

## Molas

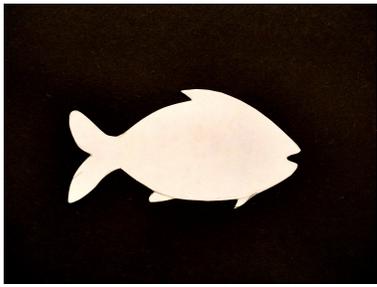
### Background:

Molas are beautiful hand-made textiles that form part of the traditional women's dress of the Kuna people of Panamá. In fact, in Dulegaya—the Kuna's native language— the word "mola" means "shirt" or "clothing." Today, molas are also created as stand-alone fabric works of art suitable for framing. They are constructed using contrasting colors from multiple layers of cloth. The technique might be thought of as reverse appliqué. Each layer is skillfully cut and peeled back to reveal a portion of the underlying color beneath. Molas often feature as many as four layers of colored cloth, with even more colored pieces and embroidery accents added. It takes many hours of sewing to create even the simplest mola.

It is thought that the Kuna were initially inspired by the geometric patterns they used for body painting in ancient times. The arrival of the Spanish in Central America gave the Kuna access to fabric, and women started to use similar designs in their textiles. The typical mola colors that were once used for body painting, such as burgundy, orange or black, are still favored today. The traditional geometric designs used for body painting are also seen in contemporary molas, but about 50 years ago the Kuna began incorporating realistic and abstract designs of flowers, animals and people. Some consider molas to be "living history books" because they depict medical plants, legends or stories.

The quality of a mola is determined by many factors, such as the number of layers, combination of colors, excellence of stitching, regularity of cutouts, and the addition of other design elements.

It's easy to make a mola out of construction paper. Read on for fun and easy directions.



Step one: Basic image



Step two: Beginning to layer



Finished mola with lots of design elements

### Supplies:

- 1 piece of white paper for drawing (if you want to draw your own shapes)
- Images to trace (if you prefer to use ready-made shapes)
- Pencil
- Scissors
- 3–5 pieces of colored paper
- 1 piece of black construction paper or card stock for your background
- Glue stick
- Scrap paper for gluing to protect your work surface

### Procedure:

- Select a picture or draw your own for your main subject. You can always download a “coloring book” image to get a simplified, yet realistic, shape to use as your template
- Transfer your image to a piece of colored construction paper and cut it out
- Retrace your image on a new piece of construction paper, making it slightly larger and cut it out
- Repeat one or two more times with different colored papers
- Glue the **largest** shape down on your piece of black paper
- Glue the next largest shape inside
- Continue until all pieces are glued down one inside the next
- Cut up remaining scraps and glue them around your images