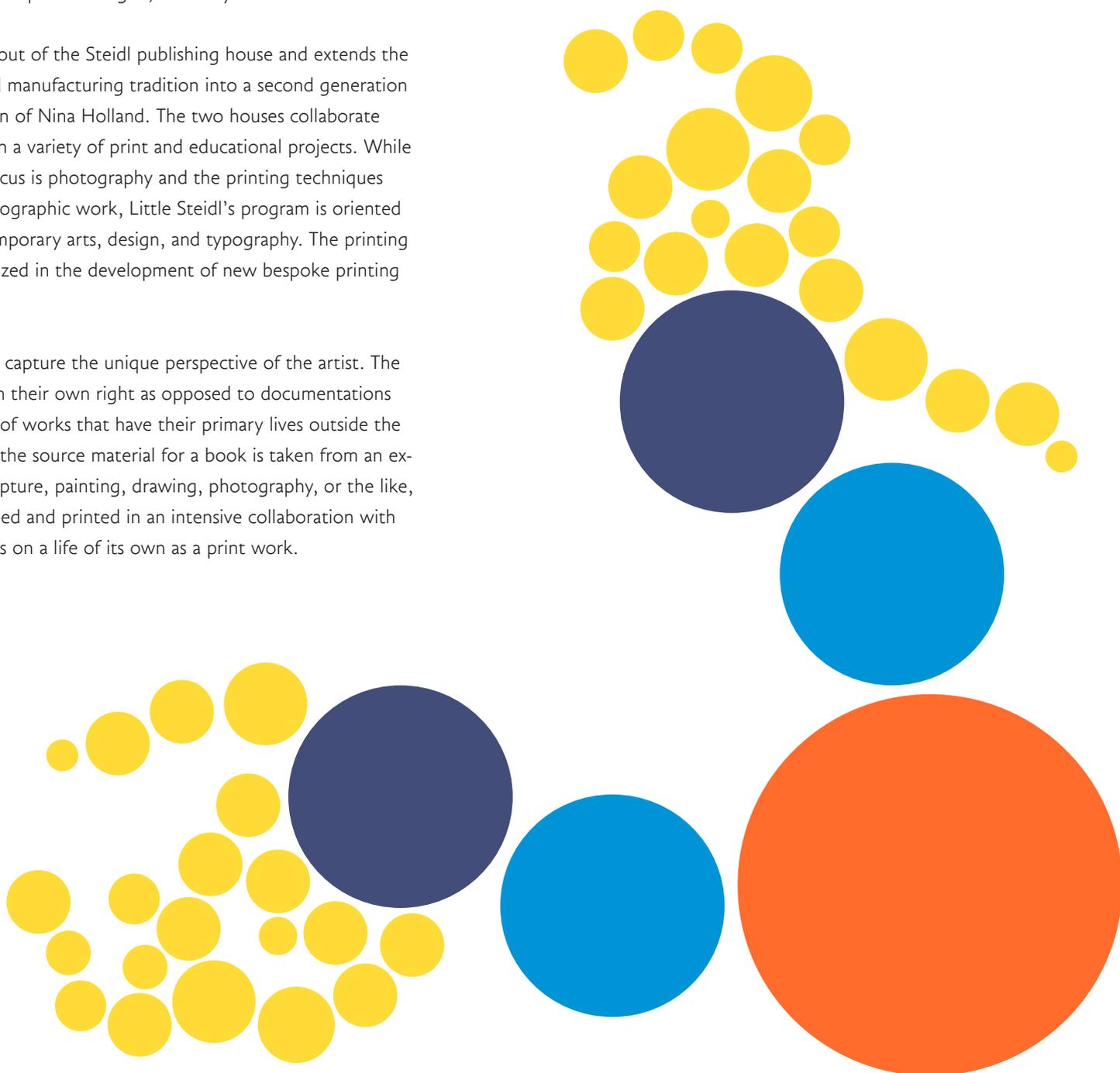


# little steidl

With a program devoted to books by contemporary artists and designers, Little Steidl seeks to expand the artistic potential of offset lithography as a creative print medium. The publishing house holds to a traditional work model in which all aspects of book development, design, and production, including printing, are carried out in its own bookmaking workshop in Göttingen, Germany.

Little Steidl grew out of the Steidl publishing house and extends the Steidl printing and manufacturing tradition into a second generation under the direction of Nina Holland. The two houses collaborate with each other on a variety of print and educational projects. While Steidl's primary focus is photography and the printing techniques applicable to photographic work, Little Steidl's program is oriented around the contemporary arts, design, and typography. The printing program is specialized in the development of new bespoke printing techniques.

Little Steidl books capture the unique perspective of the artist. The books are works in their own right as opposed to documentations or interpretations of works that have their primary lives outside the book. Even when the source material for a book is taken from an existing body of sculpture, painting, drawing, photography, or the like, the book is designed and printed in an intensive collaboration with the artist and takes on a life of its own as a print work.



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Above: schematic drawing of Little Steidl's Roland 200 offset-lithographic printing press. Yellow: ink and dampening rollers; dark blue: plate cylinders; blue: blanket cylinders; vermilion: impression cylinder.

## About offset lithography

In the printing process, an image is transferred from a master onto another material such as paper, metal, or fabric. In offset lithography, the master is a planographic metal printing plate: a flat surface on which the image area is oleophilic and the blank areas are hydrophilic. The image relies on a careful balance of chemistry between the ink, which adheres to the oleophilic areas of the plate, and water, which keeps the hydrophilic areas of the plate clean. The schematic drawing on the reverse side of this sheet shows all the inking and dampening rollers (yellow) on the printing press, which regulate the delivery of ink and water to the printing plate. “Offset” means that the image is not transferred directly from the plate to the paper. Instead, the image is transferred first from the plate to a blanket, and then from the blanket onto the paper. The intermediary blanket creates stability and reliability for large print runs.

### 1

/ Five offset-lithographic printing plates used to print an image from *The Blueberry Machine* (Jan von Holleben and Monte Packham, fall 2022). In printing order from left to right: black, magenta, cyan, yellow, varnish.

/ Wet-proofs (test prints) made from the printing plates. Plate proofs show each color separately. Progressive proofs show the effect as one color is printed on top of another color.

/ Printing blanket. This blanket was used for several projects, and the marks of each are visible on the surface.

Wet-proofing is essential to the Little Steidl work method. Every book goes through an extensive research and practice phase on press, a labor-intensive luxury that is only possible when the publisher owns and controls the printing press. It is far too expensive to contract out wet-proofing on this scale from a commercial printer, and, for this reason, the vast majority of trade books are printed using standardized formulas. At Little Steidl, every image is considered, researched, and practiced individually to determine the optimal printing methods and calibrations.

### 2

/ Wet-proof printed wet-on-dry: one color is printed at a time and allowed to dry (24–48 hours) before the next color is printed.

/ Wet-proof printed wet-on-wet: two colors are printed simultaneously and allowed to dry. Then two additional colors are printed.

Wet-on-dry one-color printing is no longer practiced in offset lithography, except at Little Steidl. The quality difference is immediately recognizable with the wet-on-dry process. Each sheet requires a minimum of ten days to print compared with only a few hours to print wet-on-wet.

### 3

/ Individually cut sheets from the print run of Lawrence Weiner’s *SOMETHING TO PUT SOMETHING ON* (2017).

/ Note from Lawrence Weiner upon receiving the book.

/ Remembrance produced for the memorial exhibition *AS LONG AS IT LASTS* at Mai 36 in Zurich, summer 2022.

Color is not just color. It is matter, substance, material. When working with Lawrence Weiner on a new edition of *SOMETHING TO PUT SOMETHING ON* in 2017, the printing inks were handled as sculptural materials. The chemistry and physics of each ink is unique, and the printing method accentuated the material difference between a fluid, highly transparent blue and a stiff, viscous red. The blue shows all the structural components of its recipe on the paper, while the red creates a flat, closed, tight surface. They are material opposites. Although it appears simple, the printing method breaks all the rules of standardized offset lithography.

### 4

/ Covers and LP with printed label from Anthony Wilson’s *Songs and Photographs*.

These indigo boards are not generally considered suitable for offset-lithographic printing and required some research. Before designing the covers, the material was tested on press to determine what kinds of marks and inks could give a successful result. The LP label captures the optical qualities of the silver ink on indigo board: the label is printed first with a solid layer of specially mixed indigo ink. Once the first layer is dry, the silver is printed on top.

### 5

/ Two handmade maquettes from the early work phase of Jan von Holleben’s *Kosmos*. The artist at first conceived the project as a single-volume book.

/ Individual sheets from the final edition of *Kosmos*, published as a set of six books of varying sizes.

The design research for *Kosmos* evolved over several years and involved printing each set of images at varying scales to understand how the images functioned. At the end of the process, it was clear that even 2mm would make an enormous difference in how the images are perceived. The design follows the scale requirements of each set of images, and the double-page spread accommodates these requirements within the constraints of the book form. A special hand-stitching method was developed for the binding: the variable-length stitches fit unnoticed into the images at the centerfolds.