

# ERIC STRAW

Eric Strawczynski, known to his friends as "Straw", was born during the period of WWII, from a father who fought in the war and a very cultured French mother who was a teacher. A first child born, he can remember this terrible period and probably developed his serious-humorous way of thinking from that time.

During the 1970's, after working as an Economics lecturer, he left dull University teaching and began to *work*. He became a specialist in French antique dolls, recognized for his expert repair of dolls and puppets.

In 1978 Eric introduced *The Musiciens*, his first collection of string Puppets in terracotta and paper mache. There were around 30 pieces which sold very fast. Inspired by this he went on to explore new methods and techniques.

By 1983 Eric was creating numerous small sculptures in terracotta and bronze. Intended to reflect a personal history, they appeared to speak to everyone. Whenever a pursuit seemed really interesting, Eric didn't stop exploring, sensing something new coming on the horizon.

In 1988 Eric showed his new work, large shadow boxes, created as kind of tribute to American Joseph Cornell, whose work he admired. At the same time he created a very original collection called "The Kings" in wood and terracotta. These works were shown only to a few amateur artists. Starting at this time Eric began to accept commissions for "one of a kind" works only.



Then in 1994, following a difficult period in his life, Eric showed a collection of black and white photos. The subjects were mainly dolls, toys and familiar objects he knew so well. But he found he preferred working in structural forms. Curiously, at that time he began collecting African masks, which was surprising as he had not been a collector before.

Suddenly, after years of creating works in many different media, he fell literally *in love with cardboard* and discovered his own unique, original method. And that has led to a growing collection of masks, in a distinctive style all his own. He named this style "New Tribal Art", and it is Eric Straw's unique expression of the human being. Eric now continues in this line, extending the process to larger and larger pieces, with great fun and enjoyment.



## TECHNIQUE AND MATERIALS

The masks are made from recovered cardboard from packaging.

Their construction puts this recycled material to new use and reveals new value in a rich material with great potential.

The techniques used in making the finished masks begin with cutting and joining. Shapes are created by folding and fastening, using only the cardboard itself.

For decoration, Eric begins with the peculiar features of each cardboard piece, the original colour, waves, corrugation... then adds details in pastel, gouache and acrylic.

With few exceptions, each mask is constructed entirely of cardboard and paper. Most of the masks are sized so that they might be worn as the face of the user.

## WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO MAKE MASKS?

Eric replies . . .

I imagine the first shape a child coming into the world can see is the shape of a face! And later it is one of the most favourite subjects of his first drawings, no?

Since the earliest time of man on earth, it seems his own face is the subject for the most important philosophical question of all, "Who am I?"

To this primary and obsessive question, masks are able to give a special answer. (One can say this kind of answer, which became the most interesting for me, really "chose me".) It's completely different - understand well - from a painted or sculpted portrait. It is *not* an image of the face, but *another face*, more truthful than the real one! Masks are able to express that which is hidden as well that which is visible. They can reveal the mind, represent elements of society and culture, or a mix of all these!



You see, I find the art of masks offers great freedom and fantasy. I discover unlimited ones ... and with only a simple code: just two eyes, one nose and a mouth!

At every point in time in civilization and culture, the mask could and can display that which is most important in life. It is commonly associated with religion, theatre or entertainment ... It goes with delight and sadness, humor and pain, life and death, as well ... without forgetting to sometimes offer a smile!

And still I feel it is an interesting artistic means for the purpose of revealing that ever present, central necessity -- the true face and then the true soul of men in our contemporary world.

But, you know, I don't make only masks ... My actual love is cardboard, really!

■ Eric Strawczynski



# ERIC STRAW QUESTIONS

## CULTURAL FRAME

What year was Straw born?

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Discuss what Straw become an expert in? (after he was a 'Doctor in Economics')

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Describe what "*The Musiciens*, 1978", are.

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In 1994, Eric Straw started to collect \_\_\_\_\_ masks. Do you think they inspired him to make masks? Why?

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Explain why Eric straw likes masks, what does he think they are about? (Use quotes from the 'why do you choose to make masks' section)

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# STRUCTURAL FRAME

Identify the materials Straw originally used to make his sculptures?

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Explain what Straw uses now to make his masks?

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Describe the processes Straw goes through to create a mask?

[illegible]

Look at the image of the mask at the bottom of page 2. Describe how Straw has used the elements (line, shape, colour, tone, texture) and principles (balance, harmony, repetition, movement, rhythm, contrast) of art on this mask. What impact do they have?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.