

Picking clay is first step

By David Messing
special writer

Selfish goals of relief soon preoccupy the mind. Then add the hospital environment and the mental dullness that medication affords. It is no wonder that even the black of the night and the white of the day blend to become a constant shade of gray.

This was my third operation, but not until this last stay did I discover the need to look at the little "A.M." or "P.M." on my watch. I have truly been in a gray haze for two and a half weeks. But a frail little old man who was there before I arrived and will be there long after my brief stay makes me aware of my own relative good health.

I think of him often and feel very fortunate. After back surgery, you lay and stare at the ceiling for hours and begin to look forward to mental things, like getting up to go into the bathroom, which was a definite means of exercise. Real joy was standing while the nurse changed my bed.

Talk about getting off the subject, I am really off, because for the next few weeks we are talking about sculpture. So we'll just jump right in on the subject.

Sculpture is one of my favorite things. I might mention, the best book for the money you could ever find on the beginning of sculpture is the Foster book No. 38 "Sculpture for Beginners" by Henry Lion. This book is almost the exact duplicate of sculpture 0120 at Wayne State University. This book is very clear and many photos help you visualize each step in not only the sculpting but also the casting of the model. The good news is that it is only \$2.95; the bad news is that it is now out of print. So what I have done is call different distributors of Foster books and I am confident I can round

artifacts

up at least a dozen or two of these out of production books. If you are interested just call the Art Store and ask whoever answers (unless it's Adam) to order one for you.

THE FIRST thing you need is clay. But what kind? There are several types of clay that work well for what each are specifically designed to do. By that I mean you have to decide what is the best clay suited for your specific need.

The first clay I will mention comes under many brand names. It is probably the least professional form, yet very popular as a craft clay. This is self-hardening clay probably most commonly known by the brand name Marblex.

I know that with practice this clay can be molded and dried and painted to produce professional results. The reason I know is that one of my customers makes whole families of turtles varying from 1 inch to six inches. . . I must also mention the turtles all wear oversize tennis shoes.

The beauty of this clay is that you need no kiln to fire it, no plaster to mold from it or for casting. You simply shape your model and let it dry. Then you can patina it, paint it, carve it, sand it or simply seal it and set it on the coffee table. The not so beautiful part about this clay is that if you make your sculpture thicker than one quarter of an inch, the model will crack as it dries. It

also cannot be formed around a rigid armature. As the clay dries it shrinks and if the model is supported by a rigid structure it will also cause the self-hardening clay to crack.

The best way to use self-hardening clay is to model your shape over some smooth rigid shape. Then near completion pull out the rigid support and this will create a hollow interior hopefully suitable for drying. The alternative to a supportive shape is to make your sculpture solid clay and hollow out as much clay as possible from underneath it's base. If you sculpture it right and if it dries without cracking, you can still carve in details or sand down rough spots before you paint.

Also if you use tempera, spray or paint a clear protective coating. The finished piece is still relatively brittle and should be sealed so that moisture not seep back into it's matrix.

There is a new form of self-hardening clay called Nevo. This clay is similar to Marblex. However, it can be fired to a relatively hard state in your home oven. I believe you bake it at 350 degrees. I haven't experimented with Nevo for two reasons, one is that I haven't taken the time and the other is the stuff is expensive. A two pound box of Nevo is \$9.50 which is a lot as compared to Marblex which is about \$4.50.

This self-hardening clay has many limitations. It is, however, the only alternative to the professional clay which require plaster molds and plaster or terra cotta casting. Any of the ceramic or terra cotta firing clays require kiln firing.

See you next week and thank you for all the many nice cards and cookies and candy (especially the cookies and candy).

Holiday gift display invites area artists

Artists have an opportunity to market their original works for the holiday season in "holiday gifts," a monthlong display of artworks during the prime selling month of the year.

The display will be at the Ann Arbor Art Association, in the historic Walker Building in the heart of the retail section of downtown Ann Arbor.

Those who want to market their art for the holiday season are invited to send 10 slides of their current work and a \$50 deposit to the Ann Arbor Art Association, 117 W. Liberty, Ann Arbor 48104, before Saturday, Sept. 15. The deposit will be returned if an artist isn't chosen to display.

A LIMITED number of artists in a variety of media are invited to participate. Works in blown glass, clay, fiber, jewelry, print techniques, stained glass and wood are desired. The artist must

be able to commit a large inventory. A commission of 25 percent will be charged by the gallery on all sales.

At the Art Association, artworks are installed in a gallery with large, street-level windows. The gallery has natural finish wood flooring and lofty, 12-foot ceilings.

The Ann Arbor Art Association is a non-profit community art center that supports the visual arts through studio art education for adults and children, a sales/rental gallery, an exhibit gallery, artists' studios and special events.

The association is open to the public from noon to 5 p.m. Mondays and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. Support is received by the Michigan Council for the Arts.

For more information, contact exhibit gallery director Susan Froelich at 954-8004.

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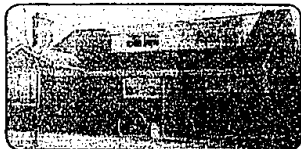
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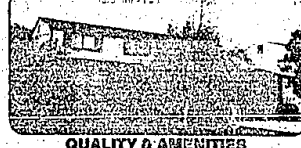
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