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# **Potential of Jelly as a Matrix in Printmaking**

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### **Abstract**

Contemporary printmaking focuses on producing a series of monoprints produced by the alternative printmaking matrix. The primary objectives of this research are to investigate the suitability of jelly as an alternative matrix for printmaking and to create a series of printmaking works based on the marks made by the jelly plate. This project aims to develop a series of artworks composed of the mark-makings generated by the alternative matrix. The process of exploration of the jelly plate making to establish the final consistency of the jelly plate as a potential matrix suitable for producing monoprints. The process of trial and error is practised in finding the right ingredients for jelly plate making. The final matrix will be produced as the consistency of the ingredients is found. Hence, producing mark-making from collected material results in a beautiful pattern-making process.

Keywords: Alternative Printmaking; Jelly Plate; Printmaking Matrix; Monoprint

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### **1.0 Introduction**

Contemporary Printmaking is one of the most famous art disciplines used to produce artwork by artists. Printmakers typically used various types of printmaking plates to express artistic creation, either producing prints with editions or monoprints without editions. How artwork is analysed is usually based on the idea by an artist from the art-making process or content. According to Julian Stallabrass, contemporary art must continually display the sign of its freedom and distinction (Stallabrass, 2006). In order to produce unique artwork, artists have the freedom to explore new things in producing their artworks in the form of two-dimensional artwork by using existing techniques and processes. Printmaking, one of the fine art disciplines, is a unique way of producing artwork. The techniques used will need meticulous precision to complete the artwork. The final artworks will have more than one edition as the block allows the artworks to be printed repeatedly.

However, there are also prints produced with only one edition called monoprint. This type of printmaking allows the artist to experiment and explore mediums and techniques that have not yet been used by others and consequently discover various ways of producing prints. Degas, an artist, referred to his monotypes as cooking or cuisine as they allowed him to explore new avenues and techniques (Hughes, 2008). The technique used by the artist may vary from another artist in producing monoprints as the artist will have the freedom to use any tools and explore the techniques that the artist is finally comfortable working with to produce the final artworks. The particular technique explored by the artist will lead to creative problem-solving activity. Despite having the freedom to explore the technique, the artist can only produce one edition of this type of print, and the prints will be one of a kind. Many artists nowadays who dared to come out with creative

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alternative printmaking are accepted in the art scene and enliven the local contemporary printmaking world. The main creative process is the material exploration in the studio practice.

## 2.0 Literature Review

As a dynamic medium in visual art, printmaking can be described in three ways: visual language, medium, and techniques (Abidin, 2009). The visual language of printmaking would be the same as the painting and sculpture, but the medium and technique of the printmaking made the difference as they used their own rules and discipline. Exploring a new path of printmaking techniques would be interesting, which can later be described as an alternative method and medium, thus becoming an alternative matrix in printmaking. In producing contemporary printmaking, various techniques are used by the artist so that the result is unique and different from another artist. Therefore, the use of Monotype technique is widely used by contemporary artists. The latest trend of producing printmaking in the contemporary art scene has gone beyond matrix and materials. The definition of print in the past was unambiguous and limited: an image that can be produced as part of an edition, either limited or unlimited (Tala, 2009). Printmaking, usually produced in multiple pieces using one plate, has its techniques and materials to produce final artworks with editions. The artist's vision and technical innovation will find their way into any attempt to define printmaking (Abidin, Daud & Rathi, 2013). Thus, the artist's creative journey leads to various material and technique explorations. According to Karim & Mohamed (2011), artists have allowed themselves to leave the conventions of printmaking behind and dared to do the unthinkable to print or to print on unconventional surfaces or techniques, which have resulted in artworks developing in different ways. The boldness of the artist who tends to experiment with surfaces, materials, mediums, or techniques and move towards unconventional ways leads to a different form of printmaking. While experimenting with unconventional mediums and techniques, the artist can also try to use unconventional methods of producing print, such as combining traditional methods or crossing art disciplines. As contemporary printmakers continue to push the boundaries of the printmaking medium across the disciplines, the role of the print has proved an essential creative element with mediums (Lucas, 2014).

The alternative printmakers revived old processes and experimented with new ones, often blurring the distinction between media boundary lines (Hirsch, 2009). Printmakers need to cross the boundaries of mediums to achieve the desired result of contemporary printmaking. Question or issue about the matrix and conventional impression in printmaking has been developed through the interpretation featured by the elements of space and time (Shahir, 2009). Previously, matrix and technique will be the central issue in producing printmaking as the discipline has detailed guideline for producing artworks. Printmakers commonly use hard surfaces such as wood, metal, and stone as the printmaking matrix. Artworks like Mitch Lyons, which explored the new printmaking matrix in producing artworks, are greatly respected. The artist obtained his formal education from Philadelphia College of Art, now called the University of the Arts, for a degree in graphic design and continued his studies at Tyler School of Art. He received a Master of Fine Arts in ceramics in 1971 (Winslow, 2013) and won the National Mature Media Awards in 2013 for his new medium finding in producing artwork. Mitch Lyons is the founder of the clay printing technique, which uses clay as the matrix in producing printmaking. Mitch Lyons has been producing two-dimensional clay printings on unique canvas and three-dimension monoprints on clay sculpture work. This inspiration has led to the exploration of material and technique, allowing researchers to creatively explore soft matrices such as jelly as a printmaking plate.

The development of alternative printmaking is considered new in the Malaysian contemporary art scene. However, the influence of revolutionised printmaking started when Ponirin Amin produced artwork entitled "Alibi Catur Di Pulau Bidong" in 1980 (Omar, 2021). The artist's boldness in experimenting with materials and techniques has paved the way for expanding printmaking research in Malaysia. Pioneer and young artists have collaborated to promote alternative print and give Printmaking art enthusiasts in the country a greater opportunity to appreciate their work. More exhibitions have featured alternative print works on the contemporary Malaysian art scene. The Printmaking Exhibition titled "GO-BLOCK" 1 took place at the Petronas Gallery in 2009. In that year, it can be said to be the first to bring together several national visual artists to explore and produce alternative print artworks. The exhibition took a large scale and focused on the diversity of possibilities ie processing print art forms (Hadi, Khan, Hamidon, & Harun, 2019). Consequently, the investigation of printmaking's matrix, materials, and techniques in producing printmaking works is crucial to ensuring the art's continued advancement.

## 3.0 Methodology

In this study, the experimental studio procedure utilised the method (see Figure 1). This research uses the studio practice method, which explores the jelly's potential as a printmaking matrix. First, the researchers analyse the artwork based on previous printmaking artwork and determine the matrix used as the plate. Then, the printmaking matrix process is done by exploring the potential of jelly as a matrix. This process of material exploration started with the matrix mould process, followed by making the jelly plate. The consistency of jelly is tested in this phase by mixing the ingredient, boiling it, and then letting it cool and harden at a specific time. The jelly plate is explored until getting the desired consistency, and the process will start with ingredient mixing again if the suitable consistency is not found after the hardening process. After the jelly plate reaches the desired consistency, the artwork-making process will start with sketches, pattern making, test print and final artwork.

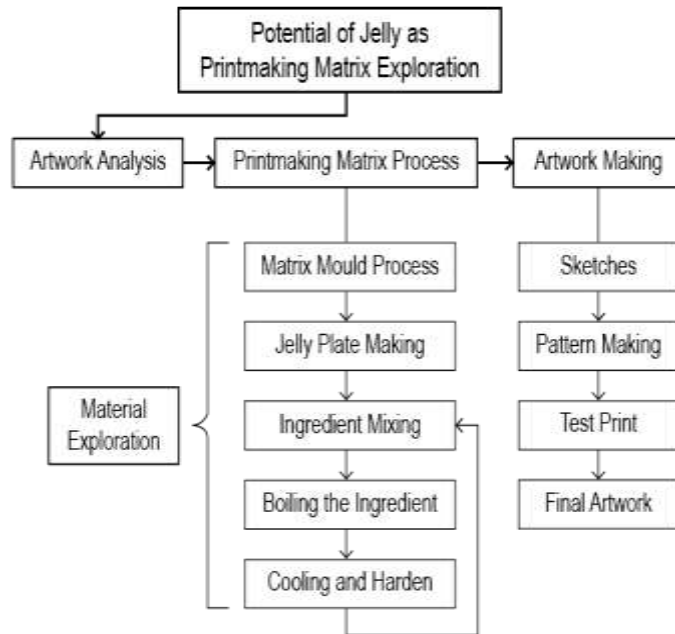


Figure 1: Diagram that shows the flow of artwork making

#### 4.0 Findings

Jelly, in the food category, is usually used as a dessert. However, in producing monoprints, it has high potential as an alternative matrix as the characteristic of the jelly is not hard like another conventional printmaking matrix. The characteristic of the jelly made it able to be used as a plate and captures textures, then producing interesting monoprints. The jelly experiment is conducted to get the best result for the plate making. The proper amounts of the ingredients to be added into the mixture must also be precise in getting the best result of the desired matrix consistency.

Before the process of plate making takes place, the mould preparation needs to be done to get the desired shape of the plate for printing. The ready-made mould is so much easier as it comes in any shape, such as rectangle, square or round. The rectangle and round biscuit containers can also be used in this process. For a bigger plate, a custom-made mould needs to be prepared. Four plastic rods are used for making a rectangle mould. The rods are pasted on a flat glass sitting on a big table, as shown in figure 2. They were secured with plasticine on their inner part, while the outer parts were secured with plasticine and masking tape. Once the mould is ready, the plate-making process begins.

#### 4.1 Jelly Plate Making Process

The jelly plate-making process is done to achieve the desired consistency of the jelly plate matrix. This process is repeated to explore the best amount of ingredients to be used for the printmaking plate. The exploration of the jelly plate-making process will be repeated until the best result is found. The mixture of ingredients is done in this process to get the best consistency for the final jelly plate, as shown in figure 3 below. The hot water is added to the mixture while stirring and then boiled with a portable gas stove to ensure the ingredients are mixed well. Then, the mixture is poured into the mould and left cold at room temperature while leaving it for a night to harden on its own.



Figure 2: Custom-made mould

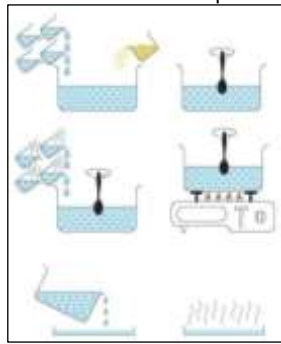


Figure 3: Jelly plate-making process

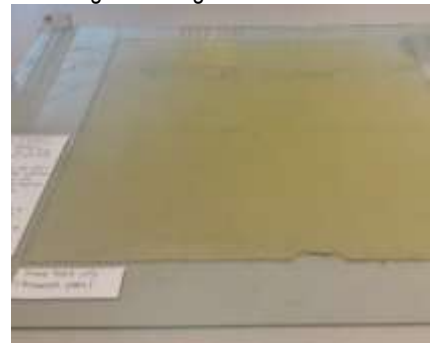


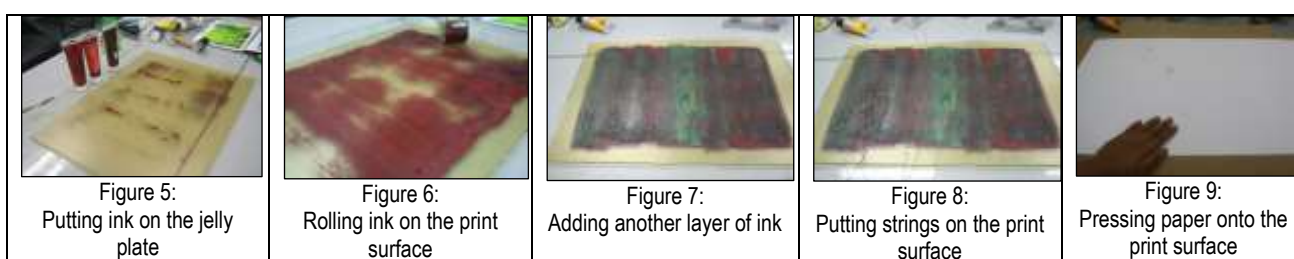
Figure 4: Jelly plate printmaking matrix

The exploration of the jelly plate has been established as the thickness and consistency of the plate are perfect for producing monoprints. The thickness and durability of the jelly plate are the most suitable of all the explorations, and the monoprints can be produced. The jelly plate printmaking matrix is shown in figure 4.

## 4.2 Pattern-Making Process

In order to prove the consistency and potential of the jelly plate is suitable as a printmaking matrix, the test print needs to be done by going through the test printing process. Some reusable domestic wastes are collected to be used to make marks while producing the prints. The collected materials are sorted out to see their possibilities of making beautiful patterns for the prints. Each material is uniqueness and can be manipulated to create unpredictable marks that suit the artwork's production requirements parallel to the theme. Producing a monoprint using the jelly plate is done by choosing the right colour for the test prints. Firstly, the acrylic paints are put on the plate, as shown in figure 5. Then, the colours are mixed on the jelly plate by rolling it with the brayer, as in figure 6. The selection of the brayer is based on the size of the brayer to get the desired result.

Another layer of colour is added if needed for making the print. Acrylic paint is then put on top of the colour already rolled on the plate and spread to get the right tone for the monoprint, as shown in figure 7. After that, some collected materials are placed on the plate full of spread colours. Strings, rubber bands or stencils can be used in this process, as in figure 8. Sometimes, the colours are wiped gently using a tissue or a rag to get a white spot or a pattern on the final monoprints. A small amount of sprayed water can also be used to get a white starry effect on the monoprint. Then, paper is placed on top of the jelly plate for the test print, as shown in figure 9 and rubbed gently to get the monoprint. This process of producing monoprints does not require a printing press machine as the material of the jelly plate is soft. Thus, allowing the researcher to get the results of the artwork by printing using hand only is contrary to traditional printmaking technique that usually needs extra pressure, such as a wooden spoon, to get the print result. This results from the soft material used in this process, which is the jelly itself.



## 4.2 Printing Process Using Jelly Plate

The monoprints printing process using jelly plate is conducted to get the final artwork. They were printed by using acrylic on the jelly plate onto paper. The strings are used to make the pattern on the plate. The monoprints were printed directly with the string underneath them, as shown in figure 10 below. While the string is placed on top of the matrix spread with colours, white marks will be on it as it blocks the ink from printing onto the paper, as in figure 11. The string is placed to produce different patterns.

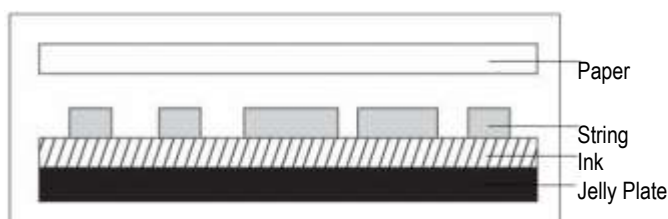


Figure 10: Printing process using jelly plate

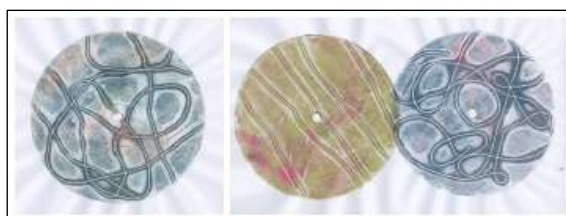


Figure 11: String pattern test prints using jelly plate

These monoprints shown in figure 13 are also the result of jelly plate printmaking. The difference is that they were not printed directly with strings on the jelly plate. Instead, the string is removed from the plate, leaving marks on the jelly plate from the previous printing process. This plate's most exciting characteristic is capturing the marks from the previous materials put on top, as shown in figure 12 below.

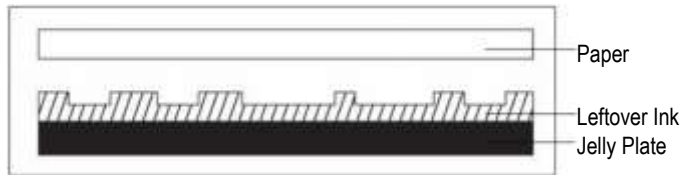


Figure 12: Printing process with string removed, leaving marks behind



Figure 13: Jelly plate mark-making test prints

Another way of making a monoprint with this plate is by not having any material to create patterns, as shown in figure 14. However, this can only be done when doing a few steps of the first and second types of monoprint. When the plate is used a few times, marks are created and left over the plate, which allows the paper to collect the marks made by the previous prints. The mark-making from the jelly plate creates beautiful results, as shown in figure 15.

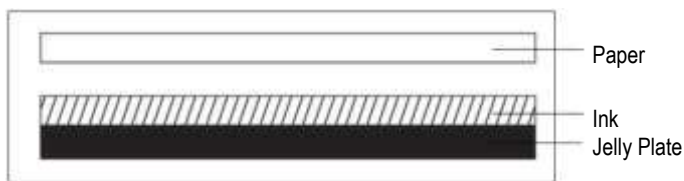


Figure 14: Printing process with marks on jelly plate



Figure 15: Test print from the jelly plate

The test print shown in figure 15, which is the result of the jelly plate, looks like an effect of the traditional woodcut print. The effect of jelly plate prints can also look like etching and engraving with particular motion and technique of applying the acrylic paint colour. This has proven that this jelly plate can be an alternative to traditional printmaking techniques and matrix.



Figure 16: Mark-making from jelly plate

The monoprints in figure 16 result from the jelly plate without anything used to create patterns. The effect is solely made by rolling on with the brayer in a specific motion. The white effect is from the jelly plate used for about four weeks. The plate leaves a slight white hole, creating a beautiful accidental pattern for the monoprints. This allows creative exploration of ways of paint application that will enhance the creativity and style of the artist using this technique.

## 5.0 Results

The jelly plate printing process results in producing the final artworks of monoprints. The final artwork can be seen in Figures 17 and 18 below. Beautiful mark-makings have been produced in the monoprint technique using the jelly plate. This plate is also a more suitable option for the artist as all the ingredients are easily found in anyone's kitchen. The exploration carried out in this research has proved that the jelly plate is the easiest and, indeed, more sustainable solution to the problem of the reusable matrix in Printmaking. The studio experiment demonstrated that the jelly plate is not only a feasible alternative to the other Printmaking matrix but is capable of offering beautiful and more delicate marks for Printmaking artworks.



Figure 17: Monoprint produced using jelly plate

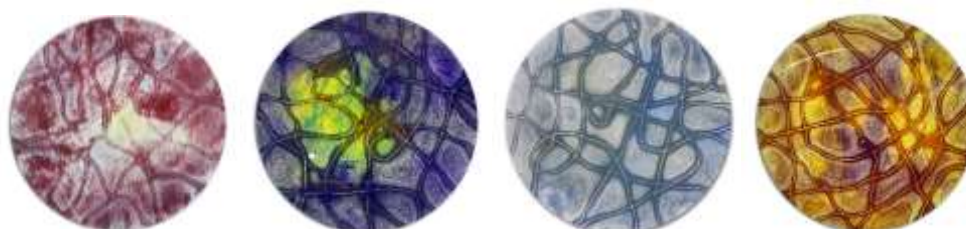


Figure 18: Monoprint produced using jelly plate

## 6.0 Conclusion

The strength of this artwork is the technical process involved in the plate making, as the technique explored is quite interesting used in producing monoprints. However, the current jelly plate exploration has its limitation to the weakness of this project currently is the struggle of making the plate on a large scale. Hence, the monoprint produced for the early stage is on a small scale and developing to be more significant. The jelly plate also has its life span, as it will damage when used for a certain amount of time. Although it will damage, the plate can be reheated and moulded to hard again and reusable for the next print project. This will be the greatest strength as the researchers do not have to make a new plate from the new ingredients. It can just be reheated and reusable, and the process continues to benefit the artist in the artwork making. In conclusion, this alternative way of producing monoprints by using the jelly plate as a printmaking matrix that does not require a press machine is very beneficial in the printmaking discipline. This will be the ideal way of producing a new contemporary monoprint that will enhance the artist's creativity. The most important thing in producing artwork is the idea that needs to be portrayed. So, this technique will help in the artwork-making process, especially in producing monoprints.

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