

Constructed Reed Sculpture

Shape supple reed into sculpture with the help of corrugated connectors

The coiled material known to many western artists and crafters as "reed" does not come from a plant that grows along a riverbank, as one might think. Craft reed is cut from the inner core of the rattan vine, harvested from jungles in southeast Asia and processed into flat or round lengths. Wicker furniture and baskets are made predominately from reed.

Commonly used for functional items, in the hands of a fine artist reed can be formed into highly innovative fiber sculpture.

American artist Martin Puryear is well known for sculptures that merge modern art with traditional methods and materials, including rattan. Cambodian artist Sopheap Pich uses native materials to express the dark history of his homeland and his own experiences as a refugee in the form of woven sculpture. In addition, artist Nathalie Miebach weaves reed and other materials to bring art, mathematics, and science together by translating numerical and environmental data into woven pieces.

Reed is an inexpensive and easy-to-use medium with diverse possibilities. This process demonstrates how reeds can be inserted into corrugated channels that will hold them in place and easily release them as well. For young artists who are experimenting and problem-solving in three-dimensional space, this process allows them to form and secure individual components and have the freedom to change their minds and rearrange their sculpture.

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

Preparation

1. View examples of sculpture by Martin Puryear, Sopheap Pich, and Nathalie Miebach, among others. The National Basketry Organization website is a good place to view art baskets and sculptural pieces that address many different aesthetics and materials.
2. Using scissors or paper trimmer, cut reed from the coil into pieces at least 15" long. Shorter pieces will break too easily when bent.



Materials (required)

Natural Reed, Round size 11/64" Dia x 200 ft coil (60961-1164) or Flat sizes 1/4" x 400 ft coil (60961-1326) or 1/2" x 200 ft coil (60961-1336); plan on approx 20 ft per student

Corrugated Plastic Panels, 20" x 30", White (13215-1043) or Translucent (13215-1603); share one among class

Maped Ultimate Scissors, ambidextrous, 5" (58470-1005); need one per student

Optional materials for adding color:

For pre-dyeing, we recommend:

Jacquard ProcionMX Fiber Reactive Cold Water Dye, assorted colors 2/3 oz (01302-6032)

Jacquard Soda Ash Dye Fixer, 1 lb (01302-1016)

For brush painting, we recommend:

Plaid FolkArt Ultra Dye, assorted colors, 8 oz (00767-)

Blickrylic Student Acrylics, assorted colors and sizes (00711-)

For spray painting, we recommend:

Marabu Art Spray, assorted colors, 50 ml (21170-)

Optional materials:

Wooden Barrel Beads, pkg of 100 (60702-1000)



Instructions for dyeing reed

1. Place reeds in a large watertight tub and pour hot water over them. Soak for at least an hour to clean and prepare them for dyeing. Drain water.
2. Mix one tablespoon Procion MX dye in a gallon of hot water. Stir. Add 1/2 cup table salt (non-iodized) and stir until mixed.
3. Pour dye bath over reeds and turn them every 10 minutes.
4. Dissolve 1/3 cup soda ash in one cup of hot water to make a dye fix. When the reeds have absorbed enough color, add the dye fix. NOTE: the color will dry to a shade much lighter than it appears when wet.
5. Leave reeds in the dye bath for up to two hours after adding the dye fix.
6. Rinse reeds under cold running water.

Preparation, continued

3. Using a paper trimmer or packing knife, trim corrugated plastic panels into 1-1/2" strips. Cut perpendicularly — against the fluting — so the channel openings are on the long end of each strip.

Process

1. For colorful sculptures, reed may be painted after assembly or dyed beforehand, if desired. Reed may be dyed as a coil before cutting, making it easy to prepare large amounts to use in a classroom.
2. The reed will stretch and create tighter bends if it has been soaked in cold water first, but it's not a requirement — it can also be worked with in a dry state.
3. To assemble the sculpture, insert one end of the reed halfway into one of the channels on the corrugated plastic, then insert the other end into another channel opening.

11/64" round reed fits snugly into each channel.

Secure flat reed by inserting a pointed pair of scissors into the channel and snipping the channel wall. Snip one wall for 1/4" wide reed, snip 2 walls for 1/2" wide reed.

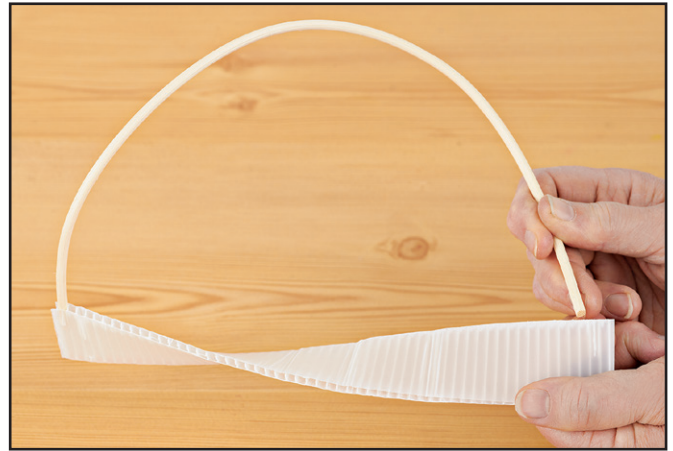
4. Corrugated pieces can be cut, bent, or scored to create variances in the direction of the reed. A single channel can accept reed from either side. Channels can also be cut part way in order to form a slot juncture with two pieces.
5. Once the sculpture is formed, it may be painted with a brush or spray application. Opaque acrylic color is recommended for best adhesion to the plastic corrugated sheet, but reed may be tinted with dye, watercolor, acrylics, or solvent-based sprays (use caution and follow label directions).

Options

1. Add beads, fibers, wires, etc. to create a mixed-media piece.
2. Use the above process to create an armature, then cover it with lightweight rice paper or tissue and attach with glue to form an enclosed sculpture.
3. For added support, glue sculpture to a wood panel to form a base. Paint to enhance presentation.



Step 1: Insert one end of reed into corrugated plastic panel.



Step 2: Insert the other end of the reed into another channel opening. Repeat and rearrange as desired to form a three-dimensional composition.



Step 3: Color can be added prior to working with reed or after sculpture is formed.

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.

