



Holiday Bird Ornament

WITH ELENA LOUKIANOVA

www.ElenaOriginals.com

MAKE SOMETHING SPECIAL THIS HOLIDAY SEASON. A GIFT FOR YOURSELF OR SOMEONE YOU LOVE. WHAT CAN BE BETTER THAN A CUSTOM MADE ORNAMENT THAT YOU CAN ENJOY FOR MANY YEARS TO COME. OR, BETTER YET, MAKE A NEW ONE EVERY YEAR!

PERFECT FOR ANY AGE.
NO SCULPTING EXPERIENCE NECESSARY!



Designed and made by Elena Loukianova

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LIST OF SUPPLIES

ARMATURE

Your sketch

Cardboard from a cereal or cookie box

White glue (Elmer's, Aleen's Tacky, Wood glue, Gemtac, etc.)

Embroidery floss or cotton twine

20-22 ga aluminum wire

Flat nose pliers, wire cutters

LIST OF SUPPLIES (CONTINUED)

As a filler you can use Paper Mache or Paper Mache paste (I used Activa Instant Mache). As an alternative, you can make the armature with aluminum foil instead.

SCULPTING

Air dry clay (Creative Paperclay, Sculpey Model Air, FIMO Air, Premier, La Doll, etc.)

Favorite sculpting tools (these could be anything: toothpicks, wooden skewers, knitting needles, dental tools)

Flat synthetic brush (medium size, to smooth the clay)

Cutting tool, or a knife, or exacto-blade

Ball stylus tool, small (embossing tool)

Large needle (or if you are a sculptor, needle tool - you can make one yourself, just embed the end of a large needle into clay to make a handle and bake. More about it in the lesson).

Small dish with water

Cotton rag

Sanding paper (large, medium and fine, from 200 grit to 800. You can find extra fine one in the Automotive section of the hardware store).

Cotton lace (any design), embroidered lace works very well

Wooden beads (2-3mm diameter)

PAINTING

Painting brushes, medium and fine.

Black gesso (any brand, I used Liquitex)

Sponge, cut into 1 inch squares.

Acrylic paints (any brand): red, orange, yellow, white, teal, phthalo blue, burnt sienna (or transparent red oxide), black, gold.

Matte varnish (any brand. Water-based).

EMBELLISHMENTS

Swarovski rhinestones (2mm), any color you like.

Ribbon to hang the ornament.



Lesson 1:

Armature & first layer of clay



1. We will begin by making a sketch of your future bird. The size I used is around 3-4 inches wide and 2-2.5 inches tall.





2. Once you are happy with your sketch, trace the outline with a marker or thicker pencil. Then cut it out with scissors. This is going to give us a foundation for the ornament, upon which we will build our subsequent layers.



3. Now, trace the cutout onto a thin piece of cardboard and then cut your final shape out. I like to use a lot of recycled cardboard packaging, such as cereal boxes, cookie boxes, etc.



4. Cover it with white glue and while the glue is still wet wrap it with a cotton twine all around. This will help the paper mache “grab” onto the cardboard.

Cover the twine with more glue on one side, let dry. Then flip over and add more glue to the other side. Let dry completely.

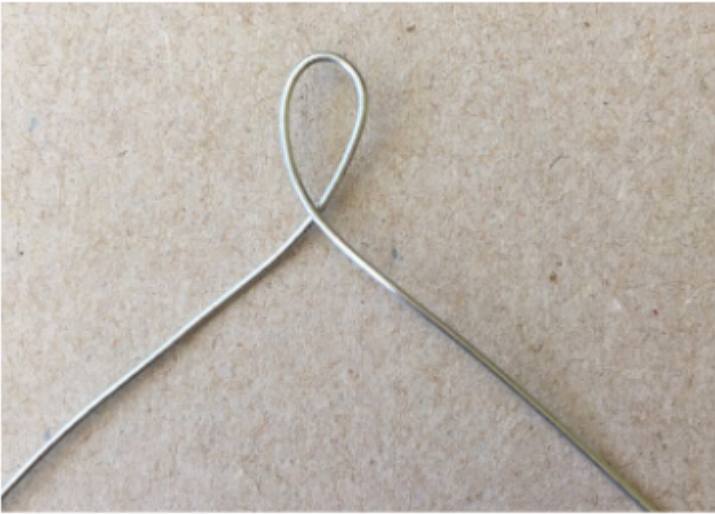




5. Prepare your paper mache paste. I use Activa brand from art supply store. It comes in a form of dry pulp. Just add water to it to turn it into paste. It is messy but really easy to use and very practical to keep the piece light when it comes to weight. You can add a bit of glue for strength, but for this project it is not necessary. You can also make your own paper mache. Cover one side of your ornament with paper mache paste. Work slowly. Make the shape slightly rounded, as if “padded” in the middle part of the bird’s body (see the photo below on the right). Try not to create any gaps, press gently but firmly. It will stick together. Now we must let

this side dry completely. Once dry (this can take from 1-3 days, depending on the climate of where you live) do the same to the other side. Paper mache might crack in places when dried, but it doesn’t really matter. Our main purpose here is to keep the piece light. You can construct the whole ornament with paperclay, however it might be a bit heavy. Let the paste dry completely.





6. Make a loop with a piece of 22 gauge aluminum wire and twist a few times below the loop using flat nose pliers.

7. Wrap the wire very tightly around the bird's body and trim the leads of the wire on the bottom. Keep the loop on top of the bird, in the middle. This will be used to hang the ornament onto the tree.



8. Cover the wire and the rest of the bird with a thin layer of paperclay. Let it dry fully. To help the bird dry more evenly turn it on different sides from time to time, until the clay is completely dried. This might take from 12 to 24 hours.



9. Once the bird is completely dry on both sides, sand the whole surface slightly with 220 grit sand paper, followed by a finer grit. Do it over the sink and cover your nose and mouth with a mask. Avoid breathing in fine clay dust particles. Now she is ready for sculpting! That's in the next lesson!

Lesson 2:

Sculpting the Head

I like to use polymer clay that is pre-baked to make the eyes. It provides a hard smooth surface upon which I can build the eyelids for the piece. To do that, use white color clay (any brand), make ball shapes of assorted sizes and bake them for 25-30 minutes. Once cool you can use them with polymer clay or air dry clay. Cut the polymer clay eye ball into two halves. They will serve as eyes. *If you do not wish to make the eyes ahead of time with polymer clay, you can make a round ball with soft paperclay.*



10. With a pencil mark off the area for the bird's face. We will build it up with clay.

For some reason I lost a photo showing the addition of the bird's nose, but it is really easy to do. Just take a piece of clay and attach it to the bird's top of head, blend it into the face leaving a protruding nose as a beak. Make sure to wet the dry surface of the clay first to make sure the raw clay adheres well. You can use your fingers or a brush for that.

11. To create an arch for the eyes, make a small ball with raw clay and roll it into a worm, thin out the ends on both sides and attach it where the eyes would go. Do this on both sides of the face.



12. Now its time to use those eyeballs. Place a half ball on one side of the face where the eyes would go (right under that first arch that you made in the previous step. Make another clay arch and attach it slightly above the eyeball. Blend the top part into the head. See photo on the left.





Add another arch to the bottom of the eye, reverse the shape, so it “cups” the eye. Blend the bottom part of this arch into the face. Repeat the same process on the other side. You can always hang the ornament in between layers. This way the sides won't get flat. I use a banana hanging rack which can be found at the dollar store. It really helps to keep the piece from unnecessary distortions.

13. Add small flattened balls of clay on each side of the face to form small cheeks. Blend, using a damp flat brush to smooth (photo above).



14. Add another small flattened ball of clay right under the nose and make a small indent with a medium size ball tool. From the bottom part of this piece form the upper lip. Make the lips as small or as big as you like.

15. Form the lower lip with another piece of clay added right under the top lip and forming the corners with a toothpick. I use a flat brush to smooth the clay. Make corners of the mouth with a tip of the knitting needle.



16. Add a ball of clay under the lower lip to form the chin. Blend it into the face.

17. Now, we need to “round” the face a bit more, so it doesn’t look so skinny and scary! Just add a few more flattened balls of clay around the cheeks and closer to the beak. Extra clay is also needed on both sides of the face closer to the bottom. Now she looks plumpy and much happier. To actually make a “happy” mouth, slightly raise the corners of the lips with a fine tip tool.

Smooth the whole surface of the clay on the face using your fingers and flat synthetic brushes, slightly dampened.



Don't forget about the line outlining the face. If you lost it in the process, just add a very thin long piece of clay around the face and smooth.

Keep your hands clean! It is very easy to get clay build up, so wash your hands periodically or wipe them with a wet cloth.

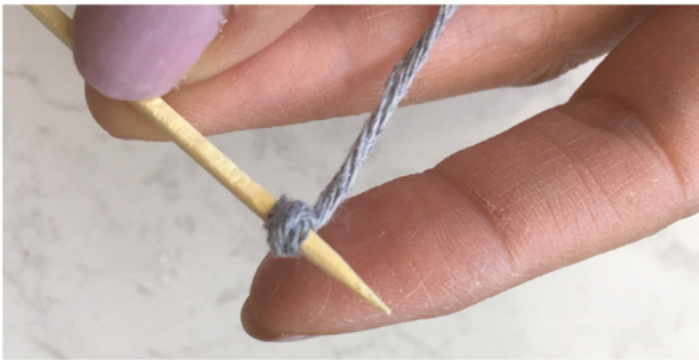
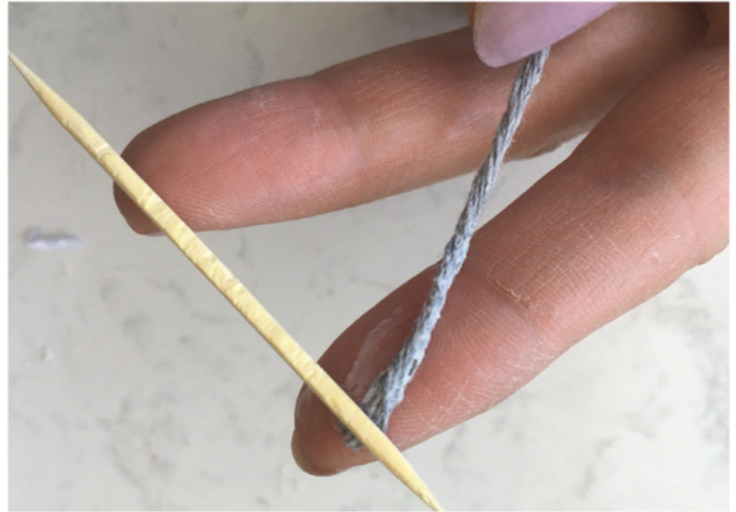


There are lots of variations of the face that you can make. Big eyes and a small mouth. Small eyes and a big mouth. Anything will work on this piece! Long nose would work too!

Now you have a foundation and also a blank canvas. You are now ready to detail the body! This is where real fun begins! Take out your lace remnants and cotton twine and let's begin!

ROLLING COTTON TWINE

Making rolled twine embellishments can be lots of fun. They are a simple and creative way to decorate your bird.



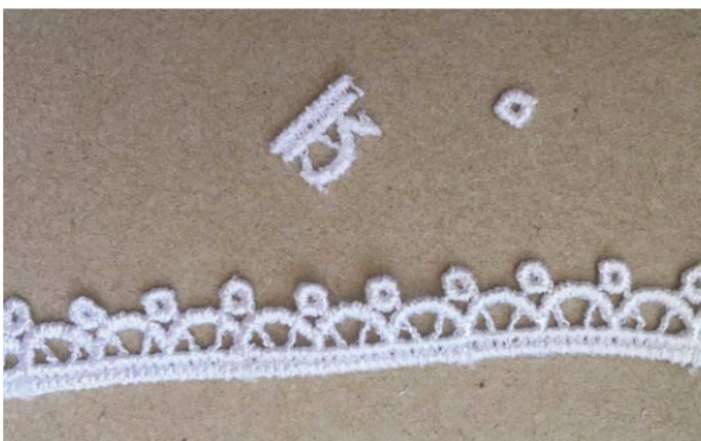
18. Place a bit of glue onto the end of the cotton twine and start rolling onto itself with the help of the toothpick. Stop periodically and apply more glue to the twine. Let the rolls dry completely before handling, otherwise they might unroll (trust me!) We will need two small rolls for the bird's cheeks and one larger roll for its tummy.

To make it easier to roll, you can apply a bit of glue on the whole length of the twine, 8-12 inches and letting it dry before starting to roll. The glue will stiffen up the cotton and make it easier to work with.



Lesson 3: Detailing

19. Look through your lace supplies. If you don't have any, maybe you have an old garment that you are not planning on wearing anymore. How about lace doilies? Find a piece of lace that has texture. I like to work with cotton lace because it is very dimensional and will work well here! I also know that because it is a natural fiber cotton takes paint well. Polyester lace can be unpredictable. Cut out some small interesting sections of the lace. Cut a strip of trim and glue around the bird's neck (see photos below).





20. I used small round pieces from my pekot edged lace and glued them on the bird's tail. You don't have to do it, if you don't have anything small like that. This step can be also done using paperclay in a later chapter. I also glued a few small round wooded beads on top of the bird. This gives it more texture and catches your eye. You really can unleash your creativity here by using fabrics and materials you can find in your stash! Just a piece of advice: avoid using very heavily embroidered lace, it could be too much bulk for this size piece. Let the glue dry completely before continuing.



Before we move on to sculpting, let's plan our design. With a graphite pencil outline the bird's wings and the design you would like on the surface of the dried clay. It is ok if you don't follow it exactly, it is easily erasable. This will just help you to place the clay elements in their proper place with minimum distortion. Kind of a general guideline. Now get your clay out and let's get detailing!



21. Take out your clay and tools. Keep a small dish of water nearby. You can add moisture to your clay if necessary. Always add a very small amount of water to the clay. To keep the excess off, wipe your fingers on a piece of cotton rag or a paper towel. Roll a thin long piece of clay, around 4-5 mm thick. Cut into small sections. Wet the surface of the clay before attaching new pieces to it.



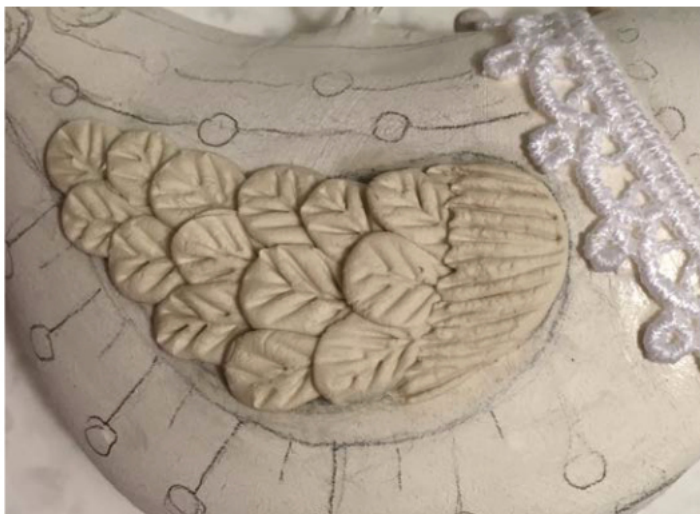
22. Slightly flatten a ball of clay and attach it to the very end of the wing (on a dampened surface). The subsequent pieces (feathers) will be layered slightly overlapping this first piece.



23. Needle Tool. I made my own detailing tool. It is just a needle embedded into a log of clay. To do that you can attach a piece of wire to the needle by threading it through the eye of the needle and folding it a couple of times to secure it to the needle. Then just wrap the clay around the wire. This way the needle will not fall out of the clay.

So, let's continue. Take your detailing needle tool and "draw" the veins on the feather by gently pressing the tool into the clay. See the photo below. Attach another "feather", by slightly overlapping the first one. Detail it. Continue attaching and detailing each feather one at a time.





24. I added an arched piece of clay in the front of the wing, just to give it extra texture and make the design more interesting. Detail it the same way as you did the feather, by using a needle tool.

25. After the wing is finished, continue working on the design underneath it. I decided to add a few radiating raised strips. Each one of the strips ends in a circular element, the dimple is created with a small ball tool pressed into a ball. (See the photo on the next page). **Don't forget to moisten the surface of the clay before adhering each new piece of clay.** You can see the shine of the photo where I applied some water with a brush. Make sure the new pieces stick well to the bird, otherwise they might fall off at a later stage.



26. Detail each one of the long thin pieces with a needle tool. Just press your needle tool in a perpendicular direction to the main piece. Roll a tiny ball of clay and attach it at the bottom end of each long piece. Impress the middle of each ball with the small ball tool. Work slowly, constantly moistening the surface of the bird. This is a long process and because the pieces are so tiny the clay dries very quickly. Hang in there, it will be worth it in the end!



27. Glue two twisted cotton pieces (we made previously) to the bird's cheeks, and one larger piece onto her chest underneath the lace collar (see photo below).





28. I glued one more piece of cotton lace in the area between the wing and the tail. Make sure to let the glue dry.



29. I didn't have enough of the little lace circle cutouts that I used on the tail originally, so I removed them and replaced them with tiny clay balls. Then I impressed each one of the balls with the small ball tool. At this point, it is a good idea to let the bird dry fully before continuing to work on the other side. You can leave it to dry overnight.



30. Add an eyelid above the bird's eye and detail it with a needle tool by making a few impressions.

31. Below is the photo of the completed bird. I added one more curved piece of lace to complete the design and surrounded it with a bunch of clay balls impressed with the small ball tool.

I tried not to bring too many new elements into the design at this point. The circles seem to be a repetitive motif here, so I went with them. You can get a lot of ideas from the lace that you have. Just be open to something that might come along the way. You can see that some lines that I drew on the bird previously didn't work for me, so I had to adjust and go with the flow of things. This is a very intuitive process. You can't have too many preconceived ideas, so just go with the flow and let your imagination dictate the design.

If you don't like something you did, just gently scrape the clay off and start over. Once you finished adding elements let the piece dry completely. Don't forget to finish the opposite side of the bird.



Lesson 4:

Painting and embellishing



32. Start preparing the surface of the bird by covering the whole piece with a layer of black gesso. Let dry completely. When the paint is still wet you won't be able to see little white areas that didn't get colored. So be patient. Once the first layer of black gesso is fully dry, go to the window and turn the bird from side to side. You should be able to see tiny white areas that didn't get painted. Try to get black gesso into all the tiny groves and crevices. Let the paint fully dry again.



33. I used a few main colors for the bird's color scheme and added a few extras. The main colors are: turquoise/teal, orange, red and gold. Extras are: phthalo blue, yellow and transparent red oxide. Phthalo blue is a transparent color and deepens the turquoise, transparent red oxide deepens the orange (it also doesn't cover the orange underneath). This is also a very intuitive process, so go with your gut feeling and emphasize with paint what you think should be highlighted. Start with your main colors - orange, turquoise and red .





This is my color palette with the exception of the gold color. It comes in at the end.



It can take 2-3 layers of your main color to reach the intensity (my orange is pretty transparent, so I used 3 layers of it). Please dry the paint in between the layers. Now that you have your main colors laid down, you can add some highlights and shadows. I used yellow, transparent red oxide and phthalo blue for that. Sometimes I would use a bit of red added to the orange just to make the color pop. Use a small sponge to dab the color in and get rid of the excess.

34. Look at your lace design and see which elements look most prominent - you can still color them with your main colors, and highlight them with another accent color later. That is what I am planning to do with the lace around the bird's neck. You will see me using gold paint as a highlighter at a later stage. Have fun with the colors! If you don't like the color scheme, just wait until the color is fully dry and paint right over it. It might just do the trick and add more dimension to the piece.



Transparent red oxide deepens the orange really nicely, just as deeper blue on some parts makes the wing more interesting. Don't forget to paint the eyelids. First I outlined the eyelids with turquoise, and then I softly spread the color to elongate the shape of the eyelid.



35. Draw a very light blue (almost white) circle on the bird's eye to indicate the iris. After the paint dries, paint a smaller circle inside of it with black paint - that's the pupil. Just add two tiny dots of white paint as highlights and voila! - our bird can see! See the photo on the next page.





I also added a few white highlights to the feathers, some parts of the face, tail and the wooden beads on top.



36. To complete the design on the bird's head, I drew a few black lines making them "meet" on the nose area. Right now the colors are still not finalized. Take a good look at your paint job and see what needs fixing or correcting. Like I mentioned earlier, it is a very intuitive process, so go with what feels and looks good to you.

In the next step we will unite all the colors with the use of our base color - black.



37. Using two brushes, one wet with clean water, another one with black paint, start adding black around all of the elements to create a soft shadow. This also works like a patina, except we are not introducing any new colors here. First you apply a bit of fresh black color around the areas you would like to patina. Use a small round brush for that. Then, right away, before the color dries, wipe it with another brush, dampened with clean water. A sponge would be great to use here, unfortunately the areas around the design are so small that it is almost impossible to take enough color out. We don't want to leave a lot of black paint, just create a natural shadow that will emphasize and unite the colors. Work small areas one by one.



38. Once you are happy with the general color scheme, it is time to add the golden highlights.

You can see on the photo on the left, I applied gold paint to the lace around the neck, wooden beads on top and the tips of the feathers.



Highlight everything you think needs to be highlighted. Don't go crazy and cover up your original colors. You still want to be able to see the main colors. This makes the painting very dimensional, where the layers of color get built on top of each other. Let the paint dry completely.

Well, guess what, we are almost done!

39. Next step is to cover the entire piece with 1-2 layers of matt (or gloss, if you like) varnish. This will help to seal the paint and dimensional elements.





Bling bling time! Using a fine nose tweezers and gemtac glue add tiny flatback rhinestones to each one of the small circles with dimples. I used pale blue color crystals, but you can add whichever color you like! Tie a piece of golden decorative ribbon to the wire loop and you are finished! Just make sure to let the glue completely dry before handling the piece. Congratulations, your ornament is ready to go on your Christmas Tree!





Happy Holidays!

*I hope you enjoyed this project. Once you make your Bird, I would love to see your photos. I can post them on my blog with the links to your blogs/website/FB pages. etc. Meantime, join my mailing list if you didn't already to be notified about any new artwork and classes! **Stay creative!***

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