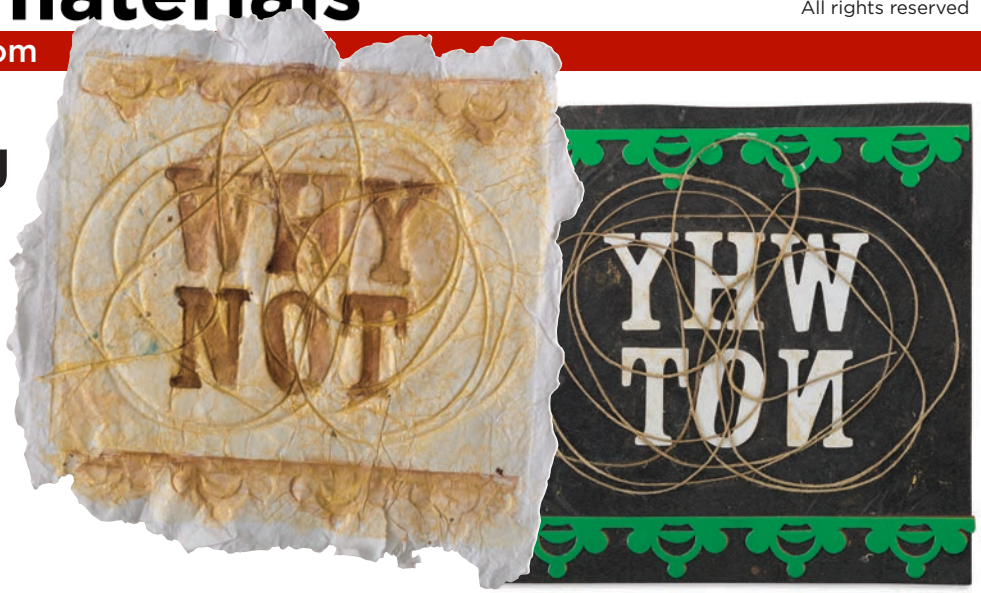
Collagraph Casting

A surprisingly fuss-free process for creating low-relief paper casts — minus the mold and messy pulp



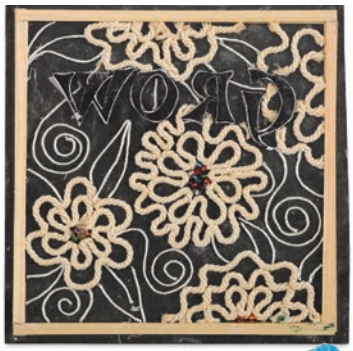
Paper casting is a process that involves creating a mold and pressing pulp into it. When the pulp is dry, the paper can be removed in a single piece. Paper casts can be very dimensional sculptures or low-relief sheets and are often dazzling in their ability to render detail.

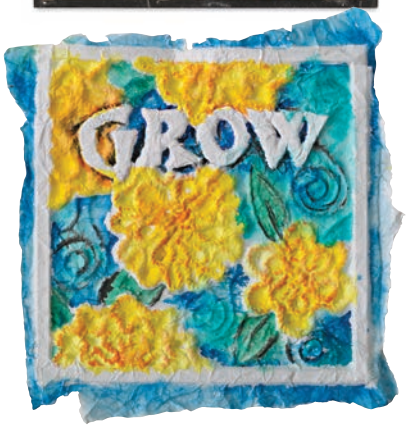
Artist Louise Nevelson, renowned for her assemblage-style sculpture, created low-relief paper castings from some of her wood sculptures.

A related process is paper embossing. With pressure, paper is stretched against a die or plate to form raised designs.

The process described in this lesson plan borrows a bit from both casting and embossing, using a hand-built plate and sulphite paper to create a deckle-edge, dimensional design. Perfect for classrooms or groups, Collagraph Casting eliminates the need for messy pulp, dies, or molds and, by incorporating an adhesive surface, it greatly reduces the need for glue.

Masa paper is an affordable paper from Japan. Made almost entirely from pure cellulose (wood pulp), it is very strong and stands up well to water. It can create unique crackle textures in watercolor painting by crumpling the paper and breaking the heavy sizing in the sheet, then flowing washes of color through the cracked areas. Used for Collagraph Casting, it stretches over raised surfaces to catch all the details when wet, and dries rigid, with a distressed texture that can be enhanced by watercolors.





GRADES 3-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Cut a piece of adhesive-backed felt in half.
2. Cut masa paper sheet into eighths: 10.5″ x 7.75″. Plan on 2 pieces per collagraph.
3. Cut sponge into smaller pieces (approximately 2″ x 3″).

Process

1. Gather materials for collagraph, including cardboard, cord, twine, and soft wires. For this process, it is better to use items that are rigid and won't be crushed under pressure.

Middle grades and older may be challenged to design and cut lettering, words, or initials from cardboard, then turn them over when attaching so they read in reverse.

2. Remove the protective sheet from the felt to expose the adhesive backing. Arrange the materials, keeping in mind that the composition will be cast in reverse.

Materials (required)

Masa Paper, 21″ x 31″ sheet (10409-1003); share one sheet between 4 students

Stick-It Felt Sheets, 9″ x 12″, pkg of 6, assorted colors (63211-); share 2 pkgs among class

All-Purpose Chipboard, 14-py 22″ x 28″ (13115-2222); share 2 sheets across class

Hemptique Hemp Twine, assorted diameters and lengths (62985-); share at least 1 among class

Blickrylic Polymer Gloss Medium, quart (00711-1027); share 1 across class

3M Commercial Cellulose Sponges, 6″ x 4″ x 1.5″ (38014-1006); share 1 between 6 students

Foam Brush, 1″ (05114-1001); need 1 per student

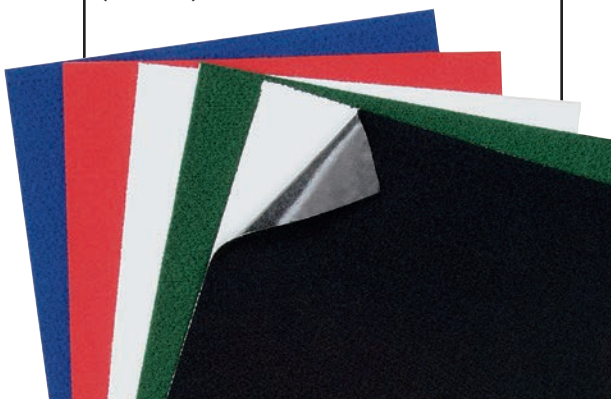
Materials (optional)

Krylon Low -Odor Clear Finish (23710-1001)

Blick White Glue, 16 oz (23882-1006)

Momenta Chipboard Alphabet Stickers (03193-1001)

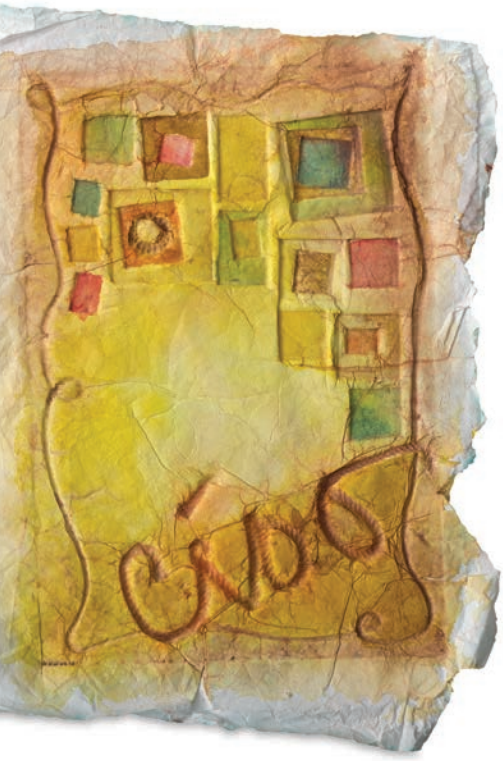
Westcott C-Thru BetterLetter Cardstock Letter and Borders (55787-)



Process, continued

3. Coat the entire surface with acrylic gloss medium to seal it and to cover the adhesive. Cover it generously and completely. Allow to dry overnight.
4. Just prior to casting, use hands to create a ball from a piece of masa paper and place it in a cup or container of water. Allow a few seconds for the water to penetrate the paper, then squeeze the ball to elimininate excess water. Open it, and lay the paper over the collagraph surface.
5. Starting in the center of the collagraph, press the masa paper against the raised pieces using pressure and a damp sponge. A stiff paintbrush can also be used to push the paper into smaller crevices. Move away from the center in a circular motion, pressing with the sponge and pushing down until the edges are reached and the paper has adhered completely to the collagraph. **Keeping the paper wet is key** to stretching it over the materials beneath.

   Masa paper may reach its limit and tear. If this happens, take a small scrap of paper, crinkle it, wet it, place it over the tear, and press it down.
6. Repeat steps 4 and 5 with a second piece of masa paper. For extra strength, a third piece can be used.
7. Turn the paper and felt over onto fabric towels, paper towels, or another absorbent surface. Using hands or a baron, push down to blot excess water.
8. Using a foam brush, coat the masa paper with glue to increase its strength. A small amount of water may be added to the glue to make it brushable. If the finished piece will be mounted to matboard, this step can be skipped.
9. If desired, tear the edges of the wet paper carefully to create a deckled look.
10. Allow to dry for a few hours or overnight. Placing the piece in a well-ventilated area or in front of a fan will speed up the drying time. The paper will be rigid when dry. Pull it gently away from the collagraph.
11. The casting may be enjoyed as a "blind" embossing (white), or enhanced with watercolor washes or pencil. Watercolors will reveal the crackle effect created by crumpling the masa paper.



12. For best results, glue the finished piece to a piece of matboard for strength.

Options

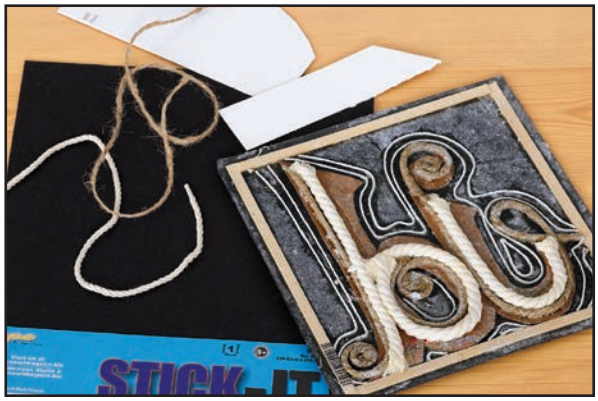
- Make multiple castings from the collagraph, then roll printing ink across the surface with a brayer and make prints, too.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

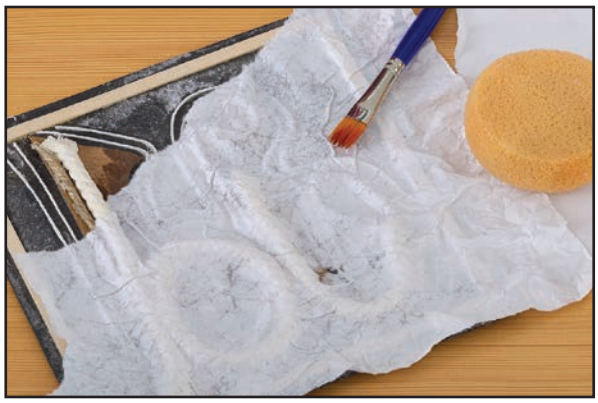
Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.



Step 1: *Arrange dimensional materials on adhesive felt sheets. Coat with medium to seal.*



Step 2: *Crumple and wet masa paper, spread it over the collagraph, and push it against the dimensional materials.*

Step 3: *Add watercolors, if desired, to enhance the crackle effect of the masa paper.*