

Brush Painting With Craft Shop Acrylics

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At very reasonable prices, often below \$2.00 per 2 oz. bottle, the acrylic paints sold in craft stores are a great bargain when compared to the paint offered by the model industry. These paints come in a huge variety of colors, many of which are a near perfect match to the actual camouflage colors used on military aircraft during various eras of aviation history. I have used them quite successfully on many occasions and have found them very easy to work with. I especially like the snap top plastic bottles they come in, because they are super easy to open or close and they keep the paint inside fresh and ready to use for long periods of time.

These craft store acrylic colors are especially useful when you're finishing up WW II German or Italian aircraft which, for example, were quite often painted with a dark green mottle over a base of desert tan or dark gray over a base of pale blue. The technique is easy. Use a cut down "stippling" brush or a very small piece of bathroom sponge and gently (you don't want to punch holes through your tissue) apply your mottle with a controlled up and down motion. In general, these mottle patterns were applied only on the upper surfaces while a uniform plain light gray or blue color was used on the lower surfaces. On many Luftwaffe airplanes the mottle was confined to the upper fuselage, fading away to nothing on the sides.

The secret here is to use a "dry brush" approach. This means that you dip just the end of the brush or tip of the sponge into the surface of the paint and then work out most of it onto a piece of paper towel to make sure the brush is almost completely dry before touching it to the model. A small, white, foam plate functions well as a "palette" when working with acrylics. Just throw it into the trash when you're done.

Another important point when doing a mottle is to use restraint. Don't get carried away. Apply the paint very sparingly to begin with, then gradually work it up to full intensity as shown in your reference photos or art work. It's easy to add mottle if needed, but a son-of-a-gun to get it off if you over do it.

Check the consistency of your paint before you use it. It should be free running and not contain visible bits of pigment. I like to pour out the amount of paint I feel I will need onto my palette plate and then add a drop or two of dish washing detergent to it. I then work this into the puddle of paint with my brush. The detergent makes the paint flow smoothly and it's well worth the extra effort. If you feel the paint is still too thick, the addition of discreet amounts of thinner (water) followed by thorough mixing should do the trick.

Some German and Italian airplanes had what was called a ripple wave pattern over their base colors rather than a mottle. This is best done by careful hand painting with a good quality pointed brush purchased in an art supply store. Again, take your time, refer often to your

reference material, and use restraint. When the job is done, spray a mist coat of clear Krylon Matte over everything to get the required "flat" look of military paint jobs.