

LEARNING RESOURCE



Direct Carving with Soap

Stone carving is a reductive process whereby the artist gradually removes material to find the finished form. Some stone carvers use a method known as direct carving, where the process of carving itself suggests the final form, as opposed to the process of working from a preliminary model or sketch.

Carving soap is an ideal way to experience carving from home, or to introduce the process to children - the soft surface can be carved easily using modest tools. Please make sure the tools are blunt to ensure their safe use by children.

This project shows you how to use the direct carving method to create an organic, abstract soap sculpture. It is a hugely satisfying process to see the form slowly evolve as you carve away. It is always possible to accidentally take away too much soap, but I would encourage you to test the limits of the material - if necessary, have an extra soap on hand!

What will I need for this project?

Bar of soap

Blunt knife (a clay knife is ideal)

Range of sculpture/modeling tools (if available)

A pointed tool such as a barbeque skewer, screw or toothpick

Natural forms such as shells (to use for inspiration)

Newspaper or an old surface to work on

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Step one:

Gather your materials together and prepare your workspace.



Step two:

Use your pointed tool to draw a line into your bar of soap. Continue drawing all the way around the form to create one continuous line. You might want to make this line wavy or curved, in response to the contours and outline of your natural forms.



Step three:

Holding onto your soap with one hand, use your other hand to carve soap away next to the line that you have drawn. This will create a new edge. Practice using different tools but make sure that you use them safely by holding the soap firmly with one hand and angling your tools away from yourself as you are carving.



Step four:

Use a screw or another pointed tool to carefully create a hole that goes all the way through your bar of soap. You can gradually make this hole larger as you progress.



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Step five:

Keep carving areas of soap away, making your hole larger and working from all sides of the form. You can create new edges by drawing additional lines with a pointed tool and then carving soap away next to these lines.



Step six:

Once you are satisfied with your three-dimensional form, you could use your tools to create different textures on your soap. Try creating rough or smooth areas, having a look at the surface qualities of your natural forms.



Finally, admire your completed carving from all angles!

Talking Points

Did your carving turn out the way you thought it would?

How did you know when to stop carving?

How might you position your sculpture?