

Scraperboard

LEAFLET
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Scraperboard

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Introduction

The desire to record thoughts and ideas extra-murally has existed from earliest history to the present day - from hieroglyphics to the elaborate machine engraving of the twentieth century. Scraperboard fulfils the innate urge to decorate an otherwise plain surface - but without specialist tools, cumbersome materials or involved chemical processing. It is a modern, dry medium for producing comparatively durable and finished works to any standard within the users capabilities

The range of subjects and the diversity of treatments depend upon the users basic artistic knowledge and standard but even the youngest or least adept can enjoy the instant result obtainable from the most fundamental 'scratching'. With the minimum of equipment - one piece of Scraperboard and a cutting tool- a unique piece of work can be produced quickly and without the usual mess so common to so many media and the novice.

At the beginner level it is an interesting and very rewarding experiment with lines, but rapidly leads the student into the world of textures, patterns and tones. At the same time manual dexterity, increased observational and imaginative capabilities are induced by this delightful medium. It successfully encourages a desire to improve ones' skill.

Scraperboard engraving is as easy as drawing with a pencil, and with much the same action, but the result is 'finished' in the sense that it can be framed or displayed.

It is an inexpensive and satisfying medium for beginner, serious amateur or professional.



Robin - Black scraperboard

What is Scraperboard?

Scraperboard is a sandwich of stiff backboard, hard white china clay and a surface of indian ink. It is a ready to use medium - the appropriate cutter scratching or scraping through the surface producing a clear and clean white line or shape.

White scraperboard is available upon which the user applies ink to selected areas. This obviates the clearing of large areas.

The resultant work cannot itself be used as a printing plate, but should reproduction be required then the block maker/printer or the photographer must be called upon. Work intended for reproduction should be produced slightly larger, as reduction tightens up the image.

As previously stated the cutter engraves a line or shape through the surface ink to expose the white beneath. Closely-spaced overworking from different directions produces patterns and textures, and automatically, tones - i.e. those grey areas between full black (or total absence of light) and white (total light). Differing types of cutter, weight or depths of cut and the varying spaces between the cuts give different effects. These range from the purely mechanical texture using steel straight edge or a repetitious curve through to completely random stipples - all of which have their particular use. It is definitely NOT a waste to experiment with all the cutters upon a sheet of scraperboard. This should be kept close at hand throughout any following work as a trial/practice board.

The Tools

Shown opposite are the cutters, the type of line and some of the textures they produce. The cutters are few in number but give a surprisingly wide range of effects - not all of which are shown here. They are used like nibs in a penholder which may be held in any way that allows for a free, clean, scraping action and is also comfortable to the hand of the user.

A, B and C give much the same line but to differing thickness'.

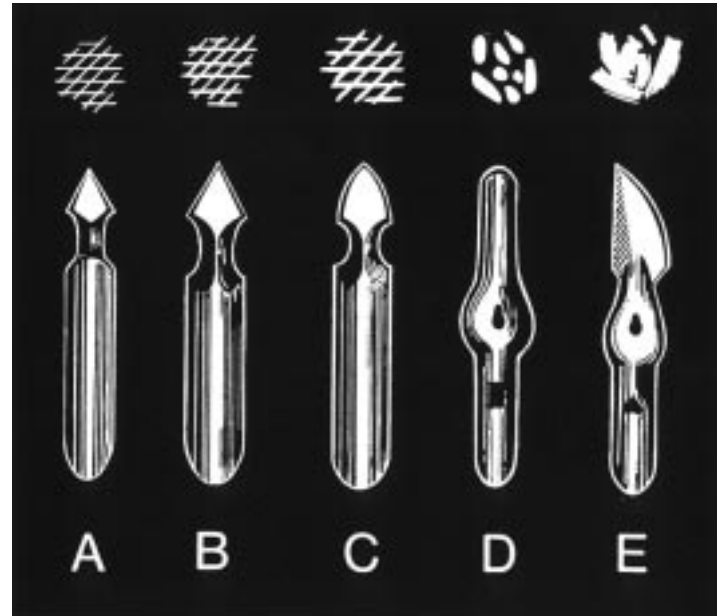
The edges of C may be used to give bold sweeping cuts or to clear small areas from black to white.

D is a gouge and must be used, carefully to avoid 'ploughing' through to the backboard.

E is useful for clearing large areas or for broad single cuts and shapes.

Alternatively, the blade tip can be deliberately serrated to produce multiple and parallel cuts. This can be extremely useful and labour saving when laying down backgrounds or final effects.

Practise cutting with the tools until they are comfortable in the hand and various scrapes can be made without physical discomfort. Get into the habit of keeping a small piece of scraperboard as a trial board.



It is relatively easy to extend the range of tools by making them yourself. Needles in holders or any form of blade such as a penknife will contribute highly individual characteristics.

Keep all cutters sharp and bright. Use a very fine oilstone to 'point- up'.



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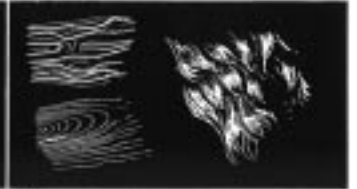
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Initial Effects

1. The simplest cuts obtainable with tool A.
2. The same cuts made over lines drawn with a pen and areas 'blocked-in' with a brush.
3. Mechanical effects using a steel straightedge and tools A, B and C.
4. Random patterns on white scraperboard using tools A, B and C.
5. Random stipples using all the tools.
6. Examples of specific effects - fur and wood.
7. Tools D and E on black scraperboard.
8. Tools D and E on white scraperboard.



Goldfish - Black scraperboard

Starting your first Scraperboard

At this stage, it is a very good idea for the beginner to work from an existing drawing, or to clarify and finalise the chosen design on a sketchpad before any engraving is started. This not only provides a continuous reference throughout the work but also helps prevent such unhappy accidents as running off the edge of the board or starting the work at a bad angle on the board. Such a design or drawing can be as finished or as rough as the beginner wishes and can carry instructions, reminders and notes for the final engraving.

For the purposes of this booklet, it is assumed that the student will use the black scraperboard, as this is 'ready to use'. The approach for white scraperboard is identical except that the design or subject has to be blocked-in with ink and then etched. The advantage of the white lies in the initial control the student has over the relative amount of inked areas.

Useful hints and method of working

Do not touch the surface more than is absolutely necessary and ensure hands are clean and dry.

1. Fix the Scraperboard to a rigid surface

Being a sandwich of three bonded but distinct layers, scraperboard is easily cracked or damaged if over-flexed. The ideal method is to fix the scraperboard to a larger piece of smooth hardboard or similar material. Strips of adhesive tape along the two longer edges, encroaching no more than 3mm on to the ink surface, corrects the slight natural bow of the scraperboard and holds it firmly enough for working. It will be found easier if the two strips of tape are applied to the scraperboard first and then the whole assembly pressed lightly onto the backboard. Do not rub along the tape to press it down - this could mark the board if any moisture or grease is on the fingertips. Place a clean sheet of paper over the assembly and gently smooth with the edge of the hand.

When finally removing the tapes - pull them away from, rather than over the ink surface. Any patches of stubborn adhesive have then only 3mm to travel rather than tearing across the design or drawing. This method of fixing allows for trimming to final size for framing or mounting. A sharp knife should be used directly on to the ink surface with a clean steel rule on the engraving side of the intended cut. This prevents a tragic knife slip across the design.



Cat - Black scraperboard

2. Make a drawing of the main lines and areas in the design on a piece of tracing paper larger than the scraperboard. Cover the reverse side of the tracing paper with red chalk and lightly smear with a piece of cotton wool or a paper tissue. This removes the coarser debris and dust and prevents it being ground into the ink surface. Do not remove too much for fear of patchy or poor transfer. Alternatively use a sheet of dressmaker's tracing paper - readily obtainable from haberdashery shops - and usually comprising three sheets - red, blue and yellow. Use the yellow or red, which are permanent enough not to be obliterated by the hand and are progressively removed during the engraving.

Position and fix the tracing over the scraperboard with small tabs of adhesive tape. Use a coloured ballpoint pen, preferably one with a micro-point, to transfer the salient lines of the design on to the scraperboard. The colour of the ballpoint being different to the pencil lines will give an accurate guide to what has and has not been transferred.

3. If chalk has been used as the transfer medium the main lines and areas must be fixed by very fine, minimal engraving using the 'A' cutter and the remaining chalk polished off. If the chalk is left on the surface for longer than this, it will begin to clog and discolour any further engraving.

N.B. Remember that illustrative work in scraperboard is an experiment with light and shadow. NEVER put a hard white line around the subject - this does not occur in nature.



Hare - Black scraperboard



Raptor - Black scraperboard

4. Try to get into the habit of using a clean piece of paper between the hand and the scraperboard. In moving the point of the tool the fingernail beneath can also polish or mark the surface. This can result in a perfect 'shadow' below and to one side of the subject.

5. Study the original design/drawing and decide upon the type of cut necessary to bring out the 'essence' of the subject. Fur and feathers require different treatments to metal or stone. It is this search and experiment for the ideal cut that increases observational accuracy and develops the artists eye and hand. Work on the obvious white or lighter areas first but try to bring along all the component parts of the design together. It is all too easy to be so involved in a tiny part of the design that the overall effect suffers.

6. Try to develop a working style that allows one to periodically sit back and carefully consider how much work has been done, and more importantly - how much more is to be done. At these points be purely objective and decide that more 'light' is required here or there. Or that a particular area has been overworked and would benefit from a little judicious re-inking, etc. The final work will be enhanced by progressing in easy and logical stages, with several analytical pauses.

7. Black, or the absence of light, is extremely valuable - if in doubt, leave it alone. The biggest single destroyer of scraperboard is overworking.



Feathers - Black scraperboard

White Scrapperboard

The working process is identical to that for black scrapperboard with the following additions or exceptions:

1. Use a very soft (B or 2B) pencil over the back of the tracing and transfer in the normal fashion but with slightly less pressure. Any extraneous pencil marks can be removed with a putty eraser. Take care not to polish the surface excessively.
2. Use a good quality waterproof ink and a sable brush to 'block-in' the main areas of the design and leave to dry naturally. Between 15 - 30 minutes should be sufficient. Exposing to such heat as an electric fire will always curl the board.
3. Alternatively, do all the primary drawing with pen and ink - the surface is admirably suited. Engraving over this produces some detailed and interesting work.
4. The use of a clean piece of paper under the hand to prevent accidental marking is even more important when using white scrapperboard.



Squirrel - White scrapperboard

Why restrict yourself to black ink ?

It is possible, though more difficult, to carefully build up an illustration with semi-transparent inks and then add detailed engraving. It must be understood that the initial colours must be strong - almost to the point of garishness - for white lines engraved through them will produce the pastel tints and shades of them.

It must be remembered that not every drawing or design produced by the usual methods on black scraperboard is suitable for colouring afterwards. The engraved white lines must all be emphasised in a positive way if you intend adding colour afterwards to your design. A thin line or mark tends to vanish completely when colour is applied over it, unless it happens to be an area where many thin lines have been hatched to give a half tone effect. Large areas of white will give a brilliant effect when finally coloured, but it is important to leave plenty of black around these areas. By isolating the colours on a black background, a special brilliance is achieved.

Any coloured pigment used on scraperboard must be translucent. If thin translucent colours are used the white chalky surface beneath the top layer of black ink will shine through the applied colour in a similar way to light shining through a stain glass window. The surrounding area of black around your colour will also intensify whatever colours are used. Most inks, however, are not light fast, so if scraperboards are to be displayed they must be away from strong sunlight.



Village craftsman - Black scraperboard



Door knocker - Black grainedscraperboard

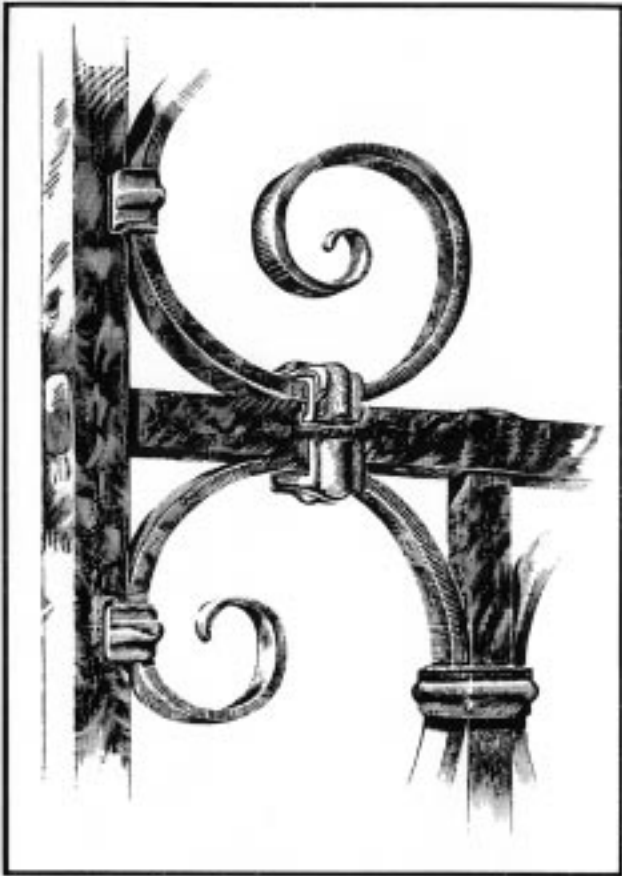
Coloured inks are ideal for colouring scraperboard and are to be preferred to most paints. Inks are easy to handle and dry quickly, and are, of course very translucent. The three primary colours, yellow, red and blue will give endless permutations when mixed and subtle shades are also possible.

Use diluted inks in successive coats rather than one application direct and undiluted from the bottle. It is better to build up to a brilliant hue. It is difficult to tone down a colour once it has been added to your scraperboard design. Distilled water or even tap water can be used to dilute most inks. Mixing colours, one layer upon another layer can take place on your design. It is important however, to keep the scraperboard as dry as possible for if too much liquid is used then the board will become soggy. Dry each coat of applied ink in turn, this only takes a few minutes.

A soft medium sable brush is ideal for applying your coloured inks. Colour should be put on as quickly as possible. This will prevent the board from becoming soggy. Slow application of colour and many strokes of the brush result in a tired looking design. Quickness is essential as it also prevents the black ink on the surface from mingling with your other applied colours. Remember that scraperboard beneath the black surface is rather like blotting paper when you come to add coloured inks. With very little practice, however, it is possible to achieve exciting results once you have a good design in black and white, which lends itself to colour.

Grained and Stippled Scraperboards

Scraperboards with a grained or stripped surface are much used by more advanced students and craftsmen. The various patterns or stipple are mechanically embossed into the material. Black stippled boards may be worked in exactly the same way as plain black boards but graduated 'tones' or 'screen' effects may be obtained by using the blade of the knife or tool (rather than the tip) and stroking it more or less lightly across the stipple. The tops of the indentations become white leaving the pattern (in black) clearly defined. A wide range of shaded effects may thus be obtained.



A. Webster

Study of iron railing - White grained scraperboard

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