

Territorial New Mexican Tinwork

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.



Supplies in Packet:

- one sheet of art foil
- wooden stylus
- tracing templates for tinwork design

Supplies Needed:

- tape
- scissors
- Sharpies or other permanent markers (optional)

How to do it

1. 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.

2. Choose one of the templates to trace onto your piece of foil. Cut along the lines around your template. Place your template on top of the foil and use a piece of tape along the top edge of your template to attach it to the edge of the foil.

3. Use the wooden stylus as a tooling tool to trace along all of the lines on the template. Be sure to press lightly so you do not tear the foil.

4. Many tinsmiths use designs like dots, flowers, shells, and lines to decorate their tinwork. You can create your own designs on your tinwork by removing the template and gently drawing on the foil with the stylus. 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.

5. If you would like to create some color designs on your tinwork, you can use colored Sharpies or other permanent markers to trace on top of the designs on the foil. New Mexican tinsmiths would sometimes use red and green paint to decorate their designs.

