Textured Metal Boxes (art + history)

Repoussé is a form of relief sculpture in which a design is pressed into the reverse side of a metal sheet to create a three-dimensional surface on the front. *Chasing* is the reverse of *repoussé* — where the design is pushed back from the top surface of the metal. Often, the two techniques are used simutaneously to stretch the metal to extreme dimensions.

Repoussé has a long history, having been employed by ancient Greek, Egyptian and Native North American and South American cultures. The technique also became extremely popular in the decorative arts in 16th century Europe.

This lesson plan combines the processes of repoussé and chasing to design a piece that looks as if it may have been crafted by an ancient silversmith. Objects are fixed to the surface of a cardboard box before the metal is applied so that the design they create is embossed into the metal in the style of repoussé. With tools, students then chase the metal around the objects to further define the texture.

Grade Levels K-12

Note: Instructions and materials based on a class of 25 students. Adjust as needed.

Process

1. Create a design on the box using a variety of firm materials. Bend Twisteez wires, cut shapes from WonderFoam® or gather "found" objects such as paper clips and buttons, and glue them onto the box. Use glue sparingly and do not glue anything where the lid overlaps. Set aside to dry.

Materials

Genuine Boxwood Tools, set of 3 (60502-1009); share six sets across classroom

Snippy® Scissors, pointed, package of 12 (57040-2009); need one per student

Creativity Street® WonderFoam®, tub of 720 assorted colors and shapes (60947-1720); share one tub across classroom

Papier Mâché Mini Boxes, Oval (60001-8351), Round (60001-8341) or Hexagon (60001-8361); need one per student

Colorfoil Economy Roll, 4-1/2" x 20-ft, Brass (60506-8410) or Coppertone (60506-8110); need 14" per mini box

Twisteez, 30" length (33407-1050); share one package of 50 across classroom

Norton Sandpaper Extra Fine 220 grit, (34935-1013); share one 25-sheet package across classroom

Blick® Studio Marker Black (22148-2020); share 12 markers across classroom

Weldbond® Universal Adhesive, 8-oz (23819-1105); share two bottles across classroom

Acrylic Felt in Craft Packages, 9" x 12" assorted colors (63201-1125); share one 12-piece package across classroom

Sargent® Metallic Acrylics, 8-oz Antique Gold (00730-9135); share two bottles across classroom

Blick® Economy Sabeline Blend Brush, 1" flat (05010-1001); share four across classroom

Options for older students:

Paper Maché Boxes, set of 3 Oval (60013-8481); share one set between three students

Pure Metal Tooling Foil, Aluminum 12" x 25-ft roll 36 gauge (60503-2850)

Blick® Black Cat Waterproof India Ink, 1 quart (21101-2007)

.Process, continued:

2. Since boxes may vary in size, it will be necessary to size the metal to fit the box. Measure box dimensions and add 1/2" for wrapping and overlapping the metal. Measure carefully and double-check before cutting to avoid waste. You also may want to create patterns on paper before transferring them to the metal.

   For sides: use a tape measure and/or ruler to determine box dimensions and add 1/2" on top, bottom and one end for overlap.

   For bottom: place the box bottom-side-down and trace lightly around it. Add 1/2" on all sides for overlap.

   For lid: place lid top-side-down and trace around it. Measure the amount needed for the lid, then add 1/2" for overlap.
3. Cut shapes from metal. To make the metal easier to wrap and give it a tighter fit, use scissors to snip cuts in the area reserved for overlap. This will form tabs which can be wrapped individually and overlap one another.
4. Apply the cut pieces of metal to the box. Do not glue the metal to the box surface — it needs to be able to stretch as it is worked with the embossing tools. Loose edges may be glued down when the tooling is done.
5. Use the boxwood tools to gently press and define (or "chase") the edges of the shapes on the box. The metal may wrinkle as it stretches, but this can be used to further enhance its texture. Wrapped edges may loosen as the metal is chased; simply push them back down to secure them in place.
6. Place the lid on the box. The metal may need to be pressed flat in order for it to fit. The fit will loosen after the lid has been put on and removed a few times.
7. Add black ink to the metal to add additional texture and definition. Two methods can be used:

   - Use a permanent black marker. Cover the entire surface, working the marker into deeply recessed areas. This method is best for small boxes with less area to cover.

   - Brush the metal surface with India ink. This may require several coats. A few drops of liquid soap added to the ink will help it adhere to the metal if "crawling" is an issue. Allow to dry.

   NOTE: Ink will tend to rub off on hands, even when dry. Spray with Blick® Gloss Fixative (21707-1005) to prevent rub-off.
8. To bring back some of the metal color and further enhance the texture, lightly buff the raised areas with extra-fine sandpaper until the black is removed.
9. Paint the inside of the box with gold acrylic paint.
10. To protect surfaces from the box's metal edges, attach a felt pad to the bottom by tracing an outline of the box onto a piece of felt. Then cut it out and glue it to the bottom of the box as a finishing touch.

National Standards

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques and processes

Content Standard #2 — Using knowledge of structures and functions

Content Standard #3 — Choosing and evaluating a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas

Content Standard #4 — Understanding the visual arts in relation to history and cultures

Content Standard #5 — Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others

Content Standard #6 — Making connections between visual arts and other disciplines