

Mythological Clay Relief Creature

Use your imagination to design and sculpt a mythological creature from clay.



Artist unidentified (China, Ming Dynasty, 1368–1644), *Pair of Dragon Gates*, late 15th–early 16th century, marble. Gift of Mrs. Harrie G. Carnell, 1928.48.1-2

Materials Needed

- air-dry clay
- water bowl
- wax paper
- paper towels
- toothpicks
- plastic knife
- plastic fork
- plastic spoon
- sponge



Optional

- wood board
- clay tools
- clay stamps
- seashells
- acrylic paint
- paint brushes



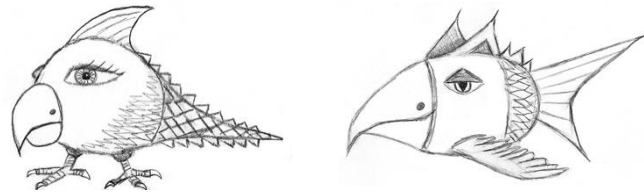
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Step 1

Take a moment to think about the unique characteristics of animals (ex: scales of a snake, wings of an eagle, eyes of a fish, etc.). Write or draw a list of at least 10 animal features that interest you most. Circle the top 4-5 from that list.

Helpful hint: for best results, ensure that the list features several essential elements of animals (ex: types of heads, eyes, mouths, noses, bodies, legs, feet, tails, etc.) as to create a complete creature.

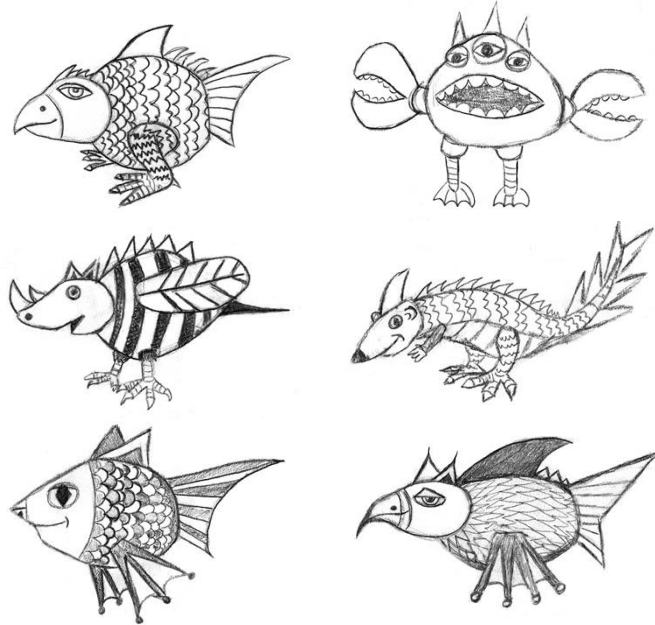
HEAD	EYES	MOUTH	NOSE	BODY	FEET	TAIL
BIRD	SNAKE	BIRD	LUPINE	LIZARD	BEAR	MONKEY
LEON	FISH	SHARK	LEON	FISH	BIRD	FISH
FISH	SPIDER	SNAKE	MOUSE	GIRAFFE	FROG	LIZARD
CAT	CAT	FISH	RHINO	BEAR	LUPINE	HORSE



Step 2

Combine the top 4-5 animal features in various ways to create multiple idea sketches for your clay creature (ex: head of a fish, body of a bird or head of a bird, body of a fish). Select a final design from your sketches.

Note: the clay creature will be two-dimensional and only seen from one perspective. For best results, sketches should be drawn in profile view or side view.



Helpful hint: experiment with your drawn animal features (ex: short tail vs. long tail, head of fish vs. head of a bird, etc.) and explore a wide range of combinations such as experimenting with perspective (ex: draw the same creature both in profile and side view to see which perspective works best) before selecting a final sketch.

Step 3

Take clay and roll in your hands to form a large, roughly softball-sized sphere. Place sphere on wax paper and flatten with hand or wooden board until approx. ½ inch thick.



Step 4

Place clay on a wooden board or other hard cutting surface. Cut away any unwanted edges with a plastic knife (ex: cut to form a square or other shape). Save the removed clay for later use. Using a toothpick, draw the basic outline of your final sketch into the clay.



Helpful hint: let the sketch inspire the sculpture but not be an exact model. Further experimentation is encouraged while you work with the clay. Erase with a lightly damp sponge and redraw lines as needed. Press lightly with toothpick before committing to final lines.

Step 5

Use clay tools or plastic spoon to carve away background and bring the creature forward. Background details (ex: clouds, ocean waves, lines, etc.) can also be carved into clay for extra effect. Use the damp sponge to erase any unwanted marks as desired.

Note: carve clay no thinner than a pencil thickness. Do not carve completely through.



Step 6

Use toothpicks to draw more details. Press firmly to create deep marks and shadows. Use clay tools, spoon or knife to further sculpt and refine the creature's shape (ex: carve down the pupil of an eyeball to make it appear darker with shadow).

Helpful hint: use leftover clay to add extra dimension to your creature (ex: add coils around an eyeball to create eyelids). Press pieces firmly into damp clay and smooth the connection with fingers and damp sponge.



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Step 7

Use clay tools, fork, toothpicks, stamps or shells to add texture to the creature or background. Add more clay for extra dimension and detail as desired.

Helpful hint: for best effect, use a variety of textures for each part of the creature.

Helpful hint: use toothpicks for hair or feather texture lines.



Helpful hint: use edge of seashells for scale texture.



Step 8 (optional)

Allow 24 hours for clay creature to fully dry. Add color with acrylic paint if desired.

Helpful hint: use several thin layers of color for greatest effect. Start with lightest colors first and apply darkest colors last. Lightly dampen brush so that paint applies most fluidly and evenly. Add more water to brush to fill in hardest to reach areas as desired.



Resources

[Helpful hints on how to draw a mythological creature](#)

[Watch an artist make a clay relief sculpture](#)

[Learn more about DAI featured artwork *Relief with Design of Dragons*](#)

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