MATERIAL WORLD

Getting the most out of drawing media
BY SHERRY CAMHY

Painterly Prints: Monotype and Monoprint

Printmaking can be a complicated, time-consuming and expensive venture, but this is not equally true for all of the many printmaking processes. In this article we'll look at monotypes and monoprints, two related methods that are surprisingly accessible. They can be executed without a large press. They don't require heavy stones, expensive copper plates, toxic acids or unpleasant inks. With both methods you can create traditional or cutting-edge prints using materials that you probably already have, supplemented with a few things you can find in any hardware or art store. Monotype and monoprint are perfect for someone trying printmaking for the first time.

Most printmaking processes result in an *edition*—multiple prints of the same image. However, as you might have guessed from the prefix "mono," which means "single," monotype and monoprint are not produced in editions. Rather they produce unique images, and in this they are the exception among printmaking processes.

The terms "monotype" and "monoprint" have at times been interchangeably used and are often confused, the boundaries between them somewhat blurred. Here we'll explore the differences between these two processes and learn how to make these prints at home.

MONOTYPE

In *monotype*, none of the image derives from a registered, repeatable matrix. The print is produced by first making a design in ink, paint or other wet media on a *plate*—a hard, nonabsorbent surface. Traditionally plates are made of copper, but lots of other materials can be used. The plate is then pressed against a sheet of paper, either through the use of a printing press or by hand. This transfers the image to the paper, resulting in a unique monotype print.

Monotype is first known to have been used in the 17th century by Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (1609–1664), a great innovator in the field of printmaking. He used a subtractive or "dark field" process, beginning with a dark tone and making marks to produce lights—an approach still favored for many monotypes. Castiglione coated polished copper plates with opaque oil color and used rags, swabs, brushes and fingertips to wipe away the lighter tones. He also used tools including reeds and paintbrushes to scratch crisp lines and highlights into the paint. He then transferred the results to paper, creating prints such as *David With the Head of Goliath.*

After a monotype has been printed, there is always some amount of ink or paint left on the matrix, and many artists cannot resist the temptation of pressing another paper to the plate and creating an additional print—called a *second pull,* a *cognate* or a *ghost.* These additional impressions are usually less defined, but in some cases they are even more appealing than the first impression. You can debate whether such images can still be considered monotypes, given that they are, in one sense, multiples, but these impressions are usually different enough from the originals as to constitute almost entirely new works.
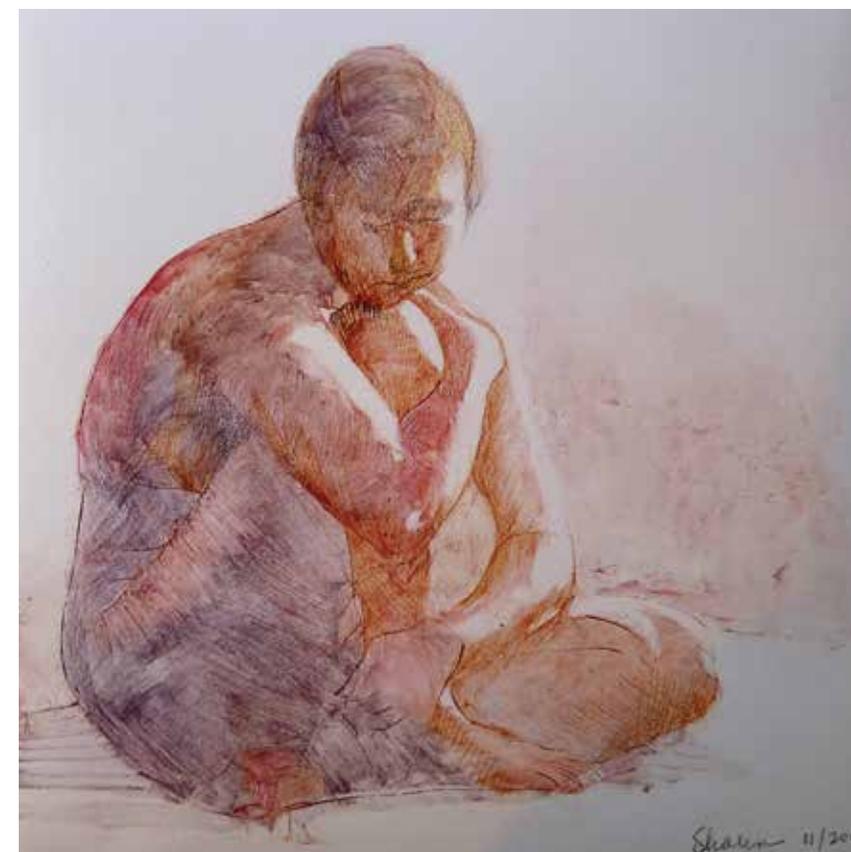
MONOPRINT

A *monoprint* is similar to a monotype, but in a monoprint part of the image is repeatable, derived from a *fixed matrix*—that is, parts of the plate are marked in a permanent manner. The result is still unique but includes elements that can be repeated in multiple prints.

The fixed matrix is often an intaglio plate, such as etched or engraved copper. In these cases, the artist creates indented grooves in the plate then inks the entire plate and wipes it clean with an absorbent material. This removes the pigment from flat portions of the surface, but pigment remains in the grooves. Damp paper is then pressed against the plate, and the pigment lying in those incised areas transfers to the paper and produces a print. (To read about intaglio techniques in more detail, see page TK.)

Intaglio processes are not the only option for creating a fixed matrix—monoprints—can also be created with a serigraph, lithograph or collograph matrix, for example. We unfortunately don't have the space to detail all these processes here, but you can find information about them in many books and on a number of websites.

After using one of these methods to create permanent marks in the plate, the artist then applies and manipulates additional pigment on the plate, as when creating a monotype. The plate is then pressed to the paper, resulting in a finished monoprint.

The handling of a plate can produce

David With the Head of Goliath by Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, ca. 1655, monotype in brown oil pigment on laid paper, 13¹¹⁄₁₆ x 9¾. Collection National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Seated Nude II by Wendy Shalen, 2009, monoprint with hand coloring, 8 x 8.

An assortment of printing inks and tools that can be used to apply and subtract ink from a plate, including plastic mesh, squeegee, spatula, foam brayer, cook's brush, string and pizza cutter.

MATERIAL WORLD

The Ballet Master (Le maître de ballet)
by Edgar Degas, ca. 1874, monotype heightened and corrected with white chalk or wash, 24⁷⁄₁₆ x 33⁷⁄₁₆. Collection National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

dramatically different effects from print to print. Manipulation of the ink, varied printing pressure and the choice of printing paper all make important contributions to the results. Prints from the same plate are not intended to be part of a consistent edition—each will inevitably evolve in its own direction—but rather a series of related but distinct works.

MONOTYPE MASTERS

Many great artists have found monotype and monoprint to be rewarding processes. Rembrandt (1606–1669), a highly skilled printmaker, would create monoprints by adding areas of tone to his etchings. Using this process he could alter an image considerably, for instance, changing a daytime scene into a nighttime one. Edgar Degas (1834–1917) considered his prints to be works of art as important as his pastels and paintings, and he experimented with various approaches to monotype to create his highly painterly prints.

Endless variation is possible with monoty-

pelike processes, and Paul Gauguin (1848–1903) invented a system called "traced monotypes." He rolled out printer's ink on a sheet of paper, then placed a blank sheet of paper on top of the inked one. He proceeded to draw on the top sheet, and as he worked, the pressure from his pencil pressed the top sheet into the inked sheet below, creating an ink image on the front, or *recto*, side of the paper, echoing the pencil drawing on the reverse, or *verso*, side. Gauguin referred to these works as "printed drawings."

Why would these artists spend time on a drawing or painting only to immediately destroy it by transferring it to another surface? Because prints have an aesthetic quality all their own and because there is something quite special that results from the process of printmaking itself. There is a balance between control and accident that inspires new techniques, visual ideas and the courage to pursue them. Printmaking is freeing.

Two Marquesans (verso)
by Paul Gauguin, ca. 1902, pencil and crayon, 18¹⁄₁₆ x 13⁹⁄₁₆. Collection National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Two Marquesans (recto)
by Paul Gauguin, ca. 1902, traced monotype, 18¹⁄₁₆ x 13⁹⁄₁₆. Collection National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

MAKING YOUR OWN MONOTYPE

You can make a monotype of virtually any image created in a wet medium on a nonabsorbent surface. All that you need is pigment, a plate, paper and pressure. With these basic materials your options are unlimited.

The process starts with an idea for an image. It can be a drawing or painting, realistic or abstract, simple or complex, monotone or color. You can even begin with no preconceived plan. You then prepare the plate, which can be any nonabsorbent surface, such as metal, glass, plastic, Plexiglas, Yupo or paper that has been sealed with varnish or acrylic spray. You can also purchase lightweight, transparent plastic plates intended for monotype. If you'd like to incise the plate (to produce a monoprint, rather than a monotype) you can use a sharp cutting tool such as an etching needle or burin.

The next step is to choose and apply wet media to the plate. Possibilities include oils, acrylics, watercolors, transparent liquid pigments or any manner of inks. You can apply your medium using anything from paintbrushes, rollers and brayers to toothbrushes, feathers and fingers. You might also try Bellows bottles,

DEMONSTRATION >> *Julian*

Step 1

Artist Gerald Ruggiero drew his model Julian using oil and a brush on a glass plate backed with paper.

Step 2

Ruggiero pressed a sheet of paper against the plate, producing the print at left.

Step 3

The artist applied additional oil to his plate, realigned the paper with the image and pressed it a second time to produce the final monotype print.

Julian
by Gerald Ruggiero, 2016, oil monotype print, 10 x 8.

compressible plastic bottles that can have straight or tapered points.

While the image on your plate is still wet, place a sheet of dry or slightly damp paper, fabric or other absorbent surface on top of the plate. Then apply pressure—this can be accomplished using a large printing or etching press, but you can also use a rolling pin, a spatula, a pile of heavy books, an old-fashioned wringer washer or a *baren,* a traditional Japanese tool. You might even be able to get enough pressure with just the palm of your hand.

After you've applied pressure, carefully peel off the paper and behold your finished print. You can then clean the plate and create an entirely new image; press a second sheet to create a much fainter ghost print; or apply pigment for your next monotype right on top of the pigment remaining on the plate.

Have lots of paper towels and antibacterial wipes ready—the process can get messy. You'll also want lots of printing paper on hand, because printmaking is addictive. One idea leads to another, and beautiful images result, always bearing a trace of the unexpected. ❖

Morning Paper
by Mary Beth McKenzie, 2010, monotype, 8 x 10. Collection Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York.