

Wearable Sculpture

Start with a mask form and end up with an organic mixed media headpiece!

(art + social studies)

Essentially every culture throughout history has incorporated some form of wearable “sculpture,” whether it is expressed through textiles in clothing, with the use of metals when making jewelry, or through wood used to make a tribal mask.

In modern times, we are familiar with various performers who wear incredibly sculptural and often shocking clothing or headdresses. The artist Nick Cave is a great example of a modern American designer/performer who sculpts with fabric and various other materials. Cave is a dancer and performance artist as well. He works in a variety of media to create what he calls “Soundsuits.” His wearable sculptures are called Soundsuits for two main reasons. Not only do many of them make noise when they are worn and moved in, but they have their own “voice.” Cave wants to push the viewer toward discussions of difficult ideas such as race, identity, disguise, or community.

One of eight brothers, Cave grew up repurposing hand-me-downs. He’d cut a sleeve off, or add something to the surface of a piece of clothing. Now, Cave incorporates everything from twigs to fur to buttons — even old toys or brightly dyed human hair can find their way into Cave’s creations. Cave loves to incorporate the piles of stuff he finds in nature, on the street, or at antique flea markets. “What’s powerful is that you know you can make something out of nothing,” he says. Cave has made more than 500 of his sculptural and wearable works of art, many of which have found homes in museums,



Materials (required)

[Creativity Street® Paperboard Mask assortment](#), package of 24 (65303-1024); share one package across class

[Roylco® Insect Sculptures](#), package of 24 (03165-1024); share one kit across class

[Blickrylic® Student Acrylics](#), Pint (00711-); share at least five different colors across class

[Aleene’s® Quick Dry Tacky Glue](#), 4 oz (23884-1104); share four across class

[Snippy® Scissors](#), Pointed, package of 12 (57040-2009); share two packages across class

[Dynasty® Finest Golden Synthetic Shader Brushes](#), Size 8 (05185-2008); one per student

Optional Materials

[Blick® Armature and Sculpture Wire](#) (33400-)

[Blickrylic Blockout White](#) (00711-1086)

[Creativity Street Big Box Pipe Cleaners](#) (61466-1001)

[Creativity Street Bump Stems](#) (61162-1012)

[Corrugated paper](#) (11214-1009)

[Plumage Feathers](#) (62147-)



galleries, and private collections around the world. With a rigid mask form as a base, along with the repurposed parts of bendable chipboard insect sculptures, other embellishments, and found materials, a wearable and sculptural headdress is made. Make one for fun, or to make a statement!

GRADES 3-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. View Nick Cave's Soundsuits, the tribal masks of Papua, New Guinea, or ancient Egyptian jewelry.
2. Provide each student with a mask form.
3. Provide containers of water for soaking of chipboard pieces.

Process

1. Begin by considering how the chipboard insect sculptures could be cut apart to create interesting sculptural shapes. Cut off a wing, or cut a body in half. Swap insect pieces across the class. Also consider the negative shapes that are left in the chipboard when the insects are removed. The sides of the board can be cut into strips or shapes to be used as well.
2. Lay out the shapes and parts to be used with the mask form in the center. The chosen mask form does not have to be used "as is." It can be cut to modify the shape if desired. Try to visualize how the pieces will be attached to the mask form. Now, briefly submerge a piece into water. As it softens, it can be bent or curled into an interesting shape. Try rolling shapes around a rolling pin or pencil, or fold them accordion-style. After the form is in the desired shape, allow it to dry. As it dries, it will stiffen.
3. Using Quick Dry Tacky Glue, attach the pieces onto the mask base. Experiment with placement. Use wire or pipe cleaners to extend pieces away from the mask. When the pieces are dry and secure, add acrylic paint. (A coat of Blockout White Blickrylic is useful as a primer under light colors.) Add beads, feathers, sticks, fabric, or other found objects.



Step 1: Cut the chipboard insects into interesting shapes. Also use the negative spaces of the board left when the insects are removed.



Step 2: Briefly dip the shapes into water and form by curving, rolling, bending, or folding.

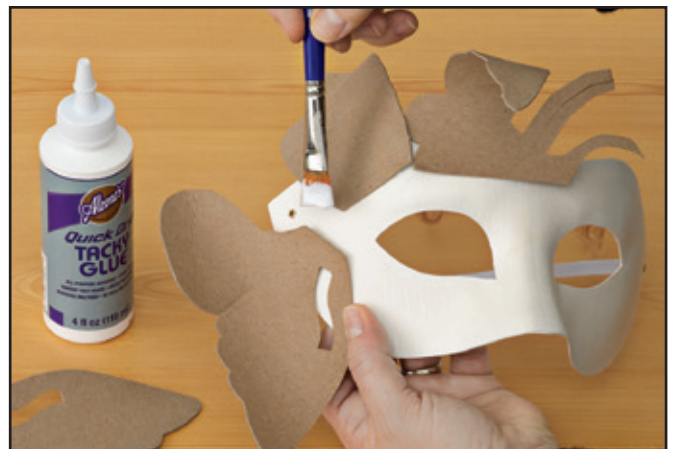
National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.



Step 3: Glue the dry chipboard shapes to the mask form to create a piece of wearable sculpture. Embellish with paint, feathers, beads, wire, and/or found objects.