Sgraffito Tools

Clay is rough on tools. Fortunately some of the most used tools in the box are quick and cheap to assemble right in your own studio.

Like many ceramic artists, I enjoy trying new tools. I do, however, get weary of buying replacements. Not long ago, a classmate asked me to pick up some clay carving tools for her while I was at the store, as hers had become dull. As I was not familiar with the type of tool, I took one with me as an example. "Hmm," I thought, as I rolled it over in my hand, "not much to it but a blunt stick and a bit of wire."

Start by gathering dowels, pencils, or brushes that can be used for tool handles and taper the ends with a pencil sharpener just a bit so the edges don’t cut into your clay surface while you’re working. Drill a 1/16th-inch hole into the tapered end.

Put a small dab of Gorilla Glue in each drilled hole, then insert the wire shape into the hole. Note that Gorilla Glue expands while it dries. Dry the tool in an upright position for 12 hours. I use a small block of clay to support my tools while they dry.

For my needs, both the smaller and larger tools work best with leather-hard clay.

Materials and Tools:

- Dowels, pencils, or old paintbrushes (keep the brush end intact and use it to whisk clay bits away while carving)
- Utility and office staples
- Tape measure (with a steel tape)
- Phillips-head screwdriver
- Drill and 1/16-inch drill bit
- Needle-nose pliers
- Pencil sharpener
- Gorilla Glue

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