SALT LAKE CITY WOODCUTS

LeGrand Olsen (Justin Diggle)
Department of Art and Art History, Printmaking

Salt Lake City Woodcuts grew from my desire to become more familiar with various woods used by printmakers. Not only did my time in the studio allow me to discover each wood's unique characteristics, but it also provided me with the opportunity to explore some conceptual ideas that I had for a series of finished prints of Salt Lake City landmarks.

The three woodblocks that I chose to work with were Cherry, Lauan and Shina.

The North American Cherry used, while the most difficult wood of the three to carve, ended up being my favorite. Cherry is very dense and holds its organic shape incredibly well. Many woods will split or splinter when being cut across the grain or will warp with repeated use but Cherry proved very durable. These qualities are especially important and helpful when working with imagery that needs to be controlled. Cherry wood also prints flat and smooth leaving no indication that the print was even made using wood.

The Lauan wood blocks used were from the Philippines. While I really enjoyed using this wood, I found its physical properties limited its use in my prints. Lauan wood is not dense, does not print flat and splinters easily when cut. However, it was useful in creating complimentary, subtle and organic textures within my work. In my opinion, Lauan would be most appropriate for working with more abstract imagery.

The Japanese Shina woodblocks used in my project held ink well and printed beautifully, but required a high degree of precision when cutting. Shina blocks will print flat while still showing the distinctive grain of each piece of wood. This feature is especially nice because each woodblock has its own particular organic pattern. While Shina prints attractively, it presents its own unique challenges. It is not a dense wood and will sometimes easily chip away in areas that you have no intention of cutting. This can be both frustrating and problematic when an essential area of your image unexpectedly comes off the woodblock.