

"I ALWAYS WORK ON WHITE CLAY" • Olga Nicolas



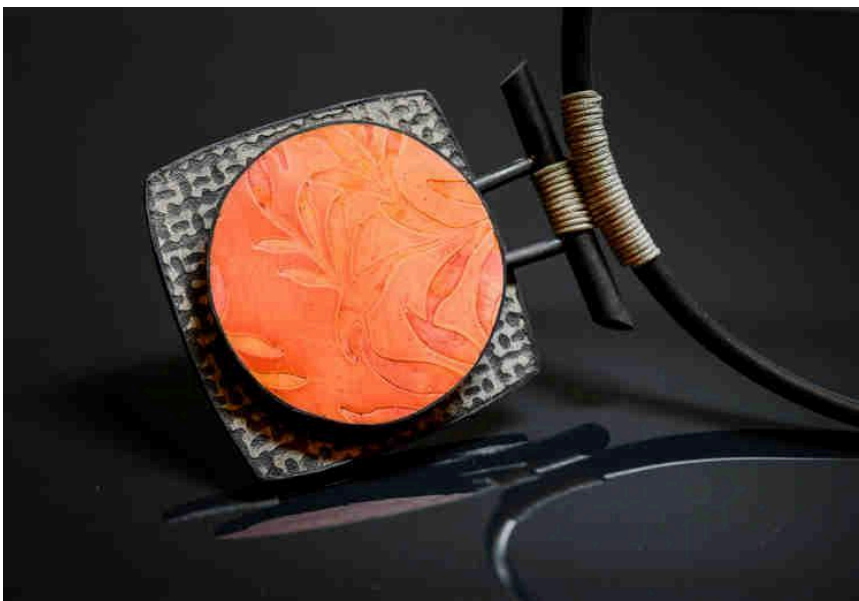
French artist [Olga Nicolas](#) is well-known for working with the polymer clay as with a canvas. She often starts with a simple sheet of white clay and while adding different mediums she lets the magic happen.

Find out more about Olga in this inspiring interview that will reveal more about the way she works with the clay but also what she thinks about the new trends in our community and future of teaching live classes.

Hello Olga! Let's start to talk about you first. How do you feel these weeks?

At the moment I am asking myself a lot of questions: I am in a phase where I am working a lot but it is the invisible work of the artists: I am feeding my creativity, I am trying out, I am experimenting, I am learning to work with other materials. I'm flipping around, I don't have a clear path to follow, yet. It's exciting and frustrating at the same time.

The pandemic we are experiencing does not help us to develop our creativity in a serene way either. What I like most about my work is teaching live, meeting people. Even though the online courses I have set up are full of interactions and discussions, it's been almost a year since I've done any workshops and I miss it.



What is your experience with online classes? Does it work for you?

I wanted to offer easy-to-use courses. Everyone can follow at their own pace. All the demos are recorded, so I'm sure the quality is excellent. I haven't done a zoom course, yet. I may offer it later.

I was very pleased to see that there was a lot of discussion on the groups created for the courses. The participants post their work and encourage each other. I can also answer their questions, give advice. It's not as friendly as a workshop but it's very pleasant.

Do you spend a lot of time in your studio working with polymer clay?

I try to have a regular routine for working. I make a to-do list each day or week but I allow myself the freedom to do anything else if the inspiration is there. At the beginning of this year I went several weeks without touching the clay. I made jewellery with wood, resin, acrylic and brass. I've been defining myself more as a multi-material artist for some time now but polymer clay is really my medium of choice. I love its endless creative possibilities. I've been working with polymer clay since 2005 and after all these years I can't get enough of it and I'm still having a blast. I now want to combine other materials, especially metal, with my polymer clay work.



Do you still start your process with the sheet of white clay that you then decor with paints, inks and other colorful mediums?

Exactly. I haven't done any color blends for months. I did use coloured polymer clay to make the stone effect in my course "to go further" but otherwise I always work on white or very light clay and then add other mediums. I'm very attracted to mixed media. I love to paint and have dirty colorful fingers.

What does it look like in your studio? Drawers full of white clay?

My drawers are mostly full of paints, inks, pastels, stamps, markers and pencils. As I work with many different mediums and materials, I have spent a lot of time organizing my studio. I like to find ways to make it easier for me to store stuff and to have everything within reach. Over time I have become much more tidy. It saves me time because I know exactly where each object and tool is. When I started, I bought all the new items recommended by other polymer clay lovers. Now I try to work with the essentials. I make my own tools and templates with recycled material if possible...



Is there any specific technique that caught your attention recently?

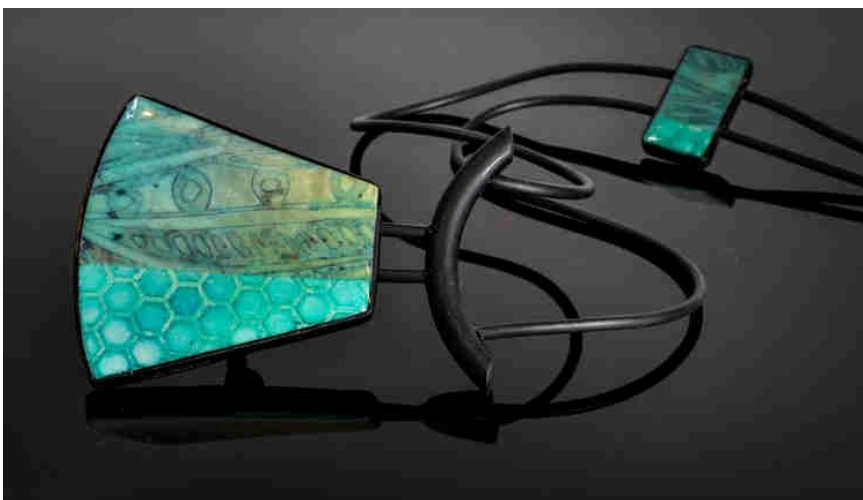
For some time now, I have been discovering a large number of earrings designers who are bringing back to life techniques that were published a long time ago. I'm thinking in particular of techniques derived from watercolor mosaic, applique and embroidery... Even if I admire the result, my eye turns much more towards mixed media techniques and surface techniques.

Finally, I believe that what interests me is not the "trendy" technique that has been used, but the way in which the person adapts and incorporates a technique into his or her own style and art. This is something I recently saw with great pleasure on the FB group created with H el ene Jean Claude. We both shared a surface technique and people who wanted to participate could present a piece using these techniques. We saw some amazing beauties from people who followed their own way.

What about the polymer clay community? I assume you have made many friends during those years working with a polymer.

When I started, I was lucky enough to meet other polymer clay lovers in my area. These meetings were a time for exchanging, sharing and laughing! I continued to meet people during my workshops and the exchanges are still going on on social media. I have also been very lucky to teach at events where I have met other international teachers. Polymer clay has made me meet some wonderful people.

I have the feeling that the polymer community is changing a lot: many people who started at the same time as me have moved on to other passions. New, younger people started working with polymer clay during the first lockdown and have since flourished in an incredible way. The way these young women communicate and master social media is also changing the world of polymer clay.



Totally agree, where do you see our community in next years? Do you think that after this worldwide situation these newbies might be interested to attend typical classes with international artists and teachers as you are?

I honestly don't know. Two or three years ago, I felt like the polymer clay craze was fading. Now I feel like it's the opposite. Big earrings have become much more trendy than a few years ago and it's a good opportunity for the polymer clay community. But I'm not sure that these emerging polymer clay artists are interested in courses or workshops with more experienced artists. They go their own way with their own codes.

It seems to me (but I could be wrong) that for these young women mastering and exploring the possibilities offered by this medium is not a goal.... It is rather a means. The goal of these women is to grow their business and that is fine. It's inspiring to see that you can have a successful business working with polymer clay.



When it comes to your design, what does the process from the first idea to final artwork look like?

I often have a jewellery design in my mind, but I don't see it precisely, which leaves me the possibility of improving my initial idea. It's always an idea for a piece of jewellery that I want to wear. The idea is refined and evolves with the technical considerations: it has to be comfortable to wear, it has to be durable and it has to be neither too big nor too heavy.

I don't have a story to tell in mind from the start, at least not consciously. I don't say to myself: I want my jewellery to express the sound of the wind in the trees or my unease about certain events. However, my jewellery reflects a part of my life, my memories and my interests. The Miyajima collection is very

inspired by the torii seen in Japan. Even if I know that the inspiration comes from this trip, I don't want to create a piece of jewellery that only speaks about Japan.

Is there anything that helps you during this process? Do you sketch your ideas and plan the construction and design before you actually work with the clay?

Nowadays, I tend to draw my ideas before I make my jewellery. I didn't always work

this way. A few years ago I used to make prototypes with clay. Now I draw a little more often. This helps me especially with the proportions, size and precision of the shape I want. More and more, I'm working on my design with vector drawing software. I draw very badly, so it helps me to be sharper, more precise.

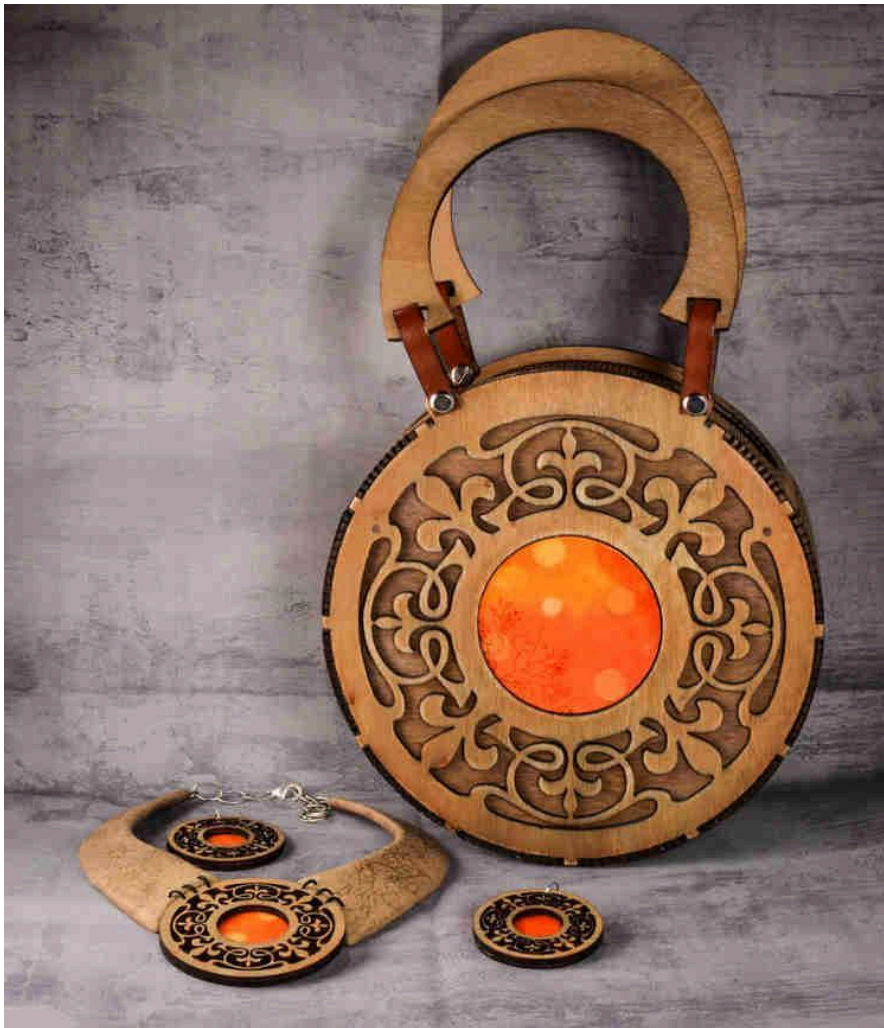
I also look a lot at artists who work with other mediums. For the "vegetable distillation" tutorial, I was inspired by dyeing and eco printing on paper or fabric.

These techniques have absolutely nothing in common, except for the plants. What interested me was the effect obtained.



In your artwork you often combine wood with polymer. Are you a fan of a laser and its possibilities?

Absolutely. I have owned a laser cutter for over two years and I love the possibilities it offers me. I didn't immediately see the possibilities in my art. I love tools and I love discovering new digital technologies. As it is not possible to cut polymer clay with a laser cutter (cutting pvc is strongly discouraged) I first saw the interest of being able to make my own stencils, templates, stamps... and then to be able to offer them to other artists. I used laser cut wood to make the storage units in my workshop (boxes and drawers) and then I started to make earrings in solid wood but I felt that the extra something was missing and then I added polymer clay. Using a laser cutter is exciting but it is only a tool, a way to push my creativity and my eagerness to learn further.



Is working with polymer clay your main job? How big a role sharing and selling your tutorials plays in that?

In 2014 I left my job as a school teacher to work full time in the area of creation. Honestly it's not easy. The income varies from month to month. Some years are better than others. I'm lucky to have a husband whose salary is constant, so that eases the fear of months that are a bit tight financially. This lack of regular income is a source of anxiety for sure, but I have never regretted my choice.

Tutorials and workshops are the most important part of my business but I have also developed the sale of accessories to work with polymer clay (stencils, templates, custom stamps or my sanding and polishing kit). There are few of them but each time they are my designs or ideas that have helped me a lot in my work. This part of my business has allowed me to not suffer too much from the impossibility of teaching in workshops since the pandemic.

What would be your advice to our Society members?

Don't lose that spark you felt the first times you played with polymer clay, remember? It was happiness. Keep that emotion.

Create with pleasure! Always! Don't let people around you tell you what you should do (you know: "You'll sell better if you do this or that"; "why don't you make small pieces that are quick and easy to make"....). Follow your instinct, follow your heart. In time you will see that this is how you find your creative path, your own voice.



