

B

is for **B**eck

ABOUT THE ART

CHARLES BECK was a printmaker. He worked primarily in a medium called relief printing. In relief printing, an image or design is carved into a soft surface (linoleum, Styrofoam, wood) with a carving tool. Ink is then added to the surface of the relief and then the relief is applied to paper and the ink is transferred – like stamping. Sometimes you can get the image on the paper by hand (see the attached activity), but often it has to be run through a printing press that uses heavy pressure to transfer the ink to the paper. Charles Beck used wood for his relief blocks. He carved intricate blocks for his prints. He carved a different wood block for each color that he used and then layered the colors on the paper.

Printmakers make editions, which means they can make many copies of the same print. Each of the prints in the Plains Art Museum permanent collection is part of an edition. For example, Plains Art Museum's copy of *Maplewood* is the 47th print Charles Beck made in an edition of 150 prints.

Much of Charles Beck's artwork is based on nature around his home in Fergus Falls and Ottertail County, MN. He looked for patterns in the fields, trees, flours and buildings in that rural area and interpreted those into his prints.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Charles Beck was born in 1923 in Fergus Falls, MN. He studied art at Concordia College in Moorhead, MN. He left school during World War II to be a Naval Air Force pilot. He then graduated from Concordia in 1948. He went on to earn a Master's Degree from the University of Iowa in 1950. Beck taught at Fergus Falls Community College for 27 years. He created art for over 80 years, until he died at the age of 94 on September 12, 2017.



top: Charles Beck, *Dormant Tree*, 1971, Woodcut, 22 in. x 16 3/4 in.
bottom: Charles Beck, *Late Autumn*, 1963, Woodcut, 22 in. x 16 3/4 in., 15 1/4 in. x 31 1/2 in.



ART ACTIVITY

RELIEF PRINTING WITH STYROFOAM

One of the easiest ways to do relief printing is using a simple tool (a dull pencil or a ballpoint pen) to scribe a design in Styrofoam and then using that to print using markers or paints.

1

You can use Styrofoam from meat or vegetable trays or take out containers. Wash them well first.

2

Cut a flat piece from the Styrofoam.

3

Using a dull pencil or a ballpoint scribe a design. You can use your lines thick or thin. Just make sure your lines are about half the depth of the Styrofoam so that it prints clearly. Keep in mind that everything you print will be in **REVERSE**. If you want to use words, both the words **AND** each letter must be scribed **BACKWARDS**.

4

You can print on any kind of paper: printer paper, drawing paper, wrapping paper, even newspaper. Cut a piece of paper that is at least an inch larger than your Styrofoam in each direction.

5

Lay your Styrofoam down in the center of your paper and make a dot on the paper at each corner of the Styrofoam. This will show you where to put your Styrofoam each time if you use more than one color.



6

You can print with many different media. If you have acrylic or tempera paint you can use that. You can use watercolors, if it is used thickly. This example used water-based markers (like Crayola).

7

If you are using paint, brush on the paint lightly, trying not to fill your scribe lines. Only add as much paint that you can print before it dries.

8

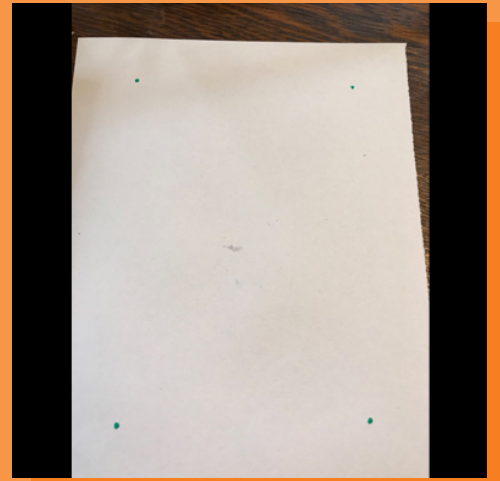
If you are using markers, you will only be able to do small areas before the marker dries. Use the side of the marker to apply the color to the Styrofoam.

9

When you are ready to print, turn your Styrofoam over and, using the four dots as your guide, place it on the paper. Use the side or palm of your hand to press and gently rub hard on the Styrofoam to transfer the color to the paper.

10

Continue with the colors until you are finished. You can wash the Styrofoam and apply more color and print again and again. Each time will be a bit different and that is the beauty of this type of printing.



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