

Not All Alginates Are Created Equal

By Brent A. Cairns, ALI

Brent Cairns is a popular artist and sculptor based in New Zealand. His finely detailed lifecastings are in great demand both in New Zealand and overseas. In this short article he discusses how he discovered ArtMolds MoldGelä, the moulding material used to create his renowned lifecasting sculpture and why he continues to use it.

New Zealanders have always been resourceful. When we first started creating lifecasting sculptures we began with dental



alginates to create our moulds. After many failed attempts trying to get slower setting alginates from local suppliers we began a search for sources on the Internet. We found the ALI (Association of Lifecasters International) site and after viewing the various artists/sculptors sites we were inspired to take our art further.

It was on this site that we discovered a number of slow setting alginate brands. Learning from our experience that some brands were better than others we decided to not put all our eggs into one basket and placed orders with a number of different suppliers.

When they arrived we began experimenting. We have experimented with nude and clothed models covering them entirely with alginate. We also varied the thickness of alginate. As I have had no formal training, I learn by doing. It has only been recently that I have learned that perhaps I do things differently as it relates to the amount of alginate that I use. I use as little alginate as possible.

This is possible as a result of the brand we favor most. For example with that brand of alginate used one only pound of alginate to create the sculpture picture on the left. Whereas, we found that the other brands required double that, thus doubling the material cost. For me this was a critical factor as the cost of getting the product to New Zealand was anywhere between US \$250.00 to

\$500.00 for 25-pounds including freight. This is an important consideration when one considers that alginates are priced relatively similarly to each on a per pound basis so that my favorite brand is actually half the price of the others.

We love experimenting with materials as the picture above shows and we have found some alginates are far tougher than others. When extracting a model from the mould if it tears a mould is often ruined or a time consuming repair is needed.

We also found that the alginates take different volumes of water to achieve the same consistency. What this means is that alginate brands vary in filler ratios. More water means less alginate is in the alginate formula.

Some of the most popular brands of alginate were very difficult to mix, as they would stay lumpy taking longer to mix. This cut back on the application time causing panic and often problems coverage problems as I raced against set time.

Some brands had to be mixed thinner to get them to a smooth and creamy consistency. However this made them too runny as I applied them. These brands were messy and costly when you consider that much of the alginate was on the floor or on the models feet.

Shrinkage is a major factor, too. Some brands would shrink very quickly in the mould, depending on the thickness of the alginate. This distorted the finished mould, causing irreparable damage.

We sell our sculptures in art galleries and specialty shops throughout New Zealand and have many sculptures going overseas. We want to be seen as making a quality product, thus using the best of materials and suppliers is important to us.

Notwithstanding the fact that I haven't tried every alginate manufacturer in the world, from my personal experience I use and would **highly** recommend **ArtMolds MoldGelä SloSet**

Brent A Cairns
www.nakedart.co.nz