

Primer on Faux Finishes

This article presents a series of topics taken from the November 1995 Nutshell News on decorative painting techniques for miniatures. Topics included marbling, stencilling, bambooning, spatter painting, verdigris, rubber stamping, faux wood techniques, sponge work, stippling, and crackle.

Marbling

Marbling is a craft that has been practiced for many years. Much that we see is meant to represent marble rather than duplicate it exactly. This is probably due to the fact that there are so many varieties of marble and wide ranges of colours and patterns. Most of us have our own ideas of what marble should look like and that is what is important for this painting project. There are two methods explained here and one or the other can be used on almost any surface.

Method 1 (Painting): You will need: acrylic paints (two colours for the marble, and one more for the veining), a natural sponge, a pointed feather, and glaze (acrylic). The base colour of the piece you are painting should be lighter than or as light as the lightest colour in your finished marble colour scheme. These directions assume that you are making a greyish marble, but you can substitute the colours to make any combination you want. You just need reasonable contrast between the three shades you have chosen for your "marble". When making a greyish marble, the base colour should be white.

1. Make a wash using a medium grey colour. Pick up on a dry sponge and blot over the white surface in a random pattern. Let dry.
2. Make a wash of black and lightly blot over grey in a random pattern. Let dry.
3. Mix a bit of black acrylic with a bit of water and acrylic medium or paint extender/retarder. Dip the tip of the feather in mix and use to trail a wobbly vein of paint over the surface. Let dry.
4. Glaze dried surface.

Remember, this is an illusion of marble, so have fun and when it looks right to you, it is right. Try to keep the scale of the sponging and veining in proportion to the size of the piece you are marbling, for example, doing floor tiles. Marble usually comes in smaller pieces, so if you are doing a large area, such as a floor, it will look better to divide it into smaller squares, and paint each individually. Cutting a clear plastic stencil to the size of the square desired will help keep the paint off the other squares. Veining is usually done in black, white or tan. This technique is useful for doing floor tiles, table and bar tops, fireplaces and surrounds, garden urns, planters, etc.

Method 2 (Dipping): You will need a prepared surface (non-porous or sealed to be that way), acrylic paint, Testors oil-based enamel paint, a container large enough to submerge the piece to be painted, tweezers and wax paper.

1. Paint the piece to be marbled white or a color darker or lighter than the colour used for the marble. Let dry.
2. Fill container with water. Drop dots of enamel paint into the water using a toothpick. The oil paints will float on the surface, allowing you to swirl the colours to get a pleasing pattern.
3. Using tweezers, quickly dip the piece to be marbled into the water, and right back up again. The floating paint will instantly stick to the surface in a marble pattern. An easy technique, but you must work fast once the paint is in the water, as it will form a skin on top if it sits too long. It is best to practice with card stock scraps to get the hang of dipping before doing a good piece. You will find it fascinating.
4. Place item on waxed paper to dry.

This technique is most useful for graniteware dishes, enamel ware, or other small decorative items.

Bambooning

An amazing variety of bamboo furniture was popular during the 1860's and 1870s when anything Japanese was in vogue. Simple in construction, this furniture was quite strong and many pieces have survived the years. Bamboo was used alone or in companion with wood or fine basket work for shelves, tables, screens, stands, bookcases, chairs, desks, easels, and picture frames. The decorative mottling on these pieces was generally achieved by scorching and varnishing.

You will need:

- Pieces of furniture to decorate which have sections, or are totally composed, of rounded wood, such as dowels or bamboo skewers
 - Tacky Glue
 - Acrylic paint: burnt umber, black and brown
 - Toothpicks or monojet glue gun
 - Paint brushes
 - Clear nail polish
1. If the wood you are using is not a golden honey colour, paint it so....
 2. Put a thin ring of Tacky Glue around bamboo every 3/8" to 1 3/4" down the stick. This ring should not be more than 1/16" wide. It can be applied by hand with a toothpick, or with a monojet glue gun. When glue is set, but not yet dry, flatten it slightly with your finger tip.
 3. After glue has dried, mix a burnt umber medium-tone wash. Dip a small, flat, stiff bristled brush into wash. Blot off excess wash on paper towelling. Stipple wash onto bamboomed surface in a random pattern. Let dry. Dip dampened brush into burnt umber (not wash), blot off excess and stipple lightly over wash. Natural honey base colour should always show here and there beneath the wash and paint. Let all paint dry. Use a fine-tipped brush and a black-brown paint mix to

make a narrow stripe around the centre of the glue rings on the bamboo. The whole faux painting should be done fairly fast, and not exact, for a natural look. No two pieces of the real thing are exactly alike.

4. Finish piece with clear nail polish.

Stencilling

Stencilling is accomplished by cutting a pattern out of a piece of thin material such as paper, acetate or brass and using this stencil along with paints to apply this pattern to another surface. The patterns themselves may be simple or very complicated ones applied using a number of stencils with different colours applied one after the other to the same area, in a composite method. Freehand designs may be added to stencil patterns to embellish them, such as adding stems to leaves. Stencilling has a long history. With a bit of research, you should be able to do a stencilled piece to fit into just about any miniature setting. Stencilling can be worked on a very small piece, such as a dish or plate, or on large surfaces such as a wall or floor. Colours can be as subtle or as gaudy as desired or needed. Designs can range from a single flower to imitation wallpaper. Check out Michael's for brass cut stencils. Some of them are small enough in scale to be useable in miniature settings.

You will need:

- A stencil. You can make your own or purchase ready made ones. Depending on what you are doing, some full-size stencils may work. Miniature stencils are usually of metal and can be found in miniature shops, craft shops, rubber stamp suppliers and in some country decorating stores.
 - Paints (there are paints sold especially for stencilling that work well). For stencilling in miniature, Plaid Paint Crayons work well.
 - Smallest of stencil brushes (stiff bristled round, flat-topped brush). You should use a different brush for each colour.
1. The item to be stencilled needs to be reasonably flat. It can be of almost any material, porous or non-porous, soft or hard. But whatever it is made of, it should be clean or freshly painted and dry. If possible, lay it on a flat work surface.
 2. If you desire a precisely placed pattern, it will probably be necessary to mark out grids or guidelines lightly with pencil.
 3. Use a piece of wax paper for a palette. Rub crayon on palette, Pick up paint with brush. Do not load paint on brush – it should be rather “dry”. Apply paint into cut-out areas of the stencil. It is best to use a circular stroke to stencil, but the tiny openings in many of the stencils may require you to use an up and down dabbing motion. Change brushes when you change colours. Colours may be blended with each other. Use several coats of paint rather than one heavy one for darker colours. To remove stencil, pull it straight up – do not slide it off, or paint may smear.

4. Let paint cure for several days. It may be heat set up after 24 hour (check paint packaging for directions).

If you want to try cutting your own stencils, thin acetate works fine. A pattern may be drawn or traced on card stock and taped under the acetate so it shows through. Use a thin knife blade or a tiny X-Acto pen knife for cutting (see Tool of the Month). Paper punches also work well for cutting stencils – there are some corner punches on the market that have interesting patterns that would make a variety of stencils for walls or floors.

Verdigris

Verdigris is described as a green or greenish blue deposit formed on brass, copper, or bronze surfaces when they are exposed to the elements. What verdigris usually brings to mind are green artefacts. The look has long been popular, especially for garden-oriented objects. Most any item – wood, plastic, metal – can be given this faux finish but pieces with some detail seem to work best. The process is quite simple but takes a bit of time. The time is worth it as the results will change an ordinary object into a work of art.

You will need:

- Liquid acrylic paints in colours of khaki (think of very dull copper), turquoise, lime-green, white
 - Liquid acrylic paint extender (such as Americana's Brush and Blend (to thin white wash and slow drying time)
 - Metallic bronze burnishing powder or wipe-on antiquing paint
 - Paint brushes, including a small, round, stiff bristled one such as used for stencilling
 - Soft cloth or paper towelling
1. Make sure the item you will be painting is clean and grease free. If necessary, use a craft knife to trim away any flash/mold lines.
 2. Base coat the entire piece khaki. Keep in mind that when painting miniature pieces, two light coats are better for coverage than one thick coat. This way, the finish will not tend to peel and the designs will not be obliterated. Let dry.
 3. Pour some turquoise paint onto a palette or piece of wax paper. Thin just slightly with water, spreading paint out. Dip stiff bristle brush in paint and blot off on paper, in a stippling motion until the paint on the brush is very "dry" and does not give off any blotchy dabs. Use a stippling motion to apply the turquoise paint over the khaki colour until just a blush of the khaki colour shows. Make sure all grooves and indentations are filled with turquoise colour (use a small soft brush if necessary) as this is usually where the corrosion starts. Let dry.
 4. Pour some lime-green acrylic paint on your palette or paper, and prepare your stiff brush as was described for the turquoise paint. Add lime-green lightly over

some of the turquoise. Done with the right touch, the lime-green will not stand out, but will accent the turquoise. Let dry several hours or overnight.

5. Make a medium light wash of white acrylic paint and water and extender. Brush a coat of the mixture over the prepared objects. Use a soft cloth or paper towel to blot off paint, leaving a slight ashy/grey look. Blot up any excess white that has deposited in grooves.
6. Apply some metallic bronze to palette or wax paper. With finger tip, soft cloth or brush add just a hint of the colour over the piece, making sure it blends into the other colours.

TIP: Verdigris finish should be dull/flat, so do not use gloss or polish. If the piece is to be out in the weather, use a matte finish.

SUGGESTED USEAGE FOR THIS FINISH:

- If pieces are unadorned, glue on assorted jewellery findings for accents. Cordings may be glued around urns or bird baths or pedestals.
- Assemble odd pieces to form urns or bird baths or pedestals and finish with verdigris.
- Look to wood turnings in craft shops, buttons, and jewellery findings.
- Look to children's toys for plastic animals or figures that would make good garden statuary.
- Wilton cake decorating supplies have many inexpensive forms that work well alone or in combination for fountains, bird baths, etc.
- Wrought iron miniatures such as baker's racks.
- Any type of planter.

Spatter Painting

Spattering is a quick way to add colour, interest, and texture to a surface. It can cover flaws on a wall or floor. It has been used extensively over the years to rejuvenate tired and worn linoleum. This was once called spatter dash painting.

You will need:

- Several colors of acrylic paint
 - Old toothbrush
 - Glaze
1. Base coat surface of object to be spattered.
 2. Slightly water down other colours. Dip toothbrush in paint. Blot off excess. Using fingernail or craft stick, pull back on bristles causing spatters of paint to fall on surface of object. You can control the size of the spatters to a certain degree by the amount of paint that is on the brush and the pressure of your finger as it passes over the brush. Obviously, this is quite a messy job so make sure you

protect your work surface and anything that surrounds it . It is not necessary to dry paint between coats, but let dry before adding a finishing glaze. Experiment with colours for interesting results.

Suggestions:

Paint a vase, crock, pitcher, etc. with a base coat of white or cream and spatter lightly with clear nail polish for a glaze.

Rubber Stamping

Rubber stamping is a fast and easy method of multiple image transfer. The variety of rubber stamp designs available means that there are many that are perfect for decorating in miniature. Look for a dealer in rubber stamps, and spend a few hours browsing their wares. You are sure to find stamps to meet your needs. As with stencils, rubber stamps can be used to produce a single design element or several stamps can be used to produce an elaborate design or one or several stamps can be used to fill an entire wall with colour. Create your own wallpaper, decorate lampshades, use one stamp to coordinate a whole room – bedspread, lampshades, window shades, rug, pillows, quilts, tiles, furniture backs, drapes, etc.

You will need:

- Rubber stamps can be purchased or cut from erasers.
 - Stamp pads (there are many sizes, shapes and colours, plain and multicoloured, permanent ink and pigment types, to be had).
 - Item suitable for stamping (paper, fabric, metal, wood, painted surfaces, leather, clay, plaster, Fimo, Sculpey).
1. Make sure the item to be stamped is clean and free from grease. If possible, pre-test material to be stamped to make sure the ink pad does not bleed.
 2. Keep ink pad well inked. Press stamp into pad a few times to get an even coat of ink. Each stamp is a bit different, some need more inking than others. Get to know your stamp(s) before starting a project.
 3. Use even, and not excessive, pressure when stamping. Do not rock stamp. (TIP: When changing stamps, clean stamp by blotting on damp paper towel).

Other tips include:

- For multi-coloured designs, colour different sections of the design with felt markers.
- Blank areas in stamped designs may be filled in or designed added to with water colours, coloured pencils or pens.
- A clear fixative will preserve and protect non-permanent inks.
- Look at stamps from all angles to see different ways they can be used.

Faux Wood Techniques

Faux wood makes good finishes for wainscoting, floors, furniture, or wherever one wants a wood-like look. Each of these techniques involves removing some of the top layer of paint to expose the base coat. Different techniques and tools create different effects.

You will need:

- Acrylic paints in different wood-tone colours.
 - Antiquing paint or acrylic retarder/extender
 - Soft cloths or razor saw or stiff paint brush or fine toothed comb.
1. Give the piece to be worked on a base coat of paint that is of a lighter shade than that which will be used for the top coat. Let dry. Mix retarder with top coat paint and brush over base coat in the direction that the wood grain will go. Then, use one of the following techniques.
 2. For antiquing, wipe top coat off in one direction with a soft cloth until desired effect is achieved. Let dry. Buff, wax, varnish or glaze as desired.
 3. For graining, gently scrape wet paint surface with razor saw in one direction, wiping off saw as necessary. Continue until a wood grain is achieved.
 4. Dragging is accomplished by dragging a rather wide, stiff bristled brush through the wet top coat, in one direction, until the base coat is showing through the brush strokes.
 5. A combined finish is accomplished by combing the wet paint until the desired pattern or under coat is exposed.

A combination of these techniques can also be used. NOTE: While all of these techniques are quite simple and easy to do for anyone, with practice you can produce some very exciting and realistic “fool-the-eye” results.

Sponge-work

Sponging is a fast and easy way to achieve a subtle painted finish. You may use one or several colours over a light base coat. The colours may have several shades of one colour, or completely different colours.

You will need:

- Acrylic colours of your choice
 - Sponge – if your sponge is not rounded off, cut it that way, or it will leave unnatural patterns.
1. Base coat the piece to be sponged. Let dry.
 2. Thin the sponging colours slightly with water and a bit of acrylic medium or retarder/extender in a saucer.

3. Dip sponge in prepared paint and blot off excess on paper towel until desired pattern emerges. Use the sponge in a blotting motion to apply the first colour over the base coat so that some of each is showing. If a second sponging colour is to be used, let the first colour dry and then apply with the second colour.

Tips:

- Two colours of almost the same shade will produce a suede look.
- By rotating the sponge periodically, you will be sure not to set up a pattern.
- Two colours of sponging will produce a marble-like look.

Stippling

Stippling requires very little artistic ability and produces professional looking results. Over the years, this technique has been used to cover all sorts of surfaces, but is most associated with walls and floors.

You will need:

- Two colours of acrylic paint (soft colours look best for this technique)
 - Acrylic medium or paint extender
 - Paper towelling or sponge
1. Base coat surface a light colour. Let dry a few hours or overnight.
 2. Mix a darker second colour with some medium or extender and brush over the base coat.
 3. Immediately use crumpled paper towel or sponge in a stippling motion over the top of the wet paint. This will remove some paint, letting the base coat show through. How much you remove is up to you and how fast you work before the paint dries. Keep the sponge as dry as possible by blotting on scrap paper as you work. If using paper towelling, rotate it when it becomes saturated.

Crackle

Crackle is an interesting finish that gives the appearance of age on the surface of painted pieces. This finish uses a commercial product and requires two colours of paint – one for the undertones and the other for the top.

You will need:

- Object to be painted (country pieces work well)
- Acrylic paint in two colours, one for the top colour and another for the base colour that will show through the cracks. This can be any combination, but a dark and light contrast works well.
- Commercial Crackle Glaze (at Michaels in the acrylic paint aisle)

1. Apply the base coat of desired acrylic paint. Let dry.
2. Brush one coat of crackle glaze over base coat. Let dry for 20 minutes to one hour.
3. Brush on the top colour of acrylic. The moisture of the top coat of paint will instantly activate the glaze, and the top coat will crackle. The wetter the top coat, the more crackle. Let dry.

Tip: Make a sampler for yourself of different colour combinations for future reference. Try adding some water to the top coat of acrylic to see the difference in crackling.