Paper Plate Lithography- Cheap, Fast and Easy

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Using photocopies or laser prints as a matrix is a cheap, fast and effective means of printing images lithographically without the need for litho stones, aluminum plates, solvents, acid or even a press. This demonstration details a method that is excellent for creating lush and layered monoprints, as well as a quick way to transfer images to canvas, wood, or even etching plates. What's more, images can be printed on a variety of surfaces, including three-dimensional objects. This demonstration will show how to create images that work best with the process, how to process the paper plates, inking techniques and printing images on two and three-dimensional surfaces.

Supplies Needed:

- Laser prints or photocopies (not inkjet). Should be a high contrast image or line work, as continuous tones don't work well. Toner should be dark and dense. Using heavy weight copier paper can also give better results.
- Bowl of cold water
- Cellulose sponges
- Ink modifier such as Miracle Gel or Easy Wipe
- Lithography ink, or other oil based inks. Your ink should be of a medium body and low tack for this process. Block print ink is generally good for this process, as is lithography ink modified with Miracle Gel or Easy Wipe. Etching inks tend to be too short and tacky for this process.
- Soft brayers
- Gum Arabic
- Glass, Plexiglas or other very smooth surface to work on.

Prepare all items before you begin. Once the paper is wet, its structural integrity will only last a short while.

Use a small amount of gum arabic to coat your work surface to help the paper to stay in place while you are applying ink to its surface.

Lay your photocopy/laser print face up on your gummed surface and quickly massage gum arabic across the entire surface of the paper. The quicker you saturate the entire paper, the less wrinkles will appear. Massage gum into paper for about 10 seconds.

Carefully lift up corners of paper to smooth away any wrinkles that appear.

Using a clean, damp sponge, remove gum from the surface of the paper. Keep paper damp, but not wet. The non-image area should be damp, but beads of water should not be sitting on your image area.

Begin applying ink to the image with a soft brayer. Use slow passes that go in only one direction. Rolling back and forth or rolling quickly creates too much friction resulting in the detachment of the toner from the paper. Try not to roll off the paper's surface as this sometimes causes the paper to tear and excess gum and water will collect on your brayer.

Wipe paper with a damp sponge and repeat inking passes until you can see a layer of ink sitting on the toner.

Ink carefully and deliberately, taking your time and monitoring the condition of the paper and toner layer, watching for any break down of the surface. Do not go too slowly as the integrity of the paper quickly diminishes once it has become wet. Ideally, you should have your image rolled up in ink in 90- 120 seconds.

Using your damp sponge carefully wipe away any excess ink or scumming that may have occurred during the inking process.

Carefully, pick up the paper plate by its top corners and lay face down on the printing surface. If you are printing on paper, you may lay the paper plate directly on to your printing paper and run it though a lithography or etching press. You may also hand rub, but this requires care, as the plate is susceptible to tearing.

If you are printing on a three-dimensional object, carefully lay the paper plate face down on the surface and hand rub carefully using a spoon, burnisher or even a finger.

You may lift a corner of the plate to check your progress.

After printing, carefully remove the paper plate and discard.

Images printed on fabric or paper will take 1-3 days to dry thoroughly, images printed on non-porous surfaces such as metal, glass or plastic will take a week or more to dry to the touch, and perhaps even longer to fully cure.