

Pieces of Perfection

a mosaic quilt by Susan Bianchi

How to make your own buttons when all else fails



My work in this Visions show is Pieces of Perfection. It's 17 inches square, weighs around one and a half pounds, and is made up of approximately 9,500 buttons and beads.

I have acquired a comprehensive stash of buttons and beads. That helps when creating this kind of piece!



Even though I have a fairly extensive collection, sometimes the right size and color are just not there and I have to problem solve.

That leaves me one of three options.

I can paint existing buttons with model paint or car paint.



I can dye buttons with various kinds of dyes. (The composition of each button determines what dyes it will take. Sometimes you just have to experiment.)





Or I can make buttons with clay.

I took a multiple day class on how to use polymer clay and would recommend that you do the same if you're interested in creating buttons or beads with clay successfully.



What I did stumble across while learning to make buttons was how to make molds of vintage buttons with silicone putty. You can see I've really taken to this idea!

The brand I use is Easy Mold made by Castin' Craft. I'm sure others work as well. This is available from most art supply stores as well as Amazon.



Prior to starting, I assemble everything I want to make a mold of and prepare a work surface. Just for ease, I cover my work surface with either wax paper or parchment paper.





I've picked some buttons that have great texture and are also sizes I don't currently have in my collection in certain colors. I think these will reproduce well.

The putty comes in two containers that have to be mixed before they can cure.



Making silicone molds from buttons.



What's really great about this is that you're not limited to molding buttons. You can look for different items.



A vintage bisque nodder whose face might be fun.

A vintage rattle.

The bottom of an antique glass from my grandmother.

A plastic gear.

Old or foreign coins.

An antique picture hanger.

Making "found object" molds.



A close-up photograph of a large, circular clock face. The clock face is light-colored with black Roman numerals. The hands are black and positioned to show a time of approximately 10:10. The clock is mounted on a dark wooden frame. In the center of the clock face, there is a small circular logo with the letters 'S' and 'M' inside. The text '25 minutes later...' is overlaid in yellow on the clock face.

25 minutes later...

Releasing the molds



I've set up my work area and conditioned the polymer clay so that it's ready to use and blended it to a color I need. Colors don't change in the baking process, so the color you see is the color you'll get!



Using polymer clay with the molds



From object,



to mold,



to finished button.



When your buttons are made, bake the polymer.

It's a good idea to have a dedicated oven for this craft as the fumes created while baking aren't good for anyone. I generally set it up outside.

300° F for 30 minutes.



Painting polymer clay buttons

Once buttons are cool, you can leave them as is or hit them with paint for definition.

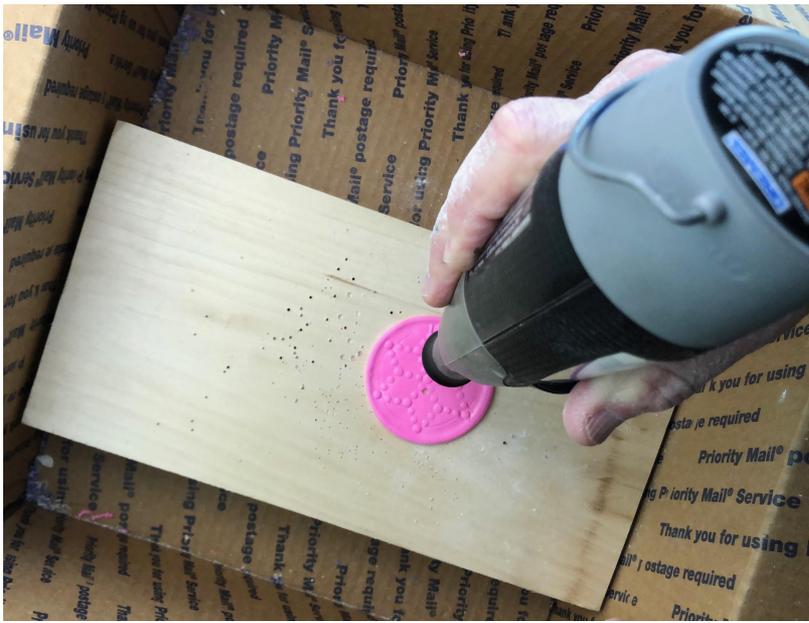




All of the beads and buttons are sewn on by hand using a size 11 straw needle and Nymo D beading thread.

The buttons need holes or shanks attached to the back to sew through and hold the buttons on to the quilt.





You can use a dremel to drill button holes. The wood provides a firm base to drill into and having it inside a box catches the shavings.

or

You can purchase button shanks and glue those on to the back of buttons with E-6000 (available at art supply stores). I've purchased the shanks on Etsy.



From original buttons to molds to new buttons.
My collection has increased!





The buttons or beads circled in red are made from polymer clay. In the pieces I've created so far, on average there are slightly less than .5% of buttons or beads made out of polymer. In this quilt even less! In going through the photo, I can only find five.



Thanks for watching!

You can find me at:

Website: **suebianchi.com**

Facebook: **Susan Bianchi Quilts**

Instagram: **susan_bianchi**