



Opus Art Supplies • Resources for the Creative Individual

Mask Making: Ideas & Materials

Mask making can be a simple and extremely cost effective project. Whether you are helping children make masks for costumes or creating your own mask for an upcoming masquerade party, mask making is a fun and easy way to prepare for festivities.

PLASTER MASKS

MATERIALS:

- petroleum jelly or cold cream
- Plaster bandage or Funstuff Plaster Wrap
- a container (to hold the strips of plaster wrap)
- newspaper or paper towels
- a roll of plastic food wrap
- a bowl of water
- scissors
- hair pins

Plaster bandage wrap (Funstuff Plaster Wrap) is an easy and fast setting mold material which is safe for application to the skin. It is also useful for building up 3D surfaces and facial features.

USING PLASTER BANDAGE

Prior to applying the bandage over skin/body hair, a release agent should be applied to allow for easy removal of the bandage once the plaster has set. An economical and accessible choice is regular petroleum jelly but you may find cold cream is a better choice as it is easier to wash off. To prepare the surface of an object with the chosen release agent, simply smooth it over the surface.

Cut the bandage into 1–2" squares and set them aside in a clean, dry bowl. Beside this have a bowl of clean, room temperature water. Drop a few squares in the water starting with 10–12 pieces for face masks. Work in batches to avoid the material setting before you have an opportunity to apply it. The squares should absorb water but they should not be soaked too long (usually about a minute).

Working one square at a time, smooth the squares onto the face/original, building up an overall layer and then adding subsequent layers. Smoothing out the bandages will help them better adhere to one another, while

creating a more even surface for painting or decorating. Alternating the directions of the layers will help to improve the strength of the mask.

Once you have a layer approximately 2-3 squares deep, let the plaster set until it is almost dry (about 10 minutes) and then gently lift it off the face starting from under the chin pulling upwards. At this stage the plaster will retain its shape but will still be flexible enough for easy removal. You will find it has an unfinished look, but keep in mind you will refine the details through subsequent layers and decoration.

After removing, let the cast dry further to improve strength. Once it is completely dry you can build up layers to improve strength or add-on features. When the mask is fully dry you can carefully sand, prime, and paint or decorate. In addition, as the plaster is porous you can use white glue to apply surface decorations to the mask.

TIPS:

- Using plastic wrap across the model's eyes will keep water from dripping into the eye sockets. Be sure to leave holes in the nose so the model can breathe!
- Add a cardboard shape to the mask for projecting animal beaks or snouts and then layer bandages over it to blend it into the mask.
- If you are using petroleum jelly on the model's skin or if you are working on an object you would like to be able to clean, keep some baby powder around as it will soak up the oil for easier removal.

PAPIER MACHÉ

MATERIALS:

- newspaper
- decorative paper or any light to medium weight paper
- cardboard
- Wireform Mesh
- wallpaper paste or flour
- water and preserving agent (Alum)
- white glue (or acrylic medium) and water

Papier Maché is an ideal way to create masks using economical materials. It is great for building up basic

shapes which can be decorated with paint, specialty papers and transferred designs.

PAPIER MACHÉ GLUES

There are a variety of glues to choose from which range in application, cost and consistency. Most are non-toxic because they are applied by hand, however, some people may find that they react to certain formulas regardless of the toxicity rating.

The most traditional kind of glue used for papier maché is wallpaper paste mixed with water to a thick creamy consistency. As an alternative you can use a mixture of regular household flour and water. Be aware that with the flour and water mixture, a preservative is needed to prevent the mask from deteriorating over time. Alum, which is used in pickling and for setting fabric dyes will work by sprinkling a tablespoon into the mixture. For the best results you should gently heat the mixture with the Alum in a double-boiler, in order to activate the gluten.

WHITE GLUE OR ACRYLIC MEDIUM

A half and half mixture of regular white glue or acrylic medium and water also works well as a papier maché glue. Both dry to a clear and flexible film which is useful in applications where you want a relatively light-weight, durable yet flexible final product. The transparent gloss finish of Acrylic Medium also works well as a final varnish.

USING PAPIER MACHÉ

To work with Papier Maché start by drawing and cutting the outline shape of the mask (or object) on a piece of lightweight cardboard, or create a 3D mold with Wireform mesh. No release agents are required for papier maché as you build the mask on top of the form. Keep this in mind when you design your mask.

If you are using the cardboard method, build up the shape you desire by taping scrunched up newsprint to the cardboard shape. The overall shape will be rough looking at this point but you will be able to refine it once you start to apply the strips of paper.

APPLYING THE STRIPS OF PAPER

We recommend you tear the paper into strips instead of cutting them because the edges will feather out more easily, which will help avoid harsh "lines" in the final piece. Working with one strip at a time to avoid waste and to control the amount of glue on the strip of paper, dip the paper into the glue mixture and wipe off the excess. Place the strips onto your mold. To improve drying time allow the piece to dry thoroughly between layers. Once you

have coated the entire surface with 2 or 3 layers allow it to dry thoroughly. If you are using a 3D form made out of Wireform mesh, tear the strips of paper, dip them into the glue mixture one at a time, wipe off the excess, and place onto the form you have created. Continue to build up the mask until there are 2 or 3 layers, and allow it to dry.

When completely dry, you can decorate your papier maché piece using acrylic paints, mediums, texture gels and varnish. It is also a good idea to coat the piece with acrylic gesso or primer before decorating. This improves the stability of the item and creates a proper surface for the paint to adhere to.

TIPS:

- Consider building half masks for kids as they are lighter in weight and have greater visibility.
- Keep in mind that the weight of the final piece is increased with each layer you add.
- When using newspaper use broad sheets as opposed to tabloid, the paper quality is higher. As well, with broad sheets the paper grain always runs up and down the columns of print so with no effort you can tear straight strips as long as you tear in the direction of the grain.
- Lumpier pastes such as wallpaper paste or the flour and water mixture will cause the final dried appearance of your project to appear quite rough.
- For a smoother finish try sanding with a fine sand paper, or use Stevenson's Modeling Paste to fill in any rough spots and sand when dry.
- Felt or Foam can be used to line the mask, or cover sensitive areas to make it more comfortable to wear.
- Decorate your masks with acrylic paints, acrylic gouache, acrylic texture mediums or decorative papers.

OPUS ART SUPPLIES

Vancouver: 1360 Johnston St, Granville Is., 604-736-7028

North Vancouver: 120 Lonsdale Ave, 604-904-0447

Langley: 5501-204 St, 604-533-0601

Victoria: 512 Herald St, 250-386-8133 or 1-800-524-6555

Kelowna: 1357 Ellis St, 250-763-3616 or 1-800-814-8885

Vancouver, 100-207 W Hastings St, 604-678-5889