

A MOCKINGJAY VASE

by Shana Angela Salaff



I admit that I love playfulness as much as I love refinement! The *Mockingjay Vase* is situated right in the middle of this spectrum. This small vessel is part of an ongoing series of quirky vases that accompanies my more serious vessels. I strive to balance each piece with elegance and a sense of playful enjoyment. I do this by making formal choices in both categories.

With this vase, adding refined details is important; I belly out the form of the body to impart a feeling of volume, then counter this with a more elegant tapering in near the bottom. On the other hand, the small wings at the sides of the rim are cute and kind of weird, more than satisfying my “playful” criteria. These pieces are also anthropomorphic, looking like small people or creatures.

Throwing Basic Parts

Creating this type of small vase is as much fun as contemplating and using it. Working on the wheel and with slabs, I create multiple quantities of the basic components: body, base, foot, rim, and wings. I don’t strive to make each form exactly alike, in fact I try for a little variety. The body is thrown as a bottomless cylinder from about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a pound of clay. The bottom is left at least $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick to allow for an attachment to a base slab later. I alter the shape when it’s a soft leather hard (*figures 1 and 2*). The top of the vase is made by throwing a second, thick cylinder and cutting the rim off, setting it aside to use later on the top (*figure 3*). Working this way, I can create several rims from the same cylinder, shaping the remaining height to create a new rim each time I cut one off. Next, I throw a third bottomless cylinder from a lime-sized ball of clay, flaring it out so I can use it as a base or foot for the vase (*figure 4*). Then I really play by moving these separate parts around, adjusting and altering until I have an individual vase grouping that feels right. Each is slightly different, but belongs in the same family.

I usually listen to audio books while I work. When completing the first *Mockingjay Vase*, I was listening to the *Hunger Games Trilogy, Volume 3*, which inspired me to name this work the “Mockingjay” series.

process | A Mockingjay Vase | Shana Angela Salaff



1
Remove the cylinder from the wheel, let it dry until it isn't sticky but still very pliable and then oval it with your hands.



2
Using a wooden rib, make 2-3 passes to gradually create the center line on both sides to shape and divide the form.



3
I use a thick cylinder and a red rib to create several rims with different shapes, cutting each off just under the shaped area.



4
The small oval for the foot could be thrown off the hump, but I prefer to make them individually from a lime-sized ball of clay.



5
Score and slip the join areas, then press the base down onto the body. Apply enough slip so that it oozes out generously.



6
Cut two feet out of the oval. After slipping and scoring, place the feet and press the body firmly down on them.



7
Compress the joins with a small, wooden tool, use a sponge and your fingertip to further compress them.



8
Attach a small coil on the interior edge of both sides of the top, creating a pointy area.



Cut one of your rims to size, using diagonal cuts so that when attached, the join points inwards.



After attaching and compressing as before, use your thumb to smooth and further attach the rim to the body.



Roll out a small, 1/8 inch-thick slab. Cut out 4 pentagonal-shaped wings (see inset) using a template. Curve each wing section.



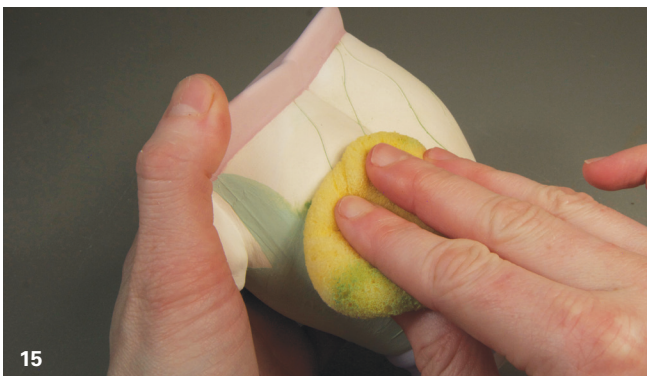
When set up, attach the hollow, pillow-shaped wings to the vase. Compress the joins with a tool and a brush loaded with slip.



Set up the overhead projection of your pattern then use an X-Acto knife to incise the pattern into the leather-hard surface.



Inlay a glaze saturated with chrome and copper into the incised lines using a bamboo brush. Use two coats if necessary.



Wipe away the extra glaze from the surface using a sponge. Clean the sponge frequently to prevent colored streaks.



Brush different glazes into areas inside and outside of the leaves. Try to leave the incised lines showing.

Assembling the Form

I draw out the shape of the base on a ¼ inch thick slab, leaving a bit of extra space at the center area, then cut it out. Using a scoring tool loaded with thick slip, I score and slip the base and the bottom of the body, making sure the slip is deep in the score marks. When attaching the two parts (*figure 5*), I use a sponge to compress and smooth the join (see *figure 7*), and let the piece set up before moving on. Next, I cut apart and alter the foot ring and attach it to the bottom of the body (*figures 6 and 7*).

To prepare the top of the vase for the rim, I add a coil of clay to the interior edge, which will provide extra surface area for attachment and create a better visual transition between the parts (*figure 8*). After cutting and altering the thrown rim so that it fits the vase (*figure 9*), I score the edges of both pieces, add slip, attach them together (*figure 10*), and then smooth over the joins with my finger.

Next, I cut out shapes for the wings using a pentagonal-shaped template that has two elongated sides. I cut out two for each wing, curve each one (*figure 11*), then attach the edges of two of the

curved pieces together to create a pillow-like form. To attach them, I start at the small end and work slowly down to the larger end with firm pressure. Before sealing the bottom edge, I usually put my pinky finger inside to reassert the roundness. After closing the seam, I pinch around the edges again, making them fairly thin to help inflate the form. Next, I score, add slip, and attach the wings to the vase, then compress the join (*figure 12*). After cleanup, I poke an air hole through the inside of the vase and into the wing.

Before drying the piece under plastic, I use a wooden rib to define and visually separate each part. This also helps to compress the seams. The feet tend to be arched because they are curved and need to be levelled. To do this, I add a small amount of water to the top of a banding wheel, then set the piece on it and move it firmly back and forth until the feet are flat.

Drying Slowly is Key

Because the scale is diminutive, I don't have to worry about cracking problems that occur with larger pieces. I work slowly because I am attaching so many parts, which can cause problems working on a larger scale when the piece starts to dry out. With these small pieces, the ongoing sponging that I do to clean up fingerprints and other marks is sufficient to re-hydrate the initial thrown form while joining additional components.

I always allow freshly made components to dry to the same level as the main form before attaching them. Because I make a number of pieces simultaneously, by the time I have finished a step on all of them, the next step is set and ready to go.



Mockingjay Vase #2, Laguna B-mix 5 clay, various glazes, fired to cone 5.

I ensure that each addition sets up well under plastic before moving on. Rims, feet, and any appendages dry more quickly, so as soon as these areas are no longer tacky, I cover them with plastic to slow the drying process for these areas.

Provided I join the separately thrown and handbuilt pieces carefully, compress the seams well, avoid weakening them by adding too much water or stressing them with too much movement, then dry the completed piece slowly, I can avoid the anxiety of worrying about cracks showing up after the glaze firing.

Projecting the Pattern

Another way to banish anxiety is by projecting the pattern I decorate on the leather-hard surface using an old-school overhead projector—purchased for \$20 at a thrift store. I have a freer line quality when I don't have to plan where to place the drawing. I find patterns in books or online, and discovered this particular pattern at a Haystack workshop. I use a scanner to save them to my computer, and then print them out onto acetate using my ink-jet printer so I can project the image. Very low-tech!

I spend time moving the acetate around on the projector until I get an interesting composition on the surface. I use an X-Acto knife to incise the pattern into the surface of the pot (*figure 13*). When the piece is bone dry, rubbing a green kitchen scrubby over the form removes the sharp edges created by the knife. After the bisque firing, I glaze the interior and the foot, then inlay a glaze saturated with chrome and copper that will fume and alter the color of any reactive glaze next to it into the incised lines (*figure 14*) and wipe away the excess with a clean, damp sponge (*figure 15*). I brush different glazes around the inlay areas to complete the pattern (*figure 16*).

I think that the formal name (for the theorists among us) for what I call playing is “flow.” For me, flow happens when the critical part of my mind is able to slow down and allow a flexible, responsive energy to overtake precedence or habit. When the main technical issues have been resolved, my receptivity increases. I can take note of new ideas to improve technique or form as I discover them. Leaving a project brimming with fresh ideas gives me incentive to return to the studio for the next round.

Shana Salaff is an artist and instructor living in Fort Collins, Colorado. To see more of her work, visit www.shanasalaff.com.

PURPOSEFUL PLAY

Tip: At this point, there are usually extra components that don't fit the originally intended form. Having extra parts on hand gives me even more freedom to have fun with form. The last few vases, assembled from these extra parts, are usually the most interesting. These become creative new ideas for the next time around.

The mocking jay wings are a good example of this: they developed when I cut down a more traditional, spiral element to fit on a smaller vase body. This kind of freedom to play usually comes at the tail end of the making process, when I feel satisfied that I have successfully created enough pieces to be able to relax and mess around. I call this my “play period.”