MAKERS MANUAL #24
James Shaw

PACKAGING PULP

LIST OF THINGS
– Waste paper or cardboard packaging about a bucket full

TOOLS
– Two buckets
– Stick blender
– A piece of loose weave cloth / an old t-shirt
– Colander or sieve
– Something to use as a mould such as a thick saucepan
– Clamps or something heavy

BIO OF THE DESIGNER
James Shaw is a designer and maker exploring the material landscape in a hands-on way. His work aims to interrogate the material, systemic, and formal approaches to the creation of objects. His work frequently considers the resources around us; challenging the notion of 'waste' to create new beautiful materials. His work is in the permanent collections of MoMA, The Montreal Museum of Art, the V&A, and The Museum of London, among others.

FURTHER READING
– Basic introduction to different industrial pulp processes: https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Molded_pulp
– A guide to moulding paper pulp into a plaster mould: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NvRasue7rc

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, we are surrounded by an increasing amount of paper and cardboard packaging, whether it's from home delivery or junk mail. This manual will show you how to take that waste and turn it back into a pulp, which can then be moulded into a new item. You will learn a simple technique by making a small serving tray, but the same principles can be used to make anything you can think of.

Makers Manual is a collaborative project between exciting makers and STORE STORE. This is a collection of manuals encouraging people to make objects from what is around them. These manuals are both a practical guide to making for beginners and experts, and a journey into the designers' practice. You can share your creations using #makersmanual.

This project is supported by G.F Smith.

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STEP 1

To begin, fill one of the buckets halfway with water and then roughly tear up the waste paper and/or cardboard material into it. Be careful to remove any tape, plastic labels, or transparent envelope windows, and use non-glossy paper such as printer paper or newspaper. Make sure all of the torn up material is covered with water. Leave this to soak overnight.

1

1b

STEP 2

Once the material is thoroughly soaked it should fall apart easily. Break apart any remaining bigger pieces with your hands. Then use the stick blender to mix it all into a nice consistent pulp. Make sure your stick-blender does not overheat. This process will take a little while but is important because the fibres need to be completely broken up in order to make a mouldable pulp. Alternatively, you can use a drill with a mixer paddle.

2

2b

STEP 3

Once the waste pulp is of an even consistency, start to remove the water. Place your colander or sieve over your other bucket and lay your cloth inside the colander or sieve. Pour the paper pulp mixture through this, making sure that the cloth catches all of the extra pulp. Then, pick up the corners of the cloth and squeeze out as much extra moisture as possible. Leave it to continue draining.

3

3b

STEP 4

After a little while, the pulp is ready to mould! It should come away from the fabric as a nice ball. To make a simple serving tray or platter, create a two-part mould that will shape the pulp and squeeze as much of the liquid out of it as possible. It is important to keep the wall thickness of the finished item consistent at about 1cm thick, otherwise it will take too long to dry out.

The inside mould should leave around 1cm from the outside mould when they are fully pressed together. As an example, you could use a metal saucepan and a wooden disk (or plate, sturdy bowl, or another saucepan) to make the mould. You could also reinforce the wooden disk and make a press handle from any scraps of wood. If you do not have access to such things then another saucepan or a very thick and sturdy bowl should work.

4

4b

STEP 5

Break up your ball and roughly spread the material around your pan and then press in the wooden disk. Squeeze out as much water as possible. If you have clamps, attach them and rest the pan upside-down so that the water can drain out. If you don't have clamps then stack up as many heavy things as possible on top of the mould. Leave this to dry for about 24 hours.

5

5b

STEP 6

Alternatively, if you cannot find anything to make a two part mould, simply press the material by hand into a sieve. Take the ball of pulp and place it in the sieve, then press an indentation into the middle, using the tips of your fingers spread the material around the walls of the sieve until you have an even wall thickness of around 1cm, pressing hard to remove as much moisture as possible. Be careful not to break the sieve.

STEP 7

After all the water has dripped out the pulp piece should be dry enough to remove from the mould. Carefully remove it and leave it in a warm place, such as sunny windowsill or above a radiator, to continue drying. This can take up to a week.

7

7b

STEP 8

Once it is dry, use sandpaper to neaten the edges of the item. Then either leave it as it is or decorate it with biodegradable inks and seal it up with a biodegradable finish, such as linseed oil or PVA glue.

8

James Shaw, London.