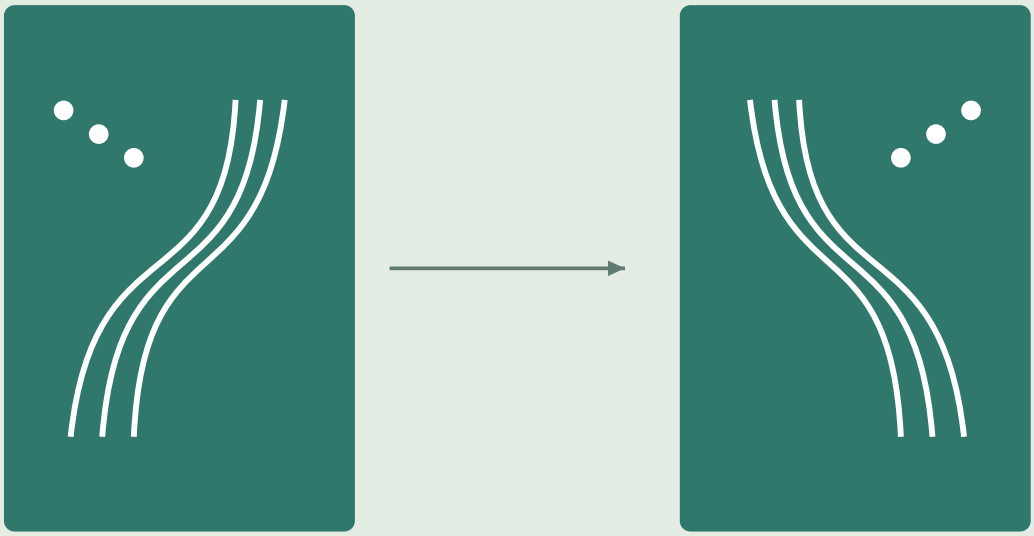
STEADLEAF PRESS
MAKE / PRINTING, STENCILS & COLOR

Use a Gel Plate with Water-Based Paint for Monoprints



ROLL / MARK / ONE PULL

14 practical steps · Coat · mark · pull

Original diagrams and two printable maker records

Illustrative plans — not physical test results

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Before you start

Gel printing offers an immediate way to turn a thin paint film into an original paper image. Instead of cutting into a block, you add temporary marks to paint on a reusable flexible plate and lift a single impression. This project uses one colour and a simple group of soft-tool marks, with no press, solvent or sharp tool. Each pull is a separate image; an exact duplicate is not promised, even if the same arrangement is repeated.

Materials: a manufactured gel printing plate approximately 100 x 150 mm, compatible water-based acrylic paint, the maker-recommended soft brayer, a clean nonporous support permitted by the plate maker, soft cotton swab or rounded rubber-tipped tool, plain 130 x 180 mm paper and several offcuts, a non-food palette, ruler and protective table covering. Read the plate and paint instructions, including ventilation, cleanup and storage. Use no blade, abrasive, hot tool or unsupported solvent on the plate. Keep paint away from food, children and pets.

Plan the project

For a planning example, use a 100 x 150 mm portrait plate and 130 x 180 mm paper. Centring the plate gives 15 mm margins on all four sides. If your plate is a common inch-sized product, measure it rather than rounding its advertised dimensions. Draw the paper outline and plate footprint on a guide outside the paint area. Record the actual plate dimensions and paper orientation so the print can be centred without touching the wet surface.

Inside the plate, leave about 10 mm as an outer visual border for the mark-making. Draw three gently curved lines from the lower-left area toward the upper-right with a soft tool through a thin paint film. Add a cluster of three small dabs near the upper-left. The tool moves paint, not plate material. The impression reverses horizontally relative to the viewed plate: x-prime = actual plate width minus x. Prepare the paper first and pull while the paint is workable according to the product. One application and one pull make the principal print; residue may produce a different impression, not an identical copy.

Steps 01–02

1. Check the gel plate and support

Use a purpose-made flexible gel printing plate with its instructions. Inspect for damage, dirt and foreign particles without scratching it. Place it on the smooth nonporous support recommended by the maker; some plates contain mineral oil that can affect absorbent surfaces. Do not place an oily plate directly on bare paper, unfinished wood or an unsuitable table.

2. Choose compatible paint and tools

Select a water-based acrylic paint explicitly suitable for the gel plate and paper. Gelli Arts recommends acrylic paints for its plates; follow the exact plate and paint directions. Use a clean soft brayer and blunt soft marking tool. Do not add solvents or unapproved modifiers, and never use a craft knife to draw into a gel plate.

Steps 03–04

3. Prepare the paper before rolling paint

Measure the actual plate width and height. Cut or obtain paper approximately 30 mm larger in each dimension for a 15 mm margin. For the illustrative 100 x 150 mm plate, this gives 130 x 180 mm. Prepare additional scrap sheets and a place for drying. Mark the paper orientation on the back or a separate guide; do not write on the inked area.

4. Sketch the marks and reversal

Draw the plate outline and planned curves on scrap paper. Add the three dabs in the upper-left. On a second outline, mirror the sketch horizontally to preview where the marks may appear on the print. For a 100 mm plate, a point at x = 20 appears at x = 80 relative to the impression. Actual paint movement may vary from the sketch.

Steps 05–06

5. Position the plate and paper guide

Mark the outer paper dimensions and centred plate footprint on a separate clean backing guide, without placing absorbent material against a plate whose instructions prohibit it. Position the plate on its compatible nonporous support. Use marks beyond the wet area for two adjacent paper edges; confirm the paper can be lowered smoothly and lifted without reaching across paint.

6. Practise the gesture on scrap

Before applying paint to the plate, practise the three curved strokes and dabs using a clean soft tool on a scrap drawing. Keep the marks broad and spaced. The purpose is to establish the hand movement without putting force on the plate. If the tool has a sharp edge or rough seam, choose a different soft implement.

Steps 07–08

7. Roll a thin even paint film

Apply a small amount of compatible acrylic paint using the manufacturer-supported method. Roll it with the soft brayer to form a thin film across the plate. Avoid pools and thick ridges; excess paint may blur marks or transfer poorly. Do not dilute unless the paint and plate directions permit it. Have the paper ready before rolling.

8. Make the soft-tool marks

While the film is workable, use the soft swab or rubber tip to move paint into the planned three curves. Add three small dabs in the upper-left area, allowing some background to remain uninterrupted. Keep pressure light; do not gouge or cut the gel. If the paint has already dried enough to resist marking, stop and follow the maker’s cleanup or re-inking instructions.

Steps 09–10

9. Lower the paper once

Align the prepared paper with the two guide edges and lower it onto the paint without sideways motion. Place a clean protective sheet on the back if useful. Smooth gently and evenly across the footprint to make contact, following the plate instructions. Avoid overworking a wet image or trying to slide it into a more central position.

10. Lift the single impression

Hold the paper by a clean margin and peel it steadily from one edge while the plate rests on the support. Do not drag it along the paint. Place it face up on a clean flat drying surface. Note the reflected orientation, areas of clear paint and any patchy or blurred areas. This is your principal one-pull print.

Steps 11–12

11. Review the image after drying

Allow the stated drying time before touching the surface. Compare the print to your mirrored sketch, but treat actual film variation as part of the image. If a second trial is useful, clean or prepare the plate according to the maker and change one variable such as the film amount. Do not expect identical repeats, and label each independent pull separately.

12. Handle remaining paint appropriately

Do not scrape dried paint with a sharp tool. Follow the specific plate maker’s instructions for cleaning or reusing residue; a separate ghost impression, if attempted, is not the original one-pull print. For the Gelli Arts example, acrylic residue may be removed with the recommended mild soap and water method. Do not substitute strong solvents or abrade the flexible surface.

Steps 13–14

13. Dry the prints and store the plate

Keep the paper flat and separate until the paint has fully dried as directed. Store the plate clean and dry using its original protective packaging or approved smooth coverings. Avoid debris or pressure marks between the covering and gel. Follow the maker’s directions for temperature and storage; keep printmaking tools separate from food.

14. Record the one-pull method

Complete both records with the actual plate and paper dimensions, compatible paint, tool, mark layout, film and contact observations, drying and cleanup. Mark KEEP PRINT, ADJUST or HOLD. Store the dry print protected from light, moisture and abrasion. The guide illustrates an original printing method; it does not guarantee an exact colour, permanence, safety or physical performance.

Fix, care and preserve

Paint beads up. Check compatibility and follow the plate maker’s advice.

Image is muddy. Use a thinner compatible film and fewer marks.

Patchy transfer. Check paper contact and paint working time separately.

Gel surface damaged. Stop using sharp or abrasive tools; consult the plate maker.

Paper sticks. Follow the maker’s method; do not scrape or force the plate.

Source & evidence boundary

Original Steadleaf English prose, calculations, vector artwork, diagrams and maker records. The following sources provide factual context, not certification of this design. Follow actual product instructions and local disposal guidance.

Gelli Arts, What to Know

https://www.gelliarts.com/pages/what-to-know

Gelli Arts, FAQ

https://www.gelliarts.com/pages/faq

Health Canada, Arts and crafts safety

https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/home-garden-safety/use-arts-crafts-materials-safely.html

Canadian Conservation Institute, Caring for paper objects

https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/preventive-conservation/guidelines-collections/paper-objects.html

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Plate, paper and mirror sketch

100 x 150 mm plate in 130 x 180 mm paper with 15 mm margins. Three curves and three dabs; the print reverses horizontally. Actual plate size governs.

A / PLATE AND MIRRORED PAPER IMPRESSION

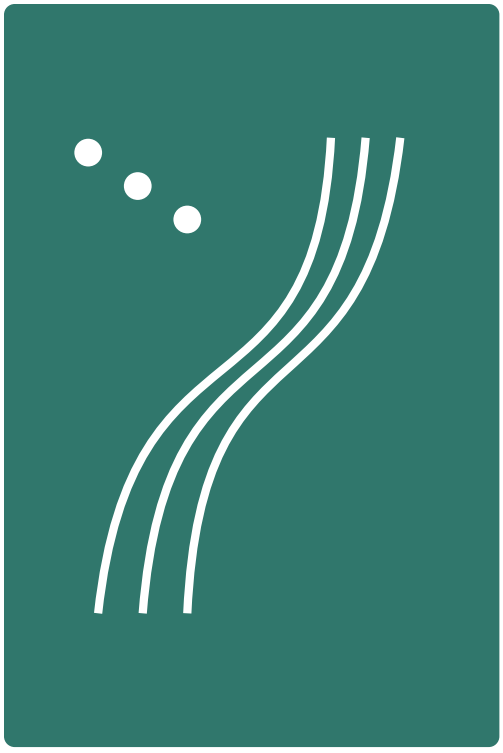
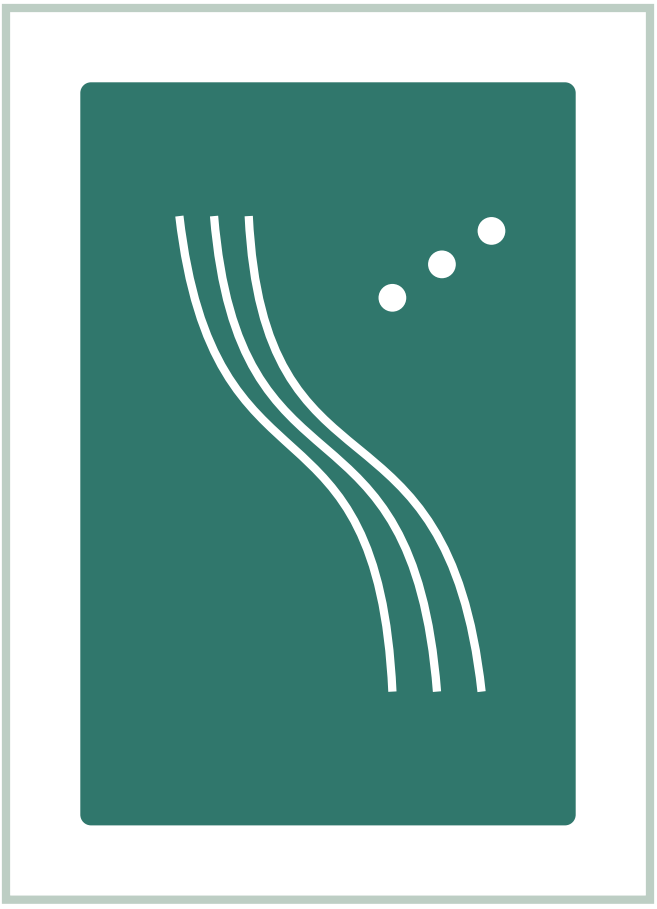


PLATE 100 × 150 mm

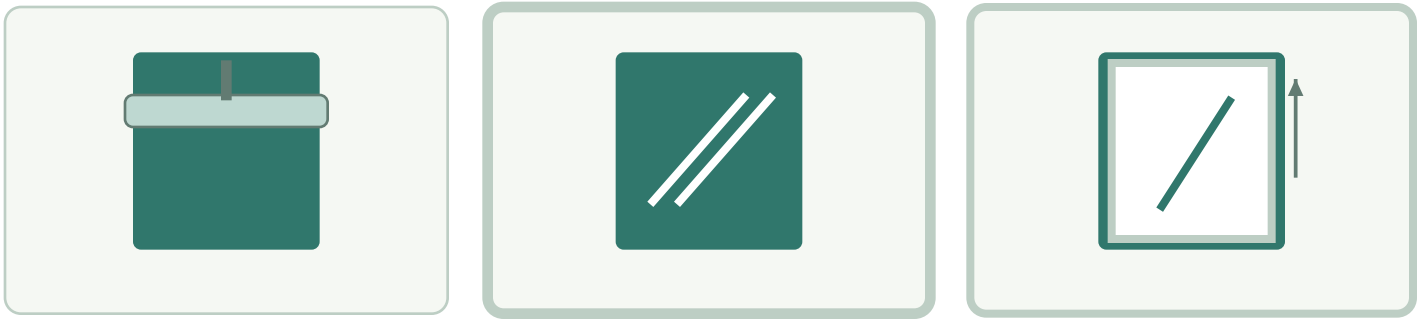


PAPER 130 × 180 mm

Roll, mark and pull once

Thin compatible film, soft-tool marks in the paint only, paper lowered without sliding, gentle contact, then one steady lift. Any further print is a separate impression.

A / ONE-PULL SEQUENCE



ROLL **MARK** **PULL ONCE**

Observe an actual scrap impression. Change only one factor if you repeat the trial. The illustrated sequence is not a physical test result.

Plate and one-pull plan

Enter actual observations only. Mark missing information UNKNOWN or NOT CHECKED. This is a craft record, not a safety or performance certificate.

Plate product / actual dimensions

Paper size / calculated margins

Paint product / compatibility / directions

Brayer / soft mark tool

Sketch / mirror orientation

Film method / guide marks

Drying and cleanup instructions

Decision: PROCEED / CHANGE / HOLD

One-pull print observation

Enter actual observations only. Mark missing information UNKNOWN or NOT CHECKED. This is a craft record, not a safety or performance certificate.

Actual film and mark method

Paper contact / lift direction

Mirror orientation / clear areas

Patchy, blurred or missing areas

Drying condition / actual date

Disposition: KEEP PRINT / ADJUST / HOLD

Plate cleanup / storage

Next trial or unresolved issue