



MESSUMS STUDIOS CLAY WORKSHOPS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

SPRING 2025

Funded by

Wiltshire Council

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MESSUMS
WEST EAST



ABOUT THE PROJECT

In Spring 2025, with the support of Wiltshire Council and generosity of our sponsors, Messums Studios delivered a number of free creative courses and workshops for young people.

Messums Studios, a not for profit, community facing, educational branch of Messums West, operates a year long regular programme of creative learning which is subject to tuition fees. We are acutely aware of the fact that creative education and material learning has, over the past decade or longer, been diminishing in mainstream education. Through this funded activity we were able to begin to address the lack of creative learning provision and offer experiences to young people which they would otherwise not be able to access.

Supported by a £2000 grant from Southwest Wiltshire Area Board, Messums Studios was enabled to deliver a series of free workshops which offered the opportunity to young people to experience hands-on creative learning delivered by experts in the field of clay, ceramic and natural materials art.

Each course had a maximum capacity of ten spaces to allow proper learning support for all participants. Each workshop was delivered by a professional practicing artist supported by DBS checked studio staff and volunteers. Safe practice was observed at all times, and children were instructed in health and safety concerns around each project. Assistance with transport was offered as available upon request for all workshops. Over the course of the programme, this offer was not requested.

With the target audience of children ages 13+, the Southwest Wiltshire Area Board funding enabled us to run the following courses:

- Young Clay Symposium | 1 March 2025
- RAKU for Young People | 7 April 2025
- Model Making & Saggar Firing | 26 May 2025
- Natural Colour Making | 14 June 2025

YOUNG CLAY SYMPOSIUM

Running concurrently with the Ceramics Symposium at Messums West Gallery in Tisbury, Messums Studios delivered 'Young Clay Symposium'. This hands-on creative course explored the topics of the vessel and abstraction. Using pre-prepared leather-hard extruded clay cylinders as a starting point, the young participants had the opportunity to design their intended sculptural structures. Having been explained the methods to adopt in working with leather-hard clay, the participants were given creative freedom.

Supported by their tutor, each outcome of this course was distinctly different, expressing the unique creative language of each individual young person. The pieces were fired by the studio staff and later collected by the participants.

"My granddaughter and her friend loved their clay workshop at Messums Studios. They hope to go back and take part in another one. It was so good that they had this opportunity to attend a free session.

Please pass on our thanks to all concerned in giving the girls an experience to remember. The chance to tap into undiscovered creative skills is so important for young people in this digital world."

-Lynne Strange, Tisbury

Right: Young artist making an abstract vessel in the studio, surrounded by tools and clay materials.

Left: Course participants hand-building with stoneware clay and decorating with coloured slips in our Chilmark studio.



RAKU FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

RAKU is an outdoor firing method derived from the ancient Japanese ceremonial ceramics firing process. Modern day RAKU offers the most immediate insight into the ceramic process. It is an exciting open-air activity which involves fire, smoke, and steam; unlike any other glaze firing, it offers the participant an immediate and vibrant result. In this course, young artists learnt to glaze and observe the firing process and participate in unveiling their resulting pottery. This workshop was attended by nine participants who were given a pot to decorate with RAKU glazes and then witnessed the firing process and took the resulting work home with them on the day. This workshop, due to its nature, was supported by four staff and volunteers. The children were thrilled with the results. This course was also attended by a young person supported by SMASH Youth Project, a Wiltshire & Swindon based charity for vulnerable young people with mental health issues.



“

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR
INCLUDING *K* ON THE RAKU
DAY YESTERDAY - ALTHOUGH
SHE DIDN'T MANAGE TO STAY
THE WHOLE DAY SHE REALLY
WAS VERY PROUD OF WHAT
SHE DID ACHIEVE AND REALLY
ENJOYED WHAT SHE DID.
THANK YOU SO MUCH.

”

ALICE LYONS
SMASH YOUTH PROJECT



Left: Two participants in PPE grinding and sieving raw material to make pigment

MODELLING & SAGGAR MAKING

In this two-part workshop participants were able to experience both the making and experimental outdoor saggar firing process. During part one of this course on 26 May – the eight participants engaged in clay sculpting and modelling. They each created a number of creatures and objects inspired by “The Wild”. Using specialist sculpting clay with good thermal resistance properties, the young participants made small hand sized sculptures. The work was biscuit fired ready for the second part of this workshop, Saggar Firing, which ran on 30 May. In this second part of our two-day workshop, young participants had the opportunity to experience a saggar firing in our outdoor RAKU kiln. Firing their wild figures using upcycled metal coffee containers as saggar cases, participants learned about achieving low fired, fascinating and unpredictable reduction effect surfaces. Participants were able to take their work home at the end of this workshop.

NATURAL COLOUR MAKING WORKSHOP

Natural Colour workshop with Polly Bennett took place at Messums Studios on 14 June 10 am -1 pm. In this Pigment Making Workshop, artist Polly Bennett demonstrated to the ten participants how to make a paint brush using horsehair, bees wax, and sticks and how to transform raw earth from Wiltshire, Kent, and Sussex into vibrant handmade watercolour paint. Young people explored sustainable, traditional techniques and processes of purifying pigment, making paint, and creating a unique colour chart. They discovered the rich history of natural pigments and their ancient origins.



Right: Participants peering inside the kiln after their saggars had been fired.

Previous (Above): Tutor lowering pot into flaming combustion box with participant throwing straw onto the flames.

Previous (Below) Participant and staff member examining pot and discussing results

“

THANK YOU FOR THE MOST
AMAZING WORKSHOP THAT
AVA AND PIP ATTENDED AND
LOVED. DO KEEP ME IN THE
LOOP FOR FURTHER EVENTS,
AND THANK YOU AGAIN!

”

ANNIE BIRD

CONCLUSION

Messums Studios was established to support life-long creative learning with an emphasis on the tuition of skills, material knowledge, and critical thinking. Through the way we teach, we seek to provide everyone with pathways to develop the means to express themselves and to communicate confidently using their own visual language. As professionals in arts and culture, we are aware of the obstacles young people face in order to access high quality, skill-based creative education. With the £2000 grant we received from Wiltshire Council, match funded by [Messums.org](https://www.messums.org), we were enabled to deliver 16 contact hours of skill-based specialist creative learning to 39 young people. Supported by four volunteers, Messums Studios staff, and visiting artist/tutors delivered four different creative learning experiences.

With the environment and sustainability in the foreground of our content planning, during these sessions young people learned from professional artist/tutors how to repurpose items and materials which came to the end of their intended purpose, and how to source and make art materials from nature.

In an age saturated with technology, it is all the more important to enable young people the opportunities in which they can express their ideas, create, problem solve and learn to communicate

through their art using materials such as clay, chalk, pencil and paint brush. In a time of heightened mental health issues among the young, creative activity delivered in a safe and friendly setting has been proven to offer a distraction from worries, new opportunities for personal expression, new ways of seeing the world, and new pathways to friendships.

Going forward, we hope to expand on our work thus far completed, and offer further creative workshops covering drawing, painting, sculpture, mixed media, pottery and environmental arts. It is important to keep young people in touch with nature and reaffirm them in their curiosity and their agency over the environment and the culture which they will affect and in which they will become adults.

We would like to thank the Southwest Wiltshire Area Board and [Messums.org](https://www.messums.org) for the generosity which enabled us to deliver this work with young people free of charge.

TO SUPPORT OUR WORK, PLEASE
GET IN TOUCH WITH US ON
CREATIVE@MESSUMS.ORG



“ I came with my friend to the free pottery course at Messums Studios. I had lots of fun and enjoyed learning new techniques. I never knew you could make effects from dry banana peel. ”

-A.R Young Attendee

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