

Shrinking Violets

Using Shrinking Plastic in Embroidery

Maggie Grey

Shrinking Plastic is a rather nasty looking plastic sheet that can be coloured in a variety of ways and is then heated. It shrinks and the colours become vibrant. You can use very basic colouring media, such as colour pencils, on the plastic and still get a good result. Shrinking Plastic looks most unappealing before it is heated, so don't be put off. Most of the plastics shrink to about half to a quarter of their size, but do try a test piece first to check. Some shrink more one way than another so always cut two matching pieces the same way round.

Basic Colouring Methods

Most shrinking plastic requires rubbing down before colouring. Do all your rubbing in one direction or it will look 'scribbly' when you colour it. When the shine has gone completely, it is ready for colouring using the colour pencils. Lay the plastic over your design and draw the outlines with a gold felt-tipped pen. Shade in one direction. The more careful you are at this stage, the better it will look. It is also possible to use a glass-painting product – keep it very thin. You won't need to rub down for this - just paint a thin coat on the plastic. The pic below left shows a design from a Celtic source, traced on the plastic with a gold felt-tipped pen. It was then painted with a thin layer of glass paint and spots were made with the gold pen. You can see the result, twisted a little before cooling, in the inset below right.



Heating

Use a heat tool to shrink the pieces, working on a heat resistant surface. You may need to place a pencil or something similar on the tile - do so gently - to stop it blowing away. Don't be alarmed if it performs some contortions as it shrinks. It will almost always uncurl itself if the paint is dry. It is possible to use a domestic oven (not microwave) to shrink the plastic and the instructions on the pack will cover this. However, I am always wary of using a food oven for craft work.



Additions

It is possible to add beads by stitching them on the plastic. You can also add all sorts of things such as the glass chips from the Stewart Gill Byzantine range, Accent Beads) or anything similar, by setting them in a holding substance.

To stitch beads, colour the plastic first and then either use a big needle and big beads or make holes first with a big needle and then use a beading needle. Start with a knot and finish by taking the thread through a loop on the back, as shown in the pic on the right.

Don't stitch the beads too closely together - remember that the plastic will shrink. The final pic below right shows the shrunk version which includes a plastic sequin that has melted most satisfactorily.



To apply other materials, such as the Accent Beads, make a little puddle of gold glass outline (used by glass painters to outline their designs) and sprinkle them in it. This will also work for the glass chips from the Stewart Gill Byzantine range. Frozen Opals can also be used but it is best to place them on after heating - and then heat again to melt them. The pics below show: left, frozen opals; middle, various shapes drawn, coloured and textured ready for shrinking; right, the same shapes after shrinking.



Cut-outs

Shapes can be cut from the coloured plastic to give interesting outlines. Cut carefully to avoid tearing. You may find it necessary to cut one way and then turn around and cut the other way. Consider the negative shape - the shape between the cut-outs - when putting several pieces together. Sharp angles can work very well. Don't forget to make the holes with a hole-punch so that you can stitch the pieces to a background. You will also need to go round the edges with a gold pen to prevent the result from looking plasticky.

You can use any colouring technique for these pieces - colour pencils or paints - and you may want to try glass-painting outliner.

An interesting effect can be made by using a stapler on the plastic, catching down a twist of thread under it. Colour the staples afterwards. The cut-out flowers, in the pic on the right, were made in this way and then stuck on to a previously shrunk background.

You could use up any left-over coloured plastic to make small shapes, which would act like beads. Either make two holes close to each other so that you can stitch them on like buttons or make one hole in the centre and lash the piece to the background.



Layers

Now try combining all these techniques in some layered pieces. Colour them as before, then cut a variety of shapes and stitch them on top of each other. You may need to make holes first with the needle. It may also be possible to use the staple technique (see above) to hold these pieces together. Another way to do it may be to glue them all with contact adhesive afterwards. The pics below show examples of this technique.

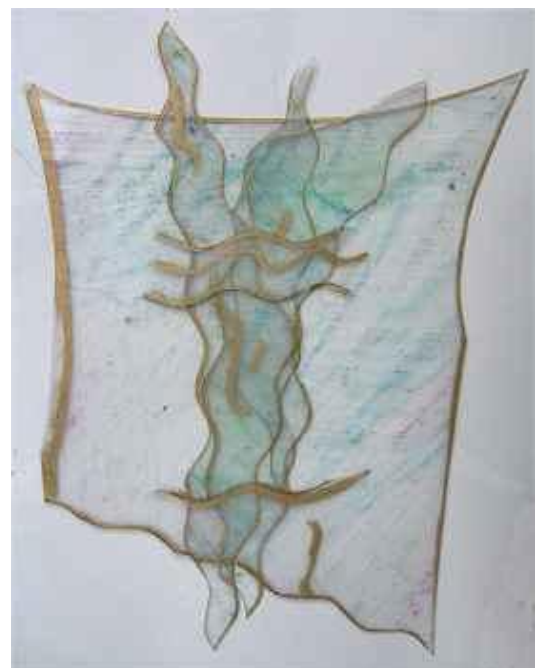


Weaving and Insertions

It can be great fun to weave together strips of coloured plastic. Remember to colour the edges of the strips with the gold pen. Staple or stitch at a few points to hold the piece together or they may all wriggle away when you heat them.

Another option is to make a base piece, about 10 cm (4 in) square, and colour it. Then use a craft knife to make two slashes top and bottom (see right) and feed strips through them. Care should be taken when heating with the heat tool as the strips will buckle and contort. Strong nerves are called for.

Persevere - it will all come right in the end.



The piece on the right was made using the 'threaded through' technique from the previous page.

Lots of possibilities here – what other things could be threaded through?

I do hope you have enjoyed these games with shrinking plastic and feel inspired to try your own experiments.

Note: This article will have a follow up in a forthcoming tutorial on Maggie's blog. We shall be making tiny Shrinkit books, so don't miss it.

Join the give-away of Shrinking Plastic by leaving a comments on the blog.



Return to blog
www.magstitch.blogspot.com

Maggie Grey is editor of Workshop on the Web and is part of the gang at d4daisy books Ltd.

She has travelled widely teaching textiles and now loves giving talks to interested groups.

Shrinking plastic is available as follows:

UK: Rainbow Silks (WOW), 6 Wheelers Yard, High Street, Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire HP16 0AL, UK, tel 01494 862111, email rainbowsilks@rainbowsilks.co.uk, website www.rainbowsilks.co.uk

USA and Canada: As an American product, it can be found in art or hobby shops throughout North America.

Australia & New Zealand: The Thread Studio, 6 Smith Street, Perth 6000, Western Australia tel +61 (0)9 227 1561 email mail@thethreadstudio.com website www.thethreadstudio.com