

GOING GREEN IN THE PRINT STUDIO

Most studios have dramatically changed printmaking techniques and gone “green” by replacing old methods with new innovations, reducing and recycling waste, and using fewer toxic chemicals and solvents or eliminating them altogether. Rather amazing, as the list of hazards to health and the environment accumulate, that more artists aren’t brain-damaged or dead long before their time!

This article tells you what some PAN members are doing and offers recommendations and a few web sites so you can check out more information. But please note this is not meant to be a comprehensive study. Because this correspondent’s experience is primarily with etching, there are gaps in the record. Many more ecologically-friendly and safe ideas are coming from the lithographers, wood- and lino-cutters, and printmakers of other techniques.

Recycling. There are many ways to reuse paper, such as printing on the backs of proofs and failed editions, sending paper to the recycling bin, cutting up paper for collage, and pulping it to make interesting new materials.

After pulling a print, print the ghost – there’s less ink to clean up plus you have another piece of art! Unused inks can be saved by wrapping in plastic and storing in the freezer. Water-soluble and water-based products mean not having to use strong solvents for cleanup.

Toxic chemicals. Most studios now use ferric chloride to etch copper instead of nitric or hydrochloric acid. But it’s still a hazardous chemical. Its concentration can be thinned with water and if kept properly contained will last a long time.

Dispose of it at appropriate location, such as the local DEQ or Metro (Portland).

Mineral spirits is not necessary for cleaning up. One contributor suggests Future floor wax as a replacement for hard ground, which avoids the use of mineral spirits.

Rosin for aquatint is flammable. So are solvents and oil-based inks and all should be carefully stored. Rags saturated with inks, grounds and mineral spirits should be stored in a closed container and disposed of appropriately. See “Clean up” below – you really don’t need to use rags for removing inks and grounds.

New ideas and products are available for safer platemaking and include solar and electrostatic processes.

Inks. New watersoluble and waterbased inks are gaining popularity. Research found reference to using copier toner and silicone in lithography, but these too must be handled with care.

Cleaning up. Vegetable oil is a good cleaner and lubricant. Many have moved away from baby oil because it’s mineral-based and its perfume can be a bit overwhelming.

Citrus- and soy-based products are strong cleaners. A cautionary tale: SoySolv is powerful enough to break down rubber and asphalt so don’t use it on brayers. We learned that the hard way.

A spritz of SoySolv dissolves hard ground and dilutes inks; mush that around and let it work, then follow with a spritz of Simple Green, wash and rinse. No rags. No paper towels. One contributor recommends applying a

thin coat of vegetable oil after cleaning the plate to protect it from the elements.

Simple Green and Dawn dishwashing liquid are recommended as all-purpose degreasers and cleaners. Both should be diluted with water. Rubbing alcohol is also a degreaser and cleans the pressbed and work surfaces, but many artists may prefer not to use this somewhat toxic material.

Water, newsprint, vinegar, and elbow grease. Water is the final great dissolver and diluter but, as always, think about what you're sending down the drain.

Protecting YOU. We've become complacent with the term "organic," but we're not referring to food here. Organic art materials – inks, cleaners, oils, rosins, sprays – are dangerous and they accumulate in the body over time, through the skin as well as the lungs. Gloves, mask, respirator, goggles ... always use protective gear! Vent the studio with a highspeed overhead fan. And, speaking of food, it's a bad idea to eat in the studio. Take a break and go elsewhere to eat and drink. Drink plenty of water after a print session to help cleanse the body of toxins.

Resources. We can benefit from the considerable research and commitment in "eco-friendly" techniques of PAN members and by artists and teachers such as Keith Howard (who wrote *Non-toxic intaglio Printmaking*), Cedric Green, and many others. Check out the web sites following this article. Another excellent resource is the art programs at area colleges and universities where the newest artists are being trained and where print studios must adhere to environmental regulations.

Many of us work alone or in small groups and perhaps in just one or two types of printmaking so it's important

that we share "green" knowledge with each other. Let's continue the conversation. Tell us what works and what doesn't.

<http://www.greenart.info/galvetch/contfram.htm> for information on electro-etching and galvanography, methods devised in the 19th century that require no solvents.

<http://www.graphicartsonline.com/article/CA6422554.html> for information on the printing industry and how it's trying to go sustainable.

<http://homepage.usask.ca/~nis715/> for information on waterless and water-based techniques to replace traditional methods for lithography, screenprinting, and etching.

<http://www.praga.com/Imagon/imhoward.htm> for comments by Keith Howard states that the change from traditional toxic techniques to safer healthier printmaking stimulates new artforms.

<http://www.metro-region.org/index.cfm/go/by.web/id=24267> for how to dispose of toxic chemicals and solvents.

<http://www.chicagoartistsresource.org/?q=node/15263> for a discussion on health and safety in intaglio.

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Happy printmaking!

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