

Making Butterfly Wings Using Translucent Liquid Sculpey and Silk by Alan Vernall

I've been trying for some time to make thin wings for polyclay dragonfly sculptures using a photographic transfer method that involves Translucent Liquid Sculpey (TLS).

The beauty of this material is that it will also remove pigments from some printed papers - and so the wings are not only semi-transparent but can also have markings such as veins and patterning on their surfaces.

I've tried several methods but finally found one that gave me repeatable results, incredibly strong wings, and a low incidence of failure. Recently, I adapted the method for the production of butterfly wings - these can be used to make life-like insects or used in figurative sculpture when making fairies or angels etc., if that happens to be what you need.



Materials:

- Translucent Liquid Sculpey (Polyform Products)
- images of wings
- T-shirt transfer paper (Hewlett-Packard, Epson or Stabilo, etc.)
- Fine wire - 28 swg Silver plated steel (or coloured beading wire)
- Silk Fabric - natural type, as used for silk painting (Pongee)
- Glazed Tile - 6in x 6in used but this is not critical
- Brass Sheet - cut into pieces for use as weights (anything of the appropriate size and weight will do)
- Sharp Scissors
- Small Paintbrush

Method

The images of your selected wings should be prepared by photo adaptation software so that the wings are 'removed' from the body of the butterfly. This is not essential but the separation simply makes the images easier to cope with in the transfer system.

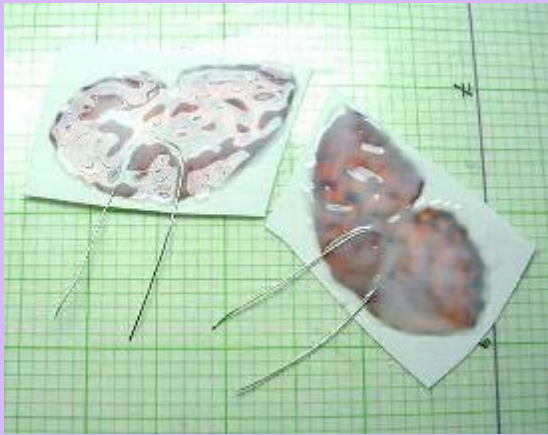
The images are then printed onto a page of T-shirt paper. The paper should then be allowed to dry very thoroughly - preferably overnight, rather than the 30 minutes as per some manufacturer's instructions. I've found that even a trace of water, from inks or sweaty fingers, can impair the image transfer process.



Step One:

The image is cut from the page, leaving a reasonable margin of blank paper all around it.

The image is then painted over quite thickly with TLS. I found it helps if I paint a little way past the edges of the image, this makes subsequently cutting out the cured wing shapes very much easier.



Step Two:

When the image is covered, a short length of silver plated steel wire is placed on the TLS.

The wire was previously bent into a rough 'U' shape and the ends of the wire stick out from the 'body side' of the wing. These wire lengths will later be the means of attachment of the wings to the rest of the sculpture.

Care should be taken that the wire 'U' is flat on the paper and TLS should be painted on the wire too.

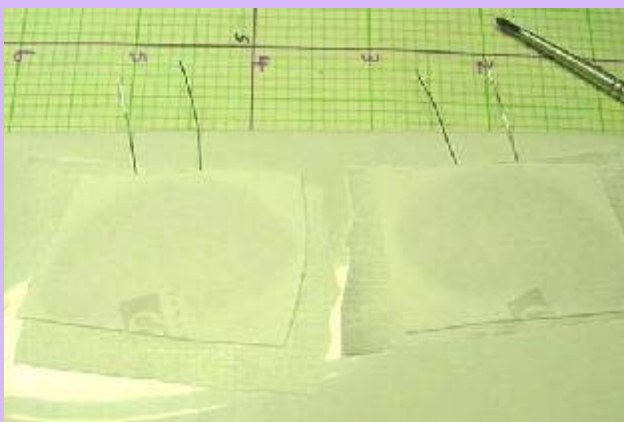


Step Three:

Next, a piece of silk fabric is placed over the TLS. The silk should be slightly larger than the area of TLS.

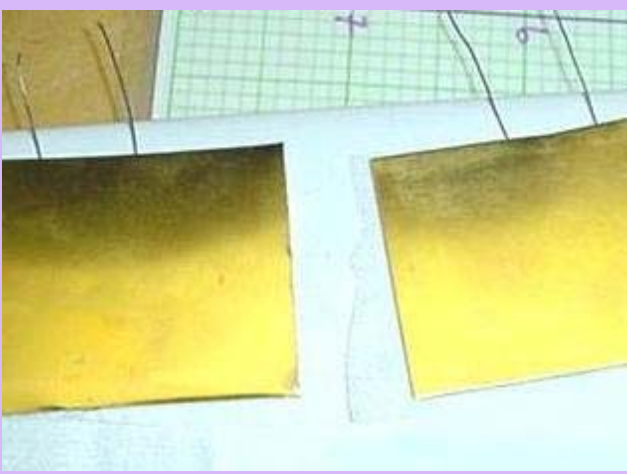
You'll note that the TLS rapidly soaks into the silk and, in fact, becomes hard to distinguish from the silk. In the finished wings, it's almost impossible to tell there's any fabric inside them! I imagine that the refractive index of the silk fibres is similar to the cured TLS (lucky that!) and so they become indistinguishable.

The silk also holds the wire very firmly in place until the TLS is cured.



Step Four:

Once the silk is embedded into the TLS over the whole of the wing's area, the assembly is placed face down on a clean, glazed tile.



I then carefully position a small piece of brass sheet over the paper - this prevents the corners of the paper from curling up and away from the tile during the curing process, which would produce uneven thickness in the wing.

The wings are then baked for 30 or 40 minutes. They are allowed to cool naturally after removal from the oven - no quenching is necessary.



The weights are removed when the assembly is cool and the wings are carefully peeled off the tile. The backing paper is now, again very gently, removed.

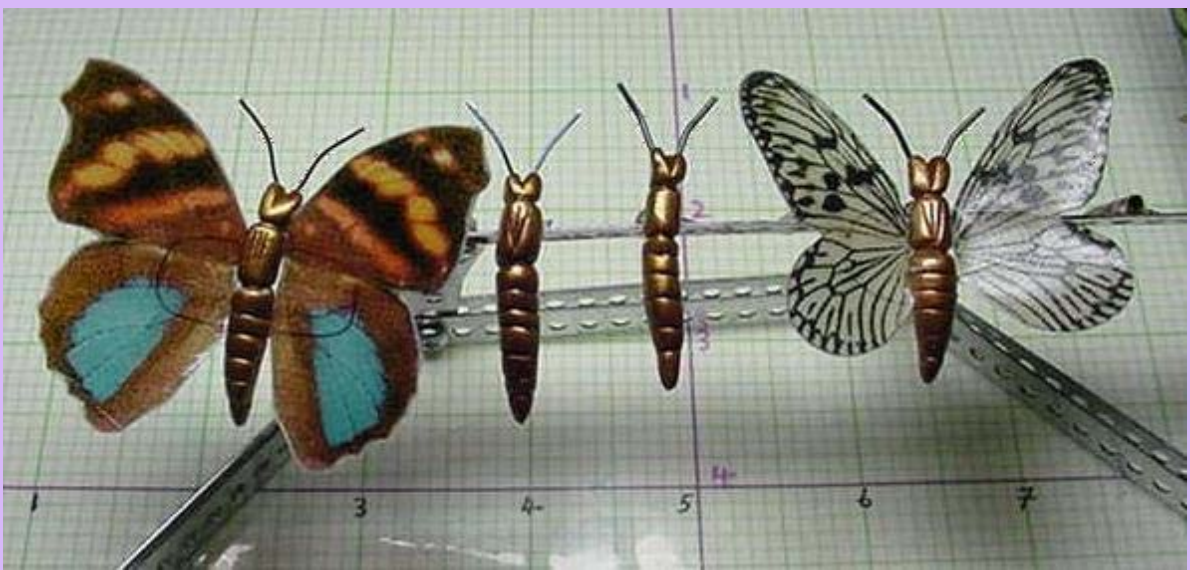
You may notice a plastic membrane from the paper over the wing's surface - this should be completely removed too.



Finally, using very sharp scissors, trim off the excess silk and TLS, being careful not to damage the steel wires.



The wings should be pressed flat for a short time and finally dipped or painted with the finish of your choice.



I've found that the addition of the silk fabric has a double benefit: it prevents the TLS from tearing during the removal from the tile and backing paper and, much more importantly, it gives the finished wing enormous strength.

You'll find that the weakest part of these wings is, in fact, the wire, where it joins to the rest of the sculpture!

© 2002 Alan Vernal

[Butterfly Conservation](#)

[Niagara Conservatory for Butterflies](#)

[Scenic Niagara Falls](#)

[Hotels in Niagara Falls](#)

[Ocean City Hotels](#)

[Conservation of Scenic Ocean City](#)