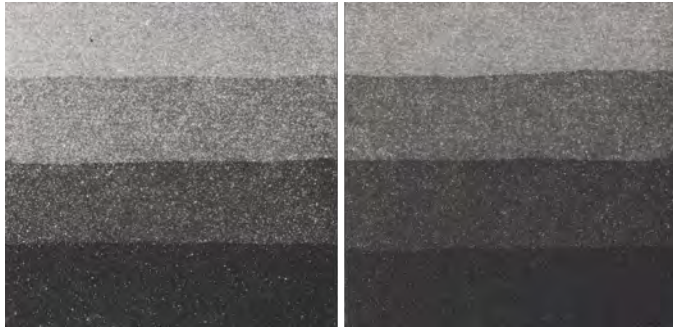


M.E.S

Melbourne
Etching Supplies



A Deep Dive into Black Etching Inks

The world of black inks, for printmakers, is a bit of a black hole. For some ink ranges, there are so many options it's overwhelming. But what is the difference? Isn't black just.. black?! We could write an essay (and maybe one day we will) but for the meantime, join us as we dive into the details of some of our most popular black etching inks at Melbourne Etching Supplies.

Of course, these are just the thoughts of some of our printmakers at M.E.S and as such, should be considered a guideline only. We highly recommend testing different black inks to find out what will work best for you!

The Great Debate - Charbonnel 55981 vs 55985

Charbonnel are well-known manufacturers of printmaking inks. With an incredible array of colours and an extended range of black inks, they are favoured by printmakers for their high quality and consistency. Over the years at Melbourne Etching Supplies, debating the difference between the 55981 and the 55985 has been a frequent topic of conversation. So, with distinct differences to their formulations and characteristics, let's have a look at the key components of both.

Charbonnel Black 55981

Composition: Ivory Black and Carbon Black
Highly viscous, relatively easy to wipe off – soft, universal black.

We would suggest that the Charbonnel 55981 is arguably the best ink for fine detail work, and areas where a smooth, even application is needed. It's quick drying time makes it suitable for projects that require a faster turnaround, which could be considered an added bonus.

Charbonnel Black 55985

Composition: Ivory black, Carbon Black and Prussian Blue

Very viscous, difficult to wipe off – slightly blueish and very deep.

The Charbonnel 55985 truly helps to reinforce other blacks. Our recommendation is that the Charbonnel 55985 is ideal for achieving deep, rich blacks with a velvety finish. It really is perfect for large solid areas (especially aquatint) and works well on various surfaces, providing a uniform and consistent print.



Gamblin Etching Inks are designed for printmakers who need a strong line and a great sensitivity to detail. Each black is designed to meet specific needs in both depth of colour and printability.

Gamblin acknowledge that not all black pigments are not perfectly neutral in colour. In a mass sense, i.e. in lines or heavy rollouts, the 'temperature' of the black is almost imperceptible, but each ink will leave a plate tone that is either warm or cool. These colour differences, while subtle, can affect the overall look and feel of a finished print - especially when paired with a toned paper.

Gamblin Etching Portland Black

Neutral in colour, the Gamblin Portland Black is formulated for easy wiping, and offers a moderate level of plate tone ideal for creating subtle value shifts. This ink will print drypoint beautifully, whilst also being a go-to choice for those editioning, and for those working in schools that need an ink for general printing techniques.

Conveniently, there is also a cool tinted version, Gamblin Etching Portland Cool Black, available 'pre-mixed'.

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Gamblin Etching Bone Black

The Gamblin Etching Bone Black is a traditional black with a warm tone. It wipes easily and leaves a very light plate tone. The combination of the light plate tone and easy wiping makes it less suited to works that require a subtle value range and ideal for work that requires strong contrasts.

Gamblin Etching Carbon Black

The Gamblin Etching Carbon Black is a silvery, dense black with a heavy plate tone. It is one of the most difficult black inks to wipe but remains a favourite due to the strong, deep blacks it can produce. The Carbon Black tone has a delicate warmth to it.



Cranfield Traditional Etching Inks have barely changed in generations. Their historic formulations provide high strength results in a range of colours for all types on intaglio printmaking - plus there is something charming about being milled in family run business in the welsh hills.

Cranfield Traditional Etching Mid Black

A versatile' mid-toned Carbon Black (PBk7) ink with low viscosity & low tack. The Cranfield Mid Black works particularly well for line work. It has a soft feel and wipes evenly & easily to give a strong print.

Cranfield Traditional Etching Aquatint Black

The Cranfield Traditional Etching Aquatint Black works particularly well for images with lots of tone i.e. aquatint. Although this initially ink feels stiffer than the Cranfield Traditional Etching Mid Black you will find this ink wipes quickly & evenly from your plate and gives bright' intense prints.

Cranfield Traditional Etching Bone Black

A strong, warm-toned black made from genuine charred bone black pigment (PBr9) with a high viscosity & a high tack. The Cranfield Traditional Etching Bone Black works well for both line work & tonal work. It is quite a stiff ink.

At the end of the day, when choosing your black printmaking inks, we think it is advisable to consider the following factors:

- **Pigment:** The pigment can affect the ink's drying time, opacity, and tone.
- **Tone:** The warmth or coolness of the black ink can influence the final print. Check to see if a Prussian Blue or a Sepia has been added to the mix. A tint of blue will make a cool/cold black, whereas the addition of Sepia will give you more more warmth.
- **Opacity:** Some black inks are more opaque than others, affecting how they cover the surface and interact with paper and other inks.
- **Drying Time:** Different formulations can have varying drying times, impacting the workflow and final finish of the print.

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