2019, an open call that showed the vast possibilities of printmaking on tiny pieces of paper.

When we received the very first photo of someone using our tiny press for their art we realised that we somehow managed to create something worth growing and pursuing, so that's what we did! A crowdfunding campaign in 2019 with almost 1500 backers was started in order to make the presses available to people without access to a 3D printer. Finally, after a long and tricky journey of founding a company and figuring out how to efficiently manufacture large amounts of tiny 3D printed etching presses, we are now very close to shipping etching presses worldwide, so that every creative out there who wants to join the printmaking community can give it a go!

This ebook was published during the fulfilment of our Kickstarter campaign, but chances are that we are able to accept more orders when you read this. Head over to our website to check if we have some in stock!

[www.openpressproject.com](https://www.openpressproject.com)

We value our small Open Press Community above everything else and are driven by the idea of making printmaking as accessible as possible, while at the same time giving people a high quality etching press. This thought is part of every decision we make, including some exciting things we are working on at the moment! Check out presses and prints from all over the world and find out about our latest news on our Instagram account (<https://www.instagram.com/openpressproject/>).





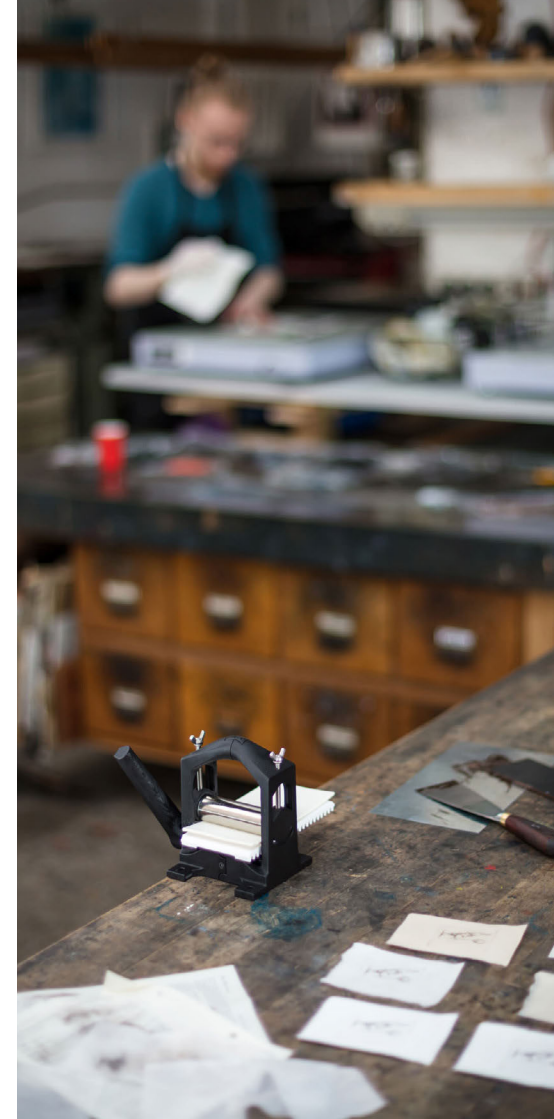
## About this Ebook

A tiny 3D printed press may need to be handled differently than a regular big etching press. That's why we thought we'd create a small ebook to share what we've learned in all our experiments, which techniques you can use with this press, what to keep in mind while printing, and what to do if you are not able to achieve the desired results.

Also, because there may be users that are entirely new to printmaking, this ebook can work as a collection of printmaking techniques you might want to try!

The ebook is not meant to explain every technique in detail but give an overview of how to approach them with a 3D printed press, since it may differ from a regular one. You'll be able to find extensive tutorials online about every single technique described here, we are just trying to give you ideas about what to print.

Happy printing! If you have any questions, feel free to post them on the official [Open Press Project Facebook Group](#) or write an email to [martinschneiderart@gmail.com](mailto:martinschneiderart@gmail.com).



## Relief vs. Intaglio Printing

A quick summary for those of you who have no experience in printmaking:

We initially designed the press for intaglio printmaking because the pressure needed for a good etching or drypoint is a lot more difficult to achieve and therefore less accessible compared to relief printing techniques such as linocut or woodcut. However, the Open Press Project can be used for both relief and intaglio printmaking.

Intaglio printmaking is usually done by scratching lines into a thin metal plate, filling the grooves with ink and leaving the surface of the plate clean. Damp paper is laid on top and pushed into the grooves with high pressure to absorb the ink. The final print can look similar to a drawing, techniques like cross-hatching can be used to print larger areas.

Relief printmaking is the exact opposite: Just like with a simple stamp, the areas you want to keep empty are carved away, leaving only areas that should print. Ink is applied to the top surface and transferred to paper with a reasonable amount of pressure. Linoleum or wood is usually used as a plate, the final print usually has a more bold look, even though it is possible to achieve high detail prints with the right kind of wood, equipment, and practice.





## Before You Start Printing

Before you try out techniques and get your hands all inky, it might be a good idea to do some dry runs with the press to get a feel for how it works.

Start by attaching your press to a table or a wooden board using a clamp or screws. It'll make it a lot easier to use, plus the press won't jump off the table!

Be careful when using screws to attach the press and don't overtighten them or you might end up splitting the 3D printed part.

Now let's practise inserting the bed a couple of times, you might need a few tries to get the hang of it: Release some pressure by turning the wing bolts counter-clockwise and check if the screws are applying even pressure or if they stick out unevenly.



Try pushing the bed and blanket in between the rollers. Oftentimes it's easier if the blanket is overlapping a bit, it'll keep it from slipping.

Now that the bed is inserted, you can adjust the pressure so that there's a good amount of resistance when you turn the handle. Take out the bed again and try this a couple of times. Make sure you are inserting the bed straight, otherwise it might jam.

So far so good! Your press is almost ready to go. All we need now are some materials!







## Plates & Paper Sizes

Most of the printmaking techniques will require a plate that you'll use to engrave, scratch or carve your artwork into.

In general, it's easier to print smaller plates than big ones, so we suggest starting with a tiny one. A size of 50x50mm, 40x60mm or 30x70mm is a good size for your plates and will leave a nice border on the paper. The paper can have a maximum size of 75mmx145mm.

Depending on the technique, you might be able to increase the size of the plate up to the maximum size of the bed, but it'll require more fine-tuning to achieve enough even pressure. This is mostly relevant if you want to use the press for intaglio printmaking; relief printing and monoprints shouldn't be affected by this since they don't need as much pressure.



## The Right Paper

Finding a paper you like will take some time and experimenting. Depending on the technique, you will need a certain type of paper. Any relief printing and monoprinting technique should work with regular paper, thin card, or watercolour-paper.

However, if you are planning to use intaglio techniques, you'll need damp etching paper, otherwise the press will not be able to push the paper into the inked up grooves of the plate and make it pick up the ink.



We suggest using professional printmaking paper such as Awagami Washi paper, Hahnemühle, Somerset, or Fabriano. All of these will need to be soaked in water before you can print with them. To do that you'll need to tear or cut the paper to the right size (etching paper is usually torn to mimic a deckle edge).

After you have a good amount of sheets for your little printing session, you can prepare a water bath in a small lunch box or baking dish.



Warm water will do the job quicker. Put the paper in the water and let it sit for a while. The thicker the paper, the longer it will need to be soaked. This may vary from 10 minutes to multiple hours or even overnight, you will need to get dialled in with your paper. Let's start with about 20 minutes.

Before you can use your paper for printing, you need to take it out of the bath and remove the excess water. Especially if you are using water-soluble ink, you want the paper to be damp but not too wet. Lay every sheet in between two pieces of clean rags or cloth and firmly put your hand on it until it looks almost dry from the outside. If you want to prepare your paper long before printing you can put the damp paper in a sealable lunch box (like Tupperware) until you need them. Unused paper can be dried with the finished prints and re-dampened for the next printing session.





## The Right Ink & Drying

For any intaglio technique you'll need professional intaglio/etching ink (preferably oil-based), any other ink might not get you good results. We especially like water-soluble but oil-based inks such as Cranfield Caligo Safe Wash or Akua inks, because you won't need any solvents like white spirit for cleaning. They can just be removed with soap and water or baby wipes.

For relief printing or monoprinting you can also use etching ink, but acrylic ink or block printing ink should work just as well. Etching ink will usually take a few days to dry completely. Because you will most likely be working with damp paper, we suggest putting all finished prints in between some regular copy paper and piling a few heavy books on top, in order for them to stay nice and flat.





## How to keep it clean

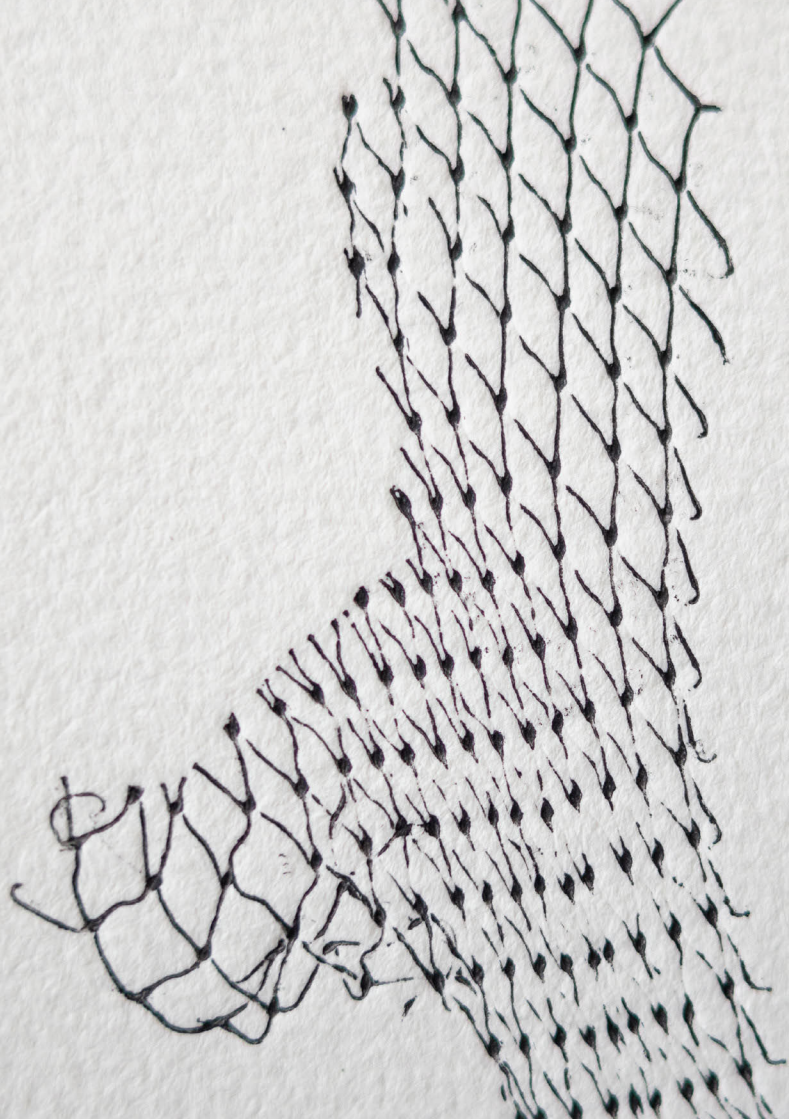
Because the press is so small, it might be more difficult to keep it clean for a long period of time. Especially the blanket and press bed are prone to discolouring caused by inky fingers and inky back-sides of plates. To avoid this, you can try using gloves while inking up the plate and have clean bare hands while using the press. Printing with another person can also be useful if one person is doing tasks that need clean fingers while the other one is working on the inky side of things!

If you use water-soluble ink you will be able to clean the press bed with water or baby-wipes, otherwise you might need vegetable oil or white spirit to clean traditional oil-based ink.

While printing, it might be a good idea to place some regular paper or tissue paper on the press bed before placing the plate on top of it. That way you can just replace the paper and keep the press bed clean. These sheets of paper can also be used for wiping.







## **Monotype**

Difficulty: easy-peasy

Materials needed:

- printing brayer
- dry thin cardboard or thick paper
- block ink or etching ink
- cleanable surface to spread ink on
- leaves, ribbons, packaging, foil, etc.

This technique is probably the most rewarding and easiest to do! We love using it at fairs and events, because people can make a print in literally 30 seconds.

It's great for kids, too! Just make sure that kids use the press under supervision only.

## 1. Roll Out Ink

To get things started, you'll need a brayer to spread out a little bit of ink on a piece of acrylic or other cleanable surface. We use relief printing ink for this technique, but etching ink should work, too. Don't go too wild, a little bit of ink will get you a long way!



## 2. Find Suitable Objects

The idea is to use thin objects as printing plates, such as leaves, ribbons, string, tin foil, cloth, or onion/garlic net, basically anything that is thin enough to roll through the press!



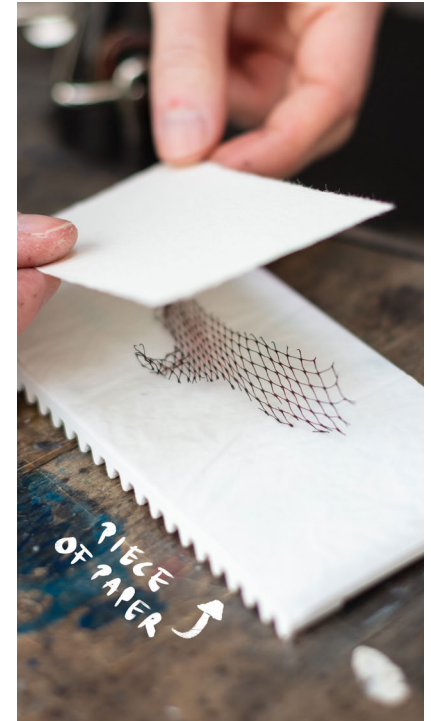
## 3. Ink Up Objects

Start by inking up the thing you want to print. Just roll over it with the brayer a couple of times. Keep in mind: You don't need a whole lot of ink, otherwise it'll just get messy.



## 4. Print

Put the inked up object – with the inky face up – on the print bed, which is covered with a piece of paper to protect it from leaking ink. Now put some dry printing paper on top of it and roll it through the press once.



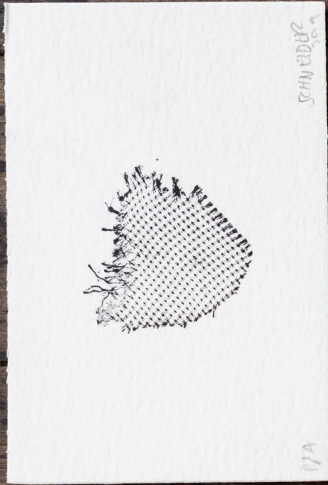




Depending on the object you inked up and the paper you used, you might already see an embossing on the back.

After that just lift the paper and you have your first print! Depending on the ink, it might take between a few minutes to a few days to dry.

On the next page you can see some more monoprints to give you an idea of what can be used. Just collect a leaf in the garden, packaging material, or textiles and give it a go!





## Juice Box/CD Drypoint

Difficulty: easy

Materials needed:

- juice box/Tetra Pak
- damp etching paper (p.19)
- tissue paper or regular copy paper
- etching ink (p.20)
- scissors
- drypoint needle or sharp nail

When it comes to intaglio printmaking, juice box printing is probably the easiest to start with. We use it in workshops with kids, but professional printmakers love it too!

You might only be able to get about 10-15 good prints from it, after that the plate will start to fall apart, but it's great for small ideas and might not be as scary as using expensive metal plates for your drypoint.

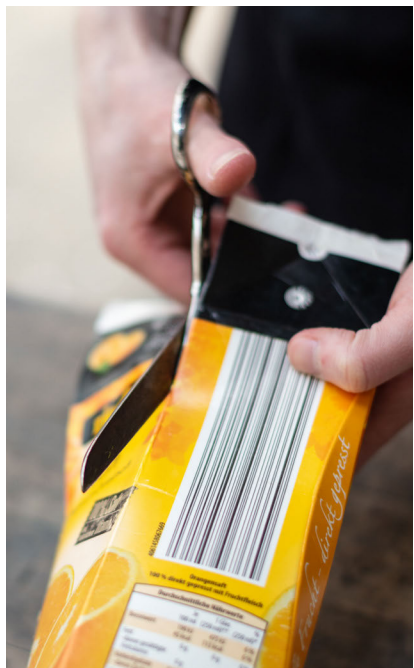
A different variation of this technique is to use old CD's as your plate.



## 1. Get a Juice Box Plate

The idea is to use basic juice boxes/ milk boxes/Tetra Pak as printing plates. Just clean the box under some running water and cut it into small pieces (p.17).

It can be fun to leave some creases from the packaging, they will show on the final print.



## 2. Scratch Into Juice Box Plate

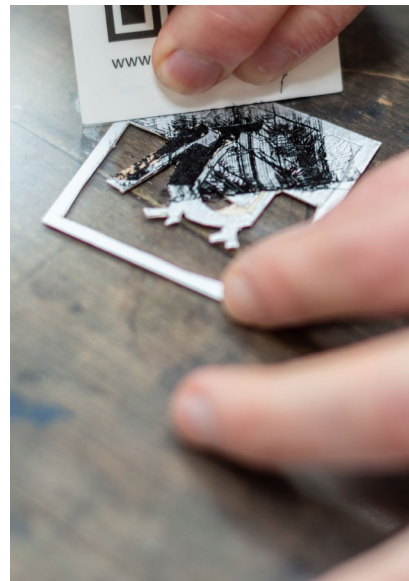
Now scratch your artwork into the aluminium/silver side of the box with a drypoint needle or something that's sharp enough. It's super easy to work with, you can cut things out or even remove the first layer, so that the card underneath will soak up a lot of ink and print like it's a crosshatched area.

If you can feel the scratches with your finger tips, it's deep enough.



## 3. Ink up plate

Once you're happy, you can place your plate on a cleanable surface (like acrylic or glass), apply a small amount of etching ink on the plate, and use your finger to push it into the grooves. You only need a little bit of ink! A business card can help push the ink into the grooves while scraping the ink from the surface. The cleaner the surface is at this stage, the easier it will be to wipe off the excess.



## 4. Wipe

Now use some regular printer paper or tissue paper to wipe the surface clean while leaving the ink in the grooves. A little ink on the surface of the plate can be nice, but try to remove most of it.





## 5. Print

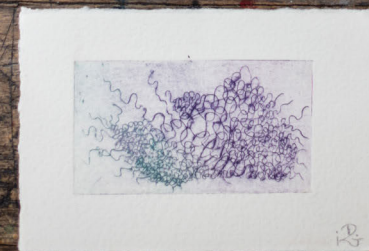
Now put some clean tissue paper on the press bed to keep it clean, place the plate on top of it with the inked up side facing up, add some damp etching paper, put the felt on top, and roll it through the press.





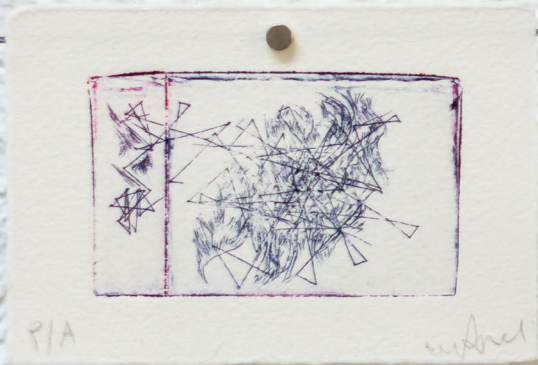
Done! You can also try putting more colours into your artwork by either spreading two or more inks on the plate and wiping it into the grooves or by using multiple plates and printing them in several steps.

Here are some prints from the community to give you ideas!



drypoints on the right by Lisa Trindeitmar, C. Stempel & Dörte Köstlin-Thompson

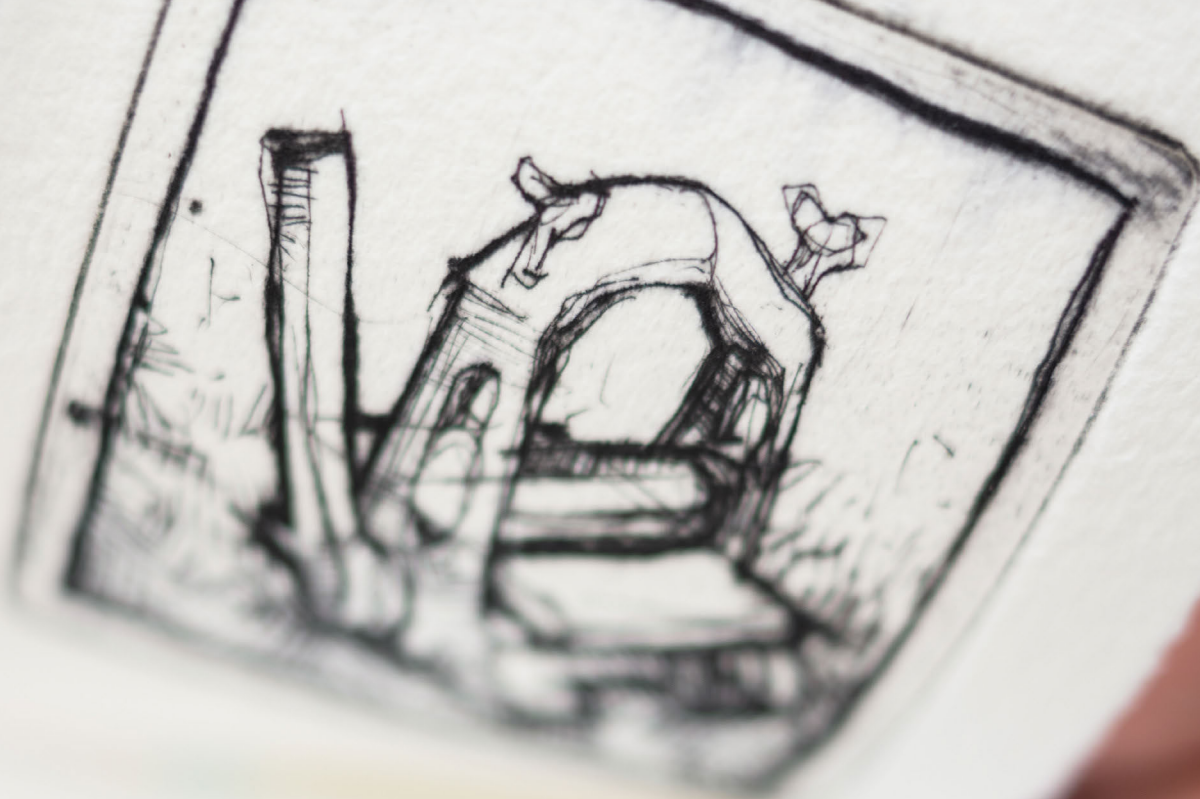




print by Ilaria Appel



print by Friedrich Mayer



## Drypoint on Metal Plates

Difficulty: easy

Materials needed:

- copper, zinc or aluminium plates (p.17)
- damp etching paper (p.19)
- tissue paper or regular copy paper
- etching ink (p.20)
- drypoint needle

This is the traditional approach to drypoint and works just like the juice box carton-technique we just described, but instead of a juice box you are using thin metal plates.

Scratching your artwork in copper or zinc plates will give you the opportunity to print a lot more prints than with the juice box, because it's more durable!

The process is just the same as the previous technique, but you'll need a steel drypoint needle to scratch into the plate.

Drypoints are known for their “sketchy” lines that appear when you scratch into the plate, instead of removing material like in relief printing.



## 1. Metal plates

You can get zinc or copper plates for drypoint at your local art supply store or online, about 1mm thickness is good. Be careful with plates larger than 60x100mm, they will require more pressure to work. We suggest a size of 50x50mm, 40x60mm, 30x70mm, etc. (p.17)



## 2. Scratching

Use your drypoint needle to scratch your artwork into the plate. It'll require more force than the juice box, so use your fingertips to check if you can feel the scratches. You can use one of our 3D printed needles for scratching, but they will get dull pretty quickly. A professional drypoint needle might be a better pick.

Remember that the finished print will be flipped!



## 3. Ink Up Plate

Apply some etching ink onto the plate and rub it into the grooves. Make sure that the scratches are filled with ink. You can then use a small scraper, squeegee, or business card to remove ink excess from the surface.



## 4. Wipe

Use a piece of tissue paper to wipe the surface clean while leaving the ink in the grooves. In the spirit of recycling you can also use old phone books or legal texts for wiping!



## 5. Print

Prepare your usual print sandwich consisting of press bed, copy paper to protect the press bed, your inked up plate face up, damp etching paper (p.19), and the blanket on top.

An additional paper between damp etching paper and blanket will keep the blanket clean if some of the water-soluble ink is leaking through the etching paper. Roll it through the press and lift the print!

If you are not satisfied with the quality of the print, check the troubleshooting section of this ebook on page 80.







prints by Francesca Casale & Carmen Moreno

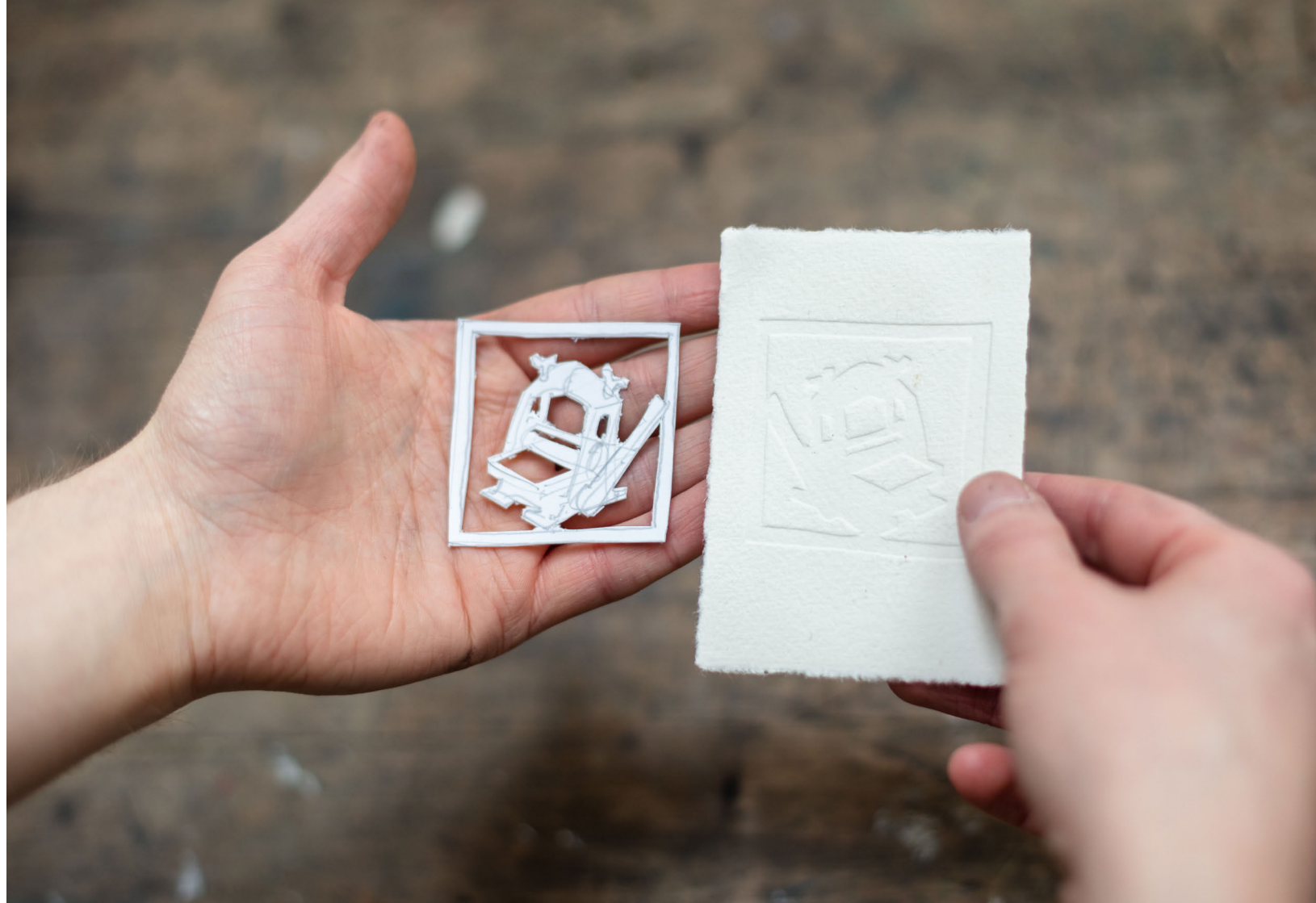
## Blind Embossing

Difficulty: easy

Materials needed:

- juice box, cardboard, various materials
- thick paper (p.19)
- scissors or scalpel

Blind embossing doesn't need ink or special tools. The idea is to cut shapes out of cardboard or use some string or other found objects and make an imprint of their texture. There is something very fun and unique about a subtle shape embossed in a piece of paper.





## 1. Cutting

The main work of printing blind embossings is cutting shapes. This can be done by using a saw to cut your shape out of metal plates or just use a scalpel or scissors to cut shapes out of cardboard. The thicker they are, the deeper the embossing.



## 2. Straight to Printing!

We don't need any ink for this one, so you don't need to worry about accidentally inking up your press. Just put your stencil under a piece of nice thick paper and roll it through the press. You might want to try holding your paper under water for a few seconds, this might increase the quality of the embossing. Not every paper will work for this, some might tear, so experiment with different thicknesses of paper and cardboard.





A 3D printed plate can also be used for blind embossing!





## Relief Printing

Difficulty: easy

Materials needed:

- linoleum or plywood
- dry thin cardboard or thick paper
- block ink
- carving tools for linocut or woodcut

A lot of you have probably done this at some point in school already. It's a very common and easy-to-learn technique, but can have a lot of complexity at the same time.

## 1. Linocut or Woodcut

First you need to decide which material you want to use. Linoleum is a bit more expensive and more difficult to find (usually in art supply stores), but it's easier to work with and won't crack as easily in comparison to wood. Plywood can be bought everywhere and has a nice texture to it. You decide!



## 2. Carving, Carving, Carving!

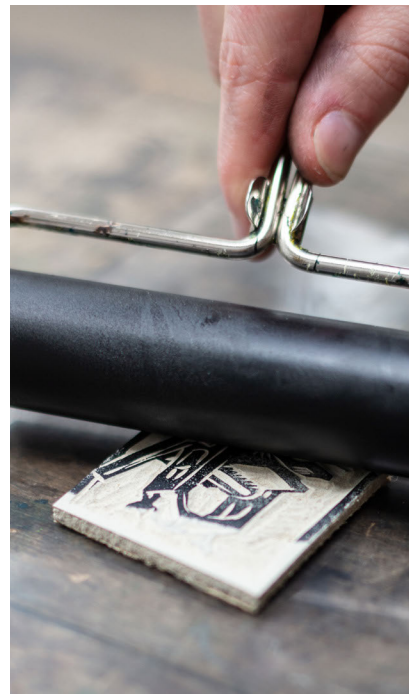
Use various cutting and carving tools to remove the parts you don't want to print. These areas will stay empty, everything else will be inked. You can start by sketching your artwork onto the wood or linoleum.

By the way: There is a technique called reduction linocut/woodcut where you gradually remove material after you printed each colour to make a multi-coloured print!



## 3. Ink

Use a brayer to roll out some ink on a piece of plexiglas/acrylic. Try to get a very thin layer of ink on your brayer and then roll over your piece of linoleum or plywood. Make sure that all areas you want to print are covered with a thin coat of ink.



## 4. Print

If you've tried any of the previous techniques, you know how this step works. You will first need to adjust the pressure on your press, though. You can do this with a spare piece of wood/linoleum to get dialled in.

Now place your inked up plate on the press table, add some dry paper and put the felt on top. Roll the sandwich through the press once.







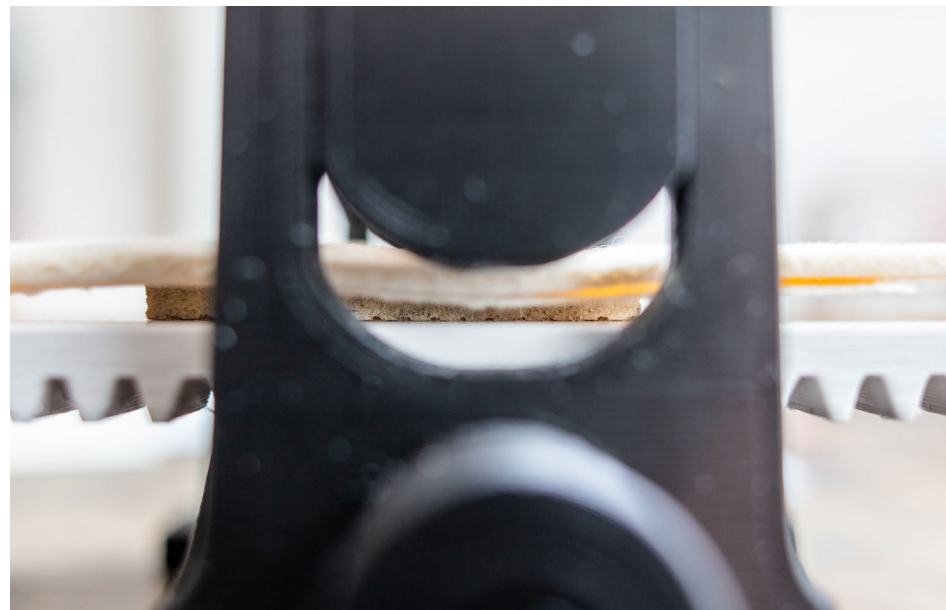
prints by June Heap,  
Alejandra Mares &  
Xavier Moreno





On the left you can see a woodcut for comparison. The process is the same, but you might want to cut the outline of your areas with a scalpel first to keep the wood from splitting. This is also how the thin lines are cut in this print.

**Tip:** If you are planning on doing a bunch of these relief prints, you might want to switch out the felt for some thicker cardboard, it will work just as well and keep the blanket healthy.





## 3D Printed Relief Plate

Difficulty: advanced

Materials needed:

- FFF 3D-printer
- dry thin cardboard or thick paper
- block ink

If you have a 3D-printer at home, you can absolutely use it to print your own plates. For relief printing we suggest using a height of about 3-5mm for the plate, the areas you want to print should be significantly higher than the ones that you want to be empty.

It might also be a good idea to sand the top surface to remove unwanted blobs sticking out. However, a textured print can look cool too, so feel free to experiment!







### 3D Printed Intaglio Plate

Difficulty: difficult

Materials needed:

- 3D-printer (preferably resin-printer)
- damp etching paper (p.19)
- tissue paper or regular copy paper
- etching ink (p.20)

3D-printing intaglio plates will be more challenging than simple stamps (relief printing plates), because the grooves have to be a lot more detailed. Since the paper needs to be able to be pushed into the inked up grooves (just like the drypoint technique on p. 43), the grooves can't be too deep. A depth of -0.1 or -0.2mm can already be a lot, so be careful. A resin printer will do a much better job at this and enables you to convert a black and white photo into an intaglio plate with varying depth using height maps.



## More Processes & Techniques

The techniques shown above are just a few of countless printmaking processes and combinations. If you are eager to learn and try out more, here are some awesome prints from the community. Most of them are more complex than what we've shown, but you'll find plenty of tutorials on each process online.

Techniques worth looking into include:

- etching
- engraving
- aquatint
- mezzotint
- solarplate
- photo etching
- collagraph
- reduction linocut/woodcut
- wood engraving

etching by Jenna Richards





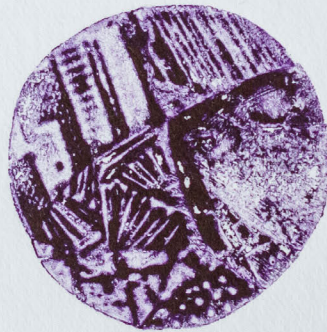






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Open Press Collection 2019





## Open Calls

We have lots of ideas for future events and follow-up projects! Our plan is to organise regular open calls for artworks where you can send in your prints and participate in exhibitions.

At the time of writing this ebook we are still working on shipping out all Kickstarter presses, but we might have some news about exhibitions by the time you read this, so head over to [www.openpressproject.com](http://www.openpressproject.com) to check!

In any case, we always love to see what you print with our little press, so please feel free to share your prints on Instagram and Facebook and tag [@openpressproject](https://www.instagram.com/openpressproject) or include [#openpressproject](https://www.facebook.com/openpressproject). You can also write us an email and tell us about a workshop or event you hosted that included the Open Press Project. We love sharing your stories on our blog!

## Want to order a press?

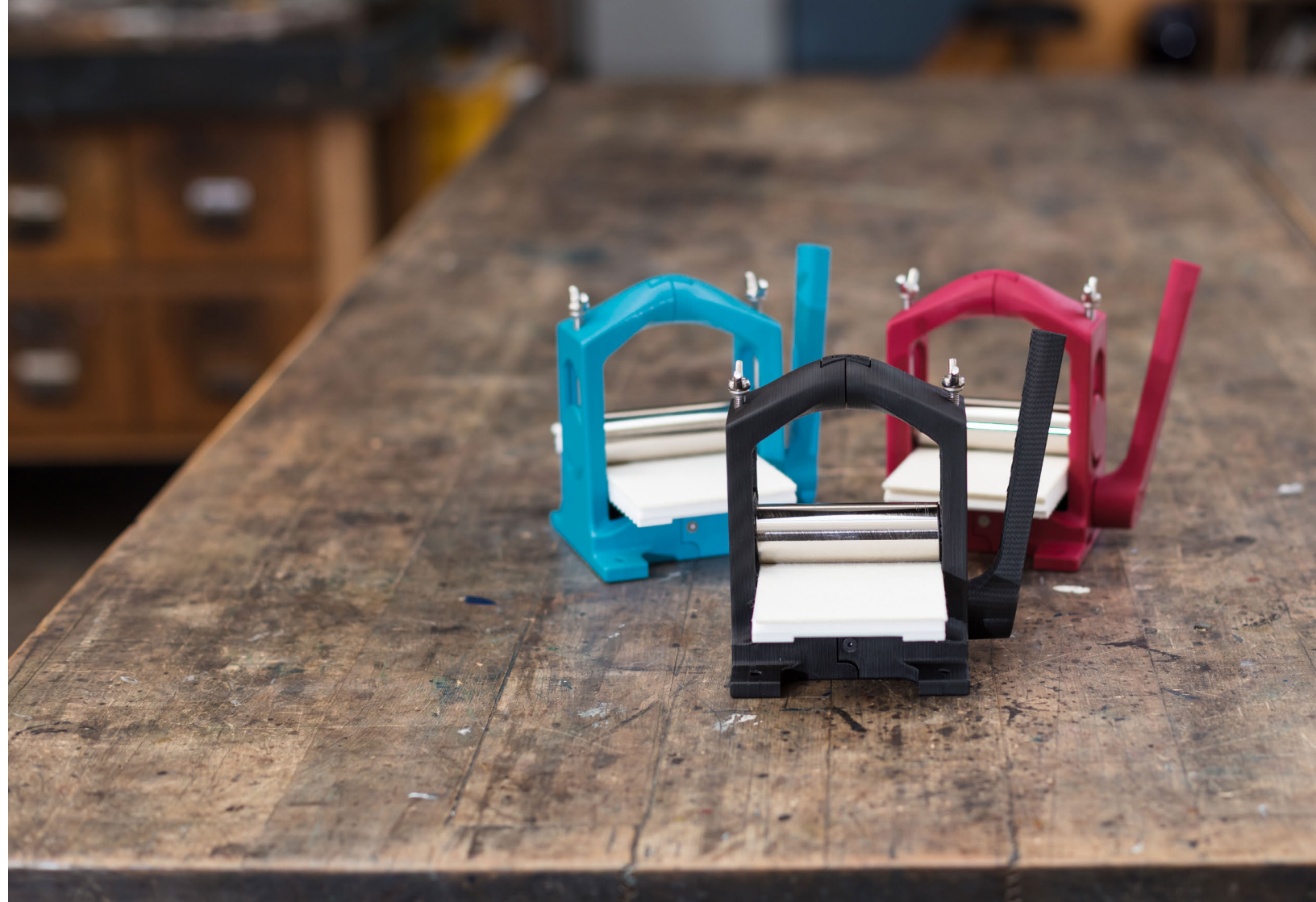
Awesome!

We had some difficulties catching up with orders in the past, so please head over to our website [www.openpressproject.com](http://www.openpressproject.com) to see if we have presses in stock.

To make printmaking more accessible we are constantly trying to keep it affordable while offering a high quality etching press at the same time. Our manufactured version comes with a stainless steel roller, a high quality woven wool blanket, and wing bolts for pressure-adjustments to enable you to make perfect the prints.

Also, we're offering them in three colours: matte black, sparkly turquoise and magenta!

If you don't want to wait you can always try and print the Open Source version of the press using the free files on Thingiverse: <https://www.thingiverse.com/thing:2841592>





## Troubleshooting

for handling the press



### Plate is Slipping

If your metal plate is slipping on the print bed, you can try to use sandpaper to roughen up the surface of the print bed, so that the felt on top has more grip. Your plate might also be too big. If it's close to the maximum width of the print bed, it might slip easier. Try using a smaller plate.



### Unable to Insert Blanket

If you have trouble inserting the bed, you might want to try overlapping the felt a bit on the press bed, so that it gets inserted first.



### Bed Jams While Inserting

If you feel the press bed and blanket jamming, make sure to angle it parallel to the table. If it's angled down it won't let you insert it.

## Troubleshooting

for intaglio printmaking



### Not picking up ink

If you can barely see any marks on the paper and if the indentation on the back is very subtle, you might want to check if you are using proper etching paper. Also, letting it sit in water for longer might improve things (p.19). If that doesn't help, you can slowly increase the pressure of the press. Be careful to not overdo it! If you can't get the plate between the rollers the pressure is too high.



### Too much wiping

Sometimes a print looks like it didn't print with enough pressure, because the paper didn't pick up enough ink. This may also be caused by excessive wiping. If you remove all the ink before printing, there won't be any left for the paper. Try to intentionally leave more ink on the plate and try again.



### Paper too wet

When using water-soluble oil colour for intaglio printmaking, it's important to use damp paper that's not too wet. We want it to be soft and fluffy for printing, but be sure to remove excess water before you use it. Put it in between two pieces of cloth or rags, push out more water, and try again.



## FAQ

### Can I use regular ink?

Generally no. Not if you want to print decent etchings or drypoints. It might work for relief printing and can be fun to experiment with of course, but you won't get around professional etching ink if you want to use the full potential of the press.

### Press shows wear on the lower roller.

That's to be expected. Due to the high friction and pressure on the lower roller and press table, they can discolour a bit. However, they should withstand regular pressure without problems.

### Press is screeching while printing

A bit of screeching during the first few prints is quite normal. If it continues to be a problem, you can put some masking tape over the part where the press table slides on the side parts, above the two little screws. If you then roll the press table through with pressure, it should calm down.

### What kind of plastic are you using for manufacturing?

To keep all our manufacturing as eco-friendly as possible, we are using PLA for all our parts and are collecting all waste to eventually recycle it into new filament. PLA is a plastic made from renewable materials like corn starch or sugar cane and is biodegradable. It also has great strength properties and is very easy to print.

### Are the Open Source-plans compatible with the steel roller?

At the time of creating this ebook, the files for the Open Source-version are not compatible with the steel roller. We want to keep the free version as accessible as possible by making almost all parts 3D-printable. It's difficult enough to find matching bolts and a blanket.

### Can I print the free version and sell it?

No. Even though we want printmaking to be as accessible as possible and spread it worldwide, we want to do so in a healthy and wholesome way. Please respect the noncommercial aspect of the license and contact us if you have any questions or want to sell them in your store.

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