

Clay Figure Sculpture

Create a figurative clay sculpture with techniques on-view *Fired Imagination: Ancient Chinese Ceramics from the Nancy and Ed Rosenthal Family Collection.*

ARTventures

... at home!



Artist unidentified (Chinese, Northern Song dynasty, 960–1127), *Court Official*, 11th–12th century, earthenware with slip and pigment. Gift of Nancy and Ed Rosenthal. 2022.34

Materials Needed

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



Optional

- clay modeling tools
- clay stamps
- seashells
- acrylic paint
- paint brushes



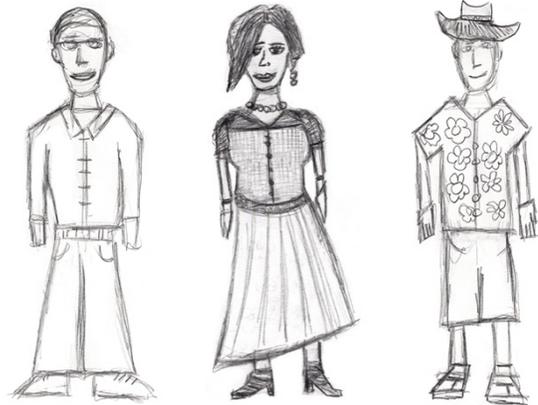
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Step 1

Take a moment to think about different types of clothing that people wear for their profession (ex: judge's robe, astronaut's spacesuit, doctor's lab coat, etc.). Consider a specific person or profession that you would like to make as a figure sculpture (ex: a family member, yourself, astronaut, artist, etc.). Create a list of what that person would wear from head to foot (ex: cowboy hat for head, jeans for legs, etc.).

| PERSON | HEAD | BODY | LEGS | ARMS/HANDS | FEET |
|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| COWBOY | COWBOY HAT | PLAID SHIRT | JEANS | GLOVES | COWBOY BOOTS |
| ASTRONAUT | SPACE HELMET | JET PACK | SPACE PANTS | SPACE GLOVES | MOON BOOTS |
| SELF-TOURIST | GLASSES | BLACK SHIRT | JEANS | WATCH | TENNIS SHOES |



Step 2

Create concept sketches of the figure wearing what you listed (ex: collared shirt and jeans, etc.). Additional details can also be added to the drawing if desired.

Step 3

Roll a handful of clay into a softball-sized sphere. Place sphere on a sheet of wax paper (or smooth wooden board) and flatten the sphere into an extra thick slab about 1" thick.



Step 4

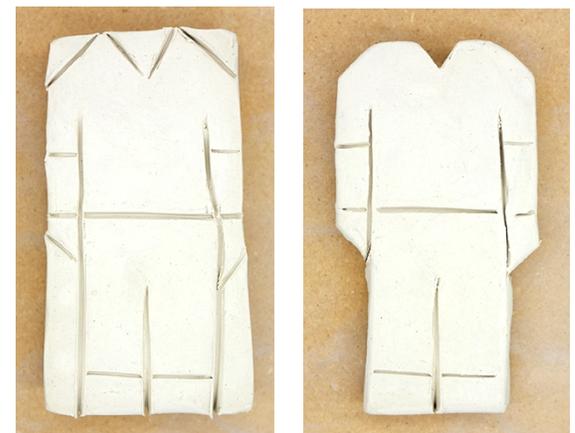
Cut and shape the slab into just the general shape of the figure's body with clothes (ex: rectangle for shirt and jeans or cone-shaped for a gown). Stand it upright after shaping it for stability.



Note: if it is unsteady, remove clay from top until stability is achieved. Extra clay can also be added to thicken sculpture if needed.

Step 5

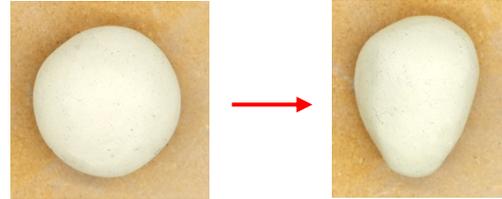
Use a toothpick to draw defining lines (ex: line where pants begin and shirt ends, lines for arms, etc.). Cut away sections of the slab as needed to further refine the shape (ex: round off shoulders). Keep leftover scraps for later.



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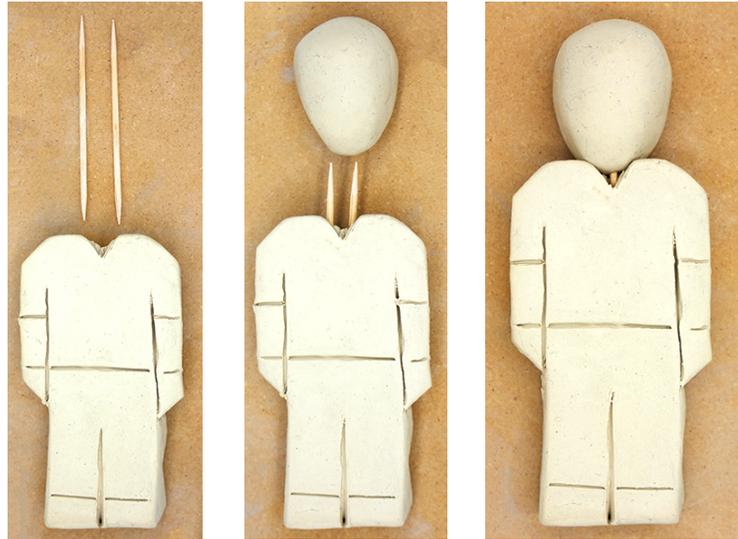
Step 6

Roll a small amount of clay into a ping-pong sized sphere. Form it into the general egg-shape of the head with a pointed bottom.



Step 7

Attach the head to the body by placing two toothpicks halfway into the clay where the neck is. Slide the bottom of the head into the toothpicks until two pieces connect at the neck.



Note: additional accessories can be added to the sculpture if desired using scrap clay (ex: insert toothpicks into top of head to attach a hat). Cut toothpicks down as needed.

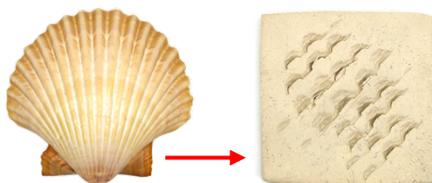
Note: the addition of extra clay may alter the stability of the sculpture. Keep sculpture upright and continue making stability adjustments as needed (ex: reduce head size to remove weight if necessary).

Note: by attaching head with toothpicks instead of attaching clay to clay, you can safely remove for refinement and detail later or as needed. Additional heads can also be created (ex: heads with different facial expressions or accessories) and switched out for even more expressive possibilities of the figure if desired. For extra safety, cut off points of toothpicks to dull ends. For permanent attachment, use super glue with proper supervision.

Step 8

Use fingers, toothpicks, and other clay tools to further refine and carve all clothing details (ex: use toothpick to draw buttons on a shirt).

Helpful hint: use stamps or shells to create repeated fabric patterns.



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Step 9

Use fingers, toothpicks, and clay tools to further refine and carve all facial features (ex: carve away clay from around the nose for it to pop forward, push toothpicks into clay to form eyes, use plastic knife to cut slot for mouth, etc.).



Helpful hint: use a toothpick to draw fine details and textures (ex: hair, eye details, etc.). Use lightly damp sponge to smooth or erase any unwanted marks.



Note: facial features can be painted on clay instead of carved if desired.

Step 10 (optional)

Allow 24 hours for clay to fully harden. Use acrylics to paint and add extra fine detail (ex: paint glasses onto face, designs on shirt, etc.).

Helpful hint: paint in several thin layers for fullest color and dimensional values. Lightly dampen brush before painting to help color soak into harder to reach surfaces.



Resources

[Fired Imagination](#)

[Watch: clay face sculpting](#)

[How to attach clay to clay](#)

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Questions about or ideas for ARTventures? Email edu@daytonart.org

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