

Using Akua Inks on Wood Blocks

Which Ink to Use?

Either Akua Liquid Pigment or Akua Intaglio can be used on wood blocks. At McClain's, we have experimented with printing Akua Liquid Pigment 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 Liquid Pigment ink right out of the bottle.
- If you are rolling the ink on the block with a brayer, you can use either Akua Liquid Pigment mixed with 20% Tack Thickener, Akua Liquid Pigment 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 linseed oil-based inks. So if you are used to using oil-based inks, it will feel familiar to you.
- Akua Liquid Pigment is looser than Akua Intaglio, even with Tack Thickener added. If you do monotypes and woodblock prints, use Akua Liquid Pigment with brushes and add Tack Thickener when you are using brayers. Then you can use the ink for monotypes, monoprints or woodblock prints.

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

To show wood grain pour some Akua Liquid Pigment 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 Liquid Pigment Consistency

Akua Liquid Pigment 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.

STIR THEN SHAKE THE BOTTLE OF AKUA LIQUID PIGMENT BEFORE EACH USE

There are no fillers to keep the pigment in suspension, so the pigments will settle to the bottom of the bottle. Stirring the ink with a skewer or chopstick is necessary to start the mixing process.

Some 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.

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, 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 on the pigment and temperature conditions. Akua Intaglio is stiffer when cold, 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. Or add Akua Mag Mix (a premixed form of magnesium carbonate that mixes in easily) or powdered magnesium carbonate.

Before mixing, work the Mag Mix with the ink knife until it is smooth. Then add Akua Intaglio Ink into the Mag Mix. Add small amounts of ink until the desired thickness is achieved.

To loosen and thin the ink, mix in a few drops of Blending Medium with a knife. To loosen unmodified ink, work it with an ink knife under a warm lamp, hair dryer, or place the jar on a hot plate set a very low temperature.

To achieve transparency, Transparent Base can be mixed into Akua Intaglio ink. Transparent Base is Akua Intaglio Ink without any pigment.

Printing on Wet or Dry Paper

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 individual block 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 slightly and use soft printmaking papers when printing on dry paper. 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. Soak western paper for 30 seconds and blot thoroughly before using. Japanese handmade papers should never be soaked. Instead, either mist lightly or place between sheets of dampened newsprint for at least one hour or overnight.

Print Drying Times

Akua Liquid Pigment will dry in a couple of days.

Akua Intaglio is trickier. The ink does not contain dryers and instead of drying by evaporation, like linseed oil-based or water-based inks, Akua Intaglio dries only by absorption into the paper.

Drying times vary greatly depending on the amount of ink used and the absorbency of the paper. Use ink sparingly, and use light coats instead of one heavy coat when inking up the block to avoid over-inking.

Adding Akua Mag Mix or magnesium carbonate to the ink will also help it to dry. Thoroughly mix approximately 10% magnesium carbonate by volume into the ink. Some people recommend allowing the mixture to sit overnight for maximum effect. The ink may bubble slightly so cover it loosely but do not put it in an air tight container. Print as usual the next day.

Use thick, unsized, absorbent papers like Arches 88. Other papers recommended by Susan Rostow, the developer of Akua inks, are Hahnemuhle Copperplate for all types of intaglio, and Revere Monotype paper for monotype printed with a press. Avoid thin papers like the Japanese papers Mulberry or Kitakata. Excess oil in Akua Intaglio ink can leech out and create halos around the image on thin paper. Hard, glossy or coated papers are also not recommended because the ink cannot be absorbed.

If you decide to use a paper other than the ones recommended, do a few test prints to make sure the ink will not bleed and will dry completely before printing the entire edition.

If the prints simply are not drying, try putting two or three sheets of newsprint on top and run the print through a press to remove the excess ink.*

Cleaning Up

We recommend that you wear gloves while cleaning up to protect your skin from the pigments. 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 twenty parts water mixed in a spray bottle can be used to clean up ink residue on glass surfaces. If necessary, use rubbing alcohol or a little vinegar diluted with water to clean any remaining residue.

***Note:** in 2020, we decided to stop carrying Akua Intaglio ink or recommending it for relief printmaking because of the problems caused by the prints not drying and halos forming from excess oil. If you are looking for a relief ink that can be cleaned up with soap and water, try Caligo Safe Wash Relief Ink. You get all the benefits of a traditional oil-based ink plus easy cleanup.



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