

Printmaking using an Orange Juice Carton as a Matrix

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INTRODUCTION

Life sometimes surprises us – adversity creating opportunity. I'm a metal sculptor and printmaker who, after a painful operation on my hip, realized that an orange juice carton could provide an interesting alternative matrix to metal plates. Whilst recovering from that surgery I worked, in diverse ways, to transform this piece of packaging into a printing matrix. In this apprenticeship I kneaded, embroidered, sewed, marked the surface with textured tips, and added textures made from twigs and leaves. I also cut the packaging to create embossing and different contours. Afterwards, I inked that matrix with various colours and extracted the prints. The article shows the interesting results. Through this exploration, I discovered a material that can be used as a cheap, flexible, innovative, creative and environmentally friendly printing matrix, because it reuses a carton that would otherwise prematurely return to nature.

I am a sculptor and printmaker based in Sao Paulo, Brazil. In February 2014, the etching press I had ordered some time earlier was delivered to my home. What should have been a source of joy became instead a source of frustration and sadness because at that time I was recovering from a painful operation and was barred from leaving my house. I could not walk further than inside the space of my house. My studio, where all my metal plates were kept, was a long way away. I couldn't drive and only had three colours of printing ink, two brayers and two blocks of paper for printing. Frustrated, unable to pick up my materials, I opened the refrigerator and grabbed a carton of orange juice. Sitting at the kitchen table, I drank the juice while looking at the carton in front of me.

Suddenly I became aware that the juice package was coated inside with a layer of aluminium foil. I quickly emptied out the juice, opened up the orange juice carton and, with a needle, began to work on the aluminized part of the package. At that moment, I had no idea of the possibilities of that matrix.

The orange juice carton proved to be a pleasant and versatile matrix. I started working it as if it were a metal plate, drawing with a dry point tool, inking and cleaning with tarlatan, as if it were a conventional metal plate and printing it under pressure in the etching press.

METHOD

The method I used to extract prints from the packaging followed the same rules as engraving in metal using a conventional press, but a multitude of possible methods existed for marking the



Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure 1: Chandelier (2018) by Rosane Viegas Medium: Monotype using an orange juice carton and inked leaves. Dimensions: 210 x 297mm

Figure 2: Dancing Wave (2017) by Rosane Viegas. Medium: monotype on orange juice carton. Dimensions: 420 x 297mm.

matrix. This kind of orange juice carton consists of a tough but flexible cardboard sheet covered by a very thin metal sheet, usually made of aluminium, with a plastic coating. This flexibility represents a different element that enabled me to develop numerous non-conventional printing techniques.

Working with this matrix full of possibilities was such a pleasant learning experience that I decided to explore further with this innovative printing material.

During this apprenticeship I began to knead, embroider, sew, mark the surface with textured points, and add textures made of twigs and leaves. I also cut the packaging to create embossing and different contours, added lace, paste and other materials; worked with acrylic media to create textures, aquatints and tones; painted with my fingers, spatulas or brushes; and every day I discovered many other possibilities besides the conventional forms. Soon, I developed colourful monotypes, using sticks, leaves and tree bark from my garden as masks.

In figures 3-6, I show a small sequence of that printing technique using an etching press.

From the perspective of inking, this orange juice packing is unique. Being very flexible makes it much easier to imbue with varied colours than metal plates or woodblocks. As the fully flexible matrix facilitates coloured inking, it enables punctuated interventions with different colours, allowing the creation of multi-coloured printing, because I could simply pinpoint a small area by pushing that area up and applying the paint only at that point.

Furthermore, the packaging has peculiar creases that, when opened up and crafted, resemble a piece of stained glass. This apparent limitation in fact proved to be an incredible benefit, allowing the creation of differentiated structures precisely because of its well-defined folds. The paint is not deposited in these folds, forming unique designs, which I find an advantage for anyone interested in utilizing the mosaic of shapes and folds created on the matrix. The wrinkles of the juice carton add a special design to the print that is different from all other techniques.

INK AND PAPER

The type of ink I prefer to use on this matrix is oil-based paint. Acrylic paint also works well, but with acrylic paint the colours look somehow opaque. It appears that the plastic on top of the metal plate prevents the acrylic paint from spreading properly.

As for paper, I very much like to use medium-weight paper (180gsm to 250gsm) suitable for good-quality metal engraving, such as Hahnemühle or Canson paper.



Figure 3



Figure 4

Figure 3: clockwise from top left) Figure 3: Orange juice carton, tinted. Figure 4: Tinted leaves over tinting matrix. Figure 5: Extracting a print from the matrix. Figure 6: Matrix and printing side by side. Blue citronellas (2019) by Rosane Viegas. Medium: monotype on cut orange juice carton. Dimensions: 297 x 210mm
 Figure 4: My history, my way (2017) by Rosane Viegas. Medium: woodblock printing over juice carton printing. Dimensions: 280 x 330mm

I also like to make prints out of orange juice packaging, along with woodcuts and etching plates. These combinations result in very interesting and innovative printings, as you can see in Figure 7.

I prefer doing monotypes, but this matrix can be reused multiple times. I was able to produce up to 30 editions with the same carton. After printing too many editions, the folds on the matrix become flat, destroying the designs formed by the wrinkles.

Since then I have improved my experimentation by studying the multiple possibilities of this unusual but versatile, flexible, innovative matrix, whose usual destination is the rubbish bin. Even the size of the package, which I had considered a disadvantage, stopped being a limitation as, over time, I learned to paste several cartons together so that they worked as one piece. Another apparent advantage is that the print can be made either by using an etching press or by rubbing a spoon over the carton, as if it were a more traditional relief matrix.

I would like to propose that using a juice carton as a printing matrix offers a cheap, versatile and environmentally friendly printmaking option.

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IMAGE GALLERY







