**Hooked Heart**

Make this pendant/brooch from polymer clay, using a technique inspired by hooked wool rugs

By Christi Friesen

I was in Liberty, Missouri at the home of a friend, when I was introduced to hook rugs – the traditional style (primitive american style, to be precise). Thin strips of wool are hooked (using a special tool of course) into a course, woven fabric to create a dense compression of fiber, creating a nifty design. It's very tactile, very dramatic.

It occurred to me that the technique could be duplicated using polymer clay, on a smaller scale of course, to make a wonderfully wearable creation.

Start by creating a flat piece of clay as the base so that you will have something to press your clay onto. I just rolled out a piece of scrap blue clay and used my blade to cut it into a rectangle shape. The clay should be about as thick as a quarter coin (about 2mm).

**For This Project You Will Need:**

- **Polymer clay:** I recommend Premo™ polymer clay. You can use any colors you want, I used a mixture of pinks, purples, ecru and bronze for the heart and blues, silver, purple and white for the border and base.
- **Tools:** cutting blade, clay-conditioning machine (or roller), needle tool, sculpting tool (I recommend the CF “Wow It’s Awesome” tool, and the CF “Can’t Live Without It” tool)
- **Pin back** or bail back (optional) and glue to attach (any jewelry glue)

Next use a blunt tool end to lightly draw the shape of a heart in the center of the rectangle. The heart can take up a large portion of the base since this technique works best with large, simple shapes.

To prepare the clay that will make the loops, it’s best to use a mixture of colors (scraps of clay work great!). There are two reasons for this – a blend will lend variety to the surface of the loops, which is more interesting-looking, and the process of mixing the scraps will make layers inside the clay, which allows the side of the loops to have variety, which is more interesting-looking!

So, gather up some colors for your heart. I suggest an assortment of fuschia, crimson, purple, ecru, white (just a tiny bit) and bronze or gold – that will make a lovely mix! Smash the clays into a flattened wad (use a roller or your hand, or someone else’s hand if you prefer). Now run the wad through the clay-conditioning machine (or use a roller). Fold and run it through again. Repeat this process several times until you have a marbled/streaky ribbon of clay. That’s mixed enough – you really want a lot of streaks, trust me!

Use a cutting blade to slice the flattened sheet of clay into long, thin strips (about 1/8th inch thick or 3-4mm).
With the end of a tool, press one end of the strip onto the base clay, I suggest starting at the point of the heart.

Now hold your needle tool at the height you want the top of your loop to come to – about 1/4th inch (aprox. 6mm). Hold it straight over the clay, like you’re cooking a marshmallow over the fire.

Actually, that sounds good... hold on while I go microwave a s’more....

Ok, >>smack, smack, gulp<< ... I’m back.

Drape the strip over the needle tool to make it bend.

Move the needle tool so that it’s on the top of the strip now, just a little bit away from the bend so that you have enough clay to be able to press it (with the tool) down onto the base clay. Press it hard and make it stick!

Do it again. Keep repeating the PRESS, BEND, PRESS motion to make loop after loop of clay, all in a line, following the outer line of the heart shape. As you run out, cut another strip. It's great if there are different colors showing!

Make sure the loops are one right against the other. It’s ok if they are slightly different heights. Sometimes the loops crack. Try to prevent it if you can (but don’t stress over it, it’ll still look fine). If you keep the clay warm with your body heat, it will bend instead of crack.

Once you’ve made the line go all around one edge and curve back around to the top, you can add another line inside the heart, right next to the first one. It’s easier if you don’t loop yourself into a hole until you have to.

Eventually the heart will all be filled up. Well, sometimes there’s a little hole in the middle. If you have to get another loop into a space and you can’t do the needle tool press, just make a loop and pinch it off. Use a tool to insert the loop into the empty space.

Your heart should look full.

Now mix clay for the border. I used blues (with some purple and white thrown in for fun). Mix, cut strips and use your needle tool to loop/press it in place. Go all around the heart first. Then fill in the areas at the corners of the rectangle. You can keep it all nice and tidy, or get a little crazy (I like crazy).

If you suddenly decide (like I did) that one loop of a different color would look better right there! ... then just use a tool to excavate a loop (the blade of the CF “Can’t Live Without It” tool works great for this), then insert a new loop in it's place.
Remember, the key to this technique looking really dramatic, is for there to be some variety of color in the clay strips.

Once everything is done, it’s time to bake your creation to harden it. Polymer clay needs heat to fuse and form a durable, flexible finished piece.

Set your oven to 275°F (130°C) and preheat for about 20 minutes to make sure the oven is at the proper temperature. Any gas or electric oven works great. Convection ovens are wonderful. Don’t use a microwave oven. You should use an oven thermometer to keep an eye on the temperature accuracy.

Place your hooked heart on a piece of clean, stiff paper (like an index card) and bake for at least 45 minutes. Use adequate ventilation. If you’re using a home oven, you may want to bake inside an oven-roasting bag to trap any fumes and keep them contained.

Let it cool completely.

Now if you want to you can add a bail or pin closure to the back so you can wear it as a pendant or brooch. A bail can also let you display it in a frame or hang it on the wall.

Whether you wear your piece or show it off in another way, you’re sure to get a lot of compliments.

I’m hooked on this technique, aren’t you? It really captures my heart.

A special thanks to Sandy Williams of American Whatever for sharing her hook-rug knowledge with me.

**Resources:**

You can find tools, bails, pin-backs (and more fun stuff) on my site -- www.ChristiFriesen.com