

Sculpture



Image Source: <https://www.gilaridgeceramics.com/uploads/4/5/0/3/45034245/newr.jpg?425>

Unit 7

Project Requirements

Create one decorative art ceramic sculpture that is at least 4" in width or height and no larger than 12" in width or height. The project should be fully glazed and complete. If it is meant to be hung for display, there should be a string, wire, hook or other way to display the item hung as part of the piece.

Basic Information

There are many techniques to explore using clay as a medium for sculpture. Clay is an awesome medium because you can pinch, roll, carve, build, and shape it into almost anything. Many of the hand building skills you have learned in the Ceramics Units 1 and 2 can be applied to the Sculpture unit by pinching, coiling, slab building, carving, or adding clay to build up shapes and details.

For a sculpture that is meant to be hung on the wall, be sure to incorporate a way to securely hang your wall hanging sculpture into your design. For hanging, a loop or holes must be incorporated into the clay while it's still soft, and the piece must be properly fired before being hung with wire, cord, or adhesive hangers. Key considerations include using lightweight materials, ensuring pieces are not too thick, and being sure your scoring and slipping is secure when joining clay parts. There are three learning projects to choose from in this unit, but you only need to complete the two of your choice.



Image Source: <https://ceramicartsnetwork.org/daily/article/Clay-on-the-Wall-An-Introduction-to-Hanging-Ceramic-Wall-Pieces>

Types of Sculpture

- **Free-Standing Sculpture:** Also known as "in the round," this form is fully three-dimensional and designed to be viewed from multiple angles. Famous examples include Michelangelo's "David" and Rodin's "The Thinker".
- **Relief Sculpture:** A technique where the sculpture is raised from but still attached to a surface and typically viewed from one angle. Bas-relief (aka low relief) is if it is only slightly raised from the surface and high relief if it's further away and more defined from its background.
- **Bust Sculpture:** depicts the head (and sometimes shoulders and chest) of a person.

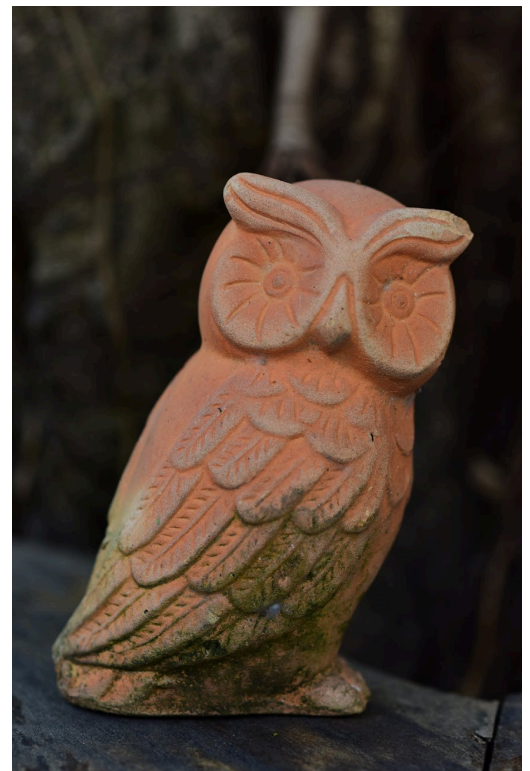
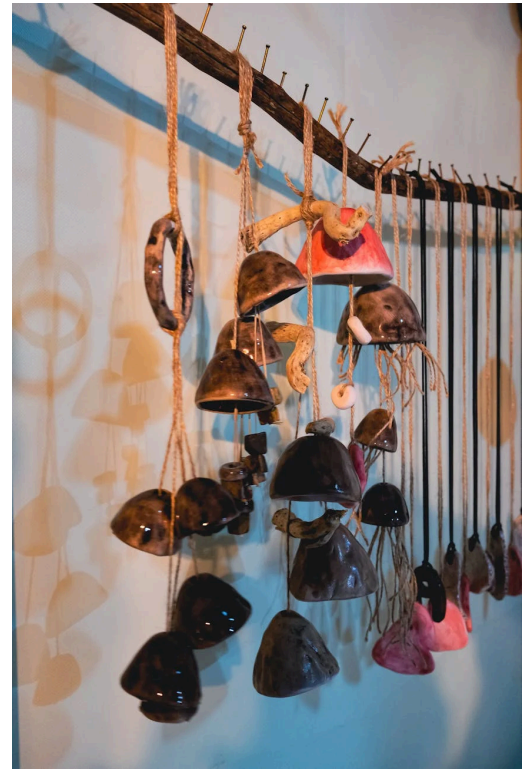
Types of Sculpture

- **Figurine:** A small statue. Figurines with movable parts are more commonly referred to as dolls or mannequins.
- **Monument or Memorial:** A single sculpture or group of sculptures designed to commemorate a significant person or historical event.
- **Kinetic Sculpture:** This type incorporates movement as part of its design, often through mechanical elements or natural forces like wind. Alexander Calder's mobiles are iconic examples of kinetic sculpture.
- **Installation Art:** Installation sculptures involve assembling various elements within a space, creating immersive experiences for viewers. It's often site-specific and designed to interact with its environment, such as Yayoi Kusama's mirror rooms.

Source for content:

<https://www.futurelearn.com/info/courses/introducing-art-history-discovering-public-sculpture/0/steps/97394>

<https://artsology.com/blog/2024/10/sculpture-101-types-techniques-and-the-best-materials-to-use/>



Images Source: Pinterest

Sculpture Technique List

Ceramic Knowledge and Goals Checklist	New skills I have learned	Skills I want to learn or improve
Pinch Building: Great for bowls, faces, creatures, and small sculptures.		
Coil Building: Great for tall sculptures, big shapes or hollow forms.		
Slab Building: Great for boxes, tiles, walls, geometric sculptures.		
Additive Sculpting: Adding clay to create things like noses, ears, scales, armor, muscles, texture.		
Carving (subtractive): Scraping or cutting clay away to create details, great for fur textures, scales, patterns, carving designs, subtracting mass.		
Hollowing: Removing clay from the inside so sculptures don't crack or explode when fired, great for any sculpture thicker than your thumb.		
Slip Casting: Pouring liquid clay (slip) into a plaster mold, great for making multiples, smooth bases, or shapes to carve and alter.		
Texture and Surface Techniques: Includes stamping, pressing objects (leaves, fabric, buttons), carving lines (sgraffito), adding thick slip for raised texture, great for backgrounds, clothing textures, scales, feathers, patterns.		
Press Molding: Pressing clay into a shape or form, great for repeating shapes, quick forms, ornaments, reliefs.		

Unit 7 – Sculpture Animal Project 1

Basic Information

Tools and materials needed:

- Prepared clay (the amount that your sculpture will need)
- Loop tools
- Modeling tools
- Cleaning tools and sponges
- Needle tool for scoring
- Slip/slurry to attach pieces
- Spray bottle, or water in a small cup (for smoothing) and keeping your clay from drying out too quickly
- Rags and plastic for covering and storing
- Canvas, burlap or newspaper material (to keep the area clean)
- Paints/Glazes and brushes for decoration

As your skills improve, sculpture is one area where you can let your imagination go wild.

Steps

A dinosaur (or any animal) is a good subject for this technique.

1. Prepare your workspace by laying down the canvas, burlap, or newspaper material to protect the table. Gather all your materials so they're easy to reach.
2. Sketch out a design of your idea with measurements and any other details noted so you can keep to your plan as much as possible.
3. With a well-prepared (wedged and seasoned) ball of clay, shape it to resemble the body.
4. Turn it upside down and remove the clay from the center with your loop tools.
5. Keep the wall thickness under 1/2" thick. If you have air bubbles in our clay or have the wall too thick, it is likely to explode in the firing process.
6. After body preparation, you can make coils and shape them into tail, neck, head, and feet.
7. Attach them to the body, using the scoring and slurry/slip method. Be sure to press the "add-ons" securely to remove air pockets. If possible, add a thin coil around the attachment area and smooth it out over the seam where the attachment was made to help reinforce the bond of the two parts.



Unit 7 – Sculpture Animal Project 1

Steps Continued

8. Scales and other raised textures can be made by pinching and shaping small balls of clay and attaching them to the dinosaur's back or the body of the animal you are creating in a layered pattern working around the figure and moving all the way down (or up) the body. Remember when attaching any "add-ons", make sure you do not trap air bubbles or you might have a dinosaur or animal without some of its body parts.
7. Inscribed textures can be made with scratching tools or ball tipped tools by pressing into the figure and slightly carving away or pressing into the clay to create low relief textures in the clay.
8. Let your piece dry by placing the mask on a flat surface and loosely covering it with a plastic covering so that your piece does not dry out too quickly or unevenly which can cause cracking (usually 24–48 hours depending on clay thickness).
9. Decorate/Glaze your piece. You need to decide how you want to decorate your piece. You can use any of the glazing methods found in Units 3–6 of this manual or have your leader or instructor help guide you with the decoration of your piece. Once your piece is decorated with the glaze technique of your choice and fired appropriately. Have fun and be creative!



Unit 7 – Sculpture Face Project 2

Basic Information

Tools and materials needed:

- Prepared clay (the amount that your sculpture will need)
- Modeling tools
- Cleaning tools and sponges
- Two strips of wood approximately 1/2" thick and 12"-24" long
- A wooden rolling pin
- Needle tool for scoring
- Slip/slurry to attach pieces
- Plastic knife or clay tools
- Spray bottle, or Water in a small cup (for smoothing) and keeping your clay from drying out too quickly
- Canvas, Burlap or Newspaper material (to keep the area clean)
- Paints/Glazes and brushes for decoration



Steps

1. Prepare your workspace by laying down the canvas, burlap, or newspaper material to protect the table. Gather all your materials so they're easy to reach.
2. Sketch out a design of your idea with measurements and any other details noted so you can keep to your plan as much as possible.
3. Roll out your clay into a slab about ½ inch thick as directed in the drape shape section of Unit 1. Cut out an oval or circle. This will be the base of your mask.
4. Shape the mask using your fingers or a plastic knife to smooth the edges. If you want a face shape, gently pinch the sides to make a chin or cheekbones.
5. Add facial features by rolling out small pieces of clay for the nose, lips, and eyebrows. Attach them by scoring both sides and adding slip. Be sure to blend the edges so they stick on well and the attachment area (seams) looks clean and smooth.
6. Create eye holes using a tool or your finger to make two holes for eyes. You can also add texture for hair or patterns using a scratching tool, a ball tipped tool or even a toothpick.
7. Smooth the surface by dipping your finger in water and gently smoothing out cracks or rough spots. You can also spray your piece with a spray bottle and use your finger or a small sponge to smooth out areas.

Unit 7 – Sculpture Face Project 2

Steps

8. Design a hanging structure if the mask is meant to be a wall hanging. Attach clay loops on the back, which can be used for hanging themselves or to attach wire and hang by the wire after firing is completed.
9. Let your piece dry by placing the mask on a flat surface and loosely covering it with a plastic covering so that your piece does not dry out too quickly or unevenly which can cause cracking (usually 24–48 hours depending on clay thickness).
10. Decorate/Glaze your piece. You need to decide how you want to decorate your piece. You can use any of the glazing methods found in Units 3–6 of this manual or have your leader or instructor help guide you with the decoration of your piece. Once your piece is decorated with the glaze technique of your choice and fired appropriately. Have fun and be creative!



Unit 7 – Sculpture Flower Project 3

Basic Information

Create a basic flower sculpture by using two different colors of clay. For example, you could use a white porcelain and a darker or lighter shade of colored porcelain. You can make colored clay by mixing a pigment into the clay. You can find more detailed instructions on how to do this by speaking to a clay supply store, researching on the internet, and/or talking to your leader or instructor about it. The picture to the right shows Linda Southwell's piece titled Wall Flower After Aeoniums made of black porcelain and porcelain with body stains. This activity is adapted from the article, How to Make a Delicate Flower Sculpture with Colored Porcelain Clay by Linda Southwell, Ceramics Arts Network, April 30, 2025.

Activity and image source:

<https://ceramicartsnetwork.org/daily/article/how-to-make-a-delicate-flower-sculpture-with-colored-porcelain-clay>

Tools and materials needed:

- Prepared clay (the amount that your sculpture will need)
- Pigments to make colored clay or purchase colored clay (optional)
- Modeling tools
- Cleaning tools and sponges
- Needle tool for scoring
- Slip/slurry to attach pieces
- Plastic knife or clay tools
- Spray bottle, or Water in a small cup (for smoothing) and keeping your clay from drying out too quickly
- Canvas, Burlap or Newspaper material (to keep the area clean)
- Paints/Glazes and brushes for decoration



Unit 7 – Sculpture Flower Project 3

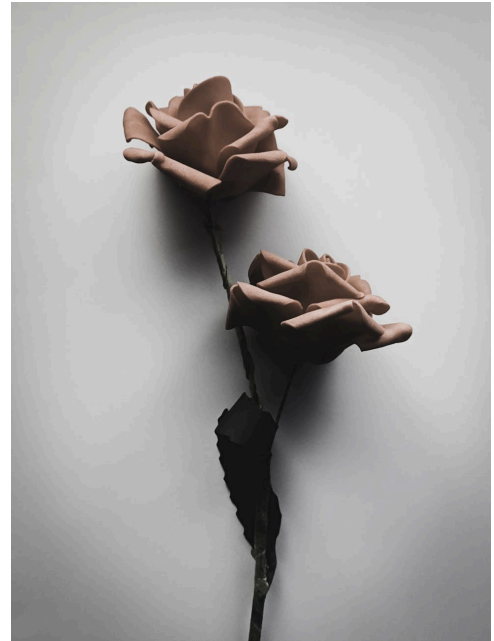
Steps

1. Select suitable clay of two different colors. Tip: you can mix colored clay with white clay to get a more pale color.
2. Prepare your workspace by laying down the canvas, burlap, or newspaper material to protect the table. Gather all your materials so they're easy to reach.
3. Sketch out a design of your idea with measurements and any other details noted so you can keep to your plan as much as possible.
4. Follow the safety rules.
5. Keep accurate notes as you proceed.
6. Join two pinchpots (you can follow the steps in unit 1 to make a pinchpot) by scoring and slipping them together to make a round ball shape that is hollow and lighter weight.
7. On the bottom pinch pot, score two holes for a hanging wire to be threaded through the back of the piece for hanging.
8. On the top pinch pot, score one hole in the center. Do not cover this hole when you start adding petal pieces to the pot around the center hole.
9. Roll coils of different colored clays in increasing thickness. Start with the lighter colored clay as the thickest coils, the medium sized coils should be a bit dark and the thinnest coils be in the darker colored clay.
10. Cut the coils into one half to one inch pieces.
11. Smooth each piece of clay between your fingers and then flatten and shape the piece to resemble a flower petal. Important: Leave one end of each petal thicker to slip into the ball shape.
12. Make about 30 to 60 large petals out of the thicker coil pieces (lightest colored clay).
13. Make about 15 to 30 medium petals out of the middle sized coil pieces.
14. Make about 10 to 20 smaller petals out of the thinner coil pieces (darkest colored clay).
15. Allow the petal pieces to firm up so they hold their shape.
16. Score the thicker end of all the petals with a potter's knife.
17. Score the ball shape around the pierced hole and add slip.
18. Apply slip to the bottom thicker end of the smallest petals and attach around the pierced hole, smoothing into place.
19. Stagger how you attach the next ring of petals so they fill the gap between the two petals on the inside as you add petals.
20. After the second or third ring, switch to the medium petals. Add two or three rings.
21. Before adding the larger outer petals, transfer your work onto a kiln shelf so it is easier to move (if possible). Use a wooden bat or tray if you can't use a kiln shelf.

Unit 7 – Sculpture Flower Project 3

Steps Continued

22. Finally, add the largest and lightest colored petals.
23. Use a soft, wet brush to clean any bits off.
24. Dry the sculpture slowly and under plastic at first to prevent cracking.
25. Once fully dried, fire to the recommended temperature for your clay.
26. Decorate/Glaze your piece. You need to decide how you want to finish your piece. If you're using colored clay as suggested, you may only want to add a clear coat glaze or a finish such as a varnish to your piece to show off the colored clay body. You may also use any of the glazing methods found in Units 3-6 of this manual or have your leader or instructor help guide you with the completion of your piece. Once your piece is decorated with the glaze technique of your choice and fired appropriately. Have fun and be creative!



Unit 7 – Sculpture Exhibit Piece

Basic Information

Now is your chance to let your imagination run wild! It is a good idea to draw some pictures on paper of what you are thinking of sculpting before you start working with the clay. That way, you have a good idea of what you want to make before you get out all your supplies.

Tools and materials needed:

- Prepared clay (the amount that your sculpture will need)
- Modeling tools
- Cleaning tools and sponges
- Needle tool for scoring
- Slip/slurry to attach pieces
- Plastic knife or clay tools
- Spray bottle, or Water in a small cup (for smoothing) and keeping your clay from drying out too quickly
- Canvas, Burlap or Newspaper material (to keep the area clean)
- Paints/Glazes and brushes for decoration

Steps

1. Draw out your idea(s) of what you would like to create as your exhibit sculpture. This is a great time to decide which techniques you want to use to build your sculpture.
2. Decide what glazing techniques you will use (if any).
3. Select suitable clay.
4. Prepare a work area with suitable covering.

5. Follow the safety rules.
6. Keep accurate notes as you proceed.
7. Create your sculpture.
8. Dry the sculpture slowly and under plastic at first to prevent cracking.
9. Once fully dried, bisque fire to the recommended temperature for your clay.
10. Apply glazes, or a finish to your piece.
11. Fire again to the recommended temperature for your glaze.
12. Complete your e-record and expense supplement sheets.
13. Evaluate your project using the Unit 7 guideline for judging.



Guidelines for Judging Your Project

Judging ceramic sculpture involves looking at both artistic quality and technical craftsmanship. Below are the core areas evaluators typically use.

Craftsmanship & Techniques

Judges look for:

- **Structural soundness**
 - No cracks, weak joins, or areas likely to break off.
- **Proper construction methods**
 - Good scoring & slipping, even wall thickness, secure attachments.
- **Surface finishing quality**
 - Smooth where intended, textured where intended, consistent finishing.
- **Control of medium**
 - Clay handled with intention rather than accidental marks.
- **Appropriate firing**
 - Even glaze application (if glazed), no pinholing, crawling, or unintended blistering.

Creativity & Originality

Judges consider:

- Unique concept or approach
- Creative problem-solving
- Personal style or voice emerging
- Innovative use of clay
 - Techniques, textures, mixed media (when allowed), altered forms, etc.

Design & Composition

Judges evaluate:

- Balance & stability (sculpture stands or hangs securely)
- Strong silhouette (visually appealing from all sides)
- Proportion & scale (parts relate well to the whole)
- Unity of parts
 - Elements work together rather than feeling disconnected.
- Visual flow or movement
 - The eye is guided smoothly around the piece.

Expression & Storytelling

Even non-figurative pieces communicate something.

Judges look for:

- Clear idea or theme
- Emotional impact
- Ability to evoke curiosity, feeling, or meaning
- Intentional choices that support the message or mood

Guidelines for Judging Your Project

Surface Treatment

Whether glazed, burnished, slip-decorated, stained, or left unglazed:

Judges evaluate:

- Appropriate surface choice for the form
- Evenness and consistency
- Color use and harmony
- Purposeful texture
 - Not random or distracting.
- Highlights, shadows, depth created through surface design.

Technical Difficulty

Judges consider the level of challenge demonstrated:

- Complexity of the form
- Size of the piece
- Intricacy of details
- Use of advanced methods (hollowing, armatures, multi-part construction)
- Risk level (thin appendages, dynamic poses, alternative firings)
- More complexity doesn't automatically mean a higher score –but clean execution of a difficult technique often earns recognition.

Workmanship Cleanliness

Judges look for:

- No unintended fingerprints
- No gouges or accidental dents
- Clean joins with no visible seams (unless intentional)
- Thoughtful finishing of the bottom or edges

Presentation

How the sculpture is displayed also matters:

- Base or stand is appropriate to the artwork
- Sculpture is stable and not leaning unintentionally
- No distracting materials or props (unless integral to the design)

