

SCUMBLING

Scumbling is the rough application of a dry, light, semi-opaque color over a darker layer of dry, opaque paint. The scumbled layer is applied thinly, creating a delicate "veil" of color which partially obscures the underlying color. Whether you work in oil, watercolor, pastel — in fact any medium — scumbling is a highly versatile and expressive technique.

Scumbles are usually applied by using a circular, scrubbing motion with a brush or crayon, but the effect can also be achieved with streaks, dabs, smudges, or stipples. The important thing is that the color be applied *unevenly*: this produces a lively, unpredictable texture in which the marks of the brush or crayon are evident.

Because scumbled strokes have an irregular quality, if painting, use a bristle brush in preference to a soft brush. Indeed, an old, worn brush is most useful, because the scrubbing action could damage the hairs of your best brush if you scumble frequently. You can also scumble with a rag, a sponge, or even with your fingers or the edge of your hand.

If you have an area of color that looks flat and dull, scumbling another color over it will make it appear richer and more vibrant; for example, a dull gray will sparkle if you scumble over it with yellow or red. This is because the two colors mix optically and thus become more resonant. Similarly, colors that are too warm, too cool, or too bright can be modified with a scumble of a suitable color.

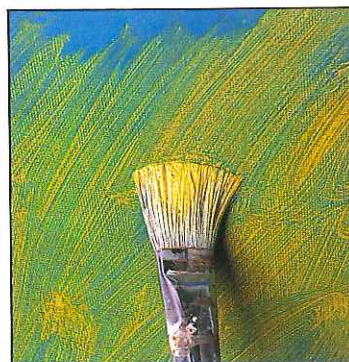
When scumbles are combined with GLAZES, the effect is one of extraordinary depth and mystery. When you apply an underpainting, followed by a scumble, followed by a glaze (allowing each one to dry before the next is applied) the colors seem to glow with an inner light, rather like polished wood.

The paints must have drying agents added to them, however, otherwise the waiting time between each layer becomes impossibly long.

This atmospheric quality can be exploited in many subjects, notably stormy skies and seascapes. The liveliness of scumbled strokes is equally well suited to textures such as animal fur, or the fuzzy skin of a peach, and subjects that contain movement — scudding clouds, tumbling hair, and rushing water.

Oil

With this method applied to oil paints you can achieve subtle gradations of hue while retaining the liveliness of the brushstrokes. Make the strokes short and decisive — don't overblend them or the effect will be lost.



Scumbling • Opaque media

Paint for scumbling should be fairly dry — wipe the brush on blotting paper to remove any excess moisture. Using a bristle brush (a soft brush is less effective) scrub the paint on with free, vigorous strokes. The paint can be worked with a circular motion, with straight back-and-forth strokes, or in various directions. The idea is not to blend the color but to leave the brushmarks showing. Here, various yellows and greens were scumbled together with short, scrubby strokes. The texture produced closely resembles tree foliage.



In scumbling, the idea is to paint a semi-transparent layer, like a haze of smoke, over another color which has already dried. The underlayer is covered only partially and shimmers up through the scumble, producing mysterious and atmospheric effects. Generally, a light scumble over a dark color gives the best results; add a touch of titanium white to the pigment to lighten it and make it semi-opaque. It is important to build up scumbles thinly, in gradual stages — if the paint is applied too heavily the hazy effect will be lost.

Acrylic

Paint for scumbling should be thick, but more fluid than that used in DRYBRUSH. Dilute the pigment with either matte or gloss medium, and add a touch of titanium white to make the color slightly more opaque.

Conversely, mixing a small amount of color with plenty of matte medium, or medium and water, produces beautiful, transparent, delicate scumbles. This technique is most effective when painting sunlit waves, for example.



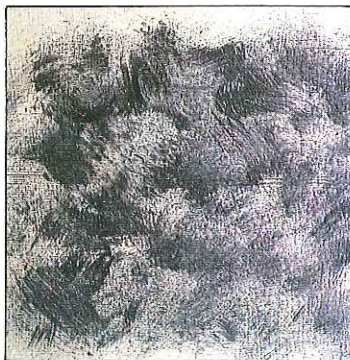
Transparent scumble

In acrylic painting, try mixing a lot of matte medium and water with the tube color; this combination produces delicate, transparent scumbles. For even greater depth and luminosity, you can glaze one transparent scumble over another.



Blending with scumbles

Scumbling can be used as a means of blending colors. The scumble allows some of the undercolor to show through and the two layers blend in the eye of the viewer. You can also scumble one wet color into another where they meet, as shown here.



Scumble over sponged texture

Subtle textures are the essence of egg tempera painting and help to give it its characteristic luminosity. Here, a light scumble was applied over a sponged surface to soften the texture and merge the tones. Use an almost dry brush and work with a circular motion.

Watercolor

Scumbling is used less often in watercolor, due to the fluid, transparent nature of the paint. But thick color, diluted with very little water, can be applied with a light, circular motion so as to pick up the texture of the paper. J.M.W. Turner (1775-1851) often used scumbling when painting stormy scenes or rough terrain.



Scumbling • Watercolor

1 Load your brush with fairly stiff paint, or wipe off the excess moisture on a piece of blotting paper. Fan out the bristles of the brush and work over the surface of the paper with a circular motion.



2 Used over washes, scumbling is useful for representing rough textures such as a weathered stone.

Pastel

Color mixing is not always as easy in pastel as in other media. Scumbling is therefore an invaluable technique, because it allows you to modify any color.

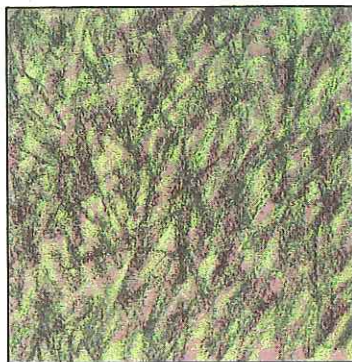
Hard pastels are best for scumbling; apply them using light strokes with the side of the stick. Soft pastels can be used, but they require a very light touch, or the underlayer will be obscured.

An area of color can be enlivened — or muted — by scumbling over it with another color. Practise by laying in a square of thick color with the side of the crayon. Then, taking a different color, gently run the *tip* of the crayon in meandering strokes over the area. The original color still shows through, but is modified by the scumbled strokes. This works especially well with complementary colors: a vibrant green, for example, can be cooled down by scumbling over it with its complementary, red. Be careful not to overdo the scumbled strokes: if they become too dense the effect will be lost. On smooth papers, only a minimum of scumbling is

possible before the surface becomes clogged up. On a rougher surface with more tooth, more scumbling is possible. If you wish to scumble several layers, spray each layer with fixative before applying the next.



1 A dark tone was laid in first, then a darker tone was scumbled over the area.



2 Here, the process was reversed: a dark tone was worked over a lighter one.



3 A dark and a light crayon were scumbled together to produce this vibrant effect.

SGRAFFITO

The word "sgraffito" is derived from the Italian word *graffiare*, meaning "to scratch," and refers to a method of scratching or scraping through a layer of paint to expose the color or colors underneath. In this way, highlights can be added to a painting, and texture is created.

Any sharp instrument can be used for sgraffito — knives, razor blades, scraperboard tools, the end of a brush handle, the edge of an old credit card, or simply your fingernail. In addition, sandpaper is useful for scraping away areas of paint to reveal some of the color underneath.

Sgraffito can be used with any medium, including pastel, and on wet or dry paint, depending on the effect desired. For example, the texture of grass or the grain of wood can be scratched into a layer of dried color, using a sharp point; while a layer of paint is still wet, you can create soft highlights by scraping into it with a blunt knife or popsicle stick.



Scratched textures • Opaque media

1 Apply a layer of thick paint, straight from the tube or diluted with just a little medium. While it is still wet, "draw" lines into the paint with the end of the brush handle or the handle of a knife.



2 Experiment with different scraping tools to discover the variety of textures and patterns that can be achieved. Here, a trowel-shaped painting knife was used to make broad marks.