

My World of Paper and Paper Pulp Art

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Independent Artist

About myself:

I do not remember any serious effort on my part for artistic endeavours in my early life. It started very late in my life about 8-10 years back. Prior to that I was doing service in various industrial houses and finally decided to enter the field of education. Somehow this artistic desire was buried somewhere deep down and started oozing out very late in my life without any formal education and training in this. My cousin brother Atin Mitra, an artist, inspired me and gave my ideas and then I started picking up scraps from here and there and thus this journey started.

A few words about papier-mâché:

The term papier-mâché (pronounced póp-ee-ay mash-áy) comes from the French phrase meaning "chewed paper." Papier-mâché can be used to make shaped containers, vases, masks, jewellery, and lots of other crafts. Papier-mâché is made from newspapers and paste. These are easy to make, but can take several days to complete.

In France papier-mâché was used for doll heads as early as the 16th century. However, the French craftsmen were interested, only in the 17th century, to use papier-mâché in commercial applications. After 1670, the interest spread to England. This increased interest had to do with the popularity of Eastern objects: Japanese decorations and china. Still, only during mid 18th century the 'new material' was used on a large scale. Papier-mache furniture and works of art made their entry in France. Much sought after were the French snuffboxes. Papier-mache was also popular as an imitation of stuccowork and plaster ornaments.



Picture 1: *Rabindranath Tagore*, relief work by pulp on boards, 16''×10''.

The English were the most productive. They manufactured the most beautiful furniture and decorative ornaments such as consoles, wall candle holders, mirror frames and ceiling ornaments. England also imported a lot of Chinese and Japanese lacquer-work, which inspired manufacturers to produce lacquered papier-mache.

In India, from the 15th century onwards, papier-mache is made in Kashmir, first for the decoration of pen cases, lamp shades, tea kettles and cups, tea boxes, bowls, vases, filing boxes, pendants and bracelets, jewel boxes, wall decorations and ceiling panels. At present, it is mostly the Muslim community who deal with papier-mâché.

My venture with paper & papier-mâché:

My love with paper developed when I saw hand-made papers about 7-8 years back. I was fascinated by the beauty of hand-made papers and started using these papers for various types of wall-hangings. Collage and mosaic murals were made purely from these papers contained my initial works – no colours were used. Hand-made papers of different colours were used for developing various designs and drawings, which looked fascinating.

Then, I started using purchased pulp but the quality was not satisfactory. The pulp used to develop cracks also in the masks and vases with ageing. Subsequently, I started making pulp of my own – my version of paper pulp, made from variety of papers helped to create various textures. The outcome was satisfactory. Papers and paper pulp creations include masks, vases and various shaped containers. Few pictures are shown here to give readers some idea about these works. These are excellent items for interior decoration. I have also tried relief works made out of papier-mâché and the outcome is excellent.

Although made from paper, these items are long-lasting and even if you clean it with moist soft cloth, these would not get damaged or defaced. The use of fabric paint and Touch-wood adds to finish and makes the surface tougher. Oil paint or acrylic can also be used here. However, water-body should not be allowed to remain on these for long. Each item is made manually without the use of patterns or dice. Hence, uniqueness is the hallmark of my work. Naturally, the time requirement is very high.

The next area, I have experimented with, is areas of ornaments–junk jewelleryes. The light weight and attractive looks of these items have been appreciated by many. These ornaments are very light in comparison to beaded ornaments. My paper ornaments are different from conventional ones—these are made from paper beads.

Selected Artworks



Picture 2: This face of a lady is sort of mosaic mural made from square pieces of hand-made paper board. Colour has not been used here. Framed as conventional photo frame, this is about 16'' × 12'' inches in size.



Picture 3: The vase is about 10''×7''. It is made out of paper and paper-pulp. It has been given a metallic finish and Egyptian design relief work. Bigger size vases to about 24 inches have also been made. Dry flowers can be kept in it.



Picture 4: This piece is a sort of half-vase suitable for hanging in the wall. It is about 24''× 9'' inches in diameter. It is made out of paper and paper-pulp. Use of colour and relief work makes it attractive. These vases can be used to hold dry flowers.



Figure 5: The masks are also made of paper and pulp. The mask on the left is about 24''×8'' inches wide. The one on right is about 16''×7'' inches. Both have facility for hanging on wall.



Figure 6: This piece is a relief work (like *Picture 1*) by pulp on boards. It presents some deity worshipped by adivasis of Madhya Pradesh. It is about 10''x7'' inches in size.

Final comment:

Although the art of papier-mâché is very ancient, I am trying to use it in a different way developed through various experiments. These pieces are very light-weight, durable and much stronger than clay, making these excellent for home-décor. I must admit, however, that it is still in the development process.

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