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How-To: A Gritty Angle on a Stipple

A Gritty Angle on Stipple

by Michael Cacy

Probably every airbrush artist knows how to stipple...that is, how to produce "dots" with an airbrush instead of the smooth, atomized spray for which the airbrush is best known. Just about every airbrush will stipple to some degree by simply adjusting the air pressure lower than normal. But, the standard tried-and-true *Iwata HP-C* is the airbrush I prefer for creating stippled textural effects. However, the *Iwata HP-A*, *HP-B*, and *HP-SB* airbrushes function equally well for stippling. Even the *Iwata Eclipse* models will stipple in this same technique (though not quite as effectively) as the models just mentioned. Micron type airbrushes will stipple, but are not ideal for this application. If the airbrush you use is a different brand, experiment to see how best to achieve a stipple effect. T-shirt artists often use the technique of spraying at an angle across a clothespin or popsicle stick, but this method is really more of a "splatter" technique.



Figure 1: To stipple with the Iwata HP-C, remove the needle cap and nozzle cap (the two front-most pieces) from the airbrush. Be very careful not to drop the airbrush with these pieces removed.

Figure 2: The left column depicts atomized spray with the needle cap and nozzle cap still attached to the airbrush. This yields the smooth spray that we expect from any airbrush at 25-psi. The next column shows a coarse spray pattern at 25-psi with the needle cap and nozzle cap removed. In each of the consecutive columns I reduced the air pressure by about 3-psi. In painting the final column, I rocked the trigger back and forth to get paint to flow. As you can see, the lower the air pressure, the larger the dots.



Aiming the airbrush directly at the surface produces tiny round dots. This type of stipple might be ideal for textural effects in painting sand, stone, brick, concrete, rust, a galaxy of stars in a night sky, or any number of other subjects. I even stipple flesh in my paintings so that it has a little texture and doesn't look like "plastic."

Figure 3: If you aim the airbrush at an angle across the surface (instead of aiming directly at it) the stippled pattern will be "slashes" instead of dots. As we will see, this angled stipple has various applications, too. These could include the textural pattern in wood grain, blades of grass in a lawn, the variegated hide of a deer, and others.



Figure 4: In the example of wood grain shown here, the angled stipple enhances the look and authenticity of the wood. Notice that the "slashes" applied run in the same direction as the wood grain. I've painted oak for my example, but an angled stipple would add to the credibility of many types of wood, including pine, fir, teak,

mahogany, and others.

Step 1: I will produce a small painting that employs both stipple as dots and stipple as slashes (directionally angled stipple). To, I sprayed the lawn area with a coat of medium value green. (The wall, stepping stones, and chair are protected by frisket masks. Be aware that really bold stipple may result in slight bleeding under masked edges.)



Step 2: Now for some stipple. Black is stippled at a very low angle across the lawn area. The air pressure is reduced to paint bolder slashes in the foreground and increased to

produce smaller slashes in the more distant portion of the lawn. This implies perspective. The black pattern represents shadows behind lit blades of grass achieved in the next step.



Step 3: Opaque light yellowgreen is stippled over the black and green. This, obviously, represents sunlit blades of grass. As in the previous step, air pressure was altered to achieve the boldest texture in the extreme foreground. There you go...a few million blades of grass, and not a single brush stroke. I decided to make my grass a little greener, and fogged

a little transparent green over the top of paints applied in steps 1, 2, and 3. Cast shadows on the grass under and to the left of the chair were darkened using an acetate loose mask.



THE FINISHED PAINTING

We can see where stipple was used as texture. Angled stipple was used on the grass and on the wooden chair. Dot stipple pattern (aiming the airbrush directly at the surface) was used on the brick-and-mortar wall and on the stepping stones. Stipple is probably the easiest and most versatile texture you can achieve with an airbrush.

Michael Cacy is a world-class illustrator whose career spans more than 30 years. A recipient of the 1997 Vargas Award, Cacy's client list includes Iditarod, Nike, Royal Bermuda Yacht Club, and many more. His video/DVD, *Illustration Cheap Tricks & Special FX*, is considered one of the best airbrush instructional presentations ever made.



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