

New Product, Life Form

By David E. Parvin, A.L.I.

I get excited about any new product that promises to be an improvement. Dave's Law #11 on my studio wall is, "There is almost always a better way." Or as fellow contributor to *Sculpture Journal*, rubber expert, and good friend Mike Sisbarro points out, "If I have been doing something the same way for a long time, I'm probably doing it wrong because someone has likely come up with a better way." Recently I got really excited! Another good friend, Todd Debreceni, who is an expert in makeup and special effects both professionally and academically, recently returned from an international conference in London with something that sounded too good to be true, a new fast curing skin safe platinum cured thixotropic silicone rubber called Life Form. So what about Life Form is so important and that if Julie Andrews had been present, we would have substituted "fastcuringskinsafeplatinumcuredsiliconerubberLifeForm" for "supercalifraglisticexpalidoscious" and danced around singing? Before I explain, let me digress.

The two most used life casting materials are, of course, alginate and fast curing skin safe platinum cured thixotropic silicone rubber. (At my age I have to make every second count since I am running out of seconds. A nine word name no matter how descriptive, just is too long. If I have to type it out over and over again, I just might be around to finishing this article. So in order to save time both for myself and for any

of you readers who just might be getting a little long in the tooth, I will use the abbreviation for generic FCSSPCTSR and Life Form when referring to this new FCSSPCTSR in particular.)

Alginate and FCSSPCTSR each has its advantages and disadvantages. Alginate is less expensive and easier to apply. FCSSPCTSR is much stronger and produces a mold that can be used over and over again. (For a more information, see "How to Cast a Dancers Foot For Fun and Profit," *Sculpture Journal*, January 2005, by DP.) I confess that I am an alginate man through and through. I am a registered member of the Alginate Party and always vote right down party lines. FCSSPCTSRs have a particular disadvantage that has limited my use in the past, a disadvantage that Life Form has, to my amazement, eliminated.

The disadvantage that every other FCSSPCTSR that I had used in the past is that they all stick tenaciously to hair. Hair isn't much of a problem for alginate. (See "Techniques For Life Casting Hair," *Sculpture Journal*, July 2006, by DP.) In my opinion, using FCSSPCTSR on any parts of the body requires that the victim shave all hair off or cover the hair with a barrier such as a skull cap or a thick layer of releasing agent. There are a number of releasing agents made for this purpose, but I have found that if applied in a sufficient quantity to be effective, the skin texture is lost. So when Todd Debreceni told me that Life Form doesn't stick to hair, though my socks started rolling up and down, I didn't believe him.

Unfortunately, Life Form is a British product and not available in the U.S. yet. Fortunately, I have met its distributor, Justin Neill, and was even a guest in his home a few years ago. I emailed him and arranged for a sample. (See contact information at the end of this article.) Not to worry, Justin is in the process of setting up a US distributor.

Life Form consists of two components, Part A and Part B, which are use in equal amounts. Both A and B are thick, rather like putty. They are the same blue color and have no odor. Photo #1 shows 10 grams of each in a plastic up. Notice that the components have no tendency to run. I mixed them together and spread them on my arm

with no release agent. (Photo #2.) The life form set up to the point that it could not be spread in about two minutes. I left it on my arm for about five minutes to be certain that it was well cured. While I do not have especially hairy arms, I had just done this experiment with another FCSSPCTSR, the removal of which even with a release agent was very uncomfortable. I am confident that if I had removed it quickly, all the hairs would have come off with the rubber as if having been waxed. Amazingly, I say again *amazingly*, the Life form came off with barely a tug on the hairs. Since Todd is somewhat more hairy than I (not necessarily a sign greater masculinity), We spread some Life Form on his arm as well with the same results.

Before proceeding to a more thorough test, I emailed Justin with four suggestions. First, make the two components different colors so that one can easily tell when they are thoroughly mixed. Second, slow the setting time slightly because two minutes isn't much time to mix and apply. Third, thin it down a little so that it's easier to apply without capturing bubbles on the surface touching the skin yet still thick enough to stay in place. And four, find a US distributor. Justin replied that all four of my suggestions were already in the works. It's always a comfort to know how great minds think alike...



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5



Photo 6

It seems to me that the special effect folks (E/FX), who already use FCSSPCTSR on a regular basis will be especially interested in Life Form. So Todd and I decided use it in a test casting appropriate to what he and his compatriots normally would do. One of his students, Ron Root volunteered to be the model.

All FCSSPCTSRs set up so quickly that one can not mix enough to cover much of an area without setting up before one gets it all on.

The solution is to measure out several small batches, mix one and while it is being applied, mix another, and so on. It is essential that the application start at one end, edge, or side and proceed in one direction over the model so that rubber is always being applied wet to wet. If allowed to set up, there will be a seam where uncured rubber meets cured. In this case we went from Ron's forehead down his face. Normally for E/FX, a skull cap would be applied to the model; however, we wanted to have the Life Form actually touch Ron's hair.

We measured out four 3 ounce batches (85 grams) of 1/2 A and 1/2B but did not stir them. In order to reduce the viscosity, we added 10 percent silicone oil. Prior, we had made test batches using up to 30 percent with no apparent degradation of the Life Form. In Photos #3 and 4, Todd, the hairy one, and I are applying the Life Form. Out of view, assistant Kelsey is mixing the next batch as we proceeded down Ron's face. In Photo #5, Kelsey and I are removing the Life Form from the edges. In Photo #6, the Life Form has come off the eye lashes and brows easily and with no discomfort. We had applied a small amount of petroleum jelly to the lashes and eye brows but it probably hadn't been necessary. In Photo #7, the hair that was touching the life Form is sliding out with no discomfort visible on Ron's face. As shown in Photo #8, the Life Form had minimal flaws. We did not construct a mother mold which would have held the rubber's correct shape, but we were only curious about how well the Life Form would perform.

In the last two photographs, I had taken a glob of Life Form an applied it to my left sideburn without any release agent. Again, it came off easily without any discomfort which was fortunate because if my sideburn had been ripped out, I would have looked like a lopsided Elvis.

In the past, I had thought of FCSSPCTSRs of being useful in very specific situations such as casting a ballerina's foot. Ballerinas are not known for being particularly hairy. But even though I will continue to be a member of the Alginate Party, I will probably cross party lines in favor of Life Form much more often than I would have with other FCSSPCTSRs. I am looking forward to when Life Form

is more available and I can put it to a more thorough test.

Justin Neill can be reached at justin@mouldlife.co.uk.

Todd Debrenceni is a Denver area educator, author, and professional makeup/special effects artist. He has a new book by Focus Press titled *Special Makeup Effects For Stage and Screen*. His email is tdebrenceni@gmail.com.

Dave Parvin has done so much good shit that there isn't room to list it!



Photo 7



Photo 8



Photo 9