

Beeswax Carving

by Alexander and Genoveva von Lübeck

Beeswax is a sweet-smelling, soft, and somewhat sticky wax produced by bees. The melting point and hardness of beeswax can depend on the type of flowers from which the bees collect pollen, but is typically 142°–150°F.

Why Carve Beeswax?

To make sculptures, either to display as a wax sculpture or to use in the lost-wax casting process. The earliest bronze sculptures began as beeswax. Beeswax was worked directly by hand to make small figures, which were then covered in clay and then fired. The wax is melted in the process leaving a terracotta mold that could be cast by pouring molten metal into it.

How to Carve Beeswax:

- Use clay and metal tools, including files, saws and other hand tools. You can even make your own metal tools by flattening the end of a 3/16" wire and filing it to shape. You can also use sandpaper!
- Work on a wood or leather surface with the ambient temperature above 65°F. Temperatures above 70°F will result in softer, but stickier, wax.
- Begin with larger, cruder tools to get to the basic, undefined shape you want for your design.
- Place the point of your sculpting tools against the surface of the wax, drawing them slowly toward you.
- When the desired design appears, change to smaller and finer tools to preserve the shape.



Some carving tools



A beeswax sculpture by Leonardo da Vinci created in 1508 (and still survives to this day)

Beeswax Carving Tips:

- Take your time. It's easier to take wax off than to stick it back on.
- Be patient with yourself. In the early stages of carving, your design will be vague, even messy and unrecognizable. Persevere and your design will appear from the wax.
- Beeswax is best carved with hand tools because it is so soft.
- With proper handling, your beeswax sculpture will last for centuries. Store it in a cool place for best results.

My Notes:

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