



Mike Lyon, *Max*, 2004,
woodcut from ten
computer-carved cherry
plywood blocks, 10 x 7½
inches (25.4 x 19 cm).
Courtesy of the artist.

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Woodblock Printing

Our word *relief* comes from the Latin *relevo*, meaning “to raise.” When a relief is cut from a surface, such as a woodblock, the uncarved parts appear to be raised. In this chapter, we will look at several methods for creating woodcuts—relief prints from carved woodblocks—including reduction carving for single-color (usually black and white) prints, the single-block reduction method for multicolor prints, Western-style multiblock carving, and Japanese-style multiblock carving.

Equipment and Materials for Woodcuts

Choosing which type of wood to use is an important first step when doing a woodcut. Woods are broadly categorized as either hardwoods or softwoods.

Maple and birch are very hard woods and difficult to cut, but they hold fine details. Woods from nut and fruit trees, such as walnut, beech, cherry, pear, and apple, are even-grained and will also hold details well. Oak is extremely hard but has an open grain. Mahogany is softer but splinters easily.

Among softwoods, pine has long been used for woodcuts. Pine species are abundant throughout northern Europe, Asia, and North America. A superior variety for woodcutting purposes is the sugar pine found on the east coast of the United States. Firm and even grained, it can be cut either with or against the grain. Other softwoods are the strong and resilient poplar, which has a smooth and even grain, and basswood.