

## Faux Bois Fantasy

Use texture tools and powdered colored clays to create a faux wood-grained masterpiece that fools the eye

### (art + history)

The word “faux bois” is French for false wood, and refers to any artistic and well-done imitation of wood or wood graining. In fact, faux bois is a perfect name for objects that appear to have been taken from the forest but are actually made of stone, cast iron, clay, or cement, or are painted to have a woody look.

The craft of faux bois became popular during the Renaissance when trompe-l'oeil came into fashion. Trompe-l'oeil, which means to “fool or deceive the eye,” refers to an art technique that tricks the eye and the brain into believing the optical illusion that a three-dimensional object could exist on a two-dimensional plane. In fact, any realistic object painted on a canvas could be considered trompe-l'oeil.

Faux bois has been done through the ages using many techniques. During the 1770s, a fad began in France in which artists applied faux graining on pottery. This process used two tones of brown to imply a strongly grained surface. Furniture and walls were also painted to resemble wood or marble (faux marbre). In fact, the homes in which faux bois was found were considered to be very sophisticated.

What will you “faux bois”? Clay makes a lovely medium with which to mimic wood. Create something purely sculptural that will truly fool the eye, or make a functional and whimsical ceramic piece that can be used over and over.

**GRADES 5-12** Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

### Preparation

1. Study examples of Faux Bois throughout history.
2. Look carefully at wood graining, and the characteristics of trees such as bark, burls, branches, etc.
3. Cover work tables with canvas.
4. Provide each student with approximately 2 lbs of clay.
5. Gather tools needed for creating a clay piece that looks like wood. Assemble texture mats, mini loop tools, or make tools for wood graining.



### Materials (required)

[Blick Stoneware Clay](#), 50 lb (30517-1050); share one across class

[Amaco Engobes](#), 1 lb (30459-); share at least three colors across class

[Mayco Designer Clay Mats](#), wood grain texture (32702-1001); share two across class

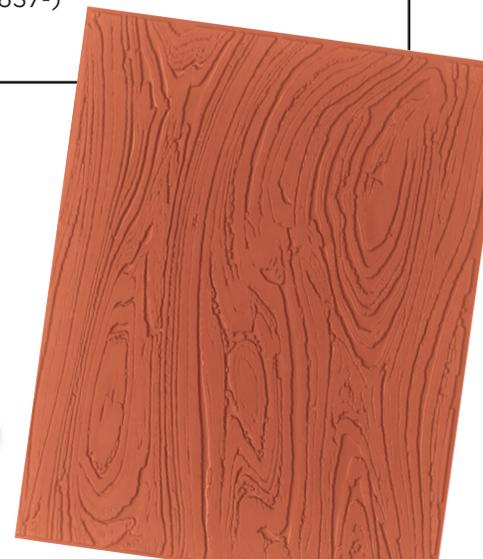
[Kemper Wire Loop Sgraffito Tool](#) (30317-1063); one per student

[Blick Scholastic Short Handle Golden Taklon Flat Wash](#), Size 1/2", (05859-4012); one per student

### Materials (optional)

[Alene's Decorative Snow](#), 4 oz (03177-1001)

[Blick Studio Acrylics](#), 250 ml (01637-)



### Optional Step 1: Make a texture roller.

Roll a slab of clay, press it into a piece of bark or the trunk of a tree. Next, cut the slab into a square. Stand the slab and coax the clay into a tube shape by connecting one edge to the other. Score and slip to hold the seam in place and smooth. All to dry completely. After bisque firing, this texture tool can be rolled or stamped onto clay to transfer the actual pattern of bark or wood grain to moist clay.

### **Process**

1. After deciding on an object to make, decide what method of forming works best. A tree trunk could be made by coiling clay, formed slabs, or even by throwing a cylinder on the pottery wheel. A slab plate is made by pressing texture mats or rollers onto a slab and then refining the shape and edges. A slab can be draped or slumped to add form.
2. Texture the form using various methods. Press wood graining mats into clay, or use loop tools to make graining by adding carved lines. Add clay to the surface to create burls. Push in from the outside to form indented areas. Add sculpted branches, leaves, a heart with initials, a bird in a nest. Does the wooden piece have lichen or fungus growing in a symbiotic relationship with the wood? Experiment to find ways to fool the eye by making clay look like wood!
3. Allow the the piece to dry completely. Bisque fire to cone 04.
4. Use powdered engobes mixed with a bit of water to apply color variation to the faux bois surface. Wood is normally made up of a combination of subtle color variations. Study these and try to mimic the surface of real wood in engobes in white, green, brown, black, and other colors.
5. If the piece is to function, glaze the interior. Fire again to cone 6.

### **Options**

- After bisque firing, finish the Faux Bois piece using acrylic paints.
- Add Aleene's Decorative Snow for even more realism!

### **National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts**

#### **Creating**

**Anchor Standard 1:** Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

#### **Connecting**

**Anchor Standard 11:** Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.



**Step 1:** Create a faux bois form by coiling, slab building, or throwing on a pottery wheel. Use texture tools and mats to create a faux wood grain texture.



**Step 2:** Graining can also be created with loop tools and clay can be added to make burls.



**Step 3:** After bisque-firing, apply powdered engobes mixed with water to add natural color.