

Client-and Designer-Based Linocut Relief Printing on Linoleum

Submitted by

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## **Abstract**

This project assessed linocut printing as a viable design process in modern times through creating and comparing different qualities of linocut-based work. Learning the opinions of designers and the general public about these varying qualities of linocut work was essential to discover the possibility of reducing issues of budget and time that have made the once-popular method rare today. Minimizing these issues will enable graphic designers to reignite linocut for clients in their work and slow down to reconnect with their work and craft. Additionally, this project provided knowledge in the preferences of linocut types for various age groups and occupations, the perspectives of linocut designers, if the price and quality of linocut are negotiable, and if linocut is worth reviving.

This new knowledge will result in unique and quality prints, prints designers can include in their work, and a greater understanding of linocut for readers. Most importantly, designers will benefit from slowing down to reconnect with their work and craft; additionally, client priorities were examined to verify linocut is a feasible approach to commercial-based design work.

## **Background**

During the Arts and Crafts Movement, there was a revival of printing near the end of the 19th century in England. This was a revolt against the industrial revolution creating cheap mass-produced items that had lost their craftsmanship (Meggs and Purvis 177-179). There were many contributors to the movement, but one notable contributor is John Ruskin who “inspired the philosophy of this movement” in bringing art and craft together. He believed this would solve the issues created from The Industrial Revolution of cheaply made products, loss of craftsmanship, and a loss of connection between the artist and their work (Meggs and Purvis

177-179). This is similar to the current situation artists and designers face. As explained by William Deresiewicz, new technology is separating artists from their work and resulting in cheaply manufactured materials and compositions (Diab).

Deresiewicz's sentiment is not new, as William Morris was a man against the Industrial Revolution of mass production, and his influence from Ruskin led to him becoming the driving force of the Arts and Crafts Movement (Diab). His work characterizing the style of this movement included: textiles, tapestries, furniture, glass, etc. (Diab). Later he moved on to establish the Kelmscott Press which aided him in creating elaborate woodblock imagery and text with a plethora of intertwining images and borders in books (Meggs and Purvis 181-183, see fig. 1). Unfortunately, Morris contradicts his goals of uniting the working class designers with their work. He proves this unfortunate situation as only the wealthy could afford his books and furniture (Meggs and Purvis 183). Therefore, the working class would not have access to an example of what he wants them to accomplish and cannot afford to create works this expensive. He also contradicts his stance against the industrial revolution, showing handcraft may not be possible without it, when "he used initials, borders, and ornaments that were modular, interchangeable, and repeatable. A basic aspect of industrial production...applied to the printed page (Meggs and Purvis 185)."

Although many generations followed in Morris' steps, the movement would come to its demise. This was an issue that Morris was aware of, but unable to solve (Clericuzio). Printmaking, specifically linocut, is comparatively as expensive, time-consuming, and a laborious process as woodcut was when Morris created his intricate works (Meggs and Purvis

185). There have been improvements over the years. For example, Pablo Picasso invented the Reduction Block method, which reduces time and cost (Alonso, see fig. 2). In modern times, artists use digital tools such as the Adobe Suite to aid in the creative and designing process of imagery with editing filters at the artists' disposal.

Based on the current research, I investigated and experimented with minimizing issues of budget and time, similar to the Arts and Crafts Movement, so graphic designers can reignite this medium for clients in their graphic design work. Designers are returning to the ways of the Industrial Revolution concentrating on “the demand for speed and scale to enable mass production (Steane et al. 86).” In the same way artists during the Industrial Revolution relied on technology to mass-produce art, modern artists and designers increasingly rely on computer programs like Adobe Photoshop or The Cranky Pressman company (Adobe; K. Berger and J. Berger; “Computer Software” 87; Kizza). The goal of the results from this investigation was to lead to a revival of linocut. Thereby reconnecting artists to their work, inspiring greater innovation and change with their art like in Lynne Cooney’s article, and improving the quality of the art (37-38).

### **Aims and Objectives**

For this project, I assessed linocut printing through the completion and comparison of varying qualities of linocut-based work. Therefore, it was vital to learn the opinions of designers and the public regarding linocut work to reduce issues of budget and time. If these issues can be minimized, graphic designers will be able to reignite linocut for clients in their work and slow down to reconnect with their craft.



### *Aims*

1. To investigate and alleviate issues of budget and time surrounding linocut.
2. To find the preferences of linocut for various age groups and occupations.
3. To learn the perspectives of designers that frequently work with linocut.
4. To determine if linocut is a viable printing method for commercial work.

### *Objectives*

1. Linocut was one of the mediums used during the Arts and Crafts Movement allowing designers to slow down and reconnect with their craft. However, budget and time were issues during the Arts and Crafts Movement that caused its demise. Through experimentation and investigating issues of budget and time, graphic designers are enabled to reignite linocut for clients in their work. Linocut also provides the opportunity to create more unique design possibilities through the medium's revival in graphic design.
2. By learning the preferences of a variety of people, it will help determine if the quality of a linocut is negotiable and for what groups of people the quality and price matter. If younger people are willing to pay for lower quality prints, but older people are not, the designer will need to decide what types of prints they want to produce and what they can afford. Additionally, knowledge of the styles various groups prefer will impact the time needed to create the print and the cost the designer needs to charge. If most people prefer an intricate print, but cannot afford the price, creating an intricate print may not be worth the designer's time.

3. Understanding what a linocut artist experiences daily will create a better understanding for myself, the reader, and graphic designers in what to expect if they were to incorporate linocut into their work. If linocut is very cumbersome, the medium may only be worth revival if a designer has a true passion for utilizing linocut.
4. Determining if linocut is a reasonable method to use commercially will inform designers and artists if they could use linocut and still make a profit. If linocut is not viable for commercial use, it may be difficult for small businesses to use this medium, unless they want to specialize in linocut and have the time and money necessary.

### **Research/Methodology**

The initial research I used was *Meggs' History of Graphic Design*. 5th ed. by Philip B. Meggs and Alston W. Purvis, "Ink, Paper, Plates: The Legacy of Printmaking in South Africa and the Caversham Press" by Lynne Cooney, "'Old-Fashioned Modern': Claude Flight's Lino-Cuts and Public Taste in the Interwar Period" by Hana Leaper, and other scholarly articles or web sources. Through these sources, I was able to better grasp the history of linocut and its impact around the world. I was also further encouraged in my statement that designers need to reconnect with their art and craft through verification from both Cooney and Meggs and Purvis' writings. Additionally, it was interesting to learn Leaper's statement and I decided to further investigate that printmaking is "suited for the mass market" and its "directness" is perfect to get the point across (Leaper 389).

Most importantly, I modified my approach to my research by going from trying to fit a specific demographic or directly popularizing linocut to attempting to show the opportunities and

innovations available with linocut. I think this is similar to Cooney and Leaper's articles in that instead of my original idea to directly popularize linocut like Flight, I am trying to indirectly popularize linocut by making a change that benefits designers and clients, similar to Cooney's article. I also learned the Grosvenor School and Flight's linocuts failed due to a focus on neither a high nor low level of art and a lack of a real demographic (Leaper 392-393). Therefore, I verified when doing my work that it would meet the demographic of the ages 20-35 years. In my experience this is the age of adults in college, attempting to follow new trends, and trying to make a name for themselves in the world. This is also the age range I am best able to relate to and felt I could use my experience to make better design decisions related to this age range.

For further research, I sent out two different surveys. One was to designers or artists that frequently work with linocuts to learn about their preferences and everyday experiences. The other survey was to the general public to learn the preferences of the public regarding various linocut techniques and styles. Concerning the survey for professionals who work with linocut, most of the answers were expected and made sense. There were common answers however that I was surprised by. For example, all the professionals explained that they considered linocut as affordable, but did agree that it was time-consuming. It may be due to in my experience most of the linocut designers I worked with are college-age with lower incomes, but to us, linocut was quite expensive. Especially if I consider I spent over 20 hours to make my intricate 8x10 inch. linocut print and the supplies cost over \$50 to create. At minimum wage, an average worker would make under \$200 working 20 hours, but in my experience, most people would not be willing to pay for 20 hours worth of work on one print. The resulting profit would therefore not compensate for the 20 hours of work invested. The other response I was surprised by is that none

of the professionals recalled having issues with clients. Working in the fast-food industry, I have issues with customers hourly and I thought this need for accuracy, specificity, and speed in my position may transfer over to selling linocut.

As for the other survey including the general public, the responses were very telling. To begin, it was split on whether respondents thought there was a disconnect between designers and their work. Therefore, my concern of this disconnection may be valid but fortunately, all the respondents agreed that linocut is a medium worth reviving and would be a good addition to graphic design work. However, respondents were shown prints created with different materials and when given the option, seemed to lean towards the look of a linocut image created in photoshop. I knew this may be a possible outcome and provided them information on which prints were handmade or not. When presented with this information, most respondents decided they would prefer the handmade option. This proved my point that people prefer handmade unique work. They also seemed willing to pay a reasonable price for handmade work. After viewing my simple 5x7 inch fish, most respondents reported they would spend over \$20 for the handmade print. When I gave the respondents information as to how I felt the fish should be priced, they still kept to their responses in paying over \$20, so unfortunately most were not willing to pay for the high-quality regular linocut print and preferred the digital print or the print created with black paint. These responses proved that it may be difficult to incorporate regular linocut prints into graphic design work unless cheaper alternatives are used to bring down the total cost.

In the second section of my survey, I questioned the respondents about a linocut created in a William Morris Arts and Crafts style and a more modern style. I was pleasantly surprised to learn most respondents preferred the detailed older look as compared to the more modern clean look. Additionally, they were willing to pay between \$35 and \$60 for the William Morris style print. Therefore this informed my research that the public may be willing to pay more if they think the quality is worth the cost. However, I provided detailed information regarding the time and costs to create the prints. When asked if they would be interested in working with linocut, few respondents were willing to do so with graphic design because of the time needed, but may be willing to work with linocut for other purposes. Also, it is important to note that most respondents were between the ages of 18 and 28, which are close to my designated demographic. Therefore, most graphic designers at the beginning of their careers may not be interested in providing linocut for their work. The public and professionals agree that linocut is a good addition to graphic design, but enough interests may not be there for designers to be willing to include linocut in their work. If they do decide to include linocut, there are willing clientele, but many would not be willing to pay the worthy cost.

### **Creative Process**

To begin the process, I created a simplistic fish design to use with various materials. One fish was created using a styrofoam takeout box, printer paper, a pencil, and cheap paint (see fig. 3). The next fish utilized photoshop and printer paper (see fig. 4). The third fish utilized the linoleum block and carving tools, printer paper, and cheap paint (see fig. 5). The most expensive and final fish print utilized the linoleum block and tools, vellum paper, and block printing ink

(see fig. 6). These fish were then compared to learn the opinions and preferences of the public. This was also to give me a feel for working with different mediums and ultimately I preferred the regular linocut process, despite that it was the most expensive. I used this experience working with the fish to design my intricate linocut book covers and my photoshop insignias/logos. The research and various images I found were important to keep as close to the William Morris Arts and Crafts style as possible. I knew however, it would be a challenge to complete the linocuts, as they are very time-consuming and my cutting tool chipped halfway through the first linocut. I also had to seek advice from my linocut professor regarding the carving and printing process. Fortunately, all my linocut prints turned out well, and receiving critiques from my professors and other classmates aided me in the design process, especially with the lettering.

### **Deliverables/Results**

I ultimately created an Arts and Crafts-inspired linocut and a modern linocut book cover to learn the perspectives of the viewer, and if the design impacts the viewer's opinions. I placed the covers in a mockup to help graphic designers visualize the unique effects and appearance a linocut design reflected (see fig. 7 and 8). This was also to inspire graphic designers so they could see the possibilities of linocut combined with graphic design that made it worth the cost and time. It could then be used with other works such as magazines or posters.

I also designed 3 insignias/logos and put them in various mockups to show designers how linocut designs can be used on different products (see fig. 9). I designed these images the same way I designed my linocuts, but created them with Adobe Photoshop, to compare and show the similarities and differences between a handmade linocut and a linocut imitation. My goal with this was to inform designers that if they couldn't afford to create linocuts for graphic design

work, this would be another option for them to similarly work with this style. It would also open up the discussion of where the linocut look originates from and create more interest in handmade linocut techniques.

## **Challenges**

The most difficult component of this process was time management. I was taking another thesis course that covered this topic but in a different direction. Therefore, I had to alternate my focus between this course and my other course to verify all the information was the same and met the requirements of assignments for both courses. It also required extensive time management for me to design my experiments, linocuts, and surveys. When adding the writing component of my research, I felt like I was always behind in trying to complete everything. This was despite the fact that I started my research in December 2020. Now that I have completed my thesis, I am confident and proud of the deliverables I designed and the research behind my work. My only concerns are that my thesis courses were not in person, so they lacked the traditional one-on-one experience I would receive from working next to other classmates.

## **Conclusion**

This semester, I investigated and experimented with how design can emphasize linocut as a way for designers to reconnect with their craft. I hoped the results of my investigation would lead to new knowledge in linocut techniques and new and unique design innovations. Therefore, I attempted to minimize the issues of budget and time so designers would be willing to work with linocut, but I was not able to alleviate the issues of budget or time significantly.

I still hope this project will impact designers returning to the ways of the Industrial Revolution and their clientele to change their preferences from the digital world to handmade linocut work. Based on my surveys, most people were not interested in utilizing linocut with graphic design but were interested in the work and willing to purchase the resulting prints. Through more research and experiments in limiting budget and time related to linocut, there are still more possibilities to be discovered that could encourage linocut to be utilized in graphic design work.



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## Image Appendix



Fig. 1 A Woodblock print created by William Morris at the Kelmscott Press as a spread for *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*.

Philip B. Meggs and Alston W. Purvis. *Meggs' History of Graphic Design*, 5th ed., John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2011,

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Fig. 2 The first and last carving on the same block for a multi-color print using the reduction method.

Bernard Derroitte. "The Rise of Color Reduction Prints." *Mesh Art Gallery*, 7 Aug. 2021,

<https://meshartgallery.com/blogs/news/the-rise-of-color-red>







Fig. 3 Process and results of creating the low-quality fish print.



Fig. 4 Process and results of creating the digital fish print.



Fig. 5 Process and results of creating the medium-quality fish print.

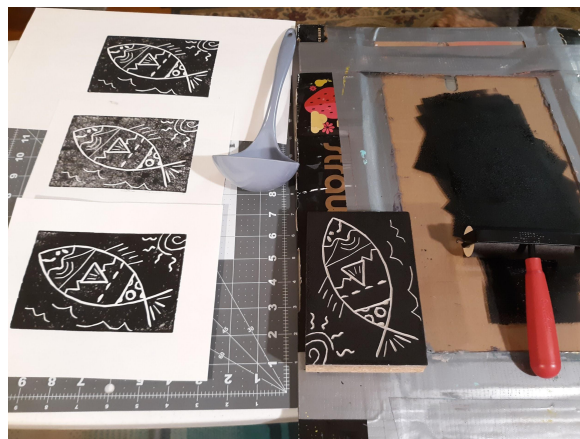
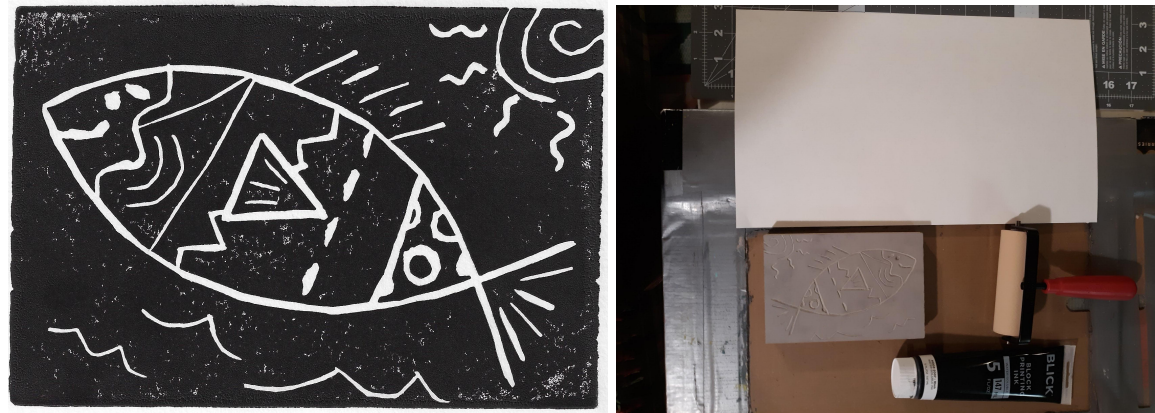


Fig. 6 Process and results of creating the high-quality fish print.



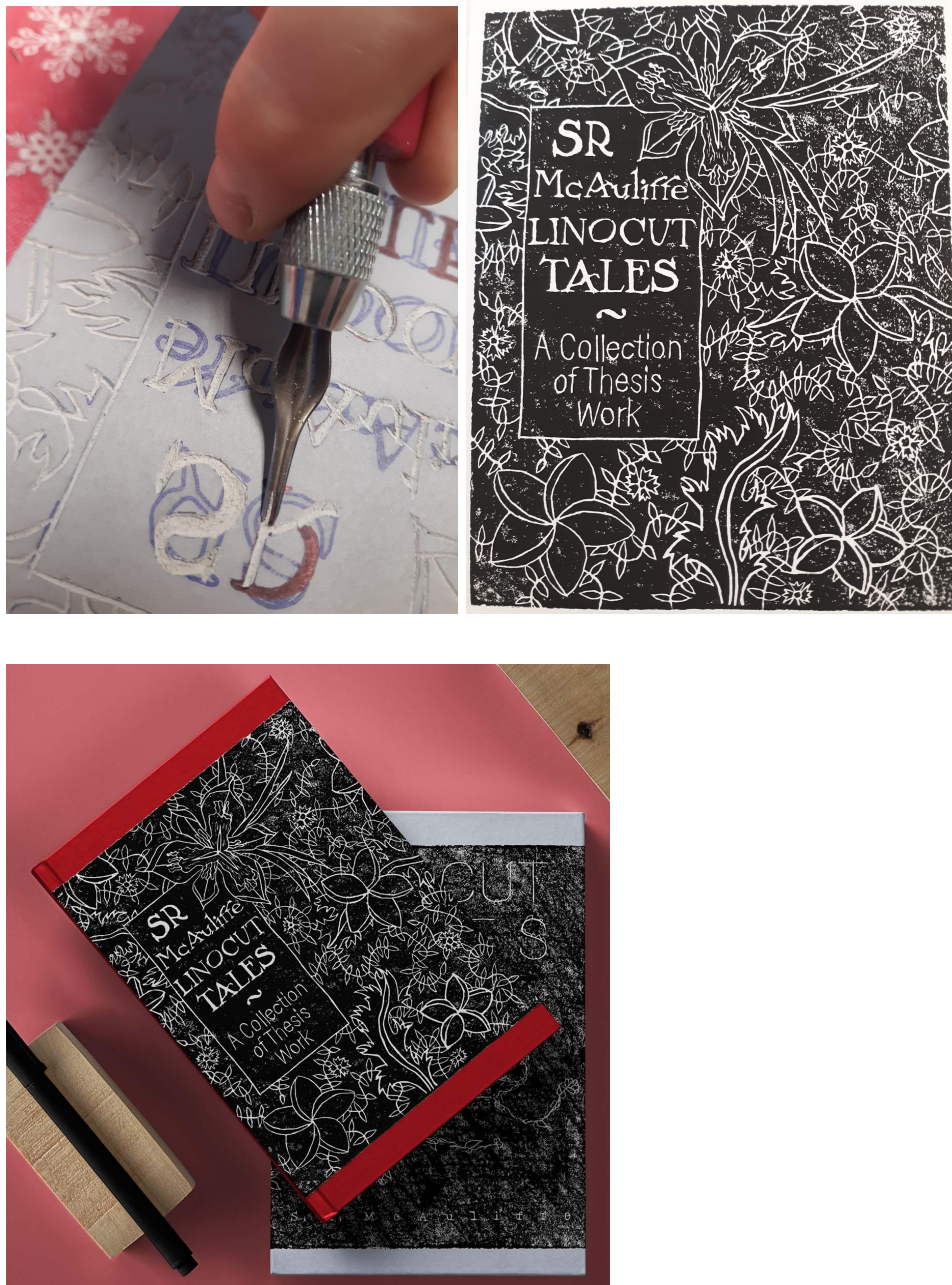


Fig. 7 Process, results, and mock-up of creating the Arts and Crafts-inspired linocut book cover.





Fig. 8 Process, results, and mock-up of creating the modern linocut book cover.





Fig. 9 Photoshopped imitated linocut mockups.

\*The framed book cover in the top right photograph is the only linocut created manually.