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Munich glass in Glasgow

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How to make a
mannequin

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BUILD YOUR OWN PAPER MANNEQUIN

by Christine Supianek ACR and Helen Ganiaris ACR of the Museum of London

INTRODUCTION

The production of mannequins is often the most costly element of costume displays. For small institutions with tight budgets, a low cost solution is very welcome. The mannequins described below are made from archival gummed paper tape and are relatively simple to make.

For large exhibitions and permanent displays, the Museum of London normally commissions mannequins from outside companies. However there are situations when a simple shaped mannequin is needed. This method has been widely used in Germany; recently an opportunity arose to use them at the Museum. They are best for the 'cut out' type, with simple shapes and when light weight but sturdy support is needed.

For this project, the 'cut out' mannequin type was required, with a dark blue interior to match the costume, in this case, uniforms. For all three mannequins, a standard Stockman dressmaker's mannequin was used as a basic shape.

STEP BY STEP GUIDE

(i) The dressmaker's form was padded to the desired shape and covered with cotton jersey. The fit should be left a little small because the paper layers will add to the volume. A cling film layer protects the base form from the gummed paper and acts as a release layer.

(ii) Cut circa 10cm long paper strips and keep them dry.

(iii) To apply your first layer of paper, wet each strip over a sponge and evenly apply each tape overlapping a little. Apply a second layer in the opposite direction to strengthen the

Applying the paper tape in a different direction for each layer.



Cutting the gummed paper tape to a convenient length



Applying the wet paper tape.

structure. Vary paper length depending on the curve of the mannequin.

(iv) After each layer, let the mannequin dry off and continue next layer; five layers are sufficient to give a full figure enough stability. Vary the number of layers depending on your requirements.

Let the paper tape dry after each layer.





The re-joined centre back



The finished neckline painted with the desired colour



Drawing the desired shape to cut out for the neckline

(v) Cut the back open along the centre with a Stanley knife and pull the paper mannequin gently from the base form. Re-join the hollow paper mannequin as quickly as possible; use masking tape for initial reshaping and apply more paper strips. A 5cm thick Ethafoam disk cut to shape sandwiched in between two plates of Perspex fits tightly in the waistline of the mannequin and gives it more rigidity.

(vi) The neckline can be cut carefully with a scalpel; apply paper strips over the cutting edge to give it a neat finish. Paint inside and just around the neckline with water-based paint and finish as desired.

The inside of the paper mannequin.



(vii) Cover figure with the jersey and pad up mannequin as needed.

DISCUSSION

These mannequins take time to produce but can be made by students or volunteers with training and supervision.

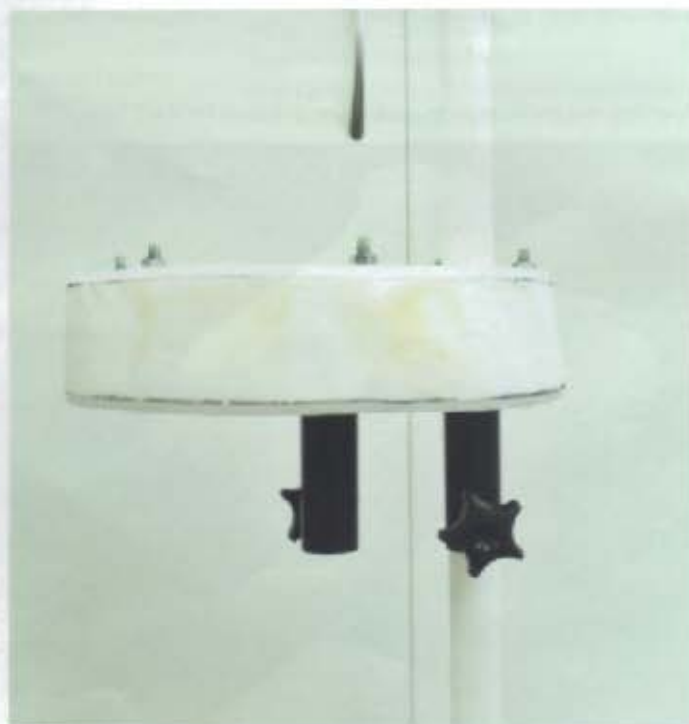
Other advantages include reduced use of fibreglass, paints, MDF or wood inserts, as found with some traditional mannequins.

They are easy to replicate if several similar figures are needed.

At the time of writing, it was found that the adhesive of the gummed paper tape (supplied by Klug) had been changed; newly performed Oddy tests confirm that the paper mannequins are recommended for permanent use*.

At current prices, the paper tape used for one figure would cost less than £20; other elements such as Ethafoam, Perspex, poles and bust runners would need to be costed in addition.

Base plate with bust runners for mannequin pole made of dense foam, Plexiglas and standard mannequin fixings.





The different stages of making a paper mannequin (far back: padded base figure; left: paper strips on base figure; centre: hollow paper mannequin with painted inside; right: finished mannequin with jersey cover before opening the neckline)

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* From the Klug website: A totally acid-free paper tape made on the basis of potato starch and manufactured without the usage of softeners or plasticizers. Used for the manufacture of mounts, file and preservation folders as well as for conservation quality picture framing. Free of acid forming substances.

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Thames Waterman's coat of 1881 mounted on a paper mannequin. The overall weight of the mannequin is ca.7kg m