

SPONGE PAINTING

The sponge is a highly versatile painting tool, capable of producing a broad range of effects in any painting medium. Most artists keep two sponges in their painting kit: a synthetic one for laying a flat, even layer of color in large areas, and a natural sponge for creating patterns and textures. Natural sponges are more expensive than synthetic ones, but they have the advantage of being smoother and more pliable to work with, and their irregular texture produces more interesting patterns in the paint. For example, a mottled pattern is produced by pressing a moistened sponge into fairly thick paint and then dabbing it onto the paper. You can dab one color over another, or produce a graded tone by dabbing more heavily in one area than another. This technique is successful in rendering foliage on trees, or the pitted surface of weathered stone.

Also, by twisting or stroking with a paint-soaked sponge, you can achieve subtle gradations of tone when painting soft, rounded forms such as clouds, fruit, or perhaps misty hills in the distance.

Natural sponges

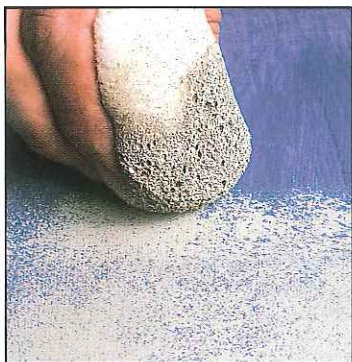
Painting with a sponge gives textural effects that are often impossible to render with a brush. The mottled patterns produced by dabbing color on with a sponge are perfect for simulating the textures of weathered rock and crumbling stone, pebbles and sand on a beach, sea spray, and tree foliage. In addition, you can create lively broken color effects by sponging different colors over each other.



1 Paint for sponging should be diluted with just a little water or medium — if it is too fluid the marks will be blurred. In acrylic painting, diluting the pigment with matte medium gives sharper results than water will. Always use a damp sponge. Soak it in water, squeeze it out until just damp, then dip it into the pool of color on your palette. Apply the color with a soft dabbing motion, without pressing too hard.

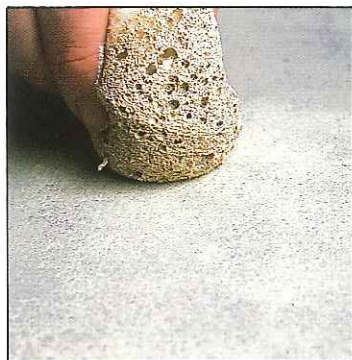


2 You can also press a damp, clean sponge into a wet wash to lift out color and leave a subtle texture.

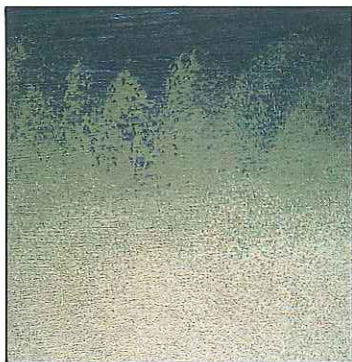


Synthetic sponges

1 Sponging often works better when a light color is applied over a darker underpainting. Here the artist is sponging over a gray-toned ground with egg tempera — a mixture of titanium white, raw umber, and cadmium yellow. A thick, synthetic sponge produces an even, close-textured pattern which is often used in egg tempera painting for building up tones and textures.



2 When the first coat is dry, a lighter color, with more white added to it, is sponged over part of the first layer of paint.



3 A delicate, gradated effect is obtained by laying tone over tone. This technique works extremely well in rendering subtle, evanescent textures such as those of clouds and sea foam.