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~~ Disclaimer - Even though I've been working with polymer clay since 1989, I usually only make jewelry or animals. This is my first venture into making a human, and this is only my second try. I hope to get better as time goes on. If anyone reads this who is good at human sculpture or an expert in it or whatever, please keep this in mind if you email me about this. ~~
All photos will be at end of document.

Clay Figure Basics For Making Your Own Mr. Peepers Sculpture [Based on a Chris Kattan character on Saturday Night Live]

Materials:

Wire for armature, 20 gauge or 22 gauge [20 will be stronger; 26 was used here, just to give me a guide for the arms/legs]

Foil, small amount

Polymer clay for body - Super Sculpey is used here as it gives a better flesh color than any others I've seen except for Cernit

Polymer clay in colors [red, white, and black are used here, Sculpey III]

Hand lotion

Various tools [needle tool, pasta machine, various clay tools, old dental tools, etc.]

Work surface, protected

Baking surface

Old powder eye shadow and blush [optional; for use on the face before curing]

Paint brushes [very thin one for lining the eyes, larger one for glazing if preferred]

Acrylic paint

Water soluble glaze, either high gloss or matte OR you can buff the piece to a high shine if you want to do that instead

Old kitchen towel

Paper towels

Home oven, not convection oven, not microwave, not toaster oven. There is a lot of discussion about each of these, and all agree that a microwave is a no-no. Toaster ovens can burst into flames at any time, so I don't trust them. Convection ovens get a film inside when you use polymer clay, and I don't trust that. A regular home oven works fine. Mine is electric, and that is what I base the below instructions on. I've been using my home oven since 1989 and so far, I don't have any extra limbs or eyes or brain tumors. You use what you feel the most comfortable using. Freedom of choice is a wonderful thing.

Good lighting - I use a table top Ott lamp [can be found at some office stores for around \$60], a floor Ott lamp [can be found in some office stores for around \$100], and a clamp-on magnifying lamp [has a round fluorescent bulb, with a magnifying glass in the center, \$100-\$180 at a home office store]. Ott lamps are best, as they mimic natural sunlight, giving you the best way to see colors etc. when working. But there is no way I'd give up my magnifier lamp, as I use it for fine painting of details, like eyes.

Curing means baking in your home oven when talking about polymer clay. For all instructions below, you will place your item on a baking surface in a cold oven, set the temp, and cure [bake] for times stated. Always use hand lotion all over your hands before you start working with this clay. It will help the residue wash off easier when you are done for the day or need to change clay colors. Cover the raw clay with a paper towel every time you leave it for more than 5 minutes to protect it from dust. If large strands of dust should get on the clay, remove carefully with a sharp object and smooth the clay over till the gouged area is covered. When changing from a deep color like black or red, it might help to rub the clay

residue off your hands with the old kitchen towel before washing your hands with soap and water. My work surface is a turntable with a 12x12" ceramic tile on top, and my curing [baking] surfaces are ceramic tiles in various sizes. You can buy these individually at any home improvement store. A list of books that might be useful will be at the end of this page.

One thing you will want to do is sign your work. I use a small stamp with my initials and the year; you can use what you want.

Tools [photos below]

These are just a few of the tools I use: a needle tool [old dental tool]; a tool with different size balls on each end [sold with the embossing supplies in a craft store, and useful for making eyes in small animals]; clay cleaning tool [I think you can get these in craft stores in the clay area]; an old dental tool that I use all the time; a strong pair of needle nose pliers with serrated tips for grasping; a small pair of wire cutters; a small spool of 20 gauge wire [can be found in the flower supplies section of a craft store]; and a tissue blade used for slicing/cutting. It's very sharp, and can be dangerous if a child gets hold of it [it's called a tissue blade cuz it's the same type of blade used by surgeons to remove tissue samples for examination]. You can now buy these in the clay section of any craft store [Donna Kato sells several different types]. I buy the large spools of 20 gauge wire that can be found in any home improvement store. They cost \$3-\$5 a spool. I also use a pasta machine that is dedicated to polymer clay. NEVER use anything on the clay that you will be using to prepare food or drink/eat from. The clay is non toxic, but you don't want to be harmed by anything in case the manufacturer is wrong.

Since it can be carved so easily after curing, just using a knife or fork on it could carve into the surface and you'd end up with bits of clay in your food. And NEVER use this clay to cover anything that will heat up, like a candle holder that has a flame close to the edge, or a lamp cover. Excess heating [and curing] emits fumes that can cause illness if breathed for any length of time. The polymer clay that comes in colors can be mistaken for candy or frosting, so it's best to keep that in mind when making anything for anyone who has small children. Other tools: needle tool; color shaper taper point soft; color shaper taper point firm; dental tool with angled flat disk; dental tool round paddle end; fur texturing tool; clay cleaner pointed end. You can find the dental tools at most flea markets or ask your dentist for old ones and be sure to explain why you want them. The taper points I got at an art store. The clay cleaner tool I got many many years ago when I was taking ceramics at a ceramics shop. I think you can now buy them in the clay area in craft stores. You will get to make your own tool now: Use a bit of clay rolled into a snake about a half inch in diameter. Cut a length about 2" long, and round one end of it.

Put other piece of snake away. Cut about a dozen short lengths of 20 gauge wire [maybe about 1" long each] and holding them all together, push the rounded end of the clay section onto the ends of the wire, till there is only about 1/4" of the wire sticking out. Make sure the wire ends sticking out are as even as possible. Cure for 30 minutes at 250 degrees, and allow to cool. This tool is used to imitate fur, short grass, or hair.

Mr. Peepers Sculpture Step 1 - Basic Body - photos are below

This is the basic version of how to make the body for this sculpture. The first step is to decide on what size you want. I like to make mine about 7" tall. I twist wire together to make the torso, leaving a wire loop for the head. I leave long 'tails' for the legs, and twist wire around the torso wire for the arms. I cover the torso area with some foil till I feel it's just smaller than what I want the finished piece to be. I then cover this with flesh tone polymer clay [Super Sculpey is my choice for this sculpture] just making the torso area, and suggesting the head area. I 'add' muscle definition, bone suggestion, etc., with the sides of my fingers by pressing them into the clay. I rub out as many of my fingerprints as I can, then place the torso on a baking surface and cure for 15 minutes at 200 degrees. After letting it rest in the oven for a half hour, I remove it to air cool.

Mr. Peepers Sculpture - Adding the legs. Photos are below.

For a standing sculpture, I leave the wire in place, but for these, I cut it off before adding the clay. It made it a lot easier to work with. After conditioning the clay [and Super Sculpey doesn't need much conditioning], roll out a fairly large snake about the size you want the leg to be. You can make the feet at the same time [I do] either by hand or using one of the great push molds on the market [heads and hands are also available]. What may work for you, as it does for me, is to let the leg [snake] rest overnight before adding it to the body. It won't be as soft to work with when you do this. Make sure you blend the raw clay

into the cured clay well so that it wont be visible after curing. You can add a dab of glue from a glue stick to help the clay stick to the cured clay a little easier. Bend the leg at the knee and position it where you want it. If you position the legs at slightly different heights, it will have a more natural look. Push the side of your finger into the clay to make the muscles and bones in the leg, shin and knee. Fold the arm wires over the edge of a heat proof cup or mug to keep the sculpture from 'falling' in the heat or settling back off it's feet. If you find that your sculpture has settled or moved during curing, you can use a sharp bladed craft knife and carefully slice or carve away the areas that might have bulged or changed from the curing. You don't want to take off too much, so be sure to do this in small slices.

Mr. Peepers Sculpture - Adding the shorts - photos are below.

After conditioning the clay, put it thru the pasta machine set at the second smallest setting to get a really thin sheet [not all pasta machines have the same numbering system]. You may have to run the clay thru several times to get a smooth clay sheet with no bubbles. Use your tissue blade to cut out a square large enough to cover the back lower torso of the figure, and lay this over the figure, from the waist down. Cut slices as large as you need to cover the image area, then cut away carefully the excess overlapped clay and blend what is left together. Cut small triangle shapes from the red clay and press onto the leg edges, blending them into the shorts [makes a ragged edge to the shorts legs]. Mark the waistline in the red clay to show the waistband. Smooth out as many fingerprints as you can. If you happen to get bubbles forming under the red clay, you can either slice carefully with the tissue blade and then smooth the bubble out, blending the cut back together, or rubbing a glue stick over the area to have the raw clay added can help them from forming. Some of the outfits that Mr. Peepers wears appear to have orange dots on them, so I used gold interference powder and made random dots on the clay. Run gold clay thru the pasta machine at the setting that will give you the thickest sheet till soft, then fold over to make a thicker sheet. Press together, and using an alphabet cookie cutter set, cut out a large P. Place the figure on top of this, using a dab from a glue stick if you want on the bottom of the figure's feet, and cure for 15 minutes at 200 degrees. If you find that your figure is stuck to your baking surface, sliding the edge of your tissue blade under the clay can loosen it enough to move it. If you find that the figure didn't stick to the P, you can use Zap a Gap to make it stick. You can do it now or after the entire sculpture is done. Curing the piece with glue in place wont harm anything. If you've used any interference powder, avoid touching it as it will rub off easily. Putting a layer of glaze over the item after it's completed will seal the powder.

Mr. Peepers Sculpture - Adding the arms – photos are below

The arms are don't pretty much like the legs: roll our a snake of clay, make the hands, attach to the body and blend the raw clay into the torso. I wanted Mr. Peepers to be holding an apple, so I had to shape the hand to mimic this. In order to get the arm to stay up and not fall during curing, I inserted a short length of 20 gauge wire into the forearm thru the elbow then covered the hole with a small bit of clay. Cure for the same length of time as stated previously.

Mr. Peepers Sculpture - adding the head. Photos are below

Print out about a dozen photos of this character so you will have as many views as possible to look at. Set them in front of you and refer to them often. Using a glue stick, apply a layer of glue to the inside 'dish' shape of the head. Add an egg shaped ball of clay to this dish, and blend into the cured clay. Work with the clay to get the shape of the jaw line. Add more clay if you need it. Your collection of tools will come in handy now. Shape the mouth, paying attention to the photos you have collected. Add clay if needed for the lips and cheeks. For the nose, you can either add a wedge shape of clay or cut into the face slightly and shape the nose that way. Be sure to put in nostrils with your tools. Using the edge of your thumb, make a suggestion of where the eyes should go on the face by indenting slightly. You can open up the eye and add white clay for the eye ball, or you can 'draw' the eye on with your needle tool. Make sure you add an eyelid and eyebrows, adding clay if needed. Add more clay where ever it's needed and blend well. This character has large ears, and to make these you pinch off some clay and shape them into a comma shape, blending into the sides of the heads. Make the ear indentations with your tools. Smooth the face as much as possible and make sure the head is as round as you can make it. Add more clay to the back of the head if needed. Inspect the head from all angles. If it looks ok to you, cure and cool.

Mr. Peepers Sculpture Instructions - Finishing - photos are below

Condition a small amount of black clay for the hair, and flatten with your fingers. Fit over the back of the head, making sure the hair at the neckline looks real. Fit around the ears carefully, and put the black clay up over the top of the head, adding small amounts of black till the head is covered, then start building it up as you see it in the photos you've printed. If you didn't get the head round enough before the last curing, you can make up for it now with the black clay. Put on sideburns etc. till it looks like the photos. Using the tool you made with the clay and wire, mark the hair by pushing in slightly and pulling it out at a slight angle. Pat down carefully any pieces that pop up. Use your cleaning tool or other tools to press all around the edge of the hair to help press it into the head and blend it into the head to make it more lifelike. Lightly lay the tools you use across the hair to help give it a 'direction'. Place into a cold oven and cure for 15 minutes, remove and let cool. If you haven't already added the straps, do it now by cutting strips from the red clay, laying one end of each strap to the back of the shorts at the waistband, press lightly and use the round end of a brush to indent to help it stick to the shorts. Adding a dab from a glue stick first might help. Cross over the back and bring over the shoulders. Attach the front of the straps the same way as you did to the back. Make the apple by rolling out a ball of white clay. Condition a small amount of red clay and flatten as thin as you can make it between your fingers. Place around the white clay and smooth the clay till the ends meet. Carefully cut away as much of the red clay that is not needed. Lightly shape into an apple shape. Dust with red interference powder or red powdered makeup like blush. Using several different shades will give it a more realistic color. [note: interference powder will not stick to interference powders, so if you use several shades of interference powders, apply it with a hit-and-miss attitude] Using your tissue blade, carefully cut out a wedge shape from the apple trying not to alter the shape of the apple in the process. Set the slice and the apple on your baking surface along with the sculpture if it needs one more baking and bake all at 250 degrees and bake for 30 minutes. Let cool in oven, preferably overnight. This will make the finished objects harder. When cooled completely, use acrylic paints to pain the eyes and a very fine liner brush to put on the eyelashes and eyebrows. Paint any areas of the eyes that need it: white eyeballs, blue/black for the iris, a white dot on the iris for reflection. Add a layer of gloss over the sculpture when the paint is dry. Depending on how thick your gloss is, you can put up to 3 coats on your sculpture before it looks 'plastic'. You should only use water based products. Using these glazes will not make the item water proof. Keep all times made out of polymer clay out of direct sunlight and clean only with a soft dry cloth. Keep away from food items and children who might mistake clay items as candy.

Books that would be good to get if you are serious about doing this type of thing:

- The New Clay by Nan Roche
- How to Make Clay Characters by Maureen Carlson
- Making Miniature Dolls with Polymer Clay by Sue Heaser
- The Polymer Clay Techniques Book by Sue Heaser

There are several great push molds by Judi Maddigan that you can use with sculptures. They can be found in most craft stores in the clay area, or you can check out the links area on my web site for some sites that might carry these molds or have links to the sites that sell them. They are made by Amaco. If the links aren't on my site yet, email me and I'll look for them for you.

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