

NO TACKY ASHTRAYS

Papier mâché for kids. Sheila McGraw. Illus. author. Firefly Books, 1991. 71 pp., \$9.95 paper. ISBN 0-920668-93-3.

Not since the '70s has papier mâché been so popular; nevertheless, few books have been written about the subject since, so the bulk of what is available in libraries is dated and often mediocre, perpetuating papier mâché as a dumpy, lumpy unattractive craft. Turn the cover of Sheila McGraw's book, *Papier mâché for kids*, however, and you encounter lively, bright, colourful and humorous things to make. You won't find any tacky ashtrays or uninspired knick-knack boxes in this instructional book. In fact, what self-respecting kid would want to make such things when they could create the imaginative pieces her book offers, such as pigs with wings, fat cats, crazy birds and fearsome monsters.

What sets this book apart from others is its emphasis on making sculptures, not purely functional objects. Kids can sculpt any of her eight projects quite easily and have for themselves, decorative, highly-personalized items to enjoy. Most impressive is the freedom in the shapes of the sculptures: most have no real-live model to refer to, they are all fantasy creatures, huge spiders, squat monsters and some not so fantastical creatures—fat cats—but no anatomical adherence is emphasized. They are all exaggerated and larger-than-life so there is much room for children to be expressive and create what they wish. McGraw's ecological awareness is another distinguishing feature of this book. Unlike other books on the subject which advocate chicken-wire or other hardware for papier mâché forms, she recommends the re-use of plastic grocery bags scrunched into forms along with taped-up balls of newspaper for the foundation of her sculpture. This is a much simpler approach which communicates to children responsible attitudes about the re-use and recycling of household items.

This book is filled with large colourful photographs of the eight sculpture projects and each project section contains smaller photographs showing the sculpture at each stage of development. These photos accompany the instructions, which are in large print and written simply as is all the text in the book.

At the introduction of each separate project, McGraw thoughtfully includes a section which restates steps to follow in the crafting of a sculpture. Inside the margins of this "Basics Box" are the paste recipe, its application, clean-up hints, etc., so the child does not have to constantly refer to the first chapter for this information.

This is a great book to introduce bored kids to on a rainy day or any day because it is a lot of fun and involving. It may also help to nurture an interest in the arts.

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