The Still-Life Floral in 3-D

Inspiration: Rachel Ruysch
Grade Level: Middle School and High School (Grades 7–12)
Time: About .5 – 1 hour
Author: Rogelio Casas, Museum Educator

Objective: By interpreting Rachel Ruysch’s work in 3-D one can explore the compositions and play with the choices of flowers and meanings. Flower choice can vary from rare to common flowers with formal to informal arrangements. Working in clay presents new challenges in blending and color mixing that mirror the struggles of this Dutch master. Using Model Magic as a medium also stretches a teacher’s budget and keeps the scale of the arrangements small.

Vocabulary

Additive Sculpture: A type of sculpture that is created with a soft material that is built up – sometimes over a wire armature
Composition: The arrangement of the parts of a picture
Maquette: Small preliminary model
Palette: A thin board or tray on which a painter mixes pigments
Sculpture: An artwork that is made by carving or molding clay or other materials
Model Magic: Crayola brand air-dry, non-toxic clay
Modeling: An additive sculpting process
Wire Armature: The framework (skeleton) of a sculpture

Materials

One spool of 25-gauge wire / Jewelry pliers (needle nose and a cutter) 12 of each / Plastic sculpture tools or (toothpicks and stir sticks) / 4” x 4” cardstock index cards for bases / Flower tape (for students that can't twist wire) / Model Magic Primary Classpack (75 ct) / Ziploc bags for the unused clay

Prep: Mix up a few colors but make sure that you write down the recipe of how you arrived at that color in case you need to make more. Only open the packets you will use so that you can extend your clay supplies.

The Lesson

1: Measure out 15” of wire and zigzag it at 3”.
2: Bundle one end of the wire and twist about ¾” up.
3: Mix some colors of clay together but don't fully mix—maintain a “marble” grain—and create a vessel over the twisted wire as your base.
4: Cut the wires and fold the points of the wire on itself. This will be the center of the stamen.
5: Roll out green clay in sizes to fit the wire stems; flatten them to wrap the clay around the wire.
6: Using various colors, you can strategize what types of flowers you will use. We will create lilies for this demonstration.
7: To create the leaves you can roll out some clay and pinch one end while flattening and spading the leaf. Use your tools and add vein details to the leaf.
8: Attach the leaves and use clay tools to blend the leaves to the stem. A bit of water can help if the stems are a little dry.
9: Carefully bend the stems upward and add yellow to the tips for the stamens.
10: Flatten small balls of white clay for the lily petals and place behind the stamen, tucking in one end and folding over the other end. Create a soft point for the end of the petal. The idea is not just to get the elements correct but to express the “attitude” of the flower.
11: Finishing touches: you can make a butterfly or a snail or shells. You can also add a handle and trim to the vessel with leftover marbled clay. Once it dries out over a few days you can carefully brush or spray on an acrylic sealer.

Adaptation Suggestions
Students can sketch their ideas in color pencil in thumbnails in their sketchbook after visiting the Museum’s still life collection; then they can work from their sketches. Once finished with the sculpture they can do a post-sketch of their still lifes, looking for changes. This project can be extended to include a table and scenery elements and painted backdrop. This helps the students think of composition in the third dimension.

For grades 7–9: Make the project a larger in scale and as they get older, they can work smaller.
For grades 10–12: Use Sculpey (polymer clay) and bake the project.