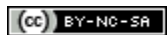


The Art of Cloth and Clay Dolls

By [Look-I-Made-A-Rat](#) in [CraftSewing](#)

Published Nov 9th, 2020



Introduction: The Art of Cloth and Clay Dolls



As usual I am making a tutorial for something because I was completely unable to find one when I was first

starting. Also as usual this is my very hackneyed improvised solution for something people have probably perfected long before me. The style I want to mimic is a porcelain doll style. While I love harlequin/jester Mardi Gras dolls, they involve a head completely covered in a hood/jester hat with only the face visible, which isn't what I'm going for.

Here is the best video I have found of this particular old-fashioned style. The creator is making a tutorial for her mostly pre-made kit on etsy, but I used my own materials and merely referenced it as the backbone of my process. There is a part two to the video which should show up in your recommends (or on the creator's channel if it doesn't).

Creating Your Clay Headed Doll Part 1:Sewing the C...



Most likely the reason I couldn't find many tutorials is because no one makes these babies anymore. Fabric and clay dolls made in a similar style have been made for centuries and all over the world. The most familiar to you is probably porcelain baby dolls, or their newer plastic versions.

I currently have two "finished" dolls. Corwin is the fox doll, my first one, and the ferret doll is currently unnamed and at this time her clothes are still in progress.

I will update as I finish her and as I make more! So if you have questions I'll happily answer them and include them in the next version!

Supplies

Materials:

Clay (I use Super Sculpey)

Tin foil

Paints

Thick craft wire

Quilt cotton or similar fabric

Superglue

Tools:

Sculpting tools

Paintbrushes/water/pallet

Needlenose pliers

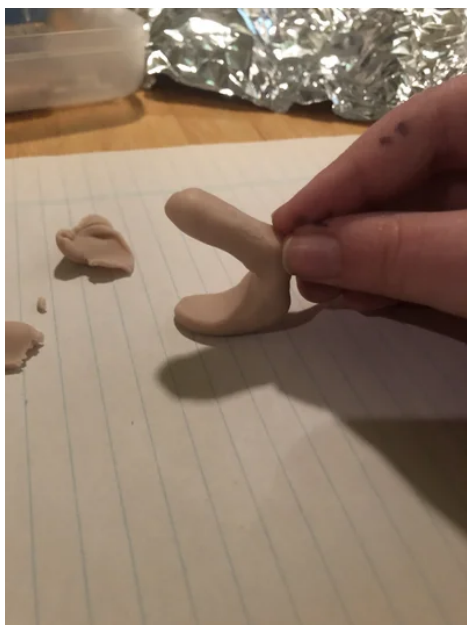
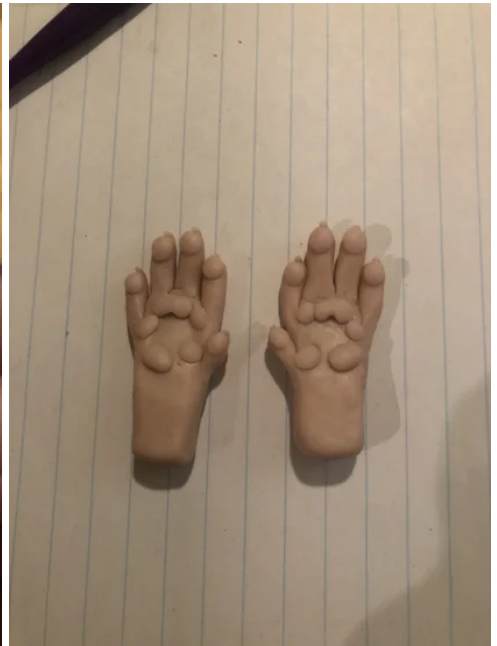
Wire cutters

Sewing needle/thread

Thimble recommended

Sewing machine recommended

Step 1: Sculpting





Look, you really don't have to be an incredible sculptor for this. Everything I know I learned from Ace of Clay on YouTube. I'd suggest finding one of his videos for more techniques and inspiration.

Roll up tin foil and sculpt it into a smaller version of the approximate shape, then cover it with a thin layer of clay. Then just play with it 'till you're satisfied I suppose. All of my dolls so far have been animals with tails, but the tails definitely add a layer of difficulty.

Important things to remember:

- 1) EVERY limb needs to have a channel carved into the end. This is how we will attach the fabric body to the clay pieces. This channel should be small and not so deep that it threatens the integrity of the piece. I use a toothpick.
- 2) The wider the hands are compared to the arms, the harder it will be to sew the arms and later design clothes to dress the doll. The first 1/4 inch of the wrist after the channel **MUST** be the same width.
- 3) Beware small pieces like claws sticking out. Every time I dress Corwin I live in fear of breaking another one of his claws (9/16 have lost the battle).
- 4) Don't be afraid to sculpt clothes into your design. Shoes will be a lot easier to sculpt than to make from scratch, just remember to scale them up accordingly, you want the shoes to be bigger than the feet would be or else your doll will look like it has tiny feet. Also accessories like bracelets, rings, and gloves should be added in here if you want them.

Step 2: Paint and Varnish

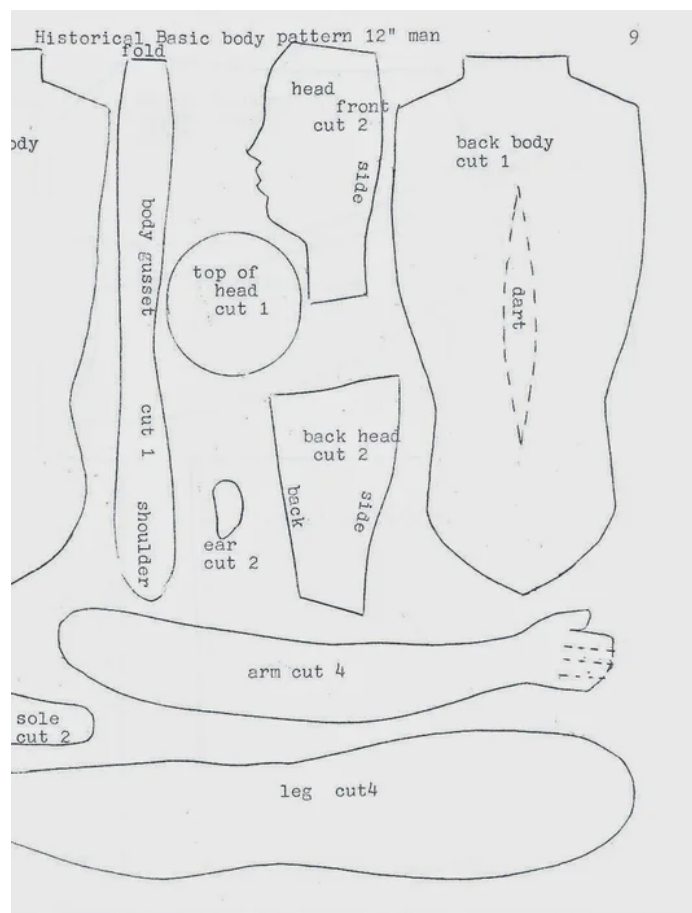




I use acrylics because that's what I have on hand, but anything that works on the clay will work. Try to avoid too many layers of thick paint or any chunks, as it makes those sections more likely to peel and crack.

Before I varnish the clay I string them up with wire. I have a specific knot I use, but it doesn't really matter as long as the pieces are connected and the wire ends in a loop. Afterward I string all the pieces to a wire clothes hanger so they stay nice and separate and hang the hanger up to spray.

Step 3: Patterning the Body



Ugh. Look. Just draw something and try stuffing it without the clay pieces. Most dolls of the time had very simple forms. They were 2.5 dimensions: 2D outlines of people with stuffing in between. Especially if you're making a boxy masculine figure, you won't need any fancy curves or darts. Most older dolls don't even have 3D legs the way I make them.

My (most recent and best) pattern includes:

1 back body piece

2 mirrored half body pieces (the seam in the middle makes the later steps easier). I do this for the front piece because the tail prevents me from doing it on the back. If your doll doesn't have a tail feel free to make this the back piece instead.

2 rectangular arm pieces (remember to factor in the size of your clay hands when determining the length of the arms. The width should be the diameter of the wrist plus .5 inches for seam allowance. Don't worry about the hands being wider than the wrists)

4 mirrored leg pieces (these are sewn/stuffed separately and then added on perpendicularly to the rest of the body. It will make sense I promise)

If you're making a human doll, your legs will be very different from mine. However I still recommend my technique for the hip joint, it allows the dolls to sit easier. In that case pattern the legs much like the arms, as straight sticks.

How much detail you put into shaping the body depends on how you plan to dress the doll. For loose, baggier clothes like Corwin's or a long skirt you can get away with simpler shapes. If you plan on having tighter clothing or more of the cloth showing consider putting more thought into realistic anatomy. It depends on the style you're going for of course.

Step 4: Connecting the Wrists and Ankles



Here is where that channel carved into the clay comes in handy.

Sew the first 1/4 inch of the first arm pattern together, right sides against each other. This should fit comfortably around the base of the sculpted wrist. Line up the end of the arm slightly past the end of the wrist, with the rest of the arm fabric covering the hand.

Take your wire and begin tightly wrapping it around the channel in the clay, sandwiching the fabric securely between the wire and the sculpted channel. After wrapping it all the way around, cut the wire so it will wrap about another 1/4 of the way around and carefully but firmly pull it tight. Dab a good bit of superglue around the wire and turn the arm fabric right-side out so it dries in place.

For my anthro character dolls the legs are digitigrade and rather wide, so they can be sewn a good 2/3 of the

way around as long as there's still a hole large enough to get the foot through. If you're making a human with nOrMaL legs then your process will be exactly like the arms.

The next step is to add the wires. First cut 4 wires to length, I always go for more than I think I'll need. Curve the end of the wire into a flat circle the size of the wrist/ankle and just glue 'er on.

Step 5: Assembling the Body and Legs



Next I finished off the rest of the legs. First turn the fabric right-side out, which hopefully you left enough of a gap for. Next you will want to snip a tiny hole in the side of the hip where you want it to attach to the "pelvis" and thread the leg wire out through it. Bend the wire inside the leg at a right angle so it sticks directly out of the hole.

The second picture is an example of what the leg will look like after it's stuffed. Stuff fairly firmly from the gap in the seam. Tip: roll a bit of stuffing into a dense ball, then grab it with your pliers. Insert the pliers into the hole and release the stuffing inside. This is a very effective way to stuff small firm pieces. When you're almost done, start sewing up the gap with an invisible stitch. Stuff the last little bit and finish off the seam.

Don't worry too much about the seam since most cloth-and-clays are fully clothed. If it *is* going to be seen however, take extra care to make it pretty.

For the arms, I use an invisible stitch all the way down the length of the open seam, stuffing it as I go until I have a solid tube. Seal off the end of the tube with a blanket stitch, tightly sandwiching the wire.

The arms are the first thing that will be attached to the body. Pin the two halves of the split piece together for now. Layer the two body pieces, right sides together, on top of each other.

Here's the fun part. Insert the arms from the inside and line them up with the shoulders, then pin in place. (Drawing needs to be added here for clarification). The wires should stick right outwards and the arms should cross between the body pieces. Sew the arms to the shoulders and a little bit above them, leaving a hole for the neck. Next, open up the pinned vertical seam and thread the arms through the slit before pinning it back up to the best of your abilities. Pin around the edges of the two body pieces and sew. The arms should stick out the open seam and you should be able to remove the pin and turn the whole thing right-side out.

If you are also adding a tail:

Mark and cut an "X" shaped hole at the small of the back, the tail piece should just barely fit through. Next, open up that center seam again, which should be on the front if you're making a tail, to access this "X" cut from the inside. Push the tail piece through and use the same method we used for the hands and feet to attach it via the carved channel. Add extra glue around the ends of the cut to prevent the fabric from fraying.

Step 6: Attaching Everything Together





First off: if you are adding a tail:

Mark and cut an "X" shaped hole at the small of the back, the tail piece should just barely fit through. Next, open up that center seam again, which should be on the front if you're making a tail, to access this "X" cut from the inside. Push the tail piece through and use the same method we used for the hands and feet to attach it via the carved channel. Add extra glue around the ends of the cut to prevent the fabric from fraying.

Next I attach the legs. Depending on how you patterned it the hips will look differently, but essentially you just cut a small hole at the pelvis to fit the leg wire through. This will probably have to be higher up than you expect. Insert the wire a little bit into the hole (making sure everything is facing the right way!), then sew and glue around the hole just like we did on the leg. Pull the wire the rest of the way through so the leg is pressed against the side, banding the wire at a 90 degree angle at the pelvis so it fits. Next, sew the leg on. You'll want to sew directly on the point where the wire is as much as you can, this preserves the mobility of the joint. It will be difficult depending on how thick the thighs are, so find a long needle and some pliers if you can. Attach both legs in this manner.

The head will be added similarly to a tail. Turn the top of the doll inside out this time (fig. 4) to insert the head through the neck hole. I recommend marking on the base of the head where the front and back are, as well as on the fabric on the neck, as lining things up can be tricky. You may have to adjust how far up the sewing on the shoulders comes during this step. Once the head fits nice and snug, use wire to attach it via the carved channel just like the hands and feet.

It should be looking like a real doll now! we're just missing some stuffing. Before that however, we have to give them a spine. You should have four wires sticking out of your doll through the center seam: two arms and two legs. Twist the two arm wires together so they form a straight line from shoulder to shoulder and cut

the excess. You'll have to estimate how far apart they will be once it's stuffed. Next, twist the two leg wires together in the center of the pelvis and continue twisting them to form a thick spine wire that sticks upward (fig. 5). Curve this thick wire around the center of the arm wires (again estimating how far it will be when stuffed) and clamp it closed. Add glue at all wire joints for support.

We're almost there! Just stuff the chest cavity using the pliers method and sew 'er up with an invisible stitch, and we're done!

Step 7: Your Naked Finished Doll





They're all finished! But wait, they're not decent!

There are much better doll clothes tutorials out there than I could ever write, so go exploring and find inspiration for your specific ideas! Maybe I'll even link a few in future edits as I come across them, who knows? Have fun!

If you make this Instructable please post your photos! I'd love to see them! Or tag me @het_look_made_a_hat on Instagram (or just check it out if you want more pictures of my progress!)