

Painting Textured Surfaces

The object of painting a textured surface is to increase the contrast between the high points of the texture and the low points. This creates an increased sense of depth, and makes the design more pronounced to the viewer. Techniques for painting textured relief's go back to at least to the ancient Egyptians if not farther, so nothing here is in any way new.

I began texture painting through Napoleonic table-top war-gaming. I ran a Warhammer 40,000 gaming league and painted figures and terrain to support it. As a result, I'm afraid my painting experience is less artistic and more ...,let's call it "practical."

There are several paint techniques that are designed to increase the contrast between high and low points in a relief, and they all involve several layers of paint. The layers need to be applied in the following order

1. **Base Coat** – This is equivalent to a sealer coat in house painting. It covers any unwanted color in the material and insures paint adhesion. Depending on your color scheme, the basecoat can add to the brightness of your final colors. It can also add shade to them. The traditional gaming basecoats have been either white or black, however, medium tone basecoats are now being commonly used for a variety of effects, primarily a light tan.

2. **Solid Colors** – At this point the primary colors in your color scheme should be applied – Application should be opaque. Two thin coats are much better than one thick one, because it preserves the natural texture of your surface. You probably want a complete coverage without the base coat showing through.

3. **Washes** – To create deep shadows in the crevices and add depth, apply a dark wash to the piece and allow a very thin paint to settle into the low areas. So painters actually dip the piece into the paint pot and wipe the high surfaces away. With a thin paint, this can add a great deal of contrast. There are a host of designated products made for washes. I don't see a real need for them. A standard dark acrylic paint watered down to its point of transparency usually works fine.

4. **Dry Brushing** – Dry Brushing adds a light color to the high surfaces on the relief. A flat-end stiff-bristle brush is used with a SMALL amount of paint. The paint is loaded into the bristle then wiped out. With this "almost dry" brush, the high spots are quickly brushed and a small amount of paint to transferred to the high surface only. And excellent tutorial can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=62U-9D3RpJg>.

Dry brushing is often used in furniture restoration and refurbishing. There the intent is not to highlight texture but to simulate age and texture. It is used to simulate distressing with sandpaper. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrNOM7j08P4>. For this application chalk paint is often recommended because it is flat and better simulates wear on the piece. This approach is useful if the surface is smooth and you want to give it some character.

Brushes

The discussion of paint brush quality is endless and the choices are vast and beyond my ability to overview. I would recommend a “good” soft pointed end brush for normal opaque painting. I recommend a cheap stiff bristle flat end brush for dry brushing. I say cheap because the very act of dry brushing will wear out your brush quickly and its not necessary to be precise. Buy cheap brushes and buy several.

Paint

Best. In my humble opinion, the best paint in the business is made by Games Workshop in England. They have been the forerunner in the table top hobby for thirty years. Their website is <https://citadelcolour.com/>. Games Workshop colors are all high quality and seem to have a higher content of lacquer in them than their competitors. Their paint is the best, and also the most expensive.

Better. I regularly use Testers Paint which is the old school model tank paint available in the model isle at Hobby Lobby. Their color pallet caters to military vehicles and they don't have many brights. They are common and reasonably priced. It is a mid level acrylic and very functional. It captures fine detail well, particularly when you cut the paint with water.

Good. But then, we're painting wood, and details tend to be much larger than gaming miniatures, and obscuring detail is not really an issue. So, any cheap acrylic in the Hobby Lobby craft paint isle will work just fine. There's a wide range of color and (if you catch a sale) its as low as 75 cents a bottle.

Palette

I recommend a palette to mix and thin paint. Skill with this is the difference between novice and intermediate skill levels in painting. Cheap white plastic palettes are fine. Gamers often use white tiles because it allows them to judge the opacity of the mix. There is also a “wet palette” which is basically a sponge in a case which will keep your paint wet from one application to the next. I've never used one. They look cool though.

<https://www.youtube.com/@ThePaintingClinic> – is a good series of tutorials that covers the gamete of painting techniques. Its PG-13. Be forewarned.