

INSPIRATION AND LINOLEUM CARVING TECHNIQUE by Jordan Makower



As a member of the Santa Clara Valley Carvers, I enjoy the diverse skills the group displays. Jack Thompson carves bears and other animals, Ron Richards has carved Indians, Joanne Carroll not only carves, but teaches people how to do exquisite wood burning designs, Roman Chernikov eagerly shows us how to do Chip Carving. There are so many carvers, each with an eye and the ability to express themselves with art. It would take more than two pages of single-spaced writing to mention each one and their skills. Everyone gladly shares their techniques.

My specialty is linoleum block carving, but even saying that, I realize that within that art form there are a great variety of styles, ranging from abstract, utilizing negative- space (even though we carve a 'negative' in order to print a 'positive', religious, representational, design, I started learning to do this in 1970, and although I had seen my father carving linoleum and printing in the 1940's, he never instructed me to do his art. The technique is my own, and this article describes it.

I need to be inspired by something to start a project. It could be a scene around me, an image from a movie, a photo of an animal or person, or a memory. For the past few months, I've found it difficult to be creatively moved. In troubling times, I think back to days that felt more peaceful, safer. I remembered a time when I was about 12 and was fishing at a lake. I had no pictures of that time to look at, but I remembered the place where I waited, patiently, in the warming sunlight for a 'nibble' on a corded line. Using the internet, I found photos of the area, along with a topographic map. I started to draw my memory. Then I traced, and carved it.



The SpeedBall Linoleum Carving Tool may have 5 blades inside its hollow handle; a 'U' gouge, a 'squared' gouge, 2 'V' gouges, and a knife-edged cutter. I use the narrowest 'V' to outline the important elements, and wider gouges to remove unwanted areas. Depth is hinted at by spacing of cut lines; wider spacing is used to show nearby areas, closer spacing conveys distance. Nearer mountains are left to print darker, distant ones are finely carved to be 'lighter' in color.