

Making a Prop Turkey

Not Tasty, but Tough and long lasting



CASE STUDY

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Hello, I'm John Maurer, artistic director of MPOnStage and in today's case study we will be talking about creating a prop turkey. This technique can be used to create any type of three dimensional free form prop that you need on stage.

Getting Stuffed on stage



A scene from the Like 40 Production of Inspecting Carol.

OK you get the script for your next production and it say... And then Bob brings a large turkey with all the trimming out onstage and places it on the table. That's always the problem. You never seem to have a turkey just sitting in your prop loft waiting to be used. Real turkeys are heavy expensive and tend to smell after only a few days of production. So how do you make one. For this production of Inspecting Carol produced by Like 40 productions the script called for a turkey that not only had to look sort of realistic but that could be thrown around the stage and not brake. The original idea of making out of plaster wasn't going to work because when the turkey flew it would shatter. We had to come up with another way.

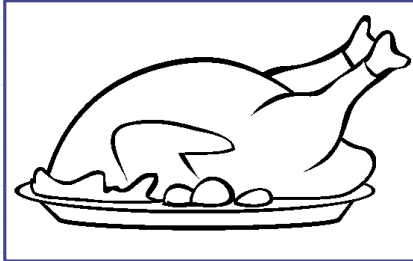
What you Need.



Here's what you'll need.

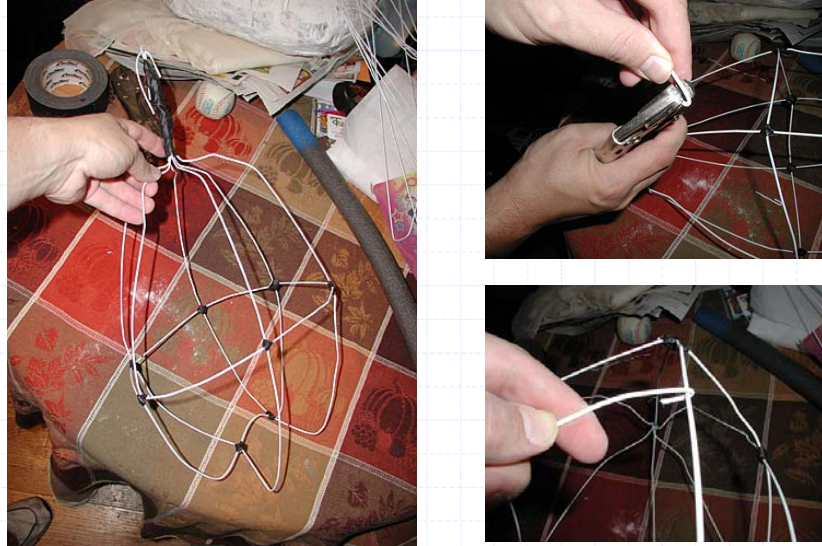
Some old coat hangers, Duck or gaffers tape, Pliers, a large container of carpenters glue and some Cheese cloth or light fabric to make the skin.

Before you begin



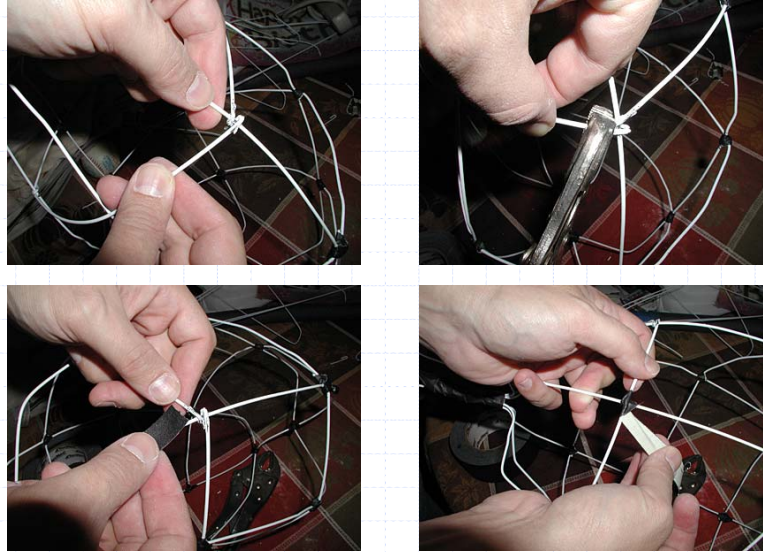
Before you begin it is always good to try and get the basic shape you are trying to replicate. I try to get at least two views of the item. Since the script called for a less than convincing turkey I decided to leave off the legs and wings and go for a more rounded bird.

Creating the Basic frame.



The hardest part in starting is creating the basic frame for the prop. I straightened out several coat hangers and then bent them in to shapes that matched the silhouette of the side view and the top view. I then taped them together at the neck of the bird and bent one wire around the center to tie them all together. To connect the wires I bent the ended into a little hook then hooked them onto the cross wires.

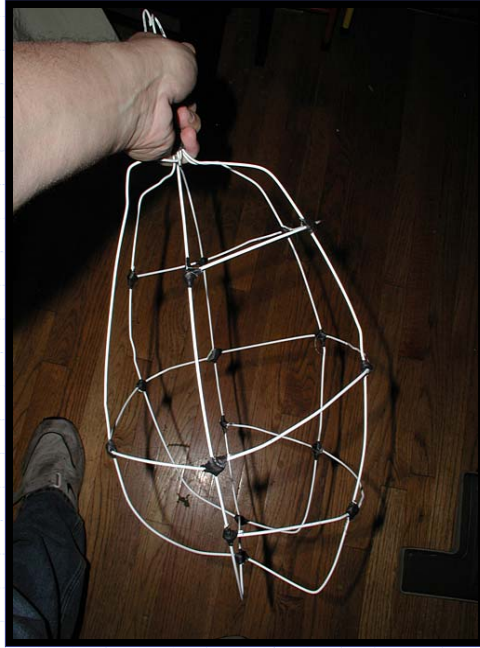
The Frame continued



The wires form ribs that outline the basic shape of the prop. As I bent the wires into position I took note of where they crossed. I bent the end into a hook and clamped them down with pliers to finish each rib. I then took a small strip of duck tape and wrapped it around each point that two wires crossed. This helped keep the shape.

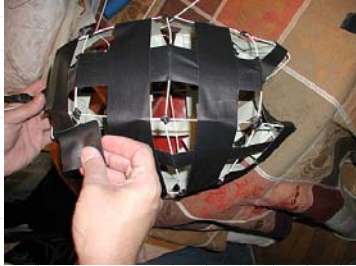
The Base Frame

1. The more ribs you add the smoother the curves will be.
2. It doesn't matter if the ribs are a little loose. The skin will help hold them in place.



I now had the basic shape of the turkey. Remember the script called for a turkey that didn't look very realistic so I only used a few ribs. The more ribs I used the smoother the curves would be and the more realistic you could make it. Also, it doesn't matter if the ribs are a little loose they will be locked into place once the skin is placed on it.

Finishing the frame



The next step was filling the holes. Since I only had a few ribs I used some duck tape and lightly wrapped the frame keep the skin from falling through the holes and making a lumpy turkey. Since the script called for a neck for the actor to hold onto I also cut 8 inches off of a pipe wrap tube and placed it over the wire at the end of the turkey to give it a better hand hold. I also cut a section of the tubing in half and placed it on the exposed part of the frame that juts out at the back end of the turkey. This helped give a little thickness and added a touch of realism.

Adding the Skin



Now its time to add the skin. I choose to use cheese cloth but you could use any thin material you have on hand. I first draped the fabric over the frame to see where it bunched up then cut away the excess. I then used some spray glue to help stick the cloth to the frame. To help in holding the turkey I used weighted outdoor umbrella stand that the neck just fit into. This help to hold the prop steady as I worked.

Toughening the Bird



To hold all this together and make sure that it wouldn't break apart I used a coating of Carpenters glue. Since the glue would coat and ruin anything I used to apply it with I bought a bowl and some foam brushes from the dollar store to use as my tools. I used to techniques for applying the glue coating. I first held the bowl to the side of the prop and brushed the glue up and onto sides. Or I just poured the glue on to sections then used the brush to smooth it out. I applied several coats, allowing for drying time between each.

The Finishing Touch



Once It was all dry I just used some off the shelf spray paint to give it some color and texture. I did it myself rather than ask the scenic artist to do it because I didn't want her great painting skills to make my cheap prop look to good.

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Well that's it. A bird ready for the table and only in twice the time it takes to make a real turkey. I hope that this case study was helpful, and that you'll be able to use it the next time you need to make a free form prop like a turkey. If you have any tips and tricks you would like to share as a case study just email me at casestudy@mponstage.com. I'm John Maurer, artistic director of MPOnStage thanks for watching