

How Can I Cast Thee for Profit Let Me Count the Ways

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The "face" of a young woman with her hair just covering her breasts. Notice the casting of twin children over her head. At her left shoulder is a head in the round which has open eyes. All are in matallic Forton MG.

Perhaps you are someone who has done some life casting and found it so enjoyable that you would like to be able to justify doing a whole lot more but the reality is that most of us have only so much time and resources for hobbies. Of course, one could always do as Paul Gauguin did, desert one's family and sail to Tahiti and rather than paint the natives, spread alginate on them. A better course of action might be to turn the hobby into a profession which happens the instant that one starts getting paid to do it.

Of course, the same could be said for traditional sculpting as well. There must be any number of readers who would love to drop whatever it is that isn't all that satisfying but pays the bills and just make art. But life casting is especially seductive because it seems so easy. All one has to do is purchase a kit and cast a face, body, or a baby's hand and if one has followed the instructions carefully, the results will probably be reasonably successful. After all, even with a poorly done life casting of a face, the subject is recognizable. Compare that to what would likely result if someone with no practice or training were to try to draw, paint, or sculpt someone's face. Life casting is to sculpting as photography is to painting and while a snapshot is



A young lady at 12 years old and again at 16. Cast in Forton MG with metal powders and a chemically applied patina

recognizable, it doesn't follow that the snap shooter is another Ansel Adams. And in the same way, while life casting can seem so deceptively easy, it isn't easy to do well.

As I will explain later, the better the end results, the greater the earning potential. For now, let's consider some ways that life casting can actually generate income.

Many people discover life casting by purchasing a kit available in most craft and art supply stores and casting a baby's hand and/or foot. Having successfully immortalized one's own child, the next step is to try friends', and finally move on to anyone who has an infant and a willingness to pay. But it isn't just the newly born that are fair game, any old hands will do. Here are some examples that I have done:

1. A parent holding his/her child's (children's) hand(s) or visa versa.
2. A whole family of hands either as a pyramid or a wreath. I once cast the hands of four generations of women from 17 to over 80.
3. I have cast hands holding all sorts of objects such as a baseball, crystal glove, paint brush, flowers, oar handle, wine glass, baseball bat, fishing rod, suturing tools in physician's hands, volley ball baseball, golf club, book, etc. One physician wanted his hand on someone's shoulder as if giving comfort.
4. One of the more standard castings is of an engaged couple's clasping hands.
5. And don't forget feet. While a newborn's foot is the most obvious, another very common request is a ballerina's foot in a toe shoe on pointe.

After hands and feet, the next logical challenge for a new life caster might be faces. Faces are especially important because we generally recognize and remember people by their faces. So adept are we at this that we can see someone from our distant past who has certainly changed with time and still recognize his/ her face. There even may be a particular part of the brain that is devoted just to faces.



A pair of hands cast in polyurethane with metal powders and attached to a marble base

"60 Minutes" once aired a segment about some people who had received head injuries that prevented them from identifying faces even though otherwise they were normal. So severe were they disabled that they couldn't recognize their own reflections in mirrors!

Although I have cast the faces of children as young as five, the magic age seems to be eight. I have seen very few kids eight or older who wouldn't or couldn't get their faces cast. If possible, I like to capture someone's face at twelve or younger. Not only do you get them while they still look like children but you stand a very good chance of having the parents bring them back for another casting or two as they grow up. Let's all be thankful for repeat business.

I have done more face castings than any other type including:

1. Children.
2. A second or third casting as the child matures.
3. Two faces cast together such as twins, lovers, and mother and daughter.
4. Though children are more likely subjects, adults at any age who want a record of themselves for themselves or loved ones.

While any body part may be a candidate for casting, the last of the big three would be torsos. The most common torsos that I have cast are either the front or back of a body from neck to mid-thigh trimmed to hang on a wall as a bas relief. While I have found that women are more likely to want their bodies captured forever, people of either gender who are in their prime or who have gotten themselves in great physical condition are likely candidates. I can not even guess at how many women who are a "little older" have remarked after seeing some of my sample castings, "I wish I had done that when..." But I can tell you exactly how many men have said that, only two.

As I listed above for faces, hands and feet, here are some examples:

1. A front or back of a torso as described above. The castings may be either clothed or nude or both. While usually done for the person her/himself, may be for a significant other.
2. A common casting for me has been a dancer's torso in a leotard.

3. Usually, the front of the torso is cast and displayed on a wall as a has relief. However, sometimes the subject may want his/ her back cast instead or in addition.
4. A third possibility is a front and back together so that the result is a free standing piece in the round. A figure on its side including both front and back is a variation on this same theme.
5. More than once, I have cast two torsos together side by side. One particularly successful pair was a female front beside a male back.

While I have considered faces, torsos, and hands and feet separately, they may be combined in any number of ways. For example, when I cast a face, I usually include down to about mid-chest often with one or both arms. Sometimes the subject holds something in one or both hands.

Another use for life casting is providing anatomical references for other art work. In fact, it was for this purpose that I originally started life casting. Not only have I often found this to be beneficial in my work but have supplied castings to other artists for a price, of course.

There are any number of things that can determine if any of us will succeed. Some are completely out of our control such as inborn talent or a trust fund that pays the bills. But no matter what our circumstances, for the most part we are in control. To actually generate some significant income from life casting, two things are necessary: being able to do quality work and then knowing how to market it. One of my favorite quotes is by Moss Hart (by the way, I have no idea who Most Hart was or is; this may be the only thing he ever said!), "Writers, actors, and prostitutes have the same fundamental problem; competition from amateurs who are pretty good and who will work for free." Moss certainly could have included life caster. In my next article I will explain how to go beyond simple plaster castings that are "pretty good" to much more professional work using better materials and ideas. The four photographs in this article are a few examples. Marketing strategies will be covered later.



A free standing torso in the round which is raku fired with a white crackle glaze.