

Plasticine®

Plasticine® is a trademark name for an oil-based modeling material that was developed by an art teacher in England in 1897. The non-drying clay that William Harbutt formulated is still available, as is *plastilin*, a similar modeling clay developed by Franz Kolb in the 1880s, but the terms *plasticine* and *plastilina* are now used by many people as generic terms for modeling clay.

Plasticine has distinct properties that make it useful. Unlike clay and wax, plasticine stays soft and workable: it neither hardens nor dries. Unlike pottery clay, it comes in a wide array of colours that can be used as purchased or blended. Also, unlike clay, plasticine doesn't stick to your hands.

Plasticine can be shaped and worked with modelling tools for shaping, sculpting, blending, texturing, thinning, scraping, poking, and cutting. It can be worked on its own or built on a pre-formed armature. Note, however, that it cannot be fired.

Two important new uses of plasticine have developed recently. Canadian illustrator Barbara Reid has developed a book illustration technique using plasticine. She creates illustrations of scenes using plasticine relief sculpture, employing a variety of techniques to convey distance, size, texture, and lighting. Her illustrations for *The New Baby Calf* by Edith Newlin Chase, copyright 1984, are the first published example of this technique. *The Party*, from 1997, for which Reid won the Governor General's Literary Award, and *The Subway Mouse*, from 2003, are other works illustrated using this technique.

Probably the most famous new use of plasticine is in Claymation®, originally used solely as a service mark for a type of stop-action movie animation process done with oil-based modeling clay that was invented by Will Vinton, the man responsible for animating the California raisins. The term *claymation* has come, like *plasticine*, to be used generically to describe animation using modelling clay. Early clay animation, in the generic sense, includes the character Gumby. Recent highlights include all of Nick Park's Wallace and Gromit adventures, including the shorts and the feature-length *Curse of the Were-Rabbit*, as well as *Chicken Run*, and Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Corpse Bride*. With the awarding of four Academy Awards to the Wallace and Gromit shorts and feature film, plasticine has arguably reached new heights of recognition.

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