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Rococo-style Candlestick

BY JULIA RAI

Create an ornate Rococo-style candlestick in silver clay.

The Rococo style is known for its ornate decoration, curves and natural forms. Often asymmetrical, the style was mainly used in furniture, silver and ceramics. This 1:12 scale tall Rococo style candlestick is made with silver metal clay, providing intermediate level metal clay users with an opportunity for elaborate embellishment.

MATERIALS

- 10g Art Clay Silver
- Thick silver clay paste
- Syringe type silver clay
- Two-part silicone moulding compound
- Moulded button (approx. 17mm across, 7mm high)
- Small flower cutter
- Ruler
- Teflon sheet
- Needle tool
- Micro carving tools
- Very small needle files
- 3mm drill bit
- Good quality paintbrushes
- Emery board
- Fibre blanket
- Soft brass or steel brush
- Steel burnisher

1. A moulded button or old piece of jewellery makes a good base for the candlestick. Something with scrolls, curves or natural themes in the Rococo style with some doming or dimension is ideal.

2. Take equal quantities of each colour of the moulding compound. Quickly combine the two parts together until the colours are fully mixed with no marbling. Roll into a smooth ball and place on a flat surface. Push the button in until the compound is level with the back and leave to cure. After curing, remove the button.

3. Form a ball of silver clay into a flat patty about 1.5mm thick and about the same size as the mould. Firmly press the clay into the mould. The clay should dip in the centre and just come up to the edges of the mould. Leave for 30 minutes, then pop it out onto Teflon to dry.

4. For the candlestick stem, roll a piece of silver clay into a rough sausage shape, about 35mm long and 3mm thick. Roll two grooves into the stem at appropriate intervals along the length using a needle tool. Straighten it carefully using a ruler or similar straight edge as a guide and then put it aside to dry.

5. To make the bobèche – the part of the candlestick that catches the wax drips – create a mould of an ornate button and line with clay as before. Immediately press the button gently into the clay, texturing the surface so it's patterned on both sides. Cut out a flower shape, about 10mm across. Leave to dry.

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6. With an emery board, squarely flatten the top and bottom ends of the stem so it stands straight. Draw fluid lines in pencil onto the surface. Use micro-carving tools and very small files to roughly carve out these lines, working carefully as the dry clay is brittle. Refine the grooves in the stem using small files.

7. File the highest point of the base with an emery board, creating a flat platform onto which you'll attach the stem. Dampen the platform and the end of the stem piece with water. Use very thick silver clay paste to stick the stem and base together. Clean up any excess paste with a damp paintbrush and dry.

8. When the base and stem are fully dry, use the syringe type clay to add some Rococo-style embellishment to the stem. The syringe type comes with a standard-sized nozzle. To make the extruded line thicker, trim the end of the nozzle straight across with sharp scissors to extrude a line around 1mm to 2mm thick.

9. Dampen a small area of the surface of the stem with water and extrude a short curved line of clay following the edge of one of your carved lines. While the clay line is still wet, use a good quality small, flat paintbrush to mark the surface of the line to emulate leaf or shell patterns.

10. Allow each syringed line to dry completely before you continue to the next to avoid damaging the embellished areas. Add blobs of syringe and use the flat paintbrush to put lines in the blobs in a fan-shaped arrangement. When it's all dry, use files and carvers to exaggerate the carved lines, giving the stem more dimension.

11. Use thick paste to attach the bobèche to the stem. Heavily textured areas need the paste to fill the texture where it joins the stem, making a good bond. Clean up excess paste with a damp paintbrush and dry thoroughly. Use a 3mm drill bit to drill a central hole in the bobèche for the candle.

12. This piece should be kiln fired, fully supported on a bed of fibre blanket with the stem padded underneath to avoid warping during firing. Fire the piece for two hours at 900°C for maximum strength and shrinkage. After firing, polish using a soft brass brush in soapy water and use a burnisher to shine the high spots.

RESOURCES

Art Clay Silver, paste and syringe:

www.creativeglassshop.co.uk

Two-part silicone moulding compound,

metal clay tools: www.metalclay.co.uk

Micro-carving tools: www.linnaeusilver.com

A button from your button box, or from a haberdashery shop.

CONTACT

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www.metalclayacademy.com

TIPS

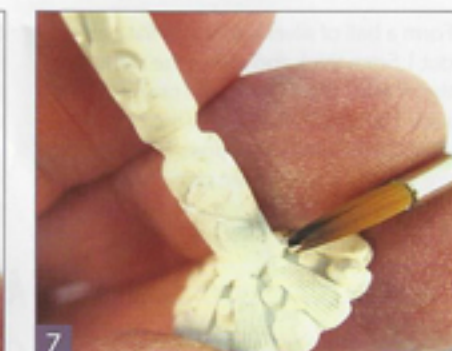
Take care not to mix the two colours of the moulding compound in the tubs or you'll end up with cured lumps in the package.

Moulding compound takes around 10–15 minutes to cure fully. Poke it with a cocktail stick to check if it's hard before removing your button.

Silicone moulds don't require oiling when using them with silver clay; they are slick enough to release the clay easily.

EXTRA PROJECTS

This technique could be adapted to fit into any period of history by changing the embellishment. The basic candlestick design – can be left plain or decorated; the stem can be shorter and squatter or longer and more elegant to suit the period.



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