



# Ruth Asawa

## FOR YOUR CLASSROOM

### CLASSROOM CONNECTION

#### Baker's Clay Recipe

The following is the recipe that Ruth Asawa used to make playdough or baker's clay in her work with children and on her own sculptures. The following recipe will make one batch of dough, which is ample for six to eight students.

#### Materials and preparation:

4 cups flour  
1 cup salt  
1.5 cups water

Mix the flour and salt. Add water. Knead the dough until smooth. It might take up to five minutes of kneading to get the flour, salt, and water properly mixed. This dough is not elastic, like bread dough. It should be soft, but still firm, and be able to hold the shape of a good mound. It doesn't like to be kneaded too much. Generally, it's hard to make the dough softer if you have mixed it with too little water. You can, however, make the dough stiffer by adding flour and salt in the same proportions.

#### Useful Tools

A garlic press makes excellent hair

Chopsticks and other circular ends  
for depressing circles

Beans and macaroni  
(moistened before being affixed)

Fork tines

Knives to cut out shapes

Rolling pins to roll out sheets of dough  
that you can drape like fabric



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In *Untitled*, metal wiring creates a cage-like organic shape that binds and encloses smaller forms within a larger composition. The negative space between the wires creates volume.

This work uses lighting to enhance the viewer's perception of positive and negative space through the use of shadow. While the sculpture seems heavy, definite, eternal, the shadow is more ethereal, hinting at the idea that a work of art is more than the physical object itself. In describing her work, Asawa said: "You can see through it, the piece does not hide anything. You can show inside and outside, and inside and outside are connected. Everything is connected, continuous."<sup>1</sup>

This idea of interconnectedness was most likely a product of Asawa's internalization of her life's experiences. Ruth Aiko Asawa was born in 1926 in southern California to Japanese immigrants who worked as farmers. In February, 1942, Executive Order No. 9066 was signed and issued by Franklin D. Roosevelt, declaring the West Coast a military zone and interning Japanese-Americans out of fear that they would sabotage American efforts during World War II. Asawa spent time in internment camps in Arcadia, California, and Rohwer, Arkansas. Ironically, with no farm work to do in the camps, she had more time to continue her creative studies with other interned artists. She also became the art editor of the Rohwer Relocation Center's high school yearbook.

Asawa later reflected on her time in the internment camps, stating, "I hold no hostilities for what happened; I blame no one. Sometimes good comes through adversity. I would not be who I am today had it not been for the internment, and I like who I am."<sup>2</sup>

After the war, Asawa continued art training at Black Mountain College in North Carolina where she made her first wire sculpture, using crochet techniques she had learned from villagers in Mexico. Asawa worked in a variety of media, including wire sculpture, paintings, drawings, masks, and public commissions until her death in 2013.



<sup>1</sup> SPARK. "SPARK Educator Guide--Ruth Asawa". [California]: KQED Inc. n.d. Web. 29 July 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Asawa Lanier, Inc. ruthasawa.com. n.d. Web. 29 July 2014.

<sup>3</sup> SPARK. "SPARK Educator Guide--Ruth Asawa". [California]: KQED Inc. n.d. Web. 29 July 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Asawa Lanier, Inc. ruthasawa.com. n.d. Web. 29 July 2014.

<sup>5</sup> RuthAsawa.com/resources/bakers-clay-recipe/