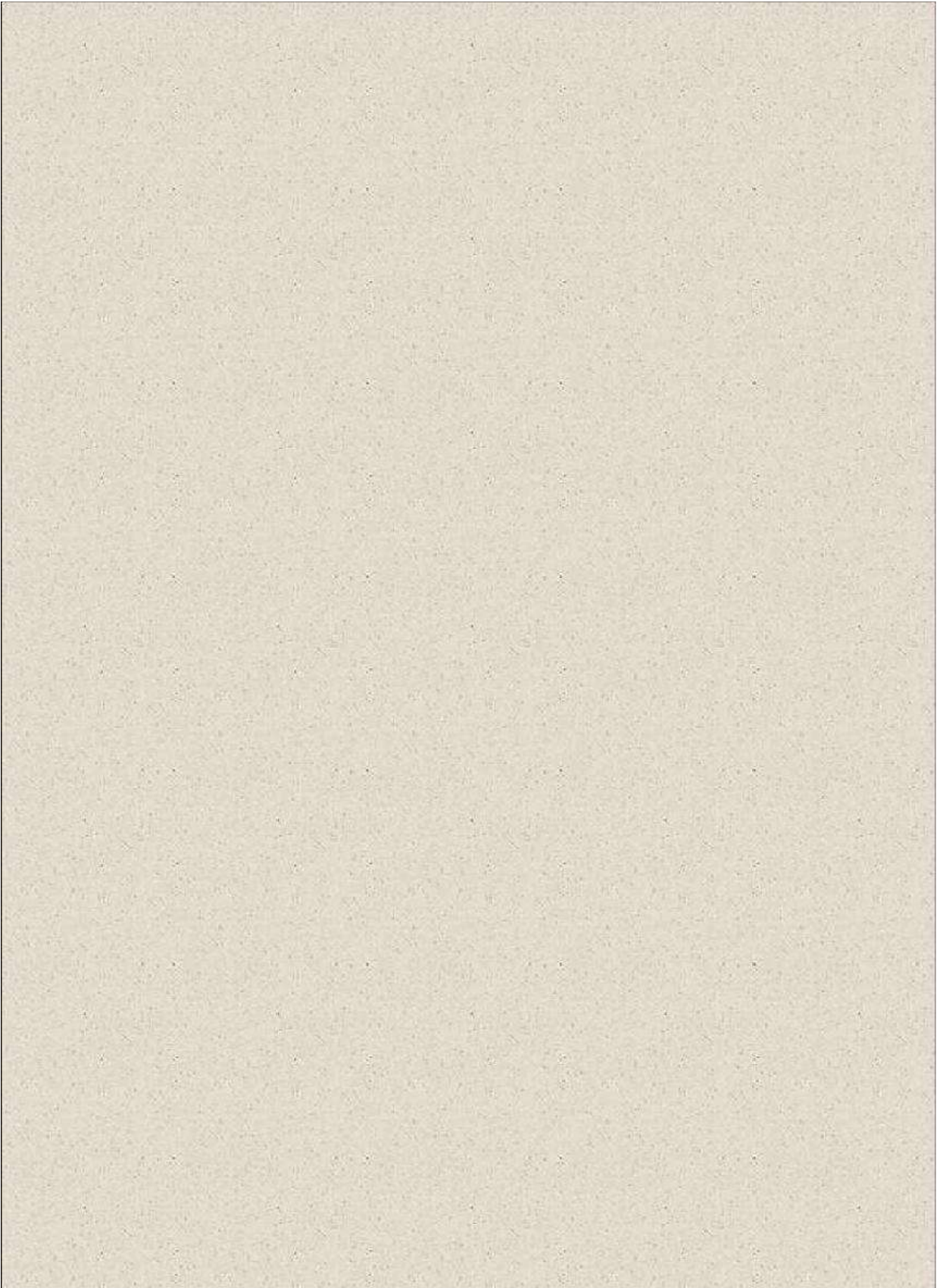


Simona Zecca

PRACTICAL
AIRBRUSHING
MANUAL
FOR BEGINNERS



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Simona Zecca

Practical Airbrushing Manual





for beginners

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Cover: acrylic airbrush on canvas painting by Simona Zecca (portrait from "Afghan Girl" picture by Steve McCurry)

Introduction

This manual is dedicated to those who want to approach the use of the airbrush to learn how it works and the basic techniques needed to create illustrations, paintings or to customize objects.

We will overlook this charming painting tool and also deepen all we need to learn about equipment, materials, media and tools needed to get the kind of airbrushing you want.

We will also focus on the maintenance of the airbrush, which is essential for its proper functioning and on how to identify and solve the most frequent problems during use.

We will then move on to a series of basic exercises to start getting familiar with the airbrush and you will see them all explained and implemented step by step, in a clear and simple way.

Finally, we will see how to make an illustration and you will be guided from the beginning to the end during all the phases of its creation.

I created this manual trying to explain everything in the simplest, most understandable and exhaustive way for beginners, trying to go back in time to when I started as to approach the art of airbrushing as a self-taught and therefore asking myself: what I would have liked to be taught in the beginning and how? There it is, the kind of guidance I would have needed.

I therefore hope that my mini course will be useful to you and I remind you that, in case you need clarification or insights, you can contact me via email at info@simonazecca-art.it and, if possible, I will be happy to help you!

At this point, I just have to start and introduce you to your new creative work tool: **the airbrush !**

Simona

Background

Airbrush is a very versatile painting technique that is used on various types of surfaces to create small and big works of art, from illustrations on paper, to canvas paintings, to customization of large surfaces such as those of vehicles or objects commonly used such as helmets and, recently, even in confectionery for decorations and for nail art or body painting.

In this page, some of the various uses of airbrush (illustration on top left and helmet by Simona Zecca).



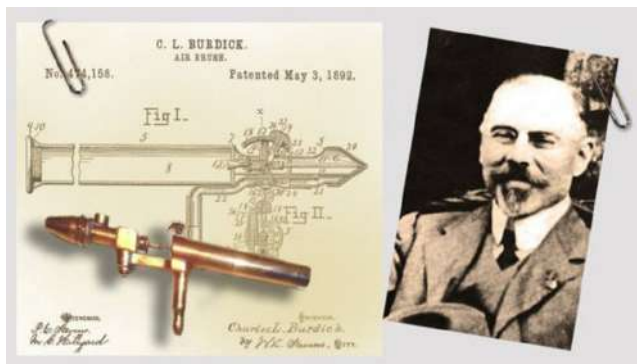






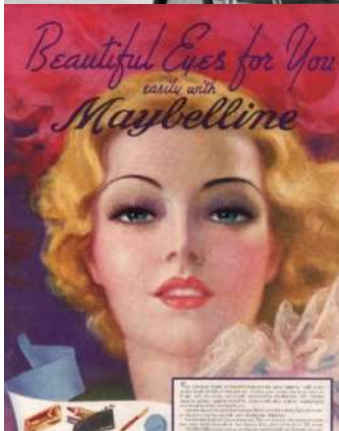
The history of airbrush is relatively recent, even if a painting technique used in prehistoric times is considered as a primitive form of airbrushing, when a hollow bone was used to blow pigments of colors on the rock to make cave paintings.

The airbrush, however, was officially born in 1893, when Charles Burdick patented the first device, used for photographic retouching





During the 1930s, the airbrush began to be employed for advertising illustrations and soon after that it was used to paint Pin-Ups on US aircraft during World War II. This was the time when airbrushing began to appear in the modern world as a true form of art.





In 1940, Walt Disney introduced a new use of the airbrushing by creating backgrounds for his animated movies with this technique.

The 1960s then introduced new possibilities for the use of airbrushing. In fact, the covers of several music albums from that period were made using the art of airbrushing to create images with a classic hippy design .



Since then, this technique has spread more and more, becoming very popular in the field of illustration, painting and customization of objects and vehicles of all types and sizes.



Only recently, digital graphics have almost completely supplanted the use of the airbrush in the field of illustration, but the uses of this technique remain multiple and applied on the most different types of surfaces. The only limits to the art of airbrushing lie within the limits of the artist himself.

Operation and components

The airbrush is one of the most fascinating and versatile painting tools as it allows you to spray color precisely and evenly, creating exceptionally realistic shades, depth effects, shadows and lights.

It is in fact a small spray gun the size of a pen with a cup attached to contain the color. The reservoir can be placed on the side or under the gun body on some models or on the top of the instrument (gravity feed).

The most popular airbrushes today are the double action ones. They are equipped with a small button to manage air/color flow, the trigger which if pressed allows the flow of air which is mixed with the color, nebulizing it thanks to the action of the valve.

Trigger also controls the action of the needle which, by retracting, allows the atomized mixture to come out of the nozzle placed on the tip of the instrument, settling on medium.

The double action button therefore has two functions:

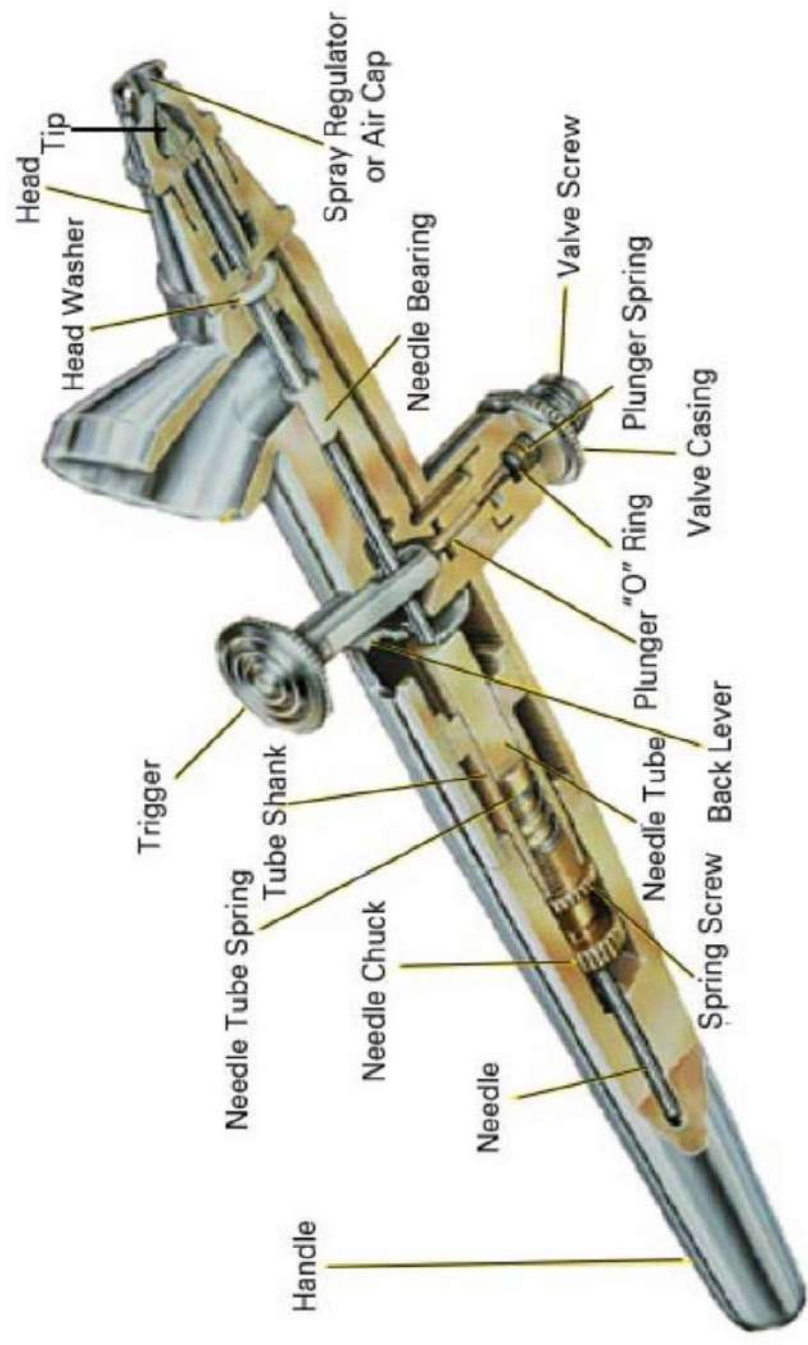
- the pressure on the button adjusts the amount of air in output;
- on its rearward movement, it controls the needle movement and the amount of sprayed liquid: this way, it increases or decreases the color cast and



Nozzle can be of various sizes, depending on the use you want to make of the airbrush and the type of paint you intend to make. The higher the level of precision and detail to be achieved, the smaller the size of the nozzle and consequently of the needle (from 0.15 mm for precision work to 0.8 for the creation of large-sized paints).

The cup also varies in relation to the amount of color you need to spray.

Obviously, there are different types of airbrushes and the necessary accessories can also be very different, from compressors to the types of color to be used.



Choice of tool - The best to start with

The choice of brands that produce airbrushes is very wide and allows you to identify the most suitable tool for every type of need.

The airbrushes that I will suggest are among the best on the market for those who want to approach the art of airbrushing. They are produced by four worldwide top brands in the world: **Harder & Steenbeck** , **Iwata** , **Paasche** and **Richpen** .

Ultra 0.20 Harder & Steenbeck

The "Ultra" model is the beginner-friendly airbrush created by Harder & Steenbeck . It is a double action gravity airbrush and can also optionally mount a 0.4 mm nozzle and a 5 ml tank .

Needle / Nozzle : 0.20 mm

Excellent quality / price ratio: about 72 euros



Iwata Neo HP-CN E 0.35

It is an excellent quality airbrush whose reliability is guaranteed by the prestigious company Iwata name.

Thanks to its technical characteristics it is suitable for various uses, including modeling and hobby and for its cost it becomes ideal also for those who want to try their hand at illustration and painting.

Gravity Feed. Price: about 95 euros



Paasche Talon TG-3F SET 3 needles 0.25-0.38-0.66

The most complete kit of Paasche Model Talon, provided with needle and nozzle in three different sizes: 12:25 mm, 0.38mm, 0.66 mm. An airbrush suitable for almost all applications, which you can work with on any scale, from the smallest detail to the pattern of large areas.

The TG from Paasche is an independent double-action airbrush with gravity tank. It features a chrome body and anodized aluminum handle for durability. It allows you to obtain very fine details and, using the included Fan Cap, strokes up to 7.5 cm in width. Thanks to the PTFE seal is possible to use the airbrush with both water or solvent-based paints.

It is used in graphics, model making, cake design, temporary tattoos, nail art, graphic art, illustrations, etc.

Excellent quality/price ratio: about 147 euros



Richpen Apollo 112B



Apollo 112B is a precision airbrush from the historic Japanese brand Richpen . It is a double action gravity spray gun, with a 15 ml tank, suitable for any type of use.

Needle/Nozzle : 0.20 mm

Excellent quality/price ratio: about 150 euros

Conclusion: if you want a great airbrush for jobs with a fairly high level of detail and don't want to spend too much on your first airbrush, just choose Harder & Steenback.

If you are curious to try one of the airbrushes of the Japanese brand Iwata that boasts an almost uncomparable precision, you can try Neo HP-CN, considering however that the 0.35 needle will not allow you very thin freehand lines and marks, but especially at the beginning this may not be your main focus.

The most complete ever of these three is the American Paasche Talon , great tool, my first airbrush, I would buy it again anytime, available in this version with three sets of needle and nozzle and tip. If you want to spend a little more but have a versatile and high quality airbrush at a more-than-affordable price given what it offers, it is the best choice.

Richpen Apollo 112b is the airbrush I am currently using and I can only talk about it very well: very good hand/trigger feel, simple, precise, quality components, easy to clean. Absolutely recommended.

Equipment and materials

Compressor

The airbrush sprays color mixed with air at a certain level of pressure. It therefore needs compressed air to work, which is normally obtained with a compressor. However, there are also other ways to supply air to the airbrush, such as disposable cans, but the compressor is always the best and most efficient solution.

There are both dry and oil bath compressors . The latter generally require more maintenance but have a longer life and allow you to work many consecutive hours without any problem and reach even a very high maximum pressure.

The cons, unlike the dry ones are generally weight, size and price.

For starters, a good dry compressor may be the best choice. I suggest this one, or a product with similar characteristics:

Werther TC108 / C silent dry compressor

Silent portable compressor with pressure regulator, anti-condensation filter and automatic ON / OFF.

Technical characteristics Power:

115 WATT

Maximum pressure: 3.8 BAR

(55PSI) Automatic operation: YES

Pressure reducer with anti-condensation filter and pressure gauge: YES Voltage: 220/240 V - 50 HZ

Noise: 45 dB

Weight: 5.1KG

Dimensions: 17 X 28 X 22 cm Price: approximately 170 euros

It is a light and quite silent compressor, small and excellent quality.



Spray booth

As a beginner, the spray booth will not be indispensable unless you want to start immediately practicing with modeling or with the airbrushing of helmets or other medium-sized objects instead of on paper (which I do recommend to always start with to acquire familiarity).

This tool allows you to airbrush by limiting the *overspray*, that is to say the particles of color that do not settle on the surface you are working on (especially when you work with large backgrounds) and that you risk breathing.

If you work on paper with liquid or acrylic watercolors and therefore water-based, it is not essential to use the spray booth because health risks are minimal, even if it is still good to have it regularly in case you perform hobby and customization work of objects that require

many hours of work and extensive color application. This precaution will serve both to avoid breathing the nebulized color and to find it laying on the surfaces around to the one you are working on.

If, on the other hand, solvent-based colors are used (for model making or bodywork, for example), the use of the spray booth will be essential as well as the mask and gloves.

There are booths of various sizes depending on the use of the airbrush that you are going to do, from the table ones to the bodywork ones in which you can airbrush , for example, a motorcycle.

BENCH VENT BV260S spray booth with recirculation of air hereafter is the one I am using.

To start, however, even if you want to customize a helmet, for example, using acrylic colors it is sufficient to equip yourself with an FFP2 mask (with valve).

However, it remains a good rule to work in an airy environment ensuring good air circulation.



Colors

When you start using the airbrush, another choice to make carefully is that of the colors to use and, essentially, it will have to be made according to the type of result you want to obtain and the surface you intend to work on.

Airbrush colors, but in general the colors to be used in the arts, divide into:

- opaque colors
- transparent colors

Opaque colors for airbrush

Opaque colors are those that when sprayed one on top of the other, only the last color applied will be seen. For example, if you use an opaque red on a blue background, the red will remain red.

Usually the opaque colors, for airbrush or not, are made with more full-bodied pigments that always need thinning. Acrylic colors will be thinned more if you use an airbrush with a precision nozzle and therefore with a narrower nozzle passage, this obviously to avoid obstructing it and obtaining irregular strokes and splashes.

A classic example of opaque color are acrylics (which, however, also exist in transparent versions for airbrushes), and you can also experiment with them with a brush. The brand of acrylic paints for airbrushes that I recommend is Hansa and its whole Pro-Color line.





Transparent airbrush colors

Transparent colors, if superimposed, allow to obtain particular shades, because the color spread on top of the other will mix with it. They are usually brighter colors than opaque colors and liquid watercolors are an example of this.

Various types of colors can be used with the airbrush:

- water-based acrylic colors (opaque and transparent)
- liquid watercolors (ex: Ecoline Talens)
- solvent-based colors
- dyeing colors for pastry
- colors for nails
- colors for fabrics

In this course, we will consider water-based acrylic paints and liquid watercolors. The former can be used both for illustration on paper and painting on canvas as well as for painting on plastic, metal, fiberglass, wood and many other surfaces, obviously adequately prepared before painting and protected with specific final varnish at the end of the work.

Acrylic colors are available in both opaque and transparent types. They can be thinned with water (better if distilled, to avoid calcareous clogging of the airbrush) or with a specific thinner that generally exists for every brand of acrylics for airbrushes (it is however not essential if not to thin particularly dense colors without losing intensity).

Thinning of acrylic colors for airbrushes must however be done according to the effect you want to obtain: if you want more or less soft shades or solid color backgrounds, you have to experiment to understand what changes and how to thin the acrylic colors depending on needs.

Acrylic colors are great for different applications, they are great for painting but also for model making, they can be used on plastic, wood and even metal. They are very versatile and exist both opaque and transparent.

Liquid watercolors are used exclusively on paper and cardboard and their characteristic is transparency and therefore the overlapping of colors to obtain the desired shades and intensities. They are thinned with water, always preferably distilled.

If you need to airbrush on white paper, you can try your hand at experimenting with the effects of transparent colors. They are ideal to start, very beautiful in color rendering, shades will be delicate and color combinations endless but if you have to airbrush on plastic or metal, for example, you will need an opaque acrylic color type .

Cleaning between the use of one color and another during work and at the end of the session is essential to ensure correct functioning of the airbrush.

It is necessary to use a special cleaner, as we will see later.

An airbrush used with acrylic paints will need to be cleaned more frequently during work and more thorough when finished than when using liquid watercolors.



To use them, you must also make su

If you are using colors with aggressive solvents (white spirit, nitro etc.), it is advisable to use tools with suitable components materials, to prevent them from being damaged.

Since they are toxic and flammable, it is more dangerous to handle them and they should only be used wearing a mask with a filter and in an environment equipped with a fume extractor.

To use them, you must also make sure that seals on your airbrush are in Teflon and that its body is made of

Accessories

When painting with the airbrush, the following materials are practically indispensable to perform and retouch the work, as we will have the opportunity to deepen during the exercises:

- Synthetic brushes from 00 to 3 or more (to perform any retouching, define contours, etc.)
- Pastels (for retouching and finishing details, only if working on paper)
- Liquid for masking
- F4 type paper sheets to make mobile and / or suspended masks (as we will see later)
- Sheets of adhesive film such as " Frisket " (for masking)

- Adhesive paper tape of various heights (for masking)
- Cutter
- Scalpel
- Cutting mat
- Cleaning station
- Cleaner
- Distilled water
- Container for water
- Absorbent paper



Media

You can work on virtually any medium. Obviously, if you intend to work on surfaces that are not paper, cardboard or canvas, you must prepare them in a suitable and specific way.

As a pictorial technique, airbrush is applied mainly on smooth surfaces, which requires the use of satin paper or in any case as less rough as possible. On the other hand, that of the airbrush is a technique that wets paper, causing undulations and wrinkles that make it difficult, if not impossible, to apply even color, use of masks, design of shapes, etc. It is therefore necessary to work on thick sheets of paper with a high grain number or "Schoeller " type cardboards or on cotton canvas, preferably with extra fine grain.

If you intend to work on plastic, metal, fiberglass or similar materials, the surface must be previously adequately degreased, also using an anti- silicone spray, it will be lightly sanded with

abrasive paper and subsequently it will be necessary to apply a spray primer to metal, plastic or specific for the type of surface you want to paint on



Cleanance and maintenance

General indications

Obviously, the better the quality of the components of the instrument, the longer the life of your airbrush but the care you dedicate to it will be even more important.

In fact, as you know, airbrush is a high precision tool that can be easily damaged by any impact. So be very careful not to drop it! Although it is possible to buy spare parts for practically all the components of your airbrush, it is always better not to have to replace them due to their quite expensive costs, especially if we are talking about brands of a certain level like Iwata, for example.

The needle, for instance, is a fundamental component for the success of the work and is particularly fragile, therefore always remember not to leave it uncovered during work breaks because, if the airbrush falls or you hit the tip of the needle, you will damage it almost irreparably and you might be almost certainly forced to change it. If the needle bends slightly at the tip, which can also occur after prolonged use, it may be sufficient to try to straighten it by resting the tip on the surface of the table, rotating it gently while exerting light pressure on it with a flat object, such as a razor blade.



There are also some special tools to repair needles and restore the shape of its tip more accurately without needing to replace it. However, this is an accessory that you can avoid buying, you just need to be careful not to damage the needle.



Furthermore, it is essential to pay close attention to cleaning the airbrush. Water is a sufficiently effective medium if you use liquid watercolors even if , at the end of the work session, it is always advisable to complete the cleaning with a specific cleaner .

If you use acrylic colors, which are more dense and which risk drying out quickly inside the tool forming a rubbery film, the use of a cleaner liquid is absolutely essential.

If by any chance the cleaning liquid ends up in the middle of a working session, it is possible to replace it by using a common one for cleaning windows (Quasar, Vetril and so on) or alcohol, but it is always better to use these alternative methods only in case of emergency. With the appropriate cleaners, in fact, you can be sure that the components of the airbrush will never be damaged in any way.

Furthermore, for the perfect preservation of the airbrush, it is always important to work at the appropriate pressure for each device, generally indicated in the instructions for use. This pressure varies between 1 and 5 db , depending on the model, and it is however advisable to always work at a standard pressure, between 1.5 and 3 atmospheres.

Cleaning operations

A very useful tool while you work is the cleaning station. It offers you a support for the airbrush and is essential to avoid going back and forth to sink to clean your tool at each color change.

airbrush .

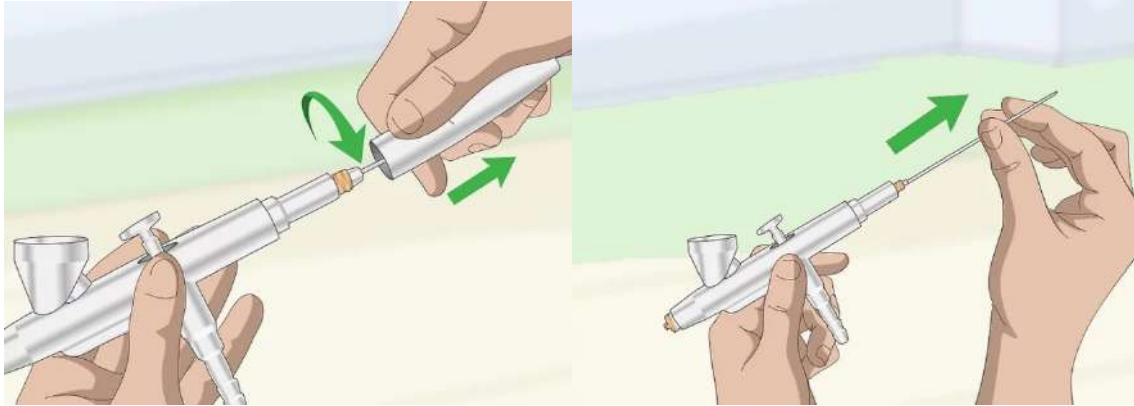
Now let's see in detail how to clean the



Whenever you have finished using a color, you will need to clean the airbrush before using another. You will then fill the tank with a little distilled water alternating with cleaner, and let it all come out at the maximum pressure and opening of the trigger (completely pressed and pulled back). You will perform this operation with the tip of the airbrush inserted in the opening of the cleaning station, which allows you to spray water and cleaner inside it.

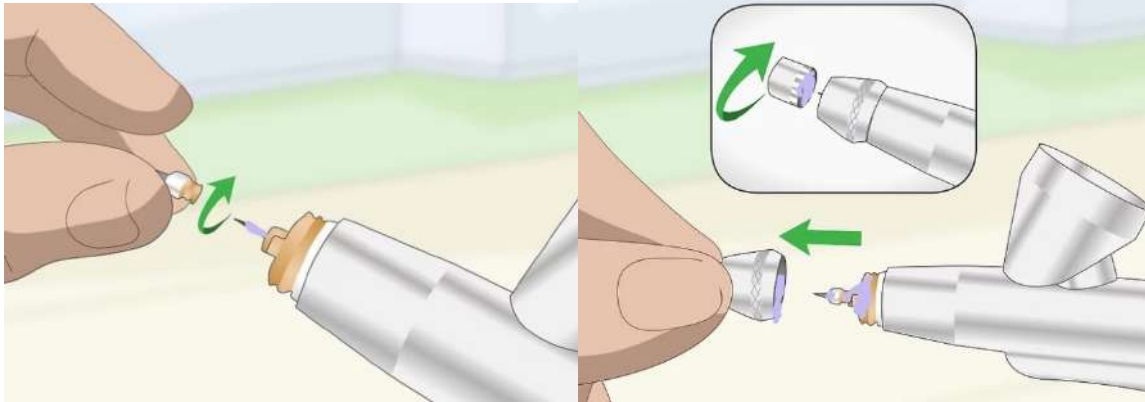
Do some tests on the paper to check that no more color comes out before moving on to the one you will need to use next. It is also a good idea to extract the needle from time to time and clean it, during and at the end of your working session.

Now let's see how to carry out the cleaning operations:



2. Extract the needle very carefully and clean it with a cotton swab moistened with cleaner liquid, avoiding sudden movements; any distortion would compromise the precision and sharpness of the atomized spray.

1. To remove the needle, remove the handle of the airbrush and unscrew the needle chuck that



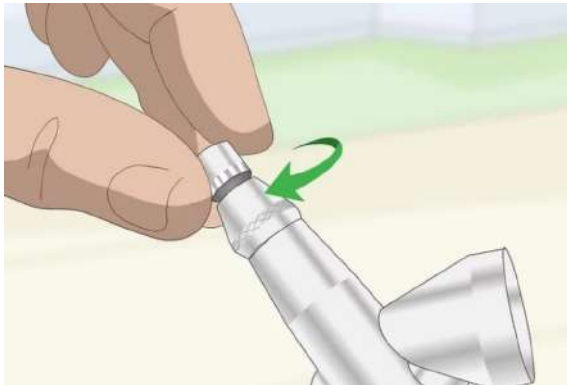
4. Gently unscrew the nozzle with the special tool and immerse it in the cleaner for a few minutes if it is very dirty or use a special brush to clean it inside

3. To clean the nozzle, pull the needle out or back in order to avoid any damage to the tip. Unscrew the needle cap and then the nozzle cap.



6. At the end of the cleaning operations, reassemble the tool taking great care not to damage the tip of the needle when it is introduced into the body of the gun. This is the most delicate moment of the whole cleaning

5. if you want to carry out a deeper cleaning, place all the disassembled components in a basin and cover with distilled water and a couple of caps of cleaner

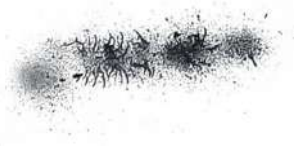


7. Always protect the final part of the airbrush with its cap. Without this protection, an accidental fall could damage it.

Common troubles and resolution

Like any precision tool, the airbrush can present various problems in its operation. The experienced professional can recognize them immediately and is able to solve them, in most cases, but those who approach this technique for the first time can be surprised by errors or component breaks.

The following table is intended to help resolve these errors, explaining their causes and possible remedies.

	MISTAKES	CAUSES	REMEDIES
	Spots are formed	- The color is too thinned - The airbrush is too close to the paper - The needle is too far back	Thicken the color Move the airbrush farer Unscrew the needle stop screw, reposition the needle making it go further and fix it again with the screw
	Splashes are formed	- Pressure too low - The paint is too thick or poorly mixed - There are color particles in the nozzle or in the body of the airbrush - Color accumulates in the nozzle	Adjust pressure Empty the tank of color, clean it, thin and mix the color better Disassemble the gun and clean it thoroughly Remove the needle and clean the

		- Nozzle is deformed	nozzle thoroughly Replace it
	Deviation of stretch	- Needle is bent - Airbrush is dirty	Straighten or replace the needle Clean thoroughly
	MISTAKES	CAUSES	REMEDIES
	Splashes are produced at the beginning and end of the stroke	The trigger moves up too fast, causing color to build up	Press and release the key more gently
	 Stretch has irregularities	- Lack of safety in the use of the airbrush - Obstruction of the nozzle	Exercise until you have gained more skill Clean with care
	Stretch is very wide	- Needle is worn out - Nozzle or cover is not mounted correctly	Replace it Adjust them properly
	Presence of excessive halo towards the outside of the stretch	Needle is worn or bent	Change or, if possible, straighten the needle

Fundamental techniques

Freehand and masking use

With the airbrush it is possible to obtain amazing and very different effects depending on whether it is used freehand or with the help of masking.

When using it freehand, you can also get fine lines like a hair (also depends on the size of the nozzle), or very wide strokes.

You can color a surface evenly or create shades between one color and another, define shapes and create practically any type of design.



Anyway, to start using the airbrush, first you have to get familiar with masking,

Masking means protecting the surfaces that must not be reached by a color and creating a more or less clear detachment effect between one element and another.





tape, adhesive film and scalpel to create the masks.

You will then need to use masking

You can also use any common object suitable to the effect and forms you wish to create (such as coins, nets, laces etc) or pre-made stencils.

With practice, you will become skilled and precise in cutting out masks without damaging the support you want to paint by excessively etching the overlapping masking tool (film, paper or tape).

Masking is one of the activities that take most time and precision during airbrushing but it is essential to learn the basics.

When you have reached a good level of dexterity, you can also try to use the airbrush almost or exclusively freehand, but it takes a lot of practice and experience to achieve this result.

Masking techniques

Adhesive masking

Adhesive masks are used in cases where you want to obtain precise contours and sharp breaks between one shape and another.

To use an adhesive mask, we will have to use the appropriate film. There are various brands, the most used are *Frisket* , especially if used as a paper or cardboard support, and *OroMask* for cutting plotters (a particular printer that, connected to the computer, allows you to cut the adhesive masking film from a graphic file shape with unthinkable precision in manual mode).



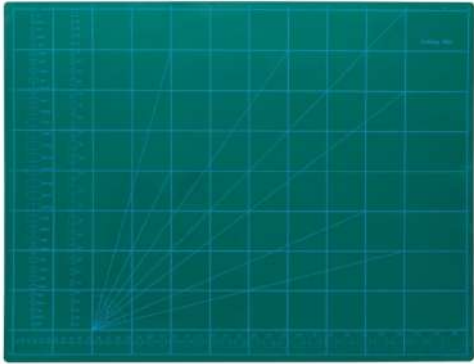


To cut out the shape you want to isolate and then paint it, you will need to apply the appropriate portion of adhesive film on the surface. You will see the drawing in transparency and you can then proceed to cut the desired shape with a scalpel. Be careful not to apply excessive force during this operation or you will risk etching your work surface too.

With the help of the tip of the scalpel, you will then go to lift the part of the film to be removed and you can proceed to airbrush. When finished, you will remove the mask.

Keep the cut parts if possible because they could be used during the work to cover areas that have already been painted and that you will later want to protect when painting other areas.





Loose masks

To obtain a soft and not excessively defined edge, mask must be raised somehow from the surface. We prepare the mask with a type of paper or cardboard of a consistency such that the air pressure or humidity does not modify its contours and we airbrush following the line of the edge of the mask. By approaching or moving the mask away from the support, we will have more or less blurred edges.

We can create suspended masks of any shape, with precise or less defined edges to give particular effects, for example by using torn sheets.



Masking liquid

To obtain negative effects, this type of masking is often used. There are various types of liquid rubber for masking on the market. They are applied with brushes in the areas to be masked, those typically particularly small or thin for which it would be more complicated to use adhesive masks. Once the liquid has been spread on the part you want to mask, you have to wait the time indicated on the bottle for it to dry, after which it will be possible to airbrush. When the color is dry, we will have to remove the masking (which will have reached a rubbery consistency), rubbing it lightly with a rag, an eraser or a ball of adhesive tape.



Basic exercises

To start

Knowledge of any technique requires a good training. In the case of the use of the airbrush this assumes considerable importance, since it is a tool of a certain complexity in the mechanics of its elements.

The airbrush does not differ excessively from a good brush: if we already have a good practice in using this, especially in drawing lines, curves and homogeneous backgrounds, the path towards learning the use of the airbrush will be much easier.



As a general rule, we must say that the airbrush must adapt with absolute freedom to the curve of your hand, between thumb and forefinger. This way the whole hand will embrace the tool, except index finger which controls the tool.

As we have already mentioned, the airbrush dual action has a button that initially squeezes air when pressed and handles the color cast and as it is pulled back.

Once you have connected and adjusted your air source, the compressor, you will need to familiarize with the airbrush.

Hold it between your fingers and initially try to let out only air. Place your hand in front of the flow to see how much air is coming out.

The **correct thinning** of the color, however, provides in principle that it reaches a density similar to that of milk or slightly more consistent and does not have lumps, which could clog the nozzle, a particularly small and delicate component.

Try to put color in the tank and use the airbrush on a sheet of paper: you will have to become familiar with the trigger for the flow of air and color.

Depending on how you move your hand (quickly or slowly) you will have more or less color on the sheet and, moving your hand closer or away from the sheet, you will have more or less subtle and defined strokes.

The fundamentals

So let's start doing some exercises, preferably with the use of liquid watercolors, at the beginning, to avoid having to stop too often to clean the airbrush during your working session.

1. Line

We will draw lines following the edge of a sheet of paper or a ruler. We then try the same freehand experiment again, moving away and approaching the sheet to see how thickness of the lines changes. We also manage the release of air and color to vary the intensity.

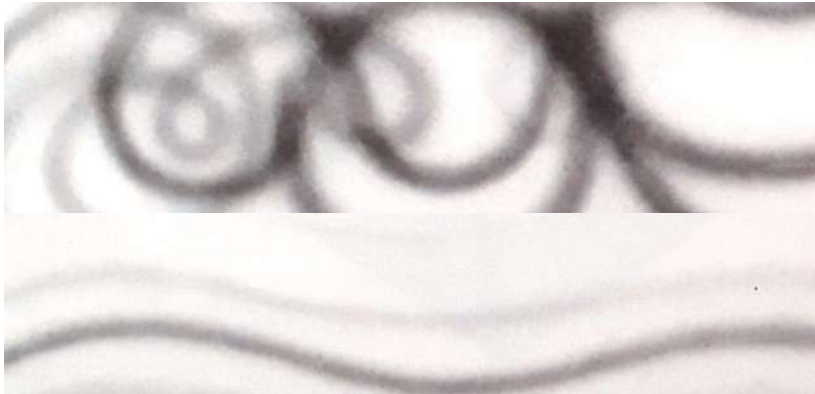
At the end of the line, we close the color air first, making trigger go up to prevent splashing. We can then practice drawing freehand lines, without the support of any sheet or line.





2. Curve/circle

We will perform freehand waves, trying to keep the wrist still in the desired direction. In curves, the movement will be more of the wrist than in circles, in which we will instead involve the whole arm



3. Dot

We will fix the airbrush on a precise point of the sheet and operate trigger carefully to spray

color where we want. This will form a dot, more or less small depending on the proximity of the tool to the paper. The further you move away, the more the dot will expand.



4. Even backgrounds

With a ruler and a pencil and then with adhesive tape, we will define a square area of about 15x15 cm.

The airbrush must be at a certain distance from the sheet, about 10/15 cm. We open the color exit by moving back with trigger almost completely and swing the airbrush from right to left, trying to avoid color concentrations on the sides and gradually descending. This can be achieved by going beyond the area to be covered. The goal of the exercise is to try to color the square as evenly as possible. When finished, we remove the adhesive masking and check the result.



5. Shaded backgrounds

We will define with adhesive tape another square and we will start to airbrush swinging from right to left and descending. As per the graphic example, the purpose of this exercise is to fade from major to minor from top to bottom. We then insist on returning to the top and going down to blend until you have obtained the desired result.



We will then prepare another square and paint a light and even background, keeping airbrush far enough away from the sheet and not opening the color too much. We will then go on to perform a central shade, on which we will have to insist in the center which must be more intense.



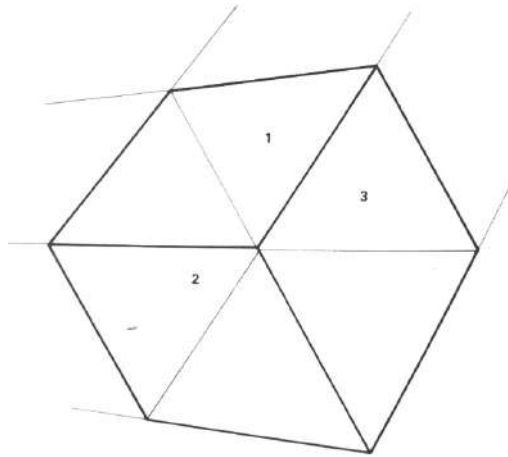
Shapes

We will now begin a series of practical exercises in order to find different volume effects in some essential shapes, to which the basic structures of all the elements that surround us can be traced.



Cube

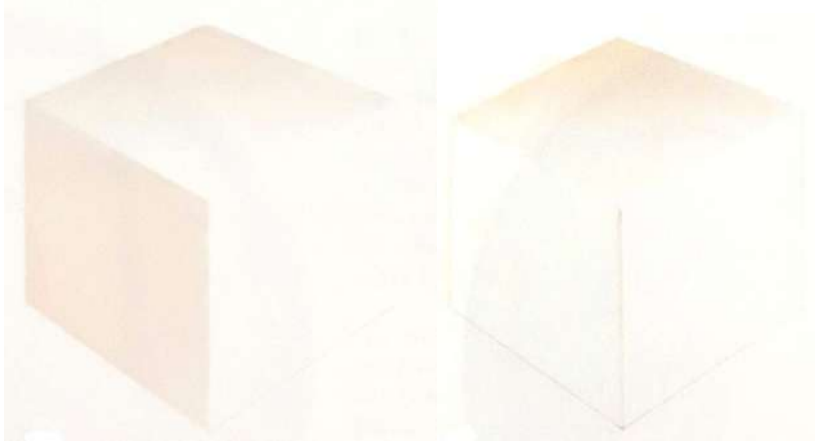
In the cube exercise, our goal will be to obtain a three-dimensional effect given by the perspective of its surfaces and by the effects of light and shadow.



We will use slightly thinned liquid watercolors and add color gradually until we reach the required color density

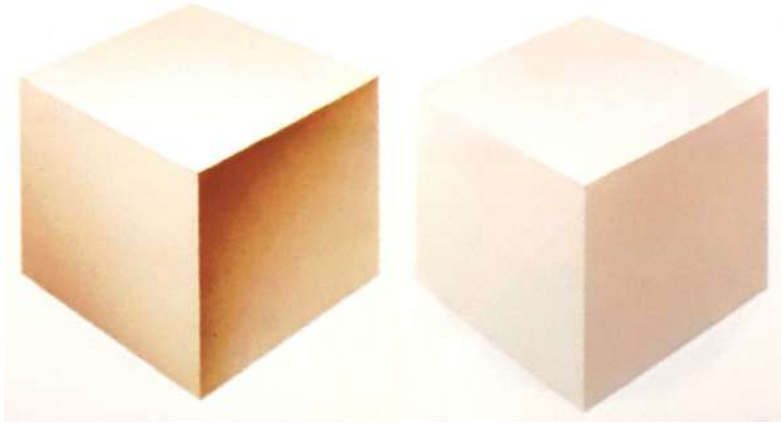
Drawing: with the help of a ruler and a square, we will draw a cube in pencil on our paper.

Masking: we will use three adhesive masks that we will cut out with a scalpel with the help of a ruler.



2. Once the color is dry, we cover again the area of the mask 1. We uncover the second, on the left, and apply a base tone a little darker than the upper part. We then create a slight gradient starting from the

1. We begin the exercise by uncovering the top of the cube (1) and proceed with a slight gradient from right to left, accentuating it slightly at the top.



4. We discover all the form and, if we deem it necessary, we give greater intensity to the shadows, always covering all the areas that should not be painted. We will thus have obtained a good contrast, by raising the central edge and moving the rear part of the cube away, thus accentuating the three-dimensional effect.

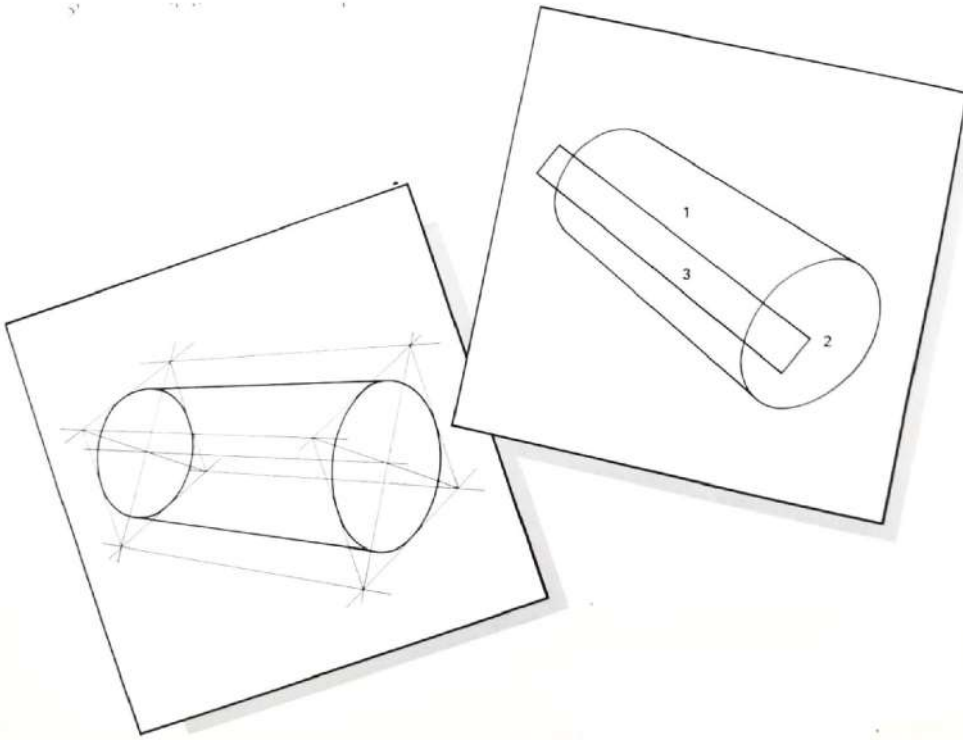
3. As soon as it dries, we cover again the plane 2 and we discover the plane 3, on which we will paint a uniform color of a tone slightly darker than the previous one. This is the darkest side and therefore we will also make the last shade with a more intense tone, starting from the central vertex and proceeding downwards, stopping before the middle of the cube.

Cylinder



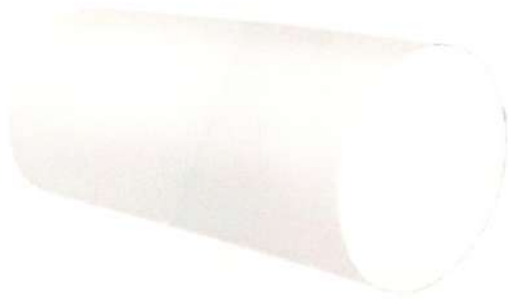
Also in this geometric shape, light is the main protagonist.

In this case, let's imagine it in the upper part of the figure, then applying the darker tones in the lower part and using the same principle, but in the opposite direction, for the inside of the cylinder.



Drawing: with a ruler, square and compass, we draw a cylinder about 15 cm in length.

Masking: We will use both adhesive and loose masks to achieve the gloss effects.



1. We will mask the area to be painted with Frisket film or similar. With a scalpel, we will cut two masks: the one of the length of the cylinder and the one with the front opening.

2. We will uncover the length of the cylinder and apply a light even base tone. We then move on to make the color more intense slightly in the upper and in the lower part, extending in this until the shade reaches almost the middle of the cylinder.



3. Let's uncover the other surface, after masking the rest of the cylinder once that area is dry.

We will apply color in a descending direction, keeping the deepest intensity in the upper part to give the idea that the cylinder is empty like a tube.



4. We cover part 2 again and add a darker horizontal gradient, which we will perform freehand, on the final part of the one already present on the lower part. We will thus obtain a greater sensation of three dimensionality



5. With one or two very simple straight masks cut from a sheet of paper, we insist on the surface with different shades, so that the volume acquires a metallic sheen. Let's add a further shadow also in the upper part, leaning on the loose mask.



6. Let's remake this part, discover surface 2 and, always leaning on the movable mask, we insist

here too with a couple of darker horizontal shadows inside the shade already made.



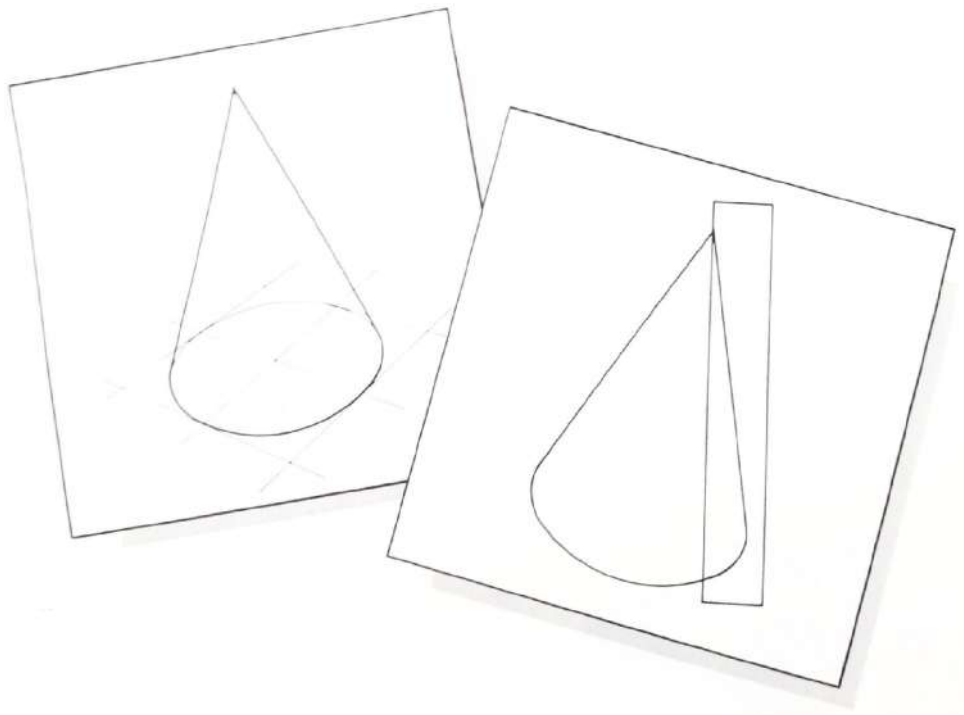
Cone

The cone is a geometric shape very similar to the cylinder, with the only difference that the effects of light and shadow converge on a vertex.

We will therefore follow the same criterion used for the cylinder, this time imagining that the light comes from the left and the shadow from the right, making the shades from major to minor, in a circular sense.

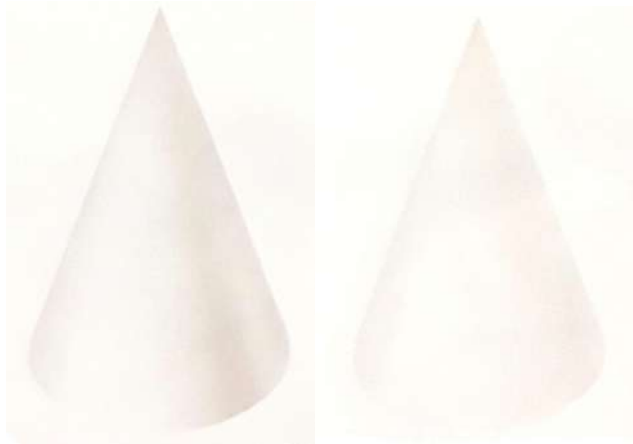
As with the cylinder, we will then add some shimmer effects and reflections using the same color.

Il cono



Drawing: we make a pencil drawing of a cylinder of about 15 cm in height with the help of a ruler, square and compass.

Masking: we will need only one adhesive mask, the same as the figure itself, and one or two movable paper masks, straight.



1. Once the mask of the shape is cut out, let's remove it and give a light base tone to the right and left, gradually fading, while the center will remain empty.

.

2. We insist a little and with greater intensity on the right side, to create the feeling of three - dimensionality



4. We accentuate the different tones, moving the loose mask and positioning it where we want to give greater effect to the reflections.

3. With loose masks such as some simple straight paper strips, we increase the gloss effect by applying more intense shades, as to the reference image.



5. If we wish, we accentuate the volume by opening some white areas with the eraser (this operation is particularly simple when using liquid watercolors or transparent acrylics or thinned layers of color).

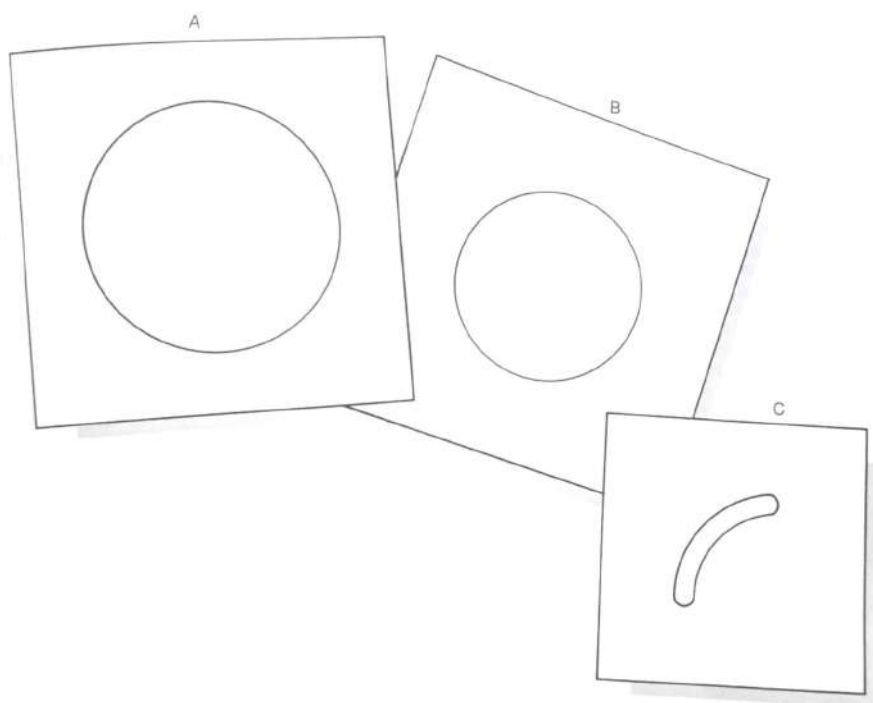
Sphere

In the cube exercise, our goal will be to obtain a three-dimensional effect given by the perspective of its planes and by the effects of light and shadow. We will use slightly thinned liquid watercolors and add color gradually until we reach the required color density.

This last exercise is certainly more complex than the previous ones, given that the direction of the shades will always be done in a circular sense, with hand raised. Therefore, we will need to have good wrist control and move arm very carefully.

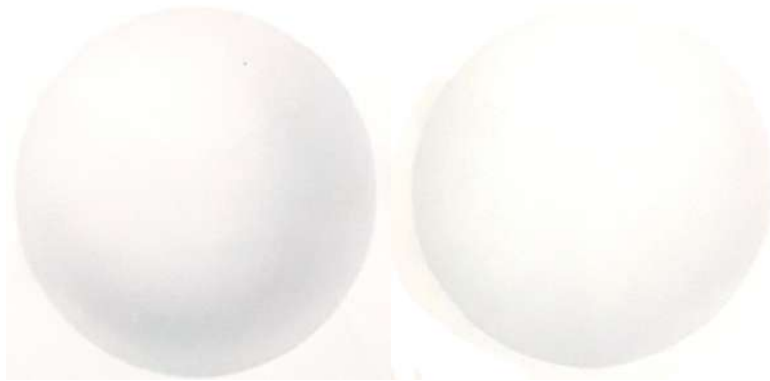
We will make the shadow in the lower right part, making sure that the volume we are





Drawing: we make a circle with a compass.

Masking: we will use three masks: one of the shape of the circle (1), one of a slightly smaller diameter (2) and its counterform and a third which will be the counterform of the shape illustrated in the graphic (3)



2. Since, as we defined at the beginning, the incidence of the light will be on the upper left, let's start shading on the opposite, lower right, to get the right volume. The nuance must be light, made with an oscillating movement following the shape of the sphere, gradually increasing the intensity.

1. We cut out mask 1 and remove the round shape. Apply a first coat of uniform light color and then slightly accentuate the intensity at the edges of the sphere, moving hand in a circular direction.



3. Once dry, apply mask 2 centrally to reduce the radius of the sphere. Let's create a light shade on the left upper part and on the external lower right one.

4. We remove mask 2 and apply its counter mask. We reinforce the lower right part with a more intense shade.



5. Now the volume is at a very good level but to give more prominence to the sphere, let's proceed by giving an enameled effect with the help of the counter mask of the shape.

Once applied, we can erase the color inside, fading towards the two ends, or use a little white opaque acrylic color to give

The making of an illustration

Step by step

At this point, we are ready to make an illustration.

We will then copy an image with a typical eighties style, elegant and essential.



For this first complete job I do not think it necessary to start by proposing an excessively complex, realistic or completely freehand work, as it often happens in airbrushing courses, because the skills necessary for this type of work must be acquired with practice.

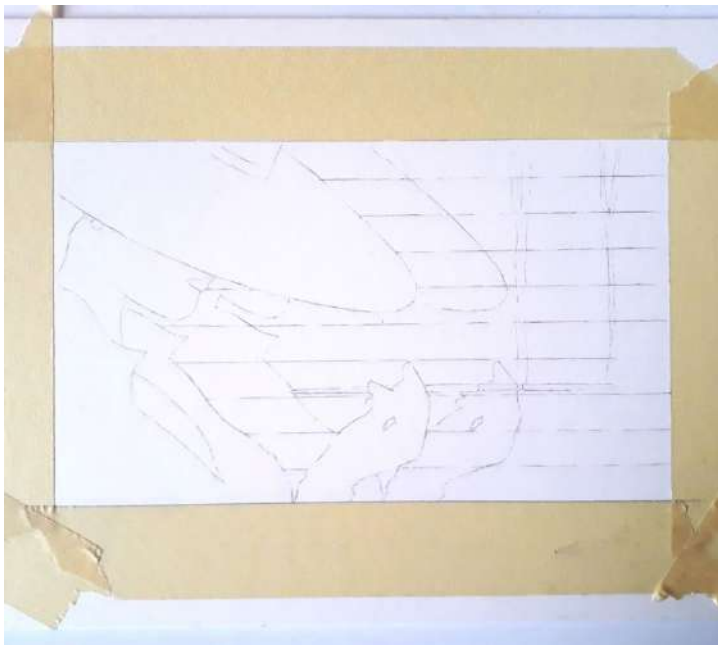
The illustration we are going to create, on the other hand, will be used to practice masking and begin to become familiar with shades. It is a work that sums up all the notions we have learned in the previous exercises, combining them in the context of a real illustration.

We will use opaque acrylic colors on rigid cardboard and at the end we will define the details with a brush or pastels. We will work small trying to reach a good level of precision.

Drawing

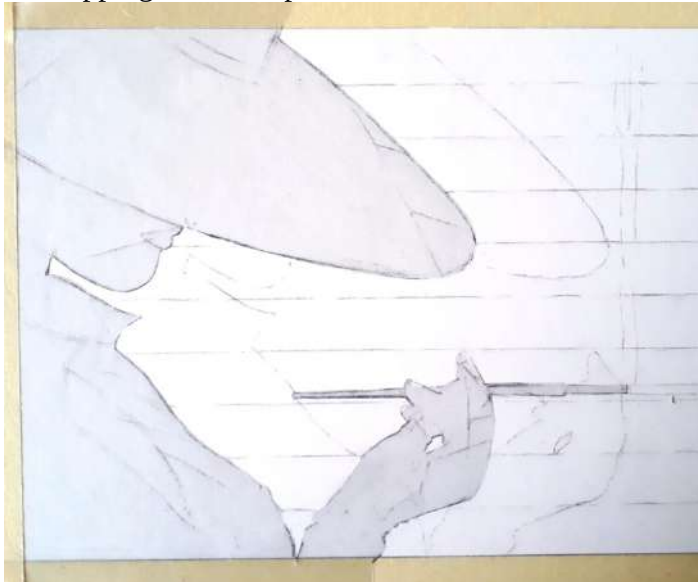
1. Let's start by drawing a 24x15 cm square – or bigger in this ratio if you wish - on the cardboard in pencil. Then we delimit the contours with a paper tape and fix around some scraps of paper to avoid dirtying the cardboard where we will not work.

2. We make the pencil drawing of the woman, copying from the original illustration. If you prefer, to speed up this exercise you can also print and trace my drawing with a tracing sheet and then transfer it to the cardboard.



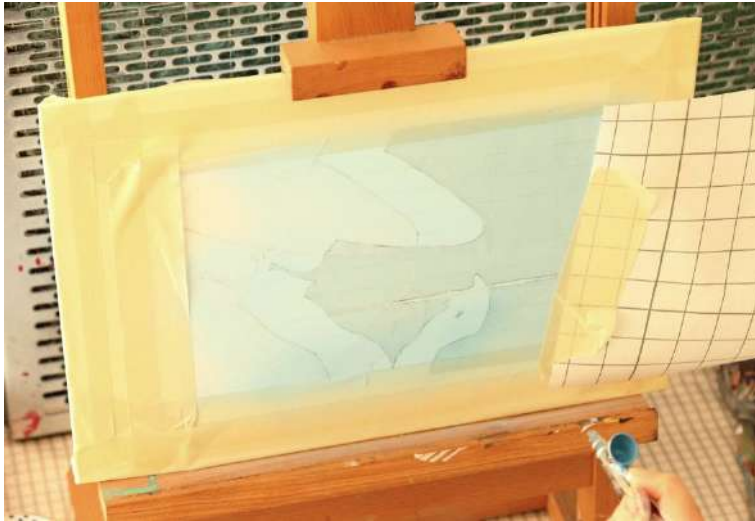
Background

1. It is a good idea to start airbrushing the background of the subject first, even if it is not a rule, but it is generally easier to work first on the layers in the background (we proceed by overlapping, from the plan which is further back to the one more in front).



With a scalpel, we then cut the woman's shape mask and uncover the background part.

We keep the counterform to cover the background later , once finished with this step.



2. By mixing color in the cup, we obtain a point of blue similar to that of the background of the reference illustration. We spray the color evenly, as we did in the exercises, moving from right to left, going down from top to bottom. We repeat the light steps until the background appears sufficiently uniform.

4. We make the hard shadow with a darker blue color, then remove the mask and leave all the background uncovered.

3. Now let's use the counter mask obtained before to create the shadow of the woman and the hand with the mouthpiece between the fingers or, if it can not be reused, let's prepare it again. The shadow of the smoke, being less clear, instead, we will make it later with a suspended mask or freehand, if we prefer.



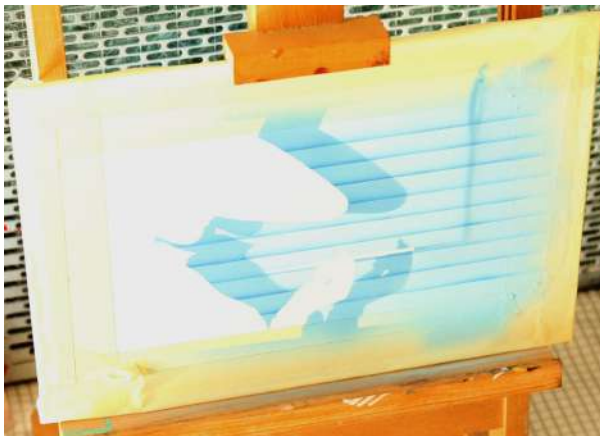


We cut out the shape of the smoke shadow on a sheet of paper with a scalpel. We hold the sheet slightly far from the cardboard and paint the smoke shadow mask.

Alternatively, you can try to make this freehand.



5. Now let's define the lines of the shutter in the background. We mark in pencil where we will have to draw the lines. With a loose mask, we now create the shades above each row. We place a sheet of paper along the first line and blend lightly with a lighter blue color than the one of the shadow, following the length of the sheet. We repeat this step for all the rows, going over and darkening further on the edge, if necessary.

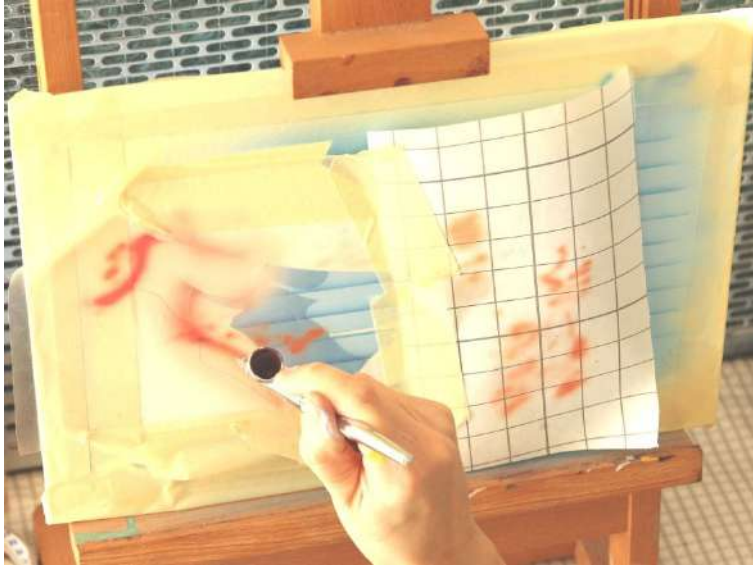


The woman

1. We cut the mask of the most secondary parts: face/neck and neckline. We remove the portions of the cut-out mask and leave everything else covered (if necessary, we use the counter mask originally kept to cover the whole background).



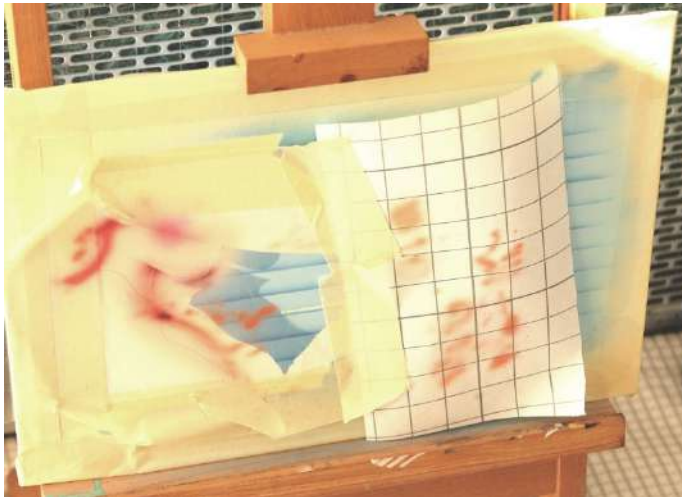
2. We prepare the basic skin color and airbrush it evenly.



3. We then prepare a color of the lighter tone of the shade and make the shadow of the hair, the one of the neckline and the one of the neck. We blend by increasing the intensity of the color along the edge of the neck and neckline. As for the one of the hair, we can instead go a little freer because we will overlap the layer of the hair shape later. However, we follow as a reference the trend of the shadow in the illustration.

4. We then get a darker brown color that we will use for the deeper shadows on the tip of the chin, on the neck and at the beginning of the neckline.

Let's now prepare a fuchsia color similar to that of the face powder on the cheek. Let's shade decreasing the intensity gradually that descend and withdraw ourselves slightly to enlarge the point.







6. With the brush, we make the highlights on the lips.

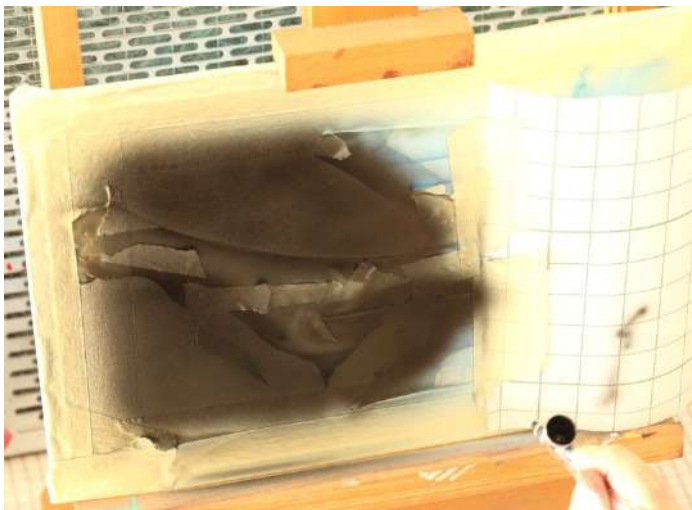


7. Let's do the hair now.
We define the shape by
cutting out the loose mask
in a fairly rough shape.
Let's use a dark brown
color and spray it evenly.



We will then add the details of the single hair by brush.

8. Now let's move on to making dress, mouthpiece and glove. We cut or mask these elements and give a black mixed with blue as a background color. It is always advisable not to use the





9. As we see in the illustration, then freehand the shades of the dress, glove and hat, with a light blue color.

10. Finally, we cut a small mask to spray the white color of the cigarette and red for the tip of it. The last step is the creation of the thread of smoke with a fairly thinned white color. We can paint it with the help of the same loose mask used for the shadow or, if we prefer, freehand.



11. Finally, we can further define lines and contours with a brush or pastels.

Always remember to clean the tool between a color change and the other and especially at the end of the work.

For this full immersion in the world of airbrushing, that's all!

I can only wish you good practice and most of all... have fun!

Esempi



In queste pagine, una piccola galleria di miei lavori realizzati interamente con acrilici ad aerografo.

Sharbat - Ritratto acrilico ad aerografo su tela, cm 50x70 eseguito dalla celebre foto "Afghan Girl" di *Steve McCurry* (2019)



Sivilla - Ritratto acrilico ad aerografo su tela, cm 50x70 eseguito su commissione da una foto (2019)



Casco integrale aerografato su commissione a tema cartoni animati, contorni realizzati a mano a pennello - Frontale (2019)





Casco integrale aerografato su commissione a tema cartoni animati - Lato sinistro e dettaglio





Casco integrale aerografato su commissione a tema cartoni animati - Lato destro e dettaglio







Casco integrale aerografato su commissione a tema cartoni animati - Parte superiore e dettaglio posteriore







Casco integrale aerografato a tema Star Wars, contorni realizzati a mano a pennello (2015, la mia prima aerografia su casco) - Lato sinistro e dettagli



Casco integrale aerografato a tema Star Wars - Lato destro e dettaglio





Casco integrale aerografato a tema Star Wars - Posteriore



Casco integrale aerografato a tema sirene, realizzato su commissione sulla base dei dipinti di *Victor Nizovtsev* (2018) - Posteriore



Casco integrale aerografato a tema sirene - Parte superiore



Casco integrale aerografato a tema sirene - Lati

