

Find step by step instructions in the captions of each photo.

How to make a hand puppet from stuff you have at home

Here's how to make a fun and expressive hand puppet from stuff you might have in your house. This activity will take about 8-12 hours (depending on how detailed you want to make it), but you will need to let the mask dry overnight between some of the stages.



How to make a hand puppet from stuff you have at home by Thingumajig Theatre.

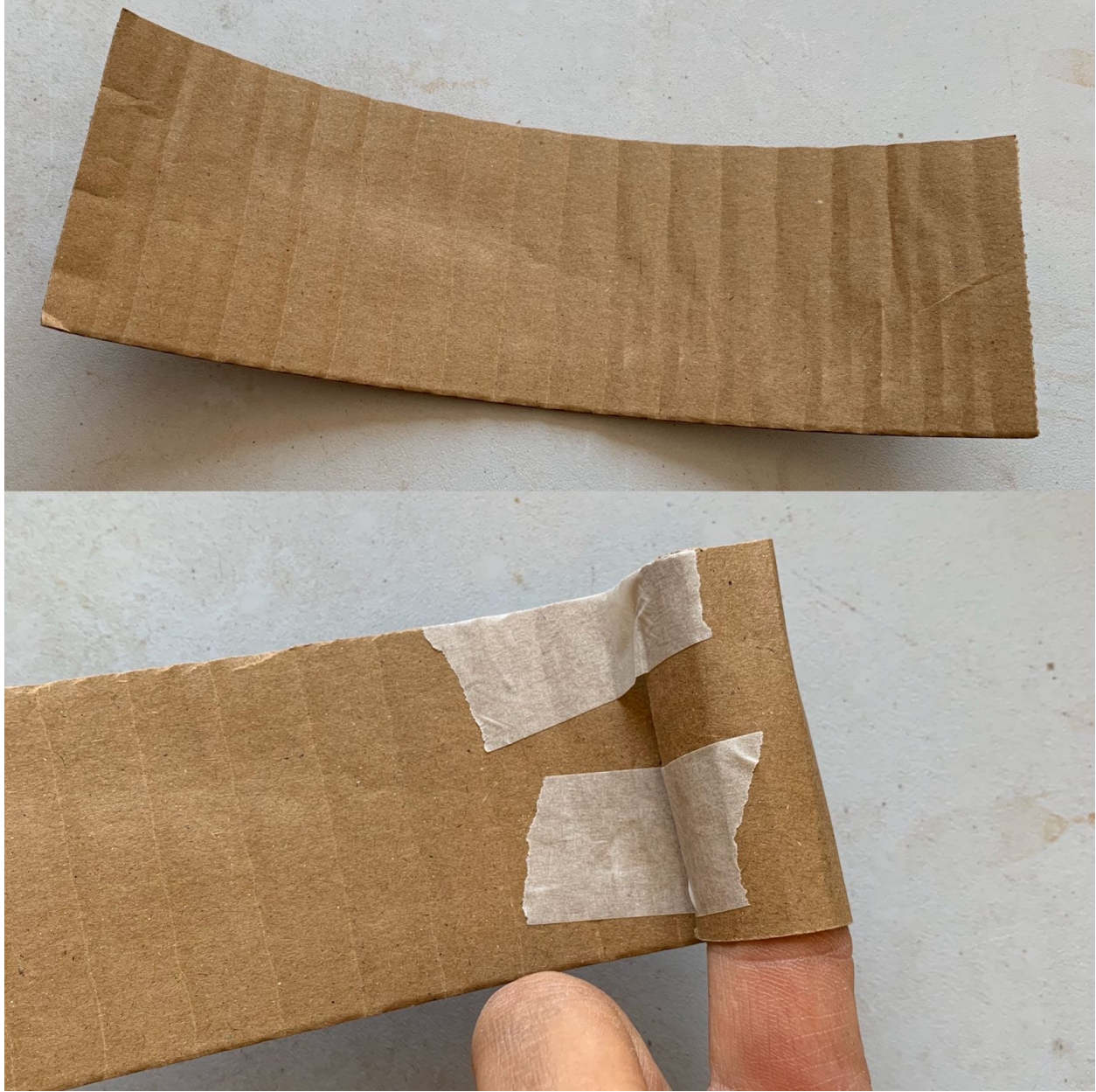


First, we make the neck of the puppet. Cut a piece of cardboard about 6cm by 22cm. Make sure the corrugation grains run up and down the short end (so it can roll into a tube easily).





Rub it over the edge of a table so that it can make a smooth tube.



Roll it in over your index finger up to the middle joint and tape it in place.





Paint PVA glue on the cardboard up to the tape and roll uptight. You can also use hot glue, wood glue, or glue stick for this.



Tape the roll. You should be able to bend your finger like this--this will give your puppet the ability to nod.





Make a holder for the head--this will make it easier to work on and let dry later. Find a stick about the thickness of your finger and find a bottle that you can place this in. The cardboard tube neck should be able to slip on and off of this easily. You can tape a cardboard piece as a stop, so the tube does not slide too far down.



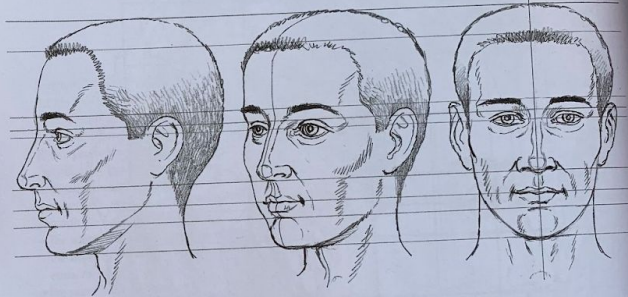
## PORTRAITS

### PRACTICE: DRAWING THE HEAD AND FEATURES

In this exercise we are going to practise drawing different views of the heads. You can either use the model shown or choose another to draw. Make sure the features line up horizontally across the three views, otherwise there will be discrepancies in their relationship. Before you begin you will find it helpful to define the form of the face by marking in the edges of the planes on the face, particularly the outlines of the eye

sockets and eyelids, the mouth and the formation of the bridge, length and tip of the nose.

This exercise can also be used to practise getting the shapes of the features right. Detailed drawings of the principal features – eyes, nose and mouth – are provided opposite. Periodically check your effort against the drawings and the accompanying annotations.



#### Profile view

- The nose projects much further than the rest of the face.
- The jaw projects no further than the forehead.
- The ear is positioned well back past the halfway mark of the profile.
- From this viewpoint the line of the mouth is quite short.
- Study the shape of the eye.

#### Three-quarter view

- The farther eye has a slightly different conformation to the nearer eye, mainly because you can see the inside corner of the near eye, so the length of the eye is more obvious.
- The mouth shape is shorter on the far side of the central line and longer on the near side of the central line.
- The same observation applies to the eyebrows.

#### Full face view

- The eyes are one eye-length apart
- The two sides of the head tend to mirror each other.
- The widest part of the head is above the ears.
- The widest part of the face is at cheekbone level.
- The ears are less obvious from this perspective.

Thinking about head shapes, I am taking some inspiration from a life drawing book and some puppets by master puppet maker [Jimmy Davies](#) of La Capra Ballerina (Italy).



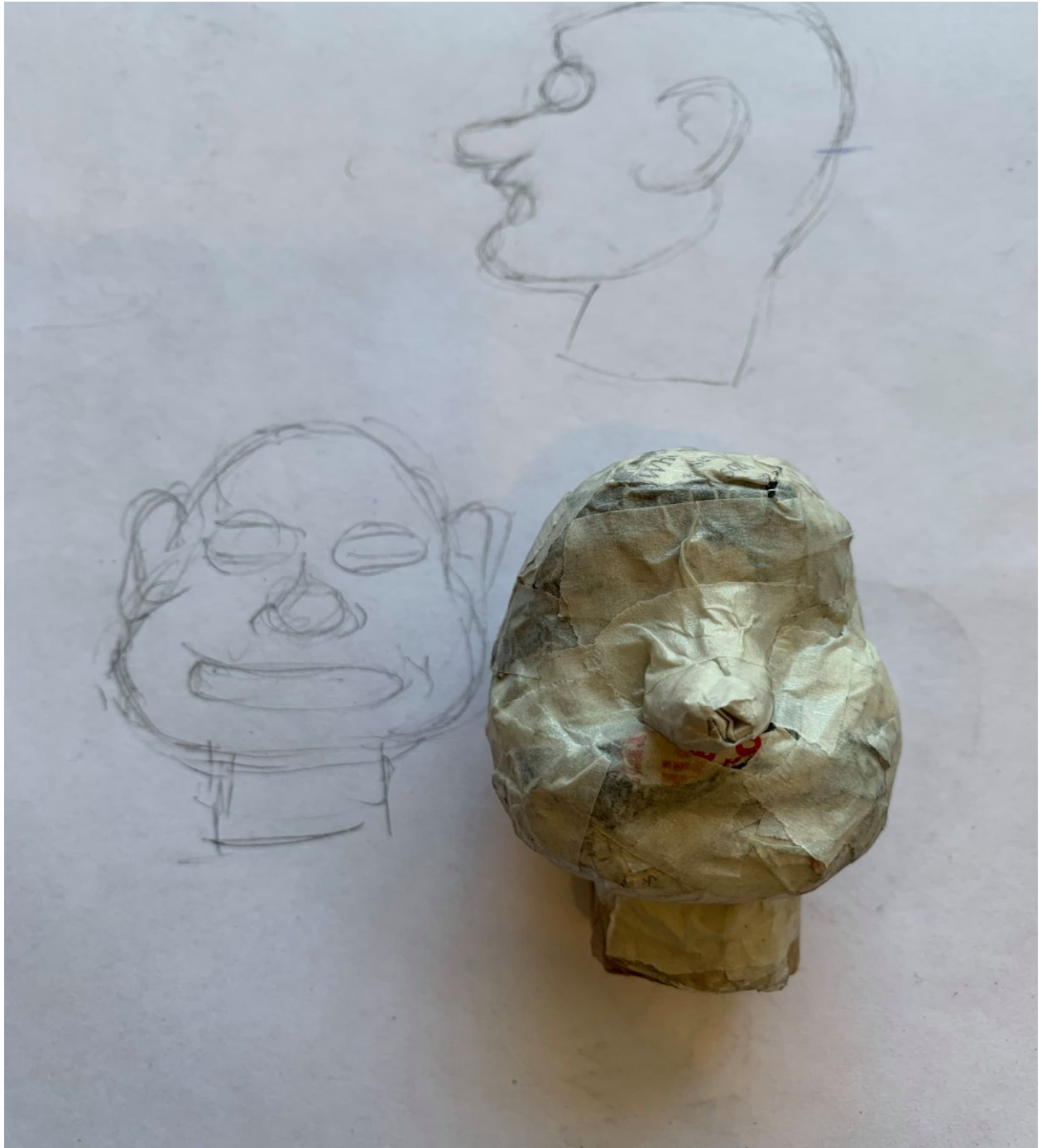


Now we build the head. Tear long strips of newspaper and crumple them. Put a piece of masking tape on one end and roll it tightly around the tube's top end. Do not use shiny tape like Sellotape (Scotch), duct tape, or packaging tape; the papier-mâché will not stick to these types of tape.



I made some quick profile and front view sketches as a guide. Once I build the head's height (remember: most of the head needs to be in front of the neck), I build the lower jaw, then the forehead, then the nose.



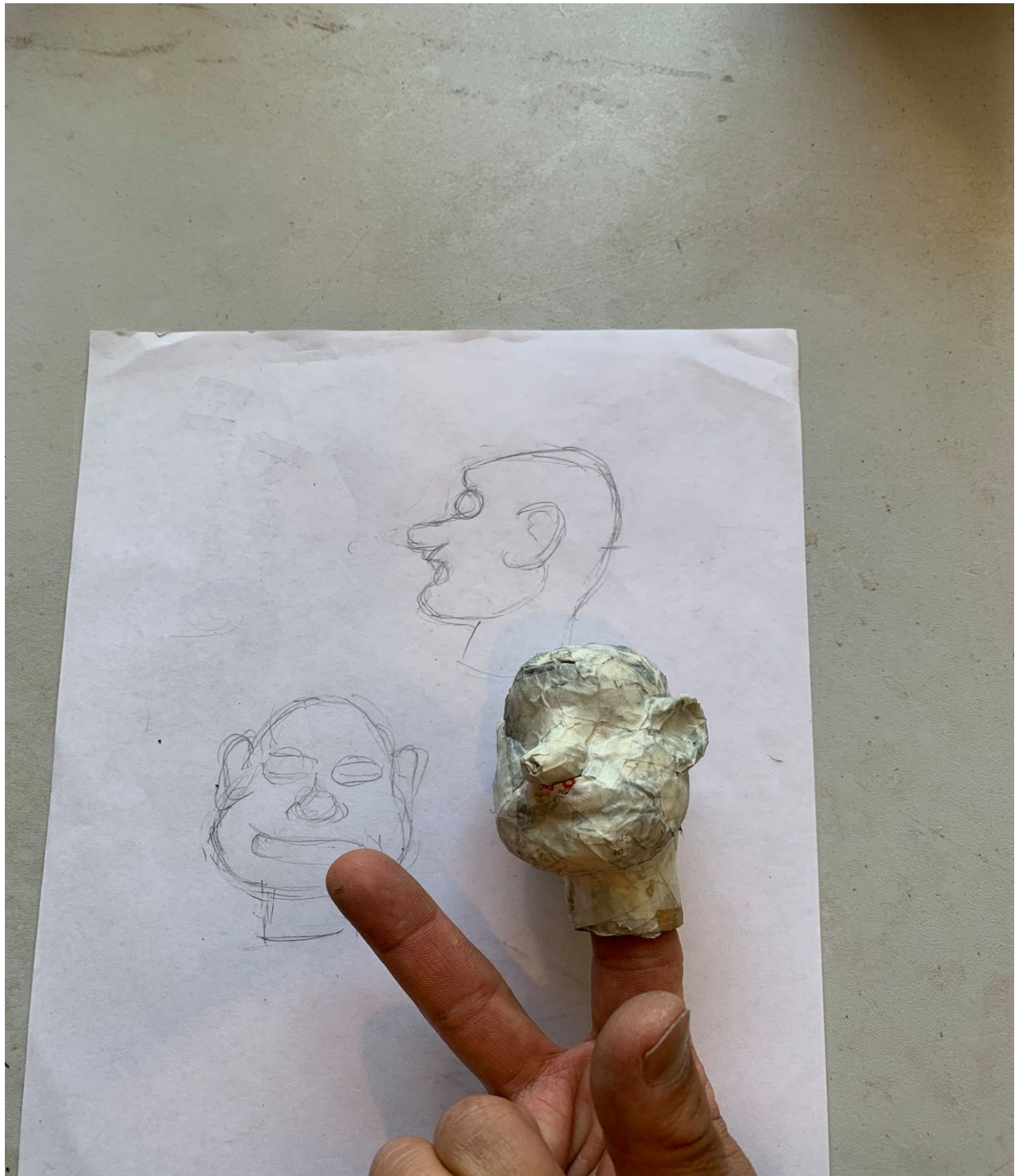


This doesn't have to be super precise as we will add more details later, but the newspaper and the tape need to be tight. Next, I build the cheeks and upper lip. Make sure the area around the eyes and sides of the nose are deep valleys.



Make some ears.





It's starting to get a character already!



On to the papier-mache paste. You can use wallpaper paste (in the UK, we use LAP, in the USA, we use Golden Harvest). Or you can use cornflour (corn starch in the the USA).

Mix  $\frac{1}{8}$  cup of cornflour with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of cold water--use your hands to break this up. Boil 1 and a  $\frac{1}{4}$  cups of water.





When the water is boiling rapidly, slowly add the cornflour mixture and whisk vigorously. The temperature is critical here, so you must add the cold mixture SLOWLY. If it stops boiling, don't add any more mixture until the temperature rises again to a rolling boil. Soon you should start to see it thicken to a gluey texture. This glue is ready to use as soon as it is cool enough to touch. You can use it for about a week. Don't cover it up overnight. If it gets thick, just add a tiny bit more warm water and mix.



Tear up a sheet of toilet paper (yes, I know how precious it is right now, but honestly, you'll only need a few sheets!).





Work a little papier mache paste into a small piece, and it will start to pulp. Add this to the head and smooth it out. This will start to smooth over any uneven areas.



Use a pokey thing like a chopstick or a pencil to help you smooth in the narrow areas.





After you smooth the whole head, use the toilet paper to build up detailed areas such as the eyes, eyebrows, and nostrils. I'm using a clamp here to hold the head, but you can also use the bottle as mentioned above.



I also added some teeth, cheeks, made the nose a bit more pointy, and added the ear's inner parts. Use your stick to make sure everything is as smooth as possible.





Next, tear some newspaper and rub the papier-mâché paste into it. Tear small pieces of paper and cover the head. I find using narrow pieces works best. Use the stick to make sure all the peaks and valleys are well defined.



The Newspaper layer is done!



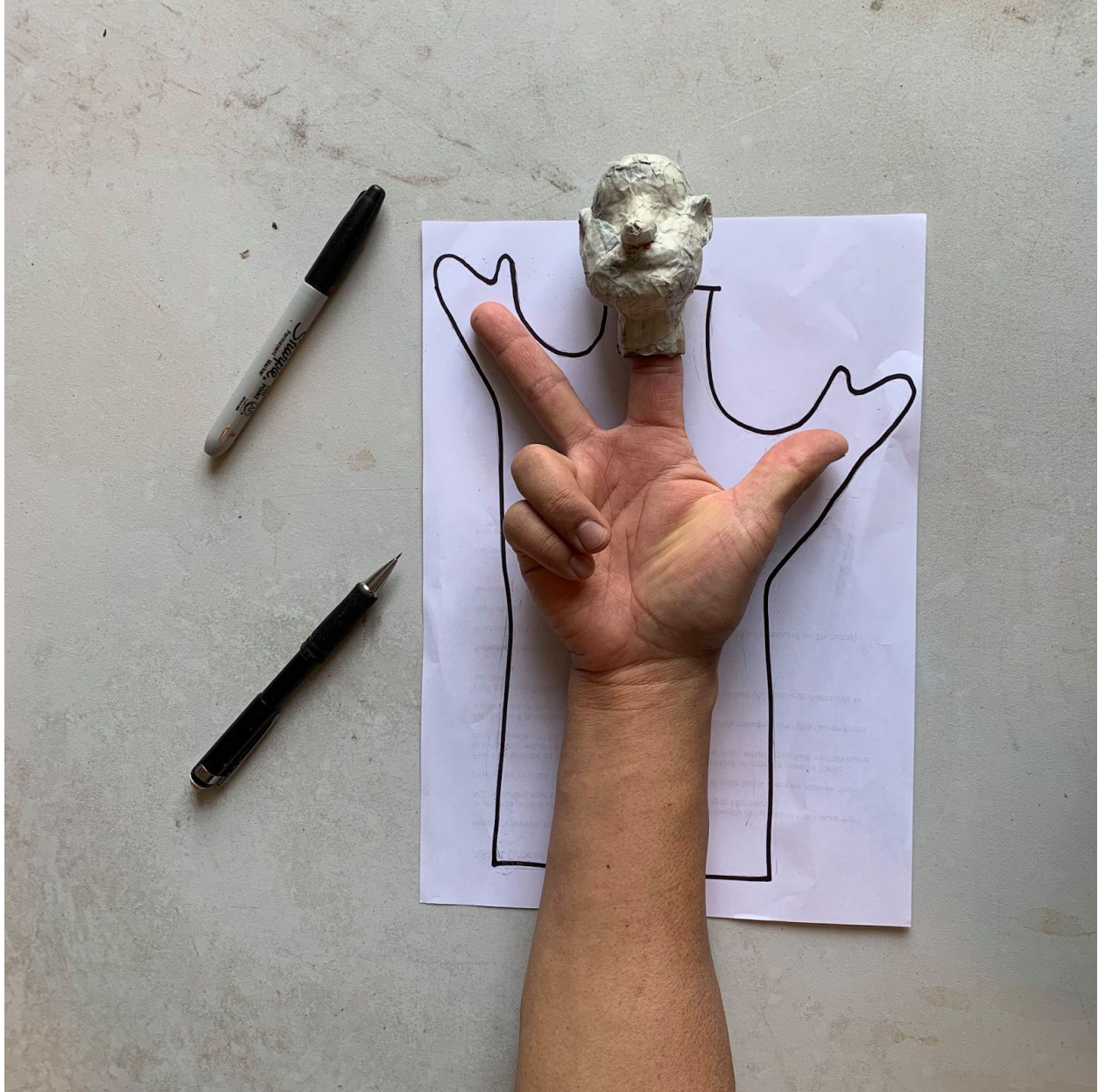


Now do a second layer with another type of paper. I am using a thin brown craft paper. You can use almost any paper but don't use glossy magazines or office printer paper. If the paper is very thick, make sure you crumple the paper well, so the paper is soft, and the glue is worked into the fibers of the paper. If you don't have another type of paper, you can use a newspaper again; just be careful you remember which has one layer and which one has two.



The second layer is complete. Leave the head to dry on a sunny windowsill or in a warm room. This will probably take a day to dry.





While the head is drying, you can start on the body. Trace your hand as if you are performing the puppet leaving plenty of room to account for your hand's width. (There are several different types of ways to perform a hand puppet--thumb and pinky finger for arms, thumb and three smaller fingers for arms, two fingers in the head hole) but I find this arrangement to be easier.





Find some fabric which can also be the base color of your puppet. This was an old shirt. Trace the pattern out and leave a little margin for the seam allowance. Pins are useful if you have them. Make two of these.





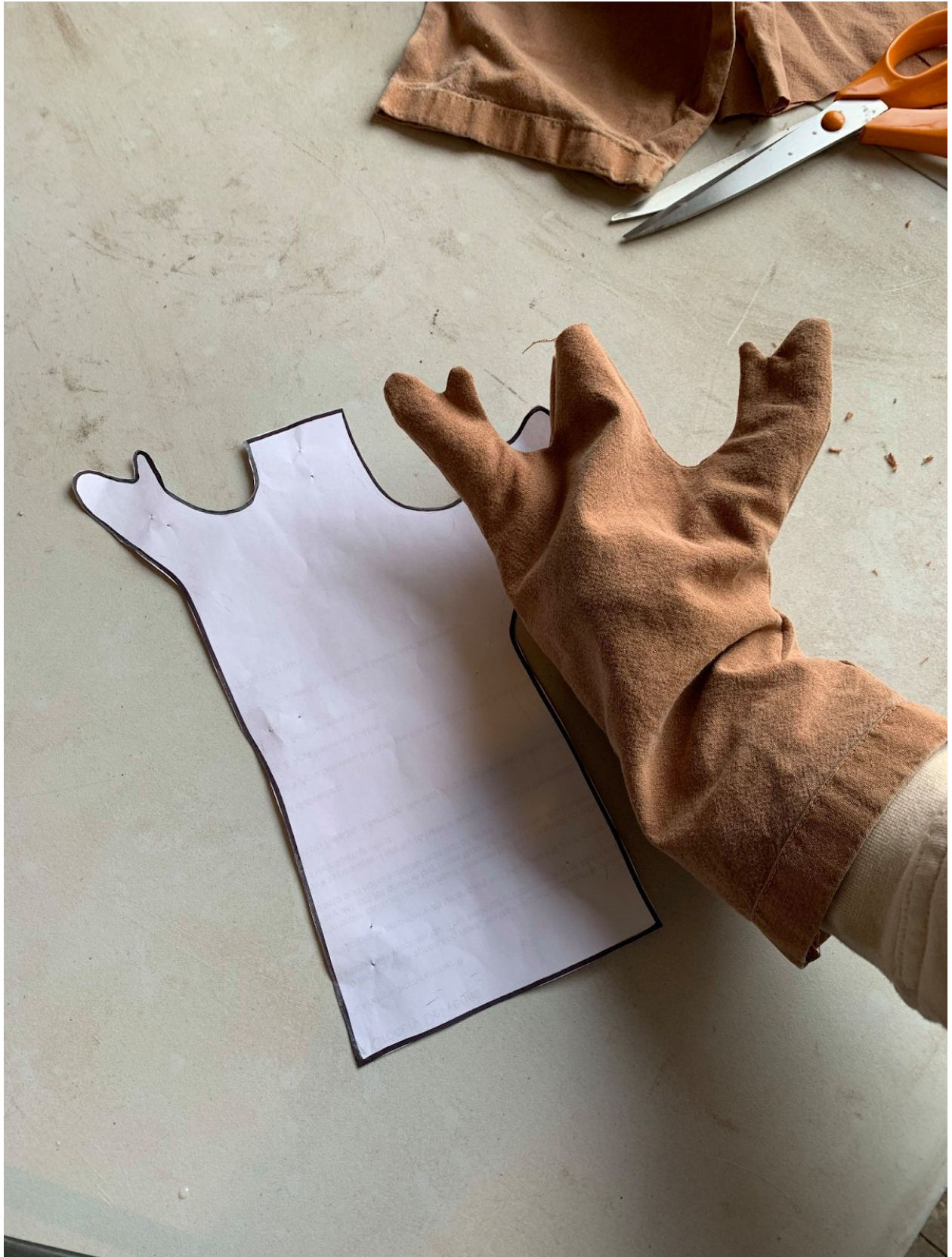
Sew them together leaving a gap at the base and the top (where the head will attach). If you don't have needle and thread, you can use hot glue or a desk stapler but it won't be as neat as needle and thread.





Carefully cut to the seam around the thumb and a few cuts around the top of the hand. Put the body inside out. The chopstick or any stick will be useful to get the hands all the way out.





Our body!



After about half a day, while the head is still damp, take the back of a spoon and gently smooth out any bit of the head, which is bumpier than you want.





Optional: When the head is completely dry, you can sand unwanted ridges with a fine grain sandpaper.



Optional: Make a hat. After I made the head, I thought he looked a bit like a dodgy car salesman, so I thought he should have a suit and hat. I cut a ring



of cardboard and a circle of cardboard for the top. I pushed it around and cut darts into it until I got the right shape. This took a few tries.



Tape the hat together and tape it directly on to the head.



Use the toilet paper pulp again to smooth out the hat.





Papier-mache one layer of paper directly onto the head. Let this dry.







No paint coloring, close up. Papier-mâché color newsprint, let dry, accent with a Sharpie, and a little crayon to blend colors.



If you do have paint, first put a layer of white paint on and let this dry. This will make the colors more vibrant.





When dry, with a pencil, draw where the eyes will be and anything else that needs to stay white such as the teeth.



Mix a skin tone. I usually use white, yellow, red, and burnt sienna (brown). Make sure you start with the light and slowly add the darker colors as it takes a tiny bit to darken the color but a lot of paint to make it lighter. Paint an even layer on the face avoiding the eyes and anything else, which will be a different color.





Now add a bit of brown to the base color and blend this into the valleys of the sculpture. Make sure you keep some of the flesh tones as you may need to bring a part of this back if you go too far in the shading.



The first layer of shading is done.





A second layer of shading using a darker brown (burnt umber) could have also used a purple or earthy green, depending on the feel of the character.



Tiny bits of black in the details of the eyes, the nostrils, the mouth, and ears. **IMPORTANT:** Make sure the eyes are looking in the same place and are able to focus on you.



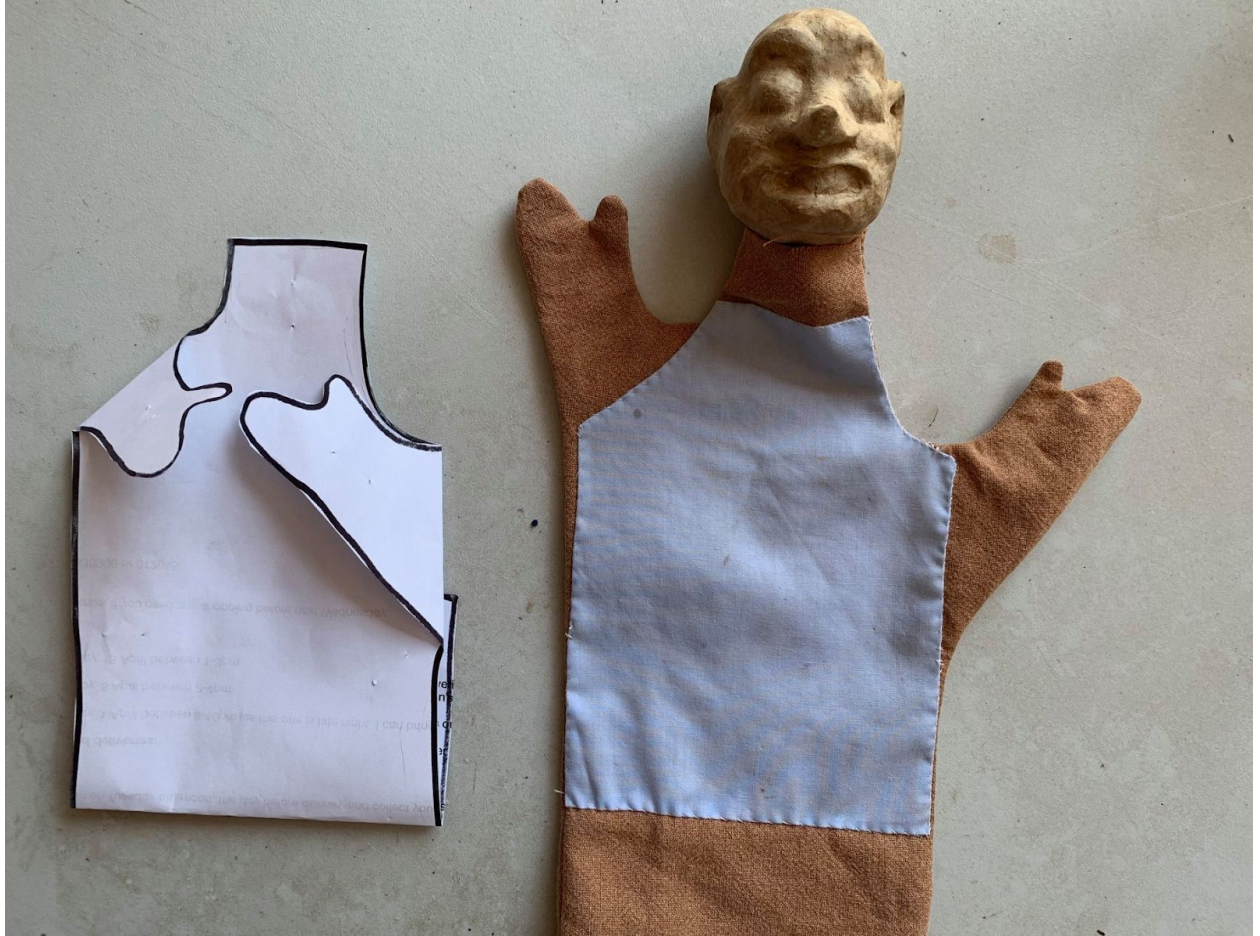


I then added some yellow for highlights, a little red in the cheeks, nose, and lips, and blue and green in the eyes.



I painted the hat grey with black shading and white highlights and brown and black for the hair. I put a tiny white dots in the eye to make them appear shiny.





Kathy took a bit of a man's shirt to make his shirt front.





The trousers and coat are from some jazzy boxers (clean really!).





Then she cut a bit of the stiff interfacing from the shirt for the collar and sewed this on.





Kathy then made a jacket from the same boxers and a tie from an African print. (She might have gone slightly overboard with the details for the purposes of a demonstration, but hey, I didn't need to make a hat, either--time is elastic during a pandemic lockdown.) The costume is then hot glued onto the neck. If you don't have hot glue, you can paint a line of PVA/white glue and tie the costume tight to the neck with a string or rubber band until the glue is completely dry.





And here he is ready to paint the town red (or sell you a used car).

If you find these instructions useful, why not thank us by buying us a virtual coffee (or 3) here: <https://www.buymeacoffee.com/ThingumaTheatre>

Be safe, be well, and stay creative!