

Tool Box Plaster Painting

Paint with plaster and tools to create a fresh, new Buon Fresco!

(art + history)

Painting on or with plaster is the oldest known form of painting, and during the Renaissance, it was considered the "Mother of all Arts." "Fresco" is the Italian word for fresh. Traditionally, Fresco paintings were done on fresh, wet plaster walls. Buon Fresco or true fresco is done by using a method in which pigments that have been ground in water are applied to wet plaster. It is different from fresco-secco and finto fresco techniques, in which paints are applied to plaster that is already dry. When pigments are combined with the wet plaster, the colors become a part of the plaster and are much more durable over time because they don't just sit on top of the plaster. Technically, plaster doesn't really dry; instead, a chemical reaction occurs in which calcium carbonate is formed when carbon dioxide from the air combines with the calcium hydrate in the wet plaster. That's also why plaster actually gets hot as it dries!

Certainly, the most famous and well known example of a Fresco painting is the huge ceiling of the Sistine Chapel painted by Michelangelo between 1508 and 1512. Because Michelangelo was working on wet plaster, he was only able to work on an area of the ceiling that he could complete in one day's time. Michelangelo painted onto the damp plaster using a wash technique to apply large areas of color, then as the surface started to dry, he worked in those areas with a more linear approach, adding shading and detail with a variety of brushes. For some textured surfaces, such as facial hair and woodgrain, he used a broad brush with bristles "as sparse as a comb."

Working with wet plaster is a fun and spontaneous act. When small batches of plaster are combined with textural elements and pigments, fresh and unique works of art are the result!

GRADES 5-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.



Materials (required)

Hardboard Panel, 9" x 12" (14945-1023); one per student

Plaster of Paris, 25 lb (33531-1025); share one bag across class

Richeson[®] Plastic Painting Knives, Set of 5 (03105-1059); share two sets across class

Blick[®] Liquid Watercolors, 8 oz (00369-); share five bottles across class

Plastic cups and spoons for mixing

Optional Materials

Kemper[®] Toothed Scraper, Serrated Edge (30334-1003)

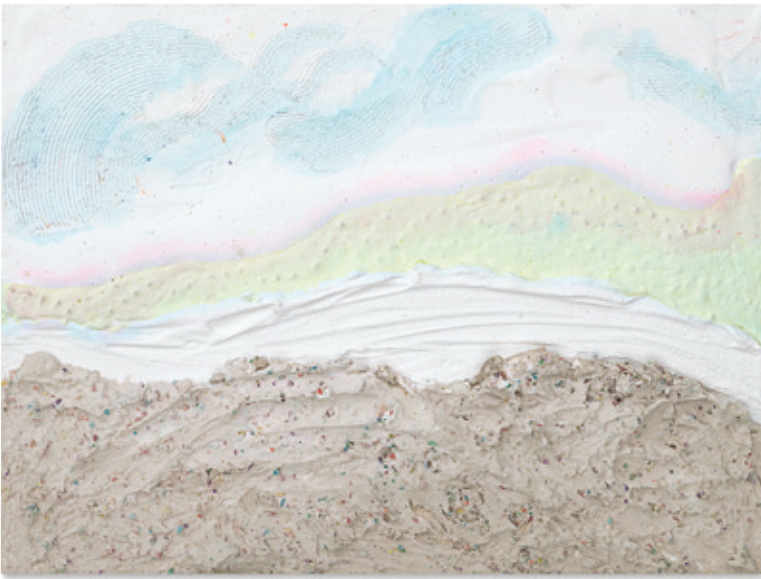
Brightly Colored Burlap (63202-)

Royal[®] Super Value Sponge Set (32934-0009)

Princeton[®] Catalyst[®] Wedges and Contours (03422-)

Colored Sand (61006-)





Step 1: Working on a hardboard panel, pour small batches of plaster onto separate, distinct areas. Apply by pouring, troweling, spooning, or brushing.

Preparation

1. View images of the Sistine Chapel.
2. Gather ingredients for adding texture to plaster, such as rice, seed beads, birdseed, barley, or other grains, small yarn or burlap pieces, sand, and other items.
3. Gather texture-making tools such as bubble wrap, burlap, combs, scrapers, sponges, and forks.

Process

1. Start by lightly sketching a composition onto a 9" x 12" hardboard panel. Think about which areas of the composition will be smooth or textured. Painting with plaster can be done spontaneously to create an abstract composition, or planned thoughtfully.
2. Each batch of plaster will be mixed separately and used all at once. Plastic cups work well to mix the plaster in because they are flexible and can be reused many times. NOTE: Once the plaster has dried in the cup, simply crack it out and throw it away — never put plaster down the sink! Into a plastic cup, scoop a cup or more of plaster. Slowly add water to the plaster in the cup, stirring constantly until it is the thickness of a heavy cream. Two variables will affect the speed at which the plaster hardens, the temperature of the water and the length of time spent mixing. Warmer water yields a faster setting time than cold. And stirring for a longer length of time will also cause a faster-setting plaster. Plan accordingly!
3. Try mixing just plaster and water without any pigments or textural elements. Use this where a smooth area is desired. If the plaster is mixed vigorously, bubbles will appear and might be transferred to the hardboard panel when it is poured. If a very smooth surface is desired, try to mix the plaster without incorporating any air.
4. Add pigment and/or texture while the plaster is still mixable. Pour a teaspoon or so of acrylic paint or liquid watercolor into the plaster. Mix completely, or leave only partially mixed for a marbled effect. Add rice, sand, or other textured materials to the plaster.



Step 2: Create texture in the plaster by adding inclusions or by applying with toothed scrapers or other tools. Textures can also be impressed when the plaster has set slightly.



Step 3: Color the plaster by adding paint into wet plaster, or painting on top of the plaster at any stage.

Process, continued

5. For each area of the composition where a different textural effect is desired, mix a separate small batch of plaster. Apply the plaster with various tools. It can be troweled on with a palette knife if it is mixed to a thicker consistency, applied with a brush, or smoothed on with a spoon. If the plaster is thick, a fork or combed rib can be used to create texture. If the plaster is very wet, textures can be pressed into it and lifted off such as bubble wrap, burlap, crumpled paper, or a sponge.
6. If white, uncolored areas of plaster are applied to the board, liquid watercolors can be brushed on top of the plaster while it is damp. The color sometimes “migrates” into adjoining areas, resulting in an interesting “halo” effect.
7. After the composition is completed by pouring and texturing, details can be added with a small brush once the plaster is mostly or completely dry, if desired.



National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.