Akio Takamori’s figurative sculptures, made with clay and underglazes, can inspire many types of art projects. Here is one we shared with teachers during a past Teacher Institute at BAM. The teachers found it rewarding, and their finished projects showed their enthusiasm for the process. It has since been taught to students of all ages in their classrooms. Give it a try!

**Figurative Sculpture with Papier Maché**

Think about a person who has an important relationship to you—whether in the present or from your memory. Creating an artwork about a person can be a powerful way to show gratitude for the meaning they give your life.

**Materials**

- Large paper and pencil for sketching
- Newspaper strips cut approximately 1” wide
- White glue and water (a 50/50 mixture)
  (or you can buy Elmer’s Paper Paste or Plaster Craft, if you prefer)
- Flat container to hold paste
  (so that strips can be dipped into it)
- Acrylic paint (other types of paint, such as tempera, will flake off the surface)
- 3/4” – 1” masking tape
- Wire hanger (optional, for creating an armature)
- Aluminum foil (optional, for creating an armature)
- Images for inspiration
- Table cloth or other covering to protect the working surface from the glue mixture

**Definitions**

Armature – an armature is the internal “skeleton” for the form of the sculpture
Three-dimensional – having height, width and depth
Figurative Sculpture with Papier Maché

Process

Learn | Watch this YouTube video [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cagLZzy-So8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cagLZzy-So8) to see the basic process for creating with papier maché. (Some people have reactions when they come in contact with flour, so keep this in mind when choosing your materials.)

Plan | Use paper and pencil (and images for inspiration if you have selected them) to draw several sketches of a figure—a person of importance to you. Think about the pose or gesture you would like to create. What features will be most prominent? What features will you decide to leave out? Draw several sketches of the same figure from several views to use the drawings as the basis for a three-dimensional sculpture. Remember that the overall form can be one large form and the details can be painted on afterward—the form of sculpture itself does not have to include complicated or intricate parts.

Sculpt | Create the armature for the sculpture. This can be done by rolling up newspaper into cylinders or sticks or wadding the newspaper into spheres or other large forms. Larger forms can be held in place by wrapping with masking tape to keep their shapes. A hanger can be un-bent and re-bent into the desired shape for a longer and stronger armature. Cardboard or poster board can also be used as a support. You can choose one method to create the armature or combine methods. The armature can then be padded with wads of newspaper, using masking tape to hold the larger pieces in place.

Wrap | Once the overall form of the armature is finished, dip the newspaper strips in the glue and water mixture, one-by-one. Wipe off the excess glue by running the strip through two fingers over the flat container so that the excess drips into the container. Place the wet newspaper strips onto the sculpture and smooth into place. This should be repeated until there are 2-3 layers of glue strips covering the entire sculpture. Be sure any joints, or areas where two parts overlap, are well covered with the glue strips. Allow the sculpture to dry completely. This could take 1-2 days depending on the size of the sculpture.

Paint | After the sculpture is completely dry, use acrylic paint to add clothing and color to complete the sculpture. Use black paint to apply the details and outlines of the facial features, body, and clothing.

Example created during a Teacher Institute

Questions to consider

- Does your sculpture remind you of the person of importance to you?
- Did you think about them while you were creating the sculpture?
- What details did you decide to include?
- What details did you decide to leave out?
- What has this person brought to your life for which you are most grateful?