

A Word About Copying

Sensitivity about copying others work has been a subject at the forefront in the polymer community this last year. It's a topic that needs to be openly discussed and debated. I feel certain that we as a community can arrive at a set of guidelines that are not inhibiting but are fair. Here is my take on the subject.

Articles like the ones in *Bead and Button*, usually describe how an artist makes a particular piece of jewelry. The article may describe 1. a set of techniques, 2. a subject matter and 3. a particular arrangement of colors or shapes or a way of assembling a piece. Each of these individual components are presented for you to use. Each individual component is public domain. It is the publication of the artists *complete concept* that associates *that work* with *that artist*. Publication helps to document this. Hopefully the article will stimulate ideas, add a new twist to your work or introduce you to a technique that you want to use in your future work.

The techniques described are now public domain, free for you to use in your work. It is generally considered appropriate to attribute a technique when teaching or writing about a technique you learned from someone else. If a technique has not been described before, check with the originator before writing about it. Sometimes the origin of a technique is unknown or disputed or was developed by several people independently. You can always mention how you heard about it.

Subject matter is also public domain, topics like Egyptian themes, Japanese themes, lettering, storybook characters, or American Indian patterns. etc. The Dover series of copyright free books are a safe bet. Be careful about using logos, rubber stamp images and things obtained from books that may be copyrighted. However, if you have changed or adulterated the image sufficiently there is usually not a problem.

Combinations of colors and/or particular shapes are, of course, also public domain. The problem arises when one uses a particular **technique+subject matter+color/shape** in the same configuration of a particular artist. It stands to reason that if you combine all the same components in the same way, it's going to look very closely like the original artists' work. It is OK to copy work for learning purposes. That is implied in published articles. After all, the great painting masters all copied each others work, but it is not good taste or ethical to submit copied work to shows, authors or to sell in galleries, shops or fairs.

We all succumb to the enthusiasm of simply loving someone's work and wanting to drink in the beauty or fascination of it. But, it seems to be an easy proposition to simply add your own mark to your work even if it is inspired by another artist. Try varying the subject matter or the colors or construction process with a given technique. Make it yours. Evolve!

It is important for our community to give serious consideration to this subject and try to arrive at some general guidelines that we can all respect. However, it would be a shame if the open atmosphere of sharing and creativity of our group were hampered by fear and anxiety over use of techniques or

subject matter just because others have used them first. We all bounce off of each other inspirationally and help each other stay loose and engaged in the creative process. Let's not lose our way!

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Please consider sending opinions and commentary to the PolyInformer of the National Polymer Clay Guild.