

Sugar Lift Process:

Sugarlift Using Ball Hardground:

Ball hardground, because it's thin and delicate, works very well for a process known as sugarlift. Sugarlift is a means of controlling value through aquatint while controlling shape through brush marks. Picasso's *Satyr Unveiling Sleeping Woman* (1936) is a superb example of sugarlift etchings. The image has one scraped and burnished correction, but the majority of the tones are controlled by exuberant use of the brush. Other artists who have produced notable work in sugarlift include: George Roualt and Misch Kohn.

Like other etching processes, the first step in sugarlift is degreasing the plate. You immediately have 2 choices. You can aquatint the plate first or you can aquatint the plate last. For purposes of simplicity, we will aquatint last.

Step one:

After the plate has been degreased, the artist paints on it with a solution of simple sugar and India ink. Depending on the consistency, this solution might tend to pull apart itself creating bubbles, or it might be more faithful to the brush stroke. The material may pull back on itself changing the shape after the brush has passed or, if it's thicker, it will register a repair of the brush. The drawing can be manipulated with rags and water. Nothing has happened to the plate in terms of texture or printing at this point. When a satisfactory drawing has been completed, the plate is allowed to dry or is moved to a hotplate set at 250 degrees.

(The plate on which the image is being formed is sometimes well served by having a second plate next to it. The second plate allows the printer to warm the braer, or small roller, with which he's going to coat the plate with ball hardground.)

Step 2:

Within a short time the sugarlift is sure to be dry and ball hardground needs to be rolled over it. The ball hardground acts as a lubricant when the roller passes over the sugarlift. To start applying ball hardground, one may draw on the plate with the melting hardground or draw on the extra plate which has been added next to the first. Ideally, the roller is warm and the ground is highly liquid due to heat. The intention is to cover the plate with that thin amber ball hardground layer that is used for needling. Once again the plate needs to be smoked. The layer of soot will turn the plate black and make it more acid resistant. The coated plate is removed from the hotplate and placed in a tray of cold water.

Patience at this point will reward the artist with greater detail. The artist should allow the sugarlift to sit in water and gradually soften. The sugar lift technique described above, in spite of its complexity, appears spontaneous when printed.

Step 3:

After soaking for a minimum of ten minutes, the artist may hurry the process by lightly stroking the surface with his or her fingers or a feather.

Step 4:

The plate is then aquatinted and etched.

Variations on lift grounds:**Solvent and Talc Lift**

Another lift technique can be executed with asphaltum. After the asphaltum has been baked, it is laid on a flat surface. The artist mixes a creamy solution of talcum powder and mineral spirits. This creamy material is laid on the asphaltum with a brush and allowed to sit for 2 or 3 minutes.

At that point a cotton ball or other very soft absorbent material is soaked in alcohol and lightly passed over the asphaltum lifting the brush marks. Open areas created through this technique sometimes retain a thin film of resist which can be cleaned from the plate by a minute or two in the acid. Like other liftgrounds, the plate is aquatinted at this point and the tone created.

The processes described above can be applied after an aquatint resulting in a softness and irregularity which may be desirable.

Rubber Cement

We've all had the experience of rubbing rubber cement off of a smooth surface. You can draw with rubber cement. The drawn plate can then be sprayed with enamel or lacquer. Once that's dry, one can rub the rubber cement from the plate.

Object Lift - Stencil Lift

If the acid resist is sprayed onto the plate, all sorts of variations can be created. Objects can be placed on the plate. The spray simply doesn't reach the plate and the area covered is able to bite.

Crayon Lift

Lithographic crayons or other soaplike products one can be used to draw an image. The litho crayons melt at a lower temperature than ball hardground. By using one pass of the roller to apply ball hardground a transfer will occur. The crayon sticks to the roller and lifts, creating a crude crayon like passage that will etch.

Powdered Sugar

Still another interesting way to create an image is the use of powdered sugar. The melting temperature of sugar is far higher than asphaltum or ball hardground. So whether one uses a bag to sprinkle it on the plate or simply

throws it on the plate, the sugar must be melted using the hot ring. Once melted, the plate can be coated with ball hardground, placed in the tray, and the sugar will be dissolved in water. The resulting tone is, in fact, a negative aquatint; that is, there are thousands of holes in the ground rather than beads of resist. This ground can be developed slowly through multiple repetitions to create a dark area. A process with a similar appearance is called saltground. Saltground employs ball hardground and salt. Any material that has weight and can be dissolved in water will function for this process. The artist first lays a ball hardground and while the plate is still hot – so hot that the ground is liquid – the artist proceeds to sprinkle the plate with salt or some other water soluble powder. Because the ground is extremely soft, the particulate material will drop through the liquid ground to the surface. The plate is then submerged in water and the particulate is dissolved. Again, the result is thousands upon thousands of holes which etch rather than valleys of between dots of resist. The resulting darks from either powdered sugar or salt require multiple applications but they have a great deal of depth to them.