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Bruce's Studio News

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New Things To Learn

I took a workshop on the 10th of January at a Zea Mays Printmaking in Northampton, MA. I had been there before to attend a portfolio day, where they exhibit prints by the artists that are regular members of the studio. The building is a well equipped, renovated factory building which performs as a studio, workshop, gallery, educational facility and research center. Zea Mays is dedicated to safe and non-toxic printmaking practices so they share their green printmaking processes through workshops, consultations and private tutorials and provide access to their studios to members as well as short term visiting printmakers.

Decidedly, I began my first experience there with a group that came to try inkless embossing using etching presses for the first time. I'm sorry to say that it has been many years since I have done any printmaking using an etching press. The main thrust of the class, which was taught by *Louise Kohrman*, was really a technical exploration of platemaking for embossing, and learning about materials



that are suitable for embossing. Also discussed were the types of papers that suit the technique, and most of all, correct use of the presses to prevent damage to them. Safety, was part of the discussion as well. Since no ink was to be used for this session, issues normally associated with inks, application of color, plate wiping, cleanup, and related areas did not have to be discussed.

We began the session looking over the assortment of 3 dimensional and textural materials that each student brought with them. The materials were judged suitable for embossing based primarily on their thickness and hardness. Some were rejected by Louise, usually because they were too thick and could damage the bed or the roller of the press. (Even though the roller and the bed are steel, some metal objects could leave a mark on them that would be impossible to remove... thereby ruining it for future use for any printing)... one of the interesting things about the process

was our use of *yoga mats* for cushioning the paper during the embossing. Because of its ability to compress evenly under the heavy pressure of the press, it allowed the paper to emboss without tearing.

The sequence of elements placed on the bed of the press before printing are as follows. 1) 4 ply thick newsboard (cardboard) sheet was placed on the bed to protect it. 2) A print plate, usually matboard or flat, textured plate with objects to be embossed arranged as the artist desired. 3) Wet paper, that had rested for at least 2 hours in a plastic covered damp pack, after soaking. 4) The green yoga mat (in picture) and then 5) another newsboard sheet aligned on top of the yoga mat to protect the roller, just in case!

In the end, my results were unsatisfactory... but that's not unusual. Any artist knows that the learning curve for new work often takes lots of testing, reworking, invention, compromise, and patience. My results failed because I chose the wrong paper for my efforts. Embossing, to be effective, requires a heavy-weight paper. My choice of a medium-weight paper, left me with a thinly embossed print, after drying, and was disappointing. But, the learning experience, now permits me to understand one thing that I need to consider the next time around. Though my matboard constructed plates worked well in the press, it was my choice of paper that doomed the prints.

After some work in my studio for the next few months, it is my hope to return to Zea Mays with some new plates to print and paper that will create far better embossments!

Spotlight -

To all my readers within traveling distance to Lebanon, NH, I'd like to recommend (*Harry Bernard-Was Here*) an exhibition of work by my artist friend and neighbor. The Panorama view below, shows the opening (which my friend had to miss because of emergency heart bypass surgery). Despite what I'd call the "worst case of Murphy's Law" ever, Harry is now recovering well at home. The paintings are uniquely Harry's both in imagery and technique. His amazing painterly style and allusions to his "place" in his world, offer insights into his personal vision. The show continues at the AVA Gallery and Art Center, 11 Bank St Lebanon, NH 03766 through February 6th.

