

Color Applications with an Airbrush

Greg Smith Feb. 1, 2010

Airbrushing Applications

Automotive: pinstriping, graphics, helmets, MC Tanks

Fabric: T-Shirts

Illustration: canvas, paper, portrait

Body Art: tattooing, fingernail

1. KISS - Keep It Sanitary, Silly
2. Wear a mask or respirator!
3. Learn what your mediums are made from
4. Ventilate
5. Wear eye protection
6. Use some type of "cleaning station" or "catch container"
7. Learn the ins & outs of your airbrush
8. Start with water based mediums

Equipment

Here is a brief run down on the different types of paints most commonly used in an airbrush. Most of the following can be purchased in most art stores, craft shops. A few of the paints listed must be purchase at specialty shops like automotive paint suppliers.

As you begin to learn "How To" airbrush its best to use a paint made specifically for airbrushing. A few good ones are ComAir, Golden Airbrush Colors, Createx. The pigments in these colors are ground finer than those in craft paints allowing for easy use in an airbrush. Craft, textile paints are fine to use after you learn the basics but when first learning to airbrush using an airbrush ready paint like Golden Airbrush Colors will make the learning process much more enjoyable believe me Most of these paints fall into two categories either Transparent or Opaque. For learning purposes it really does not matter which you use; the best color to start out with is Black as it's very unforgiving.

Airbrush Paints

WATER COLORS - As the name states these are water based colors well suited for use in an airbrush. Available in pre reduced form airbrush ready or in tubes. Water colors best reduced in most cases with distilled water and are very transparent type paint.

ACRYLICS - These come in both opaque and transparent colors. There are many manufactures but you will find it much easier to use these if you stick with a brand made for use in an airbrush. Usually can be thinned with water or if the manufacture makes a reducer that should be used. Acrylics can be cleaned up with water or a cleaning agent if the paint manufacture makes one. Long lasting on just about any surface, be sure to read the manufactures tech sheet on surface prep, best uses before you use them. Do not allow these to dry in your airbrush, clean right after use.

OIL PAINTS - A solvent based paint can be thinned with turpentine, minerals spirits and cleaned up with same products. Oils can be either opaque or transparent depending on how much you thin them. Oil paints have a very slow drying time.

Lacquer – These are not generally pre-made air brush paints

India Ink –

Basic airbrush information dealing with airbrushes made by the leading airbrush manufactures

Badger, Paasche, Iwata, Grex, Harder Steenbeck and more. This is a very quick overview of the different types of airbrushes.

Airbrushes can be either internal or external mix, single action or double (dual) action.

Color Applications with an Airbrush

Some Airbrush Definitions

EXTERNAL MIX - Combine air and paint after they exit the tip of the airbrush. Paint volume is controlled by a knob on the airbrush. __

INTERNAL MIX - Combine air and paint inside the airbrush (tip actually).

ACTION - How the trigger is used to control the airbrush functions which affect the spray pattern of the airbrush.

Air Brush Action Types

SINGLE ACTION - Pushing down on the trigger gives you both paint and air. To stop paint being applied (flowing) just let up on the trigger. Amount of paint applied is controlled by a separate knob (pictured below). Single action airbrushes operate much the same as a can of spray paint but with the added ability of being able to adjust the amount of paint applied and the air pressure. To control the amount of paint the single action will apply when you push down on the trigger you would adjust the paint volume adjustment knob. Turning the knob clockwise decreases paint flow and turning it counter clockwise increases paint flow. Which means during the painting process to adjust paint flow you must stop and adjust the paint volume knob to increase or decrease paint flow. Very slow process painting anything in this manner, very limiting.

DOUBLE ACTION - Pushing down on the trigger gives you air, pulling back on the trigger gives you paint. The amount of air used should be controlled at your compressor setting not by feathering the amount of pressure you apply by pressing down on the trigger. Amount of paint applied is determined by how far back you pull the trigger. (pictured below) This gives you ability to paint non stop and increase or decrease paint flow simply by how much you pull the trigger back or push it forward. Giving you much more control during the painting process than the single action airbrush. Double action or dual action is great for applications where constant adjustments of spray widths and volume are required. The spray pattern as with a single action airbrush is determined by how far from the painting surface you are. The closer you are the smaller the spray pattern the further away you are from the painting surface the larger the spray pattern will be.

Air Brush Styles

Whether it be dual action or single action there are three different style airbrushes available. Gravity feed, siphon feed and side feed.

Gravity feed - The most detail oriented airbrush style available. As the paint is stored directly above the airbrush and it is gravity that draws the paint to the needle / tip makes this style airbrush the most consistent and responsive style airbrush. Nozzle size range from 0.10 to 0.35 mm

Siphon Feed - The advantage of this style airbrush is the ability to use many different size color cups and bottles and to change colors quickly. Nozzle sizes range from 0.1 to 0.5mm

Side Feed - The advantage of this style airbrush is the color cup attached to the side will rotate 360 degrees giving you the ability to work at just about any angle or even over head. Nozzle sizes range from 0.10 to 0.35mm.

Compressors

Diaphragm compressors – very inexpensive, but can impart pulsations

Piston compressor – uses a piston and has a surge tank, can be oil-less or std. oil lubricated pump

Oil-less run faster and are noisier than oil lub. piston

Filter, Regulator and moisture/oil trap should be close to the airbrush.

Air Hose and Gun Holder

Color Applications with an Airbrush

Air hose I recommend a 10 foot braided hose these come with 1/8 hose connectors on each end
Install a std 1/4 inch quick connect on one end and an airbrush quick connect on the other. Buy the quick connect when you buy your airbrush, buy 2 sets so you have an extra that fits.
Buy or make a holder for the airbrush that will hold it in the level position.

Technique

Tyoes – Stencil, Freehand, or combinations

How to:

Hold it like a pen with second hand support

Push down, Pull back

Move it close and back from the paper

Practice Strokes

1. Lines and Dots

Air on

Start motion

Pull back trigger, push forward to reduce paint

Follow through with air on

2. Dagger strokes

3. Loops and Curls

Make Palm tree

4. Shading

Shade a place on the paper

Make a ball

Sphere use round template

Know where the light comes from

Build up color slowly

Cleaning

Cleaning Solution – Ready made or Self made

20% Ammonia 80% Water

Although this is an effective formula, it is moderate in strength. I do not recommend using more than a 30% ammonia/ 70% water mix. Anything stronger could damage your airbrush!

NOTE: Always rinse with clear water after using any airbrush cleaner!

What to do to keep the paint flowing instead of clogging and spattering. Often it is simply a matter of keeping the tip of the needle moist. Periodically, during your work, it is helpful to simply apply a drop of water to the tip of your needle. Remember that you are blowing air along with the paint! Air dries paint, and under the right atmospheric conditions, it can dry it as it comes out of the nozzle!

CAUTION!! THE TIP OF AN AIRBRUSH NEEDLE IS VERY FRAGILE AND WILL BEND EASILY. HANDLE WITH CARE!!

Color Applications with an Airbrush

Airbrush References:

learning Airbrush Info

- 7 AirBrush Action Magazine
- 8 Airbrush Technique Magazine
- 9 www.howtoairbrush.com

Airbrushes and supplies

Du-All
31431 John R, Madison Heights MI 48071

Bear Air - Iwata

www.bearair.com

Coast Air Brush – Iwata, Comair

www.coastairbrush.com

Airbrush Depot- Master, Createx

www.tcpglobal.com/airbrushdepot

Harbor Freight Detroit Local stores

Small air filters, & regulators

Airbrush holder ITEM 98036- \$12

Braded Airbrush hose No. 95813 - \$7.00

Some Starter Airbrushes

Gravity feed 1/3 oz Cup

Iwata Eclipse HP-CS \$119 -

Iwata Revolution CR4500 \$73 to \$115

Master Airbrush Model G22: \$39.95

Paints:

Airbrush suppliers above and

Michaels, Du-All (31431 (John R Madison Hts) ,
other art supply stores

Createx transparent or Opaque \$3.39 –4.49

Media ComArt

Home-made airbrush holder

Make from 3 1/2 inch piece of 1/2 inch pvc,

Start with a longer piece and cut off at 45 Degrees

Drill for screw and cut counter bore flat for screw with Dremel

Screw the pipe to a board and cut off the area for the airbrush with band saw or coping saw

Clean up with small drum sander on Dremel tool

1/2 inch Sch 40 pvc pipe

