

Supporting the Model in Life Casting, Part II

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Photo 1

In last month's *Sculpture Journal*, I explained the advantages of positioning a model on an almost vertical padded board for support when making a life casting either face or torso. In this article, I will expand on the subject and cover some other methods.

One of the things I mentioned in passing last month was that if a model's arm (or arms) is raised while she is being cast, the arm or will almost certainly go to sleep. The model may insist that she (or he) can hold her arm in place without some support; but do not believe her, she can't. While it will only take about twenty to twenty-five minutes for an experienced casting team to make and remove the alginate mold, the model will lose feeling in and control of her arm and almost certainly distort the mold. Fortunately, providing support is simple. In photo #1, notice that the model's left arm is supported by a rope looped around her wrist. I realize that sometimes life casting starts looking like bondage and a few

interesting photos to show friends and relatives is one of the perks the model gets from being cast. In order to keep the model comfortable while the completed mold is curing enough for removal, it is a good idea to remove the hand from the loop and bend the arm at the elbow for a few moments to restore circulation.

(Photo #2)

If you are creative at all, you will probably eventually come up with a composition that requires that the model (s) be lying down; or at least makes it easier to do. I'll give you a couple of examples. Photo #3 is of nine year old twins. In the first attempt, I had them stand and lean against the padded board as explained in last month's article. Unfortunately, because of their age, they were unable to hold the position and I repositioned them lying down and successfully made the casting. But I have done older pairs who were able to stand up, e.g. photo #4. (See "When Two Head are Better than One, SJ, June 2004 by DP.)



Photo 2

Photo #5 shows a Raku fired torso life casting of a young dancer. We were trying to make her look as if she were doing an arabesque. It would have been impossible for anyone much less a twelve year old to actually hold the position standing up long enough to do the casting. But lying down was a cinch.

The torso casting in photograph #6 could have been made with the model standing but I chose to have the model lie down because it made the casting easier to do. Normally, the breasts of a supine female body would be distorted and not look as if she had been standing. However, because, in this case, the right arm presses against and covers the breasts, the torso looks pretty much the same as if she had been standing. This simplified applying the alginate on the body as a whole and especially around the arms.



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6

In the above examples, casting the model lying down was just a means to an end and not an end in itself. But in photos #7 and #8, the model was supposed to be lying down. This may look like a difficult casting but it really wasn't though there were a couple tricks required. First, it would have been a challenge to mix enough alginate to cover both the front and back of model and apply it before it set up. I divided the alginate into three batches and mixed one of them. Starting at the neck, I began to apply the first batch as an assistant simultaneously began mixing the second batch. By the time I had covered the first third of the torso, the second batch was mixed and I continued down the torso as the third batch was prepared. This way I was able to apply wet alginate to wet



Photo 7



Photo 8

alginate for a seamless transition from neck to thighs. As I progressed along the body, I misted the outer surface of the alginate with AlgiSlo to keep it soft enough to bond to cotton which in turn attached to the mother mold. I constructed the mother mold using cheese cloth and Impression Dental Plaster rather than plaster bandages. (For an explanation of why this method is faster, easier, less expensive, and results in more perfect castings, see my article in the March, 2004 issue of *SJ* titled "An Alternative to Using Plaster Bandages As the Supporting Mold For Alginate Life Casting.") The completed mold was lifted off the model who easily slipped out the bottom without damaging the mold.

Last month, I showed the simple backboard that I use for casting a model in a close to vertical position. In fact, when appropriate, the board can be positioned well beyond almost vertical. If I lean it at shallow enough angle that I worry about it slipping, then I attach it to the wall with a rope and a large hook on its back and another on the wall. For the completely horizontal, a pair of sawhorses support it at a very convenient and comfortable height. (See Photo #9) Shown here is an example of something that I don't usually do, cast a female torso horizontally because of distortion of the breasts. However, in this case we were intentionally making a torso which would represent a sleeping figure.

If the position of the model (or models) is too extended for my regular board, I have another one that is four feet wide by six feet long which is also covered with foam and Nogahide. This larger board sits securely on the pair of sawhorses as well. In photo #10, we were using the



Photo 9



Photo 10



Photo 11

larger board so as to have enough space to position the model in an extended dance like pose.

I have had other occasions to use one of the padded boards on sawhorses. In photo #11, for example, we were casting a dancer's foot in a ballet slipper during a casting workshop. For stability, the model was holding on to a rope that had been hung over a couple of large hooks in the ceiling. Note that behind her head is an ancient pulley which also is attached to one of the hooks. The pulley is just something I found in the basement of the old building in which I have my studio and has no artistic use whatsoever; it just makes it look as if my studio might have just once been a butcher shop, or perhaps still is...

I have also used the padded boards as model stands when doing conventional sculpting, i.e. not life casting. When the model was posing for the statue in Photo #12, I used the narrower of my padded boards for her to lie on which she found to be quite comfortable.

Between December, 2005 and June, 2006 I wrote a series of four articles that explained how and encouraged people to learn more techniques so that they can separate themselves from the run of the mill life casters both for more personal fulfillment and also for monetary rewards. The use of padded boards as I have explained in this and last month's articles could help one progress to the next level.

At the end of last month's article, I showed a plaster cast of one of my assistants, Jessica. I explained that I never use plaster as in the finished casting. Since then, I repaired a few flaws in the plaster, partially opened her eyes, made a silicone rubber mold of the plaster, cast her in Forton MG with metal powder, and applied a green patina solution to the hair and cloth. In Photo #13, Jessica is holding the almost finished portrait. I say "almost" because the only thing remaining to do was buff it. Unfortunately, it needed to cure for a couple of days before buffing, time I didn't have to meet this article deadline. But at least, I hope, you get the idea.



Photo 12



Photo 13