

Stencil and the art of Pochoir

Annie Day

Pochoir is the French term for stencil. In the Art Nouveau and Art Deco eras, the colour application process of the stencil was rejuvenated by the French, to great effect when combined with key images of lithographs, woodcuts and etchings, turning a decorative technique into fine art. Stencilling traces its roots back to Egyptian times. During the reign of Henry III stencilled patterns were often created with gold powders and William Morris used stencils in his interiors. A stencil can be made quickly and will instantly transform a one colour print like Marissa's below.

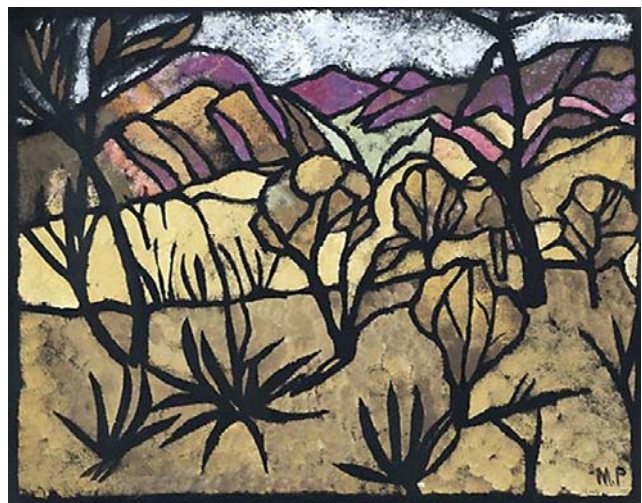


Prints above, from a recent workshop are by Marissa Bozanic – the print on the right has simple colour stencils added using translucent etching inks applied sparingly with a dabber

Notice how the black paper is used to great advantage in the images below. In Margaret Preston's day an artist would have used gouache and card oiled with linseed oil as stencil material, these days we are fortunate to have transparent sheets and acrylic paints to achieve our prints.



"Nasturtiums" by Annie Day



landscape by Margaret Preston

Choose a **simple** image, photocopy, enlarge or decrease the size until you are satisfied with the scale and follow the steps below to create a stencil

Materials

- A craft knife and cutting board
- Transparent plastic sheets
- A fine-point, permanent marker
- A simple image – see those above as examples
- Low tack masking tape
- Dabber, sponge or stencil brush
- Acrylic paints
- Paper

Making the stencils

- Make a photocopy of your image and colour it with gouache or pencils, you need a separate transparent sheet for each colour.
- Mark the corners of the image with a dot – these 4 dots need to appear on every transparency and your printmaking paper for perfect registration.
- Carefully trace each colour onto the transparent sheets with a fine sharpie or gel pen.
- Cut using a craft knife. It is very important to identify spaces in the stencil to cut away. We call these "black" spaces. The remaining parts of the stencil, which block the paint from being applied, are the "white" spaces.
- All of the white spaces must be connected to form one piece in order for the stencil to stay intact. If you have white spaces that are an "island," meaning that they are completely surrounded by black space, you must create a bridge. That way the stencil will remain as one piece. You can apply colour to the bridge space on your print later.
- Use sticky tape to mend if you cut in the wrong place.

Applying the colour - printing

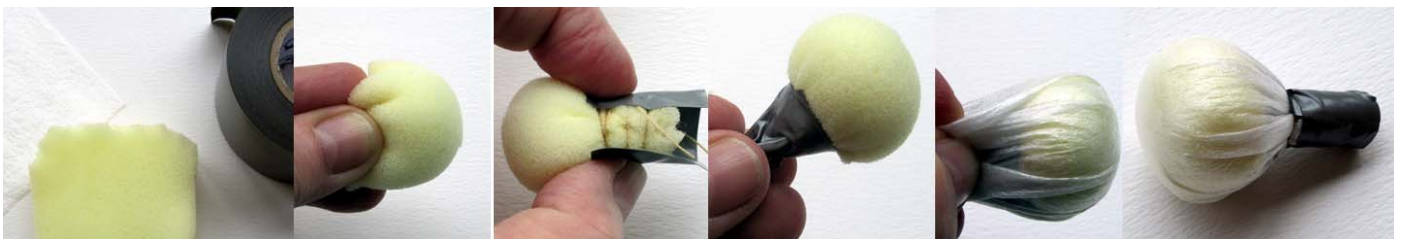
- The golden rule is to use an almost dry brush, sponge or dabber. Pick up a small amount of colour on the dabber. First blot on waste paper to remove any excess paint, leaving only a thin film of paint
- Line up your stencil with the dots you have marked on the paper, fix your stencil in place with low tack masking tape or try holding the stencil in place with one hand, begin to dab the surface with twisting, pouncing movements to apply the colour.

Making dabbers



Left to right: Sponge dabber sponge covered in fine foam sheet dacron with foam covering

- Choose a 10 - 15cm square of sponge or dacron wadding and form it into a small ball - gathering up the corners bind tightly with gaffer or other tape to form a handle. You may need a thread to hold in place while applying the tape. This makes a basic dabber.
- Try covering the sponge with fine plastic sponge sheeting – as used to pack electronic items. This surface is great for wiping clean after use and gives a smooth finish



Foam dabber: forming, securing with thread, applying tape to hold and covering in fine foam



Dacron wadding dabber: made using 2 pieces of dacron, form one into a ball and wrap then cover in fine foam