

a **PART** of the story

Making modifications with putty

by **Jim Coffee** • San Diego, California, USA • Photos by the author

I've been wanting to share two products with you—DryDex and Bondo—for more than a year, and a good opportunity has finally presented itself. My *Balloon Man* needed new shoulders and also had a few blemishes needing a cleanup. If your automata are to remain unpainted—for example, if you create automata out of wood and don't paint them—read no further. These two products won't help you. However, if you do paint your automata, you might find this information useful.

DryDex is a heavy-duty spackling repair paste. In my studio, I use it for larger situations. I use Bondo Glazing and Spot Putty for smaller modifications.

The *Balloon Man* is constructed of several different materials. The head is 3D-printed plastic and the torso is carved basswood. As I neared the completion of the *Balloon Man* I was not comfortable with his shoulders.



DryDex spackling putty is used for larger jobs. It can be further strengthened with CA cement. Bondo Glazing and Spot Putty is a smooth, fine-grained putty used to repair small blemishes.

I wanted them to be higher and rounder and I wanted his neck to sit a bit more evenly on his torso.

To accomplish this, I first thoroughly sanded the torso to



In the “after” shot, the *Balloon Man*'s shoulders have been modified with the DryDex putty.



DryDex is applied with a small spatula. Fingers work well too. As the DryDex dries and hardens, its shape can be easily modified.



Bondo is typically applied with a finger tip. Small applications are usually dry and ready for sanding in 30 minutes or so.




To repair the gap between the neck and torso, the neck end was buffered with waxed paper. DryDex was sandwiched between the torso and the waxed-papered neck, then pressed down for a good fit. DryDex does not adhere to waxed paper.

remove much of the initial paint and primer. I then used the Dap DryDex spackling-repair product. This comes in tubs of different sizes or in a tube (as pictured). Because I use very small amounts at a time I have found that tubes work best for me.

There are two important points that I want to make regarding DryDex. First, don't try to do big work all at one time. I find that layers no thicker than about 3mm (.118") work best. When DryDex is applied, it's pink. As it dries it turns white. Don't apply the second layer until the first has turned white. Second,

low-viscosity Super Glue (CA cement) can be used to further strengthen the final product. Drip it on and let it soak in.

I use Bondo Glazing and Spot Putty to repair smaller imperfections. I place dots of the putty onto defects in the torso, then sand the dried putty smooth. I used three different abrasive grits for this repair: 180, 220, and 320. (I primarily use 180 and 220 grit in my studio.)

That is how I gave the *Balloon Man* a "shoulder lift." He rides his tricycle more easily now. I hope this information will help you create wonderful automata. 

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