

SILVER SERVING TRAY

BY JULIA RAI

Create this 1:24 scale serving tray in real silver using metal clay.

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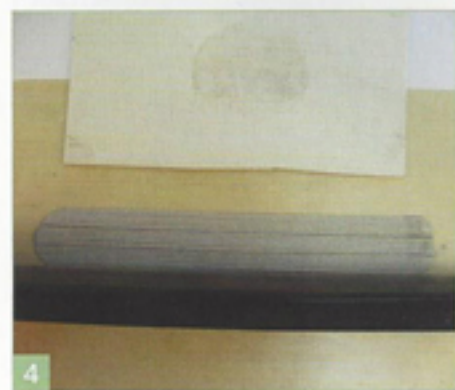
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You can make this serving tray in 1:24 scale using Art Clay Silver. Silver metal clay is easy to work with and requires simple tools that most crafters have around the house. Once fired (using a butane cook's torch), the pieces are Hallmark quality fine silver, perfect for period replicas.

MATERIALS

- 15g Art Clay Silver
- Small amount of silver clay paste
- Small rolling pin
- 20 playing cards
- Small amount of olive oil
- Teflon sheet
- Straight, rigid blade
- Tiny leaf and flower cutters
- Skeleton leaf
- Textured item or sheet
- Good-quality paintbrush
- Emery board
- Butane cook's torch
- Soft brass or steel brush
- Clingfilm
- XL liver of sulphur gel
- Glass bowl
- 1000 grit sandpaper

1. Silver clay shrinks by around 10 per cent so this needs to be added to the calculation for scaling down the object. Make a paper template to use as a guide for cutting the clay once it is rolled out. My template was 4cm x 2.7cm, including 10 per cent extra to account for the shrinkage.



2. Metal clay dries out quickly so be prepared before opening the package. Wipe a little oil onto a Teflon sheet and the rolling pin. Place two stacks of ten playing cards each side of the rolling area as depth guides and roll the clay, removing two cards at a time, until it's three cards thick.

3. Oil the template and place it onto the rolled-out clay. Using a straight, rigid blade, cut the clay around the template. Give yourself about a millimetre extra so you can file the edges smooth after drying. Place it somewhere warm to dry. Wrap up the excess clay in cling film to keep it moist.

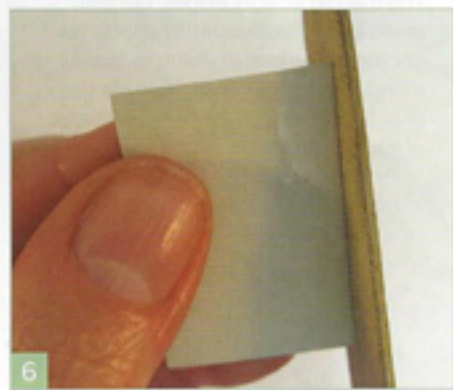
4. Decide what texture to use for the tray edge embellishment – I used textured wallpaper with a straight-line pattern. Roll the clay two cards thick then roll the oiled texture



face down into the clay. Cut out lengths just slightly longer than the edges of the tray and of equal depth. Allow to dry in a warm place.

5. Roll the clay down to two cards thick and use a skeleton leaf to impress a vein texture into the clay. I used only the very top part of the skeleton so the texture wasn't too deep. Cut out eight leaf shapes using tiny cutters then cut the flowers from untextured clay and put to one side to dry.

6. Refine the edges of the main tray panels using an emery board. The clay is very fragile at this stage so handle it carefully. Hold the clay close to where you are filing it to avoid snapping the piece. Add some distressing and dents to the surface with a paintbrush or toothpick to make it looked aged. Leave the tray to dry.



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7. Carefully refine the long edges of the embellishment panels. The dry clay cuts easily on a flat surface using a straight blade and the panels should line up with the edges of the tray, not overhang. Trim to the correct length and mitre the ends so they fit well together. Refine each mitred end with the emery board.

8. You can buy ready-made silver clay paste or make your own by adding water to some clay and filings. Dampen the area where the panel will stick to make the clay receptive. Put plenty of paste on the back of the panel and stick it down, pressing gently for 20 seconds. Clean up excess paste with a paintbrush.

9. If you can still see the join, add paste, dry and refine again to fill any gaps. Attach the leaves using paste and press gently. Clean any excess paste as you go. Finally add the flowers using a large blob of paste. Leave to dry thoroughly.

10. Protect your work surface using a brick or firing block. In a darkened room, heat the piece, watching it constantly. First you'll see the binder burn out – and once it's glowing salmon pink, time it for at least three minutes. You need to keep it at the glow for this time so it fires correctly.

11. The piece should be white after firing – if it has been fired correctly. This is the natural surface of the silver and requires polishing to bring out the shine. When it is cool, use a soft brass or steel brush to shine the surface. Brass brushes should be used with soapy water; steel brushes can be used dry.

12. To give the tray an antiqued look use liver of sulphur gel. Dilute a small drop of the gel in a glass bowl with boiling water. Using plastic tweezers put the piece in the solution and leave until it is black. Rinse with cold water and polish the high spots and the tray centre with fine sandpaper.

TIPS

Firing in a darkened room allows you to clearly see the salmon pink glow. If you heat it to a brighter red, you risk melting the piece and if it's too cool, the piece won't be strong enough.

Store your excess clay in cling film in a zip lock bag so it remains moist.

Dry clay can be rehydrated by adding a little water, then allowing the clay to rest in cling film in an airtight bag overnight.

Metal clay takes about 24 hours to dry naturally, and it must be completely dry before you start to refine it.

RESOURCES

Art Clay Silver and Creative Glass:

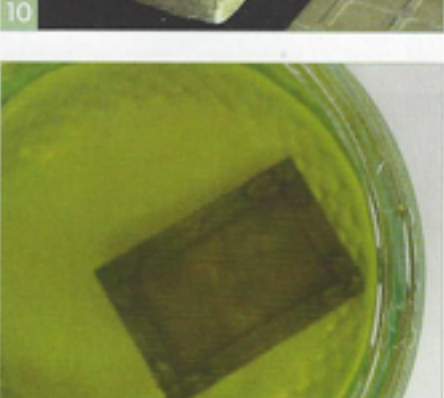
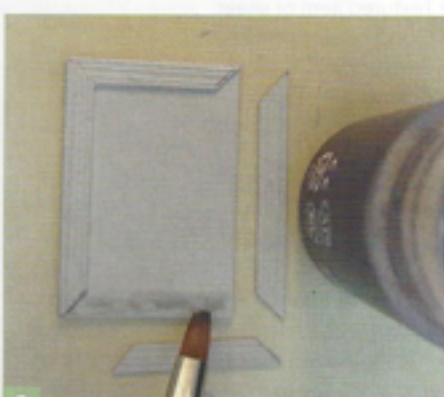
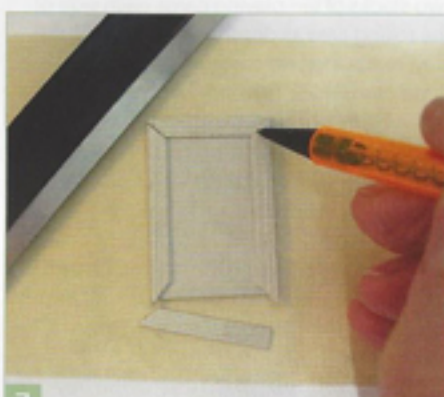
www.creativeglassshop.co.uk

XL gel, metal clay tools:

www.metalclay.co.uk

EXTRA PROJECTS

You can vary this tray to fit any historical period by choosing a different texture and/or embellishment for the edges. This tray has straight edges, but you could cut or file rounded ends, curves or change the overall shape to oval or round to suit your needs. Vary the size or proportions to create different types of tray.



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