

AGS Judging: Technique Series – CLAY



This Judging column is going to cover the judging considerations of one technique – a different one for each of the coming issues - to assist AGS Certified Judges when performing their judging duties AND gourd artists who use the given technique and those who enter and/or visit gourd competitions. Our goal is to help you answer the following questions:

- What Does Good Look Like?
- What are the Expectation Differences for Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced Levels?
- What Do Experts in The Given Technique Expect to See That Demonstrate Quality Execution of The Skill?
- What are Errors That We Should Be Aware of?



Novice. We would expect gnarly hands for a witch, but these fingers are lacking detail and the clay looks crumbly.

- What Do Artists Need to Do and Judges Need to Know When a Gourd is Completely Covered With Clay?

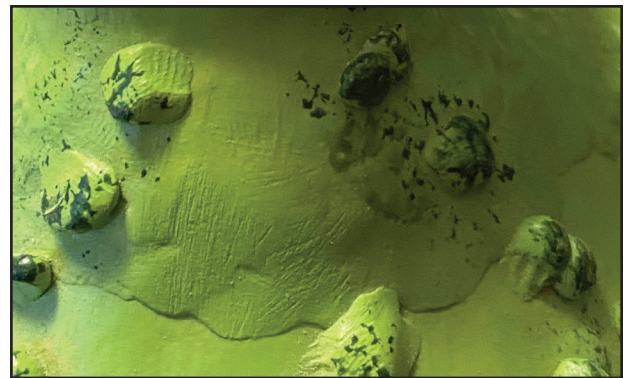
Our goal for sharing the judging criteria will promote a fair and consistent approach to evaluating gourds at Gourd Art Competitions. We know that no two artists (or judges) will agree 100% on a set of guidelines, but they will agree more than they disagree. The other “variable” happens at gourd shows, because they often describe entry categories differently. Some will allow other techniques in addition to the main one, i.e., “Main Technique” with other media and embellishments.

Understanding and Judging Clay on Gourds

The “Clay on Gourds” category encompasses any type of air-dry, oven baked, or epoxy clay in a sculpture, 2D or 3D project. Hand formed shapes, molds and stamps may be employed to form 2D and 3D clay sculptures on gourds. Clay can also be used to combine gourds/gourd pieces in sculpture categories.

Two-dimensional Relief Sculpture with Clay

1. Low relief, also known as bas-relief, is a sculpture technique in which figures and/or other design elements are just barely more prominent than the (overall flat) background.
2. High relief, also known as alto-relief, is where a sculpture project is at least half of its circumference is above the background (2D)



Intermediate. Uneven texture is okay for the skin of a frog, but where the clay of the neck comes down to the chest it should be smooth and not detectable.

Three-dimensional Sculpture with Clay

1. 3D sculptures are works of art that present the dimensions of height, width and depth.
2. The traditional methods of 3D sculptures involving clay are modeling or joining.

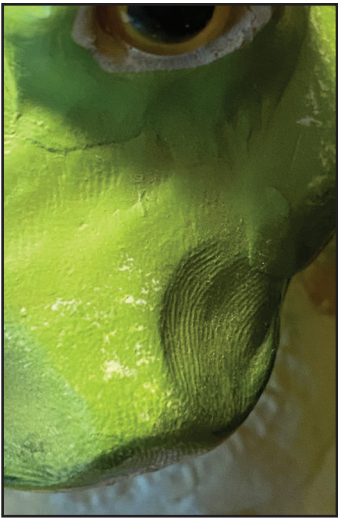
Judging Criteria

Overall appearance. Evaluate based on overall appeal, artistic design, originality and artistic creativity; a “wow” factor.

1. What is the eye appeal, balance and overall form?
2. Is the painting and finishing neat? Incomplete painting, adhesives that show or sloppiness should be penalized.
3. Do added techniques or embellishments add to or detract from the entry?

Craftsmanship. Evaluate based on attention to detail, uniform quality of work, overall impact not marred by obvious flaws.

1. Does the clay have rough edges or are the joints where handles or pieces are attached smooth and neatly finished?



Intermediate. Clearly there's a fingerprint where the artist was shaping the clay for the frog's nose.

2. Are there fingerprints or lint/debris in the clay that is not part of the design?
3. Are there unintentional cracks in the clay or random bits of clay stuck to the gourd in unintended locations?
4. How well are the clay pieces formed? Is there consistency throughout the project?
5. Do you see the armature (wire, dowels or other supports)?

Difficulty/level of effort.

Evaluate based on difficulty

of techniques as applied. Complexity of design, skill involved and amount of effort required. The expectation for the degree of difficulty increases from Novice to Intermediate, and from Intermediate to Advanced.

1. Was the design hand-formed or were molds or shaped-cutters used?
2. How intricate and detailed is the piece?
3. Is the clay work technically sound? Are the clay elements thick enough or appear too fragile?

Featured technique or theme. Theme or class description must be met; it should be what you notice most.

1. Examples: Some categories specify a fantasy sculpture; or maybe it's a realistic animal category.
2. Is the piece believable when you look at it? Does it look natural to the gourd, or in nature?

Entry Levels and Judging Clay on Gourds

What is the main difference when judging clay sculptured entries in the Novice, Intermediate and Advanced divisions? It is in Craftsmanship and Difficulty/level of effort. As the entrants advance from one division to the next, so too is the expectation that the entries will demonstrate more attention to detail and greater amounts of complexity. Entries are purposely separated into these divisions so they are judged among those of similar degrees of prior experience.

What if the Entry is Completely Covered with Clay?

We've all seen an entry that is completely encased with clay. You ask yourself, "how can I be sure it's base is really a gourd?" Afterall, in most show guidelines the



Novice. The connection of the trunk to the elephant's face is not seamless. Otherwise the wrinkly face is a nice interpretation of a real elephant's head. We'd like to see the ridges on the trunk to be a little less chunky if this were an entry in the Intermediate level.

requirement that *the gourd must predominate* is an overarching rule. If you cannot see the gourd, how can you determine the clay-to-gourd ratio?

Photographs taken by the artist during the creation of the entry is the only way for the judges to know the size, shape and overall proportion of gourd to clay. In addition to the gourd base, judges will see if there is other material used for the armature. A little wire or dowel rod or a whole lot of something else?

The exact wording will vary among shows in their competition rules and entry guidelines, but here is a recent one from the 2022 Arizona Gourd Society's



Advanced. The handles and neck of the pot are smoothly connected and look like they are one with the pot.

Continued on page 40

Judging continued

competition. Both artists and judges know that no more than 30% of the gourd surface should be covered with clay and 55% of the armature must be gourd(s) and gourd pieces. “The artist is to provide a photo of the original,



Advanced. The attachment of the fins, tail and eyes are seamless. The surface is smooth and glossy.

unaltered gourd used as the armature.” The AGS Judging Committee urges both entrants and judges to read and follow the published rules or guidelines for the specific chapter’s competition. As an aside, we also recommend that competition teams for each chapter review their rules and guidelines to be sure they address the use of clay.

Conclusion

Many of these guidelines will apply to other techniques, such as pyrography, carving and painting. It may seem redundant but repetition will lead to a better understanding and a consistent application of these judging guidelines. Focus on the originality, quality of craftsmanship and overall impact of design of your entries.

One last word. Take the time to enter your gourd art in the proper category and at the appropriate level. Don’t be afraid to enter at the higher level if you are on the cusp of two levels. Challenge yourself. Recognize that you are likely to be more accomplished than you give yourself credit for. 🐼

AGS Judging Program Overview and 2022 Updates



The original AGS Judging Handbook was published in 2008, and in the intervening 14 years subtle but important changes have been made – many by chapters based on “the real world.” The

Handbook established guidelines for judges to follow, but left Chapters “in charge” of running the competition events according to what their officers and members felt was necessary for a successful event. The AGS Handbook mainly guided the judging procedures for the observing crafted, artistic and raw gourds with the intention of selecting award-winning specimens. Detailed and Simplified Scoring forms were prepared for judges and tally sheets for the clerks. Each of these forms were explained as was the Judging procedure and authority.

In 2013 we published a supplemental training document for judges that we call the Judging by Category Guidelines. Experts in various techniques collaborated to document

the guidelines for carving, painting, wood burning and many more “categories” that are commonly represented in gourd art competitions. These “by category” guidelines

MEDIUM SCORING FORM for JUDGING

Scoring: One to Five (1 to 5) scale, with 5 being Best, relative to other entries in that category and skill level. If there are no other competing entries in that category, comparison will be with expectations for work at that skill level.

Entry ID:	
Division:	
Class:	

Score each 1 to 5	CRITERIA	COMMENTS
	Overall appearance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overall appeal Artistic design Stands out from the competition (has that “wow” factor) Originality and artistic creativity 	
	Craftsmanship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attention to detail Uniform quality of work Overall impact not marred by obvious flaws Gourd sits flat or hangs evenly Finished look 	
	Difficulty/level of effort <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty of techniques as applied Design complex or intricate Skill in multiple areas Amount of effort required 	
	Featured technique or Theme <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Featured technique dominates Apply quality of craftsmanship for the specified technique Theme or class description must be fulfilled Overall impression created by the featured technique or theme 	
	< TOTAL >	