ART SPOT:
Horse Figurine
Age 10+
30 mins

Learn about a bronze Horse Figurine from the late 8th century BCE and add a faux-verdigris finish to an old knick-knack to make it look like it’s from the ancient world!

Supplies
An old toy or figurine (plastic, metal, or wood), paint brush, acrylic paint (white, black, brown, yellow, and phthalo green)

Horse Figurine. Greek, Thessalian, late 8th century BCE. Bronze (solid cast, with stamped an incised decoration). Height 2 ¼ inches.

During the Greek Dark Ages (ca. 1200-800BCE), painters and sculptors both started to use geometric patterns in their sculptures and painted decoration. The societal upheaval of the Greek Dark Ages gave way to a more stable system of independently governed cities, and a clear and elegant Geometric Style emerged as the Greek Dark Ages ended. During this time, artisans began to decorate their pottery with stylized, sketchy silhouettes. Sculptors experimented with that same geometric style too.

This is a cast bronze horse in that Geometric Style. Horses were a popular subject in the time of Greek Geometric Art, and ancient Greeks honored horses in many ways. Horses played an important role in myths, legends, warfare, sports, and transportation. Because of their important role in ancient Greek culture, horses are the most commonly depicted animal in ancient Greek Art. Horses are portrayed in ancient Greek vase-painting and sculpture in many forms. You can mostly find horses pulling war chariots, but you can also see horses depicted as legendary and mythical creatures, heroes, and even gods. Horses are also depicted as beloved companions. Because they required extensive land and upkeep, horses were also symbols of wealth and power. This small bronze horse was probably created as a votive offering.

What is a votive offering?
In ancient times, a votive offering was a gift to a god. Ancient Greeks believed that anything dedicated by a mortal became the property of a god. Unlike sacrifices, in which a gift to the gods was destroyed (often by burning), ancient Greeks placed votive offerings intact in the temples. One of the main functions of Greek temples was as a storage place for these offerings. The temples themselves were a votive offering, dedicated by the community to a god or goddess.
ART SPOT: Horse Figurine
Age 10+
30 mins

Sometimes votive offerings fulfilled promises that individuals had made while praying. A merchant, for example, might promise to dedicate a statue to Poseidon, god of the sea, in exchange for the safe transport of valuable cargo at sea. Votive gifts also could be a portion of the good fortune that a person believed they had received from a deity. For example, a farmer might give part of his harvest. A soldier might offer treasure they won in battle.

Votive offerings weren’t just to give thanks for favors already received. Sometimes these offerings were made with a request for future favors. People also made votive offerings after an earthquake or other disaster to thank the gods for sparing them. Without access to medical care and with incomplete knowledge about disease, votive offerings made as part of a request for health and healing were especially popular.

What is Verdigris?

Verdigris is the natural blue-green tarnish that forms when copper, brass or bronze is left outside and exposed to air and moisture, especially saltwater. The name comes from the French “vert de gris,” which roughly translates to “green of Greece.” If you’ve seen the Statue of Liberty, or an old penny that’s turning green, you’ve seen verdigris. This sculpture was originally a shiny dark bronze color. Over time, like all bronzes exposed to moisture, a layer of blue-green patina formed on the surface.

Let’s add a verdigris faux finish to an old toy!

1. Paint your whole figure black and let it fully dry.
2. Mix white, brown, and yellow, to create bronze color, and paint your whole figure this new color. Make sure you dab on the paint for rusty texture. Let this layer fully dry.
3. With your paintbrush, mix some water with a little bit of your brown paint to dilute it to the consistency of skim milk. Dab and drip the brown all over your figure. Wipe with a rag if the paint is too thick in areas. Let the paint fully dry.
4. Repeat step 3 until you have a swirly, layered, organic brown texture all over the figure
5. Mix your Phthalo Green and White paint, and dilute it with water the same way you did with the brown.
6. Apply your light green paint all of your figure, just like the way you did with the brown. Allow each layer to totally dry before adding another, but you can keep adding layers until it feels tarnished enough.

Bonus Step

Look around your home for some old packaging or an old box to use as a base. Paint it black, and you’re done!