Test Six: Color Lino Blocks with Hawthorne and Caligo

Maria and I hand-rolled (to allow for more color testing on one run) Hawthorne and Caligo inks, separately, in various colors to both see how color prints on larger surface areas and to test clean up.

We tested Hawthorne first, using four colors: a burnt orange comprised of transparent base, cadmium yellow deep hue, cadmium yellow, cobalt blue hue, and cadmium red hue (in descending order of proportion); a gray comprised of transparent base, opaque white, deep black, and cobalt blue hue; a brown which was a mix of the previous two colors; and a light green from transparent base, opaque white, cadmium yellow hue, cobalt blue hue, and cadmium red hue. The colors all rolled up quickly and easily. Quite a bit of pressure and a fair amount of ink was required to obtain rich colors, but it did not take long to figure out this combination. The ink containing white seemed most stiff, and therefore required more pressure.

Clean up of Hawthorne is still a bit difficult. Vegetable oil easily removes the ink from large rollers, blocks, and tools, but how to remove vegetable oil residue from rollers? We used EP-67 followed by water, followed by thorough drying, but are hesitant to implement such a system in a student shop. Further, the ink resiliently stuck to the small speedball rollers. A small amount of estisol removed it easily, but Maria found herself quite sensitive to the fumes.

Caligo colors proved more difficult to print. It is important to consider, however, that we have fewer colors from which to choose for testing, having been sent only process colors, black, and white, and no modifiers. We therefore printed a gray mixed from transparency, opaque white, carbon black, and process blue; straight process blue; straight process yellow; and straight process red. It was difficult to roll the ink on evenly, though less ink was required than when rolling up black. The yellow and red printed well, but the gray and blue were splotchy and uneven. To rule out the rollers and lino blocks as culprits, I printed the two blocks which held the red and yellow ink so well --the blue was still uneven. It seems the gray ink, which contains white, is too stiff in its unmodified state. More testing will likely be needed in order to determine how well Caligo colors print. The customer service at Caligo has been unresponsive to questions, however, and the ink has another count against it in that it seems to skin in the container, and this skin inevitably ends up in the rolled out ink. Every color contained particulates. (n.b.: a recent email from Pomegranate Press suggests purchasing Caligo in tubes, thus saving ink and avoiding the skinning problem entirely.)

Clean-up of Caligo was especially difficult. Where straight soap followed by water has generally worked up to this point, because the colors used either involved white (which we know is difficult to clean) or were concentrated process colors, the ink was particularly stubborn. A fair amount came off with dish soap, but I had to re-wash everything (rollers, palette, blocks, and ink knives) with oil followed by EP-67 and water in order to make sure they didn't stain. The process was long and arduous.