

Abstract Art Course: Lesson 4

Texture and Pattern

Why use Texture?

Texture gives your painting areas of interest and sophistication that could be hard to achieve working from a flat surface. You can use layers of texture to emphasise or sculpt areas of a piece.

Here we will be looking at abstract forms, continuing our exploration of spontaneous, intuitive mark and shape making. We will continue practising our ability to respond to what the painting is shaping up to be and continuing to develop our confidence in what it needs next.

As always, there are multiple layers in a textured painting, even when studying abstract paintings, you will find practical, constructional aspects. There is always an order to the process, and when working with such thick textured layers you need to plan and allow drying time between layers.

If you feel like there is a bit of a sculptor in you, the practical points in this lesson will be of great use to you.

Let's look at some artists who use texture in their work. We'll focus on the materials they use and their process.





Alice Boyle

Alice is a Scottish artist who explores the relationship between textures and colours, creating imagery with a surreal yet primitive sensibility. Alice aims to stimulate the suggestion of a story to the viewer, creating vignettes of living fantasy worlds, which act as catalysts for the imagination.



She works predominantly with acrylic paint and plaster on hardboard. She starts out by sketching strange and whimsical shapes, then covers the hardboard with a plaster type mixture. She makes interesting patterns, movements, and shapes in the plaster, and allows that layer to dry before introducing paint. You can break her process down in to four stages here:

1. Get your ideas flowing and sketch them down on paper.
2. Cover all or part of the canvas or board with a textured medium to create interesting variations on the surface.
 - Alice uses plaster; we can use plaster or other materials to do this which we will explore later.
3. Paint in your colours and bring out shapes that speak to you. Play around with repeated shapes and get creative.
4. It could be that you add a symbol or recognisable shape, or you could keep it more abstract and suggestive by adding a glaze of something slightly metallic or misty.

If you're not sure what kind of shapes or patterns to make with your texture, it could help to have a loose theme. For example, you could choose one of the four elements. Here's a semi-abstract painting based on the waves of a stormy sea.



Or perhaps you want to take inspiration from flames and fire.

Or maybe you want to use something from nature to help you. Here is Jean-Jacques Pigeon's repeated pattern using leaves.



You could even go out and find materials like leaves, flowers, grass, twigs etc to incorporate into your texture, becoming a physical part of the painting. I know of artists who use actual mud as part of their texture process!

It would be interesting to give an earth-based picture some actual earth or soil in the material – it's much more of a direct connection, isn't it?

Or maybe you'll favour something softer and more ethereal. See how Scottish landscape artist Ken Bushe has put a textured layer underneath his soft, cloudy brushwork.



It's interesting how much texture can matter. Even though most artworks are not meant to be touched, their texture can affect mood, evoke psychological associations, bring attention to a medium, or divert our focus toward materials used in a work. Used adeptly, texture can even challenge our perception of what is real.

I like to use it to help the viewer notice the details that stand out to me, to exaggerate the beauty in smaller details and to bring a variation to the piece which ties other aspects of the work together form a united whole.

Materials

Essentially, you need some sort of paste and some sort of tool.

Pastes can include art texture pastes, plaster, polyfilla, stucco, PVA glue and interesting things to combine with them such as sand, tiny pebbles, and other crumbled substances.

You will need a variety of tools to make marks and build up the surface. Palette knives, scrapers, trowels, modelling tools – raid the kitchen; spatulas, cake slices, forks.

You might want to be even more inventive and experiment with other mark-making objects, to create patterns and variations in the mixture. Twigs, crunched up tin foil, bubble wrap laid over the top, tissue paper, cling film, circular items such as bottle lids.

You can lay these things over and take them off to reveal a sort of fossil-like indentation. Or you can even leave them to become part of the piece itself – tissue paper, strips of material and leaves work well.

I will now demonstrate various ways to achieve texture in three different pieces, using slightly different techniques and texture mediums.

Part 1

- Make your own texture medium: a combination of Polyfilla and PVA glue (1 part PVA, 1 part fresh, new Polyfilla).
- Use a scraper or palette knife to smooth over a canvas or board.

- Make indentations using a palette knife, cake slice, twig or any preferred tool.
- Be inspired by your chosen subject/theme or just have fun responding to the medium.
- Allow to dry for 24 hours.
- Sand off rough edges/bumps with sandpaper.
- Brush or sponge on a coat of gesso or white acrylic paint.



- Paint on your acrylic colours and see how the texture and 3-D qualities come to life.
- Pay special attention to indentations and “holes”.
- Experiment with light/dark, transparent/opaque, rub on/off to see how different looks can be achieved.

Project 2

- Using negative space.
- This demonstration shows how you can cut in to texture paste to achieve “channels” – this is a piece inspired by river tributaries.
- Think about how you can combine techniques from the previous lessons to incorporate into your work.
- This piece combined texture from Project 1 of this lesson and acrylic pour mixture from Lesson 3. The contrast between rough/smooth, bumpy/fluid is interesting!



Project 3.

Using art texture paste alongside home-made Polyfilla/PVA paste.

This project shows you how you can achieve three dimensional effects in a semi-realistic piece. This demonstration is inspired by a nebula.

- The edges of cloud are picked out in the first layer with the art texture paste (thicker and stickier), then smoothed out towards the edges with the home-made texture paste.



- Allow to dry.
- Then the middle and edges are filled in with acrylic underpainting.
- Then oil paint is used, diluted with linseed oil, to achieve a translucent, glowing effect in the middle.
- The cloudy shapes are further built up with Michael Harding's beeswax paste (compatible with oil paint).
- It's amazing how many components can make a painting really express its attributes.

Enjoy your lesson!

Chat with your tutor Madeleine in the Abstract Art private Facebook group! This group has been set up exclusively for members Abstract Art, as a place to ask questions, get feedback on your work and share experiences, tips, and advice with fellow students.