

Animal Alebrijes

Mexico is famous for its folk-art culture. Mexican Folk Art is usually bright and colorful. Many Mexican artists are inspired by animals, like artist Francisco Zúñiga.



Francisco Zúñiga (Mexican, 1912-1998, *Conejos* (Detail) from the portfolio *Grabados en Madera*, 1934, woodcut.
Purchase: Gift of Paul K. Kania, 2018. (2018.15.3)

In the piece above, we can see the unique way the artist created the two rabbits. Each artist's work is unique. No two artworks ever look the same—especially the animals in the folk-art tradition of Alebrijes. Alebrijes are painted animal sculptures. In Mexico they are usually made with Paper Mache or wood. Each Alebrije is unique and they're made in many different areas of Mexico. Alebrijes have been made for almost one hundred years.

To make our Alebrije sculptures, we are going to make salt dough. Salt dough is just like Play-Doh, and can be made in your kitchen.

Animal Alebrijes

Ingredients

- ½ cup of salt
- 1 cup of Flour
- ¾ cup of water
- Measuring cup
- Paint (Acrylic or Tempera)
- Paintbrush
- Mixing bowl
- Tinfoil (optional)
- Oven (optional)
- Baking sheet (optional)
- Whisk or fork (optional)

Instructions

Step 1: Assemble your ingredients. Measure out your flour, water and salt. Mix your flour, salt, and water together into a big bowl until it's even and smooth. You can use a whisk or fork, or your hands. Using your hands is quicker and easier- even if it is a little messy. If your dough is too dry, add more water. If it is too wet, add more flour. When your dough is mixed, you can knead it until it is smooth on a table or counter.



Step 2: Use a big piece of salt dough to shape your Alebrije sculpture. If you have a hard time shaping your dough, you can create a tinfoil 'skeleton' to support it. Rabbits, dogs, cats, foxes, and owls are popular, but you can create any animal you'd like. Use your fingers to pinch and pull the dough into the shapes you want for your animal.

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Step 3: Once you're done with sculpting your Alebrije, you can either bake it in the oven at 180°F for a few minutes, or leave it out to dry for a few hours. As soon as your Alebrije is dried out and 'crusty', it's ready for the next step.



Step 4: After your Alebrije is dry, you can paint it. Mexican artists use bright colors for the skin, fur and eyes. Bright yellows, greens, oranges, pinks, and reds work best. After you finish with your bright colors, use black paint to create patterns and details like the eyes and fur.



Tip: Store extra salt dough in a plastic bag to use later.

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