

Using Akua Inks on Wood Blocks

Which Ink to Use?

Either Akua Kolor or Akua Intaglio can be used on wood blocks. At McClain's, we have experimented with printing Akua Kolor and Akua Intaglio inks on Shina wood blocks and had these results:

If you are applying ink with brushes in the Japanese method, you can use Akua Kolor ink right out of the bottle.

If you are rolling the ink on the block with a brayer, you can use either Akua Kolor mixed with 20% Tack Thickener, Akua Kolor ink that has been allowed to air-dry on a glass slab for 24 to 48 hours so it is thicker, or Akua Intaglio right out of the jar.

The consistency of Akua Intaglio is very tacky, similar to oil based inks. So if you are used to using oil-based inks, this combination will feel familiar to you. If you are making wood blocks and applying the ink with brayers exclusively, use Akua Intaglio.

Akua Kolor is looser than Akua Intaglio, even with Tack Thickener added. If you do monotypes and woodblock prints, use Akua Kolor with brushes and add Tack Thickener when you are using brayers. Then you can use the ink for either monotypes, monoprints or woodblock prints.

Akua Kolor ink can be added to Akua Intaglio ink to create more colors. Akua Intaglio will temporarily change consistency when Akua Kolor is added into it. Continue mixing until the ink is smooth again.

- **To show wood grain** pour some Akua Kolor onto a piece of glass. Allow to air dry for about one hour so it becomes thicker and tackier. Roll out a very small amount of this ink (too much and the brayer will spin in place), then roll it onto the block. Continue picking up and adding thin coats of ink to the block until the ink has a light sheen, then print. If you want more intense color, overprint (print the same area again) until the color you want is achieved.

Akua Kolor Consistency

SHAKE THE BOTTLE OF AKUA KOLOR BEFORE EACH USE

Akua Kolor is professional quality water-based ink specifically formulated for monotype printmaking. It is made of the highest quality, lightfast pigments and binders. No chalk, fillers, dryers or polymers are added. Pigments settle to the bottom of the bottle because there are no suspending agents added.

The very heavy earth colors contain a stainless steel mixing ball in the bottle to aid in the mixing process. To insure pigment dispersion, shake the bottle for at least one minute after hearing the mixing ball rattle. Sometimes stirring the ink with a skewer or chopstick is necessary to start the mixing process.

Akua Intaglio Consistency

The base for Akua Intaglio ink is soy oil. Separation of pigment from the base can occur with Akua Intaglio ink. If it does, simply stir the ink by placing an ink or palette knife directly into the container and stirring well from the bottom of the container to the top. Akua Intaglio will never harden or form a skin in the container or when left uncovered. The ink consistency varies depending upon the pigment and temperature conditions. The ink will be stiffer when cold and looser when warm.

When trying Akua Intaglio for the first time, we recommend using it right out of the jar without modification. If a stiffer consistency is needed, try placing the jar of ink in a refrigerator until it stiffens. Akua Oil Modifier will stiffen with ink regardless of temperature. Before mixing, work the Akua Oil with the ink knife until it is smooth. Then add small amounts of Akua Intaglio Ink into the Akua Oil until the desired thickness is achieved.

To loosen Akua Intaglio ink, work it with an ink knife under a warm lamp, hair dryer, or a hot plate set at a very low temperature. Or add a small amount of Akua Blending Medium and mix in well.

Printing

Akua inks print well on most standard printmaking papers. We suggest conducting a test by printing the same block twice. Make one print on dry paper and another print on dampened paper. Your results will depend upon the block's characteristics and the type of paper used.

Printing on **dry paper** offers higher contrast prints. It also eliminates the possibility of paper shrinkage making it ideal for printing multi-registered plates or combining prints with digital ink jet or letterpress images. Increase the press pressure and use soft printmaking papers when printing on dry paper. Arches 88, for example, works well. If the print results are blotchy or inconsistent it may be necessary to dampen the paper.

Printing on **damp paper** may offer greater tonal values. Use a western paper that can be dampened, and soak for a short time, around 30 seconds. Blot thoroughly before using.

Handmade papers should never be soaked. Instead, either mist lightly or place between sheets of dampened newsprint for at least one hour or preferably overnight, until the paper is uniformly damp and feels cool to the touch.

Print Drying Times

Akua inks do not contain dryers. Drying time depends upon paper absorbency, climate, and the amount of ink applied. Hard surfaced, glossy or coated papers are not recommended. Handmade papers and *Washi* (Japanese handmade paper) are more absorbent compared to machine-made paper, and work well with both inks.

Typically a print made with Akua Kolor ink will dry in 24 hours. After two weeks, the ink will harden completely and you can overprint without lifting the ink from the first run.

Because it uses a soy oil base, Akua Intaglio inks can leave behind a light residue on smooth paper. Cobalt Dryer can be added to the ink to speed up drying time. Do not add the dryer into the jar of ink. Instead, add just one or two drops to the ink you are going to use that day. Cobalt Dryer in Akua Intaglio works very quickly, so you may not have the long working time you are used to with unmodified Akua inks.

Heat can also speed up the drying time of Akua Intaglio ink. Heat the oven to the lowest temperature available. Turn off the oven, place the print inside, close the door and leave it there while the oven cools. It is a good idea to experiment first with a piece of the printing paper, to make sure the oven will not leave marks or brown the paper, before drying an actual print.

Cleaning Up

We recommend that you wear gloves while cleaning up. First, clean all inky surfaces and plates with a dry rag. Roll excess ink on brayers off onto newsprint or the pages from an old telephone book and then clean with a dry rag. SavvySoap works very well to wash any remaining ink off the roller and condition the rubber at the same time. One part liquid dish detergent to 20 parts water mixed in a spray bottle can be used to clean up any remaining ink residue on glass surfaces. Use rubbing alcohol or a little vinegar diluted with water to clean any soap build up if necessary.

Technical Support

Contact McClain's or address questions and comments to Rostow & Jung at susan@waterbasedinks.com.



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