

TEACHERS: RESOURCES AND DEMONSTRATIONS

Creating a Portrait Bust in Clay

Introduction and materials

Hi my name is Suzanne Valois. I work at the National Gallery of Canada. Today I am going to be taking you through the process of making a bust, step by step. We are going to be using clay. There are many different varieties of clay. They also come in different colours. We have grey, terra cotta colour, and for our purposes today we are going to be using this terra cotta clay. It is air-dry clay. You don't have to fire it, and once it is exposed to air, it will start drying. Depending on the size of your work, the piece will be dry within a week or two weeks. So clay is sold in 25-pound bags.

You need to take a good look at your clay before starting and make sure that it has a good soft malleable consistency to it. When you purchase it, you can break a piece off and you can do this. Just give it a shot and see whether it is nice and soft like this. Also, check to see if there is any mould growing on the side of it. It is not good for you to inhale. You probably want to take a scraping tool and just scrape off any of that mould and toss it out. Now your clay is ready to be worked with.

Let's take a look at some of the tools we will be using. There are a really wide variety of tools here. You don't need to have this many to get started. I will go through some of them here. These are wire cutters, which consist of a piece of wire held together by two bits of wood that's used for slicing the clay. Here you have rakes and they are for taking off thin and thick layers from the clay. Here we have a tool that has a nice flat surface that is used for creating nice straight planes. A calliper is used for taking measurements one against the other. You have a brush and a sponge that is used in the final stages, when you are trying to smooth the sculpture out. Here we have the cleaning tools, a softer brush for the wooden tools and a metal brush for any kind of metal tools. Here we have a block of wood, which is used for pounding the clay together. It is a bit easier on the hands than using your own hands. Here we have a whole variety of hard woods that keep their shape even when exposed to water. There are all kinds of different bits and tips on them for getting into a variety of areas and I usually work down to smaller ones so that I can get into tiny areas. Here we have a spray bottle of water used to keep the clay moist as you work. We have an armature here. This is the simplest kind of armature that you can create. The base is about 10 inches by 10 inches by about ½ inch thick; with a dowel that attaches to the centre. Make sure that it is placed tightly. There is also a stand here. Remember we are working in 3-D, so we want to be able to look all around the sculpture and this will help us do just that.

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Anatomy

It's important to remember that the head is a mass. It's a volume. In a two-dimensional work, you have height and a length, but with a three-dimensional work, you have height, length and depth. It helps to think about the different planes of the face. You have a front plane, two side planes, a back plane and a bottom plane. Within these planes you are going to set the elements. The front plane, for instance, contains the eyes, nose and mouth and the side plane: the ears.

Another thing to keep in mind are the proportions. Proportions are what makes us all individuals and give us our characteristics. The proportion for an average head is about 7.5 inches high (19cm). Then, if I just turn sideways, the depth is about 7.5 inches (19cm). These two measurements are equal. The front of the face is about 4.5 inches wide or about half of the length. The cheekbones are always the widest area. The eye sockets are like squares. They are cavities and the eyeballs fit within them. The nose fits about half way on the full-length measurement along here. On the side plane, we have the ear canal which is going to follow a line that will be drawn from the brow to the bottom of the nose and with that arrangement the ear canal falls about half way over here. From the ear, you have a vertical line that cuts towards the jaw. These are very basic guidelines to follow and, again, we will be exploring them as we work through our sculpture.

Applying clay to the armature and working out the structure of the face

We are now going to start modeling our sculpture. Think in terms of broad geometrical shapes, using a cylinder for the neck and a rectangle for the head. Use your wood block to go around and gently tap your clay into place. If there are any gaps in the clay, use extra bits of clay to fill them in. Once you have a solid mass, determine the location of the chin. Take your tool and cut away into the face on the front plane about an inch and then down towards the base. You want to do the same towards the back on the back plane, just cut away a little bit to establish the neck edge. Once you are satisfied with the cut for the neck, it is time to determine where we are going to place the features on the front plane of the face. The features are divided into three, so divide the face plane in thirds. One, two, three. The first line you are going to draw is for the eyebrows. It needs to be parallel to the top of the head. The second line you are going to draw is a vertical in the centre of that line down that ends in a V shape. And in the middle of the last third, that is where the mouth line is going to fall, so draw that line across. On the side plane, mark the placement of the ear by locating the point for the ear canal. To do this, extend the brow line across the side plane and do the same thing for the bottom of the nose line, extend them across as well, keeping it parallel along the top. The ear canal

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will fall in the centre of these two lines. Mark that with an X. From this line drop another vertical line about a ½ inch down, make a sharp 45 degree angle towards the jaw. This will establish the jaw-line. You can start by taking out some of the clay below the jaw line. To create the eye sockets, place your thumbs about 1 inch apart, just under the brow line and push in about ½ an inch. Pull your thumbs apart dragging them to the sides around the side of the face. To round out the eye sockets push up on the top area to form the eyebrows a little bit.

Eyes, nose and cheeks

To form the nose: first carve out a little notch here. It will separate the nose area from the forehead. Then roll out a cylindrical shape that you are going to position in the notch of the nose, work it in there at about a 45 degree angle away from the face plane. Work it in then follow the guidelines you set for the nose. Finish off with a triangular shape at the bottom of it. If necessary, you can add bits of clay to build the nose up. We are going to be further shaping it later.

For the cheekbone hold your modeling tool at a slight angle and from the outside eye socket you are going to make a slice towards the chin. Repeat that on the other side, from the outside socket at a 45-degree angle, and slice towards the chin. To define the cheekbones even more start at the outside edge of the nose under the eye socket and again at about a 45-degree angle, maybe a little bit less than that, cut across to the outside edge. Draw a line from the centre to the eye socket on the front face plane, straight down. This will establish the chin area and approximately where the eyes will be placed in the head as well.

Side of face, forehead and ears

To establish the side plane that extends from the ear canal down to the jaw. You are going to do the same thing at a 45-degree angle, cut it away towards the jaw.

Check the front of the sculpture for symmetry verify whether your cheekbones are tapering down to about the same angle, if not make some readjustments. You can redefine this cheekbone plane as well and then a second cut will be made here on the forehead. Again you are going to go at the outside socket at a 45-degree angle up towards the top of the head.

To affix the ears, you probably need to wet your clay down at this point because you have been working at it a while now. You want to create two half-moon shapes for the ears and they are going to be big enough to fit in between these two lines: the eyebrow line and the nose line. You are going

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to place it above. You are going to centre it over the ear canal, make some cross hatching marks to the clay so it will affix itself. Now then, push down, work it into the ear, cut off any extra bits that you don't need. At about two thirds of the way down, make a slice at an angle that is going to make your ear lobe and then your ear canal falls about there.

Repeat the same thing on the other side to create the lower side planes at the back of the skull. You are going to cut the clay away from behind the ears, toward the back of the head on both sides. From the back of the ear to the back of the skull, all this is going to be removed.

Base of the skull, mouth, chin and details on the eyes

Create a line on the back of the skull that is parallel with the line of the ears --- draw it across making sure it is parallel with the tip of the head and then using one of your raking tools, you can remove a lot of that out.

So I have been working at shaping the head, getting rid of these square edges at the top, by following these edges at the top. Following these edges at the back of the neck to the skull, making sure my planes were well established, taking some measurements to see if I am still working within the same guidelines.

Right now we are going to concentrate on working the mouth area. To do that you need to build up the area from the nose to the chin. So with pieces of clay, you are going to make a semi-circular shape here. You will want to wet it down if it is getting dry. Crosshatch it and start adding bits of clay. Starting from this chin line here, if you don't have your line redraw it. Find the centre where the eye is going to be placed and then draw it down. This establishes the width of the chin, and where you should be drawing up. Once you have the semi circular shape here, you want to start marking and shaping the lips. Again that centre line is going to be between this third so once you have established that line the corners are going to extend to these lines that you have drawn from the middle of the eye approximately. Everybody is a little bit different but this is a guideline to follow. To draw the upper lip, take your tool and literally draw it across. Put your tool inside that line and pull it up to that line you have created. Your mouth will start to emerge or the upper lip will. Again re-draw the line, pulling it up to that top marking and from the lower lip about an inch down from the top lip you can mark it again and then take out the clay from beneath the lips. Now you are going to curve around. This line doesn't stay flat on the face it goes around to the side panels so that it is going to join over to the side

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from the corners. You can start cutting away and from the bottom lip another thing you have to create is the philtrum, which is the hollowed out shape between the upper lip and the nose. You can notch that out and soften it out later.

So I am just wetting the clay down a tiny bit and smoothing out some of the planes to see if I am pleased with where the piece is going.

For the eye, what I do is create a ball which I press into the centre, it is a little bit large, you want to press it flat a tiny bit. Check the side; make sure it is not out further than the cheekbones. Then place two smaller balls on either side of that eye, we are going to be smoothing that down into a whole shape, again the eye has a bit of an angle to it. You can create a top lid by rolling out a cylinder and you want to lay it down from the inside corner of the eye socket to the outside corner. For the lower lid, make it a little bit smaller and narrower and this is going to be worked in by my tools. I'm going to link the eyelid up underneath here. I am going to do the same for the bottom lid. You can use your tool for shaping the inside corners getting a nice curve out of it.

Top of the head and hair

Again the planes that we have established are guidelines. Normally you will be working with a live model, which directs your view, your placement of things, your proportions. We are going to start adding some clay to the upper part here. So again, start adding bits of clay to round out the top part of the skull, if you need to, go back to your wood block to tap it in place.

So take a fair bit of clay, determine your forehead line and start moulding that into the head. Start moulding that into the sides and then it comes down along to form the side burns. If you are creating a male figure, there are different ways you can add texture to the hair, it usually comes in the temples a little bit, back up again and across the forehead. You can sweep it up. Use your tools to create a texture and smooth it out after that and the same thing applies to the back of the head around the ears this would all be covered and it is all the way around coming down to the back of the hair line. Make sure it's blended in with the rest of the clay.

Conclusion

So that was a very brief description of building up a clay bust, step by step. Don't forget that this is air-hardening clay and when it dries it will dry to a slightly lighter colour. By rounding out the features and pushing your sculpture a little bit further you may end up with something like this. This is very

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much a classical look. To animate the figure you may want to play with the tilt of the neck. You can add some expression to the piece and you can colour it. And if you want to have some fun, you can also add some clothes. I hope you have enjoyed the process.

Thank you.