

At-Home Art Activity

Create a Community Sculpture!



VIRGINIA MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

A sculpture is a three-dimensional art object. It can be free-standing or carved into a wall and can be found inside or outside. Sculptures can be created using different materials like wood, glass, clay, metal, found objects and more. For example, in the Songye culture of Africa, artists create Community Power Figures, or sculptures, called Nkisi, out of a variety of materials.



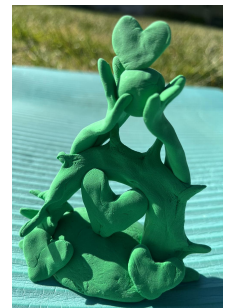
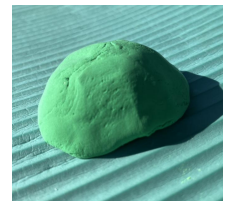
Now it's your turn! Use air dry clay to create a sculpture inspired by or for your own community.

Materials:

- Air Dry Clay
- Optional: salt dough recipe (*see the bottom of this document for the recipe*)

Instructions:

1. Start by creating the base for your sculpture; it can be any shape. The base will be the structure that your sculpture stands on, so make sure it is stable and strong enough to support your work of art.
2. Use the remainder of the clay to create your own sculpture. Think about what people, symbols, values, or objects are meaningful for your community.
3. Let your sculpture dry and then place it out for all to see!



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Community Nkisi (Power Figure) (Primary Title)

19th - 20th Century

Songye, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Miombe Village

Sculpture - Wood, horn, iron, copper, glass beads. String, raffia cloth, Bishima (magical formula made of natural substances)

African Gallery East, 89.27

The Songye create large power figures to harness beneficial powers of great ancestors. Magical ingredients, or bishimba, are packed into cavities—in this case, in the abdomen, hips, shoulders, and where the horn fits into the head. These medicines, which give the statue its potency to interact with the spirits, are inserted by a diviner.

Attachments to the figure define the status of a revered ancestor. The skirt and necklaces indicate chiefly status and the iron blade in the forehead denotes metalsmithing, agriculture, and prosperity, while the copper and brass on the face and neck indicate the power to direct lightning against enemies. Finally, the animal horn projecting from the top of the head refers to the wisdom of the elders.



Booker T. Washington (Primary Title) Bust (Object Name)

Richmond Barthe, American
Painted Plaster
American Galleries

This striking bust of Virginia-born Booker T. Washington, famed political leader, educator, and proponent of black self-help, belongs to Barthe's 1928 portrait series of eminent African Americans. (Other works in the series depict artist Henry Ossawa Tanner and historical political leader Toussaint L'Ouverture.) The Washington bust, as well as others, may have been featured in an exhibition of "American Negro Artists," sponsored by the Harmon Foundation. Established in 1922, the foundation was the first to support and promote the work of African American artists through juried exhibitions.



Rumors of War (Primary Title)

Kehind Wiley, American
Bronze, stone (pedestal)
Mary Morton Parsons Plaza, 2019.39



Commemorative Portrait Head

19th-20th century
Kongo Culture (Democratic Republic of Congo, Rep. of Congo, Angola, Gabon)
Unknown Artist
Wood, kaolin, paint, traces of fiber
2006.9

Funerary customs, which are richly developed in the Kongo culture, include processions to visit the family of the deceased, community mourning rituals, and eulogies in honor of the deceased. Death represents the individual's separation from the world of the living to cross the divide, where even greater status and power is achieved by taking one's place with the ancestors. In Kongo practice, an effigy figure is only made to honor an individual of high status. This memorial portrait head, captivating in its serenity and poise, was likely affixed to an effigy torso by means of the holes at the base of the neck. The spirit-world context is indicated by the closed eyes and the ashen color of the expressionless face, which has been whitened with kaolin (fine white clay). A large, rectangular opening cut into the back of the hollow head makes it a container, probably for a relic, but possibly for a medicine bundle. A cover to protect the contents was secured by lacing a cord through the holes around the opening.



Royal Stool

Warua Master, active late 19th century - early 20th century (artist)
Late 19th – Early 20th Century
Luba Culture (Democratic Republic of Congo)
Wood, glass beads, string
2006.18

The female form is the primary subject matter of Luba art, serving as a metaphor for civilization and refinement. This is a stool made for a Luba King. The seats of leaders are important symbols of power and authority. Rank and title are often indicated by the type of seat you have, ranging from a simple woven mat to a beautifully sculpted wooden throne such as this. This stool wasn't actually made for sitting – it was more of a symbol – a receptacle for the king's spirit. It would only be used during special ceremonies like a coronation or perhaps at a funeral. Otherwise, it would be wrapped in cloth and guarded when not in use.

Instead of using air dry clay, make your own salt dough using the recipe below!

Ingredients/Supplies:

- 1 cup flour
- 1/2 cup salt
- 2 tsp. cream of tartar
- 1 tbsp. Oil
- 1 cup water
- stove-top safe pot
- Stove-top safe spoon
- stove-top burner
- parchment or baking paper

Allergen Options: *Substitute flour for gluten free or other alternative flours to accommodate allergies. Add additional oil or water if the dough is too sticky.*

Salt Dough Instructions:

1. Combine flour, salt, cream of tartar, oil, and water into a large pot.
2. Place the pot on a stovetop burner and using medium heat constantly stir all ingredients until the dough begins pulling away from the sides of the pot (approximately 2-5 minutes).
3. Once a dough ball has formed, remove dough from the pot and place it on parchment paper. Let cool until safe to touch.
4. Knead your dough until the texture matches that of a play-dough consistency (about 1-2 minutes)