

Puppets, Posies and Pietre Dure

Sue Heaser

By

Trina Williams



Whether you have been intrigued by the intricacies of her Pietre Dure or fascinated by her sunflower canes, British polymer clay artist Sue Heaser is certainly a well known name here in the United States.

Sue's earliest adventures with art started with puppets. "I made my first marionette out of wood when I was about 10," says Sue, "and have always had a passion for them. I often gave shows at kids' parties and charity events. More recently, I have created and operated large scale puppets for local theatricals - just for fun these days."

Like many of our home grown clay artists, Sue first bought Fimo in a toy shop in 1981. She thought it looked like an interesting hobby item. Because she had a background in illustration, it was easy for her to transfer her skills to clay. By 1985, she was making jewelry for galleries and shops in her area of Great Britain. Sue soon gave up illustration in favor of jewelry production and continued in that direction for seven years.

Sue lives with her husband and two daughters in the Eastern part of England. She studied at Art College and Exeter University and has experience in glass engraving as well as illustration, but her first job was a finds assistant at the Museum of London. "I was handling the Roman, Saxon and medieval finds they were excavating from London," Sue says. "I then began illustrating them [which] led to a job at the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments in London, drawing artifacts from excavations all over Britain. I also worked at the British Museum for a while." That job, according to Sue, was "a fabulous job."

Sue freelanced for several years after her children were born, then discovered polymer clay. Her discovery of polymer clay has led to her writing about it, as well as teaching all over the world. Sue taught at Ravensdale in 1998, both a puppetry class and something that I was introduced to for the first time: Pietre Dure.

According to Sue, "Pietre Dure is the glorious technique of Florentine mosaic which uses a palette of semiprecious stones cut into intricate shapes to create works of art." She discovered the technique while visiting Italy in 1997. "I was blown away by the relatively obscure technique and decided I would try to replicate it in polymer clay. It has been very popular, although many find it challenging."

Yes, challenging is a good word. Reproducing Lapis Lazuli, agate, chalcedony, jasper, mother-of-pearl, marble and fossilized wood is hard enough. But doing the inlay work with clay is a tedious job. After tracing a design, the artist painstakingly cuts and places the elements into the design. I was so impressed with what I had done in raw clay, I waited months to bake my creation. Then I burned it to a crisp! I may try it again, someday. Maybe.

I am struck with the globetrotting backgrounds of so many of our PC artists. Sue spent her childhood in the Far East, Middle East and Africa. At age 14, she was giving a weekly marionette show on Lebanese TV. Her travel and museum background is reflected not only in Pietre Dure but motifs from around the world, some of which are incorporated in her book *Making Polymer Clay Jewelry*, which was published in 1997.

"I outlined my first book on the clay and sent the proposal to large British publishers who had never heard of polymer clay!" Sue remembers. "I was finally contracted in 1994." It was scheduled for publishing in 1995 but a series of glitches pushed the date ever forward. (Our stateside polymer artists have experienced similar "glitches" producing PC books.)

During the 1990s, Sue was publishing articles in and around Great Britain and to date, has published about 40 books. She was a founding member of the British Polymer Clay Guild in 1997 and a second book, *Making Dolls House Miniatures with Polymer Clay* came out in October of 1997.

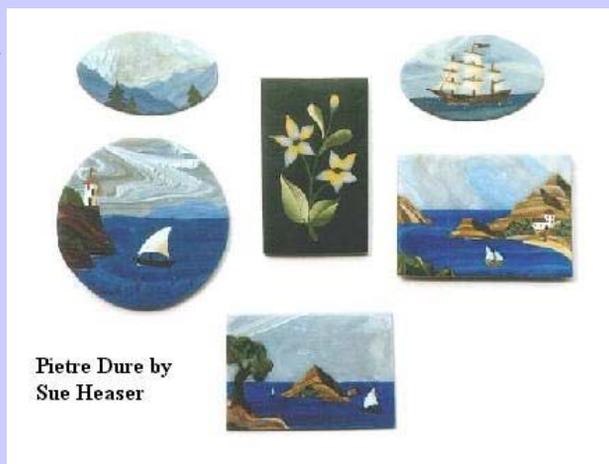
Sue's flower techniques range from the popular caned sunflower to the delicate petals of her primroses, pansies and morning glories. Her technique of hanging the delicate petals inside a glass jar to bake is one of my favorite tips.

Two more books came along in 1999: *Making Miniature Dolls With Polymer Clay* in January and *The Polymer Clay Techniques Book* in October. Currently she is working on a new book, *Polymer Clay For Your Home*.

And what does Sue Heaser do when not "playing with clay"? She plays the violin in a local orchestra, paints scenery for a drama group, and spends every available moment of the summer sailing around the coasts of Britain and Europe with her husband. She is a qualified



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Yachtmaster Offshore. She has had two children's musicals published, which have been performed all over the world, and has also published *The Encyclopedia of Candlemaking* under the pen name of Sandie Lea.

When asked about her latest travel, Sue responded, " My last trip was to teach in Taiwan last month. I was invited to teach 17 craft teachers many of the techniques from my *Techniques* book. Only three spoke English so it was all done through an interpreter. The people were lovely and their culture is fascinating- I was really fired with ideas for the future, too."

And you can bet that those of us on this part of the planet will be waiting impatiently to hear about them.

BOOKS BY SUE HEASER

Making Polymer Clay Jewelry

Making Dolls House Miniatures with Polymer Clay

Making Miniature Dolls with Polymer Clay

The Polymer Clay Techniques Book

