

MAKE A TRADITIONAL MEXICAN ALEBRIJE

For decades, artisans in Oaxaca, Mexico have carved and painted bright, fanciful animal creatures known as *alebrijes*. These creations stand out for their detailed paint finishes; these are accomplished by repeating dots, lines, and geometric motifs with small implements.

You can design your own version of an alebrije, making it slightly easier to work with by substituting sculpted clay for carved wood.

What You Need:

- Bake-able polymer clays in various colors
- Paper clips
- Old baking sheet
- Tempera or acrylic paint
- Toothpicks
- Paintbrushes
- Cotton swabs



What You Do:

1. Review “Art Lesson - Oaxacan Animals”
2. Sculpt a base for the alebrije using Sculpey, Fimo or another type of polymer clay. You can roll balls, logs, and coils in alternating colors to create the body of an alien, spider, or snake.
3. Determine where to add antennae or legs. For these segments, you can unbend small paper clips and insert them into the clay base.
4. Ask an adult to bake the polymer clay according to the manufacturer's instructions. Allow time for the clay and paper clip inserts to cool.
5. Paint the alebrije creatures. You can begin with large stripes and dots, applied with the tips of cotton swabs. Once those dots dry, create smaller inner dots and stripes with toothpicks or the point end of paintbrushes.

This art project illuminates a craft tradition popular in Oaxaca, where entire villages now devote themselves to creating alebrijes. Consider extending this activity by writing a story or poem about your new fantasy creature, giving it a name, background, and even special powers!