

# Branching out

Collaging with prints and papers  
by American artist Diane Miller

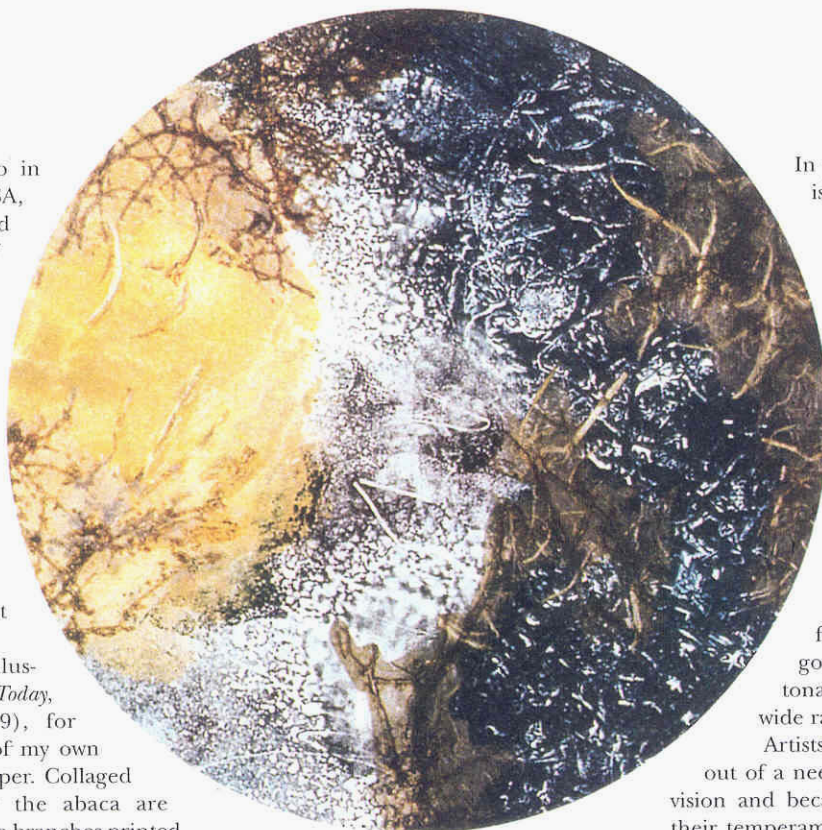
A visitor to my studio in Brooklyn, NY, USA, would find tables piled high with hundreds of silicone intaglios, monotypes, etchings and collagraphs, printed on papers ranging from heavily fibrous to virtually transparent. These prints are made as raw material to be torn up and glued over various hand-made papers, to create my one-of-a-kind 'print collages'.

*Branches Screen* (illustrated in *Printmaking Today*, Vol 8, No. 4, p. 19), for example, has a base of my own pulp-painted abaca paper. Collaged in many layers over the abaca are silicone intaglios of tree branches printed on delicate Japanese tissue. The prints are so thin that, when glued down, they seem to be an integral part of the paper beneath them.

Why not simply make a print? What are the benefits of a method such as this which makes use of prints but results in only one unique piece? Collage can combine prints and papers in ways which achieve expressive effects that would not be possible through printmaking alone.

The most important advantage of collage is that one can greatly expand the element of texture. In printmaking, the choice of paper is usually determined by the way the paper receives the ink. Sometimes an interesting paper must be rejected because printing on it would be too difficult. A collagist, however, has no such restrictions and can use fibrous, soft, unsized or irregularly surfaced papers. Collaging a print made on transparent paper onto an irregularly surfaced paper gives the feel of a textured print without the need to make casts or heavily embossed plates.

One can build up multilayered textures by repeatedly covering printed areas with pieces of semi-opaque or



*Night Branches 1, 1995*, by Diane Miller.  
Monotype with etched collage, 292 mm.

fibrous papers. The printed image 'bleeds' through the layers in varying degrees, creating atmosphere, depth and translucence. By putting fragments of greater clarity next to images 'buried' or 'veiled' under layers of paper, an artist can create a kind of textured 'pentimento' that is like painting with paper.

Although many excellent handmade papers are commercially available, making one's own paper adds another level of creativity to working with prints in collage. Like monotyping, papermaking is a free technique allowing great spontaneity. It is easy to revise an idea or take advantage of chance occurrences. Paper can be formed in a huge range of colours and textures, according to one's aesthetic needs. Any shape can be made on a vacuum table (one is not confined to the rectangle). Collaging prints onto a substratum of handmade paper means that one can work on a large scale, in as many colours as desired, without a big press and without multiple registrations.

In printing for collage there is an unexpected benefit in using exceptionally thin papers: whether the medium is etching, monotype, collagraph or silicone intaglio, one can print as many as seven sheets of paper in one pass through the press. The papers closest to the inked plate print darker, while those nearer the blanket pick up less ink. This would be undesirable if a uniform edition were the goal, but for collage such tonal variations contribute a wide range of subtle nuances.

Artists develop their methods out of a need to express a particular vision and because the procedures suit their temperament. My use of print and paper layering gives my landscape images a fibrous, textured quality that suggests the earth. Delicate papers evoke the Japanese screens that are a strong aesthetic influence. The flexibility of the technique is particularly appealing. At art school I was drawn to the Abstract Expressionist emphasis on the value of spontaneity. Using painterly media like monotyping and papermaking, joining prints and papers together in collages that can be reworked and transformed, suits my free approach to art-making. Although far from the tradition of the editioned print, my collages, nevertheless, could not be produced without making prints.

Diane Miller is a Professor of Art at St John's University in New York City. She is a member of the Board of Directors of Manhattan Graphics Center, New York, and has shown her print-collages in the USA and abroad.

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