



# Another Use For Cheesecloth in Life Casting

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One of the keys of being able to accomplish more complicated and flawless life castings is knowing the right tricks. In this article, I'm going to share one of mine. But first, some may recall that in the past I have always tried to be sensitive to the trees in Oregon. You see, up until just recently, *Sculpture Journal* was published in Oregon and every month Oregonian firs, pines, and cascaras had to be sacrificed at the: "Altar of Disseminating Knowledge through Pulpification" in order for this publication to go forth and enlighten the darkness of ignorance. Whenever I could, rather than retell something I had already covered in a previous article, I referenced the article; saving so very many trees. I was conscientious, almost to a fault, even though Oregon seemed to have more trees than the entire Mid-west and one would hardly have

been missed. But alas, it appears that not everyone shared my concern and Oregon has apparently run out of trees forcing Jon White to move his magazine to Southern California where a tree is a rare sight indeed. Well I hope everyone now understands, because if a rain forest can't fill this magazine appetite for trees, how in the world can a desert? When they say, "California is the land of fruits and nuts," they aren't referring to trees. Now if you will just take down from the mantel your leather bound collection of 2004 *Sculpture Journals*, open to page 4 of the March issue, and read "An Alternative to Using Plaster Bandages as the Supporting Mold For Alginate Life Casting I will not have to repeat myself except for a very brief summation. In that article, I explained that using cheese cloth and fast setting plaster rather than plaster bandages can save time, money and result

in far more perfect life castings. These advantages thoroughly demonstrated in my DVD "Casting the Female Torso." In this article, I will share another use for cheese cloth that may expand your life casting horizons.

Sometimes cheese cloth can be used more effectively to bond the alginate to the mother mold rather than some more commonly used material. Just in case the reader is new to life casting let me explain the importance of this step. The impression of the person consists of two main components, the alginate layer on the skin and a rigid mother mold that allows the alginate to hold its shape when removed from the mold. Unfortunately, the two components do not stick together without a little help. And if not bonded together, the mother mold will come off by itself leaving the alginate behind still on the model. At that point, the life caster would have two problems, getting the alginate off without tearing it and then seating it back into the mother mold perfectly positioned. Using **FiberGel** by **ArtMolds** with its higher tear resistance helps, but the real solution is to bond the two layers together so that they remain joined and aligned.

For the last almost two decades, I have tried numerous different materials and for the last few years had settled on rolls of medical cotton. Not only does the cotton generally work very well, but its application is easy to teach and learn. Just cut the cotton into four to five inch squares and separate them into two halves exposing the more loosely packed centers. After the alginate has been applied to the model and just prior to its setting up, press the cotton squares into the alginate and pull them away leaving a layer of cotton embedded into the alginate. Repeat until all the surface of the alginate has been covered. As soon as the alginate has set up, the cotton and the layers will have become one. This is true whether one uses plaster bandages or the better method with cheese cloth and fast setting plaster as explained in the above mentioned article.

One problem with applying the cotton in this way is that you will be trying to accomplish two things at once, covering the model with a perfect layer of alginate and attaching the cotton. The alginate may gel before you can get all the cotton in place. There are better ways. Simply mist the surface of the alginate with **Algislo**, also by **ArtMolds**, which, if applied before the alginate sets up, will keep the surface soft for several additional minutes giving more time to complete this step. An added advantage is that if you discover an area where the alginate is too thin a second layer of alginate will bond to the first, if misted with **Algislo** possibly saving a casting. I have been using and teaching these methods for several years and will continue to do so. (See "How to Extend the Setting Time of Alginate & Testing a New Product," *Sculpture Journal*, March 2003.) But there is an Alternative which I also use and I will now describe.

The reason that I developed this other method is that I was occasionally having a minor problem in that the "positive" castings in plaster, **Forton MG**, hydrocal, etc. made shallow indentations. One of my assistants, a very savvy young lady named Kelly Rooney (I mention her name because she recently moved to California to pursue a career in Make-up and special effects and you may soon see her name in some motion picture credits. Good luck Kelly!)

noticed that these imperfections most often occurred on the shoulders. What we deduced was that the firmness and rounded shape of the shoulders created suction holding the alginate and mother mold in place. When the mold was removed, the suction would hold the alginate against the skin and the mother mold might very slightly separate from the alginate before the alginate came loose from the skin, the alginate wouldn't seat itself exactly back into position. When the "positives" were cast the places of separation were minor but still visible.

What was needed was something that would still be simple to use and yet more securely bond the alginate and the mother mold. Pieces of cheese cloth do nicely. Cheese cloth comes in strips about six inches wide and four layers thick. Do not unfold the layers. Cut into lengths of three to ten inches and cover the alginate very much the same way you would with cotton. Just put the strips in place and gently tap it into the surface of the alginate. (See photo #1 where the above mentioned and soon to be famous Kelly is doing just that.) Make sure that the cheese cloth follows the contours of the alginate layer without bridging over hollow places or pulling on the alginate. In the first case, the mother mold will not be able to fill any air spaces between the alginate and the cheese cloth. In the second, the cheese cloth can pull against the alginate causing a line in the "positive" casting. Using

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fairly short pieces of cheese cloth helps prevent both of these problems. Be careful not to overlap the cheese cloth

pieces more than about a half inch. Having a supply of cheese cloth pieces in various lengths will help in applying it without excessive overlapping. It is important that the plaster in the mother mold saturate through the cheese cloth right down to the surface of the alginate to prevent air spaces which are more likely to occur if the cheese cloth is applied too thickly. Soaking through the cheese cloth is also more easily done with fast setting plaster applied with a paint brush than with plaster bandages. As soon as the cheese cloth has been soaked with plaster is as if a layer of plaster bandages had been applied and the mother mold is about half way constructed. I then apply another layer of cheese cloth and plaster for added strength. As soon as the plaster gets warm the mold is ready to remove. The time from mixing the alginate to removing the mold from a torso as shown in the photo should take from twenty to thirty minutes.

For smaller and simpler castings I will still use the cotton method. As the molds become larger and more complex I will use cheese cloth in places that require extra strengthening. In the casting in the photo notice that both arms are included causing a complex surface with ins and outs and overhangs. Consequently, I decided to use cheese cloth on the entire surface.

In a future article I will describe how cheese cloth can be used to strengthen alginate so that a totally seamless mold of an arm can be made, or a head or torso, can be cast in the round more perfectly and with less effort than one might imagine.

