

Burdz

A Paper Clay and Mixed Media Project by Kaaren Poole

Take a break with a fun, relaxing project — make a Burd! You don't need fancy, unusual, or expensive materials. And even though this is a sculpture piece, there's no kiln firing required! We'll be using paper clay, which is an air-dry clay. No sculpture stress either. Although your burd may be inspired by a real bird, it can be purely imaginary.

My purpose with this project is to give you a method for making and decorating fanciful birds (which I call 'burdz') from paper clay. It's not my intention to have you create a bird just like the one I'm demonstrating. Please enjoy using your imagination in creating the burd's shape and decorating him/her with paints, found objects, and found images which appeal to you.

Because each of your burdz will be different, I can't provide detailed steps. Please just follow the method shown in the videos, adding your own variations as you prefer. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at www.thefoxesgarden@gmail.com.



So, gather your materials, and let's get started!

Supply List

Paper clay (I use Creative Paperclay. You should be able to find an 8 oz package, which will make a flock of burdz, for around \$10.)

24-gauge wire (I like rusted wire which I buy on Etsy, but you can find a variety of wire in a craft supply or bead store.)

Aluminum foil

Plastic wrap to keep your burd from drying out when you don't want it to, and a plastic bag in which to store the opened block of clay so it doesn't dry out

Scrap paper and pencil

A file card for the wing base

A small water container

Paper towels

Needle nose pliers, scissors, toothpicks

Glues: a strong, thick glue such as Art Basics Thick Gel, and matte gel medium for collage. You may also find Aleene's Fast Grab Tacky Glue useful

Black glass beads - 4mm will probably be the right size (optional, but nice for eyes. There are other ways to do the eyes though, using paper clay and paint.

Acrylic paints, brushes, palette, water container

Water-based satin varnish

Selection of papers for collage

Selection of miscellaneous found objects for decoration (feathers, old jewelry pieces, buttons, rhinestone cup chain, cabochons, beads, etc.)

Views of my Finished Burd (for reference)







FYI – I added the cup chain on the tail and the tiny silver metal stars behind the eyes after I finished the video.

Let's Start! Part 1 – Head, Body, and Legs

If you need a break while working through the section, be sure to wrap your burd in plastic wrap so it won't dry out.

Make and Wrap the Core

We'll start by making the core of the body with aluminum foil. If we make the whole burd with paper clay, it will harden unevenly and be likely to crack. Use a piece about 6" square and roll it into a short roll with rounded ends. Size it so that if you add 3/8 inch of clay all round, you'll have the size you want for the body. Add more foil if you find your core should be bigger. Be sure your aluminum foil shape is squeezed tight. You might need to press it against your table for this.

Remove a piece of clay from your package large enough to form into a sphere about 2" across. You can add more clay or take some away to get the amount you need. **BE SURE TO KEEP YOUR PACKAGE OF PAPER CLAY CLOSED WHEN YOU'RE NOT USING IT SO IT DOESN'T DRY OUT. OR YOU CAN KEEP IT IN A CLOSED PLASTIC BAG.)**

Flatten the clay sphere into a disk about 1/4" to 3/8" thick and wrap it around your aluminum foil core. You will have extra clay at both ends. Have more clay towards one end of the core. This will be the head end.

Shape the Head, Neck, and Tail

Use the clay at the head end to shape the neck and head. Add more clay, or pinch clay away as needed. The direction the head's facing, and the shape of the neck contribute to the personality of your burd, so play with it until you're satisfied. For the beak, pinch and pull the clay, smoothing it as you go. Keep in mind that a long, thin beak will be prone to breakage. The clay on the head may very well be thicker than 3/8", but that's OK. If you get cracks as the clay dries, you'll be able to fix them.

To add the eyes, pick up a bead on the end of a toothpick and press the bead into place. The toothpick should protrude from the bead on the beak side of the eye. It will make a slight indentation in the clay of the head, forming the inner corner of the eye.

Use the clay at the other end to shape the tail. Your tail could be stumpy or longer. It could be fanned out, or not, whatever you prefer.

Make and Attach the Legs

Now we'll make the legs from wire. Decide how long you want the legs and toes. Draw them on a piece of paper, then add ½" at the top of the leg. This extra length will poke into the body. Keep in mind that the toes need to be long so the burd will stand. You'll use this drawing as a guide as you make the legs. Follow the steps in the video to make your legs. I make my toes particularly long so I can spread them out and provide a stable base on which the burd can stand.

Poke the legs into the burd's body so the burd can balance. They'll likely wobble abound in the wet clay for now. But this will give you the holes to glue the legs into once the burd is dry.

Let your burd dry overnight. It's dry when it no longer feels cool. To speed the drying, you can put it in a 175° oven for about half an hour. I generally prefer to let my pieces air dry so they are less likely to crack. If you get a crack, just add a little water then some wet clay over the crack and smooth it in.

Part II - The Wings and Permanently Attaching the Legs

Note: To add wet clay to your dried burd, dampen the place on the burd where you want to add the clay, and dampen the back of the clay you want to add. Press the new clay piece in place and smooth the edges with your fingers.

To start the wings, draw a wing shape on a file card (you need a heavy paper for this) and cut it out. Hold it up to your bird and adjust the shape until you're happy with it.

Use your wing as a pattern to draw a second one on the file card and cut it out.

Finish one wing before you begin the other. Slightly dampen the wing then stick a blob of paper clay to the front part of one side of the wing. This will be the right side (outside). Pull some on the clay downwards from the blob to cover the lower part (tip) of the wing. The clay should be thicker at the base than at the tip. You should have extra clay all around the edges. Fold this extra clay to the back of the wing and smooth it out.

If desired, use the point of a toothpick to incise the ribs of the lower wing feathers. Pull the toothpick's length across the wing to incise the lines dividing the feathers on the lower wing.

If you have a fair amount of clay on the back of the upper wing, that's good. But if you don't, just add a little more.

Decide where the wing should attach to the body and dampen the body there as well as the back of the upper part of the wing. Press the wing in place and smooth the edges of the upper wing, firmly attaching it to the body. If you don't have enough clay on the wing to smooth the edges of the upper wing in place, you can add a thin snake shape of clay so you can smooth it.

Repeat with the other wing. Be sure you are making a left wing and a right wing, not two wings which are facing the same direction.

Look at your burd from all directions for places you need to add more clay and make these corrections.

Finally, place the legs back in their holes and surround the base of each leg with a thin 'snake' of clay. Press the inner edge of the clay into the base of the legs and smooth the outer edges into the body.

Let your burd dry thoroughly.

Part III – Painting Your Burd

Since paper clay is an air dry clay, it can be damaged if it gets wet. To prevent this, you'll need to seal the clay. You can use a clear acrylic sealer if you have one. But the acrylic paints themselves will act as a sealer and the dry paper clay takes paint very well without any kind of base.

Choose your color palette. Perhaps you'll be inspired by a real bird, and that will guide you to your palette. Or you might use the placement of different values from a photo of a real bird but change the colors. Or you can choose a purely fanciful palette. Generally, these characteristics help make a successful color palette:

- If you have already chosen embellishments, those can direct your color choices for your paints.
- The more fanciful the burd, the more your colors can deviate from real bird colors.
- Include both dark and light values.
- If most of your colors are warm, a few cool accents will add interest. Likewise, a few warm accents will liven a primarily cool palette.
- A palette which contains mostly dulled (grayed or brownish, otherwise known as 'muted') colors will benefit from adding one or two bright ones.
- It may help to choose your colors if you have a mood you wish to portray in mind.

When you place your colors on your burd, keep in mind that in real birds the upper parts are generally dark while the lower part are generally light. This gives them better camouflage. When viewed from above, the dark colors blend better with the ground while when viewed from below, the lighter color blend better with the sky.

Have fun with the painting and don't stress! If you don't like something, you can paint over it. Remember that you still have decorating to do, so you don't necessarily have to do a lot of detail with the painting. Also, after decorating, you can always come back and add more paint if you think your burd needs it.

Part IV - Decorating Your Burd

What you use for decorating is only limited by your imagination!

Magazines and catalogs are a rich source for small images for decoupage.

And there are so many kinds of found objects:

- buttons,
- cabochons,
- crystals and pearls (including flatbacks),
- ribbons,
- tassels (perhaps ones you make from embroidery thread),
- thin chain or cup chain,
- parts from old jewelry,
- watch parts,
- beads,
- feathers,
- paper curls or strips,
- ribbon curls,
- metallic foil from candy wrappers,
- words cut from books or magazines,
- small brass stampings,
- and on and on and on

You will probably need more than one kind of adhesive to decorate your burd. The heavier the object you're gluing, the stiffer glue you need. Also, fast-grabbing glue is important so you don't have to clamp anything.

I use Liquitex matte gel medium for my collage adhesive.

For adhering heavier, more substantial found objects, I like Finnabair Art Basics Heavy Body Gel by Prima Marketing. It's quite thick and grabs hold right away. For lighter weight things, Aleene's Fast Grab Tacky Glue works great and it's especially good for gluing paper to paper.

Thanks for watching this video! I hope you enjoyed making your burd and that you will make many more. After all, don't you think every burd deserves to be part of a flock? I'd love to see what you make. You can send me a photo at www.thefoxesgarden@gmail.com. Best wishes for adding joy to your life through art.

Kaaren