

Printed Polymer Clay Silhouettes



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Design a wall plaque featuring a profile of great significance – "yours"!

The art of silhouettes became popular in the mid-18th century, named after the French finance minister Étienne de Silhouette. The moniker comes from both his hobby of cutting paper shadow portraits, as well as his extreme frugality. The term silhouette came to represent a cheap but effective alternative to a painted portrait; artists could cut a high-quality bust portrait in a matter of minutes.

A silhouette is an image represented as a solid shape made of a single color, usually black, with the edges matching the outline of the subject. The inside of the form is featureless, and the likeness is captured through the outline alone.

In this lesson, images are printed from a **laser jet printer** onto regular copy paper, then transferred onto Sculpey oven bake clay. The process works much like a gel medium transfer, but with clay! All that is needed for the transfer is a bit of pressure and some water.

Use a photo and tracing paper to design a self-portrait in silhouette. Make a photocopy of the image using a **laser jet printer**. Roll out Sculpey clay and press the image, ink-side down into the clay. Spray the backside of the paper with water and gently rub until all the paper pulp has been removed, and the image transfer is revealed.

After the image has been transferred, you can use a ball stylus to etch details into the image. Sculpey clay embellishments can be used to enhance the image and add a frame.

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

Preparation

1. Divide each 1 lb block of Sculpey Premo into 12 pieces.
2. Take a head-and-shoulder photo of each student in full profile. Be sure to use a solid background behind the subject. Print each photo in black and white, 4" x 6".
3. Cut Sculpey Work 'n Bake Clay Mat in half. Each student will need one 7 3/4" x 6 1/2" mat.



Materials (required)

Sculpey Premo, White, 1 lb (32334-1041), Ecru, 1 lb (32334-1451), Translucent, 1 lb (32334-1001), or Translucent White, 1 lb (32334-1309); share two packages across class

Sculpey Premo, 2 oz, choose from an assortment of colors (32334-); need at least five packages in a variety of colors

Sculpey Tools Acrylic Roller, 8" (34208-1005); share one between two students

Sculpey Tools Dual End Detail Tools, set of 3 (34208-1003); share one set between two students

Sculpey Work 'n Bake Clay Mat, 7 3/4" x 13", (34801-1713); share one between two students

Westcott Ellipse Templates, large, #2 (55475-1000); share one between two students

Blick Studio Tracing Paper Pads, 50 sheets, 9" x 12" (10609-3003); share one pad across class

Blick Studio Brush Markers, Black (24532-2020); share one between two students

Holbein Watercolor Atomizer Bottle, 2 oz (02912-1003); share one between two students

Optional Materials

Sculpey Glaze, choice of gloss or satin, 1 oz (33218-)

Sculpey Clay Conditioning Machine, (32357-1001)

Ready to order materials?

Go to www.DickBlick.com/lesson-plans/printed-polymer-clay-silhouettes/ to access a product bundle for your convenience.

Process

1. Place a sheet of tracing paper over the printed profile photo. Using a pencil, trace around the head and shoulders, paying particular attention to the profile features.
2. Remove the printed image. Adjust the profile outline as needed. There is little information in an outline or silhouette, and some features may need to be accentuated in order for them to appear accurate.
3. Use a black marker to fill in the image.
4. Scan and print the image using a laser printer. The final image size may need to be adjusted. The silhouette should be no more than 4" high and 3" wide.

This process will only work with a **laser** printed image. Laser printers use toner instead of ink, and heat process is used to set the toner in place. Toner sits on the surface of the paper, allowing it to be released when making a transfer. Generally, larger industrial printers like the ones used in offices and print and copy shops are laser printers. If you are unsure about what kind of printer you are using, do a quick search of the model to be certain.

5. Cut out the silhouette, leaving a small margin of the white paper background around the image.
6. Roll out an approximately 6" x 5" clay base onto a working mat, using a clay roller or a Sculpey Clay Conditioning Machine. If using the clay conditioning machine, use the highest (thickest) setting. The clay slab should be between 1/4" and 1/8" thick.
7. Choose an oval shape from the Westcott Ellipse Templates and use a Sculpey clay knife tool to cut the clay into an oval.
8. Test the placement and sizing of the silhouette on the clay base. There will need to be at least a 1" border around the image.
9. Center the image, printed-side down against the clay. Use a clay roller to lightly press the image into the clay.
10. Wet the paper with an atomizer or spray bottle filled with water. The paper should be saturated, but not so wet that puddles form around the clay base.
11. With a finger, gently rub the surface of the paper. Use small light circular motions. At first it may seem like nothing is happening, but don't rush this step, as it will tear the image. The paper will begin to bead and pill. Remove the paper pulp and continue to gently rub the surface. Continue to spray the paper with water and rub until all of the paper pulp has been removed leaving only the toner of the printed image.
12. With paper towels, remove excess water from the clay and working mat surfaces.
13. Use a ball stylus to etch details into the printed silhouette surface.
14. Embellish the image and create a frame using Sculpey tools, the scrap from cutting the base out, and additional Sculpey clay colors.



Step 1: Use a photo and tracing paper to design a self-portrait in silhouette.



Step 2: Roll out clay and press the image, ink-side down into the clay.



Step 3: Spray the backside of the paper with water and rub until all the paper pulp has been removed.

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Process, continued

15. Use copper wire to fabricate a hanger for the back of the plaque. Bend a 2" length of wire so that it looks a bit like a triangle with feet.
16. Center the wire approximately 1 1/2" down on the backside of the piece. Gently poke the 'feet' into the clay laterally. Be careful not to puncture through the front surface of the plaque.
17. Roll a small ball of clay, approximately 1/16" in diameter. Attach to the backside, about 1" from the bottom of the plaque. This will serve as a small bump out and will help offset the hangar above, allowing the piece hang flat against the wall when complete.
18. Bake the pieces, two at a time. Bake at 275 °F (130 °C) for 30 minutes per 1/4" of thickness. Translucent Sculpey can change color quickly if over-baked. Bake for 10 minutes, then check every 5 minutes after.
19. Coat in Sculpey glaze for added luster and protection and hang to display.

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.

Anchor Standard 3: Refine and complete artistic work

Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.



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