

The Bending Palm



an installation by Mark Lander

PAINT AND PAPER FROM YOUR LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

Mark Lander has turned to the local Christchurch and Banks Peninsula environment as the source for his art materials. Through constant experiment he has created 2 x 3 metre sheets of flax paper that range from gossamer thin sheets to heavy sheets approaching the thickness of cardboard which are painted in earth colours made from clay pigments.

The Robert McDougall Art Gallery thanks Mark Lander for sharing his knowledge which is the basis of this information sheet.

Equipment: Paper mould and deckle
Water bath (a sink, plastic container or wooden frame lined with black plastic).
Stainless steel or enamel pot or preserving pan (aluminium is totally unsuitable)
Food processor or beater or paint beater attached to electric drill
Caustic soda
Water - for washing the pulp
Flax
Clay in assorted colours

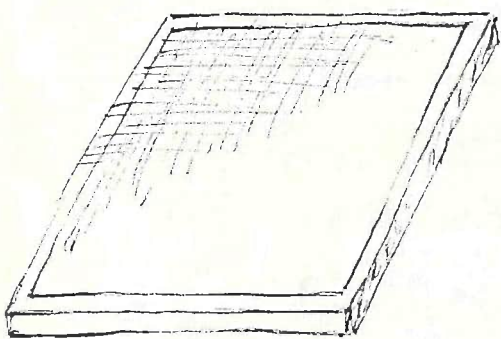
The Paper-making screen

can be - a wire coathanger bent into a rectangular shape and covered with a tightly stretched leg of old unladdered pantihose. This screen will fit most sinks.

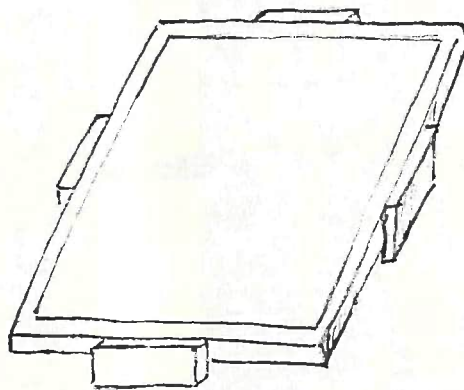
a specially made deckle and mould slightly smaller than your plastic container or waterbath. Be sure that you can lift it out easily.

The screen can be covered with flyscreen mesh, shade cloth or old nylon net curtains, anything with a small regular mesh. Again it is important to stretch the mesh tightly around the screen or the sag in the middle will result in paper of uneven thickness.

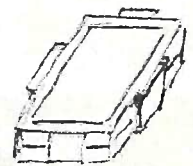
Make the deckle and mould from wood about 2cm x 2cm thick. Each frame should be the same size so that the small strips attached to the sides of the deckle will hold it in position while you are screening the pulp.



Mould-screen

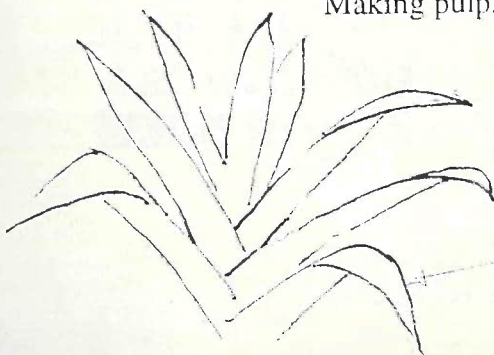


Deckle



Deckle sits on top of screen

Making pulp.



Cut the outside leaves only from the flax leaving the new growth as this is the way Maori take flax for their use.

Bruise each leaf by pounding it with a stone or wooden mallet so that the fibre starts to show and the leaf starts to separate into strips.

Outside leaves



Cut leaves into small pieces and half fill container for cooking. Cover with water and add about half a cup of caustic soda to preserving pan (lesser amount for a pot) to speed up softening the fibres.

Warning: Caustic soda is corrosive to aluminium, paint, wood and skin. so use rubber gloves and do not use aluminium.

Cook for four hours.

Wash the pulp thoroughly, an old net curtain or pillowcase is a useful container for handling the pulp at this stage.

Beat the pulp in a food processor using the cutting blade.

One preserving pan of cooked pulp should make about 30 sheets of paper 50cm by 40cm.



Screening the paper.

Fill the water bath half full of water and add enough pulp to make a thin soupy mixture, experiment with the ratio of pulp to water as a thin mixture will make a thin paper, a thicker mixture, thin card.....porridge is too thick.

Stir the pulp/water well with your hand then slide the screen from one side of the bath down and under the pulp. Lift the screen slowly and evenly from the pulp and allow it to drain. Remove the deckle and tilt the screen and drain until it stops dripping.

The paper can be dried in the sun on the screen, this will take about a day and will bleach as it dries. But to allow each class member to make their own sheet when you have a limited number of screens have a supply of corrugated cardboard pieces cut to the size of the screen frame. Place the card board on top of the screen (after you have removed the deckle) and invert. Sponge the back of the screen with a sponge or cloth until there is little water left in the paper. Take care to sponge the edges so that when you remove the screen the whole sheet of paper is left on the card. Again leave the paper in the sun to dry and bleach. The paper will peel off the board when completely dry.

Papers of this type tend to soak up the paint.



Making the Paint.

Paint is a powdered colour pigment mixed in a liquid so that it can be applied by hand, stick or brush, This liquid can be water - watercolour
oil - oil paint or
egg yolk - tempera

The source of Mark's colour pigments are local clays which have provided him with a rich range of earth colours. He has used clay from under the streets of Christchurch (green) a cave in Sumner (pink) and French Farm (yellow and blue)

But any clay can be used as the paint colour remains true to the clay colour. Keep your eyes open as you walk, drive around Canterbury as road cuttings and diggings will reveal many different clays, and a plastic bag of clay will make a very large quantity of paint.

To make the paint add about a handful of small pieces of clay to a half full blender of water and a dollop of PVA and process.

This paint is very durable and does not fade.



The task now is to create an environmental work. The Robert McDougall Art Gallery hopes that you will find Mark Lander's installation **The Bending Palm** an inspiration to art-making in the school classroom.

