



Mistakes Offer Experience & Confidence

Although this article was originally written for polymer clay (pc) beginners, you may still find it of interest, regardless of preferred art medium.

I love including both polymer and air dry clays in some of my bas relief work. I've had some interesting results, but not without some trying moments.

I've recently been working some long hours experimenting with a few new ideas in order to create a bas relief that I couldn't get out of my head. I thought it unfortunate the results didn't turn out as I had anticipated. No big deal. I enjoy the occasional challenge. I took a much needed break and thought it through for several hours before attempting additional changes. Again the results weren't what I had hoped for. Feeling somewhat frustrated by the entire experience; I decided it was time to separate from the painting and think it over for a few days longer. I took the pity trip instead. You know the trip. We've all taken it, feeling frustrated and wanting to give up. It's not often that I do this, but when I do, it usually lasts a day or two then I'm back in the studio with new found energy. I accept that creating art is a rewarding experience regardless of the outcome. I remind myself of the experience that I will leave with that wasn't there when I first started. Believe it or not, mistakes are to your advantage. You will never learn without them. They are not the enemy. They are a gift. Accepting this isn't always as easy as it sounds. Especially when investing time and energy in a long process resulting in less than desired results.

Our art represents a major part of who we are. Therefore a failed piece of work can easily be taken personally, and it doesn't always feel too good. There's this strong intimate connection between the artist and the final work of art. You know it from the moment you envisioned it, from the first brush stroke, kneading that block of cold clay, mixing a color palette you felt attracted to, and all the hundreds of steps, decisions, and movements that only you the artist can connect with on a realm words can't express. And let's not forget the emotional connection in which we openly express our intimate selves through our art. We bravely offer it over; exposed for all to see and judge.

What's most important is how you view your work for all it's true worth, including failed outcomes. Failures are valuable lessons that teach us what we need to know at that moment. They're priceless and make us better artists over time.

So I didn't create what I had originally envisioned. I did however end up with a painting that I love and have a special connection with, and something that I never expected when I first started. I also possess more experience and confidence than I had before I started. This is always the case after every painting I have completed, regardless of the outcome. As artists our lessons aren't free. After all, a good one never is.

Closing Note: I have cut interesting sections from some of my paintings that I didn't particularly care for only to see them included in later works. The same can be done with cured pc.

I once saw a piece of furniture beautifully adorned with a variety of pc pieces that the artist had left over from various projects. I can't remember the artist's name or even where it was that I saw it. It may have been in a pc book or magazine. The work was very tedious to say the least. It was very inspirational. Although the pieces were from various times, it was easy to see the artist's style in each unique piece. They belonged together.

So the next time you want to give up, or throw that rejected clay piece away, think about saving what you don't particularly care for at that moment. You may be able to use it at a later time in a project that you can't currently imagine. So instead of

tossing those cured pieces into the trash or in a box only to be later forgotten, make them valuable creations with a future purpose. Store them in a clear container located where you can see them on a regular basis.

I have rediscovered old clay pieces that weren't going anywhere at the time I had created them, only to discover new purpose in them years later. You may be surprised at what you will see in them with a fresh eye. You will wonder why you didn't see it before. Perhaps you have grown on your artful journey and are now on a different path.

Here are a few ideas to turn those clay rejects into valuable creative possibilities.

- Cover with foil, embellish, or paint them for new projects.
- Make mosaic tiles or plaques.
- Adorn a box, vessel, or a frame.
- Carve and sand them into new shapes.
- Cover your art journal or scrapbook.
- Use to make molds for future projects.
- Children love to play dress up with old jewelry. Make it a special day and have fun stringing them together.

Explore! Experiment! Create!

C J