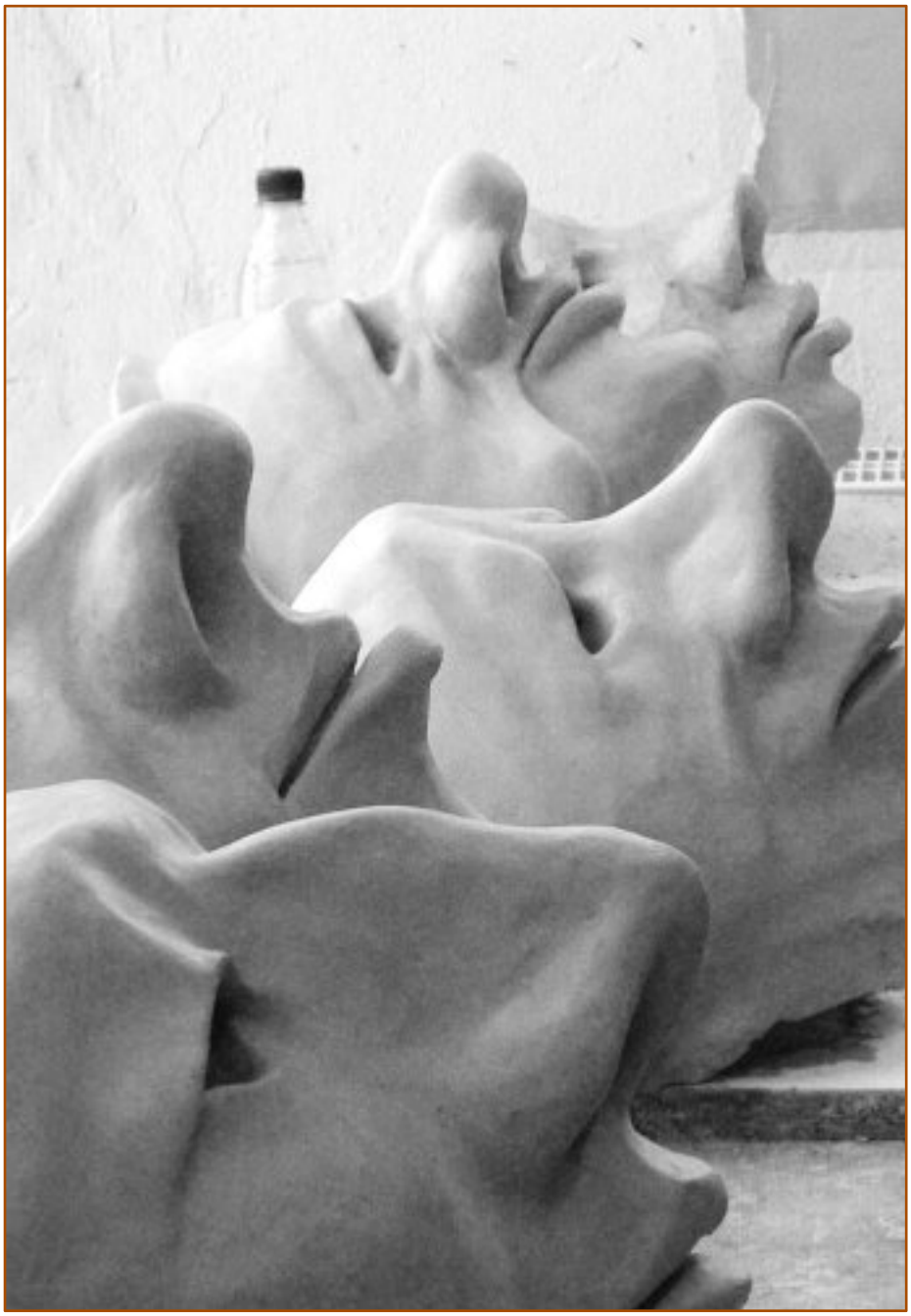
FLÖZ AKADEMIE

MASKMAKING

A practical Guide



FAMILIE FLÖZ

Introduction

According to all that we know today, there really is no human culture that does not know masks.

People cover their faces in order to become someone else for a period of time. The materials and forms are infinitely varied, as is the occasion and purpose for which a mask may be worn.

But every mask always has two sides: an inside and an outside. Someone who wears it and someone who looks at it.

So, the real essence of a mask is the relationship between these two people, and how the mask may transform this relationship. It is this quality that makes a mask such a universal and powerful tool.

The oldest preserved masks are about 9000 years old and were found in a desert in the Middle East. When the ancient Greeks built the first theatres and wrote plays about 2500 years ago, masks were what played on stage. The Greek word for mask was "persona", and in the truest sense of the word, they gave the role a face, they made it a person.

Familie Flöz has been working with masks for more than 20 years.

Our work has taken us to many countries on all continents, and so we have learned through experience that, still today, masks are a tool that can connect people and create relationships.

Defying language barriers, masks can make strangers laugh, cry, or simply breathe in rhythm with one another.

Hundreds of masks have been created for our plays – not all of them got a role. Some had a very short life, some a long one.

There is no method for building a mask that will definitely play. But when does a mask play? The simple answer is: When it moves despite its rigidity, when the solid form belies many facets, and when its shape is actually nothing more than a combination of many forces.

Above all, this booklet exists to encourage you to take the first steps to design and build your own mask. It is designed to give a foundation to mask making, to answer questions that may arise, and to give you agency to make your own decisions.

The steps and materials described are only possibilities and can be changed and developed by anyone depending on where and how the masks are to play.

Hajo Schüler

Content

Plaster Cast

The actual process of mask making begins with a cast of your own face. An actor must surrender their face to the mask twice: first in the making, then on stage. This can be a very powerful experience of surrender. The actor is without eyesight and unable to move for a period of time - they must fully trust the mask-maker. Therefore, it is important to take your time for the plaster cast, work in a peaceful environment, and be well prepared.

You will need a release agent (such as Vaseline) to prevent the plaster from sticking to skin and hair. Hair should be moistened and combed backwards, then covered with a thin swim cap, bald cap, or saran wrap. Eyebrows, eyelashes, protruding hair, and lips should be covered with a thick layer of Vaseline.

The actor sits comfortably, upright and freely, preferably on a stool. Of course it is also possible to work lying down.

All preparations should be done before the actual work begins, so that the actor does not have to spend unnecessary time in the cast.

Cut the plaster bandages into strips and dip them briefly into warm water, then lay them directly on the face, making sure to overlap. Repeat for four layers. The nostrils are left free.

After 10-15 minutes, the plaster will be set and the cast can be carefully removed.

Materials:

Vaseline

Bowl

Water

Plaster bandages

Cutter / Scissors

4 Plaster cast

Now there are two possibilities to continue.

1st Variation

The negative plaster mould can be filled with soft clay. Then the plaster shell is removed and the clay face is mounted on a suitable base.

2nd Variation

The negative plaster mould is isolated with a release agent and then poured with plaster.

This method has the advantage of creating a reusable positive from plaster.

After the plaster that has been filled in is dry, the shell is removed from plaster bandages.

Make sure that the face axes are aligned vertically and horizontally.

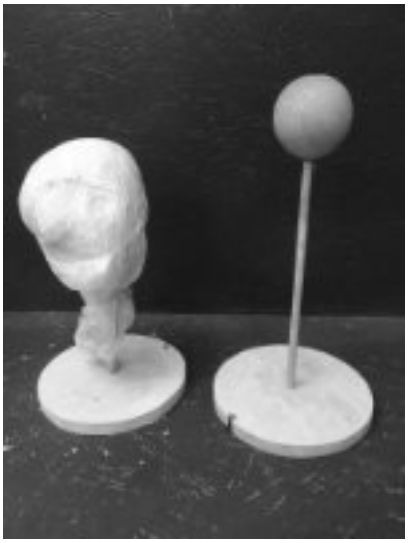
5 Plaster cast

Base / Tripod

Now a stable base is needed on which you can mount the clay. There are several possibilities for this. It makes sense to construct this base in such a way that you work face to face with your mask, and not with it lying horizontally on a table. It is practical if you can put the base on a turntable. We use simple, flat turntables made of plastic.

1st variation

You can build a practical stand from different sizes of terra cotta flower pots. The pots can be glued together with silicone.



2nd variation

Get a simple head made of styrofoam, which are available in different sizes for a few euros. The styrofoam head can also be quickly and easily glued to a turntable.

3rd variation

You can quickly build a durable base yourself from a wooden base plate and a sturdy dowel or wooden strips. On the base, create a ball that is slightly smaller than your head using newspaper or packing material. You can use masking tape to attach it to the rod and to form the shape.

4th variation

The ideal base is a complete mould of the face and back of the head, down to the bottom of the shoulder. But this is a bit more time consuming.

Sculpting

The mask is now built on top of the face. Sculpting with clay is an additive process, i.e. you create the shape you want by adding mass, building clay up piece by piece. In doing so, planes meet planes, which can result in sharp or soft edges. The planes can take on convex or concave shapes - even a wrinkle in the skin is actually just planes meeting each other. With the sculpting also comes the exciting play of light and shadow, which can dramatically enhance the liveliness of a mask.

A mask is three-dimensional. Using a turntable helps to view and work on the mask from all sides. It may also be helpful to look at the mask from a distance in order to judge the effect from stage to audience.

It is helpful to periodically measure your own face against the clay model in height, width, and depth. The mask should be at least slightly larger than your own face.

Tip: In order for the eyeholes of the mask to line up with your own eyes, it is helpful to mark their position and relative distance in the clay. You can use toothpicks as a placeholder so you do not lose their position while sculpting.

Materials:

There are many different types of clay available, We usually use a simple grey clay without chamotte

Wood Clay Knives

Ribbon Tools

Sponges

Spray bottle

Calipers Wood

Plastic bags to wrap the clay

Every detail of the later mask is defined in the clay form.

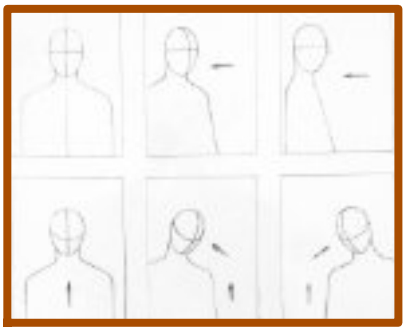
Also the edge of the mask has to be modelled exactly, because finally the mask only becomes the actual mask together with the head and body of the player. Therefore the transitions from mask to body are extremely important: Do parts of the actor's face remain visible? How does the mask close off the face at the sides? How is the hairline shaped? Is the eye relief correct so that the actor can see well? What is the distance between the player's eyes and the mask?

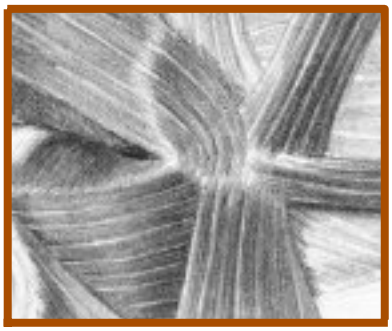
When sculpting, it is always a great temptation to ignore physiognomic features of the face too freely. But in the end, the mask is also a tool of the actor and has to serve him as well as vice versa.

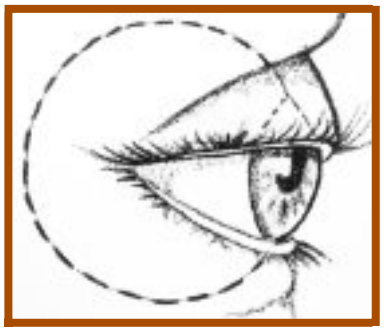
Sculpting is also a constant moving, approaching, retreating, and circling around the mask. You will be amazed at how a fresh angle, a slight shift in gaze or perspective, can bring out a new expression, a different emotion. This is the key to the mask's ability to constantly change despite its unchanging form. If it is possible to design each of these facets in such a way that the expression of the mask changes again and again, finds nuance, and still remains a harmonious whole, then the mask has a chance to become "alive".

„Creating is not Inventing.“

Jacques Lecoq







Materials (Variation 1):

3-4 Cartridges of transparent Silicone

Silicone Gun

Some detergent

Cutter

Bowl with water

Moulding

1st variation - with construction silicone

Construction silicone is readily available at a low cost in hardware stores, and it commonly used in bathrooms and kitchens. A disadvantage of construction silicone is that UV rays will cause it to shrink slightly over time. The finished clay model (keep it damp, do not let it dry!) is now completely coated with silicone. Be aware, ensure sufficient ventilation and evaporation for up to 24 hours.

Set up your mask and base in front of you and work and work section by section across the mask, careful to avoid air pockets. Depending on the size of the mask you will need 3 - 4 cartridges of silicone. Cut the nozzle of one cartridge diagonally with a craft knife.

Press the silicone against the clay without damaging the surface, making a thin, even layer. Once the silicone is on, you can press it lightly with fingers dipped in soapy water to ensure contact with the clay. Do not level it out! Be careful with undercuts/concave shapes in the clay model, such as nostrils, skin folds around the mouth, and other areas that sink inwards. These must be filled in such a way that the plaster shell can be removed.

Silicone remains flexible after curing, and so can be peeled off the clay mold in one piece, but will not provide a rigid form suitable for paper maché. This requires an additional shell made of plaster bandages, which is applied directly to the silicone layer (4 layers of plaster bandages).

2nd variation - with silicone rubber

Alternatively, a silicone rubber can be used. It is slightly more expensive, but has the advantage that the mould will not shrink over time, and can be used again and again. The exact process will depend on the type and brand of silicone. Here, too, a shell of plaster bandages will be needed afterwards to support the flexible silicone. Silicone rubber has a higher viscosity and is easier to use. It can conform to fine details with great accuracy.

3rd variation - with plaster

For very simple shapes without undercuts, a negative plaster mould can also be used. For this purpose, moulding plaster or alabaster plaster is suitable. If the mould has undercuts, a two-part or multi-part negative mould can also be made. The advantage of a plaster mold is that the paper maché will dry much faster. The disadvantage is that the mould is often large and heavy if you want to store it.

Materials:

Recycled Paper non-coated

Wood glue

Brushes

Papier Maché

To laminate the mask, use an absorbent paper that is not coated or painted. Multiple papers can work and can also be used together. Suitable options include brown wrapping paper. In areas with traditions of carnival, you can also find papers made especially for the production of masks (e.g. in Southern Germany, Switzerland, or Italy). Thicker papers must first be soaked in water for a short time, otherwise they will not take on the desired shape.

Any white wood glue is suitable as glue, but white glues for textile wallpapers may also work. Waterproof wood glues are even more effective as they are more resistant to sweat.

Avoid wallpaper paste. It does not provide sufficient strength and is unnecessarily heavy.

The silicone mould is thoroughly cleaned and dried with a soft sponge and plenty of water. Then it is placed in the plaster mould. Now the silicon is first glued to the plaster mould with the help of a few strips of paper at the edge so that it cannot slip.

The paper is now torn into small pieces. The size of the pieces is determined by the size and differentiation of the mask. Every detail of the form should be covered without wrinkles. The first layer must be laminated very accurately but must not stick to the silicone in such a way that it is damaged when removed. To achieve this you can either soak the paper only briefly in water and press it directly into the negative or you can dilute the glue with some water. It is best to test if the glue sticks too much to the silicone. It is advisable to start at the lowest point of the mask, usually the tip of the nose, and work your way outwards in a ring shape. The edge must be laminated at least one centimetre beyond the later edge of the mask, so that it can be cut off cleanly later.

Special care must be taken to ensure that there is no air between the silicone and the paper, otherwise the previously worked out shape will be lost. The second layer is now only laminated with glue. The right amount is crucial: the pieces of paper should be completely coated with glue (brush or finger), but without white glue residue protruding. There should also be no gaps or folds between the first and second layer. Only after the second layer is finished, let the mask dry thoroughly in a warm place. Depending on the thickness of the paper, 3 - 5 layers are sufficient to give the mask sufficient stability, but not too heavy.

The lamination should be done very carefully, because this saves a lot of work in the later process of sanding. A good stability and long durability of the mask can only be achieved by accurate laminating.

Do not lose patience and care!

Leave to dry well in the end.

Further processing

After the paper maché has fully dried, the shell can be carefully removed, starting with the plaster, and then the silicone. Usually, the silicone mould can be peeled off inside out.

Now the edges are trimmed clean with a craft knife, the eyes and nostrils are cut out clean with a scalpel, and any holes and irregularities on the surface are patched or corrected.

For the elastic band used to attach the mask to the head, two T-pieces of strap (see photo) are required. These are glued and laminated into the mask from the inside. Make a "T" using two pieces of strap, about 7cm each, and sew them together. These T-pieces are glued into the mask from the inside at the level of the eyes, just above the ears, using construction adhesive. Make sure to check and mark the position you want before you glue them in place! Leave approx. 2 cm of adhesive for the elastic band. After the glue has dried, paper maché over the "T" with 3 - 4 layers of thin packing paper.

12 Further processing

Sanding

Now the mask is sanded to remove the unevenness in the papier-mâché.

Using a small plastic spatula, armour putty is applied in a thin layer to the surface of the mask. Texture can be evened out, corrections can be made to the surface.

After the paste has dried, the surface is then sanded smooth again. You can change from a coarse 60 grain to fine 180 grain sandpaper. You may also find sanding sponges with a medium and fine grit to be helpful.

After each sanding process the mask is cleaned with a damp cloth or sponge. The sanding is repeated until the mask has a smooth surface and all small irregularities have disappeared.

The edge of the mask is covered with small strips of a thin cloth or paper and glue. This prevents moisture from penetrating and gives the mask extra stability. Once dry, the edges of this extra layer are simply sanded smooth again.

Materials:

Armour Putty

Sanding paper 60 - 180

Thin fleece

Sponge

Putty knife

Materials:

Acrylic paint

Brushes

Acrylic Varnish

Painting

How you paint the surface depends on how the mask is intended to be used.

In stage lighting, it must not shine and reflect the light. In coloured light, the colours of the mask also change. Red tones in your mask, for example, become much more intense in blue light. In sunlight, the surface will appear different than in artificial light.

Therefore, this step should be done with the appropriate light source.

Using acrylic paints, mix a colour to use as your base, and apply a thin even coat with a sponge. The paint will dry quickly, but a hair dryer will speed up the process.

It is best to mix each tone from the basic colours red, blue, yellow and white. Work in thin, translucent layers, from the deepest tone to the lightest. Thin out your paint with water to achieve a fluid consistency.

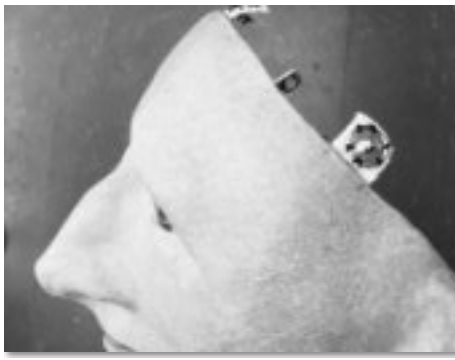
This is repeated 10 - 30 times, gradually mixing lighter and lighter tones.. Dry each coat before applying the next one. This will slowly create a dimensional skin tone. Certain facial areas can also be given special emphasis: the cheeks a little redder, the forehead a little paler...

The inside of the mask is now coated with varnish to protect the papier-mâché from sweat. Transparent or black, high gloss acrylic lacquer is suitable. It should be applied at least three times with a soft brush.

Elastic, pads, wig

Sew the elastic band onto the T-straps, and glue foam padding into the mask at three points, the cheeks and forehead. Depending on your preference, the foam padding can be wrapped in cotton or leather. If you want the option to change or wash the padding, it can also be attached to the mask with velcro tape.

Wigs, caps, and other accessories complete the head of the figure. They are attached directly to the surface with velcro or snap fasteners. A contact adhesive is suitable for attaching velcro or buttons.



Materials:

Pieces of foam

Pieces of cotton fabric or leather

Velcro

Push buttons

Sewing kit

Glue

15 Elastic, pads, wig

Play

When the mask is finished and ready to play, the exciting process of getting to know it begins.

The mask is initially a being unknown to us.

A look in the mirror can help to get a first impression, but it is more exciting to experience the new mask in action. Someone from the group can play the mask for the mask maker.

Try out simple emotional states such as anger, sadness, embarrassment, fear, pride, or joy.

Ask the actor to allow the mask to discover the space so that the different angles of the mask become visible: How does it look when it looks down or up, right or left? Does the expression change? Can it be frightening? or fall in love?

A simple exercise to get started:

A person sits on a chair. He takes a neutral position: The feet rest on the floor, the upper body is upright, the gaze goes straight ahead, towards the horizon. The observer simply watches and the person sitting. Now the person puts on the mask and resumes the neutral position. The mask is looking at the horizon. This position is called the 'zero point'. The mask is completely exposed and open to the observer.

Now the performer slowly moves the mask in different directions and takes successive poses: The mask looks down - up - right - left - diagonally down right - diagonally down left - diagonally up right - diagonally up left. Every movement passes back through the zero point.

Already in the initial posture a lot happens for the viewer. He can observe how the same body completely changes its meaning through the presence of the mask. Although the outer posture of the performer with and without the mask is identical, the body tells a different story. We could say that the body suddenly speaks a different language. Previously hidden details become apparent. The viewer realises the accuracy of his own perception. This deepens when the mask begins to move and takes up the eight postures one after the other.

For the observer, the mask mourns, creates hope, ponders, doubts, longs for, is distracted etc. The observer is drawn in by a sequence of different states, emotions, and he connects them to a story. This happens without the performer having to be aware of it. At first, he does nothing more than operate the form, the journey through eight directions.

Imprint

Familie Flöz

Lehderstr. 39/41
13086 Berlin
Germany

+49 (0)30 - 91 14 75 85

Company Manager:
Gianni Bettucci

Artistic Directors:
Hajo Schüler
Michael Vogel

Text:
Hajo Schüler
Thomas Rascher
Lei-Lei Bavoil

Photos:
Lei-Lei Bavoil
Gianni Bettucci
Hajo Schüler
Thomas Rascher

© Familie Flöz 2020

www.floez.net

www.floez-akademie.net