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Acknowledgements

I am fortunate to have learned a great amount both from my teacher, Richard Steiner, and my many students. While studying in Kyoto with Richard I undertook many projects with his help which explored some of the techniques presented in this book. From my many students in workshops, who often ask questions that have made me think in new ways about mokuhanga, and especially from my students at our residency programme in Karuizawa, I have learned a lot through helping with their questions and projects.

Looking back, I guess it was the same for Richard when I was asking him about techniques and processes to achieve my visions. As a teacher you will know how things can be done despite never using that technique in the same way in your own work. Students bring new ideas and ways to achieve mokuhanga that through the process of problem solving then become part of your own knowledge and skills.

This circle of learning has been very fruitful for me, and I would like to thank all my students, who unfortunately are too many to name individually, but you know who you are!



Richard Steiner in his Kyoto studio, 2011



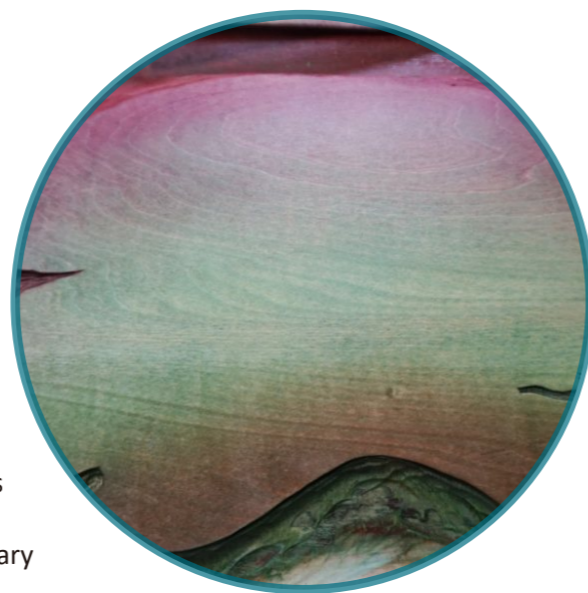
Introduction

Creative Print

Mokuhanga is an incredibly versatile and flexible technique and with a broader set of skills and techniques you can create almost anything! This book is about equipping you with some extended skills and introduces a number of techniques for you to try that will extend your knowledge and make your mokuhanga more visually complex.

Creating your own mokuhanga that really explores your authentic voice as a mokuhanga artist requires a vocabulary or language that you can use. The techniques presented in this book extend your basic vocabulary beyond imitating a Ukiyo-e style mokuhanga, and allow you to explore a more contemporary and creative approach.

Although the materials and techniques are not new, the way that we can use and combine them will give your work a more visually complex and contemporary look. This book introduces alternative ways of creating and transferring designs, and a range of carving and printing techniques that will enhance your mokuhanga and give you more expressive work.



Intermediate level

This book very much assumes that you have a firm grasp on the fundamental skills of mokuhanga. Therefore, it does not cover or re-introduce any basic skills and techniques, and you will find it frustrating without already having a firm basis to build on. I highly recommend that you do not use this book as your entry to mokuhanga, as you will have many unanswered questions and frustrations with the technique. Instead, learn these basic skills from other sources before attempting the mokuhanga included in this book. The companion book in this series *Mokuhanga Fundamentals* is the perfect starting point, if needed. It introduces all the basic techniques, and takes you through the process step-by-step.

The Structure of This Book

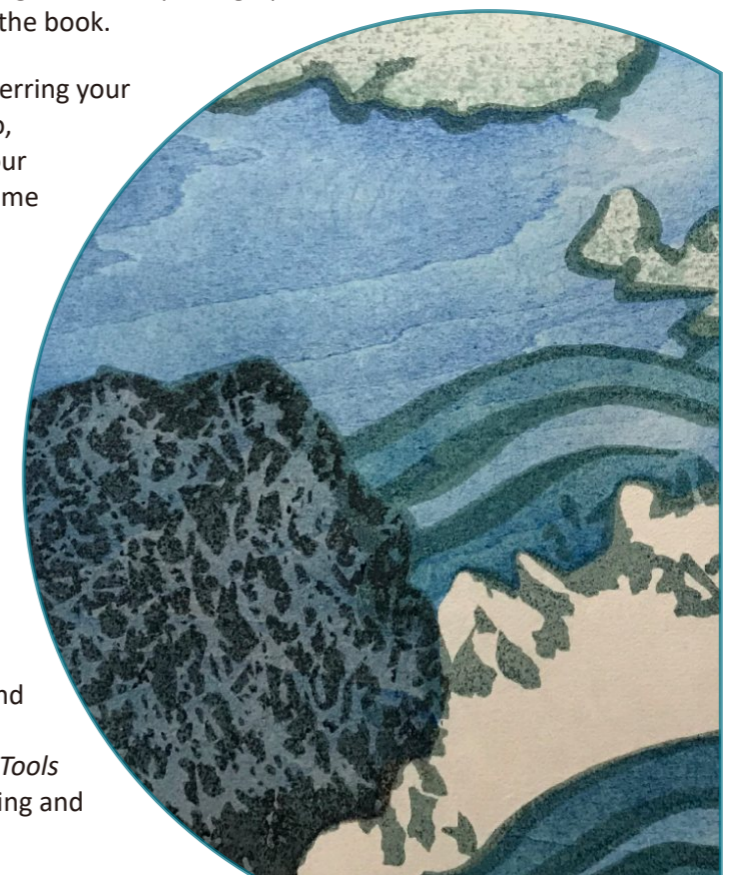
As you progress in creating mokuhanga you will acquire new methods that you can tailor to the kind of work that you want to produce. This book begins that process for you, and is a selection of ideas and techniques that students have asked for and that I have judged helpful for this intermediate stage. I've also included several important supplementary skills, tool sharpening in particular, that underpin successful mokuhanga for the creative artist.

This book is primarily a compilation of techniques, and is not intended as a step-by-step guide. Although our demonstration projects follow a sequence through the book, they are just to demonstrate the techniques in context. You can find a particular transfer, carving or printing technique that you would like to use in your own work, and study how it is done. Then you can include it in your design, and when you need to, refer back to the appropriate chapter or section with the technique, as you need.

In fact, I recommend skipping ahead to see what is included, to broaden your perspectives, and inform any new projects that you want to develop. The Design chapter has some examples of the techniques included to assist you in this regard, with a photograph, short description, and where to find it in the book.

The first few chapters cover Design, transferring your image to the blocks, and the use of Kyogo, printed colour separations, to create colour blocks. The carving chapter introduces some carving techniques that improve your overall carving and some specific techniques to use for creating new effects in your work. Some of these techniques would be used to complete the work of the earlier chapters, so you will need to go back and forth in the book.

Printing techniques are included to enhance your work, and ideally are decided on as part of the design process, so again, you will need to take a few detours, to use the knowledge you can find here. The tool sharpening chapter is a shorter version of our stand-alone *Sharp Tools* book, and the Hanko chapter covers making and using a personal seal.



We have also included a chapter on washi preparation, which covers sizing washi as well as some other useful techniques.

Self-Assessment Before Starting

Before you progress further with this book, you should already have a solid grasp of the fundamental mokuhanga tools, materials and processes. The material presented here assumes you have this knowledge, and builds additional skills and knowledge on these required skills. Without these foundations, you will have many questions and have difficulties attempting the material presented.

What you should already know about mokuhanga:

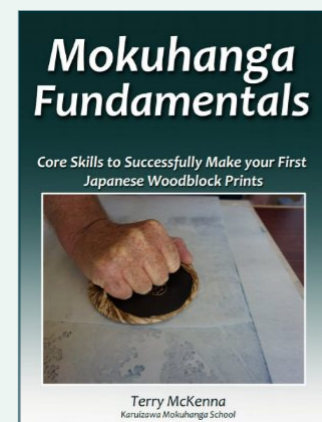
- Understand Carving processes of cutting outlines, clearing and smoothing edges of channels, and cutting kentou
- Understand the types of carving tools used, their purposes and how to use them safely
- Understand wood, including wood grain and suitable timbers for mokuhanga
- Understand baren, the different types available, their purpose and how to use them
- Understand mokuhanga printing process and how to achieve consistent basic print quality
- Understand colours, the pigments used in mokuhanga and how to mix them
- Understand washi, what it is made from and dampening for printing
- Understand where to source tools and materials for mokuhanga

If you are not familiar with these, I suggest our *Mokuhanga Fundamentals* online workshop or book, as all this, and more, is covered in detail there. Alternatively, other teachers, books or videos are a possible source for this knowledge.

Our *Mokuhanga Fundamentals Workshop* is also available on our website:

www.mokuhanga-school.jp

You can also use this QR code to go to the workshop page on our website:



Mokuhanga Fundamentals, and *Sharp Tools* books should both be available at the same place you have purchased this book.

Tools and Materials

It's assumed you already have your basic tools and materials, and know how to use them. We will introduce some new tools and materials that extend this basic knowledge, including additional carving tools, baren and washi for specific purposes. For these new items, suppliers' information is included in the appendix, as well as general information on supplies and suppliers.

We will also cover sizing washi, and making hanko, which will require several items you are unlikely to have yet.

Demonstration Project

The project that I use has been designed to incorporate several new techniques and is intended to show those, not to suggest that you should include all of these in every mokuhanga project you create. You will see that with the blocks and techniques demonstrated, we end up with several quite different prints, even though they are using the same set of blocks. Normally I would pick and choose just several of these techniques to suit particular projects, as trying to do too much may lead to unsuccessful prints. You can do a similar project of your own design to include these techniques, or even better, do several using different techniques for each project. The chapter titled *Integration* shows the process of deciding which techniques to combine together, into a completed work, and suggestions of what works well together. The more mokuhanga you create, naturally you will improve, and gradually you will find your individual expression in the medium.



Above: Project combining mokume, gomazuri, scratched texture, and printing with four deckle edges.



Washi

Preparing Washi

We assume you already have a general understanding of washi, Japanese paper, for mokuhanga, and the qualities that make it a perfect match for printing with this technique. Western papers can be used, of course, but washi is by far superior in its beauty, ability to withstand multiple impressions, holding of pigment, and steadiness under moisture changes. If you are serious about pursuing and developing your mokuhanga skills, I whole heartily recommend that you only use good quality washi that has been made for mokuhanga. More general information about washi can be found in our other publication, *Mokuhanga Fundamentals*, which covers the topic in some detail.

Even though washi has been made for mokuhanga, you still may want to prepare it in different ways for your work. Most washi can be used straight away, but some washi and for some particular techniques, you may need some further preparation. This chapter covers three techniques that you will find useful: sizing washi that is unsized, calendering washi, and using tags to prepare and then print with washi to preserve all four deckle edges.

The main factor, and one which is often a difficulty with buying washi outside of Japan, is having your washi sized. Sized here means that the paper is treated with an agent to make it less absorbent, as



well as slightly tougher against repeated impressions. Most commercial papers used for printing purposes are sized in the manufacturing process. Hand-made, natural fibre papers often are not sized by the paper maker.

It is more convenient to buy washi that is already sized, of course, but in many cases you can only buy unsized papers. Awagami washi is an example of this, while their washi is commonly available, and suitable for mokuhanga, most is not sized.

In this chapter we will prepare washi by applying size, as well as some other processes for the specific projects for this book. You may not have to do these; it depends on your project and the washi you have purchased. If you have purchased washi that is already sized, then it is not necessary to size, however it is a useful skill and broadens the range of washi that you can use.

The print shown as an example on the double page spread at the end of this chapter had all three of the processes covered here applied. It is hand made, 100% kozo, unsized washi from liyama, in Nagano, not far from where we are based in Japan. In fact, all of the example photographs shown in this chapter are of the processes being applied to this particular washi.

Sizing - to prepare the washi for printing, making it less absorbent and stronger

Calendering - to make the washi very smooth for printing the wood grain pattern

Gluing, trimming and removing tags - to enable printing with all four deckle edges retained

All three processes were necessary in this case to achieve the final print, but it was also, by design, a sample print for this book. Of the three techniques, sizing washi is the most likely and common task you may have to do in general mokuhanga practice, and also the one where you may have to purchase additional materials.

Being able to size your own washi opens up a lot more possibilities for the washi that you can source and use, as well as deepening your skills, understanding of your materials, and appreciation of the qualities of washi. It is also possible to use sizing, or lack of sizing, to create effect in your work. For example, you may allow bleeding to occur on unsized washi, then size the washi and print normally. You may also use heavy sizing to create some visual effects as it will resist pigment absorption in the washi. There are many creative possibilities which we haven't included in this book, but without the basic skill, which is covered, you cannot go on to explore them. I hope you use the skills here to good effect in your own mokuhanga.



Sizing Washi

Washi, as it is normally bought direct from the paper maker, is not sized. There are professionals, who can do the job for you in Japan, and you can ask the paper maker to arrange this as well. Some makers sell their washi sized, and machine-made papers may have internal sizing as part of their manufacturing process. Sizing your own washi is not difficult, so it is very useful when you unsized washi prevents you from buying a suitable stock for your artwork.

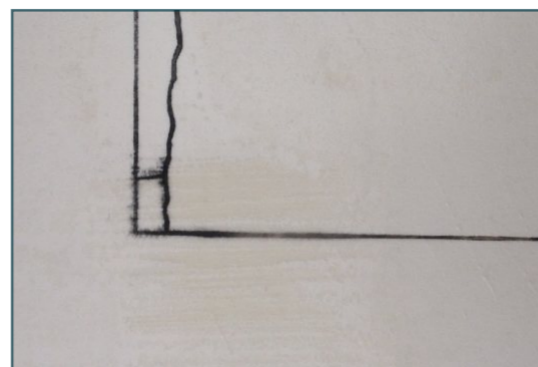
Sizing is important to make printing trouble free as it both toughens the washi and prevents bleeding of pigment. Some washi is sold already sized, and some has not been sized. A reputable seller, or the maker should be able to tell you if the washi is sized or not. In Japanese it will be ドーサ引 (*dosa-biki*). *Dosa* is the Japanese word for size.

A Simple “Drop of Water” Test

There is a simple test you can perform, which is to put a small drop of water on an unimportant part of your paper. Sized washi will not absorb the water, while unsized washi will absorb the water quite quickly. The middle paper in the photograph here is not sized, we can see the water has penetrated and spread out in the fibres of the paper.



You may also find that the sizing of your paper is not strong enough, or that part way through printing your paper needs to be sized again. I’ve also bought washi that had been poorly sized, with gaps in the sizing where bleeding occurred. This washi needed sizing again before resuming printing. During a long printing project, the sizing might also be weakened or even removed from the washi by wetting and multiple impressions on the paper.



At right: This washi was not sized well, so the pigment is bleeding during printing.

If your washi is unsized, it is a relatively simple procedure to size it, and the good news is that a precise formula is not necessary for it to work well enough. There is a wide range of recommended strengths and different formulas, which is confusing, but also most will work satisfactorily for general printing. A professional printer will be able to recognise the strength of sizing, and use different strengths for different washi and seasons. For the student or artist printmaker, precise amounts will not make a noticeable difference.

Sizing is usually done with a warm animal skin glue mixture of glue and alum. This has been used for centuries both in Japan and in Western paper making. Different materials have been tried with varying effects on the durability of paper, mostly affecting the PH level, which can dramatically alter the quality of paper and how long it will last. The traditional materials outlined here will not appreciably affect the longevity of your washi.

Materials and Tools

Sizing washi, or other papers, requires some materials that you are unlikely to have, but can easily buy. We can use everyday cooking equipment without any problems, and you may already have a wide brush that is suitable.

The task can be done on any clean table with enough space. Although a little inconvenient and possibly messy, it is not a big problem for the studio or home to do occasionally.



Animal Skin Glue

Called *nikawa* in Japanese, this is a purified cow skin glue, commonly available in stick form. This type of glue is gelatin from skin protein of mammals, cow skin is commonly used, and rabbit skin glue can also be used. A less refined form, in pellets, used as wood glue in traditional furniture making, works the same but has a strong, persistent odour.



Alum

Called *miyoban* in Japanese, Alum is Aluminium Potassium Sulphate, and small quantities of alum mixed with the glue both hardens the gelatin, and assists it to adhere to the cellulose in paper fibres. The alum pictured is in pellet form, it also comes as a powder. Either form is suitable, and should dissolve readily in water.



A Wide, Soft Brush and Cooking Pot

We also need a soft, wide brush. A *mizubake* is perfect, and the brush needs to be washed out very well after use. A professional sizer in Japan has an especially wide brush, purpose made. This brush has slightly shorter bristles and has bracing strips attached, to strengthen the bristle end. For the home printmaker, a *mizubake* or similar wide, soft brush will do.



Traditionally, a double boiler pot is used to heat and keep the glue at a constant warmth, but an ordinary pot can be used with care for small batches by the home printmaker. The pot needs to be large enough for your brush to dip into.



Carving Skills

Beyond the Basics

Many mokuhanga learners find carving frustrating, as their skill does not yet match their vision of the work they want to make. The way to improve, however, is to persist and continually attempt new projects. Alongside this effort, having effective information on skill to acquire will help you advance quickly. Learning to carve accurately and efficiently is helped by extending your knowledge, the tools you use, and your technique.

This chapter broadly has two categories: techniques that help you get better results with carving and printing, and some that extend the possibilities of what effects you can create in your finished prints. These are additional techniques with which you can bring new and interesting elements into your prints.

The whole point of carving is to make your blocks ready for printing and to achieve consistent, quality results in that printing. Students of mokuhanga often find several tasks challenging, such as getting good results with the knife, and clearing channels effectively. The single most important step you can make is to have properly sharp tools. More than any other factor, this will bring better results. The previous chapter has some foundations to build on, and this chapter has some additional information about the knife tool, which will further develop your knowledge of this essential tool in mokuhanga.



As well, there is advice specific to the demonstration project for this book, which will at some time apply to a work that you will do.

The chapter has further information about the tool geometry of the knife tool, as well as introducing a technique to use both hands when cutting with the knife. This technique, while not for everybody, can increase your efficiency dramatically, especially on larger works. Using larger gouges will also improve your efficiency on the most laborious stage of clearing channels, and then shallow gouges can be used to get far better results with smooth channels. Both types of gouge, the 18mm gouge and shallow gouges are not usually part of most carving tool sets, but are a great addition to your tools that you will never regret buying. Making your blocks very smooth has a number of advantages and is essential for good results printing mokume. Shina plywood often has a slightly rough finish, especially after being wet from printing, so there are practical methods to achieve very smooth finishes.

As well as the practical content about tools, introducing and using different varieties of gouges for more efficient and cleaner results, there are three carving techniques to produce specific visual results in your prints. This, after all, is the purpose of carving; to make prints that look great. These techniques: jagged knife cuts, tou-bokashi and chatter are immensely flexible and combine with many printing techniques to give your work more visual interest and new possibilities.

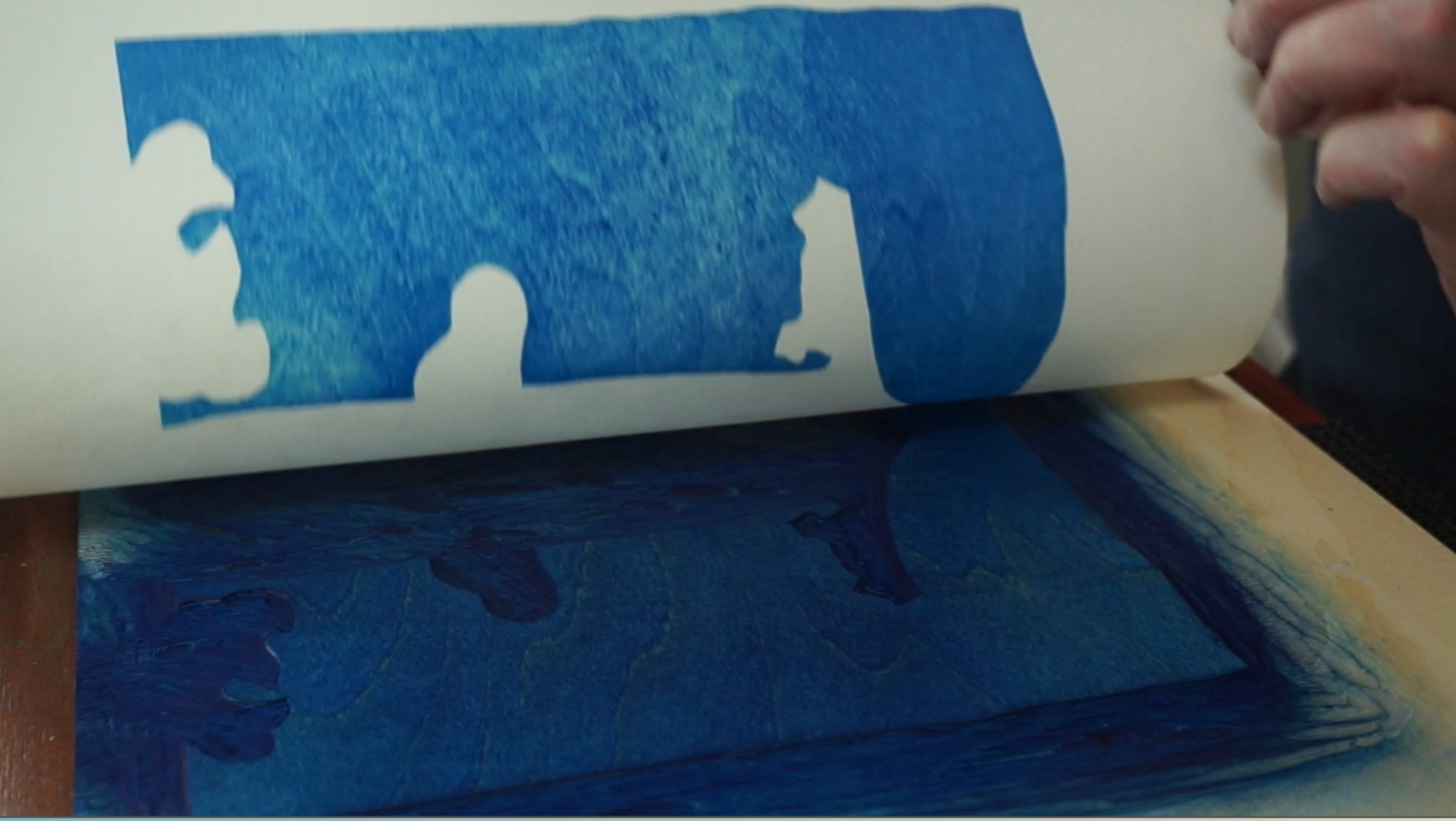
Normally in mokuhanga, and especially so in more traditional forms, the carver avoids leaving any tool marks to show in the print. There is no rule, of course, that you have to do so, and in fact there are many possibilities, as each type of tool can leave its own distinctive mark. It is common in Western relief print techniques such as Lino-cut or woodblock for the artist to leave many expressive tool marks and uncleared areas. This aligns with the idea of the artist leaving signs of the thinking and making process as an inherent part of the work. We can do the same in mokuhanga, and these techniques can also be used in combination with other carving and printing techniques to build visually complex and highly expressive works.

Jagged knife cuts is a decorative technique that will introduce an exciting texture on a flat, colour block. There are a wide variety of marks you can make, and any colour can be used. As well as this, the flat block can be printed with other effects as well.

Tou-bokashi, pictured at right, can be used on any block, with any colour to achieve a softer, more variable edge, and is one I often use in my own work. The last, chatter, is perhaps the one with the widest range of possibilities, and what we show here is just a starting point. The *Case Studies* chapter shows some very appealing use of this technique.

I hope the content of this chapter will give you some wider horizons for your mokuhanga, and as carving is the link between your design and the finished print, I also hope the techniques will improve your efficiency overall, as when you do become more efficient, your pleasure and sense of satisfaction from completing sets of blocks will increase.





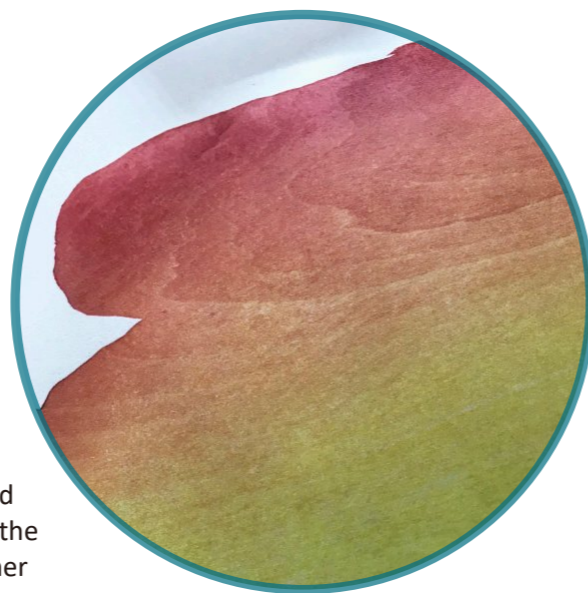
Printing Skills

Introducing New Printing Techniques

The printing techniques covered here can all be used by themselves, or together, in a print. Some can even be used together from the same block, in sequence as a different impression. In the following chapter, *Integration*, we show some of those options as examples. Some techniques will not work well together, one overpowering another for example. Think of each printing technique not as an end in itself, but rather a visual element that supports your design and idea. A general rule of thumb is to allow the visual strength of the technique to show through without being overpowered by other elements of the work.

The instructions here very much assume that you have a solid grasp of fundamental printing in mokuhanga and know how to get a consistent quality, ordinary print. Without this knowledge you will inevitably run into problems getting consistent results here as you vary the methods and tools from their usual application to achieve different effects.

I suggest that you try some practice prints just of the technique you wish to learn to get a clear idea



of how it works and what you need to do. You can practice on plain, uncarved blocks of shina for any of these techniques that don't require carving or other preparation of the block. As a separate sample, it is much easier to see the technique in isolation and judge how you want it to be in your print. Then it should be something you include in your design from the very start so that all elements work together. Keep in mind though, the sample will work and look different on each kind of paper.

These are not presented in any order signifying importance, or progressing in difficulty, but just the random order I worked on each example. It is also important to note that this is not an exhaustive list of printing techniques available in mokuhanga, there are other, completely different techniques as well as variations on the ones shown here. The ones that I have selected are some of my favourites, as well as suited to the contemporary style of demonstration print for this book.

As in the previous chapter there are two broad categories: one of techniques that assist in printing and getting better results, and another category of print techniques that are visual, that is effects you can include in your print for a variety of purposes, whether they are decorative or giving a realistic effect.

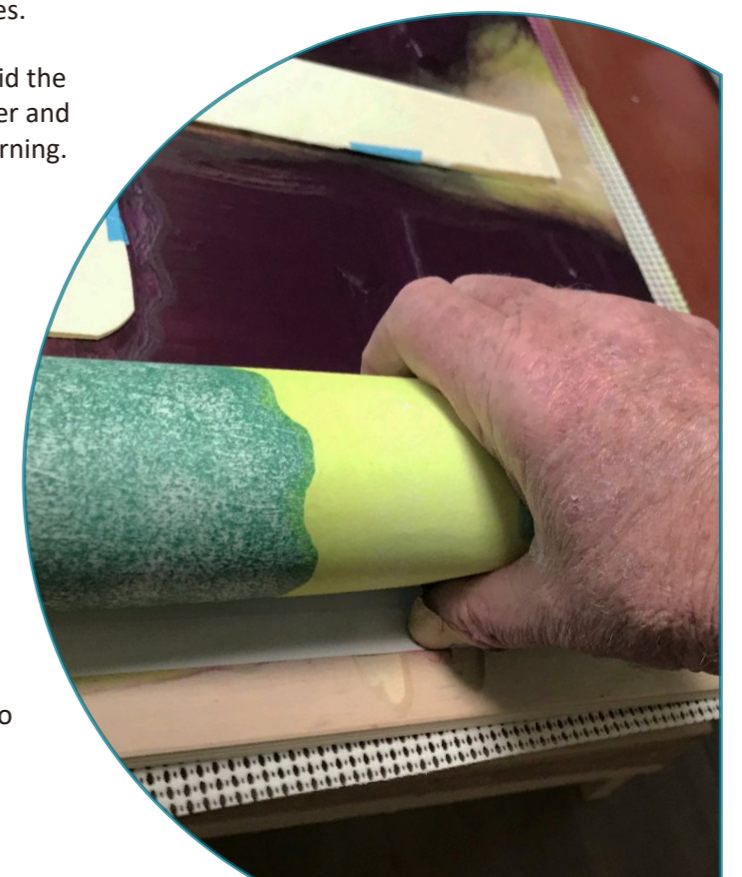
In the first category there is information on handling larger sheets of washi, making and printing large mokuhanga, up to full size sheets of washi, and managing moisture in this process. In the second category there are printing techniques that are part of traditional mokuhanga, such as bokashi, gomazuri and baren-suji, which can be adapted to a contemporary context. Then, also, there are techniques that are modern additions to mokuhanga such as scratched textures, chatter, wax-drip, baren-bokashi and gomazuri-bokashi.

All of these give you a lot of possibilities to further develop your mokuhanga skills and achieve your artistic vision. No two people will select and combine these creative techniques in exactly the same way, or print in exactly the same way. Each person brings their own character to printing and produces unique work in this most versatile and responsive of print mediums. Even though this is true, having a variety of techniques that you have mastered is indispensable to broaden your possibilities.

I hope the instructions here help you avoid the mistakes, trial and error, and wasted paper and effort that I've personally made in my learning.

There is no other source that I know of, other than direct teaching for these techniques, so I hope you can gain the skills and knowledge to improve your mokuhanga and realise your authentic, artistic vision.

These are all practical skills, which you can understand through an instruction book such as this, but you won't really know them until your hands have done the work enough times to fully grasp them. Take your time, repeat as many times as you need to gain the practice, and you will master the easiest through to the most difficult of these techniques



Bokashi Conclusion

The great thing about bokashi is that it is so versatile. Any colour on any block in any direction can be printed with bokashi, which then adds new spacial sense and variety to your image. Bokashi can also be overprinted to create much deeper transitions as well as a variety of shapes. Despite being one of the simplest techniques, it adds great visual interest to your work.

You can see from the different approaches included in this section that there is also a variety of ways to use bokashi, some for decorative effects and some for realistic affects.

Actually, despite what you probably first thought as a beginner, brushing the bokashi is quite versatile and can be approached in a few different ways. The most basic bokashi method, using water and nori mixture at one end, and pigment and nori at the other, is pretty straight forward, requiring the minimum of equipment. I was shown this method by my teacher in Kyoto who laughingly told me that using a wooden block and damp cloth (zokin) is used in Tokyo, not in Kyoto!

In my experience, the “Kyoto” method is good over an existing colour, but the “Tokyo” method gives a more even bokashi. Both rely on having the right quantities (as in all mokuhanga printing) for best results, and with the “Tokyo” method the zokin gives a much more accurate, even application of moisture. Another good thing is that zokin are really fast and easy to make. You will probably end up with several sizes.

The combination of gomazuri and bokashi is interesting in the right print and is even easier to do, but relies on getting the variables in balance, just as a standard, flat gomazuri does.

Every bokashi is somewhat artistic, in the sense that you will have to look at your block and judge the evenness and spread of pigment to the point where you have achieved your goal and are ready to print. At the same time, you have to be efficient, as taking too long will cause the block to dry out.

Creating larger bokashi is more technically challenging, and it is also quite satisfying when you have done it well. A broader bokashi area shows unevenness and mistakes to a larger degree, while in a small area you can get away with differences in the result.

Bokashi of any description enhances a print with a sense of space, and can also be used in multiple ways in the same print without overpowering the image. It is an essential addition to your mokuhanga skills.



Mokume

The kanji for *mokume* (木目) mean “wood + see”, meaning see the wood grain. Printing mokume is often challenging and frustrating. Sometimes it appears when you are not even trying, and then try as you might, it is hard to do when you want it. Understanding the principles and making the conditions correct however, makes this job both achievable and satisfying.

There is an often seen, easier technique using a heavily grained softwood timber, charring the top surface and wire-brushing the charred wood away. The harder grain is left standing proud and prints distinctly. This is included later, but to start with we will focus on the far more beautiful and satisfying print achieved from the flat block which has an interesting grain pattern on it.

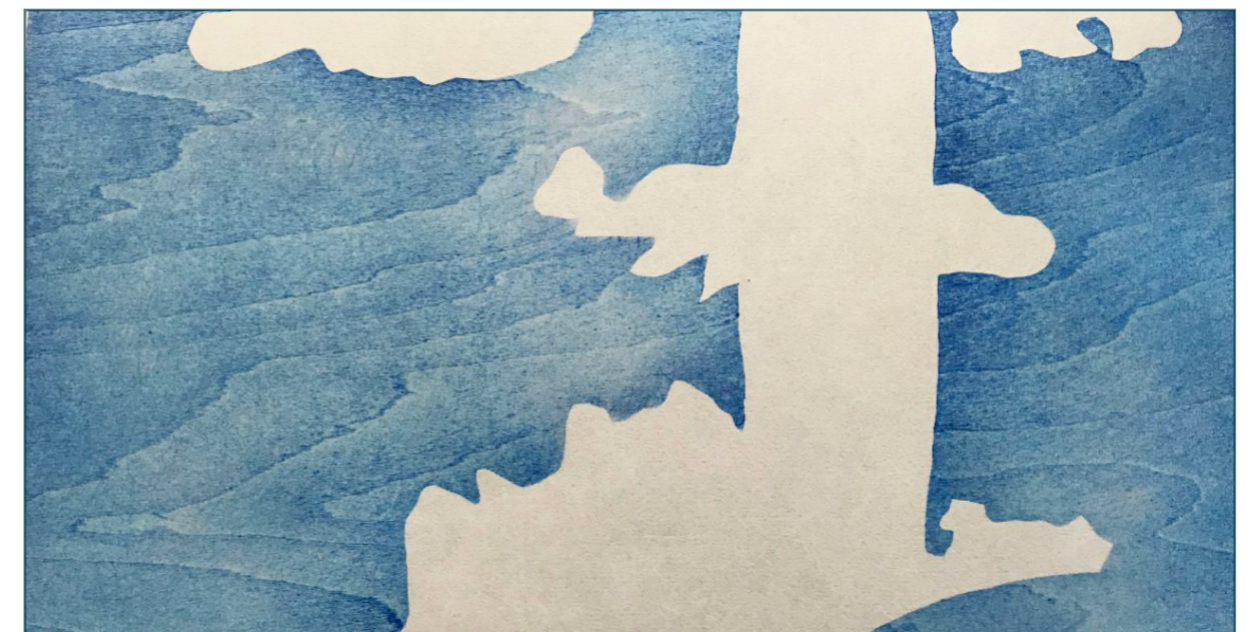
We use shina, but any good mokuhanga timber with a beautiful grain is suitable. This technique shows a much more subtle pattern, allows for greater variation, and your blocks can also be used for other printing techniques, such as a flat colour, gomazuri or bokashi.

Achieving a consisted result with mokume depends on these important factors:

- A woodblock with distinctive grain pattern (naturally)
- A very smooth woodblock surface – refer to *Smoothing the Block* in *Carving Skills*
- Smooth washi, thinner washi is also an advantage – refer to *Calendering Washi*
- A pigment which becomes transparent when watered down
- Very heavy pressure from the baren (explained below)

The main focus we will show you are two approaches to applying pigment, a “dry” technique, and a “wet” technique. Each has a distinctive look, which will suit different designs. Later some alternative approaches to mokume are included.

One further consideration is that this effect is easily lost on a complicated print with other colours or elements printing over the mokume. It shows best in an open, clear part of your design, where it is the main feature. Considering the effort that it takes to print mokume, it is sensible to make it so.





Case Studies

Real-life Examples

This is a selection of contemporary mokuhanga from Japanese and other artists who have kindly allowed me to reproduce their work. I've chosen these because, apart from admiring and liking these artists' work immensely, these examples particularly illustrate how some of the carving and printing techniques covered in this book have been applied in inventive and beautiful contemporary work. I've included one of my prints at the end, to show how I also use these techniques to enhance my work.

I recommend that you follow these artists on social media to see their new and inspiring mokuhanga. Their details are at the end of each artist's section.

Once you develop a firm understanding of mokuhanga techniques, you can analyse works that you see, and have a reasonable idea of how the artist has made the work. You can always get inspiration and aspire to increase the quality of your own work using this knowledge. Personally, I'm a fan of "Lifelong Learning" and think it is a helpful attitude to develop, always trying new things and experimenting with your own art.



The four selected artists are:



Left:
Kawamura Sayaka



Right:
Sarashina Mariko



Left:
Honjo Masahiko



Right:
Fabiola Gil Alares

Note: Japanese names are following the standard used in Japan, Family name first then personal name.

We will examine each artist's work and pull out some techniques they have used. Even though some are using the same techniques, you can see their personal style is very different. In this way mokuhanga is a very versatile, individual, and expressive medium, where each artist will inevitably make work that reflects their own character.

