

Carving a Tree Face Ornament

I've seen a lot of these cartoon tree face ornaments on the internet and at carving shows. I don't know who the originator is. I bought a couple of these tree face ornaments from JR (Art Hemmerlein, Jr) a couple years ago at a woodcarving show. He has so many different styles and sizes. With JR's permission, I created this pattern based on his style.

Pattern: Trace pattern onto a piece of basswood 4.25" x 2" x .5". (Pattern included)

Blank: Cut out blank using a coping saw, bandsaw, or scroll saw.



Branches: This project can be completed with just a knife. It's up to you decide what works best for you. I use a knife, V-tool, and shallow gouge to shape the branches. I like to begin by outlining the branches with a V-tool, creating a groove. Follow the groove with your knife to cut in deeper. This method helps to avoid the knife cut accidentally following the grain in the wrong direction. Then, come back with a knife or gouge to push the lower branches under the ones above, creating a layering affect. This gives the tree depth. On the sides of the branches, round them back, leaving the knife marks. If needed, clean up the saw marks with your knife as you go. Make sure you leave enough material at the top of the tree to add an eye screw and hanger. Watch the grain direction. The branches are easy to break off. If they break off, redesign. Lightly outline the eyes and nose with a V-tool.



Eyes and Nose: The eyes and nose are cartoonish, so don't worry about proportions and shape. You can use the edge of a round gouge (about a #9 sweep) to outline the eyes. Find a gouge that fits the profile of the eyes and the nose. Use the gouge as a stop cut for the eyes and nose. Push back the eyes and nose so they are further back from the branches. I like the tip of the nose to be the high point. So, from the tip of the nose push back the nose toward the eyes. These are shallow cuts. You don't need to carve deep.

Cheeks, Mustache, and Mouth: The branches between the eyes and the mustache are the cheeks (tree branch cheeks). Push the cheek branches back so they are slightly higher than the eyeballs and rounded inward toward the nose. The mustache will be pushed back under the nose and then rounded out at the edges of the branch. Use a small #9 gouge to create the groove under the lip. You are removing the material below the lip to form the mouth.

Trunk and Branch Details: At this point, you can carve the trunk, rounding and shaping it toward the back of the piece. Go back and add details to the branches, grooves between needle groups. Since this ornament is designed to hang, I like to carve the bottom of the trunk at an angle in the opposite direction of the top.



Finish: I like to finish my piece with Natural Minwax Penetrating Stain. This is oil based. It would be best to use oil paints on top of this. But, because of drying time, I will use acrylic paints. Let this dry before continuing.

Tree Color: First mix olive green paint with water to thin. I paint the entire piece with the olive green paint, front and back. Optionally, you can avoid painting over the eyes, nose, and trunk areas. Let it fully dry.

Trunk: Paint the trunk with watered-down burnt umber. It might take two coats to cover the green.

Eyes: Paint the eyes with full strength paint. Do not water down. Paint the eyes with white or off-white paint first. Determine the direction the eyes will be looking. Use Yellow-Green

full strength paint for the iris. Use black for the pupils. Once dry, add a white speck on the iris as a reflection of light. Use a green fine tip Sharpie to outline the iris.

Nose and Lip: I used Mars Orange for the nose and a dab of the same color for the lip.

Snow: Use a small fan brush to lightly brush on white on branches for snow. Wipe off most of the paint off the brush so it is only holding a small amount of paint. Brush across the piece lightly, avoiding the eyes and nose.

Hanger: Be careful when adding the eye screw. Use an awl to start a shallow hole for the eye screw. Turn the eye screw into the hole until it is secure. Then add the ornament hook to the eye screw.



Pattern



Basswood 4.25" x 2" x .5". You can also use ¼" thick basswood.

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