

Sugar Lift Etching

What is sugar lift etching?

A sugar lift is a way of creating painterly marks on an etching plate using a sugar solution and a paint brush. The areas you paint are a positive mark. It is a form of aquatint etching.

Preparing the sugar lift solution

Using a screw topped jar, fill one third full (approx. 100 ml) with hot water and add as much sugar as will dissolve to create a saturated sugar solution. Add a small tube of black gouache and a couple of drops of gum arabic. Stir well. You will need to stir again before use.

Making the plate

- File the edges of the plate at an angle of approximately 45 degrees, to allow the smooth passage through the press, protecting your paper and the blankets. Try to leave a smooth bevel as any ridges will hold ink. Polish the plate with brasso or metal polish.
- Degrease the plate using the degreaser provided, rinse the plate and drain in an upright position.
- Create your image using the sugar solution by painting straight onto the prepared plate with a brush. The areas you paint will be a positive mark.
- Allow to dry.
- Apply a thin coat of straw hat varnish (light colour) with a wide soft brush over the whole plate.
- Allow to dry.
- Submerge the plate in warm water in a tray. Top up with hot water. Use a soft brush to encourage the sugar layer to lift. Your original painting is now exposed and ready to aquatint.

Applying an aquatint

- **IMPORTANT:** Ensure you wear the personal protective equipment – a mask and a pair of gloves. Please also ensure the extraction unit is switched on.
- Tap the box to dislodge the dust and turn the handle vigorously around 10 times. This will circulate the dust so it descends evenly. Allow the dust to settle for a minute then place your plate on a board and place in the box.
- Leave in box for 5 minutes to coat evenly then remove.
- Remove from board, place on the mesh grid and fuse the resin using with Bunsen burner. Keep the flame moving until the resin is transparent. Cool.

Etching the plate

- **IMPORTANT:** Ensure you wear the personal protective equipment – goggles and a pair of gloves. Please also ensure the extraction unit is switched on.
- Protect the back of the plate with parcel tape.
- You can create tones from light to dark depending on the length of the bite. Biting times will depend on the strength of the acid but 30 seconds might give a light grey and 4 minutes a black. The acid bites between the resin particles to create tone and a magnifying glass can help you see this and judge how long to bite the plate. Take care not to over bite as the aquatint can lift off

completely. You can stop out sections to create a range of tones using stop out varnish. Allow to dry before re-biting.

- When all biting is complete remove the stop out varnish with white spirit. Remove the straw hat and aquatint with meths. A soft tooth brush may help.

Preparing the paper:

- Place your paper in the water bath for at least 5 minutes before printing. This time will vary according to the type of paper you are using. The better the paper, the longer the soaking time.
- When you are ready to print, remove the paper from the water and then place between two sheets of blotting paper and blot off any excess water on the surface of the paper.
- The paper needs to be damp and soft to print, not wet.
- Keep hands clean at all time at this stage.

Inking up:

- Using a card spatula spread a small amount of ink all over the plate.
- Taking a pad of scrim, push the ink into the etched areas.
- Then start to wipe the plate – wiping excess ink from the surface – use smooth strokes in one direction, turning the plates as you go.
- Finish cleaning the plate with tissue – polishing the surface gently taking care not to lift the ink out of the incised marks. Clean the beveled edges.

For colour printing: Apply each colour separately and wipe down in the same method as described above. Use a separate piece of scrim to rub each coloured ink into separate areas on the plate. Each colour is carefully wiped down before the next is applied. Some merging of colour will occur.

Printing:

- Lay your inked plate upright on the press bed with a sheet of newsprint underneath.
- Place your dampened paper on to the plate and a piece of newsprint on top of that.
- Smooth the blankets carefully over the plate and wind through the press bed at even speed.
- When rolled through, fold back the blankets carefully and peel off print with clean hands.