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Art behind book plates

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Photographs: Julianna Chau / Hong Kong iMail
Mui Chong-ki shows different types of book plates. SOME people like to collect toys, others stamps or matches or something else. For artist Mui Chong-ki, it is ex libris.

Ex libris is also known as bookplate. It is a Latin word which means "from the collection or library of".

Book plate is a piece of decorated paper which is stuck in front of a book and on which the owner's name is printed or written.

Mui tells us how to make book plates so that we can design some for our friends or exchange them with others like stamps.

Making a book plate is almost like printing. First, we need to find an image. It could be anything: flowers, scenery, animals, whatever we like. Then place a plastic sheet on top of the image, which can easily be found in the artwork shop.

Use a carving knife or cutter or some sharp and pointed tools to cut the plate surface directly, following the lines of the image.

"For the area with darker colours, we need to scratch harder, and more gently on areas of lighter colour," Mui says.

Use the back of a knife to rub on the image that is drawn on the plastic sheet, then rub it with a little kerosene, and it is time to apply ink on the sheet.

"A used paintbrush would be the best choice, or we could use our fingers to apply the ink on the sheet. However, the fingers would get dirty. Rub as hard as you can so that the ink gets into the scratched area," he says.

Use a newspaper to rub away the excess ink on the plastic sheet. The direction of the rubbing movement should be from inside to outside. Then use a dry rag, which is immersed in diluted glue beforehand, to rub the sheet again until the pattern appears almost complete.

Place a piece of dampened paper over the inked plastic sheet. Put it between two transparent films, use a baren to rub in circular motion, and use the back of a tea spoon to add pressure on it.

Remove the dampened paper carefully and an intaglio printing is done.

“The paper should be fully dampened but should not have excess water on the surface, otherwise the ink would become blurred,” he says.

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