



# Animal Mask Making Class

In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre

*July 10-19, 2007*

From July 10 through July 19, I participated in an Animal Mask Making Class with In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre in Minneapolis. The class was held in three evenings - July 10th, 17th, and 19th. In just three evenings, participants were to conceptualize the animal we wanted to create, form and shape a clay mold of our animal's face, paper mache over our clay mold, then paint our masks. I had no previous experience making masks whatsoever, but was helped throughout this process by instructors Julie Kastigar and Laurie Witzkowski, as well as others in the class. Included in this journal are my experiences, photos, and reflections on the process.



## *July 10 - Encountering our Animal Making Clay Molds*

Our first task for our first class was to decide on the animal which we would fashion our mask. I was torn between two animals that had come to me in my first shamanic journey - the albatross and the whale. Finally, in thinking about the practicality of the mask, I decided to focus my energies on having an albatross emerge from my mask, and perhaps incorporate some of the aspects of a whale or the element of water come forth.

Our instructor, Julie, led us through a few writing and visualizing exercises where we would draw some of our ideas, list the qualities of our animal, and then we were guided through a short writing exercise where we would “tell the story” of the animal we chose. Is it a strong animal? What does it eat? What do we know about our animal?

From within these exercises, I decided that I would incorporate parts of a whale’s tail fin into the crown around the face of an albatross - a large and forceful bird which ruled the sea.



To begin our clay mold, we stuffed newspaper into plastic bags, until we created a round form that would be the base of our clay mold. We would tape this form onto cardboard to secure it, and then begin sculpting our animal’s face with clay atop the base.

Once I had enough clay on my base, I simply began letting my fingers glide over the clay, in much the same way that I would give a massage. I found it amazing how my albatross face began to emerge

from the clay. Julie helped me to construct a beak out of cardboard and masking tape to place in my clay mold. The rough outlines of my albatross were taking shape.

At the end of the class, we sprayed down our clay molds with water, then covered them with plastic wrap so our clay would not harden. We would wait an entire week before returning to move on to the next steps.



## July 17 - Paper Mache

Julie was called away for the evening and could not instruct us for the second class. Instead, another contract artist with *In the Heart of the Beast*, Laurie Witzkowski, joined us to share the joys and pain of paper mache! I had recognized Laurie from seeing her previously in the production of West Bank Story. She was also a participant in the May Day celebration at Powderhorn Park. This evening, however, she was helping us to complete our clay molds and to paper mache our entire mask.

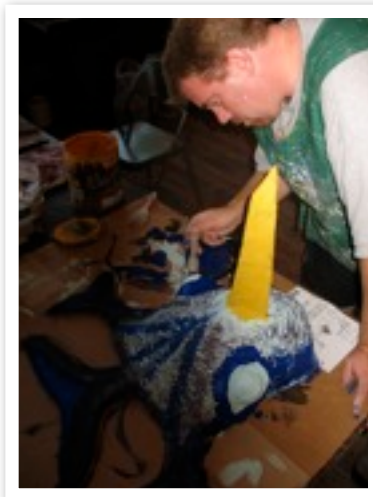
We needed to be sure that our entire clay mold was covered in plastic wrap, and that no air bubbles remained underneath, as they would create ripples in our paper mache. This was probably the most frustrating part of the entire mask making experience, as placing plastic wrap over the eyes I had molded was quite a challenge. I ended up having to re-form the eyes to accommodate layers of paper that we would apply to the mold.

We then applied SEVEN layers of paper mache to our clay molds! To speed the process, Laurie would glue large sheets of newsprint together for us first, in order to make a thicker, two layered paper, as we neared our last layers. Our final layer would be of thicker, “paper sack” paper, that we would paint over at our next class.



## July 19 - Painting and Wearing our Masks

On the final day of class, Julie had returned, and we it was time to detach our paper mache masks from our clay molds. Surprisingly, my mask detached from the clay rather easily, as I began digging out large globs of clay, so as not to tear the paper mache. One of the advantages of using clay and plastic wrap as a mold, is that the clay can be re-moistened and re-used.



After detaching our masks, we all donned aprons, grabbed paint brushes, and selected paints. Julie taught us the importance of applying a “base coat” of paint to our mask, to give colors more depth. I began applying a light base coat of purple to my mask, and quickly found that the bumps, ridges, and imperfections of the surface of the albatross face almost appeared like feathers under the paint! I used this to my advantage as I applied blues to the surface over the base coat, and in some of the “massaged” ridges i had created.

Julie assisted me in creating the cardboard “whale fins” that were painted and stapled to the top of the mask, and then finally

helped all of us to create a mounting mechanism, so that we could wear our masks. The final step was cutting out small holes in our masks at eye level so that we could see out them.

At the very end of the class, I decided to re-paint my albatross' eyes from white to black. I gave him golden circular iris rings within these new black eyes as well. I stepped back from my mask, and for a moment stood amazed that the bird face seemed to come alive!

Looking back, I am still quite amazed at how I was able to create this mask so quickly and easily. It was as if my albatross simply emerged with every sweeping of my thumbs through the clay mold, and every stroke of a paintbrush. The texture of the mask allowed me to paint ripples that resembled feathers. The fins I attached to the top and sides of the paper mask gave this bird a kind of majestic quality that it could not have had, in my opinion, on its own without them.



Many of the students in our class had taken workshops in shamanism, and had wanted to use the class to connect with their “power animal” in a new way. In my shamanic vision years ago, I saw an albatross guide me into a vast ocean, where a whale would finally present himself to guide me into the depths of the sea. While in my vision, the albatross was somewhat of a “supporting character” - I feel that I came more in touch with this animal through this class. My albatross is a strong and willful bird. It now has a power of vision, and a solid and commanding presence - hardly a supporting actor anymore!



## *Resources*

### **In the Heart of the Beast Puppet and Mask Theatre**

1500 East Lake Street  
Minneapolis, MN 55407  
<http://www.hobt.org/>

### **More pictures of the Animal Mask Making class**

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/holisticgeek/sets/72157601245139954/>