Intaglio

Preparing Plates For Etching & Drypoint

Metal plates of Zinc, Copper or Aluminium can be used for both acid etching techniques or Drypoint. Prior to etching or drawing, it is necessary to prepare the plate by bevelling the edges slightly and rounding the corners. We use a deburring tool for the plate edges. Generally this will smooth them enough to avoid tearing your print paper or damaging the press blankets.

Polished Zinc plate is the primary plate used in the printmaking workshop at WSA. It is available to purchase in a variety of sizes through the Printmaking Stores. The printmaking technician can advise you on where to purchase other metal plates.

01. Place your plate so the edge is overhanging the table by approx 1cm and hold it firmly in place.

02. Use a deburring tool to gently bevel all 4 edges of the plate. To use the tool, place your index finger in the crook of the swivelling head. Start at the top of the plate edge and firmly pull the tool toward you. A curly ribbon of metal will peel off the edge.

Too little or too much pressure will result in chattering and roughness along the plate edge. Practice will help you understand the amount of pressure needed with the tool.

03. Continue until the plate edges are smooth and slightly bevelled, passing over each edge no fewer than three times.

04. Flatten the sharp corners by rolling the file around the corners of the plate. It will not take much effort and we only need to round the corners slightly.

05. Bevel the top of each corner. Use a few gentle strokes, down and away from you in one direction, rather than back and forth.

06. Lay the plate with the edge flush against the side of the table. Put a drop of 3-in-1 oil on the burnisher and slide it along the whole length of the edge and over the corners back and forth to polish the edges smooth. Repeat on all 4 edges of the plate. The edges should look polished when finished.

For Drypoint the plate is now ready.
When using acid etching techniques the plate will also require degreasing to remove any oxides or oils from the printing surface. Any contaminates will hinder the application of the ground and prevent the acid biting the plate successfully.

01. In the fume cupboard and with the extractor on, polish the face of the plate with Brasso using a scrap of felt.

02. Wipe off the Brasso residue with a clean cloth and small amount of white spirit. Let the plate sit until the White Spirit has evaporated off. This should only take a minute.

03. Place your plate over the sink on the wooden draining board and spray a little water on it. Notice how the water beads up on the plate. Once you have finished degreasing, there will be no beading.

04. Squirt a little Mr Muscle onto the plate and add a small amount of whiting.

05. Use your fingers to work the whiting into a thick paste on the plate surface. The consistency should be that of pancake batter, add a little more whiting if required.

06. With a felt pad, work the paste over the face of the plate. Pay particular attention to the edges and avoid touching the face of the plate with your gloves.

07. Rinse your gloves, then rinse the plate thoroughly with water. The water should now sheet off the plate. If there is still beading degrease the plate again.

08. Blot the excess water from the plate with a clean paper towel and keep the plate to dry on the hot plate. Avoid touching the surface of the plate and leaving greasy marks on it.