

Claybord and Ink

Who Needs Trees?

By Renée Trembl



FINAL STEP

This talented scratchboard artist always tries to spend some time just observing a piece of her work before deciding it is complete.

MATERIALS

- Ampersand Claybord (smooth white).
- Black waterproof acrylic or India ink.
- Acrylic round brushes with sharp points (Numbers 2 and 6).
- White cotton gloves (available at the grocery store).
- A sheet of tracing paper.
- Craft knife with several Number 11 blades and a sharpening stone.
- Waterproof pigment pens (Numbers 005 and 01).



STEP ONE



STEP TWO

Claybord is made up of a hard panel that has been coated with a fine layer of smooth clay. When I work on white Claybord, I like to combine painting, drawing and scratching to create a piece with a unique style and texture. I created this piece 'Who Needs Trees?' for an environmental art exhibit and it exemplifies why I love this technique ... I can create very realistic looking animals and place them in highly unlikely settings, and yet they still look believable.

STEP ONE

I trace the completed drawing onto a piece of tracing paper and transfer it to the Claybord. For this example, I put a piece of graphite paper (shown here) under the tracing paper and lightly traced over my lines with a ballpoint pen. I am careful not to press too hard because it will indent the clay.

When I do not have graphite paper

available, I lightly shade over the lines on the back side of the tracing paper using a soft 2B pencil. I then put the tracing paper right side up on the Claybord and lightly trace with a ballpoint pen or hard pencil.

STEP TWO

I make a concentrated mixture of ink using about one drop of ink to three drops of water. I never paint with ink straight from the bottle because it is too thick. For my initial washes, I dilute the mixture even further until it resembles wet watercolour paint. I paint the ink on the Claybord in thin washes, allowing it to dry between layers.

Claybord is very absorbent and dries quickly, so do not be surprised if you see 'blooms' or other irregular marks in your washes.

At this stage I begin building up the volume and roundness of the Frogmouth's head and chest.

STEP THREE

I continue adding washes and developing the shape and texture of the bird. I think shape and volume are most important to develop first – you can always add texture and detail later. I also begin drawing defining lines and markings with my ink pens. I continue drawing and painting until I feel satisfied that the piece has good depth and a coarse level of detail.

STEP FOUR

To recreate the mottled appearance of the Frogmouth's feathers, I choose to splatter the bird's body with different concentrations of ink. Splattering creates random patterns that I think mimic the irregularity of the Frogmouth's camouflaging feathers. To splatter without ruining my white background, I create a mask for the background from the piece of tracing paper I used in Step One.



STEP THREE



STEP THREE



STEP THREE – CLOSE UP



STEP FOUR



STEP FOUR



STEP FIVE



STEP FIVE

To make the mask, I cut the Frogmouth's body from the tracing paper and carefully lay the cut paper over the Claybord so that it is covering the background. I wet my brush with ink and splatter the piece – I can be rather carefree because the mask is protecting the background.

If any splatters do get onto the white background, I wait for these to dry and scrape them from the surface using the broad side of my blade – being careful not to gouge the surface of the clay.

STEP FIVE

After the splatter dries, I add a few more bold washes of ink to the Frogmouth to deepen the overall shadows on the body, as well as some specific areas under the beak and near the eyes where I want depth. Now I am ready to begin scratching.

Scratching with the knife quickly sharpens the details and adds even more volume to this drawing. I use the knife lightly, trying not to cut into the clay too deeply. I can always go back and add more pressure if I want a thicker or whiter line. I also remember to keep my scratch marks moving with the direction of the shape.

See how my scratch marks are following the curves on the head and adding to the feeling of roundness.

STEP SIX

Now that I have added detail to the entire bird, I see some areas where the whiteness of the scratched clay is bringing things forward that should be kept in shadow. For example, the white markings and feather details on the wing are too eye-catching and taking away from the feeling of roundness and volume.

To push those white areas back into shadow, I lightly apply washes of ink over the wing. I also add some washes underneath the bird's belly, and to the back of the head.

As a final step, I want to add detail to the egg cup without drawing too much attention away from the Frogmouth.

After lightly painting and drawing my design on the shadowed cup, I lightly scratch over the areas of the egg cup that are not in shadow with a very fine piece of steel wool (or sandpaper) and the broad edge of my knife.

FINAL THOUGHTS

When I feel 'finished', I put the piece on an easel in my studio so I can look at it for several days (or weeks, if time permits). After looking at this piece, I see the need for a few more white highlights on the chest – and maybe some darker shadows – before I sign off. I always try to spend some time just observing the piece before I decide it is complete. ■

MASTER HINTS AND TIPS

- Work out your drawing completely before beginning – it is extremely difficult to fix a big mistake neatly on Claybord.
- Claybord is great for highlights and shadows. Identify the light source and shadows for your subject before you begin.
- Be sure your blade is always very sharp. A dull blade will not cut through the clay smoothly. I keep a sharpening stone nearby and discard any blades with broken tips.
- Your scratches should follow the direction of the fur or feathers and the shape of the body to help add to the feeling of volume and roundness.
- Do not start scratching if you have wet ink on the Claybord, as the clay 'dust' will adhere to the wet ink and your washes will appear dirty and feel grainy.