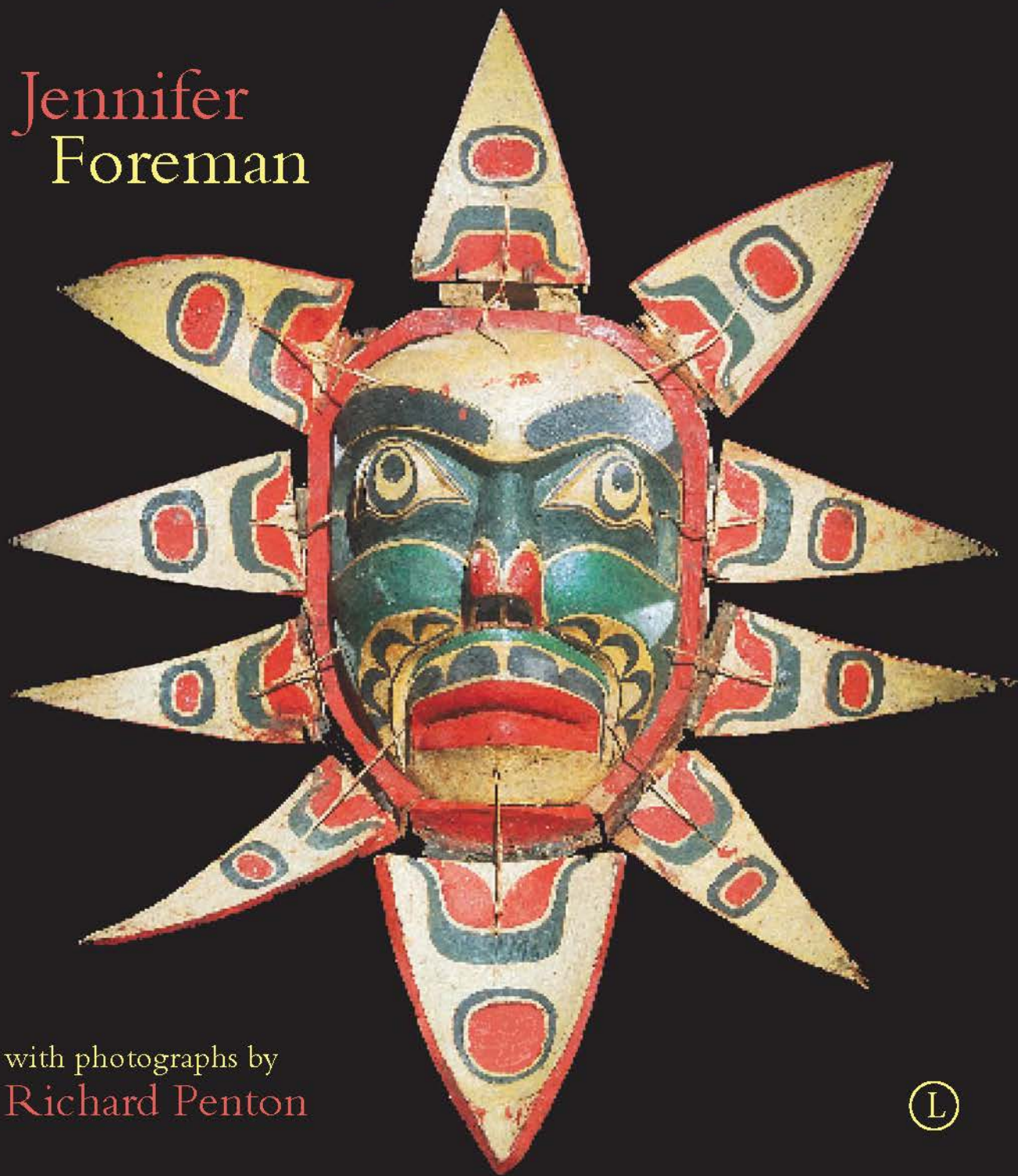


# MASKWORK

THE BACKGROUND, MAKING AND USE OF MASKS

Jennifer  
Foreman



with photographs by  
Richard Penton



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The Lutterworth Press

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In Memory of  
Richard



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**Frontispiece.** ‘The Politician’, full-face character mask made from a moulded brown paper gum-strip base with ears and nose modelled in card. Designed and worn by a student in mask-making workshop, Hull Dance Project, Spring Street Theatre. 1989.

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# Prologue

‘Will anyone turn up?’ was the question on my mind. It was seven o’clock on a cold October evening. The small room, above the back of the empty theatre, was dark and seemed even colder than outside. ‘It is a pity’, I told myself, ‘that the room was so difficult to find’. I began to unpack my collection of scissors, paper, gum-strip and card. I tried putting the jumble of small tables and chairs into some kind of order. Leaflets about the evening class had been distributed, and six people had signed up. ‘I’ll give it another ten minutes,’ I said to myself, then I heard voices say ‘Is this the mask workshop?’ Three beaming faces appeared from nowhere and I was in business.

It was Jane Thomas who asked me if I had ‘any ideas’ for her programme of evening workshops at Spring Street Theatre. At last I had an opportunity to explore my enthusiasm for masks and theatre, originally sparked by John Harris when I joined his mask seminars as an undergraduate at Hull University’s Drama Department. The mask workshops I offered proved to be popular and attracted students, teachers and everyone locally, or so it seemed, with a passion for theatre who wished to learn something different. The workshops grew when Helen Wragg included me in her ‘Summer in the City’ dance project. Pam Dellar’s invitation to ‘help her out’ with a few evening classes resulted in a full-scale mask and costume performance. I would like to thank all four for giving me so many opportunities to develop my ideas in those early days.

The chance to research for this book and so share my enthusiasm for learning more about masks with even more people, came after I spotted an advertisement in ‘The Independent’ newspaper for the BEROL/NSEAD 1989 Curriculum Development Award, (Berol being the pen makers and NSEAD being the National Society for Education in Art and Design). The bursary enabled me to begin this book and I am greatly indebted to John Steers, General Secretary of NSEAD, for his faith in *Maskwork* as a viable publication.

Over the years there have been many other people who have contributed to the evolution of this book. I would like to thank the LEA advisers in the late 1980’s at Humberside County Council (as it used to be) for enabling me to run workshops in local schools, as part of ‘The Arts in Schools Project’ and for permission to reproduce photographs of workshops at these schools: Grange First School, Grimsby; Headlands

School, Bridlington; Keyingham School, Keyingham; Newland School for Girls, Hull; St. Nicholas School, Beverley; Tweendykes Special School, Hull; Winifred Holtby School, Hull; Withernsea High School, Withernsea. I would like to thank the teachers and pupils at these schools for their participation.

I wish to acknowledge the assistance of staff in the Education Department of the British Museum and Students' Room at the Museum of Mankind. Thanks are also due to the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, the Egyptian Department and the Department of Oriental Studies at the British Museum, and to the staff of the Horniman Museum.

I would like to thank Professor Nick Stanley for his advice on the ethnographic subject matter and Dr. James Booth for his patient help with the text. Sue McIntyre is thanked for proofreading the book. Andrew Greensmith, and the staff at Kall Kwik, Hull, perfected the laser copies, and thanks are given accordingly. Thanks are due to Professor Jenkins of Harvard University, for permission to quote from one of his articles, free of charge. I wish to thank Adrian Brink, Colin Lester and staff at The Lutterworth Press. They have been a source of encouragement and advice. Also, Kate and Christophe Grillet are thanked for their generous hospitality on my frequent trips to Cambridge.

Special thanks are due to my family for allowing me the time to work. In particular, my two daughters who have, literally, grown up with the book.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge both Richard Penton and Bob Allison. I am greatly indebted to Bob for generously giving his time and skill in setting out the whole book on computer and for his impeccable advice and good humour throughout.

Richard collaborated closely with me on this book from manuscript through to publication, and undertook the photography of people mask-making in addition to most of the unique mask material which he also helped to track down. Eventually he took over the management of the manuscript from its first stages through to designing the layout of the text and photographs, as well as organizing all the photographic permissions and the comprehensive index. It has been a lengthy undertaking and I am greatly indebted to him; without his commitment *Maskwork* would not have been possible.

# Acknowledgements of Photos

Out of one hundred and eighty two photographs in this book, twenty three are from outside sources:

a. We are indebted to the following owners for generously loaning their pictures without charge: Bob Allison, 150–157; the Bulgarian Museum of Ethnology, Sofia, 12; Vivienne Gardner, 159; Jocelyn Herbert, 27, 170; Professor Mary Miller, Yale University, 15; Staatliche Museen, Berlin, 44; and Trestle Theatre Company, 28, 138.

b. Reproduced by permission of the British Museum, 91.

c. The photographs of the following copyright owners are acknowledged with thanks: Sue Jenkinson, 27, 170; Steve Morgan, 43. However, despite every effort, it has not been possible to find these owners and so they are invited to contact The Lutterworth Press.

We are grateful to Hans De Marez Oyens for tracking down the source of figure 44.

All the other one hundred and fifty nine photographs are by Richard Penton. Also, thanks are

due to the following institutions, private collectors and artists for permission to photograph masks in their collections, free of charge: the British Museum, 9, 11, 14, 16, 21, 22, 37; Cambridge University Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology, 10, 61, 97; Japanese Gallery, Kensington, London, 19, 20, 41; Museum voor Volkenkunde, Rotterdam, 13, 38, 39, 166, 167; Gordon Reece Gallery, Knaresborough, 34; Rijks–museum voor Volkenkunde, Leiden, 29, 36, 161; Tropenmuseum, Amsterdam, 46; the Chinese Community, Hull, 158; Lesley Croome, 171; Pär Gustafsson, 168; Polly Richards, 17, 18, 165; Miranda Gray, Artist, 177; Walter Storey, Artist, 171.

Thanks are due to both Bob Allison and Richmond & Rigg, Hull for the high standards with which they processed and printed the photographs.

All images are copyright to the above owners, institutions, artists and photographers.

## Glossary

\* Denotes an entry in the glossary.

**A3** an international paper size measuring 297 x 420mm or 11¾ x 16½ inches.

**A4** an international paper size measuring 210 x 297mm or 8¼ x 11¾ inches.

**Brown paper gum-strip** a gummed paper packaging tape, which can be purchased in rolls from post offices and stationers.

**Das** a self-hardening clay widely available from art, craft, toy shops and educational suppliers.

**Fibreglass** glass fibres mixed with epoxy resin which hardens to a durable, lightweight finish. Small amounts can be purchased from boat builders and model-making shops.

**Mod-Roc** or **Gypsona** a fabric reinforced plaster used in model-making and plaster cast making. Packets are available from art and craft shops or medical suppliers.

**Papier-mâché** paper pulp or pieces of paper used with adhesives to mould into shapes. It can be home-made or purchased from educational suppliers, model-making, craft and art shops.

**Plasticine** a pliant material widely used for model making. It comes in many colours and is obtainable from art, craft, toy shops and educational suppliers.

**Plaster of Paris** a fine powder of gypsum, used for making plaster casts etc. It is obtainable from educational suppliers, model-making, craft and art shops.

**Play Doh** a soft modelling material obtainable from craft or toy shops.

**Play dough** a home-made version of Play Doh. Mix together equal parts of plain flour and salt with enough water to make pastry. Keep in an airtight container in a refrigerator.

**P.V.A.** a water based adhesive suitable for general use and providing a protective finish.



# Introduction

This book explores the creative and educational potential of masks and their life-enhancing properties as a means of communication. There is ample scope for people of all ages to enjoy constructing masks of their own and exploring them through language, drama, dance, mime, movement and music (figs. 1–2). All the ideas and activities are tried, tested and workable, having been used and modified over the years in many different situations.

The processes for making masks outlined in Projects 1 to 6 use paper-construction and brown paper gum-strip techniques, which are adaptable for the classroom and for non-specialist workshop (figs 3–5). Project 7 to 8 go on to explore more specialized methods. The

**Fig. 1** (facing page). *Helmet-mask made from papier-mâché and topped with a cylindrical hat adorned with tissue paper flowers, on parade at the Notting Hill Carnival, London, in 1992. This mask is reminiscent of the North Tyrolean carnival masks.*

**Fig. 2.** *Children and adults at an open-air paper mask-making workshop, led by the author. York Early Music Festival. Summer 1987.*



process of mask-making is explored from the design stage through to practical use. The aim is to stimulate ingenuity in the full imaginative use of materials and the exploration of the principles of design.

Each chapter on mask-making provides vital information and theory in addition to practical, topic-based advice. This means that the reader can be assured that practice is underpinned by theory and knowledge. Whenever masks from different cultures are cited, information to set them within their cultural context is given. In Projects 1 to 6, step-by-step mask-making processes are outlined, but there is scope for the reader to develop his or her own solutions to practical problems. Each project has extension activities at differing levels of complexity for exploring the meaning and imagery of the masks once they are made, through expressive arts activities. Where appropriate, there are suggestions for further reading and additional sources of ideas.

The chapter 'Masks and Resources' outlines some of the important arguments surrounding the whole ethical issue of using artefacts from other cultures as resources for our own creative work. Masks make exciting visual stimuli, but it would be irrelevant to bring a set of ready-made masks for groups to use, largely because they will have no point of reference for understanding them. In such instances their response might very well be to fool around and make fun of the masks. Clearly there is some point in introducing masks from other traditions to drama students or in an actor's training; but with young people the main value of maskwork is in what they learn from the process of making their own mask and by devising their own project. Even then we should be aware that there might be a limit to what can be achieved.

As someone trained in both Theatre and Education, I have long recognized that masks have a value in the training of actors and in the art of performance. I have also been aware that their potential as a means of personal expression or educational resource has hardly been recognized. The approach described in this book originated, therefore, as an extension of my theatre training and from a desire to formulate techniques and ideas that could be utilized within the classroom at all levels of education, or at home, or in the studio.

At this point it is worth mentioning some of the superstition that surrounds the effect of wearing masks. Admittedly some people have reservations about the wearing of masks because, it is rumoured, they unleash 'uncontrollable' powers in the wearer. It is true that, in general in our society, masks are debased and often have associations with the 'darker' side of human nature, but this has more to do with the wearer's intentions than with the properties of the mask itself. It is a fact nevertheless, that in much ethnographic literature, unique psychological states are reported in conjunction with the wearing of masks. For example, people are described as 'becoming' the



**Fig. 3.** Scene from Japanese Noh in performance.

spirits, the dead or whatever the mask was meant to represent. It is, however, impossible scientifically to verify such mental conditions as distinct psychological states.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the belief that traditional masked celebrations act as a release for emotional or irrational behaviour is based on false assumptions. Although the mask might very well represent some demon of antisocial behaviour, more knowledge of traditional mask ceremonies reveals that the wearing of the mask is surrounded by restriction, convention and taboo. Society stipulates exactly who should wear what kind of mask and only members of a certain lineage, of a specified age or sex, or with a special quality, may don a particular mask. The privilege of the mask rests upon subtle notions of style and timing.<sup>2</sup> Society harnesses the power of masking for its own ends. These might be cathartic: to heal, to inform or to castigate, but such ceremonies are not a free-for-all.