

## Information and overview of Tetra-Pak® Printmaking Demo 4/8/2025

### What is Tetra-Pak?

**Tetra-Pak** is a company that provides food processing and packaging solutions, including packaging, filling machines, and processing for a variety of foods and beverages. Tetra Pak cartons are the type of packaging that is often used for milk, juice, soup, sauce, and coconut water. Tetra Pak was founded in 1951 in Lund, Sweden and Pully, Switzerland by Ruben Rausing.

### What is Tetra-Pak made of?

An average Tetra Pak carton is made of about 70% paperboard, 25% plastic and 5% aluminium to protect its contents. The layers are pressed and heated together to create a six-layer armor that protects the contents from light, oxygen, air, dirt, and moisture. Tetra-Pak is working to make their packaging more sustainable by replacing aluminum with more recyclable materials that have a lower carbon footprint. It is not fully recyclable.

### Printmaking with Tera-Pak

Tetra-Pak cartons can be used as printing plates for a variety of techniques, including dry point, collagraph, and intaglio printing. Tetra Pak printmaking gained popularity in the early 2000's, particularly among artists interested in recycling and environmental conservation. To use rinse and open the carton, then cut it into printing plate-sized pieces or shape as you desire. Draw a design on the surface or transfer using graphite paper, then use an etching needle to score the carton. Apply ink to the plate, then wipe off the excess and run it through an etching press. The plate can be used multiple times but will eventually start to break down.

### What types of tools do you need to make images on Tetra-Pak?

Dry point needles, etching tools, scoring rollers, and other scoring and mark making hand tools work well. This substrate is very responsive to mark making allowing for very fine and painterly line work. Cross hatching, stippling, and embossing all work well with this material. You can even cut away the top layer to get solid black or dark color saturation.



## How to ink and prepare your Tetra-Pak plate for printing

1. Dabbing inking with a soft make-up sponge allows for adequate ink application (especially in the dry point lines and marks).
2. With either a crumpled and softened phonebook page made of newsprint or with a make-up removing pad gently wipe away the excess ink. This can be done in a similar but gentler fashion to wiping a metal or plexi-glass etching plate.
3. With a clean make-up sponge or various Q-Tip style applicators remove additional ink to create highlights or “white” areas until you are happy with the appearance.
4. You may need to experiment with the ink removal until you get it just right.  
Note Tetra-Pak holds ink amazingly well.



## Printing your Tetra-Pak plate

1. Prior to inking your Tetra-Pak set the press height to accommodate the plate, press sheet, newsprint sheets and press blanket to lightly to moderately contact the press roller. You don't want to run these elements too tightly through the press. Document these settings.
2. It is suggested that you are mindful of ink on your press area. Place 1-2 layers of newsprint down on the press bed the size of your press sheet.
3. Lay your inked Tetra-Pak plate and position within the newsprint area as you want it positioned on your press sheet.
4. Lay your lightly moistened press sheet atop of your plate and newsprint.
5. Then place 2 more sheets of newsprint also sized to your paper on top of your press sheet.
6. Finally, overlay the press blanket. You are now ready to run the elements through the press to see the results of your printing effort.
7. Based on the image achieved you may decide to back off (loosen) or tighten the press ever so slightly to improve the ink reception on the paper.

## Continued inking, printing and or cleaning of the Tetra-Pak plate

Because the Tetra-Pak is comprised of 70% paperboard with a thin layer of aluminum and plastic the pressure of the press will slowly degrade the plate. Editions of 10-20 impressions can be achieved if care is given during the printmaking process.

I **do not** recommend cleaning the plate between reinking and printing more images. If you plan on waiting to print additional images another day after pondering your first few prints, I recommend the following process. Using an alcohol wipe, squeeze out the excess fluid and gently wipe off the plate being careful to not get too much moisture in the etched line work. Excess moisture will get into the paperboard expanding the substrate and possibly damaging your line work and causing the aluminum and plastic edges to curl upward. Immediately pat dry the plate with paper towel. Store your plate safely until your next printing.