

DOUGLAS and STURGES

Ingredients for ART

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Introduction to Body Casting

Since the beginning of recorded history, man has attempted to reproduce the image of the body through various sculptural techniques. One of these techniques has been to make molds of body parts and cast them in a permanent material that can be put on display as a representation of an artist's sense of creativity. Over the centuries, the materials have changed, but the essence remains the same, in that these "bodies" of work represent an artist's ability to capture the bodily image in such a way as to present a specific feeling or gesture. We might consider some of the earliest body casts to be the tragic examples of those individuals captured in the ash of the Mt. Vesuvius eruption and subsequently cast in plaster of paris to create the positive images we see today. Death masks made from plaster of paris molds were common in a bygone era in order to preserve ones visual image upon passing.

Today we find artists in many parts of the world using body casting as a tool to create all sorts of images made from a wide variety of materials; everything from the lowly plaster we have mentioned to the highly durable and desirable bronze castings that might come from a modern art foundry.

The tools that we have available to us today are surely the most diverse set of materials ever available and of course each has its advantages and disadvantages which we will discuss here.

Mold Material	Advantages	Disadvantages
Plaster	Inexpensive, readily available, molds can be archived if not used	Can be dangerous in the hands of an amateur because of heat generated as plaster sets, as a rigid material is somewhat limited in its use, only specific few casting materials can be used directly with plaster, mold may be lost or "wasted" in process
Plaster Gauze	Low cost, easy to use, fast and direct.	Although the plaster gauze can be used for a mold, it is probably best used as a direct casting

		material to give a good representation of the image and essentially it becomes not only the directly molded material, but the finished product.
Moulage (agar)	Because of reusability, cost is minimized, no release agent is needed on the skin, captures finest skin detail, shelf life is indefinite	Difficult to apply without lots of practice, making large molds can be difficult, limitations as to what casting materials can be used in a Moulage mold.
Alginate(Dermagel)	Easy to use, no release agent needed, especially good for making molds of hands and feet, maintains freshness for long periods when unused if kept in sealed container, captures finest skin detail	Molds are difficult to keep for the long term as they will degrade, making large molds requires special skills, limitations as to what casting materials can be used in an alginate mold
Wax(Flex Wax)	Another reusable material, and as such ultimate cost is minimized, does a fair job of capturing detail, wide variety of casting materials can be used in wax although heat must be limited, is somewhat flexible, molds can be archived indefinitely if not used and kept cool and clean.	Release agent must be applied to skin, hair must be coated in order to prevent adhesion, large molds must be supported which requires time, because of low melting point, although resins cast nicely into Flexwax, heat must be kept to a minimum during cure cycle
Silicone(Dermasil)	The only truly permanent mold material for body casting, essentially every imaginable type of casting material may be used in a silicone mold-everything from wax to resin.	Very high cost compared to other materials, hair must be lubricated or silicone will stick, easily chemically inhibited, so certain kinds of materials must be avoided for a good result, difficult to use for molds of hands and feet, silicone must be supported to cast good parts that are dimensionally stable

In addition each material requires a specific set of skills to have a positive outcome. Sometimes these skills are easily perfected, with other materials it may require a fair amount of practice before one is able to have a reasonably positive result. Each has its pitfalls, each has its place in the hierarchy. When attempting to make an intelligent decision as to which material might best be used for a specific endeavor, it is often helpful to start at the end of the process to make that determination. In other words, what is the final outcome to be? What is the actual piece to be made from and how many of these pieces do we need? Once we go there it becomes an easier process to make the determination.

For example, let's discuss making a bronze casting of a large portion of the body. We might actually use a variety of molding materials for various parts of the mold to get the best result and have the least impact on a model. We might use alginate for the hands and wrists to capture the finest possible detail of these complex parts. We might use silicone for the main part of the torso and we might include the face in this image. These individual parts can be cast in wax and joined together to complete the image in its final configuration. Much depends on the level of detail needed in the final piece and will have a profound effect on the choices that might be made when making the decision about mold materials.

If on the other hand we only need specific parts of the body as the piece being created in its entirety, we might only use one mold material. A face could be done with any of the aforementioned materials, although alginate will have the least impact on the model. A face could also be done with the silicone and this mold could in turn be stored for future use with a variety of materials. A cold metal casting could be created from a silicone mold to simulate what a final bronze casting might look like. A plaster mold might be used if one's intent were to make a ceramic slip casting as the final part. Or perhaps Moulage might be the best choice if the material were to be used in a classroom environment where cost is a major consideration.

In any event, the bottom line is this; when in doubt about which material and/or process might be more appropriate for any endeavor, it is always a good idea to start small and practice on areas of the body similar to what the final imagery might be and practice, practice, practice!

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