Widow Maker's Crafternoon

EPISODE 118 · CRAFT GUIDE

Incised, Intaglio, or Sunk Carving

The carving is sunk and the ground left high, so the wear falls on the ground.



From A Manual of Wood-carving (Leland, 1891) · public domain

"Sink the pattern, leave the ground, press it into clay to check."

1. **Prepare the Surface**
   Take any wood except a coarse one: holly, beech, oak, poplar, pear or walnut. Let the surface be well planed, or perhaps polished.

2. **Transfer the Pattern**
   Choose a simple pattern, your object being to learn how to cut and not to produce something startling at a first effort. On light wood, draw it on paper with a very soft pencil, lay it face down and rub the back carefully with a polisher. On dark wood such as American walnut, mark it through with a prick-wheel. If your eyesight is not perfect, or you expect to carve at night, outline that dotted line with a very fine brush and Chinese white, which prevents many mistakes.

3. **Cut the Lines**
   Take a small gouge, a little less in diameter than the stem you are cutting, and run it along the line. When you cut leaves, work gradually towards the centre. Then take a larger gouge and finish the stems.

4. **Work by Hand**
   This work is executed almost entirely by hand, without hammering. It is worked chiefly with bent gouges and grainers, flat and hollow, and two or three bent chisels and stamps, and a good piece of incised carving can often be done with very few tools.

5. **Take an Impression**
   Keep a piece of clay, putty or moist kneaded bread beside you, and take an impression of your work from time to time. The real excellence of intaglio carving is that it is exactly like relief carving reversed, so the impression shows you at once what tools your work still needs.

6

Use It as a Mould

If you carve in hard wood you can use a finished piece of sunk carving as a mould. Soak a piece of russet leather in water until it is quite soft, press it into the mould with your fingers and a sponge for some time with great care, then take it off. The wood will not be injured in the least if you wipe it dry afterwards.