

Julia gives advice on teaching metal clay

Choosing metal clay training

Looking at metal clay and thinking you really would like to have a go but don't know how to find the right training? Then let Julia Rai show you the way

Metal clay is rapidly growing in the UK with many more training providers offering classes and courses in metal clay. So how can you decide which class to choose? In this article I'll give you some basic information about the different types of metal clay training available in the UK and some advice to help you pick a teacher in this expanding marketplace.

What do you want to do with metal clay?

Do you just want to find out if you like working with it? If so look for someone who offers taster sessions lasting a few hours. On a short taster you'll find out if you like metal clay and if you like the teachers' training style. It allows you to see where the course is held - is it clean and tidy, well equipped, free from distractions, safe? Can you see yourself enjoying a longer course here?

Do you want to jump right in and learn as much as possible in a weekend?

Many teachers offer weekend beginners metal clay courses. Search online or look at the Metal Clay Academy training pages or the Guild websites to see what's available in your area. On a two day class you can find out more about the teacher and how the class is run.

Do you want to do a recognised metal clay certification or diploma training course?

There are several qualifications available; Art Clay Certification, PMC Certification or the Diploma in Silver Metal Clay Proficiency. Each course has specific merits so research them carefully to find out which is right for you. This is a more expensive option so think very carefully about why you want a recognised qualification and choose the training provider who fits your aspirations.

Branded courses

Some of these qualifications are linked to one brand of metal clay, either PMC or Art Clay. This

often means you get a discount on buying clay when you've completed the qualification but not always, so check with the training provider before you book, particularly if the discount is important to you. Also remember that there are metal clay suppliers in the UK who will give you a discount on clay with no qualifications so ask around before committing to expensive training just for a discount.

By taking a branded course, you can normally be sure that the teacher is well versed in how to work with that brand. You may find though that they know very little about the other brands or varieties of metal clay or even that they tell you their brand is superior, which is always something to be wary of. Art Clay and PMC both have their merits and one is not superior to the other. Good teachers need to be aware of all the brands and varieties of metal clay to give students a well-balanced training experience.

Choosing the right teacher

One thing to bear in mind is that very few teachers delivering metal clay classes have had any formal teacher training. This doesn't mean they're bad teachers though. Ask the teacher what teacher training they've had before booking a course with them. Remember though that they may still be an excellent teacher without formal qualifications. Likewise, someone who has teaching qualifications may not be a good teacher!

One way many people choose a class is by looking at the teacher's work. The standard of their work indicates their level of skill with metal clay. Taking a beginners class with someone who produces basic pieces is fine but if you want to develop your skills and really excel, choose a teacher whose work is good quality and who is well respected by the metal clay community. The best way to find quality training is to ask other students who have taken a class with the teacher. A recommendation from others really helps you



to choose the teacher and the class that's right for you. And a good teacher will be very happy to show you testimonials from their students.

Doing your research

To get a completely independent assessment of the teacher, check the PMC Guild website. It has a facility for Guild members to list the classes they run and allows students to rate their experience with the teacher. Anyone can add a review; you don't have to be a member of the PMC Guild to review a teacher. I'd encourage you to leave a review of any metal clay teacher you've trained with. This is really helpful for others to see when they're trying to choose a class. I'd also encourage you to look at the reviews of any teachers you are considering training with.

Finally, a good teacher should ask you for feedback on the class. If the teacher asks you to evaluate the class, please be honest. Tell them what you liked and what would make the class even better next time. This is how teachers improve and raise the standard of their classes – something all good teachers are passionate about.

resources

Useful resources
 Metal Clay Academy
www.metalclayacademy.com
 The PMC Guild: www.pmcguild.co.uk
 The Art Clay Guild: www.artclayworld.org.uk