

NO. 1 FOR DIGITAL ARTISTS
ImagineFX
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EASY

illustrator

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HOW TO... SCULPT WITH CONFIDENCE

Be inspired by The Shiflett Brothers, as they craft a whimsical figure out of clay **Page 106**

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SCULPT A WHIMSICAL FANTASY FIGURE

Sculptors and brothers BRANDON and JARROD SHIFLETT unveil their process for crafting a character who's influenced by classic fantasy art... and Dr. Seuss

We're creating a character sculpture, in clay, and our goal is to open up a little window on to our sculpting process. Although we're sculptors, we're inspired by many old school painters and illustrators such as Frank Frazetta, Jeffrey Catherine Jones, and Moebius. Indeed, Moebius' influence will play a big role in this piece.

We don't do any sketches or drawings beforehand. Instead, we largely make up our characters as we move along, having only a rough idea of what we're going to create at the start of the sculpting. And our rough idea this time is a guy wearing artificial wings and a dragon costume, so that he can sneak into dragons' nests with the goal of stealing some eggs. We suspect this job might have a high turnover rate, as dragons are known to be very fond of their eggs! We'd like to achieve a little whimsy in this piece, with maybe even a touch of a Dr. Seuss vibe.

We're creating this sculpture in Aves Apoxie

Sculpt, which is a two-part modelling compound that cures when mixed together into a very dense and high-grade sculpting material. It hardens between two and three hours after you've mixed it together. It can be carved, drilled and sanded, and it stays crisp.

BEFORE WE BEGIN...

For a sculpt like this, one needs an armature, because this clay won't stand on its own. In fact, one needs a wire basically anywhere there's a piece of clay sticking out: fingers, horns, wings and so on. The silver wire is an aluminium alloy armature wire, which can be bought in varying gauges to fit whatever size piece you're creating. We use lots of floral wire – the tiny, white, cloth-covered wire – to bind the armature wire together.

Once our armature is built, the real work begins, blocking our character in clay, like the first broad strokes of a painting, and then getting down to the details, using smaller and smaller pieces of clay. We'll be paying close attention to this guy's face, because we'd like for him to come across as a sympathetic character.

In the end, we'll apply a paint job with acrylic paints that'll separate the organic parts from the sculpted hardware parts more succinctly. This character is going to end up being about 13 inches tall, and we're calling the piece Dragon Division: Egg Appropriations Unit. It has a nice ring to it...

The Shiflett Brothers, Brandon and Jarrod, have been sculpting comic book and fantasy characters for 25 years.

www.shiflettbrothers.com

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ARTIST INSIGHT

TOP HEAVY

We like big muscles, too, but make sure the upper body doesn't get so bulky that the armature you've allotted for the character's legs now appears too short. (We caution from lots and lots of experience!)



1 Armature and materials

The armature is built and all the wires are superglued into place. You can see many of the tools we like to use, including wire clippers, razor knives, handmade sanding pads and files. We use a tool called a burnisher, which is used for leather-making, for most of the real sculpting.

2 Blocking out the character

Gloves are necessary when mixing the Apoxie Sculpt. We're going to slowly build him up and these pieces are only structural; the true surface is still a ways off. His human head will go just under the dragon head, which at this point looks way too much like a chicken head!

SCULPT TIP

EYE SOCKETS

Many beginners place their figure's eyes on the face, without realising how deeply eye sockets retreat into a human head.

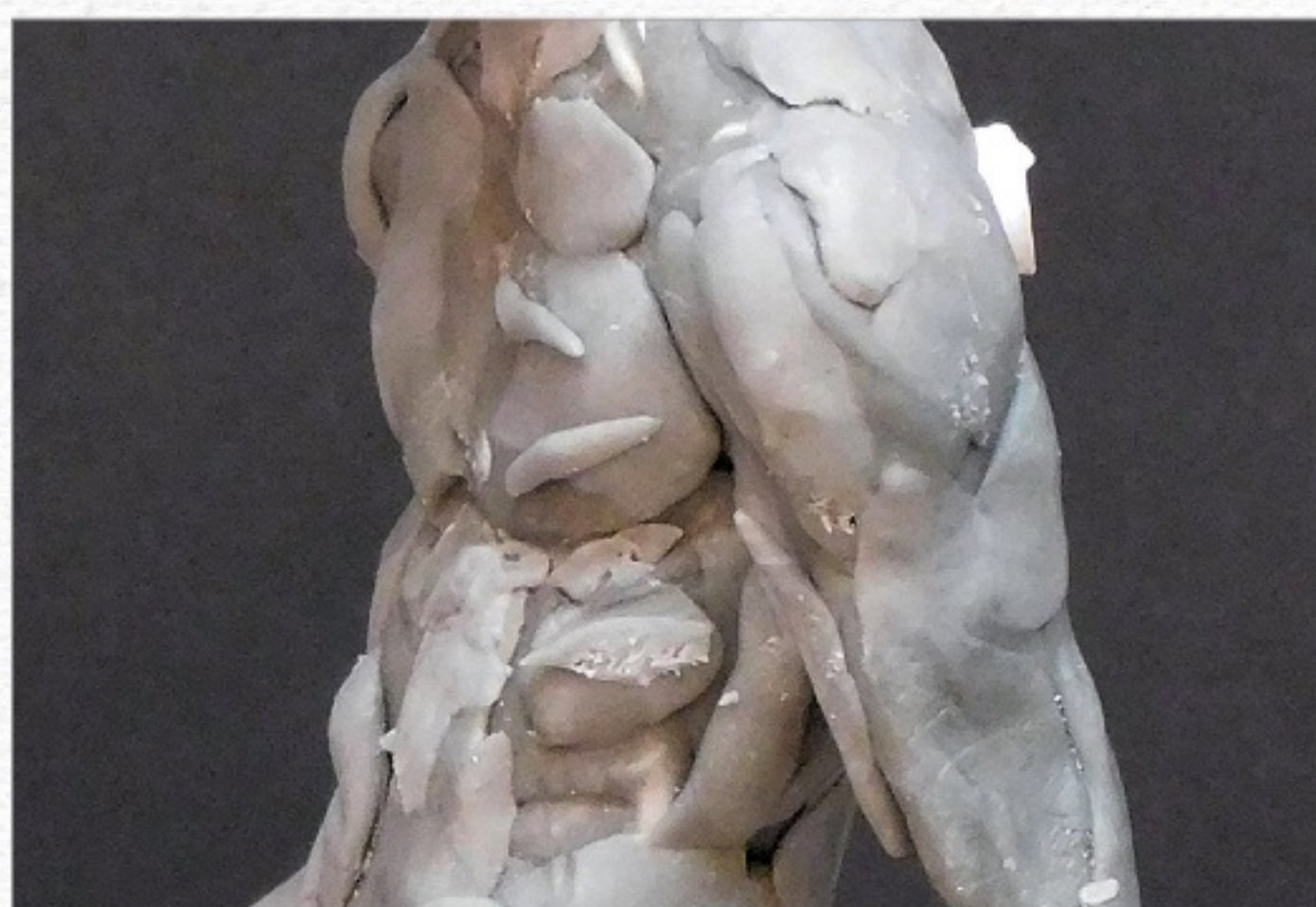


3 Identify reference points

We're beginning to pick out good reference points: the collar bone, sternum, belt line, groin and knees. Keep in mind the basic facial geometry that the eyes are in the middle of the head from top to bottom. The bottom of the nose is halfway from the eyes to the chin, and the bottom lip is halfway from the nose to the chin.

4 Compose the face and hand triangle

We start to sculpt some of the muscle groups, and the relaxed nature of the pose can be seen. We see the face and the two hands as forming a key compositional triangle in almost every sculpt we create. The natural, relaxed pose helps to play into the whimsical composition, countering the fact that he's wearing a slightly ridiculous dragon head.



ARTIST INSIGHT

PERSPECTIVE IS EVERYTHING

Get up from your sculpture, walk 20 or 30 feet away, and then look back at your piece. Does it still work from a compositional point of view? Distance makes your sculpt smaller, just like a thumbnail drawing, and the strength of design should still be evident.

5 Three-dimensional muscles

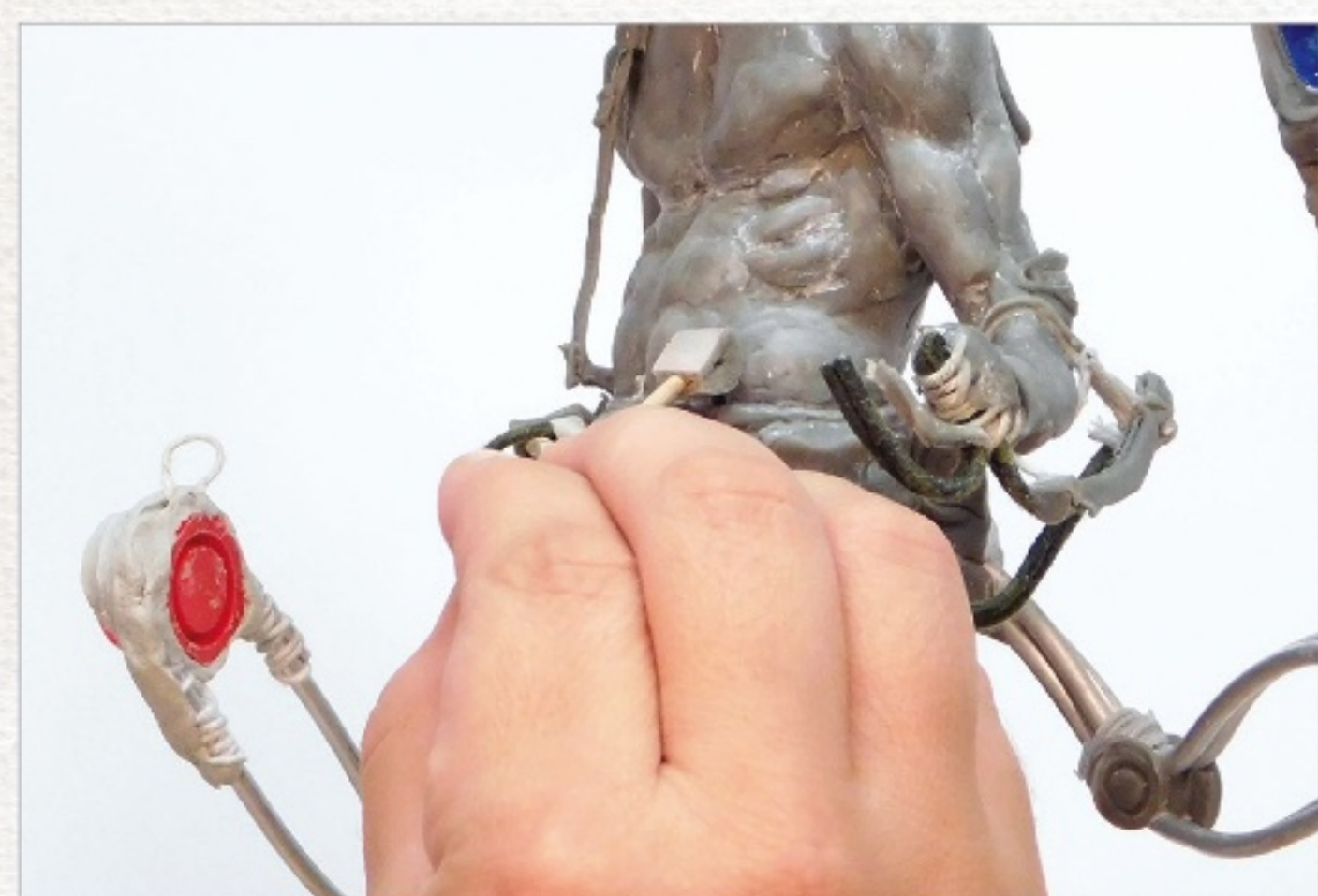
We like to jab the eyes in there quick so that we can start to get a feel for the character. Here we're beginning to find the tips or high points of the muscles. It's important to purposefully try and make every muscle as three-dimensional as possible, even if "skin" will cover it later.





6 Benefits of the dense sculpt material

Accessories make the Dragon Division Team Member. You need a lot of stuff when hunting dragon eggs! Luckily, the Apoxie Sculpt material becomes so dense and strong, it's easy to drill into it, put in some floral wire and then add more clay on top of that. Indeed, all his bags and packs are supported in this way.



7 Create custom sanding sponges

We like to cut apart 3M sanding sponges and glue them to toothpicks, to make little sanding tools. It's good to have a rough, medium, fine and very fine grade on hand. We wet-sand with water to avoid micro-scratches.



8 Developing the dragon head

Now we're rolling. The wings are taking shape, and the infamous chicken head is turning into a more intimidating dragon head, as originally intended. We're having ideas that are being attached and detached, coming and going, trial and error. ➡➡

MATERIALS

MATERIALS

- Aves Apoxie Sculpt
- Almaloy aluminium alloy armature wire
- Floral wire
- Oatey bonding putty
- Superglue
- Styrene
- Plastic caps
- Wood

PAINTS

- Armory Grey primer
- Acrylic paints

TOOLS

- Vinyl gloves (powderless)
- Pliers
- Clippers
- Jewellers saw
- X-Acto blade
- Burnisher
- Ball tool
- Various small loop tools

ARTIST INSIGHT

MIRROR UNIVERSE

Hold your sculpture up to a mirror. We know that first look is horrifying, but all of your symmetry issues (especially facial) will be revealed. Now it's up to you to fix them!



9 Using styrene and plastic

The 'found' items we're using are bits of styrene and plastic where the wings attach to the main body. Sculpting metal surfaces and hardware is always tricky, so in this piece we're using a more beaten-up or junkyard metal look that's much more forgiving.

10 Revealing the true surface

At this point, fairly far along, it's time to give the character a coat of miniature primer. We're using Armory Grey Primer from Dork Tower. We apply a couple of light coats. This primer won't clog up any detail and enables us to see what the true surface of the piece looks like.

INSPIRATION

WWHD?

When creating clay figures, ask yourself, "What would Harryhausen do?" (That's Ray Harryhausen, of course!)



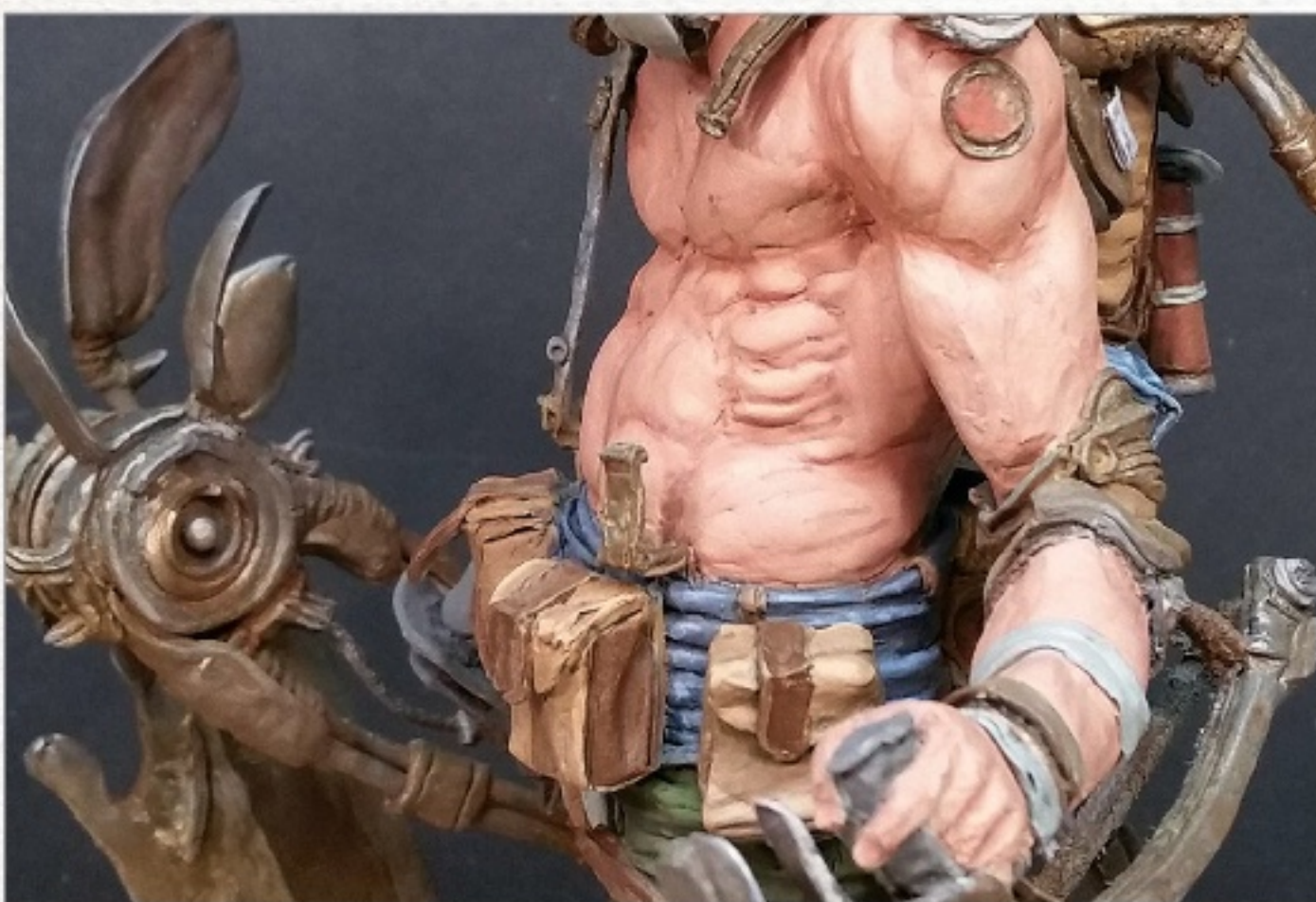
11 Working through multiple base coats

We start painting the base coats using acrylics and a lot of water. Base coats aren't the final colours; rather, they're darker versions of those colours. So we'll start dark and work our way lighter. We hand paint our sculptures: an airbrush would probably be quicker, but we enjoy painting this way with lots of washes and a little dry brushing.



12 *Muting the reds, greens and blues*

Sometimes our colour choices have more to do with what we don't want, and here we don't want anything vibrant. The character's meant to look apprehensive, almost sad, so we're going with muted and dull colours. There are reds, greens and blues, but they've all been muddled by the same brown so it mixes together and no one bit jumps out. We want things that are further away to be darker, while things that are closer or would be 'in the light' are given a brighter colour.



13 *Pushing the details*

Dirty washes, including sepia and the different colours that have been used, are applied liberally. Most specifically into the crevices and around any points of detail to help accentuate them. We use the lightest version of each colour to dry brush the tips and highest points of anything we want noticed more than other spots.



14 *Save time with Aves Apoxie Sculpt*

While our usual clay of choice is Super Sculpey Medium Blend, we really enjoy this Aves Apoxie Sculpt and it's speedy curing time with no baking needed. It's great stuff, and we have a lot of fun with it. Now this guy's ready to go hunting for some dragon eggs. Wish him luck... he's going to need it! ●

