

## **Mask Reflection**

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My mask deviated from the original art directive's instructions to use plaster bandages and sculpt the masks on our faces. Due to my *sensory* concerns of acne and claustrophobia, I opted not to slather my sensitive skin in thick and oily vaseline and build a hard plaster shell over of my face. Instead, I utilized foam core as a base material to design my own lightweight mask.

To begin, I *cognitively* grabbed some dot paper and plotted out my design within a scalable grid. The design came from an old doodle that I had *perceptually* drawn in the margins of my notepad while taking notes for class. Going through my notes, the doodle caught my eye and felt like the right shape to adapt into a functional 3D mask. It was an irregular polygon that had many intersecting triangular and square perspectival planes. In a *symbolic* sense, I felt that this polygon represented my complex identity as a queer Jewish woman. Similar to my box art directive at the beginning of the semester, my doodle's dynamic geometry couldn't be neatly categorized into a standardized format, such as a cube or oval. Instead, it transcended my own facial anatomy, breaking down established boundaries with its multiple intersecting perspectives.

This semester, I have been going through a depressive episode due to stepping away from my new job and local synagogue, which has evoked feelings of disappointment, loss, and grief. Being an overworked and undervalued receptionist, as well as dealing with homophobic and classist micro-aggressions and apathy from the synagogue have reinjured my trust in community and adversely affected my mental health. Currently, my sense of belonging is fragile and I am working hard to maintain an internal sense of self-worth. In order to locate my displaced self, I need to retrace my steps, reaffirm my fundamental values as a human being, and reestablish an

authentic connection with HaShem. Making a mask couldn't have come at a better time, because I genuinely needed this art directive to reconstruct my identity and heal myself.

Once I plotted my doodle out on the dot paper, I scaled it up by redrawing the grid and mask design in accordance with my own facial proportions on poster board. After my mask design had been redrawn, I decided to paint three layers of primary colors (yellow, red, and blue) using watercolor to fill in the grid with a rainbow mosaic pattern. Starting with a base of discontinuous yellow squares, I overlapped rhythmic punctuations of red to create orange squares and then added blue on top of the remaining yellow and red squares to create green and purple squares. Satisfied with this result, I used a metal ruler and X-Acto knife to cut the mask shape out of the poster board. I also cut out some of the polygon's internal triangular and quadrilateral shapes so that I would have eye holes to see through. To aesthetically balance out the eye holes, I cut out additional internal shapes and then decided I would use red mylar to create transparent plastic windows that would unify the negative space and complete the mask design.

To stiffen up the poster board, I decided to grab some lightweight foam core, trace the mask shape onto it, cut the tracing out using a metal ruler and box cutter, seal the foam core base with black gesso, loop braided tying strings through the foam core, and mount the poster board mask shape onto it using polymer and soft gel acrylic mediums as adhesives. In order to properly adhere the poster board onto the black foam core base, I used wax-resist paper to protect the mask and placed a hefty stack of my textbooks on top of it overnight. By morning, my mask was assembled and ready for its final layers of acrylic!

After sealing the mask with a clear isolation coat of thinned gel medium, I allowed it to dry and cure before using painter's tape to mask off the internal shapes I wanted to glaze with dark red acrylic paint. Once I burnished the painter's tape down and added an additional isolation coat, I applied two layers of the dark red transparent glaze and let it dry and cure again overnight. For the final touches, I busted out my airbrush and loaded it up with a special mixture of airbrush medium and my own hand-mixed colors of acrylic paint. For the first layer, I sprayed my personal sky blue color over the red glazes. Then, I finished it off with my highlighter yellow color, which simultaneously neutralized the red glaze and brightened the sky blue with touches of neon green. After all the fresh coats of paint dried, I removed all the painter's tape and felt satisfied seeing the crisp new glazes interact with the rainbow mosaic underpainting. To complete my mask, I took all of the red mylar shapes that I had cut during our last class and adhered them to the back of the black foam core base with artist's tape.

The moment of truth came when I pulled my mask over my face and tied the braided strings around the back of my head. When I looked in the mirror, I had an *affective* experience seeing myself wearing my inner identity as an externalized art object. I stared at my own eyes through the red mylar film and felt a sense of raw anger that transformed into empowerment and determination. Ultimately, I realized that I wasn't willing to compromise my values in order to fit into flawed manmade institutions. My spiritual core is and has always been creating art, sharing meaningful experiences with my friends, and spending quality time out in nature. This is how I heal and sustain myself and is the basis for which I will become a healer and help others. Designing my own mask felt like reclaiming myself and moving forward in the true spirit of all that I am.

Because my mask-making process was so idiosyncratic, I wasn't thinking about a client's limitations or experience. In hindsight, I realize that much of my process was based on my professional fine art training and would not be accessible to the average client. However, I have also considered how I might adapt my mask process to the needs of all my clients. First, instead of rigid foam core, I would simplify my lightweight materials to be thinner and more flexible, such as foam sheets for crafting or poster board. Then, I would have the client draw the shape of their mask onto the material in accordance with their facial proportions. Templates could be provided if the client has a hard time conceptualizing the shape of their mask.

Once the initial shape is drawn or chosen, they could use scissors to safely cut it out. I could also help them cut it out, if necessary. Next, I would offer a range of decorating materials, including dry and wet media such as markers, colored pencils, watercolors, or acrylic paints so they have the option of adding colorful designs to their mask. Other materials such as googly eyes, pompoms, glitter glue, puff paints, beads, or feathers could also be chosen and adhered using a hot glue gun. If the client were afraid of the hot glue gun or unable to use it, they could direct me to help them glue down components however they wish. Lastly, because the foam sheet and poster board materials are thinner, little holes could be easily punched on the sides to add strings to secure the mask around the client's head. If the client didn't like the idea of wearing the mask, they may also choose to adhere a popsicle stick to the bottom and hold it up in front of their face.