

Using Photoshop Elements to Create Repousse Designs on PMC Sheet

Presented by Marian Ward
Certified PMC Instructor

Overview

Repousse and chasing are metal-working techniques that involve forming a relief pattern on thin metal. Traditionally, designs are transferred onto the metal with carbon paper or a pencil. The piece is placed in a cast iron bowl called a *pitch bowl* or *pitch pot* filled with hot pitch to keep it from moving while it is being worked. Repousse and chasing tools —polished steel punches and blunt chisels as well as a specialized hammer called a *chasing hammer* are used to bring three-dimensional life to the design.

This difficult ancient technique can be adapted easily to Metal Clay, eliminating the need for expensive tools and messy pitch.

_____This presentation is in two parts. The first part outlines several Photoshop techniques that can be used as tools to aid in the drawing of a design on paper/ sheet PMC. The second part of the presentation outlines the steps needed to transform the photoshopped image into a repousse design on metal.

Part I

When choosing a photograph for this project, choose one with simple, clean lines - a single object rather than a vista; a tree rather than a forest; a blossom rather than a bouquet. The image should be in focus, although a blurry image should not be immediately discarded. The photo will be altered, so it is possible that an out of focus image might work for this technique since it the general outline of the image that is important.

In this example, I took a picture of my cat, cropped it using the **Crop** tool (from the left side tool box) and I changed the shape of the picture to a square. Next, I needed to resize the image so that it would fit within the 2" x 2" square of a fired sheet of PMC. To do this I selected the Menu item **Image**. In the drop down menu under **Image**, I selected **Resize**, then **Image Size** as illustrated here.

Next, the image must be altered so that the outline of the image is the dominant feature of the image. To do this, I selected **Sketch** under the **Filter** drop down menu (across the top tool bar). There are several choices under the **Sketch** filter. In my example I chose "Photocopy", but other choices might work better with your particular image. If you choose one and don't like the result, **Edit** → **Undo** works well to undo a step. (If you want to begin again from the beginning and go back to your original, uncropped, unresized image Edit → Revert does the trick.)

Once you have a black and white outline of your photograph, you are ready to print this out and transfer the image onto a fired

piece of PMC sheet. You will need a piece of carbon or transfer paper to do this. Place the transfer paper so that the carbon side is against the fired PMC sheet. Tape along one edge to hold the paper in place. Next, cut the photoshopped image so that there is a small border around the image; tape this on top of the carbon paper.

Use a pencil to trace along the black edges of the picture. Every so often, check to make sure that you are capturing the complete image. Go over any lines you missed the first time around, if needed.

Part II

Once the image has been transfer to the PMC sheet you can remove the photoshopped copy and the carbon paper. Place the PMC sheet, which now has the carbon outline of the image, on a folded terry or paper towel. You need a surface that has some 'give' to it to accommodate the gradual 'bulging' or displacement of the metal. With a small sized ball embossing tool, slowly retrace the image using firm, steady pressure. Take your time and go slowly on this step. It is important to stay on the carbon line or the image will be distorted. Don't try to rush this step. Repousse is a slow technique. The metal needs to be displaced gradually. Once you outline the image with a small sized ball embossing tool, go over the same lines with gradually bigger sized ball embossers.

It is important to use a tool that will not scratch the surface of the metal. In addition to the ball burnishers, I use wooden clay-shaping tools that come in various shapes and sizes and have a smooth, polished surface. Starting at the outside edge of the Repousse image, apply gentle pressure to the metal to smooth and define the raised lines.

Once the image is clearly defined on the backside of the metal sheet, turn it over to check your progress. Are the lines uniformly raised? Is the image identifiable? Now you are ready for the 'Chasing' part. Chasing is defining the image on the front of the piece. It often goes hand in hand with Repousse that is worked from behind, although either technique can be used alone. Repousse pushes the metal into convex shapes while Chasing defines the edges. Working slowly and carefully on both the front and back of the piece, continue to raise and define the image.

Once the PMC sheet has the finished Repousse design, it will need to be backed with a stronger material in order to be functional. A fired PMC sheet yields a very thin (approximately 28 gauge) piece of fine silver. Because it is fine silver and extremely thin, the sheet must be backed with something -- another piece of PMC sheet, fine silver or sterling sheet, Bronze or Copper clay, polymer clay etc. The two layers can be attached by soldering, riveting, use of tabs or prongs, PMC slip or a chemical bond. The design can be turned into a pendant, pin, bracelet or belt buckle. There are endless design possibilities and options!

Go play.