TIPS & TRICKS FOR USING SHALLOW LOW PROFILE PHOTOPOLYMER PLATES

by Sue McNenly

Shallow photopolymer plates are a wonderful tool for creating textures incorporating fine lines and text. There are a few issues to keep in mind to get the best results:

Artwork

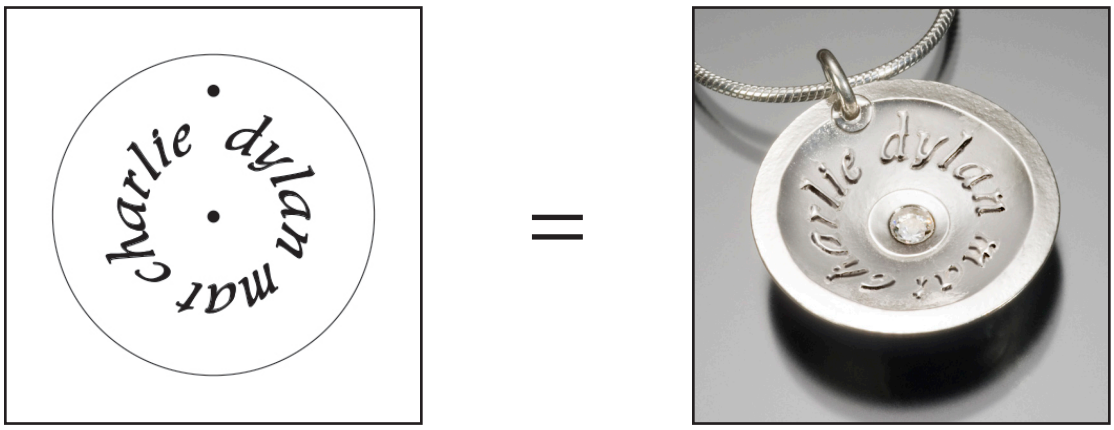
You have three options for creating artwork:

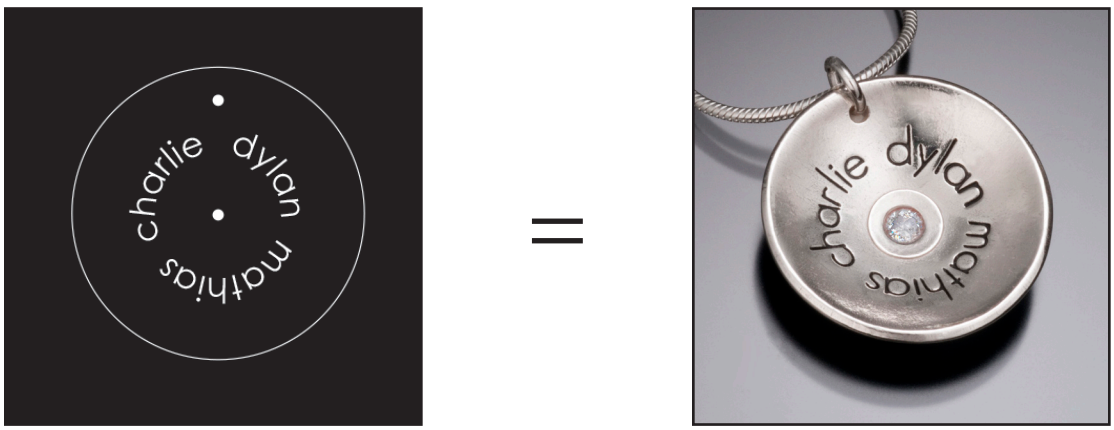
1. Draw it directly onto whatever plain white paper you prefer. Black ink will work best in the long run. Photocopy this image onto transparency or clear vellum. The lines of the artwork will copy as black, without you having to go over and over your art to blacken it in the drawing stage. For fine lines, one pass of the pen is best.

2. Draw directly onto clear vellum or transparency film. This may result in having to go over your lines numerous times to solidify them and may not give you the cleanest results.

3. Create your Artwork using the computer program of your choice, then simply print out onto vellum or clear transparency film. This is my preferred option for clean and crisp lines.

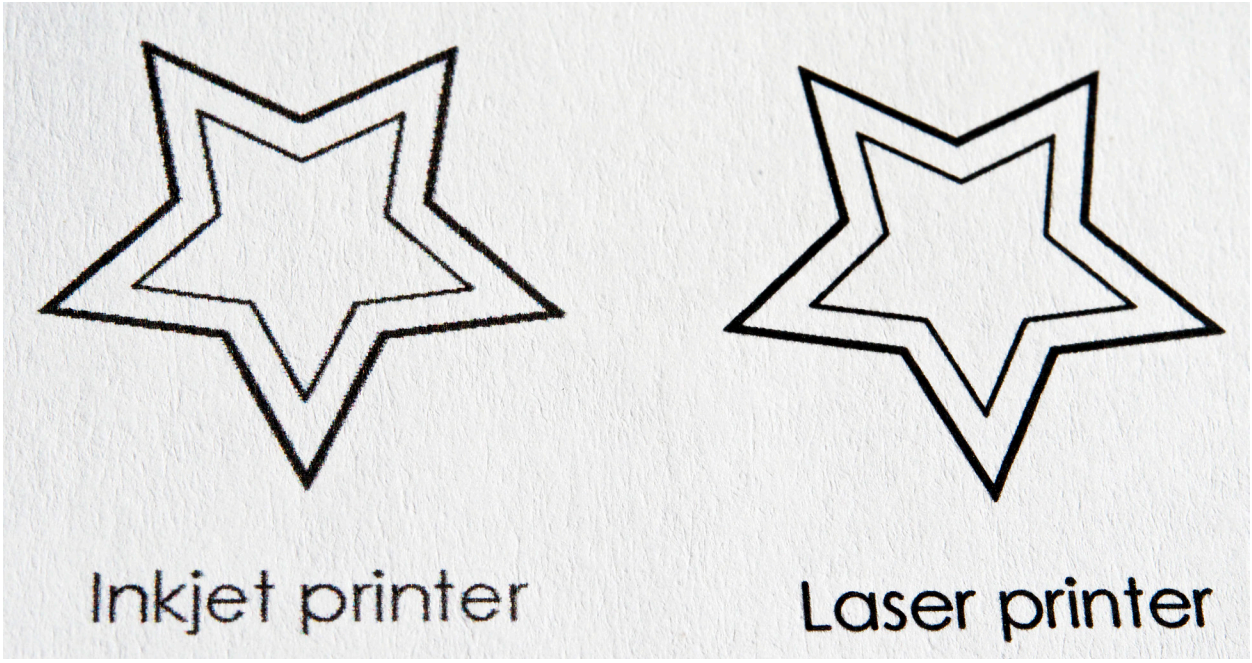
Now that you have a piece of clear vellum or transparency film with your artwork on it, you have a design decision to make. If you wish for the black lines of your artwork to stand up from your final piece, you are ready to create a photopolymer plate. If you wish for the black lines of your artwork to be 'engraved' into your piece, you must create a negative of this artwork (black lines become white, white background becomes black). To do this, simply use the ReVerseArt™ Film to create the negative. When those steps are completed, you are ready to create a photopolymer plate with the resulting negative transparency.





Tips for Working with Text & Fine Lines

Your final plate will only be as good as your original image print. I find that laser printers create a far cleaner line than ink-jet printers, although you will still get great results from inkjets. In the sample, you can see that inkjets lay down ink in a different manner, creating a sawtooth effect when viewed under magnification, whereas the laser gives a more solid line. Whatever is on this original printout will translate through the process and onto your final piece. This may not be visible to the naked eye, and is merely meant to illustrate how other factors can affect the sharpness of your final work.



As a rule, laser mono (black only) printers give the highest quality black print, but as these printers come down in price, their print quality more closely matches that of inkjets.

Washing Out Plates

Use cool water and a soft toothbrush to wash out plates. Warm water will wash away the photopolymer material on Shallow Low Profile material too quickly, which may cause very fine lines to disappear. Cool water allows a longer working time (still only about 2 mins). Keep checking the design. If you notice a fine line looking too thin in a few spots, stop.

Text

I have had success with many different fonts, going as small as 5 points, with drawn line thicknesses going as narrow as .25 points. Simply experiment. My preferred stroke thickness when drawing on a computer is .5.

Photopolymer Plate Issues

A flat plate is key. Though very slight curl at the edges are probably not an issue, if the plate has some curled edges or bent corners if you cannot easily unbend it simply snip them off. The plate does not need to be perfectly square, or look nice... the image and ample space around it to work with is all that matters. You may wish to snip off the corners as the plates can be quite sharp when all of the polymer material is removed.