

## WORKSHOP: "PAPER CLAY FIGURES"



**Summary:** Participants create a wire armature figure, fill it out with foil and apply paper clay to surface it. Recycled egg cartons are shredded, blended in water to create a pulp, and then mixed with PVA glue and drywall compound. This paper clay is then patted in place on the figure with sponges and can be painted, embellished with paper yarn and/or coated with colourful napkin fragments.

### Materials and Equipment:

2 egg cartons	plastic sheet/chloroplast to work on
coated flexible wire	figure template
foil	pliers
masking tape	wire cutters
hockey tape	paint brushes
sludge primer	foil or plastic lids
acrylic paint	water container
mod podge	t-shirt scraps
drywall compound (not DAP)	scissors
mod podge	spatula
white glue PVA	measuring cup
colourful napkin pieces	metal spoon
acrylic varnish	compostable sponges
optional: paper yarn	2 buckets (mixing and soaking)
access to water	sandpaper
blender	strainer
extension cord	vinyl gloves
smock	popsicle sticks
table cover	wood blocks
safety glasses	artwork samples
instructions/idea sheet	

**Class Plan:**

1. Cover your work surface, wear a smock or old clothes and tie back loose hair to avoid getting glue on it.
2. Gather egg cartons for making paper clay. Other materials work well too like soaked and shredded toilet paper or cotton linter for a more archival finish.



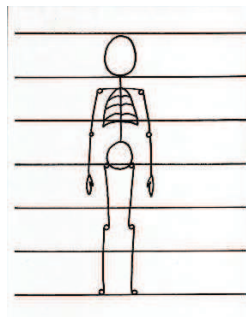
3. Rip up the thick paper part of two paper egg cartons into small pieces.



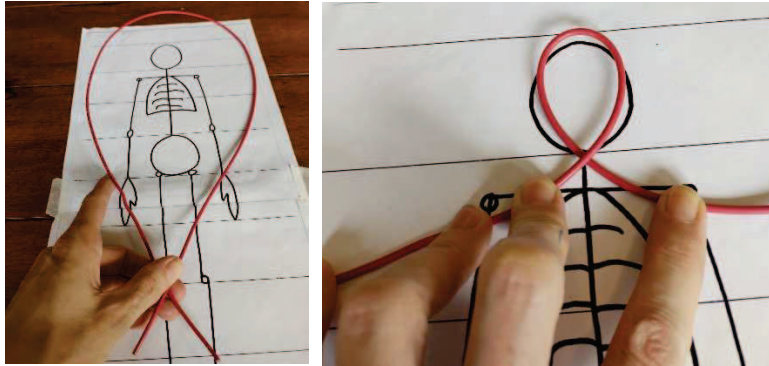
4. Soak your egg carton pieces in water for a few hours.



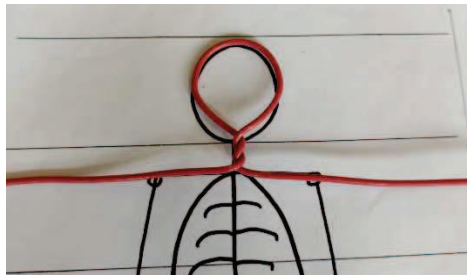
5. While waiting for your paper to soak, make a wire figure armature for your sculpture.
6. Try working from a template for the figure or work free form if you prefer. Bodies are all shapes and sizes, so there is no right or wrong. For ours, we worked from the template below. A larger version is attached to the end of this write-up.



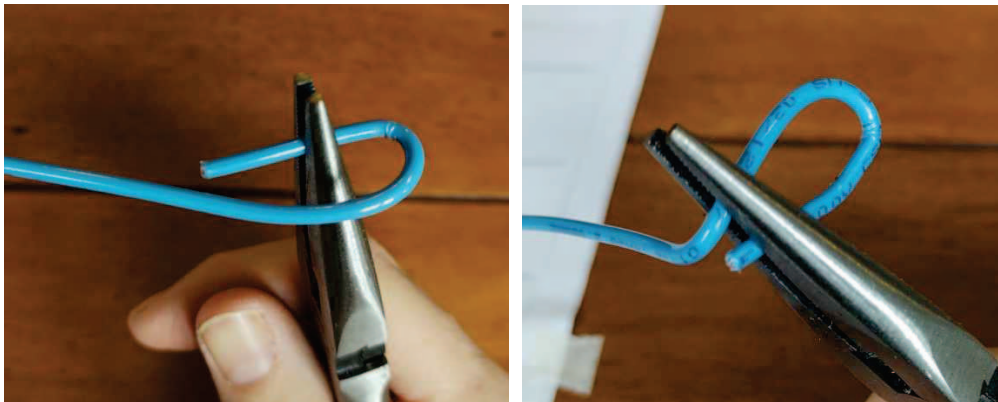
7. Cut three pieces of flexible coated wire or use scrap wire, one short piece and two longer equal pieces.
  - a. For the sculpture we made, the short piece was 40-cm long or 15.3/4-inches (red wire).
  - b. The two longer pieces were each 60-cm long or 23.3/4-inches (blue wires).
  - c. This resulted in a figure about 23-cm or 9-inches high when finished.
8. For the head and neck:
  - a. Bend the shorter piece of wire (red) in half, crossing over wire ends in the middle enough to form a loop about 1-inch long to make the head.



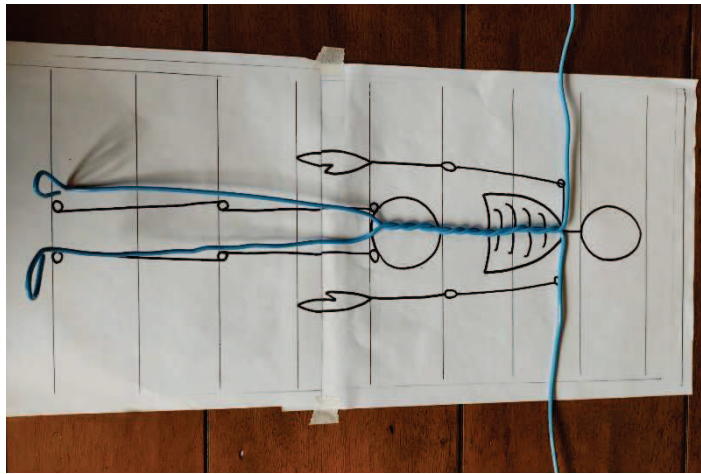
- b. Twist the wires together under head a few times to form the neck. Then spread out the wire ends perpendicular, ready to attach to the body.



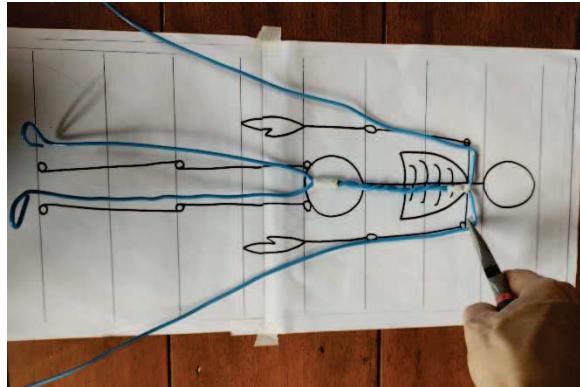
9. For the body, take the two longer wires (blue) the same length:
  - a. Bend a small loop at the end of each wire using pliers (left). Then bend that loop flat like a foot (right).



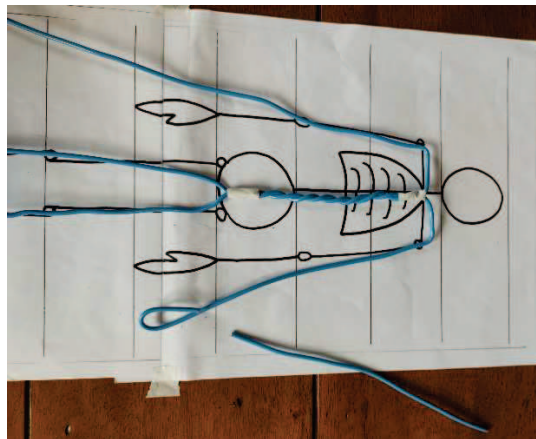
- b. Leave enough length for the legs, then twist the two wires together to form the main body.



- c. Bend the wires down at the shoulders to form the arms.



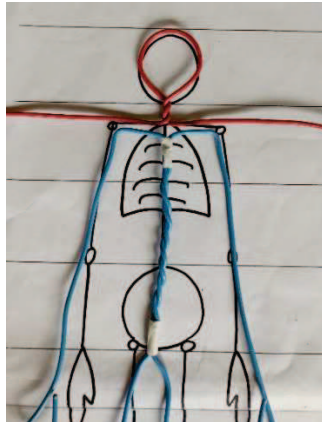
- d. Form a loop for the hands with pliers and cut off the extra wire with wire cutters. Secure sections with masking tape or hockey tape as you go.



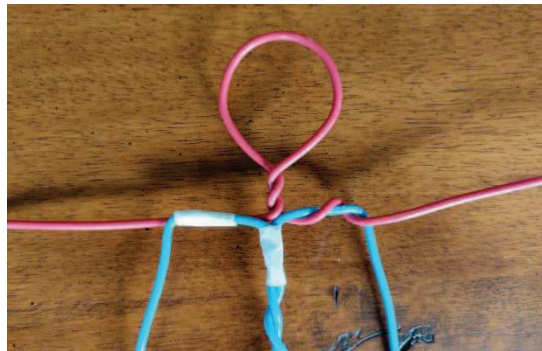
# 10. Join the head to the body:

- a. Line the head and body pieces up so the neck is in the middle of the shoulders section.

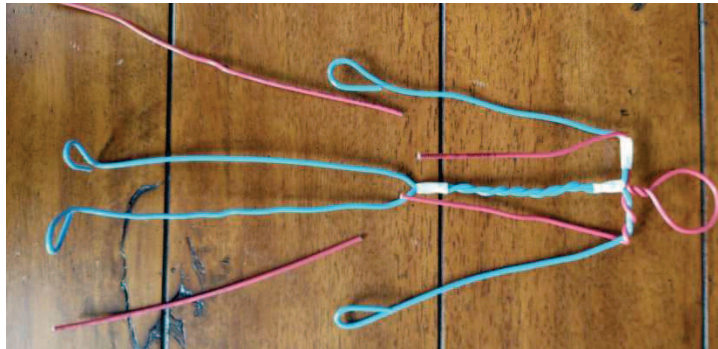




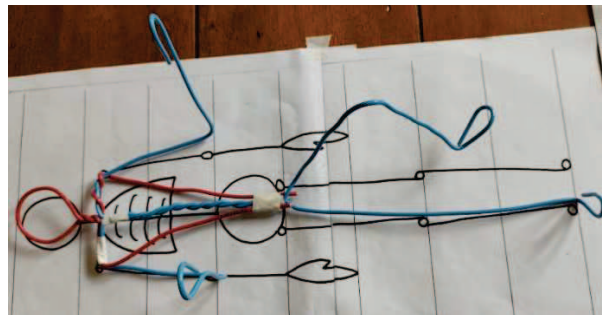
- b. Twist the perpendicular wire on the head piece around the shoulder section on each side.



- c. Bend the remaining wire down to the figure's waist, and trim off the excess wire.



- d. Bend the figure's elbow and knee joints about halfway long.



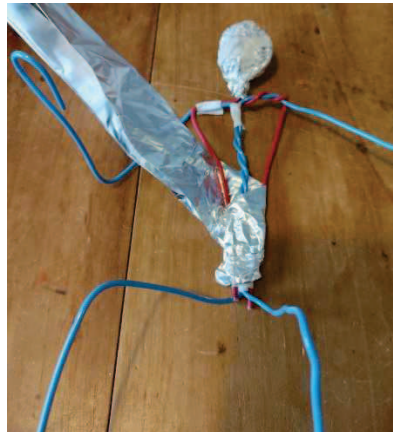
11. Bend your wire figure into the position you would like it to remain in as a sculpture. If you would like your figure to be seated, choose a wood block for it to sit on permanently or a plastic container if you plan to remove it after drying to seat it elsewhere.



12. Tear off approximately 3" wide pieces of foil from a roll. Fold the foil in half again and again until you have long thin strips about 3/8" wide.



13. Wrap your foil strips diagonally up and around the arms, legs and body of your figure. Overlap foil strips until your figure is completely covered in a few layers.



14. For the head, wad up a ball of foil and fit it inside the wire loop of the head. Then wrap and scrunch another piece of foil over the entire head to hold the foil ball and wire in place altogether.



15. Finish wrapping the figure until there are a few layers of foil over all surfaces. Secure foil strips and wadded foil for shaping your figure with small pieces of masking tape or hockey tape for a more secure hold.



16. Mix up your paper clay mixture once your figure armature is ready.
17. Place small clumps of egg carton pieces and enough water to cover them into a blender. The water is essential or the blender will just push the pieces up and then spin without cutting them up.





18. Put the lid on the blender and blend on a medium speed for about 10 seconds. Repeat if the paper is not fully pulped. Use short blender bursts to dislodge stuck papers.



19. Unplug the blender, remove the jug from the unit and take off the top.
20. Pour the blended pulp and water into a strainer over a bucket. Use a spoon to dislodge any remaining pulp because the blades at the bottom can be sharp.



21. Strain your blended contents to remove the bulk of the water. Gently press the pulp against the edges of the strainer to remove more water.

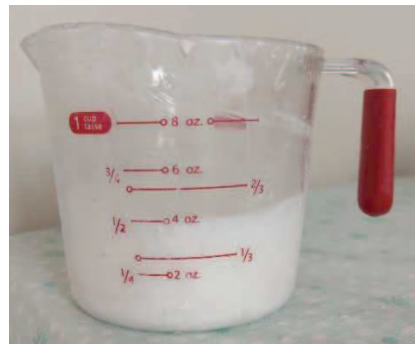
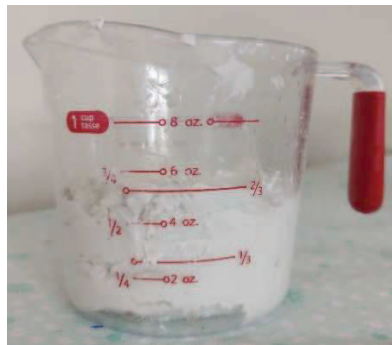




22. By hand, squeeze out as much water as you can from the paper pulp and transfer it to a container to mix with the other ingredients.



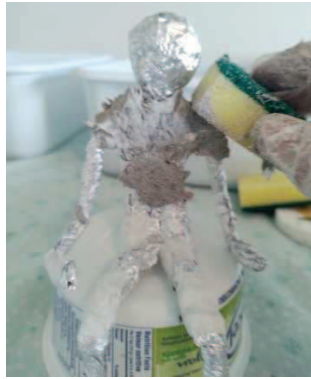
23. Wear reusable waterproof gloves to keep the drywall compound from drying out your hands.
24. Mix according to the recipe:  
1 cup shredded paper pulp  
2/3 cup drywall compound  
1/2 cup PVA (regular white) glue



25. Mix ingredients together with a mixer reserved for non-food projects or with a spoon. A spatula helps with scooping it out of the bowl.



26. Smooth this mixture about 3/8" thick onto the foil covered figure. We worked from the top down, but working from the bottom up would probably work better. That way the figure could sit on a block while the top half was finished. The mixture becomes sticky as it starts to dry and sticks to your hands otherwise.



27. Dab the paper clay in position and smooth with a sponge. Cut a long narrow wedge off of the sponge with scissors, and use it to dab smooth tight areas around the figure's neck.



28. Allow the figure to dry for a few days or more depending on the paper clay thickness. We allowed a week between classes to be sure. The faster it dries the better, to avoid it becoming musty with too much moisture. Place it outside in the sun if the season/weather permits.



29. Remove your paper clay figure from the plastic bowl it is sitting on and turn it over after a few days so the seated part also dries.
- Imperfections can be repaired by adding small amounts of paper clay to any gaps.



30. Any rough spots can be gently sanded with about 120 grit sandpaper.
31. Optional: Paint the dry figure. Start with a coat of sludge primer and then paint with acrylic paints using very little or no water.
32. Alternatively, choose a decorative paper napkin and remove the plain layer(s) if there are multiple layers.



33. Tear or cut pieces of the decorative layer of the paper napkin and laminate it to the surface of your figure in sections using mod podge for paper.
  - a. Apply a layer of “mod podge for paper” or gel medium to sections of your figure with an old paint brush and to the back of the decorative napkin one piece at a time.
  - b. Smooth your paper napkin face up over the surface of your figure. Apply more mod podge to the decorative top side of your napkin to laminate it in place.
  - c. Trim any extra pieces of the napkin off with scissors as needed.
34. Sit your figure on a block of wood to dry, keeping in mind that it will permanently stick to this block of wood. If you don't want it to stick to the wood, seat your figure on a plastic container instead.
  - a. The figure can be painted or laminated in sections to avoid it sticking to anything while drying.
35. Optional: apply 1-2 thin coats of non-yellowing varnish to your sculpture when complete and allow to dry.
36. The sculpture should not be exposed to water, but can be placed indoors for display.
37. Happy creating, and please send us photos of your creations if you feel comfortable sharing.

#### **Useful Information/Adaptions/Variations:**

- Try making a paper clay bowl by applying it inside a plastic bowl and then laminating a decorative napkin onto the surface with mod podge when it is dry. This can be another whole project.
- A sponge is very useful to smooth the surface of the figure, dabbing but not wiping the paper clay.

- Light weight objects can be stitched through the dry paper clay or glued to the outside of the figure sculpture for embellishments, instead of or as well as using a napkin for decoration. Here is a sculpture holding a book.



- Applying paper clay around your figure in other shapes can add to the sculpture. Try applying paper clay over a salvaged Styrofoam sphere to make a ball.

#### **Trouble Shooting:**

- Leaving too much water in the pulp will result in it taking a very long time to dry and then smelling moldy. If this happens it is best to try again with a new bowl.
- Some recipes call for the optional addition of 1 tbsp mineral/baby oil. We did not do this because we wanted to paint the figure and were concerned the oil might prevent the acrylic paint from sticking to it.
- We tried a recipe with flour that still wasn't dry after 4 days and went moldy. This is the recipe: soak 2 egg cartons a few hours, blend in a blender, squeeze out water, add 1 cup flour and a sprinkle of salt, knead into a dough and press over a form or bowl. This could be tried again with more water squeezed out at the forming stage. However, the recipe in the main section above worked, so we went with that.
- If you have trouble removing your paper clay bowl from the object it is sitting on, try applying a small amount of talcum powder to the wood block or plastic item as a mold release before seating or standing your figure on it.



