

Sculpture starts with sketches, armature

This is another in a series of lessons on art and drawing by special columnist David Mesling. He has taught for eight years and operates an art store, Art Store and More, 18774 Middlebelt, Livonia. Mesling encourages questions and comments from readers. You may write him at his store or c/o Observer Newspapers, 23352 Farmington Road, Farmington MI 48024.

By David Mesling
special writer

Probably the most valuable lesson I learned in college was not taught by any teacher. Nor did I learn it in any text book.

Because of limited finances I was forced to work any job I could find in the summer and budget my savings throughout the school year. So my most valuable lesson was to work hard and spend money wisely.

Here is one of my favorite techniques for finding a free mat board: Sit close to the cutting board and look like you are really working hard on your drawing. Then when one of those "Daddy foots the bill" students cut out a mat, they usually throw away the center of the mat board.

Why, you ask? Because "Daddy foots the bill." Now I do have my pride, you know, so after class I would pick up and leave with the rest of the class. Then I would say, "Oh, hey guys, I'll meet you in the cafeteria, I gotta go back and get something." Then I would roll through the trash barrel and pull out some real "keepers." Same with the sculpture class.

Professional modeling clay is expensive and I only had a little of it in my first class. Now sculpture is a required course and many who take it know they will never do it again. So at the end of the semester they simply throw out their clay.

So on the final day of class there was, for years, this kind of tall guy hanging around every sculpture 0120 class, and minutes after class dismissal he could be seen pulling pounds of clay out of the trash barrel. What a cheap skate. But, hey, I had to be. This kid was putting himself through school.

I once asked a girl in class if she wanted a Coke at the campus canteen. When we got there she ordered, of all things, a cone island, fries and a Coke. Breaking out in a sweat, I only ordered a coke. The cost of that meal was the thing that forced me to think of the "mat board in the trash" scheme.

artifacts

Well, I made it through those days of frugality. I'm glad to say those days are over and I'll not deprive my children the opportunity to learn the same lesson. In other words, "This Daddy won't foot the bill."

THE BEST PART of professional clay is that it last and lasts. As a matter of fact I am still using the same clay that I rescued from the trash 17 years ago.

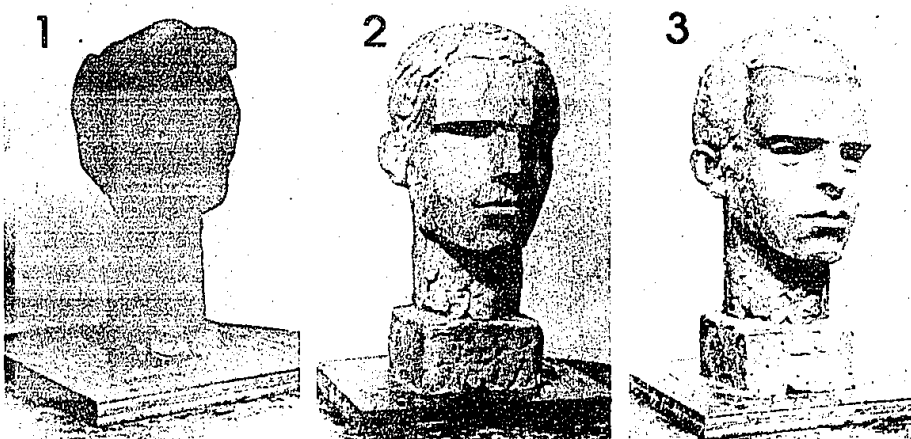
What I call professional clay is more rightly called permanently pliable, or oil base clay. This clay is strictly for modeling and for casting molds. Permanently pliable clay is made of casting wax, Jordan clay, oil and grease.

All of this stuff is heated and mixed and the name of the homemade variety is called "Schmidt wax." The mess, however, from homemade clays makes you feel better about buying premade clay, or swallow your pride and look through the trash barrel in the sculpture room.

Of course there are many brand names for permanently pliable clay. Some are Plastocene, Plastolene and Artoc. Artoc has my vote as it is perfect as soon as you open it up. Other brands, to me, seems rather hard. To soften them up, you must dab motor oil on your fingers and work it well into the matrix of the clay. Oil base or permanently pliable clay does not need to be covered as it will never harden.

There are many tools you can buy for working clay but I recommend you limit yourself to a few wood and wire loop tools. If you only have a few tools, you soon become very familiar with them and will make them do the work you need. Nothing can slow you down more than looking for the perfect shape in a fistful of tools. My favorites are the bass wood tools and wire loop tools. The wood tools, moistened in water or oil can produce a perfectly smooth finish and wire loop tools are irreplaceable for cutting and gouging out clay.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN a sculpture, do a few sketches to develop your mental image into a two-dimensional image. Then you will, from this sketch, create a three-dimensional shape. But before you start flinging clay all over the place, build a decent armature. What's an armature? No big deal really. An armature is merely a rigid shape or inner structure to support the clay. A good armature will help your sculpture stand up to all your posing, patting and pulling. It will also save you money because the more massive



Clay sculptures begin with sketches and then an armature to support the clay. Cut slices of clay and press them over the armature, adding clay where needed to build the shapes required.

the armature you have, the less clay you need to buy.

An armature can be made of wood or pipe wound with rags. You could even wad up this article and tie or tape it to an upright dowel or pipe (really, I wouldn't mind). But best of all is our modern-day marvel: Styrofoam.

When you, for example, do a head

study you can as a base merely use an 8-inch or 10-inch square of three-quarter-inch or inch hole and glue in about a 12-inch dowel rod of the same diameter. Then you can tape chunks of wood or Styrofoam to this dowel rod to help form the large mass of the head and thereby save clay.

The reason I prefer Styrofoam is of-

ten in sculpturing you cut into the clay and hit your armature. With Styrofoam this is of no consequence.

So start covering the armature of whatever simple shape you would like to sculpture. Just cut slices of clay and press them over the armature. Add clay wherever you need to begin building the shapes you require.

Remember at this point you are three-dimensionally sketching and should not mess around with details. Just develop the main shape and the plans of the shape.

Above all be very patient with yourself for a Rod Serling would have said, "You are now entering another dimension."

Holiday gift display invites 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 chil-

dren, 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 994-8004.



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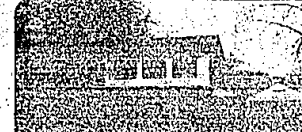
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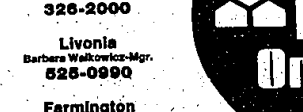


COUNTRY LIVING WITH CITY CONVENIENCE

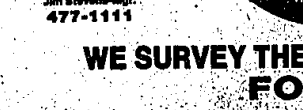
PEACEFUL PART OF TOWN. 4 bedroom, bath and a half, 1 1/2 car garage. Full finished basement. Lots of storage. Tool shed behind garage. Great treed lot. \$54,900. 559-2300.



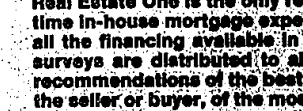
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Mary Ann Grant-Mgr.
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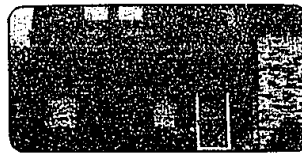
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