POLYMER WEEK

advent calendar

22 FANTASTIC SEAHORSES

by Virginie Enza Garnier

The seahorse is a fascinating sea creature, rich in symbolic and poetic meaning. Often associated with freedom, patience, and quiet joy. Virginie's project invites you to create a seahorse that reflects your own sensibility. By following the steps and learning about armature, sculpting in volume, texturing, and coloring, you are encouraged to shape the piece in your own way and explore your natural creative rhythm.

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TOOLS & SUPPLIES

POLYMER CLAY
- CosClay white
- CosClay glow-in-the-dark (blue or green)
- scrap polymer clay
- translucent liquid clay
- CosClay liquid clay glow-in-the-dark

MATERIALS
- 15 × 21 cm ceramic tile or glass sheet
- wire
- baby powder
- UV resin
- color pigments
- watercolor pencils
- white acrylic paint
- acrylic markers (white, gold, black fine liner)
- tulle for surface texture

TOOLS
- pasta machine
- scalpel or craft blade
- 3–5 cm round cutters
- jewelry pliers
- silicone shapers
- ball tools
- needle tool
- small round cutters
- bubble texture roller
- paintbrush
- baby wipes
- wooden stick or toothpick (for applying UV resin)
- UV lamp (for curing resin and charging glow effect)

1 Print the general seahorse template and cut it out with a scalpel.
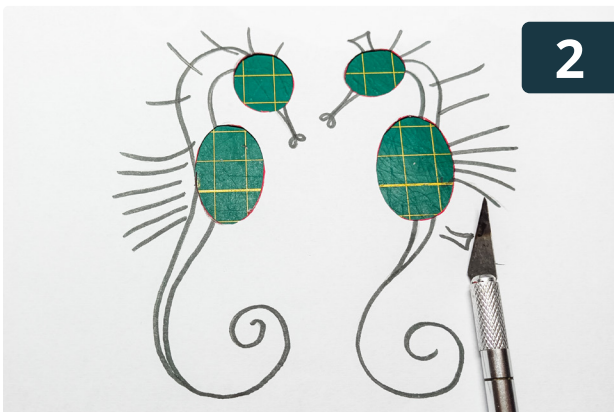
2 On the armature template, cut out the oval shapes. These define the dimensions for the head and stomach volumes.

3 Condition a sheet of white polymer clay to a medium thickness on your pasta machine. Place the general template on the clay, cut around it with a scalpel, and carefully remove the paper template.

4 Condition a sheet of polymer clay to a medium thickness. If the clay is too soft or sticky, leach it between two sheets of copy paper. Cut the sheet in half and place one half over a large round cutter. Place the second half on a tile.

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Lightly dip your finger in baby powder and gently press the clay inside the cutter, moving in slow circular motions to create a shallow dome. Make sure the clay adheres to the edge of the cutter, but does not cut through it.

6

Carefully turn the round cutter upside down and place it onto the second prepared sheet of clay. Air should be trapped between the two clay layers, forming an enclosed pocket. This creates your first hollow bead.

7

Place the armature template over the hollow bead and press gently on the paper. There is no need to press down to the tile. Once the rounded stomach shape becomes visible through the paper, carefully remove the template. You will see the outline of the stomach volume.

8

Using the same round cutter, cut out the stomach shape following the marked outline. Make sure the air remains trapped inside the hollow bead by cutting down to tile. Work around the outline in several cuts to obtain the size and shape.

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9 Repeat the same process to create the face shape using a smaller round cutter. Carefully remove the excess clay around each hollow bead. Bake the hollow beads at 130°C for 30 minutes.

10 Cut and bend the metal wire according to the armature template.

Adding wire is only necessary when creating jewelry, as the piece needs extra strength to withstand movement when worn. For a framed seahorse sculpture, an armature is not required.

11 Shape the wire following the indicated direction, then place it onto the prepared seahorse shapes made from the white clay sheet.

12 Fill the areas where the hollow beads will be placed with small pieces of white clay. Make sure these areas are flat, so the beads can fit perfectly.

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13 Apply a thin layer of liquid clay and place the baked hollow beads for the stomach and head. Lightly coat the beads with a small amount of liquid clay, then begin covering them with additional layers of white clay to build up volume.

14 Build up the head, nose, neck, crown, and areas around the stomach. Make sure there is enough clay to allow for texturing later. Shape the full body gradually, using your fingers and sculpting tools.
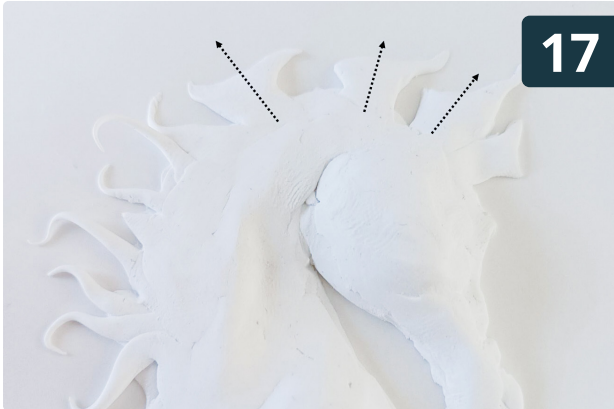

15 Take your time to sculpt the forms. Smooth and refine the curves of the jaw, crown, eye spines, nose spines, trunk rings, and tail. Use modelling tools to soften transitions and gradually define the shapes.

16 Pay special attention to the shape of the stomach. It should appear naturally rounded, not flattened or pressed against the ceramic tile.

6

17 Begin smoothing small fragments of clay using the tips of your fingers, working from the neck outward toward the ceramic tile. This helps thin the edge of the crown. A micro round cutter or a modelling tool can be used to define sharper outlines. Soft, thin edges add elegance to the form.

18 Create thin sticks of clay and taper one end of each. Gently curve them to add volume and movement to the sculpture.

19 For the dorsal fins and crown, create several similar fragments using the same process. Take a small piece of clay, shape it into a large crown section "coronet", and smooth it with your fingertips. Cut the shape with a micro round cutter to create flipper-like edges, then add fish fin lines.

20 Add texture using a ball stylus and a scalpel.

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21 Continue applying this process directly onto the seahorse. Add the clay elements one by one, smoothing and adjusting them with a round cutter as needed.

22 Finish by adding additional texture to unify the surface.

23 Create the dorsal fin and shape it with a ball tool. Texture it with a scalpel. Don't hesitate to stretch the outside edges to slim it.

24 Add texture to the tail. Seahorses have natural ring patterns, which can be suggested by gently pressing with ball tools of different sizes. Enhance the surface by filling small cracks and adding subtle ridges. These ridges can also be extended from the dorsal side of the tail to create visual continuity and a more realistic texture.

25 Mark a line with a scalpel where the spinal column will be placed. Roll a thin string of polymer clay and place it along this line on the body.

26 If needed, adjust the fish fin texture so it flows neatly up to the edge of the spinal column.

27 Create one additional element for the crown that extends beyond the dorsal fins, adding volume to the head in the foreground. Smooth the connection carefully using a modelling tool.

28 Cover the seahorse with tulle to create a fine, even surface texture. Gently press the tulle onto the clay using a modelling tool or a silicone shaper, working across the stomach, along the tail, and over the front of the body. Avoid using your fingers, as they can leave marks and reduce the clarity of the tulle pattern.

29 Additionally, you can create texture using small circular cutters or a bubble-pattern texture roller. Apply these selectively to vary the surface and add visual interest.

30 Now your seahorses are fully sculpted and textured. Take a moment to review the overall shapes, refine any details, and make final adjustments before moving on to the next stage.

31 Create a larger dorsal fin extending from the stomach area. Place the second dorsal fin on the side of the stomach, in the foreground. Press firmly to create a solid connection, then add fish fin texture to visually blend the joint.

Before baking, support the fin in position using a folded or creased paper towel to keep it stable.

32 Make a thin string of white clay and place it beneath the crown to define the eye area. Mark the eye position with a ball tool and gently texture the center. Add a small clay string, tapered at both ends, to shape the lower eyelid. Use a modelling tool to gently blend the clay, creating a smooth transition.

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33 Shape the nose area and make a teardrop-shaped mark to define the nostril.

34 Roll thin clay strands and apply them along the spine and belly, following the natural curves of the body. These subtle lines help guide the eye and add rhythm and movement to the sculpture.

35 Texture the main strands with micro round cutters and ball tools.

36 For the stomach and face, select one dominant texture and repeat it across the whole seahorse. Here, small raised dots made with micro cutters are applied around the body. The diversity of relief helps colors settle and enhances shadows and depth.

Bake in the oven at 130°C for 30–40 minutes.

After baking, do not remove the seahorse from the ceramic tile.

37

For the couple in love, follow the same steps described above. The only difference is the use of the specific template designed for interlaced tails.

38

When adding clay to build volume on the two tails, carefully mark the crossing points with a modelling tool. This will clearly define which tail passes over and which goes under.

39

Because the figures are very close to each other, work gently and patiently. While refining one seahorse, take care not to flatten or distort the other. When all details are finished, bake in the oven at 130 °C for 30–40 minutes.

COLORING WITH COLOR PIGMENTS

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There are many ways to add color to your pieces. Depending on the brands, products, quantities used, and the textures you create, the final result can vary. Below are a few examples of coloring techniques used in this project: pigments and metallic powders, or watercolor pencils.

41

Think about your color choices before you begin. In this case, I am mixing Lucy Štruncová's color pigments with metallic powders. What I particularly love about Lucy's pigments is their matte finish, which gives an authentic look. The colors also remain true and faithful after baking, unlike some dry pastels, for example.

Preparing your color palette on a ceramic tile can help you plan your combinations and mix colors more intentionally. Here, yellow, orange, and red pigments are combined with metallic powders (or eyeshadows) in white and metallic pink.

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For these two seahorses, I chose a contrast between warm and cool colors, which creates a strong visual balance and highlights their complementarity. This contrast can also subtly evoke the idea of a duo.

43

Apply the pigments generously at first, allowing them to settle into all the textures and recesses. Then, using a baby wipe, gently remove the excess pigment from the raised areas. This step increases contrast, reveals the details, and highlights the sculpted textures.

If needed, soften transitions or lighten the extremities of the seahorse by adding a touch of white pastel.

44

On the cooler-toned seahorse, add a touch of brown around the center of the eye. This area should remain slightly darker than the rest of the body to give the eye more depth.

13

45 Golden pigment can build up very quickly, especially on raised areas.

46 Gently wipe away the excess with a baby wipe, keeping the pigment mainly in the recessed parts of the texture.

47 Use a white acrylic pencil to lighten the outer edges of the spines and highlight details such as the fish fin textures.

With a thin black pencil, accentuate some of the recessed circles and add small dots.

Finally, add small white dots in the centers of some textured circles, giving them a decorative, bridle-like appearance.

COLORING WITH WATERCOLOR PENCILS

48 Polymer clay does not react well to water, but once baked, you can safely apply small amounts of watercolor.

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To prepare your watercolor palette, firmly scratch the tips of your watercolor pencils onto a small paper card. Use a slightly damp brush to dissolve the color.

While the watercolor is still wet, mix the colors on the card to create subtle nuances. Apply them to your sculpture immediately, as the card quickly absorbs the pigment.

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As shown in the previous example, finish with white and gold acrylic highlights.

51

These two seahorses show the same sculpture colored using two different approaches.

With pigments and metallic powders, the colors appear deeper, warmer, and more matte, strongly enhancing texture and relief.

52

With watercolor pencils, the result is lighter, brighter, and more transparent, creating a more delicate and luminous look.

53

Add a small touch of white acrylic to the center of the eye color to create a light reflection.

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Using a wooden stick, apply a small drop of UV resin to the eye. The resin should not run or flow.

55

Do not try to fill the corners of the eye. The light effect will be stronger and more natural if the resin forms a rounded shape.

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Your piece does not need additional protection if displayed as a wall sculpture. To avoid dust, a three-dimensional frame is a great option and will highlight both color and volume.

If you plan to wear it as jewelry and add a backing layer with a brooch pin, make sure the final baking is completed before applying UV resin.

Finally, apply a protective varnish to seal and preserve the pigments or watercolors.
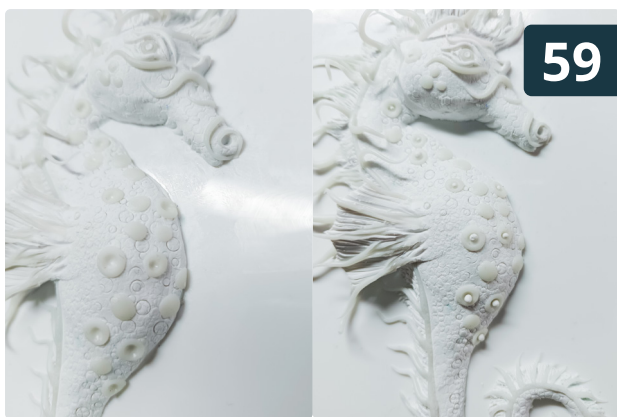
GLOWING IN THE DARK SEAHORSE

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There are many ways to use glow-in-the-dark products from Cosclay. These materials are available in blue and green, in both liquid clay and solid polymer clay. I found that the green polymer clay produces a stronger glow-in-the-dark effect.

One approach is to incorporate glow-in-the-dark polymer clay directly into the sculpting process, using it for selected details that will stand out in the dark.

58

Using glow-in-the-dark clay, you can highlight the main line or individual strands extending from the seahorse.

59

For the details around the stomach, add small balls of glow-in-the-dark clay. Create a tiny indentation in each one, then place a small ball of white clay in the center.

60

Another option is to color the seahorse first and add the glow-in-the-dark details after the first baking.
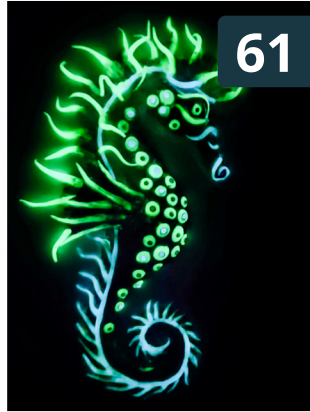
61 This way, the glowing elements stand out more, as they are not covered by additional pigments.

62 For a faster approach, you can use liquid polymer clay as a surface treatment. Once you have finished coloring, apply the liquid clay to selected areas and bake again.

63 Blue-violet and pink tones work especially well with blue glow-in-the-dark CosClay.

FINAL PROJECT

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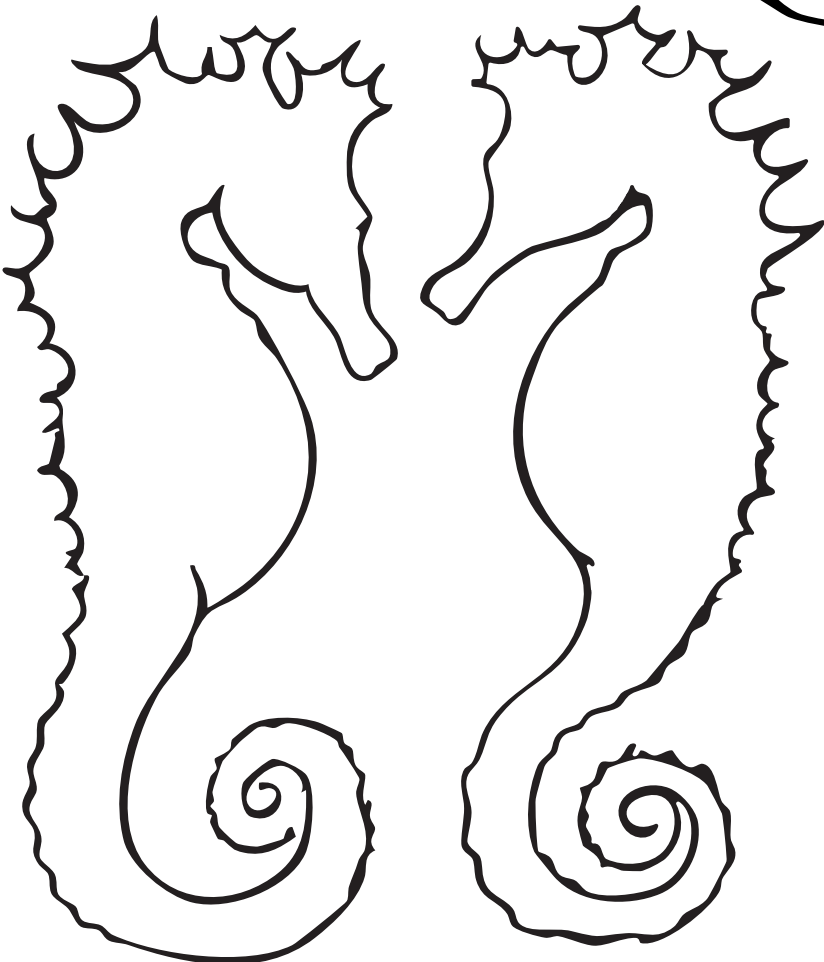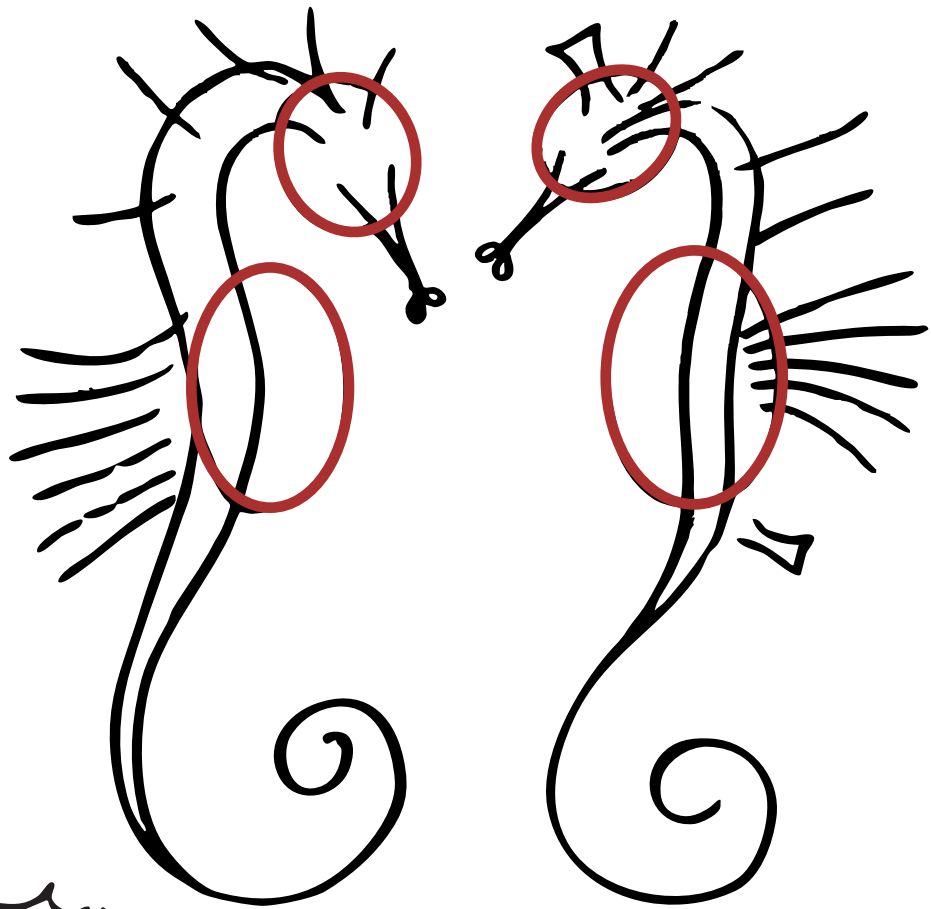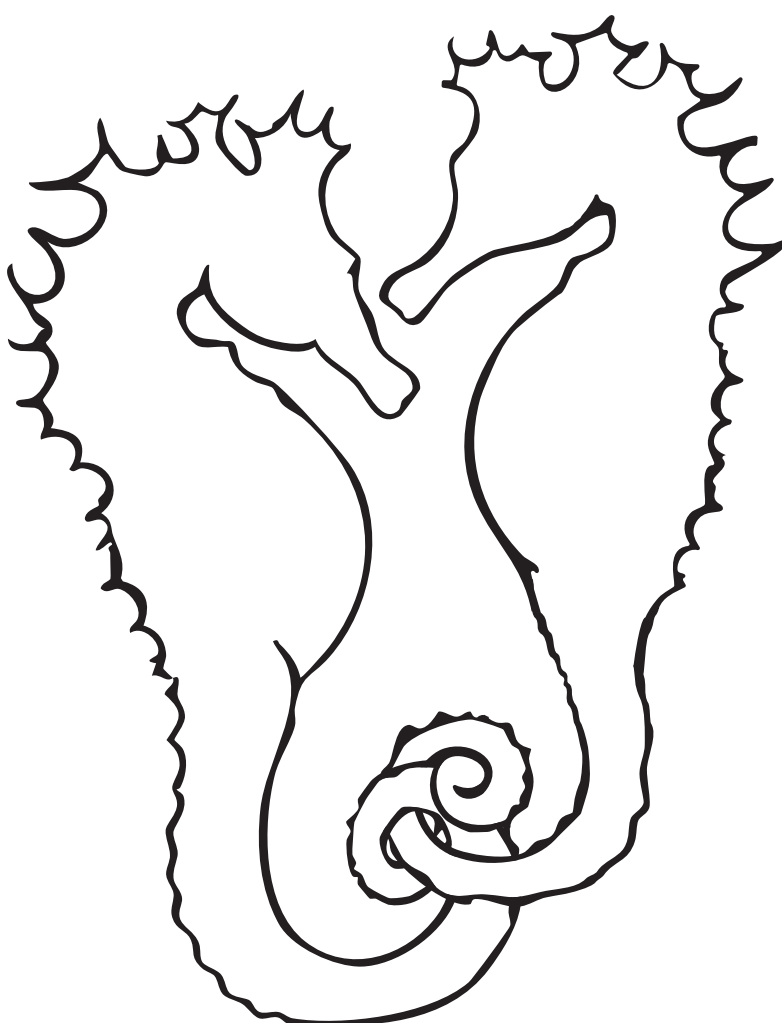*advent calendar*

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VIRGINIE ENZA GARNIER

Virginie Enza Garnier is a French polymer clay artist who has been working with the medium for over ten years. Her work explores the parallels between natural forms and human experience. She focuses on hollow, lightweight constructions that highlight the material's strength, flexibility, and sculptural potential, combining delicate textures with refined surface techniques.

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