Fragments

By Jenny Dowd

I love the antique effects we can get with very little effort using polymer clay, textures and acrylic paints. I also love making buttons, so I've combined both for this month's technique. The buttons are meant to resemble 'fragments' or 'shards' of broken carved antiquities and are great fun to make. You could also very easily turn them into earrings, pins, or elements in a necklace or bracelet.

You will need:

- Polymer clay of your choice in either white or beige (ecru) and some translucent if you want to make faux ivory as the base.
- Textures (I used both stamp molds and printing blocks)
- Acrylic paints - Burnt Umber, Raw Umber, Raw Sienna, Cool Blue, Gold or Copper Mettalic or your favourite antiqueing colours. Plaid Patina is also a good product for getting a really good verdigris effect. Note: I use Cool Blue mixed with any of the others for an aged green effect.
- Small chisel type paintbrush
- Small pile of dirt
- Wet and Dry sandpaper in 400, 600, 1000 grits, tub of water and paper towel or cloth
- Buffing wheel or denim for polishing
- Sealer such as Future or a matte gloss
- Corncob holder for making buttonholes, plastic button shanks or telephone wire for making embedded shanks
- Zap-a-gap or E6000

To start, condition your clay and roll into a rough shaped ball. Compress slightly.

Tear off a piece about the size of your thumbnail and flatten with your fingers until it is the size and thickness you want. I can't give specifics because each 'fragment' is different and not meant to match exactly. You'll soon work out how much clay you need for each piece.

Don't worry about fingerprints, as these will be sanded off later.

If you want to make faux ivory, you'll need to roll a snake of beige/ecru and one of translucent. Slightly twist these two snakes together and marbelise until you can just see streaks of translucent through the beige/ecru. You can also go to http://www.glassattic.com for a more detailed explanation of faux ivory.

To texture the fragments, lightly dust some corn starch onto the stamp/mold/printing block etc. and press the scrap of clay against your texture source, making sure that you don't use a section of texture that is fully representational of the image.
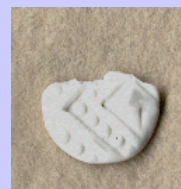
If you are using a spiral stamp, press the clay onto it off centre, or if it's a floral stamp, just pick up half the flower and a leaf or two. See the example above.

Hint: Texture sheets are wonderful things but they don't work well with this technique, mainly because you need a fragment that looks like it has broken off a piece of old pottery or carved artifact! You'll get more realistic results if you use sections of an image that as a whole, actually represents something.

With a printing block, for instance, you could texture a sheet the size of the block, then tear the whole thing into fragments. In this picture, you can see where I've dusted the blocks with cornstarch. Although I wouldn't necessarily use the elephant as a whole, the section I did use looks like it could, realistically, be a fragment from around the rim of an ancient pot. The same is true of the lower block.

Before you remove the clay from the texture source, gently press it onto some baking paper on your work surface. The baking paper will help you avoid a shiny bottom.

At this point you will need to make buttonholes if desired.
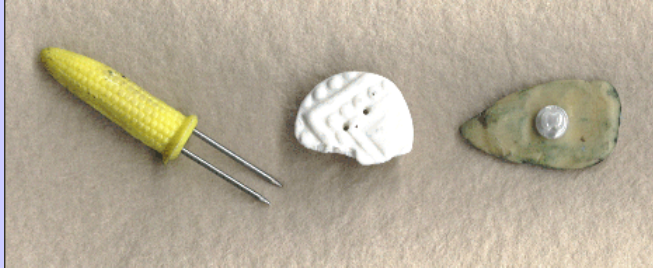
After removing the raw fragment from texture source, lay it onto the baking surface and pierce with the corn cob holder. If you have a little hand drill, you can bake then drill the holes afterwards. If not, pick the fragment up, push the corn cob holder through from one side, then from the other. Be careful not to squash the textured surface too much. Fortunately, a little distortion to the shape won't really matter since it will only add to the realism of the fragments.

Button Shanks: If your fragment is thick enough, you can embed some telephone wire into the back of it in a loop formation (see Irene Semanchuk Dean's book, *The Weekend Crafter: Polymer Clay* for detailed instructions on this method) or you can glue a plastic shank on with Zap-a-gap or E6000, as I have done. (Sue Heaser's *Polymer Clay Techniques* book also has an alternative shank method.) I rarely use button shanks and can't attest to how long these plastic shanks will remain attached, so I am working on other ways that might prove more secure. If anyone has a really good tip for this, please send it in to pcPolyzine so we can share it.

After adding the buttonholes, bake according to the manufacturer's specified temperature.

When cool, sand each fragment using 400, 600 and 1000-grit sandpaper.

At this stage you can also scratch the surface of each piece with a needle tool to add to the antique look. This works particularly well with faux ivory or bone.

Now comes the fun and messy part. Here's where you can use the dirt I listed in the requirements! Depending on the effect you want, choose the colour paint which best suits your purpose. Wet your fingers and rub some dirt into the fragment. (You don't have to do this since I know the ground is frozen solid in some parts of the world at this time of year, but it adds a touch of realism to the project!)

Squeeze out some paint onto your work surface or a plastic lid and with your paintbrush or your fingers, work it into the texture so you get a good coverage. Then, before the paint has time to dry quickly wipe off the excess with some paper towel. Don't use water because this will wash away too much of the paint (unless of course you were **too** heavy handed, in which case a quick wash will remove some of it). Be aware that once you've rubbed paint into baked clay, it is virtually impossible to remove all traces of it. If you find the paint didn't get into the depressions of the texture, use the paintbrush to get into the crevices.

Set aside to dry while you work on the other fragments.

Once dry, sand gently with the 1000-grit sandpaper to remove some of the paint from the surface. Buff gently and seal.

Hmmmmm. Having thought further about using that elephant as a whole, I'm off to explore the possibilities!!!