

Pasta Machine Press - Milk Carton Drypoint Print Instructions

By Stephen Fowler (@stephenfowler_rubberstamping)

You will need the following:

Plastic milk carton/bottle,

A pair of scissors,

A variety of incising tools such as; a scalpel, etching needles, perforating tracing tool, long masonry nail, leather craft prong tool, stone carving tooth chisel, and sandpaper.

A pasta machine (these can be found secondhand in charity shops or online for a few pounds).

Caligo Safe Wash Etching Inks,

An old plastic bank card/loyalty store card,

Cheap liquid soap for cleaning tools and the drypoint plate (I find very cheap bubble bath is perfect).

Etching scrim

Paper: blotting paper, tissue paper, photocopy paper and printmaking paper such as; Somerset and Fabriano Unica

Cat litter-tray or something similar to soak printing paper.

Don't forgetting an idea for an image or motif.

TIP - Read through the instructions before you start the workshop.

Step 1 Preparation

a: Wash your 4-pint milk carton, then using a pair of scissors cut off the handle.

b: Cut the bottom, rim of the carton off. Next cut along the vertical 'seam' of the vessel.

c: Finish off, by trimming away the the remaining handle area, and make 3/4 cuts down the carton, so it can lie flat (*see illustrated instructions*).

Step 2 Cutting out

Cut out a drypoint plate, this could a geometric shape, or the outline of your image (*e.g. the bat in the illustrated instructions*).

NOTE - Remember to check the size of your pasta machine, you won't be able to fit a drypoint plate and printing paper which is wider than the width of the machine's 'mouth', however you can pass through the machine a plate/paper that is endlessly long of course.

Step 3 Incising a motif/image

Experiment with a variety of incising tools, make a number of marks in the plastic. Sandpaper is excellent for creating 'tone'. Prong tools/tooth chisels/perforating tools make uniform patterns in contrast with freestyle linear lines of a drypoint needle. Consider incising deeply as well as lightly; like drawing, the harder the pressure the darker the resulting print, the lighter the pressure the lighter the print. Now dispose of any dust resulting from this work.

Step 4 Inking up

With an out of date bank card or loyalty store card, spread the etching ink across the entire drypoint plate/cut out surface. Make sure the ink penetrates all the incised lines/marks. A small 'ball' of etching scrim can be used to dab/push all the ink into the marks and scratches you've made.

Step 5 Cleaning the plate

The next stage is removing the excess ink. Both etching scrim and white tissue paper are required. 'Bunch up' a piece of scrim and then very lightly mop away at one end of plate using circular movements, this will pick up the ink from the surface of the plate and not from the incised marks. Work slowly and steadily across the plate, using a clean section of scrim for each small section of the plate. Then with a small piece of white tissue paper, using circular motions with your fingers, very, very lightly touch/clean the entire plate again.

With practice you'll learn how to ink-up and clean the plate to create a print your happy with every time.

Step 6 to 9 Preparing the printing paper

Step 6

A cat litter tray is a simple and affordable vessel to dampening your printing paper.

NOTE - *Before soaking the paper, remember to crop the paper so it the correct size for the drypoint plate.*

Step 7

Soak the paper in the tray/water bath for approximately 2 minutes.

Step 8

Remove the paper from the water, allow any excess water to drip into the tray before placing the wet paper between some blotting paper sheets.

Step 9

Before removing the printing paper from the blotting paper, firmly pat and rub the blotting paper with your hands. Watch out for inky fingers. **TIP** - *place a piece of scrap paper on top to avoid any mess.*

To know whether the paper is damp enough and not too wet, there shouldn't be any shiny water residue on the paper, if there is, simply place the paper back between the blotters and rub the paper again. A dampened piece of paper should be cold and not wet to the touch.

Step 10 Print preparation

NOTE - *You will need a piece of lightweight paper (e.g. photocopy paper) which is the same size of the printing paper, and a piece of lightweight paper which is the same length, and double the width of the printing paper.*

a: Fold the wider piece of paper in half, next place your drypoint plate on the other piece of lightweight paper. When your happy with the positioning of the drypoint plate and paper, carefully place them both inside the folded paper – see illustrated instructions.

b: Next carefully place the dampened printing paper on top of the drypoint plate, so it lines up with the lightweight paper below – see illustrated instructions.

Step 11 Printing with a pasta machine press

NOTE *Before using the pasta machine press for the first time, its advisable to get the hang of it beforehand, this is essential if you're using the full width of the machine 'mouth'.*

When placing the folded paper 'sandwich' of printing paper, lightweight paper, drypoint plate, in the pasta machine press, make sure its lined up at a 90degree angle, otherwise it may buckle up.

When lined up and ready turn the handle of the press, keep turning at steady pace, do not pause, with your other hand guide the 'sandwich' out the press so it exists towards you.

TIP *If you're considering trying this workshop with children I would advise using smaller plates and paper, then you'll have fewer issues with buckling.*

Step 12 The Finish!

Carefully remove the printed paper from the 'sandwich', the drypoint plate may stick to the printed paper, this is fine and not an error, simply peel away the plate and put to one side.

Place a pieces of white tissue paper on top of the print and place under a board (piece of wood or Perspex), place heavy weights on the board such as some hardback books and leave for a few days until the print is completely dry.