

Making a Silverpoint Drawing

Jeannine Cook



Piedra de Cala Torta, silverpoint, washi,
watercolour pencil, Polychromos pencil, 10 x
7 7/16 x 18 cm, Jeannine Cook, 2020

Step 1

The drawing begins with a blank white piece of 140 lb/300 gr hot-pressed watercolour paper. In this case, I used Arches paper, a piece measuring 7 x 10"/18 x 26 cm. To prepare the paper for drawing with silver (or gold, copper or other metals), I use different grounds depending on the drawing I have in mind. This time, I used white Golden Silverpoint Ground, a pre-prepared product which is practical for travelling as an artist. At other times, I use Golden Titanium White acrylic, or their Black Mars acrylic, diluted to a thinner consistency so that it does not leave roughness nor ridges on the paper. There are many different approaches to preparing grounds, from the classical rabbit skin glue and gesso, to white Chinese watercolour, casein, or even house paint, but since I often work outdoors in heat and insect-filled situations, acrylic is more practical. As long as you end up with several layers of dilute ground, well dried between applications, you are ready to start a metalpoint drawing.

It all begins with the blank page.

Step 2

For this drawing, I was inspired by an interesting, complex stone from a dry river bed running to a beautiful Mallorcan beach. I first selected washi* paper that seemed appropriate and then cut out shapes inspired by the stone. I temporarily affixed them with artist's tape as I tried to balance them out in design, all without any prior drawing.

*Washi is traditional Japanese paper. Here I have used both a handmade type and an industrially produced one.



Step 3

I then collaged the washi paper cut-out pieces onto the white prepared paper, using archival glue.



Step 4

A first silverpoint shape is added, using a fine sterling silver stylus. Placing the first shape (seen just above the lowest of the plain blue washi shapes) is always a leap into the unknown as without any prior drawing, the location of the first silverpoint marks starts to dictate what path the drawing might eventually take. The subject matter, the stone in this case, rather guides the development of the drawing.



Step 5

Here, more silver lines are added around collaged pieces of washi. I tend to “anchor” the collage by framing and surrounding it with silver as incorporating the collaged pieces seems to help make the drawing an integral whole at the end. Again, the lines are placed spontaneously and using only intuition.



Step 6

I added more silverpoint shapes that I was observing in the stone, working entirely without prior planning.



Step 7

More silverpoint shapes are added, embroidering themselves together without any prior preparation. It is all rather an adventure, one that can succeed or can lead to huge failure and the expenditure of a lot of time and effort for nothing! Until the drawing is finished, one never knows which it will be.



Step 8

More silver lines and shapes are woven together in the drawing.



Step 9

The drawing continues to develop, with more silverpoint lines. I also added lines in Polychromos pencil and watercolour pencil, both on some of the washi paper and on the white ground. Polychromos pencils are easier to use – still with care – on the white ground; watercolour pencil tends to fight one and if you repeat the line, there is a danger of almost erasing the line versus enhancing it. Since silverpoint lines are reflective – think of shining silver objects – photographing or scanning silverpoint drawings can be complicated. This image shows the problem of flare that can happen so easily in a photograph. Ironically, the flare also foretells the potential silver tarnishing that frequently occurs with silverpoint drawings. They are always developing as the silver oxidises to a warm golden brown, which can add to the interest of a drawing as you live with it and watch it evolve.



Step 10

The completed silverpoint drawing.

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x 18 cm, Jeannine Cook, 2020



Materials list

Arches hot-pressed watercolour paper, 140 lb/300 gr
Sterling silver silverpoint stylus
Golden white Silverpoint Ground
Watercolour pencils
Polychromos pencils
Washi paper
Archival glue



Pictured, an array of metalpoint styli along with a silver coin and spoon, all among the artist's drawing tools

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