

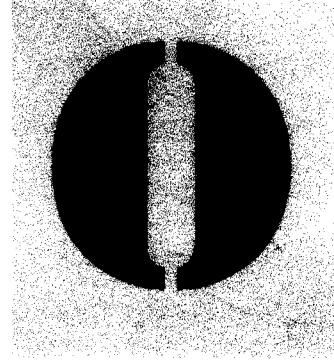
Making A Stencil

by Lauren Norby

sten'cil --*n.* 1 a thin sheet, as of paper, cut through so that when ink, etc. is applied, designs, letters etc. form on the surface beneath

Supplies:

Bristol Board or Mylar
Exacto Knife
Spray Paint
Newsprint
Ink or Sharpie Marker
Cutting Board
Whiteout or white acrylic paint



It is possible to translate any image into a stencil. When making a stencil, think of your design in terms of positive and negative. What is going to be cut out, and what will remain uncut. The cut-out areas will print the color of your paint, and the uncut areas will protect the printed surface from the paint.

For starters, reduce the image in your mind to black and white. The black areas will be cut out. However, the white areas must all be connected to one another. For instance, think of a stencil of the letter "O." In order to make the center of the "O" stay in place, two lines interrupt the circle shape, connecting the middle with the area outside of the letter. To determine where these connections are placed you may follow the contours of the image represented, or create an arbitrary pattern which covers part or all of your image (parallel lines for instance), or have no connections, and simply leave your design a solid black silhouette.

Once you have a design idea, proceed through the following steps:

1. Sketch out your idea to visualize arrangement of shapes. Use ink/marker to darken areas to be cut. Use whiteout to change shape of darkened areas. Keep in mind that any white shape must connect to uncut outer edges of stencil. Floating whites won't remain attached to your stencil.
2. Transfer your image to bristol board, mylar or other sturdy but cuttable surface. If it helps, black in the areas to be cut out. Keep your design in the center of your bristol or mylar, otherwise when you spray, some paint will show the square edges of the stencil.
3. Once everything is drawn out, use an exacto knife to cut out the designated areas. Use a cutting board beneath your stencil to protect any table or other surface from your knife. Cut slowly and deliberately, as the knife is sharp and can easily cut the wrong part of your stencil (or your hand).

4. Take your finished stencil outdoors or to a well-ventilated space. Place your stencil over a piece of newsprint paper, or other disposable test-paper on a flat surface. After shaking the paint, spray over your stencil in steady side-to-side motions, covering all of the cut-out areas. Even coverage is not mandatory on a test-print. Carefully remove your stencil from the paper beneath it. At this point you may assess if modifications are necessary, or if your stencil is finished.

Once you have finished your stencil, you are ready to print it on any appropriate surface. What follows are a few other tips and ideas about stenciling.

Multi-Color Stencil

In order to make a stencil with multiple colors, design one layer at a time. Start with your largest shapes. When doing several layers, colors can overlap, so you can have shapes from one layer floating in the center of shapes from other layers.

Stencil from a Photo

If you have access to photoshop or a similar image-editing program, you can adjust contrast and play with filters to generate a stencil-like separation of lights and darks from any photo image. You may need to adjust some shapes to prevent floating white areas.

Bristol Board vs Mylar

A stencil made out of bristol board will not last as long as one made of mylar. After many uses the paper breaks down or tears. However, bristol board will absorb some of the excess paint sprayed on it, whereas mylar will not, which can mean your stencil may have wet paint on the front and/or back side if you spray it two or more times in a row. The wet paint will mess up and distort your design.