



# Hanging Gardens of Babylon

## Ancient Bas-Relief Sculpture

Created by Lee-Jean Lin

February 2023

### Motivation

Inspired by examples of ancient bas-relief, this low-relief sculpture project will introduce students to the story of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and bas-relief. They will create their own version of bas-relief on a tile to mimic ancient artifacts discovered in the garden site.

### Student Objectives

- Students will learn about the history of bas-relief
- Student will learn the process involving low-relief sculpture
- Students will create a low-relief sculpture using modeling clay on ceramic tiles

### Visual Arts Language:

**Bas-relief (Low Relief):** To create a sculpture in relief is to give the impression that the sculpted material has been raised above the background. There are different degrees of relief depending on the degree of projection of the sculpted form from the field. The full range includes high, mid, or low relief. Bas-relief is a projecting image with a shallow overall depth. Small variations in depth register as a three-dimensional image.

**Balance:** Balance can be either symmetrical, asymmetrical, or radial. Balance also refers to a sense that dominant focal points don't give a feeling of being pulled too much to any specific part of the artwork. Balance can be achieved by the location of objects, volume, or sizes of objects, and by color.

**Composition:** It is the placement or arrangement of visual elements or ingredients in a work of art, as distinct from the subject of a work. It can also be thought of as the organization of the elements of art.

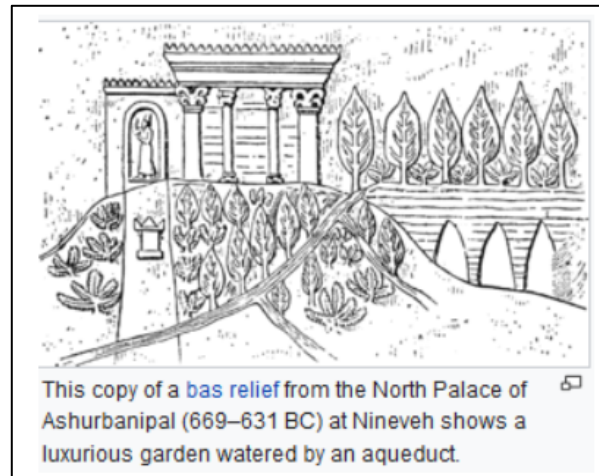
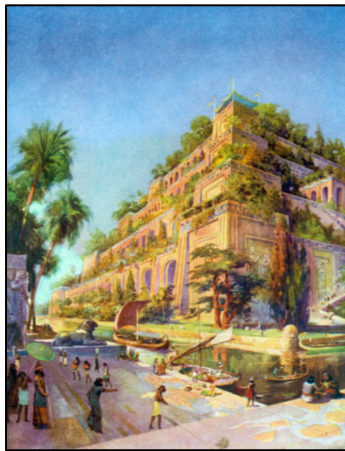
**Texture:** Texture is one of the elements of design. Texture is the surface quality of a shape - rough, smooth, soft hard glossy etc. Texture can be physical (tactile) or visual.

## Cultural and Historical Connection: The story of Hanging Gardens

This ancient garden is considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World, which was located near the royal palace in Babylon, now in modern day southern Iraq is. Traditionally, they were thought to be the work of King Nebuchadnezzar II (reigned c. 605–c. 561 BCE), who built them to console his Median wife, Amytis, because she missed the mountains and greenery of her homeland. The Hanging Gardens probably did not really “hang” in the sense of being suspended from cables or ropes. The name comes from a translation of Greek word “kremastos”, or the Latin word Pensilis which means not just “hanging” but “overhanging” as in the case of terrace or balcony.

By the beginning of the 21st century, the site of the Hanging Gardens had not yet been conclusively established. There are neither extant Babylonian texts that mention the gardens nor definitive archaeological evidence has been found in Babylon. Some researchers proposed that these were rooftop gardens. It was laid out on a series of terraces irrigated by pumps from the Euphrates River. The structure was built with a core of mud brick and an exterior covered with baked brick, which had no internal chambers and was usually square or rectangular. Some archaeologists also suggested that the gardens were built within the walls of the royal palace at Babylon, the capital of Babylonia. Although no certain traces of the Hanging Gardens have been found, a German archaeologist, Robert Koldeway, did uncover an unusual series of foundation chambers and vaults in the northeastern corner of the palace at Babylon. A well in one of the vaults may have been used in conjunction with a chain pump and thus was thought perhaps to be part of the substructure of the once towering Hanging Gardens.

An artist's re-creation of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. (Britannica.com)



### Definition: Bas Relief:

“Relief” is a form of sculpture in which a solid piece of material is carved so that objects project from a background, almost as though they are trapped in the stone, metal, wood, or other materials used. This carving technique is quite ancient, and it has been used independently in many cultures from Mesoamerica to India. Numerous very beautiful examples of relief sculpture can be seen in museums, and also in-situ at a variety of archaeological sites. Relief is not specific to any one culture and the technique is as old as humankind’s artistic explorations. There are different styles of relief depending on the degree of projection of the sculpted form from the field. The full range includes high, mid, or low relief (bas-relief), and hollow (sunken) relief.



High Relief (Deep Carving)      Bas-Relief (Shallow Carving)      Hollow Relief (Carve into Flat Surface)

“Bas-Relief” is a French term from the Italian basso-relievo (“low relief”), it is a sculpture technique in which figures and/or other design elements are just barely more prominent than the (overall flat) background. Some of the earliest examples of the style appeared in the Babylonian, Assyrian, and Hittite cultures. Examples of beautiful and very detailed bas-reliefs from later periods, when the Greeks, Romans and Asia made use of the technique, can be seen in museums around the world.

Bas-relief is created either by carving away material (wood, stone, ivory, jade, stone, clay, marble, and bronze etc.) or adding material to the top of an otherwise smooth surface (e.g., strips of clay to stone). The depth of the elements shown in bas-relief is completely distorted, if seen from the side. But from the front the small variations in depth register as a three-dimensional image. Images on coins are typical examples of bas-relief.

In this project, a bas-relief will be made on a clay tile to mimic the mud brick, common building material in Babylon. A coat of yellow oxide paint results in a finished product to rival those of the ancients!

### Supplies:

Daltile white tile 4.25” X 4.25”

White Model Magic 0.5 oz

Chromacryl Acrylic Paint: Yellow Oxide ½ teaspoon

Blickrylic: White pea size

Souffle cups with lids:

- ¾” for white paint and a very small amount of tacky glue
- 1” for yellow oxide paint

Roller: Rolling pin, pvc pipe, etc.

Kitchen sponge cube 1” X 1” X 2”

Dry wax deli paper: 1 sheet per student

Toothpicks or pop sticks

Tacky glue

Stick for applying glue: coffee stir, thin popsicle, etc.

Pencil

Paint brush (medium)

Scissors

Resource Images

### Step-by-step:

1. Introduce Hanging Garden and bas relief.
2. If using large dry wax paper begin by tracing the tile with a pencil onto the paper.
3. Sketch your design on the dry wax paper (inside the square) with a pencil. The design can be objects in the garden, e.g., a palm tree, part of the architecture structure, an animal that may live in the garden. Additional elements can be added to the design to keep the composition more interesting or balance.

4. Roll out or flatten the clay. To achieve the best result, keep the thickness between 1/8" to 3/8". Shape the clay on paper according to the drawing. Trim off excess clay with scissors. See "Clay Techniques" page in the lesson plan.
5. Before transferring clay apply small dots of glue to the back of the tile.
6. Transfer the clay on the unglazed side (back) of the tile by flipping the wax paper and the clay on the tile. The clay will stick to the tile. (Can also place tile on top of clay and flip. Press lightly and then remove the tile).
7. Create texture on clay using toothpicks, craft sticks or scissors.
8. Paint the tile and clay image with yellow oxide. Make sure to get into nooks and crannies.
9. Use a paper towel to wipe off the wet paint from the clay to create high light on the sculpture. Let dry.
10. Optional: Sponge white paint on the design then on the tile (background).  
**Note:** Use the white paint sparingly. Spread out the paint on the sponge with fingertips and dab the sponge on the scrap paper until the paint is no longer blobby. Do not cover the entire tile with white paint. Let some yellow oxide show through.
11. Complete project label and affix to other side of the tile.

#### Reference

Hanging Gardens of Babylon - The Seven Wonders of the Ancient World

<https://youtu.be/DmgIKtom7YE>

#### Aesthetic Valuing

1. What image did your craft with the clay?
2. When you added the paint, did it bring out all of the sculpted details?
3. What do you think is the difference between a low-relief sculpture and a free-standing sculpture?
4. Were you transported back to the ancient gardens?

**Presenting Artist:** Lee-Jean Lin is the founder of Art Experience. She uses art to guide children through the creative process so that they have the tools to empower their own lives. She also runs "Art Experience Night" to provide a casual and fun environment for adults to create their own works of art.

She has served as a docent for the Palos Verdes Art Center and was a docent in Torrance's "Adventures in Art" programs for 10 years. When her children age out of the program, she crossed the bridge and became the presenting artist for several South Bay art programs.

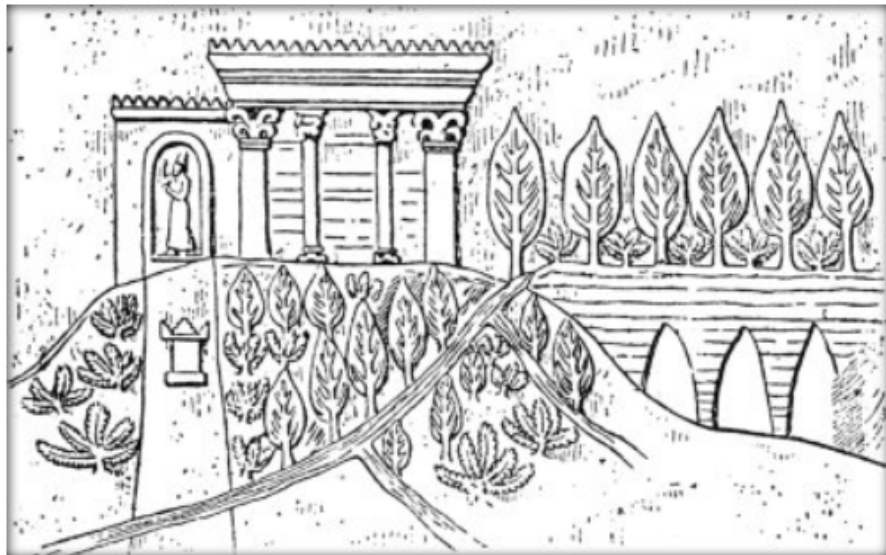
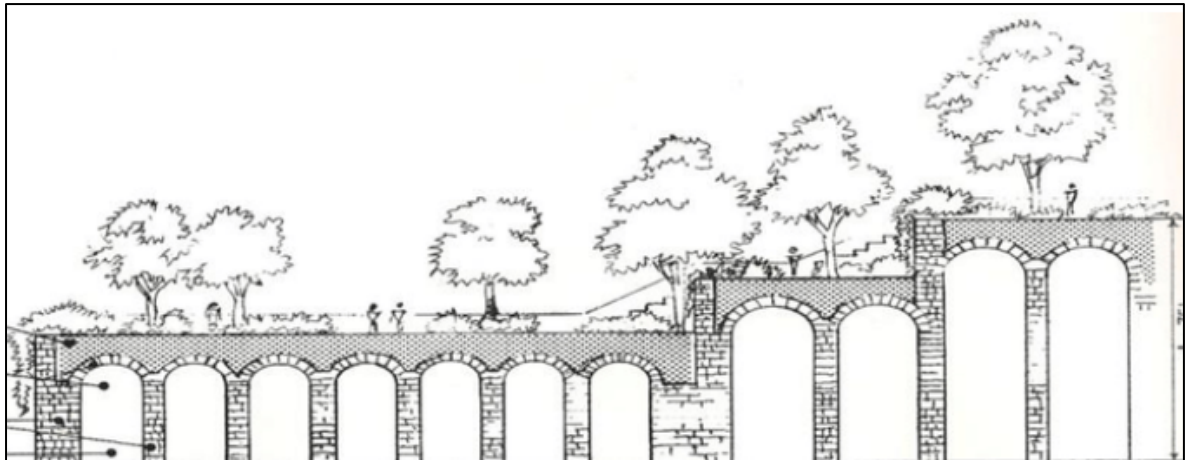
Lee-Jean is the recent recipient of Certificate of Congressional Recognition from Congressman Ted Lieu and an award from South Bay Chinese Woman Association, respectively, for her involvement in Art Education and Community Service.

Lee-Jean was brought up in a family of artists and architects and has been practicing art as her life-long passion. She has a bachelor's degree in Psychology and a Masters in Industrial & System Engineering. Her extensive psychology background, experience from raising a child with special needs, and more than 20 year's corporate experience as a designer give her unique perspective to children's art education. She believes in making art part of life and, therefore, enjoys creating art projects with materials readily available in our daily lives.

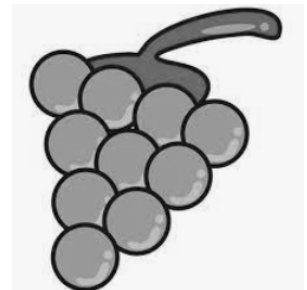
At Your Fingertips is a Palos Verdes Art Center school-based outreach program in partnership with the Palos Verdes Unified School District and the Palos Verdes Library District. Founded in 1976, this volunteer program annually brings quality visual arts education to almost 7,000 transitional kindergarten through fifth grade students at public and private schools on the Palos Verdes Peninsula Art as well as schools and organizations beyond the Peninsula.

We thank PTA, PTO, and Booster Club for their support.

# Images of Gardens



Objects Samples



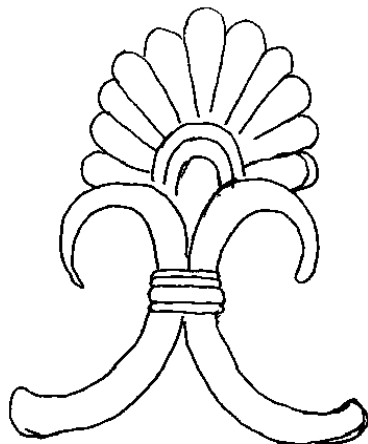
Architecture



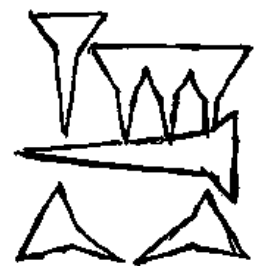
Suns



Lion



Decoration



Writings

# Clay Sculpture Techniques

by  
M.C.Gillis

I think gentle and slow, when I am  
working with moist clay.

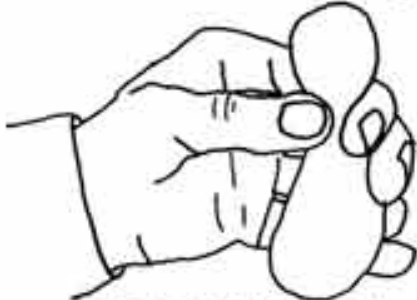
Remember,  
gentle  
and  
slow.



I can roll balls of clay.



I can roll snakes with clay.



I can squeeze the clay.



I can pull forms out of the clay.



I can carefully scratch designs into the clay.



I can gently smooth  
the clay to give it a  
finished look and feel.



I can subtract (take away) pieces of  
clay. I can use tools or my fingers.



I can add clay  
pieces to my sculpture.  
They must be moistened, scored,  
and smoothed or, when the clay  
dries, the pieces will fall off.

**Which techniques can I use to sculpt the idea in my head?**

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### *Hanging Gardens of Babylon:*

Inspired by ancient bas-relief, this low-relief sculpture will introduce students to the Hanging Gardens of Babylon and bas-relief.

Learn more with these resources from the Palos Verdes Library District

#### **In the Young Readers section**

J700 GIPSON The Ultimate Art Museum by Ferren Gipson

Visually spectacular survey of world art from pre-history to the present, curated in collaboration with a global team of experts and educators. Every piece in this book is selected to illustrate important historical, cultural, and artistic fact.

J700 HODGE 100 Things to Know About Art by Susie Hodge

From pottery to Pointillism, each of the carefully chosen 100 words has its own 100-word long description and quirky illustration, providing a fascinating introduction to art from prehistoric cave paintings to contemporary masterpieces.

J935 BANCROFT-HUNT Living in Ancient Mesopotamia by Series Consultant Editor:

Focusing primarily on two "ideal" periods set in about 3500 B.C (Sumer) and 1000 to 500 B.C. (Assyria and Babylonia). Examines all the aspects of daily life across all strata of society, from the kings and priests to the slaves; from food to religious beliefs.

J935 HUNTER First Civilizations by Dr. Erica C.C. Hunter, Updated by Mike Corbishley

This atlas focuses on the Ancient Near East, and particularly the area known as Mesopotamia, the acknowledged cradle of civilization. Helping to build a picture of what life was like at the time, it treats the story of the first civilizations of this area both historically and culturally, and presents the key steps of the rise to civilization - farming, urbanization, writing, development of technology.

J935.5 GIBSON Ancient Babylon by Karen Bush Gibson

Exploring secrets of Ancient Sparta to the influence of Ancient Athens, students learn about the civilizations of their ancient ancestors.

#### **Explore the web**

[https://www.worldhistory.org/Hanging\\_Gardens\\_of\\_Babylon/](https://www.worldhistory.org/Hanging_Gardens_of_Babylon/)

World History | Hanging Gardens of Babylon

<https://www.kpbs.org/news/arts-culture/2014/05/05/secrets-dead-lost-gardens-babylon>

KPBS | Secrets of the Dead: The Lost Gardens of Babylon with Dr. Stephanie Dalley, Oxford University

<https://www.dkfindout.com/us/history/seven-wonders-world/hanging-gardens-babylon/>

DK findout! | Hanging Gardens of Babylon

