

Best Methods for Painting Structures

April 11, 2020

The question was raised by one of our members regarding painting structures with an air brush or by alternative methods. The following on-line discussion ensued. The bottom line was that an air brush is good for rolling stock and locomotives but not necessary for structures.

Responses:

April 11, 2020

Initial Response by Tim Wilmot, Education Chair NWV:

Hi,

I have painted lots of structures and never used an airbrush (although I own one). As I have mentioned in my recent clinic, I like flat Rustoleum primers for a base paint and craft paint for details. The brushes can be bought from Amazon, for example

https://www.amazon.com/Detail-Model-Paint-Brushes-Set/dp/B0859QZZ5P/ref=psdc_2236130011_t1_B07GHGR6GV

Or, you could order from Michaels etc. Michaels appears to have lots of

paint in stock:

<https://www.michaels.com/american-acrylic-paint-2oz/M10132000.html>

The best acrylic paints for this purpose usually come from hobby shops that cater to military modelers, as the small bottles of paint they sell are much more concentrated than standard cheap craft paints, and don't dry up easily as the bottles themselves are also superior. Here is a site that caters to fine scale RR modelers--check out their "University" for advice on colors <https://www.sierrawestscalemodels.com/ho-scale.html>

In any case, some other members may be masters of the airbrush, but Benjamin can probably get along fine without one unless he starts painting locomotives.

Regards,

Tim

Addendum by Mike Saunders, April 11, 2020

There are many, many methods of painting structures, I reserve air bushing to cars, engines and weathering mostly.

Brush painting can produce excellent results with the proper paint and brushes.

It is important before painting that the surface be clean of all mold release. Cleaning with "Shout" like what you use for laundry works great.

I think Ben said he gets the E-zine Model railroad hobbyist. They have an acrylic painting guide with a free download. (Great guide).

Next, he needs good brushes.

Then good paint. Must be fine ground, self-leveling, thin, and not dry too fast.

I prefer paints that do not have all the petroleum bases. (It is safer and does not require as much ventilation.)

New craft paint works. The nicest and easiest to use is Vallejo, it comes in many colors. Turner Toys has it. They will order colors they do not have.

Craft paint is \$1 or \$2 per bottle.

Vallejo is more expensive at over \$3.50 per small bottle of 17ml. It comes in an eye dropper bottle. It is very fine ground and self-leveling, giving a good finish. It covers well and goes a long way.

Remember NEVER, NEVER brush from the container. Put some on a small piece of plastic bag to work from and put the cap back on the bottle.

<https://acrylicosvallejo.com/en/>

Catalog-hobby-vallerjo-november-2019.pdf

Look for the catalog November 2019 in the download section, it has a lot of instructions on how to use the products.

Hope this helps.

Additional from Chris Monje: April 18, 2020

<https://model-railroad-hobbyist.com/sites/Acrylic-Paint-Guide>

Relevant excerpt:

Do NOT thin your acrylic paint with just water (tap water or even distilled water). Water has a high surface tension and beads up, especially on plastic or metal. Water is fine for cleanup but not by itself as a paint thinner.

Page 31 in this document had more details on thinning acrylic paint, mostly for air brushing. Armor All glass cleaner can also be used for cleaning, but I have not used it myself.

(Note: the following link only works for subscribers to model railroad hobbyist magazine.)

<https://model-railroad-hobbyist.com/subscribers-only/painting/acrylics>

Do NOT brush paint straight from bottle! Remove paint from the bottle onto a palette (old plastic bag) and work from there rather than painting from an open bottle and wiping the brush on the lip. A palette allows more control over how much paint you get on the brush, it avoids the paint in the open bottles from thickening prematurely, and it keeps dried paint off the bottle lip. When brush painting, use three small plastic Dixie cups about half full of Armor All Auto Glass cleaner. Use the first cup for the initial brush wash (the dirty cup), move the brush to the second cup to remove the rest of the paint (the cloudy cup). Lastly, move the brush to

the third cup (clean cup) and give it a final quick rinse. Never load a totally dry brush with paint. Dampen the brush with thinner and wipe the excess on a paper towel. Now dip that damp brush into the paint on your palette. Load only the lower half of the brush with paint. Get an old frozen dish microwave tray and flood the bottom with some Armor All Auto Glass cleaner. Lay your working brushes in this tray with the bristles end in the Armor All. This keeps any paint residue in the working brush from drying out and keeps the tip pre-wetted before each use. Do the end-of-session brush cleaning at the sink with a cake of ordinary soap. Put the soap under running warm water and wipe the brush back and forth on the soap cake to build up a lather. Remove the soap from under the water and continue to work the brush back and forth in the soap lather until there is no more staining of the lather from any paint residue in the brush.