

Heritage Day

Territorial New Mexican Tinwork Frame

Ornamental tinwork originated in New Mexico during the mid-19th century as food products in tin cans arrived through the Santa Fe Trail. Its development was a result of the limited availability of materials in the region. As people in New Mexico had limited access to material for artmaking, containers that once held products like coffee, lard, and kerosene were repurposed into picture frames, nichos, candle sconces, and more. You can create your own version of New Mexican tinwork at home using aluminum foil.

How to Do It!

1. If you are using aluminum foil: Cut a 8" x 12" piece of aluminum foil and fold it in quarters so that you have a 4" x 6" piece of foil. If you are using an aluminum baking pan: Cut a 4" x 6" piece of foil out of the bottom of the baking pan.
2. If using aluminum foil, flatten and smooth the foil's surface on both sides. You can do this by either laying a pencil on its side and running it over the foil from top to bottom, or by running the bottom of your scissor blade over the foil from top to bottom.
3. Place you foil on top of a soft surface, such as a magazine or several sheets of newspaper. This will make it easier to make marks on the foil without tearing it.
4. Take your ruler and create a 1" frame around the outside of your foil. You can to this by measuring 1" from the edge of the foil and then pressing down with your pencil to mark. Once you have marked 1" from each edge of your foil, you can use the ruler and the pencil to make a line along the entire side on each side to create your frame. Be sure not to press too hard or you will tear the foil.
5. Use your pencil as a tooling tool to press lightly and draw designs on your foil frame. Many tinsmiths use designs like dots, flowers, shells, and lines to decorate their tinwork. You can view samples of traditional New Mexican tinwork by searching for the word "tin" on the Museum's collections database at albuquerque.emuseum.com.
6. If you would like to create some color designs on your frame, you can use colored Sharpies or other permanent markers. New Mexican tinsmiths would sometimes use red and green paint to decorate their designs.
7. Once you are finished decorating your foil frame, you can cut a 2" x 4" piece of paper and draw a picture to put in the center of the frame. New Mexican tinsmiths often put pictures of Catholic saints in their tinwork because the saints were important to them. What is important to you that you can draw to put in your frame?

Supplies Needed

- Aluminum Foil (You can use rolled aluminum foil or a foil baking pan)
- Ruler
- Scissors
- Dull Pencil (You can also use a toothpick, an empty ballpoint pen, a wooden skewer, or a manicure stick)
- Newspaper or Magazine
- Green and Red Sharpies (optional)
- A 2" x 4" Piece of Paper (optional)
- Glue Stick (optional)
- Colored Pencils/Crayons/Markers (optional)



Albuquerque Museum
2000 Mountain Road NW
Albuquerque, NM 87104
505-243-7255 • cabq.gov/museum

ONE ALBUQUERQUE cultural services