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Institut culturel Avataq  
Avataq Cultural Institute

## Visual Arts - Secondary

### Steps

#### - Sculpting Tools and Materials

##### **The moulding plaster**

It is important to choose a proper moulding plaster, and not just any industrial plaster. The moulding plaster becomes white when drying and its smooth texture, along with its non granular consistency, make it easy to sculpt and allow a better finishing touch. You can find this kind of plaster at any good school supplier for visual arts material.



##### **A container for the plaster**

Any dedicated bucket (because once used for the plaster, it will be difficult to completely wash the container) will do. Choose, preferably, a flexible receptacle which will facilitate the cleaning process. This bucket will serve for the preparation of the liquid plaster.



### **An empty 2 litre milk or juice container**

The empty container will serve as a mould for the liquid plaster. If, as shown on the picture below, your container is equipped with a plastic cap, make sure that the cap is on. (Otherwise, the excess plaster might pour through the opening.)



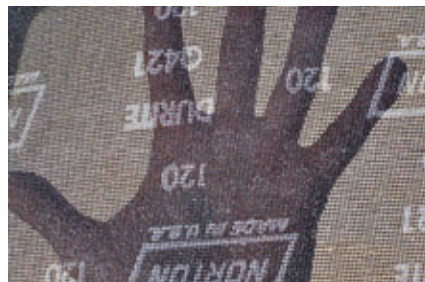
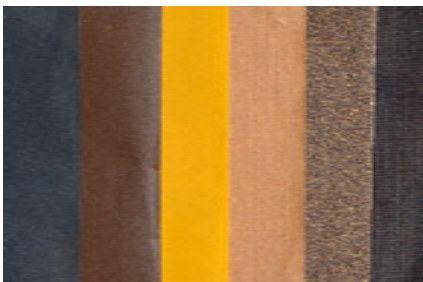
### **Sculpting tools**

A wide selection of sculpting tools can be found on the market. These tools are generally meant for stone carving or woodcarving. Plaster being extremely abrasive for metals, it is not advised to use these sculpting tools if you wish them to remain sharp. Instead, we recommend the use of simple and inexpensive kitchen knives.



### **Sand paper**

Make sure you have papers of different roughness, about 100 to 400. You can also find a "mosquito screen" paper specially designed for plaster, which is ideal.



### Acrylic paint, gouache or shoe polish, and paintbrushes

Whether you use acrylic paint, gouache or shoe polish, the results will vary. Employ what you have at hand and do some tests first on another piece of plaster, to avoid ruining your sculpture with bad surprises!



### Nails

These nails will be used to engrave the plaster



### - Preparing the plaster block

**Bucket cleaning: (If your bucket is already clean, skip to the next step)**

1. Apply pressure on the sides of the bucket to deform it a little. The old plaster dried inside will then crack. Peel it off. Hit the bottom of the pail vigorously so that the maximum amount of dried plaster will fall off.



2. With a little wood stick, scrape the interior of the bucket in order to remove the remaining dried plaster. Finalize the cleaning by hitting the bottom of the pail with the stick to make sure that not a single particle still adheres to the sides.



**Preparation of the plaster:**

\* Since plaster is quite abrasive and can make the hands dry, we recommend that people with sensitive skin should wear rubber gloves during the process.

1. Pour some water into the bucket. The quantity required equals, approximately, two third of the plaster needed. Therefore, for a 2 litre container, you will need about 1.33 litres of water.





2. Gently handle the plaster to air it and to get rid of all lumps. Once your plaster is nicely refined, you will need a small receptacle to take it. A medium depth lid will be perfect. (Avoid breathing the plaster dust; wear a mask if necessary.)

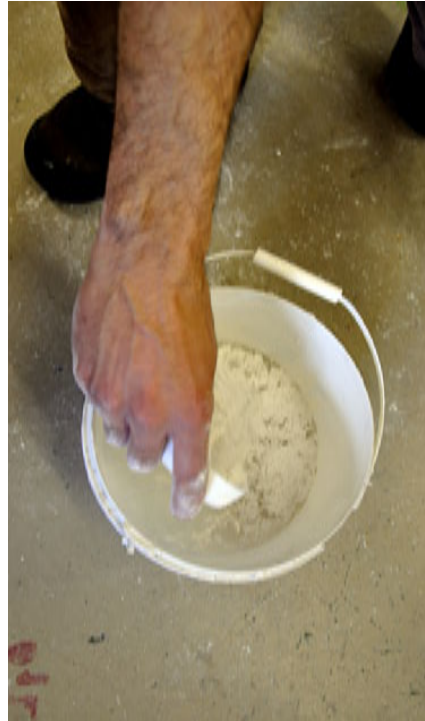


3. Bring the plaster close to the bucket and spread it in a circle at the surface of the water. Do not stir; simply let the plaster lay under water without interfering. Reproduce this step until saturation. At saturation, the plaster will remain on the surface and will stop being absorbed by the water. Wait a minute or two, until the plaster at the surface becomes wet.

1.



2.



3.



4.



Photo 3 – Attained saturation

Photo 4 – The plaster is now wet and ready for stirring.

4. Mix the plaster and the water well with your hand (use a glove if necessary). Make sure your mix is perfectly consistent by crushing the lumps. To finish, tap on the sides of the bucket to allow all air bubbles to resurface. Ideally, the finished product should be completely uniform, homogeneous and without air bubbles.



5. Pour the plaster in your container.



6. Throwing away the remaining plaster:

**It is imperative that you never throw away the extra plaster in a sink, because such misfortune could lead to the replacement of the whole piping system! Always throw away the excess in a garbage can. In addition, if your hands are covered with plaster, we strongly recommend that you rinse them first in water that you can throw away outside or that you dry them well before washing them in a sink. (If you did not wear any gloves, you will appreciate the application of some hand cream afterwards!)**

You can let some plaster dry in the bucket without fearing for your pail. Eventually, you will just have to refer to the section "Bucket Cleaning" to clean it properly.



### - Preparing for the sculpting of the plaster block

In order to start the removal from the mould and the sculpture itself, the plaster will need to harden, which will take a few hours. If you remove the block from the mould the day following the casting (and if your plaster mix was adequate) you should not experience any problem.

Once the plaster is hardened, it is important to start sculpting it quickly (and not to wait several days) or it might dry completely and then will require constant moistening to remain malleable.

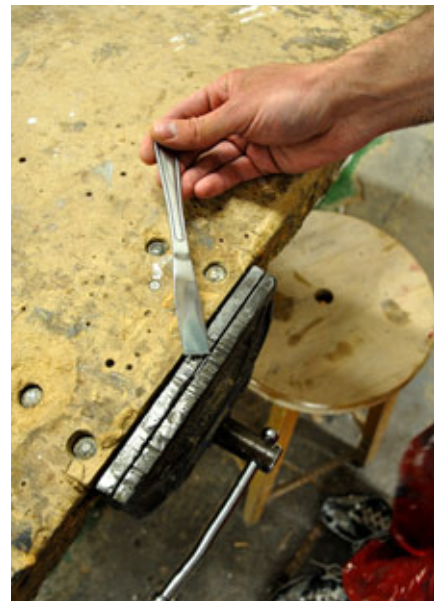
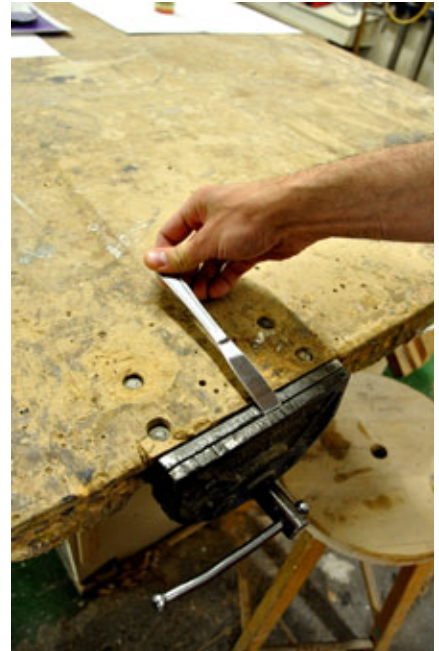
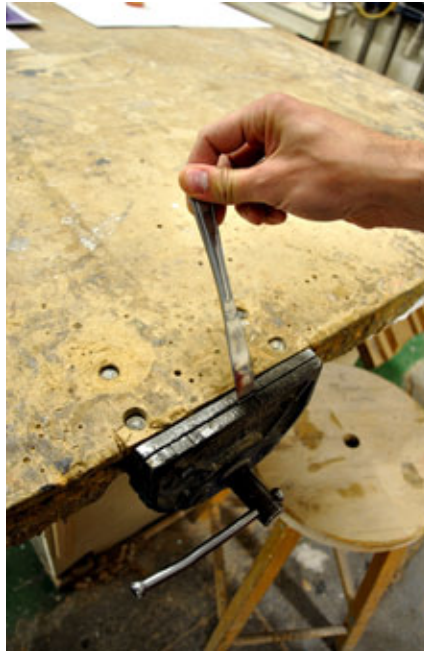
Do not be surprised if, when hardening, the plaster becomes hot. This is a normal and temporary chemical reaction.

1. Remove the block from the mould by tearing apart the cardboard box (the 2 litre container). Your plaster block is now ready!





2. Preparing sculpting knives: 1. Firmly stick a butter knife in a vice. 2. Bend the knife forward and backward until it breaks. This operation is harmless.





3. Sharpen the blade of the knife using a grinder or a sharpening stone. The use of a grinder may be dangerous for a beginner. It is not advised to let the students handle it.



You now have all your tools and materials ready to begin your sculpture!



## - Sculpture of the plaster block

**A demonstration of the safe handling of knives is essential and a prerequisite to any sculpture activity. Furthermore, the teacher ought to supervise the use of the knives throughout the whole activity. You should always have a first aid kit at your disposal. The risks are real, but can be greatly minimized with a prudent approach.**

Experienced sculptors usually like to let themselves be guided by the natural movements resulting from the textures of the stone or the wood they carve. Plaster, by its uniform nature, is less inspiring and, therefore, it is preferable to sketch your idea before beginning the sculpture. \*At anytime, if your plaster becomes dry and impossible to carve, wet it.

A good way to begin your sculpture is to engrave in two dimensions on the surfaces of the block first and then deepen the forms gradually. Always start by working on the planes and the rough forms of your model. The details will come later.



Once the general form is achieved, it is time to linger over finer planes and details.





An efficient technique to soften the forms is to use the “unsharp” side of your knife.



THERE! Now, you just need to let your piece dry completely before moving on to the stage of the finishing touch.

Be patient and plan alternative work for your students because, sometimes, the drying can take several days...

## - The Finishing Touch

Ideally, you have to wait for the plaster to be completely dry before sanding it.

Cut a little piece of a 120 or a 150 sand paper sheet and soften the plaster by doing smooth circular moves. When the plaster is not totally dry, the sand paper has a tendency to become obstructed. If this happens, you can gently hit the paper with your finger to unblock it. If by chance you have at hand a “mosquito screen” paper 120 for plaster, the sanding and the unblocking will be really easy.







Finalize the sanding with a finer paper: between 200 and 400.



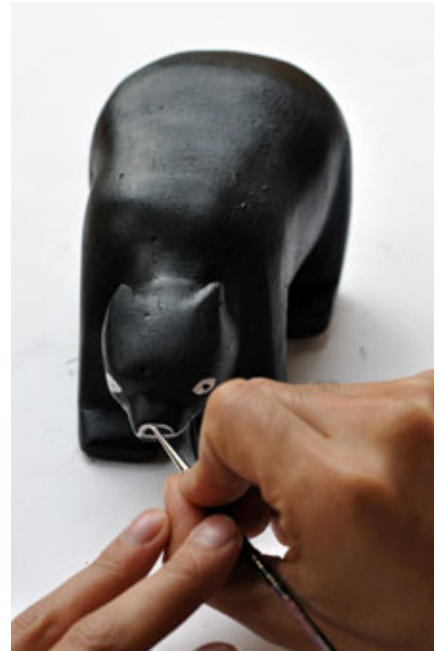
**Applying the colour**

For this example, we used acrylic paint, but do not hesitate to experiment with other paints or dyes. You can apply the colour using a rag or a paintbrush.

In all cases, clean the sculpture well with a dry cloth, a feather duster or a clean and dry paintbrush before beginning the painting. If you skip the cleaning, the paint will adhere to the thin layer of plaster dust on the surface rather than on the sculpture itself. You will probably need to apply more than one coating of paint, intermittently, in order to achieve the expected result.



Once the bottom coating is completely dry and even, you can start adding details by engraving with a nail or by painting with a fine paintbrush. Be careful with the acrylic paint; if you try to engrave it, it will probably peel off.



Finally, you only have to varnish your sculpture if you want to. Otherwise, your sculpture is completed! Congratulations! You have just finished your Inuit sculpture!

