

» TESTING RIPPIN' CLIPZ™ SKULLOLOGY, AIRBRUSH ACTION'S VINYL PLOTTER-READY STENCILS—FULLY EDITABLE, AND BADASS!

BY KEVIN KIDDER

BEFORE WE GO INTO THE DETAILS of choosing a vinyl plotter and software, allow me to introduce you to the steps involved in creating and using a vinyl stencil. It's important to point out that a plotter must be given the proper type of image so that it knows what it's supposed to cut. This comes in the form of vector graphics.

For this demonstration, I used Evil Skull 1, a stock graphic found on the new Skullology CD by Cross-Eyed. This collection contains 51 varieties of skulls, each one vectorized and ready to import into virtually any vinyl plotter software.

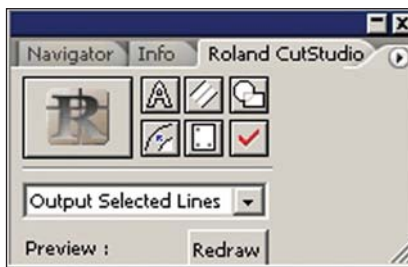
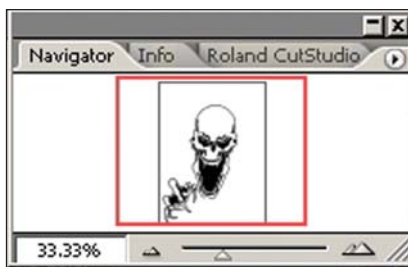
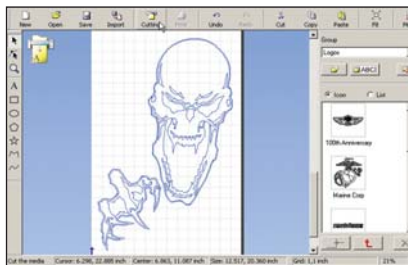
Adobe Illustrator was my software of choice for this project (the standard plug-in is included with the Roland GX-24 plotter). Although the techniques may vary slightly between software titles, the procedure is basically identical. To make it easier for you, I'll list the most common commands next to the Illustrator commands.

I started by creating a new document in Illustrator. I like to scale the document as close to the size of the surface that I'll paint on. This gives me a good perspective of how my design will look on the finished product, allowing me to re-size, shape, and move each object to reach the desired effect.

Now, we can place our graphic onto the design board by selecting "Place" (or "Import") found under the File menu or list. (Note: If the file has either an .ai or .eps extension, you can also select "Open" rather than "Import") Locate the image that you wish to use, then click "Place" (or "OK"). Now, your image is ready to size and manipulate.

For this panel, I wanted to make the skull a little smaller to accommodate some background graphics. In order to select the whole image for re-sizing, click "Select All" (or "Cont-A") from the top menu.

A "bounding" box should now surround your image. Using the points on this box, you



The Cut Studio screen (top) and plug-in toolbox details.

can stretch, crunch, or resize your image as one piece. You can also resize or change individual areas by selecting them one at a time. Notice that I used hands from another of the Skullology files. We're ready to cut our stencil!

In Illustrator, the Roland plug-in is added to the Navigation window located at the top right of the screen. (Note: This plug-in works equally well with Corel Draw!)

With the items selected that you wish to include in your design—yes, you can leave out an eye if you wish!—simply click on the button marked "R" to send your image for cutting.

The following screen appears, giving you such options as multiple copies and manipulation of the lines. You also have the option to save your artwork as an icon for later use.

Simply click on "Cutting" from the top menu and your image will be sent to the plotter for cutting; just as if you were sending an image to your computer's printer!

WITH THE SKULL STENCIL SIZED AND CUT, IT'S READY TO APPLY IT TO OUR SURFACE.

Another tool borrowed from the sign trade, which helps with transferring the stencil, is

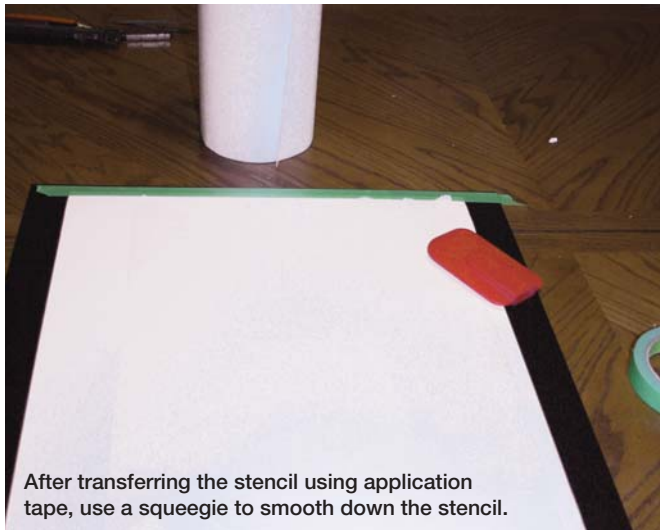
/// THE RIPPIN' CLIPZ COLLECTION CONTAINS 51 VARIETIES OF SKULLS, EACH ONE VECTORIZED AND READY TO IMPORT INTO VIRTUALLY ANY VINYL PLOTTER SOFTWARE."

application tape, also known in the paint industry as Auto Mask or Paint Mask. Essentially, it's a roll (available in small to large widths) of masking tape applied to the topside of our stencil to keep all the pieces in place.

With the application tape applied, align the stencil onto your surface and tape one edge. This holds the stencil in place while removing the backing from the vinyl, and also acts as a hinge for applying the vinyl to the surface.

Using your tape hinge, remove the backing from the stencil vinyl, and apply it to the surface to be painted. Use a squeegee to ensure a good bond.

The unveiled stencil is ready to paint! ❖



After transferring the stencil using application tape, use a squeegee to smooth down the stencil.



After removing the application tape, peel the excess material away from the design (also known as 'weeding'). Below: The final stencil is ready for paint.

