

Carving a basic head by Alan Ball

This article is based on my part of a seminar Marion and I did, since doing the seminar, we have had people asking for the pictures and something that they can read.

People seem to be always telling me that they are happy to convert figures, or even scratch build them, but are never happy doing faces.

Now, like everything else, there are different ways of approaching the making of a face, and none of them are better than any other. It's the result that matters...does it look like a face!

Anyway, I was asked some months ago to do a new head for a 90mm figure that someone had bought, he just wanted a straight neutral face, with no complicated expressions and I went about making it for him.

Something very rare for me also happened.... I thought about it, and remembered to take "in progress" pictures (not good ones, I admit, but at least I remembered to take some), and that is what are used here to illustrate my basic approach to a head.

Basically, I like to keep things as simple as possible and take things one step at a time. I always find it helps to spend plenty of time in preparation, in the case of making a head; I spend most time making sure that the basic shape is smooth and symmetrical.

So, starting off with a lump of well mixed Magicsculpt I form the basic shape of the head...With a long tail attached (this is used to hold the piece while I carve the face).

Once this is well set, I begin to smooth it all off, and spend quite a bit of time forming what I would describe as the "Spiderman mask stage". This is important, as if this basic shape is off, the whole head starts to go wrong when cutting the basic forms into it.



The basic forms I am talking about are simply inverted "L" shapes to start with (when the head is seen from the side).

The first cut out starts from just above the half-way point on the head, and will help form the brow ridge and the fall of the nose.

In drawing, the eyes are said to be in the middle of the head's form, but in this case I will be adding hair on top of the shape, so just above the half-way point works well.

It is important to go deep enough with this cut, so that I can carve back the brow later on and still have a nose that protrudes from the face.



The second cut out is about half way between the top of the first cut and the chin, this will help forming the bottom of the nose, and the upper lip.



Now looking at the "face" from the front. I cut out wedges from what will be the widest part of the nose to the sides...this is the start of the cheekbone area. At this point I start to check that things are still symmetrical, and do that by looking at the head from different angles ...looking from "Above" always help to show if things are going astray.



When I am happy with everything, I then carve back the forehead, and the face really starts to take shape



At this stage, I start to round off some of the angles left from the cuts so far, and I also start to work on the nose to give it some sort of shape. I will also cut the angle off the bottom corners of the nose, which will then form the bottom of the Nostrils.



Now, about half way between the bottom of the nostrils and the point of the chin I take a smaller cut out, and wipe it over with sandpaper to give a smooth transition...this will become the underside of the bottom lip. The mouth itself is scribed with the tip of my scalpel as a line just above this.



Leaving the mouth for a moment, I concentrate on some of the other lines in the face , these I cut using very small and controlled movements of the scalpel, each cut taking off very little material every time until I am happy that I have gone far enough .Working that way I add lines from the inside corner of the eye sockets to wards the jaw, and from just above the nostril towards the corners of the mouth.



Now everything is given a wipe over with wire wool to clean off some of the residue and dust, it also smoothes out some of the cut lines, and allows me to evaluate where I am, and what needs more work. So, When I am happy , I go back and do some more work on the forehead, cutting in some lines, and defining the shape and roll as the brow curls over the eye socket....all with very small movements of the knife again so I don't take off too much material and have to end up adding Magicsculpt back on.



I work a bit more on the corners of the mouth, making sure that the bottom lip rolls in under the top lip, and giving more definition to the upper lip.

I also work the area under the cheek bones, to give a better definition to the Jaw.

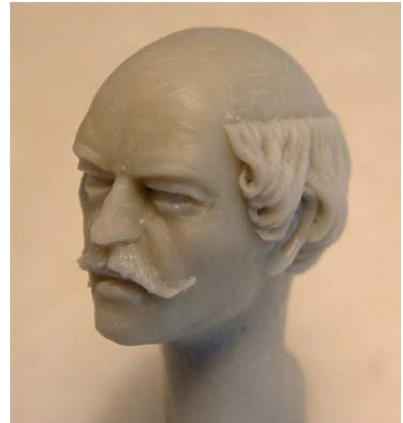
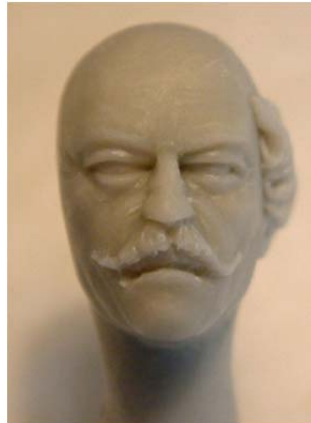
I must keep stressing that in all these little areas, it is very easy to go overboard and take off too much material this is why it is important to take it very easily and control the knife as much as possible



At this stage the head is pretty well done, and all that is left is to add eyes, ears and hair. I add the eyes and shape the Magicsculpt when it is wet...the hardest thing is to make sure that the eyes match...as I am right handed, I find it easier to do the left eye, and usually add that first. The left eye is always harder work for me, as when I am trying to get the shape of the eye, the figures nose tends to get in the way. Anyway, on this head, I also added the moustache at this point.



As I mentioned, I like to keep things simple, so I add the hair and the ears at the same time. I only work on one half of the head when doing this, so I don't have to worry about fingerprints etc appearing in what I have spent time doing. I put a blob of Magicsculpt on one side of the head and work it with a pointed tool (or toothpick) until I have the shape of the hair and the ear in place.



It's an interesting side point here, but one of the main keys to getting a period look to any figure is the correct hairstyle...even if you are working on a personality figure, the nose, eyes cheekbones etc, are of course important, and would be nice to get right, but sometimes a face just won't come...in the end, they don't need to be exactly right, if you can get the hairstyle correct people won't notice all the little bits of the face that you had problems with.

Once all that has set hard, I then work on the second side of the head...and to finish it off, add the neckpiece.



All that was left to do on this particular head was add the Mitre that the guy was to be wearing. That was built up bit by bit on the head and finally finished a day or so later.

When all was complete, I gave the whole thing a wipe with very fine Wire wool, and washed it with warm water and toothpaste (to give it a final polish). It was then sent off to the modeller who had asked for it. Okay, this was a simple head, with no difficult facial expressions to complicate matters, a good book will show plenty of facial expressions, and it just takes a little more time to incorporate them into this basic way of working. I like working this way and like to explain it because you can take whatever parts of it you would like to try and apply it your own working method. At the very least, it means for 90% of the time, you have no worries about handling the piece, as there is no chance of you smudging the work you have spent a couple of hours doing with fingers.