

Subtractive Sculpture: Soap Carving

Whether you are carving marble or soap, the process is basically the same. You need to begin with a vision of your sculpture and then remove anything that doesn't belong.

Working with a bar of soap is easier and safer than working with stone or wood so it is a good project for young sculptors.



Any kind of bar soap will work, but larger bars are easier to handle. Ivory soap is particularly easy to carve.

For tools, use a butter knife or even a plastic knife. Tongue depressors or popsicle sticks work well. Toothpicks are excellent for details.

Cover your work area with newspaper and sketch your design on one side of the soap.

Large shapes with a simple outline and not too many sharp angles work best. A fish or turtle is a good design for a beginner.

Carefully carve away the soap around your outline. Take small chips or slivers at a time. Remember that this is a *subtractive* process – once you take it away, you cannot add it back, so it is best to work slowly.

Once your outline is cut out, you can slowly round the top and/or bottom and add details with small tools like toothpicks. You can use a fork or similar tool to carve parallel lines into your sculpture. Just remember to work slowly with minimal pressure so that you don't crack your sculpture.

To finish your carving, wet your finger and smooth any rough edges or stray marks.

