

intermediate
polymer clay



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You ought to be in pictures . . .

Transfer your favorite photographs to jewelry using polymer clay.

by Jill Erickson



This direct image-transfer technique is easy to master and does not require special papers or transfer gels. This versatile method can be used to transfer copies of drawings, copyright-free images, text, and original color or black-and-white photographs. Using a high-contrast black-and-white photocopy of an image, you can personalize your jewelry without damaging the cherished original. To complete this project, you'll learn to use simple cold-connection techniques to mount your polymer piece in a sterling silver frame.

The brooch and pendants shown here were all made using the photocopy image transfer technique. They average 1 x 1½ in. (25.5 x 38mm) in actual size. The original photos used to create the photocopies range in size from 3 x 5 in. (76 x 127mm) to 8 x 10 in. (20.3 x 25.4cm).



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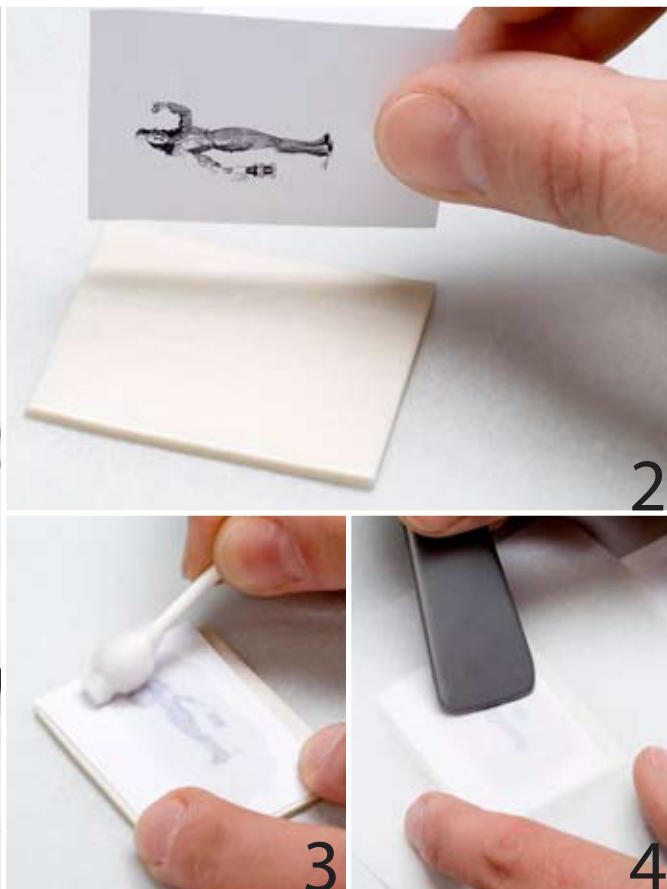
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◀ Enhance your polymer image panel with a sterling silver mounting. The easy corner-tab prongs on this frame mimic the nostalgic look of photo corners.



Make photocopies. Gather photographs, line drawings, captions of text, or copy-right-free artworks that appeal to you. It is important that these images still look good when reduced in size to 1½ in. (29mm) or smaller. Rectangular compositions work well, and for this project, the longest sides of my reduced image will be 1½ in. (29mm). The original images can be either black-and-white or color, but you must make a black-and-white photocopy on a photocopier that uses carbon-based toner. Fresh photocopies work best, so make a few extra photocopies to practice with while you get the knack for achieving a successful transfer. For tips on making copies from your original images, see "Photocopy FAQs," *opposite*.

[1] Trim the photocopied image. Cut the photocopy, leaving a ¼-in. (6.5mm) border of plain paper around the image.

[2] Condition the polymer clay, and position the photocopy. Condition light-colored polymer clay (see *Basics, page 84*),

and roll it out to ⅛ in. (3mm) thick, or run it through the second-thickest setting of a pasta machine. Use a craft knife or tissue blade to cut a shape out of the clay that is slightly larger than the trimmed photocopy. Lay the photocopy image-side down on the clay.

[3–4] Apply astringent and burnish the paper. Moisten a cotton swab with a low-alcohol-content astringent. Rub the back of the photocopy with the moistened swab, being careful to moisten the entire image [3]. Roll the dry end of the swab over the paper to absorb any excess astringent. Place a sheet of parchment paper over the photocopy, and use a stationery burnisher to burnish the paper for 30 seconds [4]. When the astringent has evaporated, repeat steps 3 and 4 twice.

Since there are variations in astringents, papers, and photocopy toners, you may need to experiment. Altering how many times you moisten the paper, how long the paper dries between applications of astringent, or how much pressure you use while burnishing may improve your results.



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photocopy FAQs

What size should I make the final photocopied image?

If you want to retain a lot of detail in the reproduced image, start with an original photo that is 3 x 5 in. (76 x 127mm) or smaller. Reduce the original image to approximately 1 1/8 x 1 1/8 in. (29 x 29mm) for a jewelry-sized project. If you use original images that are 4 x 7 in. (10.2 x 17.8cm) or larger, make a reduced copy, and then reduce that copy again. Alternatively, you could reduce the image in Adobe Photoshop prior to making your photocopy or focus on a smaller detail of the image.

What kind of photos should I choose?

For best results, select images that are in sharp focus and that have a fair amount of contrast — distinct dark and light areas. Avoid photos that are made up entirely of gray tones. If you must select a photo with gray tones, use Adobe Photoshop to increase the contrast.

Is it okay to make black-and-white copies from a color original?

Sure, but make sure there's enough contrast.

What kind of photocopier should I use?

This process requires black-and-white photocopies made from a copier that uses carbon-based toner. Do not use ink-jet copies.

Can I make good copies at my local copy shop?

Absolutely. Many copiers today have programmable settings to sharpen, adjust contrast, and make a mirror image. All of these settings can help when making a copy of your original.

Hey, he wasn't left-handed in the original photo!

The photocopy must be made as a mirror image of the original photo in order for the transferred image to have the same orientation as the original. This is especially important if you have text in your photograph, and this is where the programmable copier at a copy shop would come in handy.

What happens to my original photo?

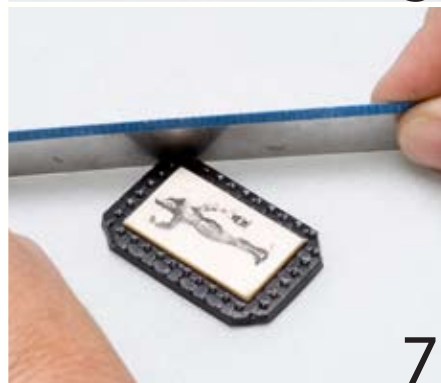
Nothing. This process uses a photocopy, not your original photo, to transfer the image to the clay.



5



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7



[5] Remoisten the paper, and peel it from the clay. Very lightly remoisten the paper one last time with astringent, and dry it with a clean swab. While the paper is just barely damp, grip it at one corner and peel the paper from the clay in one steady motion. The astringent should have transferred the toner from the photocopy to the clay to create your image panel.

Remove the image panel from the work surface. Gently slide a tissue blade under the image panel to lift the image panel from your work surface. Be careful not to stretch the clay, or the image will distort.

[6] Crop the image panel. Use a craft knife or tissue blade to crop the image panel to the desired shape for your brooch or pendant.

Make a polymer clay back panel, and attach the image panel. Condition clay for the back panel. Run the clay through the pasta machine on the second-thickest setting, or roll it out to 1/8 in. (3mm) thick. To give the back panel a texture, reroll the

clay on a texture plate or impress the clay with a rubber stamp.

Use a fine-tip paintbrush to apply a thin layer of liquid polymer clay to the center of the back panel and to the back of the image panel. Position the image panel on the back panel, lay a piece of parchment paper over the image panel, and then use a burnisher with light pressure to fuse the two pieces of clay. Gently remove the parchment paper from the image panel.

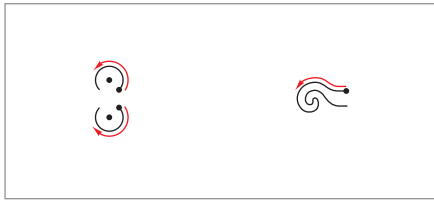
[7] Trim the back panel, and bake the piece. How you trim the back panel depends on whether you're making a pendant or brooch. To make a pendant, see "Make a Polymer Pendant," page 40.

To make a brooch, you'll need to mount your piece into a sterling silver frame. First, use your tissue blade to trim the back panel, beveling the edge so that the back panel extends 1/8 in. (3mm) beyond the edge of the image panel. Use a rigid tissue blade to create a straight border or a flexible tissue blade to create a curve. Bake the piece according to the manufacturer's instructions, and then allow it to cool.



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Template



make a polymer pendant



Use your tissue blade to trim the top of the back panel so that it extends $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (16mm) above the top of the image panel. Trim the remaining three sides as desired [a].

Cut a $\frac{5}{8} \times 1\frac{1}{4}$ -in. (16 x 32mm) strip of clay, and set it aside. Center a bail above the image panel, lightly pressing the bail into the front of the back panel.

Trim the clay strip to fit above the image panel. Apply a thin layer of liquid polymer clay to the top of the back panel [b] and to the back of the clay strip. Press the clay strip over the bail, securing the bail between the two layers of clay. Place a piece of parchment paper over the clay strip, and lightly burnish the strip to seal it to the back panel.

Trim excess clay from the sides and bottom of the pendant. Check that the bail is secure. If necessary, use light pressure to squeeze the clay strip to the back panel to confirm the seal. Bake the pendant according to the manufacturer's instructions.



[8] Make a template for a sterling silver frame mounting. Make a photocopy of the Template, *above left*, and lay the polymer piece on the photocopy, centering it over the pattern for the pierced findings. Trace the outline of the polymer piece onto the template. Use a ruler to draw four evenly sized corner-tab prongs emanating from the outline of the polymer piece. These tabs will hold your polymer piece in place and will be visible on the front of the brooch, so make them symmetrical. Also, make them long enough that you will be able to bend them around the back panel.

If you'd like to leave some of the silver mounting showing so that it frames the polymer piece, draw on the template to indicate where you want the silver to show.

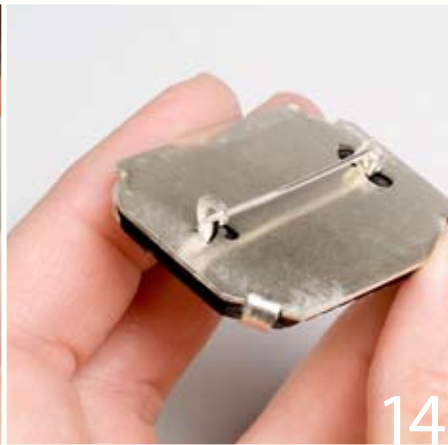
Use a glue stick to adhere the template to 22-gauge (0.6mm) sterling silver sheet.

[9] Saw out the frame mounting and refine it. Saw out your frame mounting using a jeweler's saw with a 2/0 blade. Use a center punch to make five dimples as indicated on the template. Drill 0.5mm holes at the dimples.



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materials

- Polymer clay:
 - White or pearl, 2 oz. (56g)
 - Contrasting color, 2 oz. (56g)
- Bail (optional)
- Sterling silver sheet: 22-gauge (0.6mm), half-hard, 2 x 2 in. (51 x 51mm)
- Pin stem: 1½ in. (38mm)

tools & supplies

- Photocopies: black-and-white, carbon-based toner
- Acrylic roller or pasta machine*
- Nonstick work surface
- Tissue blade: rigid and/or flexible; or craft knife
- Cotton swabs
- Astringent: low alcohol content, cosmetic liquid
- Parchment paper
- Stationery burnisher
- Texture plate or rubber stamp (optional)
- Paintbrush: fine-tip
- Liquid polymer clay
- Oven*
- Glue stick
- Jeweler's saw, 2/0 blade
- Center punch
- Flex shaft, 0.5mm drill bit
- Chainnose pliers
- Flatnose pliers (optional)
- Finishing items (choose from): needle files, sanding stick, abrasive rubber wheel

*Dedicated to nonfood use.

See Suppliers, page 87



Release one end of the saw blade from the saw frame, and then thread the saw blade through a hole. Re-tighten the saw blade in the saw frame, and pierce the findings by following the saw path on the template. Repeat for each of the remaining saw paths.

Saw to remove the extra metal along the edges of the frame. If you intentionally left some frame showing around the polymer piece, you will need to saw a 1.5mm (1/16-in.) slit on each side of each corner-tab prong so that the prong can be bent in the right place to secure the polymer piece.

Leaving the paper template in place to protect the metal from scratches, file and sand the edges smooth. Remove the paper template, and finish the frame mounting as desired (Basics).

[10–12] Bend the corner-tab prongs and findings to make the brooch. Use chainnose or flatnose pliers to grasp each corner-tab prong at its base, and bend it so it's perpendicular to the sheet [10]. Use the tips of your chainnose pliers to push

the two hinge tabs outward, opposite the corner-tab prongs [11]. Grasp each hinge tab at its base, and bend it perpendicular to the sheet. Repeat for the catch hook. The side of the sheet with the pierced findings is the back of the brooch.

Place the polymer piece in the frame mounting, and bend the tabs over the back panel [12]. Gently squeeze the corner-tab prongs down onto the back panel to tighten it into the mounting.

[13–14] Attach the pin stem, and complete the finishing. Position the base of a pin stem between the two hinge tabs. Squeeze the two hinge tabs onto the pin stem's rivet wire [13]. Use either an abrasive rubber wheel with a flex shaft or needle files and a sanding stick to even and smooth the edges of the pin-back finding [14]. 