

HORSING AROUND WITH POLYMER CLAY

BY DEIRDRE F WOODWARD



The Western New York State Polymer Clay Guild recently sent out a birth announcement to various polymer clay lists. They welcomed into the world "A Well Seasoned Horse," 225 pounds of fiberglass and polymer clay. The horse, 6 feet tall and 8 feet long, took the guild 12 weeks and 1553 hours of intense physical labor to create. I recently spoke with one of the proud "mothers," Christine Platt, about the guild's recent delivery.

My first question was, of course, why? Christine explained that it was all guild member Kathleen Fiete's instigation. Different cities in New York State -- New York City, Buffalo, and now Rochester -- have been engaging local artist groups to decorate various large animals for display throughout the city. New York City had cows, while Buffalo, naturally, had buffalo. "[Kathy's] mother photographed and clipped newspaper articles about all the buffalo in the city of Buffalo," Christine told me. "When it appeared in our local paper on September 12, 2000, that Rochester was going to do horses, Kathy sent me an e-mail suggesting that this would be a good project."

Rochester chose the horse because it represented 12-Horse Ale, a beer brewed by the corporate sponsor of the event, High Falls Brewing Company.

The process for entering the event was quite rigorous. Artists had to compete in a juried selection process for the right to cover one of the 156 horses available. The guild received their application the first week of October and had only three weeks to submit the application, complete with resumes, drawings of their design, and slides. "We had to include slides of guild member's work," Christine said.

Although they only had three weeks, guild member Patricia Kramer, who designed their project, was able to complete her winning creation in time for the deadline. Then the guild had to wait several weeks to hear whether or not they were accepted.



Husbands wrangling the horse

Once the guild received the good news that their design was accepted, the 125 pound fiberglass horse was delivered. "We basically had three months -- twelve weeks, from the time of delivery to having to drop it off finished," said Christine. "And at times it was a nightmare."



Patti applies the design to the horse

When the group first received the horse, Patti immediately transferred her design onto



the fiberglass shell. However, when they attempted to glue the polymer clay tiles onto the horse, no glue they used would bond and the tiles kept falling off. "Around Christmas, we found out from the manufacturer of the horses that they have oil-based primer on them and needed to be sanded," Christine said.

"We spent three days sanding the primer -- and the reference drawings -- off."

Watching Patricia's beautiful design disappear was heartwrenching, said Christine. "I was totally destroyed."



Christine works on flowers for the horse's legs

There were other problems as well. Some of the clay crumbled, and tiles had to be redone. "There were days it felt like a nightmare," said Christine. "It was just as things go wrong we started questioning 'why did we ever agree to do this?' But there was always belief that this would come off and it was going to turn out wonderfully. I think we knew that we were going to make it."

The guild had generous help from corporations to help them succeed. Their horse was purchased for them by the CPA group Insero, Kasperski, Ciaccia and Co., "who had no idea what polymer clay was," said Christine. "We had to educate them."



Surrounded by clay!

The close-to-130 pounds of clay was donated by Accent Import-Export and American Art Clay Co. The guild used both Fimo Classic and Fimo Soft and spent hours on conditioning. "Believe me, we conditioned a lot of clay for this project," Christine said as she laughed. "Kids were conditioning, and we sent clay home with guild members to condition. We learned that Fimo works much better when you beat it to death!"

Fortunately not all the clay had to be hand conditioned. They had the help of two pasta machine motors owned by guild members.



A commercial oven was donated to the guild as well. Hobart, well known for commercial ovens, donated an oven big enough to hold six cookie sheets. Since most of the horse was covered in 2x2 inch tiles that were cut and baked before application, the generous oven size was most helpful.



The horse's chest displays the sun



Not all of the horse was covered with tiles, however. According to Christine, "The legs and some of the bigger design areas, such as the moons and lilacs, were done as single larger pieces." Guild members formed raw clay around the legs of the horse, partially cured them with heat guns, cut the clay off, cured it, and put it back on the horse leg.



Fortunately, said Christine, none of the clay burned, "but there were definitely things we learned about how clay reacts. We had to find out how other people who covered large objects did it, and what glue they used."



To find the perfect glue, they turned to another corporation, 3M Corp., who found for them an ideal glue: 3M Scotch-seal PA Sealant # 560, a glue used in the RV industry and strong enough to withstand outdoor exposure. "We were worried that with expansion, the tiles were going to pop off," said Christine. "3M found us the perfect glue."

The guild members used Zap-A-Gap to hold the tiles in place while the 3M glue hardened. Because they were concerned the horse would be located outdoors, the guild also covered the horse with four coats of Diamond Varathane, "the outdoors variety that has UV protection." "We now have have 100% UV protection," said Christine.

Heading off to the corral



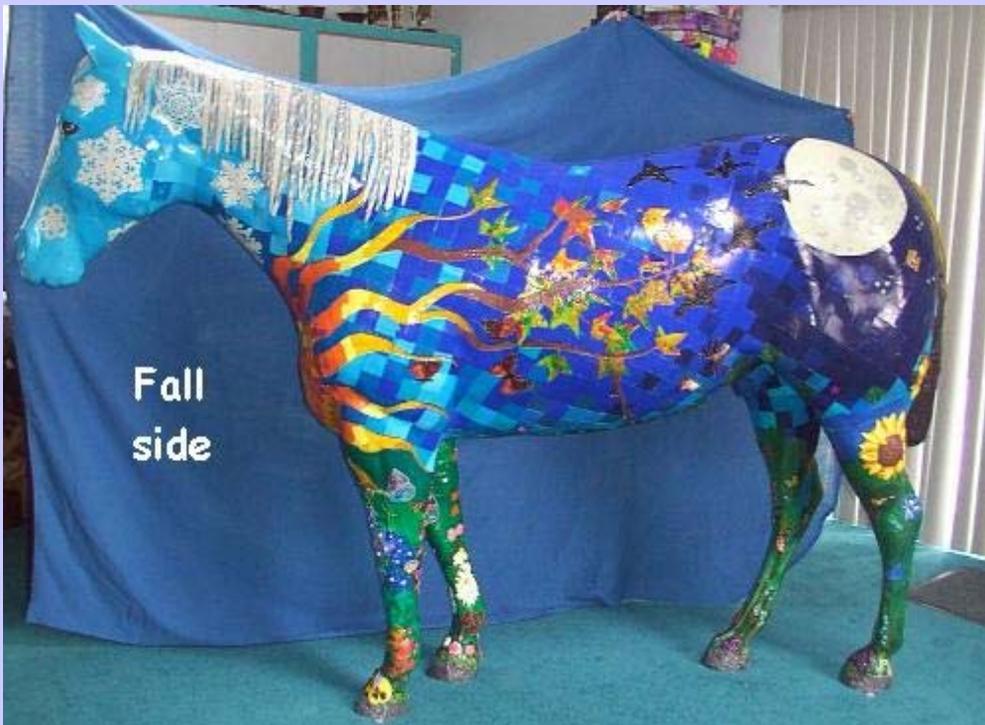
Luckily, the horse will be located indoors, at the Eastview Mall Shopping Center in Rochester, NY. The horse is now in a holding corral and will be located at its summer home sometime between May 10 and 12.

All the horses will stay up until September 13, 2001, then they will be auctioned off.

Who does she hope will win the horse? "We want it to be auctioned off to someone who

will treat it well," says Christine. "We don't want it to be in someone's back yard and deteriorate."

Wherever it ends up, however, Christine hopes the horse will serve as an inspiration to other polymer clay artists to design big. "I would like the word to get out for people to create larger things," said Christine. "I want people to know that polymer can be done on a larger scale than is currently being done. I'm waiting for the first polymer clay dresser to come out. Where it can go is endless. People just have to know it is possible."



Fall
side



Specific details about the horse include:

It was finished on March 9, 2001, at 3:27 p.m.

The horse's "mothers" are Patricia Kramer, Kathleen Fiete, and Christine Platt.

The "stepparents" include guild members Maura Muir, Marilynn Thompson, Carl Johengen, Deb Collier, Stephanie Donaldson, Carol Dluzen, Mary Lalumiere, Carolyn Lomeo, and Karey Brindel.

