Fibre Glass Mould Jacket
-part 1

Video Workbook

Stuart Bray

sili_faces

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Hello, this is Stuart Bray, back with another video this time looking at using fibreglass in mould making.

Sometimes known as GRP (*Glass Reinforced Plastic*) it is a staple material in FX workshops.

Fibreglass and polyester resins used together make incredibly durable moulds which pick up every detail, are lightweight, strong and can be baked for use with foam latex.

Precautions must be taken when working with these materials - it is important to use a correctly graded respirator mask to protect against the dust and fumes, you must wear gloves when working and ensure adequate ventilation and extraction is used to remove harmful vapours.

This work is for your information only and is given in good faith. It is not advised that you use these materials without adequate instruction or supervision

I start by slicing water based clay into even thickness slabs with a clay cutter. I have had this for years, and you can also use a wire like a cheese cutter to slice off thicknesses.

Pottery suppliers also have clay slicers like these - the wire is easy to make but the slicer makes life easy.

These slicers are great for keeping consistent clay thickness, and creating walls for moulds is an absolute breeze. I have gone for 10mm (approx. ½") thickness.

Using a thin wooden board like this one keeps the cutter flat and straight. It also makes a convenient board to work on when cutting into strips which is...

...next up. Keep the strips neat and even using a straight edge like a piece of wood or a ruler if necessary.

It may be that when you get your clay from the store or warehouse that it is misshapen and an uneven shape. It helps to make the clay a squared-off rectangular block. To do this, drop the bag gently onto a hard floor surface whilst still unopened until the sides are neat and flat enough.

These strips bend easily around the curves found on the head, and I start at the top, working down. I went around the back of the ears as I won't include them in this back half of the mould.

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James Brown wanted to '*Take It To The Bridge*', but I want to take the clay down to the baseboard instead!

I make sure the clay wall is slightly back from the halfway point to ensure this rigid mould section will come off the rigid plaster. **Undercuts are to be avoided at all costs when getting hard moulds off from hard shapes!**

Small blobs of leftover clay are good at helping this fragile wall stay in place.

Areas such as behind the ear may need packing out with clay to allow the flat strips to sit correctly in place without falling off.

Once the desired wall height is achieved (I have gone for about 2½" to 3" high or about 65mm) we need to support it with plaster bandage. If we don't do this, that wall will easily get damaged or fall away.

Before we do that though, we need to protect the plaster face with tissue so it will all clean off easily later.

Using a wet sponge, the tissue is easily patted into place and the tissue sits snugly against the face, conforming to the features snugly.

You can use cling film or plastic food wrap, but the tissue sticks nicely to the adsorbent plaster surface and stays in place once dried.

Once the face is entirely covered, the bandage can go on. I use three or four layers (1 long piece folded over to make it four layers thick).

Overlap each time to ensure strength. Go right down to the baseboard and secure it there for a really strong wall.

After ten minutes or so, the bandage has set up and we can confidently smooth the wall out using flat bladed tools.

Pressing against the clay creates a nice surface, and is only possible due to the strong support of the bandage behind.

Various flat bladed plaster-working tools

Make sure the clay is neat right up against the plaster head and down to the baseboard. Everything here will pick up on the mould, so make it as neat, smooth and clean as possible.

You make a mould only once, but you may use it for years!

I need to cut a thin key to help locate the silicone that will later be in the front half. By cutting a groove in here, there will be a corresponding ridge later in the resin version. This will help keep the seams aligned when the front and back half are placed together.

I use a smallish loop tool to cut the groove.

I also cut chunkier keys from a slab of clay to place around the wall at regular intervals. These help the fibreglass sections line up nicely.

These are cut up with angled sides to ensure they do not create any undercuts whilst creating very positive location points for the mould walls.

I spray the clay wall with a mould release wax once it is finished and as neat as I can make it.

Take care to use correct safety precautions when using sprays, as the airborne mist is bad to inhale! Wear the correct respirator mask and use extraction if you don't have sufficient ventilation.

When the wax is thoroughly dry, I like to pump talc over the surface. This prevents the waxy surface from being too slippery, which can cause the resin to slide off leaving holes in the gel coat. It also helps me to see where the gel coat is. Brush off excess if it collects in corners etc.

I measured out what I estimated to be sufficient gel coat to cover the back of the head and the wall. Estimating volumes takes a bit of practice, but I poured out probably more than I need to be safe, and adjust the next time. It helps to keep a record of your mixes what you were moulding so you can see over time how much you need for different things. *I know a great moulder to this day who still refers back to his and wastes little as a result!*

Because the plaster is still slightly damp and cold, and so is the clay, I want to increase the catalyst slightly to make the resin go off quicker. Without catalyst, the resin won't set, and the more you add the faster it sets. Ambient temperature also helps (warmer=quicker) so you may need to adjust the amount accordingly.

It's a good idea to include room temperature in you records!

I like to use the brush to mix the catalyst in rather than a stick - the bristles help mix better. I clean brushes after the job with acetone, and it is great to keep using the same brush as long as possible.

They shed hairs at first so an old but well cared for brush saves you hassle as well as money!

Brush the gel coat onto the surface, starting at the top and work slowly down. Make sure you get into the nooks and crannies early as once the gel coat starts to thicken, it is more likely to trap air bubbles.

The talced surface shows where I have missed and it only takes about five minutes to cover this whole thing with gel coat.

Shortly, the gel has started to set. It sets slightly slower on the surface in contact with cooler areas (in this case the whole thing as it is damp plaster and wet clay).

Check the gel coat at the edges to avoid damaging a vital part of the mould. When it has set but remains sticky to the touch is when you do the next part.

I sprinkle (and throw) the chopped strands onto the set gel coat and it sticks to the tacky surface. If you miss your window and it is no longer sticky then you have left it too late. If the gel coat hasn't set then there isn't enough catalyst in there...you can use a blow drier to speed it up but go easy. Too much heat will cause the setting gel to distort and come away from the head.

I measured out the thinner polyester resin for the next part. This time I add much less catalyst as I need plenty of time to build up the layer of glass mat.

This build up of layers is known as 'laminating'.

Mix the resin really well - there is less catalyst so it is crucial to mix it thoroughly to ensure the whole mix does indeed cure properly.

The first job is to get the chopped strands stuck to the gel cot wet. This will help reduce any air bubbles and make laminating of glass mat much easier as deep crevices get filled out.

I had already cut the glass matt into convenient sized rectangles or squares to make it easier to cover the head. I prefer lots of smaller pieces which can be overlapped to conform to difficult shapes.

Using the brush, I 'wet-out' the glass a few pieces at a time and place them on the head. After a few minutes, the resin softens the glass fibres in the mat.

Usually I do the edges first, overlapping slightly as I go. I do two a layer on the edge and then two layers all over, including the wall and base.

The walls and base are made thicker and stronger as these parts of the mould will get the most punishment when a mould is used. The bolts will go through here, and when levering a mould open, it's these poor flanges which get the pounding.

Make sure the glass extends slightly beyond the clay wall, but not too far. If they shoot past too much then they overhang or worse, fall off.

Brushing gently and working out the edges of each piece of glass gives you a pleasingly smooth finish.

Once the glassing is done, I wash the brush out in acetone and grab some fresh air.

After twenty minutes or so, the glass has started to set. It normally sets in the thickest areas first, and it is possible to sometimes trim the glass when it has reached a 'cheesy' state. Because it hasn't quite set, we call this the 'green' stage, and green trimming (*trimming while the glass is still soft enough to cut*) is great to do if you can.

Using a sharp utility knife (*sharper is so much safer than struggling with a blunt blade*) I carefully make a test incision to see how it looks.

If the glass stays intact and doesn't turn into a mass of fibres then it is ready to trim. Leave it too long and the glass won't cut - so grab your window and if you feel confident enough with tools then slice that fella up. Getting the glass trimmed now means I won't have to use power tools and saws later to cut it.

On bigger moulds it isn't always possible - and sometimes you just don't fancy standing around for hours after work waiting for it to get there if someone got the mix wrong!

Once the glass has been left for a wile after trimming, the clay can be carefully removed.

Peeling the plaster bandage away should be easy - just take care to not flex the wall if it is still slightly soft.

The tissue should have protected the face nicely, and so the whole thing should be peeled away with relative ease.

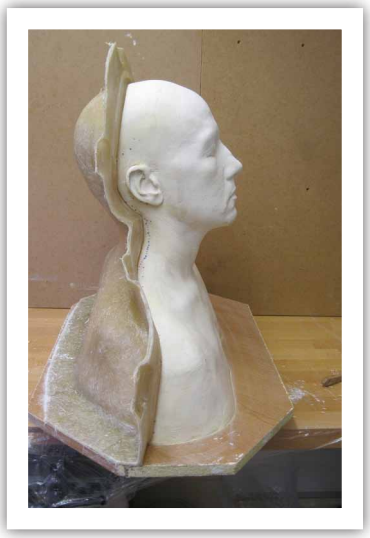
The warm fibreglass helps the clay to come away thanks to the softened wax release sprayed on earlier.

Should there be suction (if the clay is quite wet and soft, for example) then a little water dropped between the clay and the fibreglass wall should aid separation.

Take care with metal tools to not scratch the still-soft gel coat.

Once the clay is off, the glass and plaster face can be prepped for the next phase - the front half.

The front half will eventually need to be in silicone, but I want to make a nice jacket to hold the silicone in place. This will be covered in the next video.



As always, questions, comments and feedback always great to hear! *-STUART*

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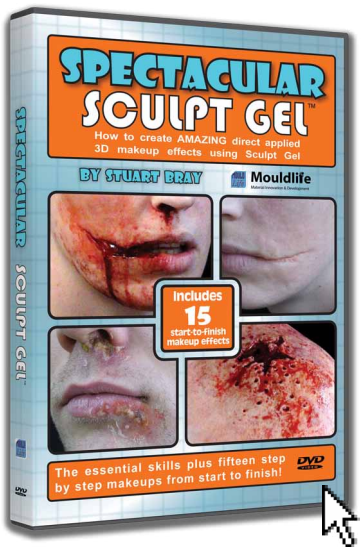
YouTube http://www.youtube.com/user/stuartbray73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