

## Metal Clay Miniatures: From Malleable to Metal

Bonnie Toney

For thousands of years, the shaping of metal has involved hammers, heavy equipment, and serious force (human or mechanical). Less than thirty years ago, a new medium was developed that allows the manipulation of small amounts of metal with no more force than human fingertips; metal clay. There are now several manufacturers, each producing several kinds of clay, with different working qualities in different types of metal; silver, copper, bronze (in multiple colors), brass, iron, and steel. All of these metal clays can be shaped in multiple ways to produce small objects which are dried and then kiln-fired to produce solid metal.

In this class, we will work with several different types of base metal clay to produce small objects suitable for jewelry and/or decorative use. Students will learn how to use commercially-made molds and texture sheets to enhance their creations, and they will also learn how to create their own molds and textures. Once shaped and dried, unfired metal clay can be further refined by sanding, carving, and smoothing techniques which we will learn and practice. The class will learn to construct working hinges, set small synthetic gemstones, and build hollow shapes.

As always, I teach techniques, and students design their own projects using those techniques. Thus, any student can make their project as manly or feminine as they wish.

Taking this class from Mrs. Toney entitles a student to free kiln-firing of metal clay projects (up to ten pieces a month) for six months from the start of class, in addition to classroom projects.

### Policies and Procedures:

As always, I have a one-warning policy concerning tools/materials and their proper use; I expect my students to treat them and each other with care and respect. Some of the tools we will be using this semester can be dangerous if mishandled, and our materials are expensive. Depending on the project, I may not be able to provide your student with a spare if they fool around, ignore instructions, or otherwise spoil the materials they are given. It would be doubly awful if anyone damaged another student's work. Therefore, I have a one-warning policy for classroom foolishness; if a student uses art materials in an unsafe or disrespectful manner (such as poking another student with a paintbrush, whether or not it has paint on it, dueling with pencils, throwing things, etc.), they receive a warning reminder from me that their behavior is inappropriate. If they continue the behavior, or demonstrate that they cannot or will not settle down, they will be asked to sit out the remainder of that class session without further access to the materials or tools we are working with that day. I go over my expectations about respecting materials, tools, and classmates at the beginning of the semester, and at the start of any class session where I feel the reminder would be helpful. I will add that I have only had to ask two students to sit out a single class session each over the course of my many years of teaching; most students respond very well to the reminder about our class rules.

A word about safety equipment: when we are refining dried metal clay shapes with sanding tools, a fine dust of metal clay results. It is heavy, and generally falls to the table, but if you would like to, you may provide your child with a basic dust mask to wear during such activities. I do not generally wear a dust mask while sanding metal clay in my own studio, but this is a group setting, so it is up to you to decide whether you wish to have your child wear a dust mask. If you decide to do so, please have your child bring the mask back and forth with them to class. Again, it is your responsibility to provide a dust mask for your child if you wish them to wear one, and to ensure that they have it with them.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns.

