

Printmaking Abstract

Natalie Hall & Abby Derbyshire

Our first foray into printmaking began with a relatively simple “self-portrait” woodblock print. The project was meant to be an introduction to the overall process of printmaking, but to deepen our use and understanding of positive vs. negative space, line, and compositional emphasis.

We began in our sketchbooks, thumbnailing and studying our concept before we committed to transferring it onto our 8” by 10” in. woodblocks. After transferring, we used a sharpie to block out our lines and shapes. Whatever we carved away would remain white on the paper, and whatever we left alone would show up as black. Having outlined our sketch in sharpie proved useful, since it was recommended not to leave a line thinner than the sharpie’s, lest it break off under the press.

When we were done carving, we moved onto proofing. We skied (not scooped) our palette knives along the top of the ink canisters before laying the ink on the table. The consistency of print ink is much more similar to paint than traditional pen ink- it takes time to warm it up and work it smoothly over the table, brayers, and woodblock. Newsprint (thinner, less “archival” paper) worked well for our proofs as we figured out how much ink we needed. Too much ink would cause blotching that ran over the edges of the woodblock and bled onto the paper, but too little would leave “ghost prints” whose images were reminiscent of static. We got the hang of it eventually!

We used a long ruler with a dull blade in order to tear our sheets of stonehenge paper, keeping three of the margins 1in. longer than the woodblock, and one margin 1½ in. longer. These pages (should we have used the appropriate amount of ink and properly aligned them with the woodblock) would be our editions, of which we needed at least 3 for the project’s completion.

This project was a great opportunity for artists of all disciplines- printmaking is a very detailed but process-oriented practice. Communication with fellow printmakers was important, not only for shop safety, but for print quality as we consoled each other on our blocks, inking, and printing techniques. Not only that, but the process of carving, inking, and printing the woodblock is so different from many traditional art practices that it greatly increased my awareness of my every action. It’s a fun and interesting, if perhaps repetitive, process compared to the one-and-done variability of most other artistic mediums.