

CREATE A  
**Polymer Clay**  
IMPRESSION



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LAURYNE





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# Foreword

In 1989 I was exposed to the wonderful material that is the subject of this book. It was a little strange; a plastic clay, colorful with brilliant hues, soft and malleable, and hardened in an oven! Wow! It could be used in so many different ways and I had never even heard of it before. Where on earth had this wonderful stuff been hiding? At the time, I was interested in the beautiful old glass millefiori beads from Venice and was passionately in love with ancient Roman glass mosaic pieces that were on display in Washington, D.C.'s Freer Gallery of Art. As I was being shown how to make my own millefiori designs by Kathleen Dustin, in a fateful class at The Torpedo Factory Art Center, the connections were exploding in my head. I don't think I slept for several days after that class, I was so excited! The 60 or so of us that attended that incredible class lost our composure that day.

It was the beginning of a movement. Through an accident of fate, I was asked to write a book about the material, the first book that pulled together all the diverse information on the clay that came to be called polymer clay.

In 1991, *The New Clay* was published. It was a wonderful collaboration of all the artists across the country that were familiar with and developing new ways to work with the clay. A little knowledge can have a powerful effect. The simple act of compiling the information in one place fanned the flames of curiosity and soon artists all across the country were creating and teaching with polymer clay. A national guild was founded in Washington, D.C. In the 10 or so years that have passed, the movement has grown exponentially and continues to grow today.

The clay is fun, easy to work with, uses only simple tools or none at all, and is a chameleon for new techniques and those borrowed from other art and craft disciplines. This is one of the few really new materials to arise in a long, long time. Born in the 20th century with few pre-conceived traditions associated with it, the clay is wide open to all uses and techniques.

Everyone seems to be seduced by it and I am sure you will be, too. Enjoy exploring this wonderful material with Sarajane's book. It is the latest of a growing number of exciting books that are teaching and spreading the word about polymer clay and the polymer clay movement that is taking the country by storm.

May your own personal muses be unleashed by your experiences with this magical stuff. Enjoy!

Yours, Nan Roche



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# Create a Polymer Clay Impression

**F**unk and Wagnall's *Standard Dictionary* defines "poly-" as "many; several; much" and it certainly holds true in the case of polymer clays. The chemical components themselves are formed of long chains of molecules, and there is also a mental and social aspect that shows this definition to be true—not only are artists able to string together their learned abilities and use them with polymer clay, but the artists themselves are often found linking together to form a stronger bond. Over and over I have heard people say how very supportive and sharing polymer clay artists are, and the common fund of knowledge, tips and techniques develops and grows in unexpected ways due to this flow of ideas and observed results.

Synchronicity happens when many people "discover" the same ideas at the same time. I personally know many people who recognized independently that pasta rollers would make great polymer clay tools. What is even more interesting to me is the way three artists can take the very same information and follow three distinctly different trails of discovery, finding ways to realize their artistic vision that are deeply personal and unique. This is true even while they work with the same medium!

Polymer clays are one of the most exciting and versatile developments in the world of art supplies. When used according to the package directions, these clays, (which are sold under brand names like FIMO™, Cernit™, Sculpey™ and Premo™, to name just a few) are easy and safe to use at home. Unlike earth clays, polymer clays do not mix with water and so do not dry out, though they will degrade over time without proper storage. They don't require expensive tools and equipment, such as a kiln. They are available widely through craft stores, art supply stores, fabric supply stores, and through mail order. Many companies now sell supplies via the Internet. Never before has such a wide variety of high-quality art material been available to so many people, with such a wide variety of backgrounds and talents in making and decorating. Is it any wonder there is a giant explosion of interest right now in learning creative skills and using the ones already known in new ways?

Polymer clay is an artist's dream medium in that it becomes whatever you want it to be, much like the "Shmoo" creatures in "Li'l Abner." You can model it, sculpt it, cast it, cane it, paint it, animate it, and I'm told that some people can even throw it on a wheel.







You can wear it or decorate with it. It can be made to look like bone or semi-precious stone, coral or shell, like leather or lace, and all sorts of fabric in between. It can mimic wood or metal, and can be used to model the features of a realistic sleeping baby, or a warrior elf.

You can play with it. You can work with it. You can make stuff with it.

Everyone—regardless of skill level—can have a fun and gratifying experience with polymer clay. Of course, there are a few things you can do to ensure this—buy fresh clay, and store it properly. Condition even soft clays thoroughly and bake all clays according to directions. Most breakage is the direct result of incomplete conditioning or under baking.

After more than a decade of seeing what all I can do with polymer clays, I still find new things all the time. Polymer clay artists share information quite freely, and there are many fine teachers available both in person, and through books and videos, magazines, Internet news-groups and Web sites. I've learned a great deal by looking at what other professional artists can do with polymer clay, and by looking at what my students and my children do with it. Most of what I've learned has come from exposure to the stuff itself, as we all really learn best by doing.

Some of the most valuable lessons have come from things I attempted that didn't come off the way I planned. (Some think of these as mistakes, but they really aren't.) Another way to learn more is to just "mess around" and have a play day, where no production work or planned projects are allowed. If you have trouble allowing yourself unstructured creative time, invite a few friends. This makes it "official" and helps get the time censors we all face to approve some time to experiment and push the boundaries of what we



already know. In most cases, hobby/craft knowledge (and tools) from one area such as quilting, rubber stamping, miniature or model making can be cross-utilized with polymer clays.

One of the most seductive aspects of polymer clay work is that the wide array of colors already available can be mixed to any desired shade, tone, or hue. Fabrics can be matched for use in decorative items for the home or for wearable art. With textural and color coordination, you can make just about anything "go with" or match within your chosen design plan. It is a pure delight for the costume designer or doll maker, as accessories such as crowns, scepters, period buttons and even masks or armor pieces are easily fabricated.



*pearlescent palette**cool palette**warm palette**neutral palette*

find a happier medium. When mixing old, hard clay and new, soft clay, a messy sort of shredding takes place. It eventually will all work together, but this can also be used to create very interesting effects as the clay is put through the pasta roller. Sometimes I even do it on purpose.

Use a thin sheet of old clay (leave some out for a week or two uncovered if you don't have any already) and place it on top of a thicker slab of softer clay in a different color, then roll it down to pancake thickness and put it through the pasta roller on the widest setting. As it starts to break up, fold the clay tongue so that an interesting-looking patch is on top, with the rest of the clay padding the underneath. Then put it through the rollers again. It will start to look like watercolor splotches, stone, even tortoiseshell, if done with the right colors. If the sheet is getting too thin, pad it with more clay, or just keep folding what you have, keeping the part you like on top.

This is one of the effects we have stumbled onto by accident, and an example of what we call the "I meant to do that" school of artistic techniques. Many times what seems to be a mistake or problem is actually the start of some new effect. People will ask, "How did you DO that?" and we smile and say, "Oh, it's a special way...we meant to do that!"

For those with wrist or hand strength problems, or who are working with large quantities, a pasta roller can be used to knead the clay. This has the added advantage of rolling the clay into even sheets of adjustable thickness. Color blending is also made faster and easier by using a roller, or is accomplished by hand by rolling and kneading two or more colors of clay until they blend. Partial blending is used for a marbled effect, but individual colors should be conditioned first, as continued kneading will result in a solid color or shade that differs from the original colors.

To condition, slice and chop clay by hand or with a processor. Roll the clay out into a snake shape, then ball it up, and roll it out again. Flatten it into a pancake about 1/2-inch thick or less, and put it through the pasta roller at the widest setting (a #1 on many machines, though some work backwards and start at #7). This produces a sheet or "tongue" of clay. Fold it in half lengthwise, and place the fold side down in the roller or along either side but not on top—the fold on top traps air bubbles. Repeat the process. Do this several times. If the clay crumbles, roll it back into a snake and start over. Some very hard clays benefit from a little pre-warming, and some people wear blocks of clay in their pockets, stuffed in their bras or shirts, or they sit on them. Do be careful to remove all