

Title: Creature Sculptures

Ages/Prerequisite: This is a good beginning lesson to introduce clay.

Element: Form

Prints: Prints of Oaxacan Alebrijes. Alebrijes are carved wooden figures created by Oaxacan artisans. Prints by Pedro Linares and Manuel Jimenez.

Concepts: This is a good starting lesson for clay because it involves creating an animal sculpture out of one lump of clay without attaching separate pieces of clay to it. All the parts of the animal are pulled or pinched out of the one clay ball.

Materials: Clay, plaster bat or wooden base with canvas cover.

Lesson:

“Let’s first look at some prints of sculptures by an Oaxacan artists called “Alebrijes.” These are brightly colored sculptures of fantastical creatures. The first alebrijes, along with use of the term, originated with an artist named Pedro Linares. In the 1930s, Linares fell very ill and while he was in bed, unconscious, Linares dreamt of a strange place resembling a forest. There, he saw trees, animals, rocks, clouds that suddenly turned into something strange, some kind of animals, but, unknown animals. He saw a donkey with butterfly wings, a rooster with bull horns, a lion with an eagle head, and all of them were shouting one word, ‘Alebrijes.’ Upon recovery, he began recreating the creatures he saw out of cardboard and paper mache and he called them Alebrijes. Soon other artist in Oaxaca were creating similar animals out of copal wood.”

Show Prints



“Notice how each creature has a slight turn or position that makes them look like they are moving. For example a turn of the head or a leg going up to scratch an ear. This adds more interest to your creature. We are going to make our creatures out of clay.”

Give each child a small lump of clay not more than one pound. Talk to the children about only touching the clay when you have an intention or reason. If you are just manipulating the clay without intention you are just drying out the clay and making it less useable.

“To begin making your animal, form the clay into a ball or sphere shape. Then using your fingernail, indent a cross or a plus sign on one side of the ball. This divides the bottom of your ball into four sections.”



“Each of these sections can be pinched, pulled and shaped into legs for your animal.”



“After you begin to pinch and pull out the legs, you can also begin to pinch and pull out the head and tail of your animal. This is a gradual process, consisting of repeatedly reshaping. Try to start out with gentle pulls but making the head large enough for the body of the creature. If you pull too hard you can end up breaking off a piece. Gently push this clay back into the lump and start over.” You want to make sure you are not creating any air pockets in your sculpture as hot air needs to expand and this will cause your piece to explode in the kiln.”



“After you have the main shape you can start to add details. You can pull out horns, a mouth, hooves, antennae etc. Do this without adding clay on but by pulling or pushing the clay.”



“Let the clay ‘bone’ dry and bisque fire. After you can glaze the piece or use acrylic paints. See the how to glaze section for tips on glazing.”



The glazing really makes the sculptures come alive, be sure to talk about patterns as a way to increase interest.

