

Metal and Polymer Clays

by Angie Boyer

Carol Blackburn

Polymer Clay Artist

"My goals are to continue promoting this versatile material through working with it and teaching"

Although many people enjoy using Polymer Clay to create colourful and unique pieces, the material has, until recently, received more acclaim in America than the UK. Now, however, the potential of polymer clay as a versatile creative material is gaining wider recognition in Britain, as artists develop new techniques and innovative styles.

For the uninitiated, polymer clay is a non-toxic, synthetic modelling material, available from craft and hobby suppliers under brand names such as Fimo, Premo, Sculpey and Kato Clay. "It is soft and malleable until it is baked, when it becomes hard," explains Carol Blackburn in the introduction to her excellent book, 'How to Make Polymer Clay Beads'. Carol's book has been so well received that it has recently been translated into French and Italian.

She continues, "Polymer clay consists of pigments and PVC particles, bound together with a plasticiser. It is available in a wide range of colours that can be mixed together to produce an even wider colour palette."

It's these marvellous colours that make the material such a delight to work with, along with the fact that no expensive equipment

is required and much can be achieved in a small work space.

However, Carol's creative interests began before she discovered polymer clay. "I studied textiles at Manchester College of Art and environmental media at the Royal College of Art. It was much later, while designing knitted fabrics for the US market, that I 'found' polymer clay," she recalls.

"I visited a bead fair in late 2002, looking for interesting buttons and beads to incorporate in my fabric swatches. A stand was displaying polymer clay beads. I bought a necklace and booked a lesson. I was hooked and gradually my knitting machines were packed up to make way for polymer clay. Since then I've attended classes and many events, mainly in the United States, where polymer clay has a much higher profile."

Carol's interest in textiles and textures is reflected in her polymer clay work; she has a range of tassels which, she says, "can be plain or fanciful, from a simple key tassel, to ornate curtain tie-backs. They can be used in the home to complement other textiles, or as a decoration on a bag or purse."

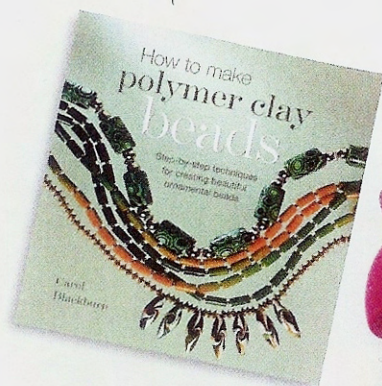
Carol's polymer clay bowls are bright and cheery, each delicate enough to fit into the palm of your hand, whilst her pens offer something a little out of the ordinary. "I make each ball point pen with decorative polymer clay that is finished to a smooth surface, so they feel good in the hand," she says. "Each one is unique... these are pens that people take care not to lose."

However, it is Carol's impressive selection of hand made polymer clay beads which really catch the eye, and it is these that form the basis of her book. Expertly coloured and crafted, the polymer clay takes on a new life, sometimes mimicking the look and feel of wood or metal, of stone or bone, on other occasions showing off its own glorious colours and patterns.

Carol says, "I am constantly surprised by what this amazing material throws up when I'm working with it. Even if things go wrong there's usually an unexpected surprise, unlike my knitting which, when it went wrong, it usually went badly wrong and a day's work could fall off the machine and end up on the floor."

Originally from Heswall, Wirral, Carol is now based in London where, in May 2007, she started the London Polymer Clay Group. "I wanted to meet





Find out more about 'How to Make Polymer Clay Beads' with Carol Blackburn's book, which is published in paperback by A&C Black @ £12.99 ISBN 978-0-71367-859-8



others using polymer clay," she recalls. "We are a small but keen group and growing. To begin with we had several meetings, we call them 'clay days', at my studio, but now we take it in turns to host and write-up the meeting. We now have a website www.lpcg.co.uk to showcase our work and news of our clay day meetings."

It is on these clay days that ideas are shared and new work is shown. "Working with polymer clay, I particularly like the way its speed and versatility helps generate designs as if by chance, but then these 'accidental' ideas have to be refined and honed to perfection. The polymer clay community frequently adapt techniques from glass lampwork, metal and ceramic practice. While I am working with polymer clay I'm constantly saying to myself 'what if I do.....?', which frequently leads me in a new direction."

"I continue to attend workshops," continues Carol, "as I believe you can never stop learning. I'll seek out a class with a polyclay artist whose work I admire. But I also love teaching and watching students take the technique that I've just demonstrated and doing something with it that I hadn't thought of, so adding to the technique. I encourage students to experiment and discover how to turn chance effects into personal and unique designs. As polymer clay can be reused, we are free to try things, so there is no wastage. Even baked pieces can be used as a base for a new creation."

Last August Carol taught at the first Euro Clay Carnival UK in Nottingham, which was attended by about sixty students from all over Europe. And in October this year she will be teaching at the French version of Euro Clay Carnival.

"I will also be teaching two new classes at West Dean," she says, "a 'taster day' on 4 July and a three day course from 7 - 10 September. I'll also be teaching a residential course at Urchfont Manor in Wiltshire on 25-27 November."

"At the moment I'm focusing on developing a range of work using new techniques, which I will be selling from my website," she continues. No doubt she will eventually be sharing those new techniques with other polymer clay enthusiasts... maybe there's another book in the pipeline?



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