Metal Clay Australasia Pty Ltd – www.metalclay.com.au

Basic Guidelines to Working with Metal Clay

Here are some basic guidelines for working with Metal Clay. Please also go to the FAQ page and follow the link after the question: Are there any information sheets available on Metal Clay? There are more detailed information sheets available for working with Metal Clay.

- **Plan ahead and work fast!** Metal clay dries out very quickly. If you're used to working with polymer clay, you'll need to adjust your working style and pace. Think through your design before you begin. Sketch your design so you have a template to follow. Make sure you have all your tools and supplies ready to go before you open your metal clay packages.
- **Keep your clay covered while you work.** Try to keep as much of your project covered with plastic wrap as possible to slow down the drying process while you're working. You may need to moisturise with small amounts of water periodically while you work, to keep it from drying out prematurely.
- **Firing hotter and longer = stronger.** Detailed firing instructions for each brand and formulation of clay comes in the packaging. The longer and hotter you fire the clay, the stronger it becomes. If you don't fire long or hot enough, the clay will not sinter (fuse) properly and the resulting piece can break easily. It is always a good idea to fire at the hottest temperature for the longest time possible (within the prescribed firing schedule for the clay you're using). It is possible to sinter metal clay using a gas torch or on a gas stove top but in general, using a kiln and firing at 900 degrees Centigrade for 2 hours will produce the strongest metal.
- **When mixing formulations and brands of clay, always fire at the highest temperature/longest time.** Different formulations of clay are fired at different temperatures and for different lengths of time. If you are mixing more than one brand, type and/or formulation of metal clay, always fire at the temperature and time required for the type that needs the highest temperature and the longest time.
- **Embed only kiln-safe stones.** Whether you are firing with a torch, on a stovetop or in a kiln, make sure that any stones you embed in your clay can tolerate the necessary firing temperatures. Most lab-grown and synthetic gemstones and CZs are kiln-safe, and some natural stones (including peridot and garnet) can usually tolerate the necessary heat. To be safe, buy the stones you will be using in your metal clay pieces from a reputable supplier who can vouch for their ability to be fired safely in Metal Clay.
- **Have fun and push the boundaries.** One of the beauties of working with metal clay is that nearly any mistake can be corrected. Cracks can be filled and re-fired, and mistakes that can't be corrected to look as originally planned can be embellished to create unexpected new designs. Embrace the opportunity to stretch your imagination and design horizons!