

“Mama” Spider Sculptures

Posable mâché arachnids, in the style of Louise Bourgeois

(art + science)

One of the largest sculptures in the world, a 30-foot-tall bronze spider entitled “Maman” (the French word for “mother”) was first installed outside London’s Tate Modern Museum in 1999. French-born artist Louise Bourgeois was in her 80s when she created the sculpture. As a result, she was famously nicknamed “Spiderwoman.”

An avant-garde artist and activist whose work was often explicit and centered around very personal narrative themes, Bourgeois purposely avoided being categorized as part of any art movement or type of art. Her iconic arachnid theme appeared late in her career, yet one of these artworks holds the record for the highest price paid at auction for work by a female artist.

“The Spider is an ode to my mother,” Bourgeois is quoted as saying. “She was my best friend. Like a spider, my mother was a weaver. My family was in the business of tapestry restoration, and my mother was in charge of the workshop. Like spiders, my mother was very clever. Spiders are friendly presences that eat mosquitoes. We know that mosquitoes spread diseases and are therefore unwanted. So, spiders are helpful and protective, just like my mother.”

Compelling and frightening at the same time, this spider sculpture is made from simple and inexpensive materials, including wire and tissue paper. The legs can be bent and positioned so the spider can assume natural (or creepy!) poses.

GRADES 3-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Using a trimmer, cut tissue paper into 1-1/2" strips.
2. Cut wire into 24" lengths; need four per student.

Materials (required)

Blick® Sculpture Wire, 12 gauge, 350 ft coil (33401-1014); share one coil across class

Blick® Art Tissue, 50-sheet package, 12" x 18", Black (11308-2007) or assorted colors; share 2 packages across class

Mod Podge® Wash Out for Kids, 8 oz bottle (02916-1205); share three bottles across class
OR Blickrylic® Polymer Gloss Medium, quart (00711-1027); share one across class

Foam Brush, 1" (05114-1001); need one per student

Rubber Bands, two per student

Newspaper

Optional Materials

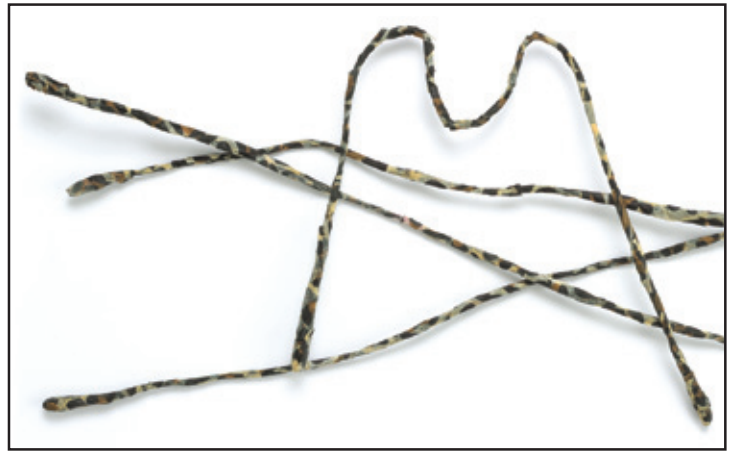
Chroma® Molten Metals Acrylics, Aged Bronze (00688-8155)

Hygloss™ Animal Skin Tissue Assortment, package of 20 sheets, 20" x 30" (11300-1003)





Step 1: Brush the medium/water mixture onto a strip of tissue paper. Wrap the first wire.



Step 2: Repeat Step 1 until all four wires are covered. Allow them to dry, then form them into "M" shapes.



Step 3: Form the body from crumpled newspapers or paper towels. Divide it into two segments by placing a rubber band tightly near the middle. Place a rubber band securely on each side.



Step 4: Insert the legs into the rubber bands and cover the top of the legs and the body with strips of tissue paper and the medium/water mixture. Allow the sculpture to dry. Embellish as desired.

Process

1. In a small bowl, combine one part Mod Podge Wash Out or polymer gloss medium with one part water. Stir until smooth. The mixture should be about the consistency of cream — thick enough not to drip from the brush, but thin enough to brush easily.
2. Brush the mixture onto a strip of tissue paper and wrap the paper onto a wire, beginning at one end and turning the wire so that the paper applies in a spiral manner. The tissue paper does not need to fit tightly; in fact, a looser fit will give the sculpture more dimension. Repeat with another strip of tissue paper until the wire is covered.
3. Repeat Step 2 with the remaining three wires, then wrap each wire with tissue strips a second time. Make sure the wire ends are completely covered.
4. While the wire legs are drying, build the spider's body by crumpling newspaper until it is about the size and shape of a small submarine sandwich (see Step 2 photo). Arachnid bodies have only two segments, one larger than the other, so place a rubber band as tightly as possible to one side of the middle to create a large abdomen and a smaller cephalothorax.
5. Place a rubber band on either side of the first one. These should be tight enough to stay on the body, but not tight enough to form another segment.
6. Bend each of the wire legs into a tall "M." Insert two of the legs into the middle rubber band so the top of the "M" is against the spider's body. With the body upside down, position the legs so they form an "X" in the rubber band. Using strips of tissue and the medium/water mixture, cover the rubber band, newspaper, and top of the wire. Wrap it all the way around the body.
7. Repeat by placing the legs in the other two rubber bands and wrapping until the body is completely covered with tissue paper. Allow it to dry.
8. To make the spider look like one of Louise Bourgeois' cast bronze sculptures, brush bronze or gold acrylic paint over just the raised areas of the tissue paper. To accurately create spider anatomy, use small amounts of tissue paper and glue palps (fangs) on the front. Glue beads or sequins on the top to create eyes, and additional tissue paper or yarn to create spinnerets on the back.



Options

1. Make whimsical spiders from animal print or other colorful tissue paper.
2. These instructions make a spider that stands approximately 8" tall. For larger spiders, increase the length of the wire. For smaller spiders, use less.

National Standards for Visual Arts Education

Content Standard #1 — Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes.

K-4 • Students use different media, techniques, and processes to communicate ideas, experiences, and stories.

5-8 • Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.

9-12 • Students apply media, techniques, and processes with sufficient skill, confidence, and sensitivity that their intentions are carried out in their artworks.

Content Standard #5 — Reflecting upon and assessing the characteristics and merits of their work and the work of others.

K-4 • Students understand there are various purposes for creating works of visual art.

5-8 • Students analyze contemporary and historic meanings in specific artworks through cultural and aesthetic inquiry.

9-12 • Students identify intentions of those creating artworks, explore the implications of various purposes, and justify their analyses of purposes in particular works.

