

CLAY : MEDIUM & METHODS



Get to know the artist's MEDIUM and METHODS. First, explore the MEDIUM of clay, along with various types of clay-like materials. Learn about various METHODS you can use to create functional and sculptural objects from clay. Learn the steps and different techniques artists use and use them at home.

MEDIUM

CERAMIC CLAY is a naturally occurring material found in many locations where water and earth meet, such as riverbeds and caves. It has been sourced by humans throughout the course of history as a material for making functional objects like vessels as well as decorative objects like sculptures. It can be dried, hardened with the high heat of a kiln, and sealed with glazes to create lasting results that are airtight and leakproof. Clay can also be mimicked with alternative materials to create beautiful decorative objects. Below are some examples of clay and clay-like media that can be used to help you learn more about this medium.

CERAMIC CLAY ■ The traditional material of choice for most ceramic artists, ceramic clay is available through many art supply stores and specialty ceramic suppliers. It can be used to produce both functional pottery and non-functional sculpture and other objects. Finished work is intended for drying and final firing in a kiln. Once kiln-fired, ceramic clay is permanently transformed into a hard, stone-like material and can be painted or glazed. Glazing produces a waterproof result.

AIR DRY CLAY ■ Air dry clay is a popular alternative to ceramic clay that can be dried and hardened at room temperature, without a kiln. It is readily available in craft and art supply stores and is commonly used for decorative objects and sculpture. Finished pieces can be painted and sealed, but they are not waterproof or food safe.

POLYMER CLAY ■ Polymer clay is a smooth, human-made material that can be hardened and cured in a home oven. It is available in a wide range of colors and is a popular material for small sculpture and jewelry items. Finished work is durable and can be sanded, filed, painted, epoxied, or glazed with compatible sealers.

PLASTICENE MODELING CLAY ■ Plasticine modeling clay is an oil-based material that never fully dries or hardens. It can be easily reshaped, making it an excellent material for stop-motion animation and skill-building practice. It is soft, flexible, and reusable, but not intended for permanent artworks.

PAPER PULP CLAY ■ Paper pulp clay is a paper-based clay-like medium that is lightweight, versatile, and similar to papier-mâché. It can be purchased ready-made, but recipes for do-it-yourself options are also available by conducting a simple internet search. The lightweight quality of this medium can be used to create large, delicate forms. It can be dried at room temperature and can be sanded, carved, painted, epoxied, and sealed, but must be treated to be waterproof.

KITCHEN-BASED ALTERNATIVES ■ Recipes for the following clay-like media can be found by conducting a simple internet search and require only common household ingredients.

- **NO-BAKE SALT DOUGH** ■ Salt dough can be made from common kitchen ingredients such as flour, salt, and water. It can be used to make ornaments and other small-scale sculptures but is often fragile and sensitive to moisture. Finished work can be carefully sanded, painted, and sealed. This is not a durable material, but it is an excellent option for skill-building activities.
- **GINGERBREAD** ■ Gingerbread dough and other similar cookie dough varieties can function as an edible modeling material. The raw dough can be rolled, cut, and sculpted like clay and then baked until rigid. Royal icing is often used as an adhesive for attaching and joining, as well as for decoration. Finished work is fragile, sensitive to moisture, and intended for temporary display and consumption.

METHODS

The methods described below are intended for working with traditional ceramic clay but are easily adaptable for alternative clay and clay-like media:



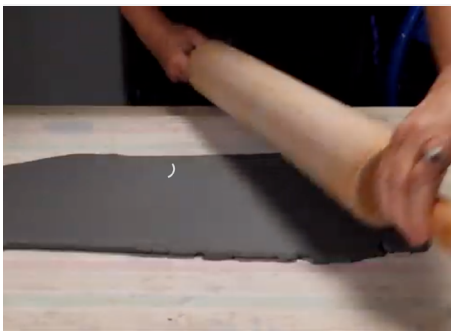
<https://youtu.be/kE49bLY7knM>

PINCH ■ Beginning with a ball of clay, hold the ball in the palm of your hand or on the surface of a table. While supporting the clay with one hand, press your thumb deep into the ball of clay with the other hand, while reaching the fingers of that same hand around the ball to gently pinch. Taking care to not push all the way through the clay with your thumb or fingers, gently turn the ball, with your thumb still in the center of the clay, and pinch again. Repeat this process while slowly and gradually turning the ball of clay in your hand, until you've created a bowl shape.



https://youtu.be/xmRyOqwf_JY?si=6XF8I3jBb4lCY06&t=123

ADDITIVE ■ Knowing how to attach and join clay to clay to create durable bonds is important for any clay artist. For all clay types, scoring the surfaces of where clay will join to clay is usually recommended and done by scratching grooves into these surfaces using either traditional clay tools or plastic kitchen utensils. In the case of non-ceramic clay, refer to manufacturer recommendations or recipe instructions. Some clay types will not require any special preparation. Other clay types will, at minimum, require the moistening of scored joint surfaces with water, prior to attaching. In the case of ceramic clay, the application of slip—water and clay mixed to a thickened liquid consistency—is strongly recommended and often done with brushes or fingertips.



<https://youtu.be/0MImjvy4X2o>

SLAB ■ Begin by flattening a piece of clay onto a piece of canvas cloth by patting or pressing with your hands.

Then, place two sticks or other objects such as wooden rulers of the same thickness on opposite sides of your flattened clay. Use a rolling pin to roll your clay into a slab, keeping the sticks in place as a guide.

Next, cut your slab into a desired shape using traditional clay tools or plastic kitchen utensils. Attach and join clay pieces by using the ADDITIVE method described above.

HELPFUL TIP: If using slab pieces for construction, allow the slab pieces to harden slightly beforehand without drying all the way, until they reach a leather-hard state that can be carved, but has not lightened in color. In between work sessions, use a spray bottle to lightly mist water onto your slab pieces, and wrap those pieces in plastic to prevent premature drying. You may also opt to store in-progress work on boards or trays that can be easily transported between storage areas and work areas.



<https://youtu.be/mKKcuu0apa8>

COIL ■ Begin by rolling a SLAB to create a base for your vessel, using the method described above; cut the slab base to a desired shape.

On a non-absorbent surface like a plastic tray or finished tabletop, use your hands to roll coils that are about the thickness of your thumb.

Attach coils a layer at a time, using the ADDITIVE method described above. Begin your first layer by bending, cutting, and attaching a coil directly onto the perimeter of your base. Bending and cutting, add your next coil layer directly on top of the previous one. Repeat this process until the vessel reaches a desired height.

You may opt to finish your vessel by smoothing the coils on the inside to strengthen the vessel walls. You may also opt to smooth the coils on the outside, or not at all, depending on your design preference.



https://youtu.be/DL-vBmeE_xw?si=Jh2LCKSNPFUAK_e&t=95

REDUCTIVE (RELIEF) ■ Starting with a thick SLAB or other form you would like to decorate, use traditional clay tools or plastic kitchen utensils to carve away and shape the surface of the clay to create a desired image or surface texture.

You may want to first transfer an image from a piece of paper prior to beginning the carving and shaping process. This can be done by laying the paper directly onto the clay and tracing the lines of the desired image onto the clay surface. Remove the paper and use the lines pressed into the clay from the tracing process as a guide for carving.