

Instructions for Carving Whales and Other Animals with Fins

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Introduction

Congratulations! You have an opportunity to produce your own work of art. As you carve your personal soapstone animal, you must remember to have fun. Keep in mind, traditional Inuit carvings are noted for their powerful simplicity.

Tools

Rasp
60 grit mesh sandpaper
320 grit wet/dry sandpaper
600 grit wet/dry sandpaper
Tung oil (food grade)

Set up a bucket of water to carve/sand in, or dip the carving in as you go. Water keeps the dust down, making clean up much easier.

Prep

Think of what kind of carving you would like to do. There are many different ways to carve the same animal. Look at pictures in books or on the internet. Looking at a toy model of the same animal can also be helpful.

It is good to find pictures of multiple angles. Keep in mind that soapstone is a soft mineral, so detailed work is very limited. As with all minerals, you will get varying hardnesses between soapstone pieces; however they are all fairly soft.

Shaping

Look at your soapstone animal and decide which large areas need to be removed. Using a rasp, begin to file these areas away. Start with the areas that require the most material to be removed.

Carving Fins and Tails

For fish, sharks, and whales I start by streamlining the body,

narrowing the front of the head and behind the front fins. I leave the tail for last. I will also leave the front fins or flippers so as to keep them at a higher level than the main body of the carving. Once I have tapered the body to my liking, start working on the flippers and/or fins. For whales, I create a little "bump" where the blowhole is, carving the rest of the head down around it. Once all my fins, flippers, and the tail are stencilled out, I begin to carve some of the smaller details.

Work your way back and forth around the animal, not doing too much in one section at a time. Keep looking at all angles as you carve. It is easy to get carried away on one section and remove too much material. If this happens, you will just end up making the whole sculpture smaller.

There are natural fractures in stone and it can be easy to drop your piece while carving. If a breakage occurs, don't panic! Let your piece to dry, then use superglue to repair the break. Allow time for the glue to cure, and continue carving.

Sanding

Once satisfied with your animal's shape, it is time to begin sanding. Starting with the coarsest mesh of sandpaper, sand away all the unwanted tool marks. Follow with the next coarsest, and then the finest. Continue until the sculpture is nice and smooth. This is an important step! The better your sanding, the better the sculpture will look when oiled.

Sanding in water is a must, because frequently dipping it will show you where more sanding is needed.

Leave it to dry, or warm it on the stovetop on low until the stone is completely dry.

Oiling

Included in the kit is a food grade tung oil. Apply the oil with a thin rag. Allow 24 hours before applying a second coat. Tung oil leaves a more matte finish. If you want your carving to be super shiny, spray with an aerosol water-based wood varnish available from most local hardware stores. Traditionally, carvings are heated up and beeswax is applied to the surface.

Breakage

Sometimes stones get dropped or seams in the stone let go and break while carving. When this happens, the first thing to do is stop carving. Rinse off any dust on the carving and let dry. Do not rub the pieces together, as this may alter your contact points making the breakage point more noticeable. Once dry, apply a medium viscosity superglue on one of your contact points. Place the two pieces together, squeezing them together until excess glue weeps out the sides. Place your carving in a spot where it will sit undisturbed until the glue sets, usually about 15-30 minutes. Once cured, use a rasp to remove excess glue, and continue carving. If there is a big gap missing, you can make a filler by mixing extra soapstone dust with an epoxy glue.

Email us a picture of your finished carving to be added to our online gallery!

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