

Mola Study in Felt

Create an interpretation of a unique artistic tradition, inspired by Mola designs of the Guna women of Panama.

art + social studies

Mola, also called mola fabric, is a textile art developed by the native Guna women of Panama. Ornate designs are created by stacking and sewing multicolored sheets of fabric together, then cutting through the layers to reveal the colors and patterns below. Traditional applique (which translates to “apply” in French) involves layering fabric on a background piece and sewing them into place to create a design. When creating molas, this process is reversed using a technique called reverse applique. Since fabrics are already stacked and sewn together, the design is revealed through cutting.

In Dulegava, the Guna’s native language, “mola” means “shirt,” leaving one to question how it also became the term for intricately patterned fabrics. The practice actually began as a form of body painting using natural earth pigments. Later, similar designs were woven in cotton and eventually, brightly colored western fabrics were introduced. In addition to traditional motifs from Guna culture, contemporary mola designs now take inspiration from popular culture, including political posters, TV, and magazines.

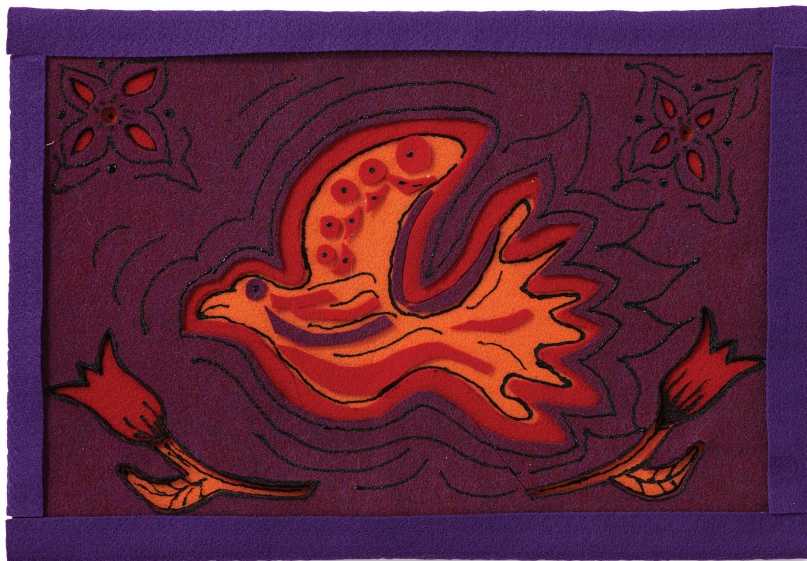
In this lesson, students will first learn about the Guna women and the traditional process of mola fabric design. Then, they will create a simplified, classroom-friendly version using felt and acrylic paint. While this should not be considered a mola in the traditional sense, students will learn to appreciate the original process while also developing an understanding of negative space in design.

GRADES 5-12

Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Show examples and discuss the current and historical cultural importance and use of mola fabric within the tradition of the Guna.
2. Using a variety of colors, cut 12 pieces of Kunin Classic Felt into six pieces each measuring 12" x 18".



Materials (required)

Kunin Classic Felt, 36" x 36" (62151-); Need at least twelve pieces in three colors to share across class

Surebonder Cool Shot Super Low Temperature Mini Glue Gun, (23631-1000); Share one between 4 students

Cool Shot Regular Mini Glue Sticks, Pkg of 40 (23933-1001); share one package across the class

Blickrylic Student Acrylic Paints, Black, 64 oz (00711-2048); share one across the class

Mayco Detailer Writers, Pkg of 6 (32929-1009); need one per student

Optional Materials

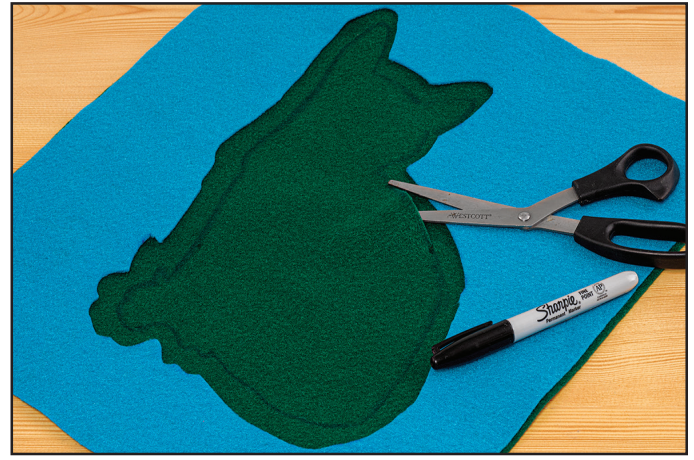
Janlynn Embroidery Floss Packs, Primary colors, Pkg of 36 (73502-1036)

Ready to order materials?

Go to www.DickBlick.com/lesson-plans/mola-study-in-felt to access a product bundle for your convenience.



Step 1: Create a basic design on a piece of felt and cut out shapes.



Step 2: Using the first sheet of cut felt as a template, trace onto a second sheet, cutting inside the lines by approximately 3/4".



Step 3: Using hot glue attach the pieces together in a stack, with the wider, more open cut, felt on the outside, then the second cut layer, followed by a solid backer piece.



Step 4: Cut additional details, and use paint to outline.

Process

1. Start by choosing a simple main image for the tapestry and create a preliminary sketch. Since this shape will be cut out of felt, it's best to keep it simple. A stylized silhouette of a bird, for example, would work well.
2. Based on the preliminary sketch, create paper templates and cut them out.
3. Trace the templates onto the felt using a marker or very soft pencil.
4. Cut out the shape from the center by pinching the fabric together and cutting along the folded edge, just enough to open it, then following along the edge of the shape.
5. Place the first cut piece of felt on top of a differently colored piece of felt. Trace the main center image onto the second piece of felt, but this time move the line in approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ " and cut.
6. Now that the main image has been cut out, place the third and final sheet of felt below the other two. Using a hot glue gun, tack down the four corners of each felt sheet. This will help keep the pieces together while also allowing the piece to be further worked on.

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7. Cut small, simple shapes to create a patterned background by pinching the first layer of felt and pulling up. Snip with scissors, cutting where the fabric is pinched together just enough to open it, then cutting the desired shape. A second layer can also be cut through the first to create a greater variety of color in the design.
8. Scraps of felt can also be applied using a traditional applique method to add details or introduce a fourth color. Simply attach pieces with a drop of hot glue.
9. Using a Mayco Detailer Writer filled with black Blickrylic paint, outline all main shapes. Again, add detail and definition where desired.
10. To finish, create a "frame" by attaching a 1" strip of felt to the edge with hot glue and folding over to the backside, so that each side has a border of half an inch. Use a wider 3" strip for the top, but keep both sides in line with the other strips, approximately ½" down on both the front and back. This will create a loop, where a dowel rod can be threaded through for hanging and display.

Options

- Add detail and embellishments with embroidery floss instead of using paint to outline the design.
- Use the negative pieces to create a second artwork.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

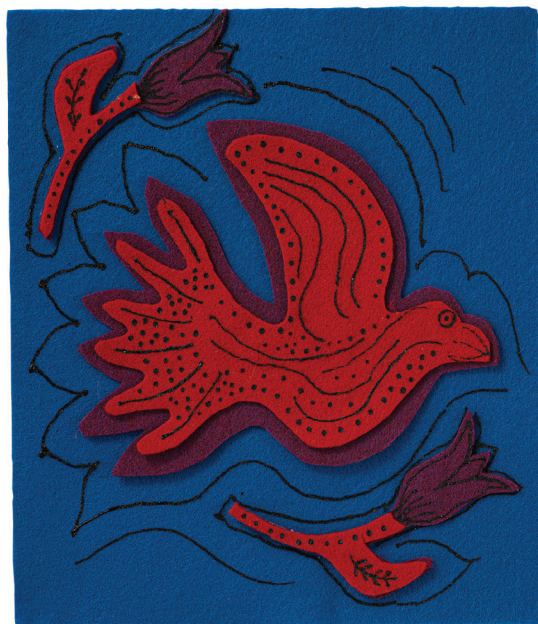
Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Responding

Anchor Standard 8: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.



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