

# TOTEM FUN

by MARLAINE VERHELST

Making a personal totem is a fun thing. When I started sculpting I could hardly stop to make a class out of it.

A totem made by yourself could be a nice gift idea for a friend.

To make this class fun for non experienced sculptors as well I kept the shapes and techniques simple. For instance I used pins for the eyes. If you are more experienced you can go all the way and add your own techniques using this class for inspiration.

I used air-drying clay La Formo for this class. You could easily replace this by Creative Paperclay or use any other clay you prefer.

Sometimes you just want to play around and sculpt a bit without doing a large project like a doll that needs a body and a costume.



## Supply List

Content:

- One package La Formo clay, 500 gr. (1lb.)
- 2 wooden stands, 8 inch (20 cm.) high
- 2 Styrofoam eggs, 2.35 inch (6 cm.)
- 2 Styrofoam balls, 1.2 inch (3 cm.)
- 2 Styrofoam balls, 1.6 inch (4 cm.)
- 2 Styrofoam balls, 2 inch (5 cm.)
- 1 Styrofoam ball, 2.75 inch (7 cm.)
- 8 black headed pins
- 4 wooden tooth picks

This is everything you need to make two totems except paint.

The European Styrofoam in this kit is smoother and denser than the American Styrofoam.

MARLAINE VERHELST



# TOTEM FUN

class 1 sculpting faces

# CLASS 1

What we need:

- Sculpting clay

I used La Formo but an other brand (air drying) clay, like Creative Paperclay, will do as well. You also could use these ideas and try them in polymer clay.

- Styrofoam balls and eggs

I used the sizes 1.2 inch (3 cm.); 1.6 inch (4 cm.); 2 inch (5 cm.); 2.75 inch (7 cm.) and eggs size 2.35 inch (6 cm.)

- A stand

- Sculpting tool(s)

- Black glass-headed pins

- Tooth picks

- Brush sticks



Making a totem is like stringing beads. First we make all the separate 'beads' and then we string them on the stand.

The idea is that you make your own personal totem. I describe several examples of items that I used for my totems but I am sure you will come up with your own designed 'beads'.

You can't go wrong because you can go on and on changing the order and if you really don't like one of your 'beads' you simply don't use it.



Push the Styrofoam balls and eggs on the brush sticks to make a hole for placing them on the stand.

You can leave the balls on the brush sticks to cover them and to sculpt on them. It makes it easy to hold them in your hand when you are working on them and they can be put in a pot to dry without deforming.



### **COVERING THE STYROFOAM**

The easiest way to cover the Styrofoam is rolling a flat pancake from the air drying clay. First put plastic foil on the table to make sure that the clay doesn't stick on the surface of the table. Wet the Styrofoam with water. Push the brush stick through the pancake and fold the pancake around the ball or egg. Cut off the surplus of clay. Work as smooth as you can because this will save you time later.

Another method to cover the balls and eggs is adding small flat pieces of clay one by one to the wet Styrofoam surface, blending the seams with a wet finger.

For both methods: make the layer of clay thin to keep the ball and egg shape as they are.

Let the covering layer dry before you go on. If there are cracks or dips in the surface you can fill them in by making them wet and by adding some soft clay.

If you use polymer clay for this class you possibly have to cover the Styrofoam first with aluminum foil.



## A FACE

After adding the face the ball should still be a ball.

Wet the spot where you want to add clay to make it stick better. Start with a little triangle for the chin.

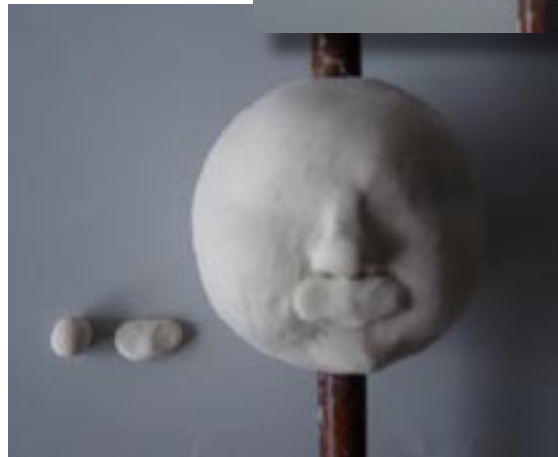


Add two flat balls for the cheeks.



Add an oval piece for the forehead. Blend all separate pieces well with a wet finger.

Pre-shape a pear shape for the nose, put it in place, blend it and push the two nostrils in it with a sculpting tool.



For the eyes I used black glass-headed pins. I cut off half of the length and pushed them into the head.



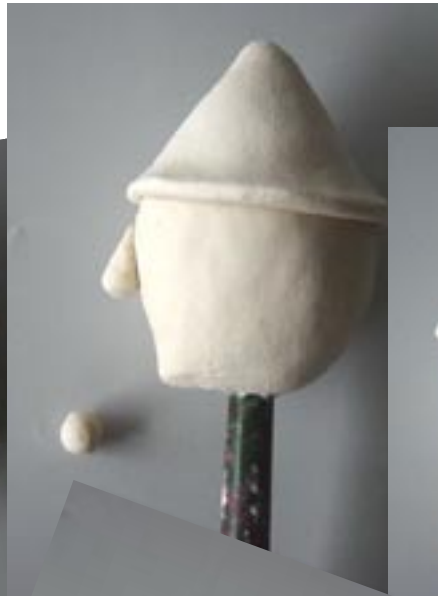
Put a small oval piece of clay just below the nose to shape a mouth. I pushed the lips in this piece with a sculpting tool and I pushed deep mouth corners in the cheeks.

For the ears I took a flattened ball, cut it in two and attached these moon shapes to the head.

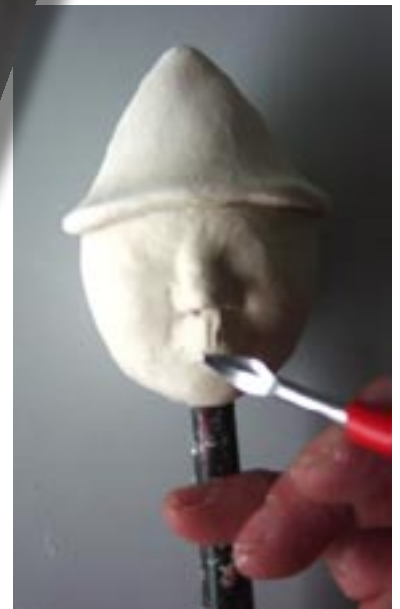
## FACE WITH HAT

Place a Styrofoam egg on a brush stick. Make the egg more pointy by adding some extra clay to the top. I pushed a hole in this top piece so I could attach the feather later. Roll a worm and lay this worm around the egg. Blend the worm only towards the point of the egg.





Sculpt a face as described earlier, leaving the forehead out.



This was class 1  
I hope you are having  
fun!

MARLAINE VERHELST



# TOTEM FUN

class 2 sculpting components



# CLASS 2

## SCULPTING HANDS

Working on two hands at the same time makes it easier to sculpt hands with the same proportions.



Roll a sausage, flatten one side and cut out the triangular piece between the thumb and the index finger. Reshape the hand into a mitten. Divide the finger part in 4 pieces, the pinkie should take the smallest part. Now carefully roll the fingers round. The middle finger should be the longest finger, the pinkie the smallest. If they aren't, add some extra clay to the middle finger and/or cut off some clay from the pinkie.



For the small hands you break a tooth pick in two pieces and push them into the arms, the pointed side sticking out.



When the hands are dry, you push a hole in the ball with a pointy tool and attach the hands to the ball with the tooth picks. After painting you can use some glue to keep them in place.

For the small hands I made fingers with a spatula shape (bolder at the top). When the hand is finished, roll the wrist a bit narrower between your fingers and bend it.



To make a nicer connection between the hands and feet and the balls I layed worms of clay around the arms and legs on the ball. Then I have blended them in the direction of the ball. Now it looks if the body part really sticks out of the balls.



The cut between the pinkie and the ring finger should be the deepest.



In the fingers of the big hands I have sculpted creases to make it easier to bend the fingers a little bit.



The big hand needs a hole in the palm to fit on the stand.

Use a brush stick to make the hole.

**class 2 - 2**

## SCULPTING FEET

Work on two feet at the same time as you did with the hands.



Roll a sausage, flatten one side and bend it. Make cuts in the flat part to divide it in toes, using one third of the width for the biggest toe. Roll the toes between your fingers to make them round. This works best if you carefully spread them a little.

Roll the ankles narrower and add some extra clay to the heels.

Push two half tooth picks in the legs



Also the legs get a blended worm around them.

## THE BIRD

The bird is very simple to make. I used a 2.35 inch egg.

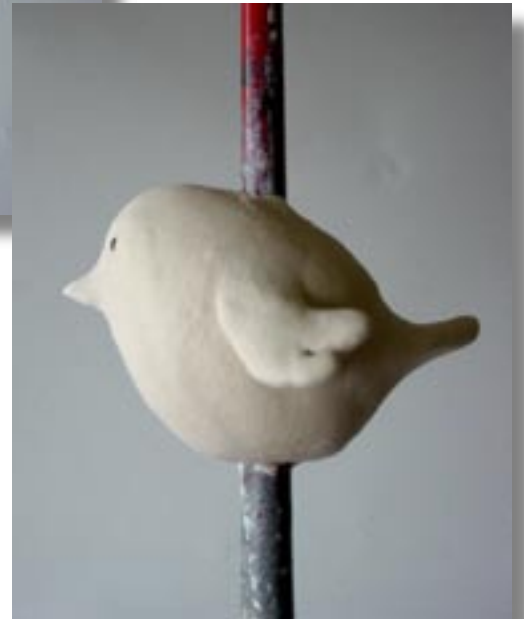
Push the stick of a brush through the egg in an angle. Cover the egg with clay and let it dry.



Use a cone shaped piece of clay for the beak and two black glass-headed pins for the eyes. Take a flat triangular piece of clay for the tail.

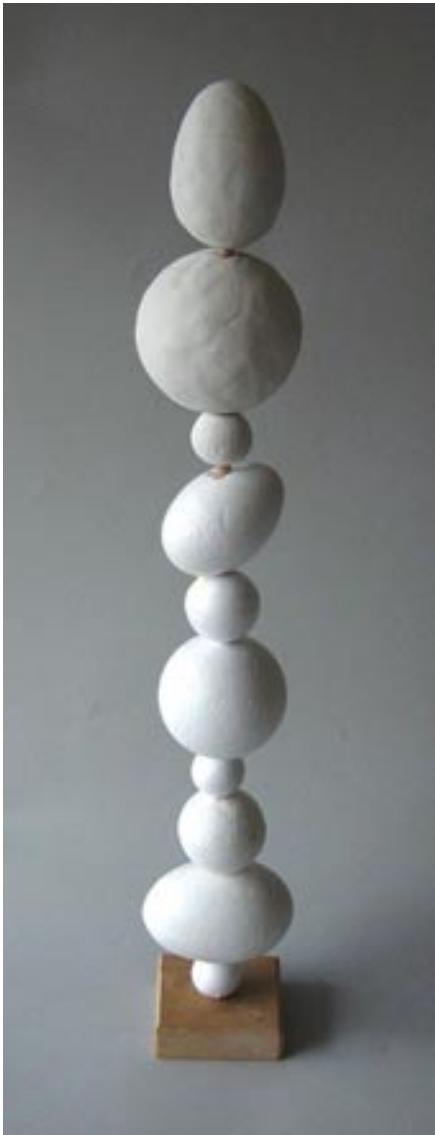


For the wings I used a flat bean shape with only one cut in it.



## THE WINGED BALL

Start with two equal balls of clay (like for all things that you want to make two of). Shape them to a flat 'comma'. Make two cuts in it and shape the pieces round as you did with the fingers. Use half a tooth pick to attach them to the ball.



*This is how one of my students started her totem.  
The lower egg will be a fish, the middle egg will be a  
bird, the top egg will be a face with a hat, the biggest  
ball will be a body, the second big ball will be a sun.  
The top 3 parts got a first layer of clay.  
This is a higher stand than I used.*

Please find below some additional ideas and I am sure you can come up with lots of ideas yourself:

- two faces on both sides of one ball: a happy one and a sad one
- making texture to the plain balls, for instance by stamping in lace or gluing on lace parts that you have cut out
- making all kinds of fish shapes
- putting big glass or iron beads between your creations
- make one ball with ears, one with a mouth, one with one sculpted eye, one with a nose ...

I wanted to keep this class simple to make it fun for non experienced sculptors as well.

I only explained briefly how to sculpt a face, hands and feet. The detailed sculpting process you can learn from my online class 'Sculpting a doll in air drying clay' or from my CD 'Handsculpting directly into porcelain'

– <http://marlaineverhelst.com/cdrom.htm>

MARLAINE VERHELST



# TOTEM FUN

class 3 the painting process

# CLASS 3

What we need:

- fine sandpaper
- a non fuzzy cotton cloth
- real hair water color brushes F1 #2 and #5
- brown water color
- white opaque poster color
- hobby varnish
  
- or acrylic paint: I used yellow, orange, red, pale green, dark green, white and brown.
  
- optional: a red feather



First make sure that everything is dry thoroughly.

If you used air drying clay you can sand it or 'smoothen' it with a damp cloth. I use a piece from an old cotton diaper for this purpose but an old wash glove or even a T-shirt will also work.



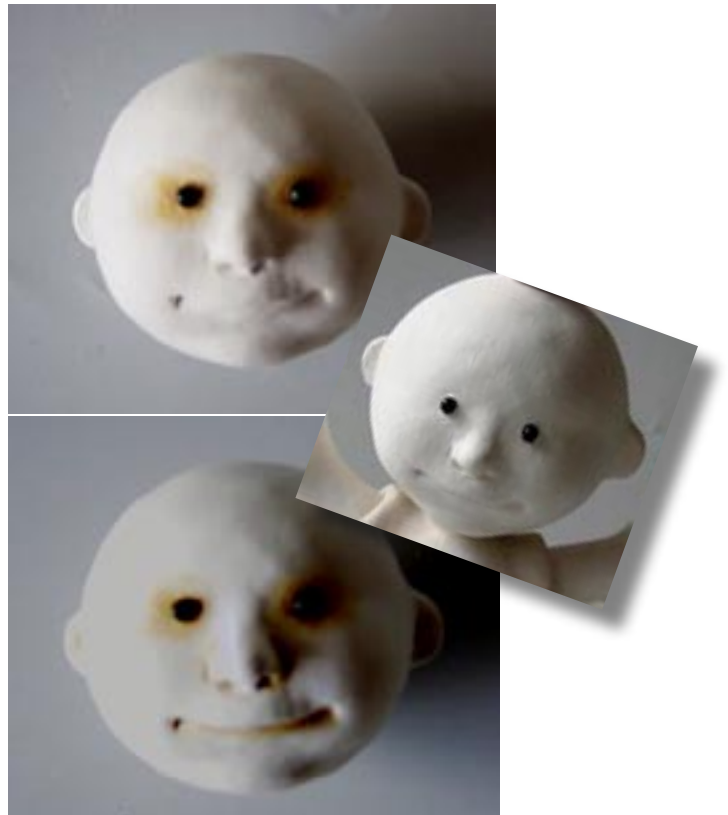
I have painted the totems in two different techniques:

## **1. Water color in combination with opaque white poster color.**

I only used brown water color mixed with a little yellow to make it warmer. I started with the face.

### **THE FACE**

Make a shadow around the eyes adding color around the eyes and blend the shadow towards all directions with a damp brush. Put some shadow inside the nostrils, around the wings of the nose, between the lips, in the corners of the mouth and on the front side of the ears to simulate an ear canal. Paint the eyebrows with brown. To make the eyes more 'real' I have put two small triangles with white opaque poster color beside the black glass balls.





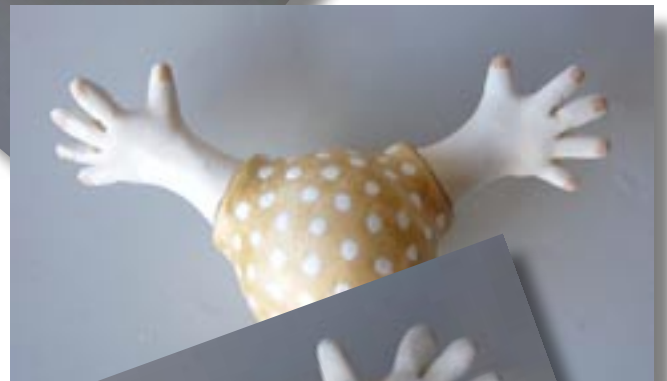
## THE HANDS

For the nails I mixed a little red with the brown. With the brown color I have put a little shadow between the fingers. The big hand got some shadow lines on the knuckles and on the creases on the inside of the fingers. Also the end of the wrist gets brown with an edge of brown dots. When the brown paint is dry you can put a white opaque line on top.



## THE BALL WITH THE HANDS

Give the whole ball a brown 'wash' and let it dry. Put white opaque dots all over on the ball. It doesn't have to be perfect. Just start at one point and go on adding dots. It also doesn't matter if the dots are not perfectly round. It is the overall effect that counts.



As a finishing touch you put darker brown lines around the arms.

## THE BALL WITH THE CONCENTRIC LINES

The easiest way to do this is to put the ball back on a brush stick. Start with the line in the middle. Put the brush on the ball, keep it there and turn the ball until you went all around. Then do the next line and the next and so on until there is no room anymore for another line. Again, it doesn't have to be perfect. Probably it isn't even nice if it would be too straight. Just do it your way.



It is still handy to have the items on brush sticks.



## THE BALL WITH THE BROWN DOTS

Just start with one dot and add a next one and a next one until the whole ball is filled with dots. Don't try to do it perfect but try to make the dots more or less the same size.

## 2 ACRYLIC PAINT

Start with painting all items in a basic solid color. For the face and the feet I mixed white with a little bit of orange to get a skin color. The bird pale green, the big ball yellow, the small ball red, the wings white and the hat orange.



### THE FACE

For the painting of the face I used the same method as I used for the water color painting but now using acrylics. Acrylics can be used both opaque and transparent but I find water color easier to blend. On the cheeks I made two red circles. On the hat I have painted concentric lines in red.



### THE BALLS

Choose a contrast color for the dots. Again, don't be too hard on yourself. Start with one dot and add another one and another one and another one ....

I made orange dots on yellow and pale green dots on the red ball.

The feet got white nails and a little bit brown as a shadow between the toes. Around the legs I made red lines as an extra accent.

The white wings got a little yellow as a shadow color.

## THE BIRD

First I made the entire bird pale green. The back, the head and the top side of the wings and the tail I made dark green. I have painted some orange around the eyes and an orange beak and a red heart on his breast.



I hope that your totem turned out nicely and that you got as enthusiastic and inspired as I was.

Warm regards,  
Marlaine