Aftosa’s how-to series: Metal Clay
Skill level: Easy

Modify a texture to suit your creative vision.
by Patrik Kusek

With this simple yet sophisticated design you’ll be able to quickly add dimension to any of your projects. This technique will help add volume and structure to boring flat designs without a lot of extra work. Plus, this technique will work in numerous form factors such as brooches and pendants. Adding dimension will add yet another technique to your design tool box and give your work that polished professional look.
Start off by choosing a texture and shape that is suitable to add dimension to. In this case we used Aftosa Item # “Rocker B”. This set comes with 12 designs in a variety of sizes.

Next (photo 2) roll out a strip of PMC+, 4 cards thick, long enough to accommodate the design of the earrings. Be sure to lubricate the work surface. I recommend Slik Balm. Not only is it great for releasing stubborn textures but it is also good for your hands because it all natural and has aloe.

(photo 3) Press the leaf texture into the clay firmly, be sure not to press too hard as the pattern may come thru the back of the earrings.

(photo 4) Take the pin tool and cut through the clay by loosely tracing around the shape of the leaf. Be sure to lubricate the tip of the pin tool to ensure a clean cut.
Instead of drying the earrings on a flat surface, use a small drinking glass. Look for drinking glasses that have the appropriate curvature for your design. The larger the glass the less curved the earrings will be. Be sure to lubricate the glass before laying the wet clay earrings on the surface.

Use two pieces of polymer clay as supports to stop the glass from rolling around. Next put the glass and earrings in to a food dehydrator to dry.

Check the earrings to be sure they are completely dry. In our case, the side against the glass was still wet while the surface facing outwards was dry. If this happens, take the earrings off of the glass and put them back into the dehydrator or on a warmer to dry completely.

Once the earrings are dry, sand and shape the edges to conform to the shape of the leaf. Start with a “fine” grit sanding sponge. Once the shape has been established then continue to sand with progressively finer grits until smooth to the touch. Remember to sand the back of the earrings as well. The better your piece is sanded and finished the more professional it will look.
(photo 8) Using a hand held drill. Drill a hole approximately 1/8 of an inch from the edge of the top of the earring. Be sure to support the top of the earring from the back to prevent breaking.

(photo 9) Using vermiculite (shown) or alumina hydrate*, support the earrings during firing on a kiln shelf. Simply place a pile of the vermiculite in the center of the shelf. Place the earrings on the vermiculite making sure they are fully supported underneath.

The vermiculite or alumina hydrate will not burn in the kiln. The earrings, if fired directly on the kiln shelf, will have a tendency to flatten out during the firing process. Using vermiculite or alumina hydrate will prevent this from happening and allow the earrings to maintain their shape.

Next fire the earrings according to manufacturers instruction.

Finish in the usual manner by using the brass brush or tumbler. Add earring wires. Enjoy!

Patrik

* If using alumina hydrate remember to use the appropriate safety gear. I use the 3M Dust and Mist Respirator
About the Author:
In addition to teaching at Aftosa, Patrik Kusek is a Senior Instructor for Rio Grande’s Rio Rewards certification program and travels the country teaching PMC certification workshops. He is a seasoned PMC artist, a member of the PMC Guild and the 1st Place winner of the Saul Bell Award, PMC Division. He sells commissioned pieces of jewelry to individuals and also at various galleries. He is a graduate of FIDM (The Fashion Institute of Design and Merchandising) and a graduate of the Academy of Art University. Patrik’s work has been published in Art Jewelry Magazine, Jewelry Artist, 500 Pendants and Lockets, New Directions in Metal Clay and various other publications. Patrik has also appeared on HGTV’s That’s Clever show. Patrik can be reached at his web site at www.patrikstudio.com

Supplies

PMC + 18 gram package: Item #100881

Earring Wires: Item # 631003

Tools

Basic PMC Tool Kit: Item #111499

Card Deck or Graduated Slats: 111569

Rocker Tool “B”: Item #ROCKER-B

PMC Work Surface: Item # 111567

Sanding Sponge Set: Item # 337318

Vermiculite or Alumina Hydrate: Item # 100960

3M Dust and Mist Respirator: Item# DM

Kiln: Item # SC-2 KILN or torch: Item # 500230

Tumbler: Item # 202140

Food Dehydrator

Warming Pad: Item #CWPAD

Drinking glass

Polymer Clay