



WOMAN DRESSED AS FRIDA IN FRONT OF FRIDA KAHLO SELF-PORTRAIT



The Educator & The Artist

Photos courtesy of
JAKE GARFIELD

Woodcut artist *Jake Garfield* tries to keep his teaching and his printmaking separate, but they inevitably come together in a wonderful collision of passion and practical skills that just makes each one better.

Ordinarily when I interview a printmaker, it's our first time meeting, but this one has already become a familiar face in my living room. For the past five Thursdays, Jake Garfield has been beaming in from London via my laptop to teach me, and 12 other print-curious people scattered across the country (and globe), a range of processes through the Royal Drawing School's 'Printmaking At Home' online course. From dining tables and home studios in England, Wales, Lithuania and Egypt, under Jake's tutelage, we've had a go at monoprinting, reduction and multi-block relief printing, learnt how to sharpen our tools, frame work and which acronyms to use to sign our prints (always in pencil, never pen!). So this is not the usual 'getting to know you' interview, it's a 'tell me more ...' chat.

"I love talking about this stuff," says Jake, and it really shows. Over the past five weeks, he has swept me up in his passion for printmaking, and we've embarked on a whirlwind tour through its history, innovators, processes and potential. A teacher once told him that an educator's role is less passing on information, more getting people excited about learning, and Jake does both. Every time he speaks I add another artist, book, website to my 'to google later' mental list. Even now, after the course has finished, his enthusiasm and knowledge are contagious as he recommends a free

Words by
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JAKE GARFIELD

online lecture series* that he thinks I'll enjoy. "There are easier career paths," he laughs. "You have to be really into it to choose to make a living with art!"

It was at the University of Brighton, studying painting, that Jake first fell for print. Fascinated by the physicality of the processes under the influence of visiting artist/lecturer Tom Hammick, he hung up his paintbrushes and plunged into printmaking. "It's so raw, you're almost climbing inside what makes an image," he says. "Focusing just on lines, then tone and then texture, compartmentalising, constructing the image one step at a time."

Working primarily with wood – preferably birch ply which is workable and affordable, soft enough to cut and hard enough to print multiples – Jake uses other print techniques from time to time, dropping a black and white etching into a colour relief print, for example, "so they jar, feel a bit awkward." Many of his images feature pictures within pictures, questioning the relationship between fiction and reality, the print and the world we live in. Jake is great at tackling quite complex, sometimes academic ideas in an accessible way, and true to form, he uses *Itchy and Scratchy* (the *Tom and Jerry* parody cartoon that exists within *The Simpsons*, for those who don't know) to illustrate what he means. And then follows it up with Matisse, Manet and the filmmaker Charlie Kaufman who all use worlds within worlds in their work. "I like things that make you think, make you feel something," he says.

Over the last few weeks, Jake has shown the work of maybe 50 printmakers in his classes, from Albrecht Durer to Edgar Heap of Birds, so when I ask about his influences, I'm surprised to get an immediate and succinct answer, no messing about. The romantic, poetic work of his former tutor is one and Christiane Baumgartner with her meticulously carved woodcuts taken from film stills is the other. "They're my yin and yang," he says. "Christiane freezes time, extends it. She will take a sunset and drain all the colour out, strip the most romantic subject; and then Tom takes on operatic narratives, uses luscious rainbow rolls, hits you in the gut with emotion. The artists I like, you can find something universal in what they do, even if it's quite niche, because they're being honest and following an instinct that it's worth exploring."

Jake has a 'quite niche' project of his own on the go, but he's not ready to share the details just yet. "It's still in its infancy, I'm pulling lots of strands together that seem very unconnected. It changes so much through the process, whittling down, adding things in and taking things out," he says. "I admire people who have a beautiful, simple idea



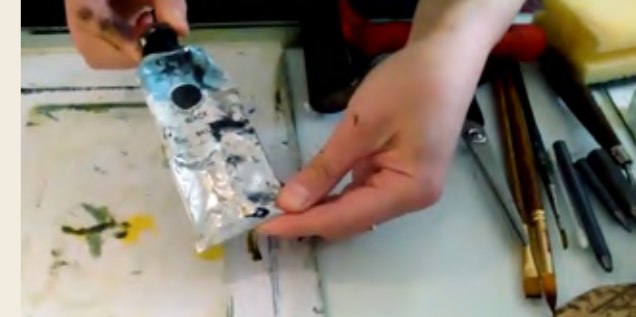
and execute it brilliantly, but my way is more chaotic and open minded at the beginning, then I get ruthless, editing and picking out the patterns, shedding anything that's unnecessary."

It can take anything from a few days to a couple of years for Jake to go through his artistic process. He keeps folders and folders full of collected imagery that he works from, but tries to ditch the source material early on: "You can become anchored to it, making decisions based on replicating it." During lockdown, Jake's way of approaching printmaking changed dramatically when he got an iPad. Before then, he would compose an image on the block, proofing a lot and figuring out how to make it work through trial and error. Now, the prep work is done digitally before ever taking tools to wood. "I used to want to get straight to cutting, not wasting time with planning a print, but I've found the more preparation you do, the less time you lose because you make your mistakes in a way that's much less costly in time," he says. "It's completely changed the way I work."

There are two distinct sides to Jake: Jake the educator and Jake the artist. After graduating from The Drawing Year at the Royal Drawing School, he went on to do an MA in Printmaking at the Royal College of Art. There, he trained in Philosophy for Children – a method of teaching that's all about curiosity, critical thinking and working collaboratively – and set up Line of Thought to put it into practice through art and philosophy sessions for young people. Although teaching takes the pressure off having to constantly sell, he tries to keep it separate from his printmaking, "for the headspace," but they inevitably intertwine and overlap. "I might think I know how to do something, but you have to *really* know it if you're going to communicate it in a way that's understandable for someone who's never done it before – it helps me fine tune my practice," he says. And he learns a lot from participants in return. "People do some quite advanced things, things I've never come across before." On our course, he was introduced to the 'drinking glass in a sock' method of burnishing which was new to him (and everyone else).



*The Mellon Lectures – Contact: Art and the Pull of Print from the National Gallery of Art by Jennifer L Roberts, Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University. www.nga.gov/research/casual/meetings/mellon-lectures-in-the-fine-arts/roberts-2021.html



PRINTMAKING AT HOME

Getting inky with Vinca Power

It's Thursday morning. I've covered my dining table with newspaper and secured it in place with an obscene amount of masking tape. I've laid out my collection of rollers and several tubes of ink. I've made a coffee, swapped my pyjamas for equally stretchy 'daytime' clothes and flipped open my laptop to join Jake and the rest of the Printmaking At Home crew. Over the past five weeks this little ritual has come to signify the beginning of a whole day dedicated to print.

To start, we all say hello and give a brief history of our lives in printmaking. Some have a wealth of experience and are working their way through a range of Royal Drawing School courses, others (me included) sit closer to the novice end of the spectrum. Through the screen, Jake exudes a gentle energy that puts me instantly at ease and any tinge of imposter syndrome melts away. Each week he shows us a hugely varied selection of printmakers' work with one strong message: if there are rules in printmaking, you are under no obligation to follow them.

Sessions begin with an interesting intro followed by a detailed demo where Jake breaks print processes right down so we can digest every little bit. We get time to mess about with what we've learnt before plunging into a more focused piece of work in the afternoon. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Zoom might seem daunting, but time really does fly when you're up to your elbows in ink! We round things off with a show and tell of the day's efforts to encouraging and insightful critique from Jake.

Week one is monoprinting, followed by woodcut and lino, multi-layer block printing and the reduction (or 'suicide') method (apparently invented by Picasso), but we cover so much more than that. "We pack in a lot. It's like a three year degree in five days," says Jake. This course has imbued me with a pick'n'mix of practical printmaking skills (which I have been gleefully sharing with friends and family along the way), but infinitely more valuable, for me, is that it has unlocked some inner permission to experiment and find my own artistic groove. For that I am forever changed. And all without leaving the house.

The Royal Drawing School offers online and studio-based courses in drawing, printmaking, painting and sculpture for all ages. Daytime and evening courses run during term-time, with holiday courses taking place at Christmas, Easter and Summer. Visit www.royaldrawingschool.org/courses/public-courses to book.

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"Printmakers have always taken things designed for something else. It's in the spirit of print to figure out how to use whatever you have to hand," says Jake. In spring last year, as the pandemic hit, the Royal Drawing School trained all their tutors to run virtual classrooms, and devised a whole programme of online classes. They asked Jake to put together a course about printmaking without specialised equipment beyond ink and cutting tools, which has run five times since then. "It gets better each time," says Jake. The online courses have been such a success that they will be continuing indefinitely alongside real-life classes, opening up the Royal Drawing School to people outside of London, with Jake teaching on a mixture of both. "It's not just a wider audience, it's a different audience," he says.

For Jake, printmaking is a bridge between fine art and "things out in the world," and he himself is a bit like that. Through his art, his classes and a nice chat on a Tuesday afternoon he has demystified this totally accessible but strangely daunting realm of print, deepening my understanding and giving me a nudge (and the confidence) to get stuck in and explore it for myself. T

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