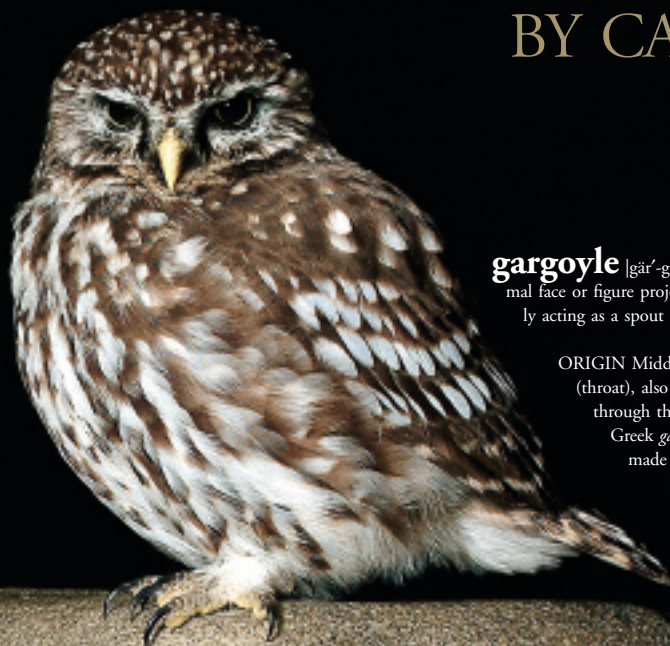


# Competition Base Work with a Difference

BY CARL CHURCH



**gargoyle** [gär'-goil] NOUN: a grotesque carved human or animal face or figure projecting from the gutter of a building, typically acting as a spout to carry water clear of a wall.

ORIGIN Middle English: from Old French *gargouille* (throat), also *gargoyle* (because of the water passing through the throat and mouth of the figure); related to Greek *gargarizein* (to gargle) imitating the sounds made in the throat.

**C**OMPETING AT THE 2003 World Shows® opened my eyes to competitive taxidermy, then being presented with Best of Category Bird gave me the ambition to attend in 2005, bringing with me the experience I had learned in 2003.

One thing that stood out at the 2003 show was the specimen room was laid out with rows of tables and tall display stands. This became the seed for my ideas for my 2005 mounts. I have been to British, European, and World Shows and have seen the same thing: taxidermists not using different levels to show their work to its best. Looking over the specimen room, you often see people bent over looking at the mounts, not just looking at the details, but to get down to the same level. So on this thought I wanted two different mounts, one at a comfortable eye level and one above head height. Using gargoyles was the perfect concept for bases to try out my ideas. ►

At the 2005 World Taxidermy Championships®, this little owl by Carl Church won Best of Category Bird in the Professional Division. He went on to win \$3,000 for winning first place in the Competitors Award (Professional) with this owl, a carrion crow (below) and two jackdaws.

The wall-mounted piece was placed about 6'6" high at the show, with the bird placed on the edge of the corner, looking down over the edge, giving the maximum impression of height to the observer below.

The table-mount had to be tall enough to bring the bird to a comfortable eye level without creating any dead space below. If a bird was to sit at table level on the same mount, this would have to be looking up so all eyes were on the observer.

Why did I use the gargoyle concept? It would give me an opportunity to improve my sculpting, moulding, and stone effects to cast and produce an eye-catching and appealing base to my mounts. Also, this kind of ground work is uncomplicated and robust enough to make the trip to the USA in one piece, which is a concern to any one travelling so far to compete in a show.

After looking at reference photos of different gargoyles I came up with the two designs, the first being the cornerstone wall mount. The aggressive expression of a small screaming griffin, again looking down, worked well with the owl as it sat above, looking relaxed.

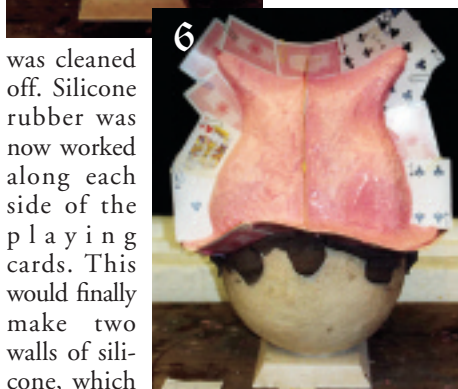
**TABLE MOUNT.** The table mount incorporated a face on a ball on a plinth. The face needed a devious, mischievous look, again to blend in with the carrion crow. Each look of these gargoyles had to match the behavior, image, and even the personality of these birds.



**1.** A basic frame was put together, and the size was checked to match the composition of the bird as the work went on.

**2.** I used a modeling wax to sculpt the face and arms. Using this medium I had lots of time to work and make changes without any time scale. The ball was a basketball covered with a paper pulp modeling compound called compo.

**3.** After shimming around the head with playing cards, a thin layer of silicone rubber was poured over, then lightly blown over with compressed air to expel any air bubbles trapped and to push the silicone rubber into the details of head.



was cleaned off. Silicone rubber was now worked along each side of the playing cards. This would finally make two walls of silicone, which after the playing cards were removed would make supporting walls for the incision.

**7.** Using fiberglass, a backing jacket was quickly made. This photo shows the detail at the back of the head, the backing jacket, the two walls of silicone, and the playing cards acting as a shim.

**4.** Thixotropic was added to the silicone rubber and a thick covering was worked over the head. This took several coverings to get the thickness I wanted. After applying the final coat of silicone rubber I dusted it with talcum powder, which enabled me to smooth the silicone rubber by hand. Only do this on the final coat as the talcum powder will act like a release agent.

**5.** Once completely set, the head was shimmed again with playing cards preparing for the back incision and the backing jacket.

**6.** The head was shimmed down its back and the talcum powder



**8.** Once cleaned up, the backing jacket was drilled and bolted together before the jacket was removed. With the jacket removed, the playing cards could be removed, and now the two silicone walls were parted as an incision was made down the centre of the back and a small way up towards the ears. This method would make a very clean incision, and the silicone walls (with the help of the backing jacket) will create a flash line hardly visible on the finished cast.

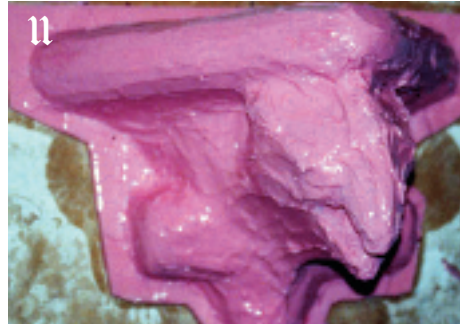
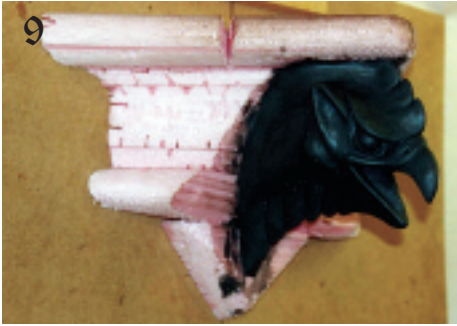
**9-10-11-12-13-14.** These next 6 photos show the same process on the wall mounted gargoyle as on the table mount. The only difference was there was no shimming needed as this was a one-piece mould.

## CASTING

The gargoyles were cast in polyester fiberglass resin. I developed the recipe myself and my methods are not as shown in other textbooks, so please read and understand the properties of the resin you are accustomed to. Always use protective clothing and eye protection when using resins.

- COMPO (Composition Ornament)
- 3.5 ounces pearl glue. (Pearl glue is a high quality animal glue in a pearl form. It is

## MOLDING AND CASTING



used for veneering, wood joinery, and antique furniture restoration.

- 7 ounces paper pulp
- 6.5 pounds whiting (calcium carbonate, which does not harden)
- 6.5 pounds plaster

Put 3.5 ounces of pearl glue into a plastic bag, add cold water, tie the bag up, and leave it overnight. The next day, put the pearl glue into a jug and make up to 4.2 pints with hot water. Mix well and pour over the 7 ounces of paper pulp, then add the whiting and plaster and mix well. You will have around about 40 minutes working time. Covering with a wet cloth will extend your working time as long as you need. Great stuff—give it a go.

### STONE EFFECT RECIPE

- 5 pounds polyester resin (standard lay-up resin)
- 1 pound Fillite® (Very sandy alumino-silicate microspheres, common in the resin casting industry)
- 1 pound coarse grit (This is the grit used in grit blasting; I used a very coarse grit. This will give a good texture to the cast.)
- 4 ounces Aerosil® (This is a very fine filler used in the making of polyester resin. Use a face mask whenever using this product. It's white and has very little weight at all.)
- 5 level teaspoons of yellow ochre concrete pigment (As the name suggests, this is a powder pigment used in the building industry. It's cheap, very strong, and will colour about everything.)

Mix the above in a suitable container. The mixture should have the consistency of margarine. If not, add small amounts of resin to dilute or small amounts of Aerosil to thicken.

I now removed 2 to 3 pounds of this mixture and added the catalyst, using 10 milliliters to every 2 pounds of mixture. This gave me



around 40 minutes of working time. A 3/4-inch coating was worked around the inside of my moulds, pushing it into the details of the mould. I smoothed the surface as the resin started to cure. Once fully cured, the mould was layered up with 2-ounce fiberglass matting.

15. Here are all my cast gargoyles, the wall mount on the left and the table mount in the three pieces I had to cast it. These were now cleaned and parts of the three-part table mount were joined together with a thick mixture of the stone effect resin. ►

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# MOLDING AND CASTING

## FINISHING

**16.** Now with all the rough edges ground of the gargoyles I started the finishing by lightly grit blasting. I used a small handheld gun, which are commonly used in DIY car repairs.



**17-18.** The light blasting results in the top layer of resin being removed, leaving a dry rough finish. This gave a too-clean stone look so an aging look was needed. I used a black finishing wax used in the picture framing industry. This is very strong so I only used small amount. A light covering was worked all over the two gargoyles using wire wool, working slightly more around areas of detail and to highlight around the eyes and other dominant areas. This soon dried, so once again I lightly grit-blasted and repeated this process until I was happy.

**19.** This method worked well in producing the two aged gargoyles. It was not the quickest method but the results speak for themselves. ■

*In the photos below, CARL CHURCH is only seconds away from bearing the announcement that he has won \$3,000 for First Place Competitors' Award (Professional) at the 2005 World Taxidermy Championships®. He is a specialist bird taxidermist based in West Yorkshire in the north of England. Carl can be contacted at [www.birdtaxidermy.co.uk](http://www.birdtaxidermy.co.uk).*

19



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