

Art Activity

Styrofoam Printmaking



Printing with Repurposed Styrofoam

Printmaking is an art process where ink is transferred from a printing plate onto paper. In relief printmaking, artists carve designs into wood or linoleum. Ink does not go into the places that the artist carved away, similar to a stamp. The artist rolls on ink with a brayer (roller), places paper on top, and runs it through a printing press. The pressure of the press transfers the ink to the paper. In this project, you can make a relief print using a piece of styrofoam. Using a pencil, incise a design into the soft foam and then sponge on paint and print.

1

PREP

Gather your supplies and prepare your workspace.

2

DESIGN

Draw your design or shape for printing.

3

PRINT

Sponge on the paint and print away.



McNay Connection

Karl Schmidt-Rotluff, Katzen (Cats), 1915.



McNay Connection

Carlos Mérida, Carnival in Huixquilucan, 1940.



McNay Connection

Anne Ryan, Primavera, ca. 1945.

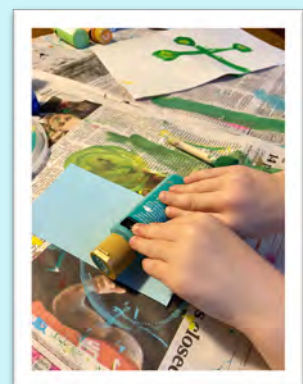
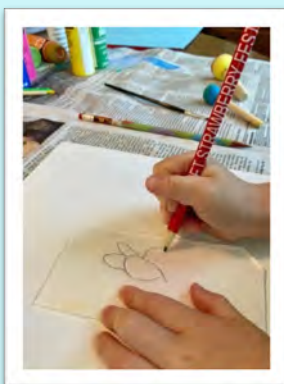
Suggested materials

- Styrofoam to-go container or meat tray
- Scissors
- Pencil
- Craft Paint (we used [these](#))
- Water container
- Paper plate or large lid for paint palette
- Newspaper and paper towels
- Sponges for applying paint (we used [these](#))
- Paper (colored copy paper is what is shown in example)



Instructions

1. Thoroughly wash a styrofoam container to remove any remaining food or grease.
2. Cut out the flat pieces of the container.
3. Draw your designs into the foam with a pencil or pen. The pencil cuts into the foam making a groove. Don't worry if you accidentally poke through the foam. It shouldn't affect the print as long as the foam is still in one piece.
4. You may want to draw your design on a piece of paper first since you cannot "erase" the lines in the foam. To transfer, tape your drawing to the foam and trace over the lines of your drawing. Go over the lines in the foam again to deepen.
5. Prepare your palette by squeezing a small amount of paint onto the plate.
6. Working quickly, apply paint with sponge. The paint dries very fast! We got better results by not trying to color in the lines and just applying paint in general areas.
7. Place paper on top of the painted foam and roll with your paint bottle. This helps the paint transfer to the paper.
8. Separate the paper from the foam, peeling gently. Let dry.
9. Make another print by applying more paint to the foam. If you want to change colors or put away for another day, gently wash with water and let dry.



Tips

Applying the Paint

We used foam stencil brushes from another project. A kitchen sponge cut into small pieces would work too. Paintbrushes did not work as well because the paint was not evenly distributed on the printing foam. It also took longer to apply and the paint dried in places before we could make a print. A small paint roller would work if you weren't concerned with getting colors in precise areas.



Note about Designs

You can also cut out shapes without incising a design into the foam. We had a lot of fun with moon, sun, and cloud shapes. The shapes can also double as stencils for tracing. Feel free to combine multiple prints per page.



Combining with Drawing

Embellish your print with drawing. Other shapes we enjoyed were things like sunglasses, a top hat, and crown. After printing, we drew silly faces and bodies to go with the hats.



Printing over a Printed Area

Allow your print to dry completely before printing another shape on top. Printing on a wet area in our tests either removed the first layer of paint from the paper or the top layer of paper all together. Make lots of prints of your favorite shape so you have some extra to print on once they dry.

Sourcing paint

If you don't have craft paint handy, poster paint or finger paint may work. You might also be able to use paint from a craft kit. We had some leftover from a rock painting kit, for example. In our tests, marker and watercolor were not as opaque as craft paint, but it did make a print.

Printing Text

You'll notice that prints are mirror images of your printing plate. If you want to print words, they have to be written in reverse. Try it on a piece of a paper first and check it in a mirror. The words should appear normally in the reflection. Tape the paper to the foam and trace over the letters pressing firmly. Remove the paper and go over the lines to deepen.

