

REDUCTION LINOCUT PROCESS

For a reduction print, I use a single block of linoleum to print multiple colors. I print the colors in a special sequence that I devise, usually in the middle of a sleepless night, usually light to dark, one color on top of another. Between each printing, I carve a bit more out of the block. This process of carving and printing and waiting for the ink to dry, continues for days until I've printed all the colors, leaving the linoleum block greatly "reduced." The last color is always black. This is called the key block. It's the key that unlocks the final image. An edition printed from a reduction block is truly limited, because the majority of the block is carved away by the end. There's no going back! The technique is sometimes called "suicide" or "kamikaze" printing.

Here's how I created "Flicker."



FLICKER

ON LITTLE CRANBERRY

Island full of flickers
flying south—shy,
unlike black-backed gulls
who patrol the shore
or cormorants who air
their inky armpits on rocky outcrops
or crows who harass us
from a scrim of birch trees.

When I scare up flickers
from the ground
where they feed,
I only glimpse
their winking white rumps
as they flit into the forest
calling *flicka flicka flicka*.

I wish they would pose for my pen—
black-bibbed, brown-backed,
cream-bellied, scalloped
with dark bars and spots.

I want to carve their contours
into a linoleum block,
print one hue after the other—
gray crowns, red crescents,
yellow-shafted tail feathers—
capture their skittish panache
on thick, creamy paper.

Leslie Moore

STEP 1

First, I find an image that reminds me of my encounter with the bird. Thank you to Ed Peterson of Omaha, Nebraska, who graciously allowed me to use this photograph of a flicker on his suet feeder as a reference. I like his image because it shows both the back and breast patterns on the bird as well as its red patch, yellow tail, and a strip of yellow in the wing feather. It highlights all the elements I mention in my poem, “On Little Cranberry.”

STEP 2

I transfer the image onto tracing paper and play with colors.



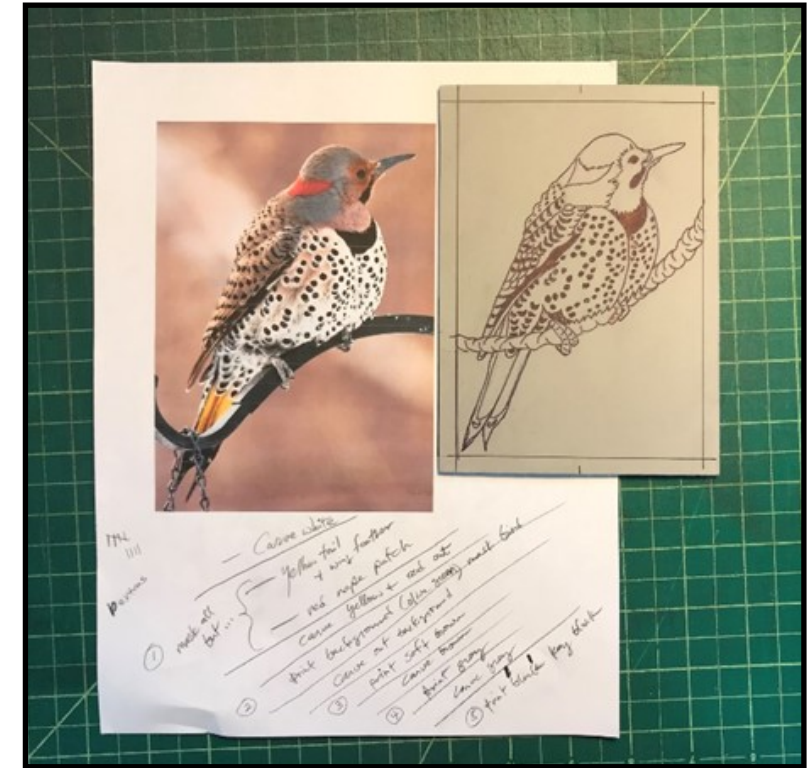
“Yellow-Shafted Northern Flicker”

by Edward L. Peterson

<http://edward-peterson.pixels.com>

STEP 3

I transfer the tracing paper image onto the linoleum block, using carbon paper, and reversing the image. On the block, the flicker will be facing right. On the print, it will face left. This is what happens with printmaking, one of its many complications. I have to work in reverse. I found the stick outside my studio to use for the flicker's perch.



STEP 4

I go over the carbon marks on the linoleum with a Sharpie pen, because the carbon marks will rub off with successive cleanings of the block between color layers. The Sharpie won't. However, the Sharpie marks will sometimes transfer to the printing paper, so I try to mark only what will print black on the final print. Note that substituting my own perch will allow more of the yellow tail feathers to show.

STEP 5

I make a detailed plan of action. Ha! My plans have been known to change course right out of the gate.

STEP 6

Somewhere along the way, I have to fold, score, tear, and tab the paper. The tabs are crucial for registration. They will fit over pins on a jig I use to hold the block. The paper must line up in the exact same spot on the block every time I print a color. Otherwise, the colors will be offset and the image will blur. The insert below shows the Tiernes Burton pins ready for their tabs.



STEP 7

Finally, I get to the carving, my favorite part! I carve out everything I want to remain white on the print. In this case, the breast feathers, highlights on the head, the outline of the beak, lines on the toes, a bit of feathering on the tail, and my chop.





Here are my carving tools: U and V gouges, an xacto blade, an awl, and a toothbrush for brushing off bits of linoleum. Ah, yes! And the ever important honing block and compound in the top right. Got to have sharp tools!



This is my pocketbook printing press—an Xcut Xpress. It's actually a die cutting machine for crafters, but a group of British printmakers found it made a great little press for relief prints. I have a bigger press—a Conrad E-15—but my Xpress is perfect for this job.



STEP 8

I want to print the red and yellow on white paper to keep the colors crisp and clear, but I don't want to print the whole page in these colors, so I create a mask to isolate the red patch on the nape of the flicker's neck and my chop, and the yellow in the wing and tail feathers. On the left, the mask is taped onto the jig with holes cut to allow the red and yellow to print. Note the pins at the top of the jig that the tabs will fit over for printing. On the right, the first pass—the red and yellow printed on the page.



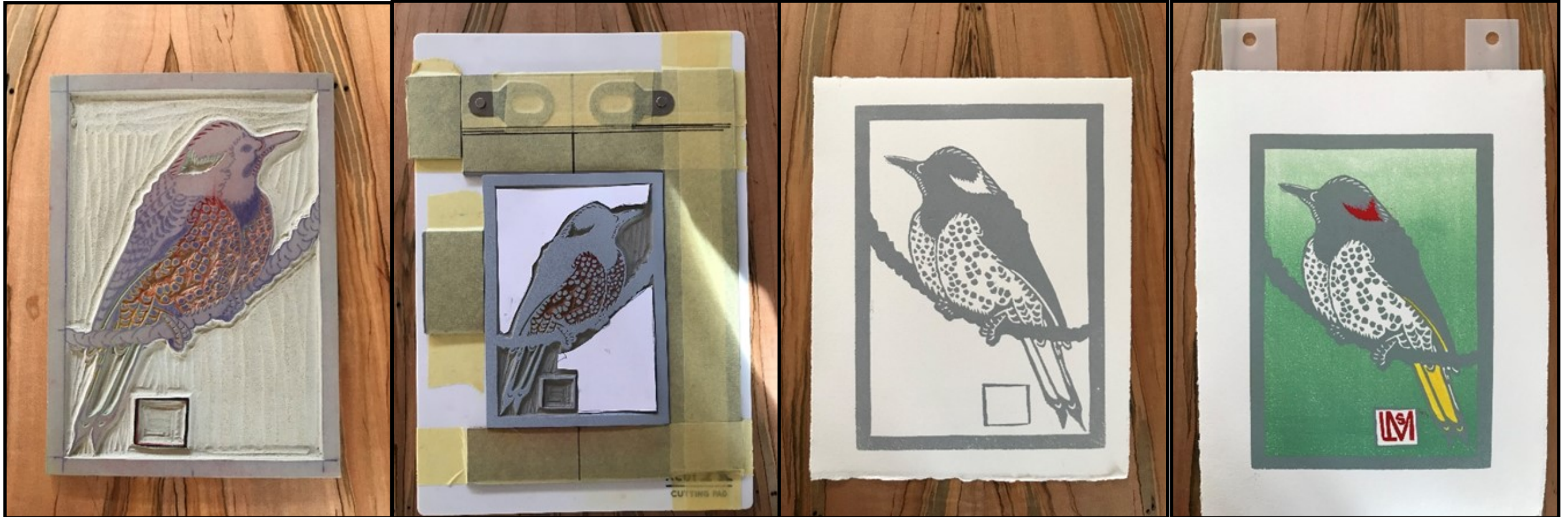
STEP 9

I carve out of the block what I want to remain red and yellow. These first two colors will dry quickly, from the front and the back of the paper. I can print the next color, almost immediately. Keeping my studio warm and running a fan helps speed drying time. Once I begin layering the colors, they only dry from the front of the paper and this takes longer. I'm ready to print the green background, graduated from light to dark, top to bottom.



STEP 10

I carve out the green background and print gray. I use masks in parts of the background to avoid picking up stray carving marks there. These marks are called “chatter,” and some printmakers incorporate chatter into their prints, but I like a cleaner look in mine.

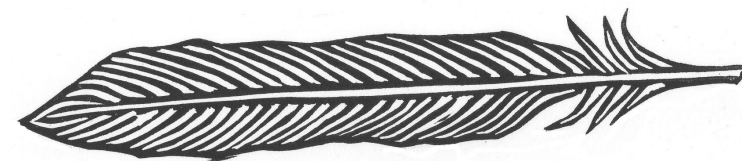
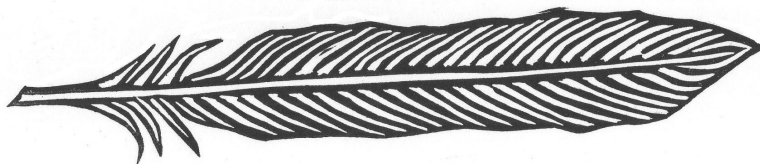


The green is carved out of the block.

The block is inked in gray, masked, and secured on the jig.

Gray printed alone.

Gray printed over green, red, and yellow.



STEP 11

I carve out everything that I want to remain grey—head feathers and the twig—and print burnt sienna mixed with a little white. In this case, I mask everything on the block but the sienna parts—the cheeks and the back feathers. The spots on the breast feathers will eventually be printed black.



The gray carved out of the block.



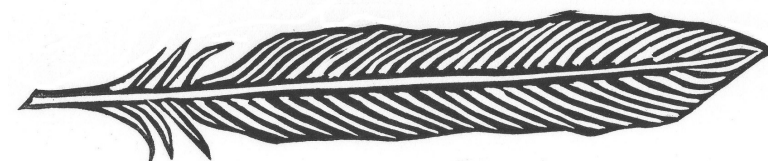
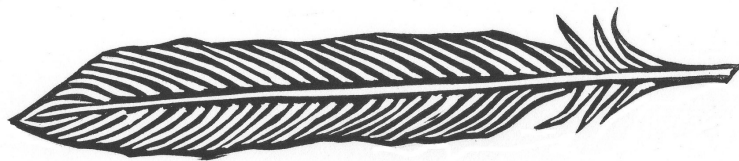
Everything is masked but the parts I want to print burnt sienna.



Burnt sienna printed alone.



Burnt sienna printed over gray, green, red, and yellow.



STEP 12

The final step! Hold your breath! I carve out burnt sienna and print the black key block. Drum roll, please.



I charge the brayer with black ink.



I ink the block.

Step 13

Ta Da!



The black key block printed alone.



FLICKER



An edition of 20 prints hanging out to dry.

