

Whimsical Figures

by Dee Schaad

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Dee Schaad was born and raised in Nebraska and has a MFA from the University of Nebraska Lincoln, has taught ceramics at the University of Indianapolis for more than 30 years. He has been chairman of the Department of Art and Design since 1994. His work is included in a number of public and private collections and has exhibited nationally. His writing has appeared in a number of National publications. As a ceramist, his work covers a broad spectrum of ceramic processes. He works in both stoneware and earthenware. His work consists of large and small sculptural pieces and traditional, more functional vessel formatted objects. Dee Schaad was named University of Indianapolis' Teacher of the year for 2006. During the summer of 2007 he was awarded a Creative Renewal Arts Fellowship from the Arts Council of Indianapolis.

Clay figures can be inspired by history, literature or current events. Clay figures use the same skills and techniques used in most clay projects constructed by hand.

Tools & Materials

- AMACO® No. 25 White Earthenware Clay; 2-3 lbs. for each figure
 - AMACO® Velvet Underglazes 8-12 different colors in pints or assorted Velvet Underglazes in sets of 2 oz. jars
 - Extra Jet Black Velvet Underglaze
 - AMACO® LG 10 Clear glaze – 1 or 2 pints
 - Rolling Pins
 - Canvas – for table surface
 - Sharp bladed knife
 - Paper towels
 - Assorted brushes
 - Containers for slip and water
 - Items for texture, such as AMACO® Plaster Texture Molds
 - Toothbrush to scratch surface of clay
 - Garlic press (for making hair)
- Use your own imagination for additional tools

Lesson Plan Goals and Objectives

- Students learn to make whimsical figures using simple materials and common ceramic processes. "Students learn how to create with clay."
- This exercise allows for the introduction of content and the artistic process while either teaching or reinforcing standard practices for producing ceramic art.
- It would be possible to integrate an art lesson with topics being taught in history and literature.
- This lesson incorporates aesthetics, symbolism and personal expression.

This lesson is suitable for 4th grade through adults.

Background and Preparation

Basic instruction on clay processes and some understanding of ceramic terminology would be appropriate before beginning.

If content is receiving some emphasis, preparation is appropriate. If illustration of a work of literature is the goal, some understanding of the work is necessary as well as its place in history and its impact. Figures of Dante or Tom Sawyer would require some knowledge of the period as well as the literature. Videos, prints and photographs would be helpful. For younger artists, keeping it simple may be better and using more appropriate topics will keep their interest.

The teacher could also present a brief overview of the use of humor and cartoon-like illustration in the fine arts showing artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Keith Haring, Stuart Davis and Red Grooms.

Examples in step-out photos were made by Tim Martin, AMACO® Key Account Manager, following the instructions in this lesson plan.

Preparation

Give all students a stiff piece of cardboard or wood to act as their work surface/board. It is helpful to lay a piece of paper towel on top of the cardboard or wood to prevent the clay from sticking.

Create the Head & Neck



1. Roll a piece of AMACO® No. 25 White Art Clay into a small golf ball sized egg shape. This piece will become the head of your figure.



2. Roll out another piece of AMACO® No. 25 clay into a carrot shape that is 1½" – 2" long. This piece will become the neck of your figure. You need to attach the neck to the head at an angle. Think of the head as a clock with the narrow part of the head being the bottom and make a mark at 7 o'clock. Slip and score the marked area along with the fat end of the carrot. Next, attach the neck and head where you have slipped and scored.



3. Now you can create the mouth by making a horizontal cut into the head where you want the mouth. Next, make small vertical cuts along the horizontal cut to create the impression of teeth.



4. Roll two pea-sized pieces of clay into small coils. Lay them along the teeth to create the impression of lips, one above the teeth and one below. Smooth the top lip up into the head and smooth the bottom lip down into the head.



5. With the mouth in place, now add the cheeks and nose. Two small pea-sized balls can be smoothed into each side of the mouth to create easy cheeks. Form another piece of clay into the nose and attach it just above the mouth. A needle tool or pencil works great to help create nostrils.



6. To create eyes, push depressions into the clay where you want your eyes to go. Next, roll out two pea-sized clay balls and two more just slightly smaller. Moisten the sockets then place one of the pea-sized balls into the depression and cut it in half horizontally. Next, push one of the smaller clay balls into that slit creating the eyeball with an upper and lower eyelid. Repeat this for the second eye. Use a pencil, needle tool or any other tools to help define details within the eyes.



7. With the facial features of the head finished, add the ears. Again, start with two pea-sized clay balls and roll them into the shape of an egg. Squeeze them slightly and attach them both on the sides of the head to create the ears. Use a small clay tool to help define the shape and detail of the ear. With the ears attached, wrap the finished head in plastic and set it aside for later.

Create the Body

8. Using a rolling pin, slab roller or any other method, create a slab that is 6" X 10" and approximately 1/4" thick. This slab is going to become your figure's robe. Taper the slab slightly from top to bottom (the neck of the robe is smaller than the bottom).



9. Add texture to the slab using AMACO® slab texture molds and any other object that you find that can create an interesting texture. Now form the slab into the robe by rolling the outer edges underneath itself. Fold the top under itself further than the bottom to create a tapered effect. Once the robe is formed, place it on the work-board to prevent over-handling. Move the robe by handling the board and not the actual textured clay.



10. Next, attach the head created earlier to the robe. Slip and score the back of the robe and the front of neck to create a solid connection. Sometimes a small support made of clay is needed to prevent the head from drooping (place a small piece of paper towel between the head and the support and leave during the firing process). Attaching the head allows the artist more opportunity to create personality by having the figure looking in any particular direction.

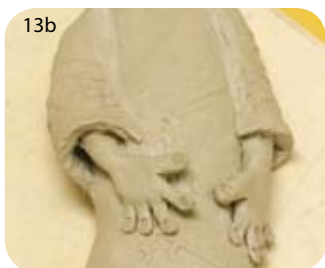
Arms



11. To create the arms and hands, roll out two carrot-shaped pieces of clay approximately 1 1/2" inches long and two clay balls the size of small grapes. Squish the balls flat and attach them to the narrow part of each carrot. With the arms now created, roll out small coils to create each finger. Keep in mind not all fingers are the same size and shape. Attach them to the hand with slipping and scoring. For more detail feel free to add fingernails and jewelry. Set the arms to the side keeping them moist.



12. Create the sleeves out of two small slab pieces of clay approximately 2" x 1 1/2". Attach one end of the sleeve to the robe near the figure's neck and slightly taper it down toward the waist. Repeat for the other sleeve.



13. Slip and score the bottom of the sleeve to the top of the arm and attach.

Feet



14. Creating the feet is much like the hands. Start with two egg-shaped pieces of clay approximately the size of a grape. Squish them flat to create the shape of each foot. Roll out small fat eggs of various sizes and attach them to the feet to create toes.



15. With the feet finished, slip and score the bottom of the robe and the top to the foot and attach.

Finishing Touches

16. Finish the figure by adding details to further the figure's personality. Use a garlic press to create hair, apply small textured shapes to create jewelry or top your figure off with a hat. The possibilities are endless.

Firing

17. Allow the figure to completely dry and bisque fire to witness cone 04.

Decoration

Enhance the texture on the figure by coating the entire figure with a wash solution of 50% AMACO® black underglaze and 50% water. Once applied over the entire figure, use a damp sponge to wipe away the underglaze from the high spots. Color any remaining areas you choose with AMACO® Velvet underglazes and fire again to cone 05. Apply AMACO® LG-10 Clear Gloss if a gloss finish is desired on certain areas.

Glossary

Bisque: Unglazed ceramic after the first firing.

Fire: To heat the clay in a kiln at a very high temperature until it is hard and it becomes ceramic.

Glaze: A special clear or colored liquid mixture applied to ceramic surfaces that become hard and glass-like when fired to the right temperature in a kiln.

Kiln: An oven or furnace that can achieve very high temperatures (2000 to 2300) and is used for firing bisque and glazed ceramic ware.

Sculpture: A three-dimensional work of art that is intended to be viewed from all sides.

Slab: A rolled out piece of clay of a certain thickness.

Slip: Clay that has been mixed with water into a creamy consistency.

Scoring: A method of joining two parts of clay together by scratching the two surfaces and spreading slip between them as "glue".

Underglaze: A special type of color that is put on a ceramic piece before the glaze. It has no flux (glass former) in it so it stays where it is put when fired and is good for detail work. It is used for painting and decorating.

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