

“Encaustic Toner Transfers for Color Lovers”

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Abstract:

Printmaker Darian Goldin Stahl will demonstrate how to create toner transfer prints onto silk using encaustics and beeswax. With only a few pieces of equipment needed, including a hot plate and light table, this technique can be done in any studio or in the home. The waxed silk contains beautiful translucent qualities that can be read from the front as well as the back—making it adaptable for print installations or artist books. The final print is strong yet pliable, opaque or transparent, and easily incorporates a full color range. The benefits of this transfer technique are that it is non-toxic, does not require the use of a printing press, and provides a rich, dimensional, and full-color photographic print.

Description:

Through intense experimentation during my recent eight-month residency at Malaspina Printmakers in Vancouver, British Columbia, I have found a non-toxic way of transferring photographic toner images onto silk using beeswax and/or encaustics that produce a true photographic color print. I use silk instead of paper because it is able to stand up to the intense burnishing and soaking in this process, and it is a versatile, translucent material for printing and installation. This technique can produce black and white images, but color can be easily incorporated through colored silk, pigmented encaustic bricks, and a color laser printed imagery. It is also important to note that this printmaking method is inexpensive and does not require a press, which is perfect for any studio or home-based printmaker. This demonstration is ideal for SGCI because it combines the handmade with the digital—continuing the movement of new processes that make printmaking a relevant and evolving medium.

The process begins by heating up the hot plate to 180 °F. At this temperature, the beeswax and encaustics can be melted and mixed to my ideal color. At this state, I can decide if I want my final print to be opaque or transparent using different ratios of encaustics to beeswax. Next, I paint on my mixed encaustic color or glide my brick of beeswax over the clean hotplate to create a thin coating of wax on its surface. Then a piece of ultra fine white silk is placed onto the hotplate, which immediately soaks up the wax. I carefully peel off the silk and it dries within seconds. This wax-coated silk is now the substrate to receive my toner transfer imagery.

Once my image is printed off of a color laser printer, I place it toner-side down onto my silk overtop of a light table, and press the toner into the wax surface using a bone folder. The toner is being forcibly transferred into the wax as I burnish the back of the cartridge paper. Once I make a few passes with the bone folder, I can remove the printer paper by spraying water on the back of the paper and rubbing it off completely with my fingers. Finally, I carefully peel the silk off of the light table. Because there is no drying time with this technique, my image is now complete. If there are any stray

burnishing marks in the borders of the silk, a light pass with a heat gun can make them disappear and intensify the color and transparency.

Once I have my encaustic toner transfer print, I can leave it as is or incorporate it into a larger project. It is possible to mount the silk onto western paper for a traditional print presentation, but I do not personally prefer this. The waxed silk contains beautiful translucent qualities that can be read from the front as well as the back. Therefore, I use this method to create large installation and sculptural prints. I also use this process to create artist books, as the silk is quite flexible and easily sewn into pages. Cut out pieces can be incorporated into a larger print or collage, and even heat set onto sculptures. Silkscreen sits nicely on top of the waxed silk as a final layer, or other traditional printmaking methods, such as woodcut or lithography, can be printed onto the silk before dipping it in wax. Because the silk is transparent on the light table, registration for tiling images or precisely laying down your toner transfer layer is easily accomplished.

A downside to this process is that the results are best when only one toner transfer layer is made. It is very difficult to heat up the silk again and add more beeswax for an additional layer while keeping the integrity of the original image. However, perhaps this can be used to the advantage of the printmaker's final concept and image.

Although toner transfer methods have existed for decades, my process of using wax onto silk is superior in a few ways. Because the transferring agent is wax-based, the final image is incredibly bright and saturated. This is opposed to gel-medium transfers, which can result in dull colors. Second, the transfer does not use any noxious agents, such as acetone. The toner laser print offs are inexpensive and easily obtained (I print mine off at Staples). Finally, clean up is simple and only requires a glass scraper, shop towels, and water.

Equipment:

Hotplate

Clean metal plate (any kind, medium sized)

Light table

Heat gun

Two yards of silk

Beeswax brick

Encaustic color bricks

Laser printed images on cartridge paper

Shop towels

Water spray bottle

Glass scraper

A Xerox machine to distribute demonstration notes to the audience