



Making ceramic dice



Clay photos Joseph Havel

CRAFT SOME DICE

**I invite you to craft some dice with me.
Why make dice?
Because this is an act of self-discovery.**

Play and spirituality are linked. In life's ongoing struggle between order and chaos, play helps shape how we understand the world. Play is not frivolous; it is, in fact, a "cornerstone for civilization," according to Bo Kampmann Walther, because "it shapes rituals, social structures, and symbolic systems."

Dutch anthropologist Johan Huizinga argues that "there is no difference between play and ritual."

And ritual is an interesting phenomenon, that space where ordinary life is pushed aside, and actions take on specific meanings. According to historian Jonathan Z. Smith, "ritual acts as a focusing lens" between the human and the divine.

Making art is a ritual too. So I invite you to take some time to focus and make some personal dice with me. We can use them to create a liminal space where the divine (whatever your sense of the divine is) and human meet. Use organic materials to craft the dice, for the earth is a sacred body, and we are made from it. Connect to the source running through us all, and create. Mark the dice with your own symbols, favorite letters, colors, words, glyphs, or numbers; one ancient die from Egypt's Dakhla Oasis featured the names of Egyptian deities and was studied extensively by Martina Minas-Nerpel. Create a codex to interpret these personal symbols. I am making 16-sided dice in honor of **documenta 16**, but with your dice, you can choose to create however many sides as you wish.

A die does not have to look perfect. While today we equate dice with chance and equal probability, this was not always the case. According to new research by Jelmer Eerkens and Alex de Voogt, dice were not thought of as reliable, balanced generators of chance until the Renaissance. Before that, dice discovered around the world were imbalanced, and some were even lopsided. It didn't matter, though, because by throwing the dice, people invited the hands of gods to send them a message—giving agency over to the "greater than human" plane.

Whatever your beliefs, your dice will be a focusing lens. Let's use our dice to open pathways towards better presents and futures that feel creative, alive, just, and full of possibility.

Bring your dice with you to Kassel in Summer 2027.

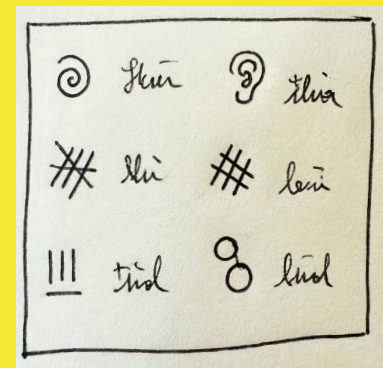


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Choose the symbolic system you want to create for your die, then translate that symbolic system with text or images in a journal or on a card.



Photo mary flanagan

Before dice, knucklebones from the skeletons of animals were used as dice—clearly imperfect!



Cubic die from the Near East, the 3rd millennium B.C.. Note the system of distributing the points. The numbering of the opposite sides (1-6, 2-5, 3-4) adding up to seven comes into more general use only later, as reflected by this die from Qasr-i Abu Nasr, now Iran.



Cubic die from Egypt with the date starting from 30 CE. This style replaced knucklebones.



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Twenty-sided die (icosahedron) with faces inscribed with Greek letters, Ptolemaic Period–Roman Period ca. 2nd century BCE–4th century CE.

Ancient Dice these examples are at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York

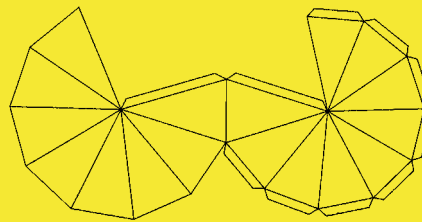
Make a blank die
No matter how it falls
You know the result



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Following the ancients, you can also use a stone to create your symbolic system.

This die will
Show me
What to reflect on



Link to a 16-sided die paper template:
<http://bit.ly/4ztoNB1>

Bibliography and Further Reading

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