

Studio Saturdays: Plant Printed Handkerchief



Anatomy of Longing Tanja Softic

2001

Intaglio

44 x 36 in.

Gift of Dr. Michael and Wendy Henner in honor of Drew Henner, Rollins class of '17 and Sophie Henner, Rollins class of '20, 2020.7 © Tanja Softic

MATERIALS

- Handkerchief
- Cardboard
- Flower Petals & Leaves
- Hammer
- Tape
- Paper Towel

Tanja Softic is a Bosnian-American artist born in Sarajevo in 1966. At that time, Sarajevo was the capital of a country called Yugoslavia. Like the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia was a federation, or group, of different countries. Sarajevo is now the capital of the country Bosnia and Herzegovina. Like Sandra Ramos, much of Tanja Softic's art relates to a time of chaos in her country; in 1992, Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with some other countries, chose to become independent from Yugoslavia. However, not everyone in Bosnia and Herzegovina wanted to leave the federation. This led to a war inside the country, called the Bosnian war. Many people's homes and many historic places were destroyed in the war. When Tanja Softic returned to Sarajevo in 1996, she was inspired by both the loss of these places, and the way that people were coming together and rebuilding. Softic's prints, like this one titled "Anatomy of Longing", are meant to be like collections of memories, or records of things lost in the destruction the war caused.

Like "Anatomy of Longing", many of Softic's prints have detailed illustrations of plants, objects, and sometimes organs, like the kidneys in the lower right corner of this artwork. The plants in her work are examples of botanical illustration. Botanical illustrations are extremely detailed drawings of plants. Before photography was invented, scientists would have to make detailed drawings of plants, animals, and other things that they were studying. They would also often cut a plant in two and make drawings of the inside to study how it worked. The purpose of these illustrations was not just for science, but for decoration too, so people could have beautiful and realistic images of flowers, birds, or other things from nature on their walls.

For today's craft, we will be making our own botanical prints by hammering leaves, flowers, and other parts of plants onto handkerchiefs! The pigment, or color, from the plants is pushed into the fabric, and leaves a print. Although our prints won't be as detailed as the illustrations on Tanja Softi's artwork, they still record the plants in the spirit of botanical illustration. As you're gathering flower petals, leaves, grass, and other plants for your project, imagine you're a scientist studying the plants in your neighborhood. How many can you name? What new ones can you find?

THINK LIKE AN ARTIST

- 1) I think about your plan for placing your plants. Will you make a pattern, or place them randomly like in Softic's artwork?
- 2) What do you think are the advantages of botanical illustrations vs photographs? What are the disadvantages?

INSTRUCTIONS

1. First, gather your materials. Whether you take plants from your front yard or a nearby green space, make sure to stay safe and stay aware of your surroundings. Try to find flowers and plants that are full of color for your design!
2. Next, place your section of cardboard wherever you'll be working. Things could get a little loud, so try making your project outside if you need quiet inside your home.
3. Place your fabric down on the cardboard. Tape the corners or edges of the fabric to the cardboard so it doesn't move around while you're hammering.
4. Now, you can lay out your plants and petals on the fabric. Design your flowers however you want!
5. Once your pieces are where you want them, lay your paper towel over the fabric, making sure to cover all of your design. Once it's placed, tape down the edges to the cardboard.
6. Now that everything is in place, take your hammer, can of soup, or other heavy object and start hammering! Make sure to keep your other hand out of the way, and make sure you hammer all over the plants more than once. This will ensure the pigment is pressed into the fabric. If you want to check on your progress, you can lift up a corner of the paper towel to look at the fabric—just be careful not to disturb your plants and petals underneath!
7. When you feel satisfied with your hammering, you can un-tape the paper towel and lift it away to reveal your new botanical print handkerchief!