

Fresco Panel Painting



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Not just for wall painting!

Art on a plaster surface is steeped in history, yet so engaging for modern materials.

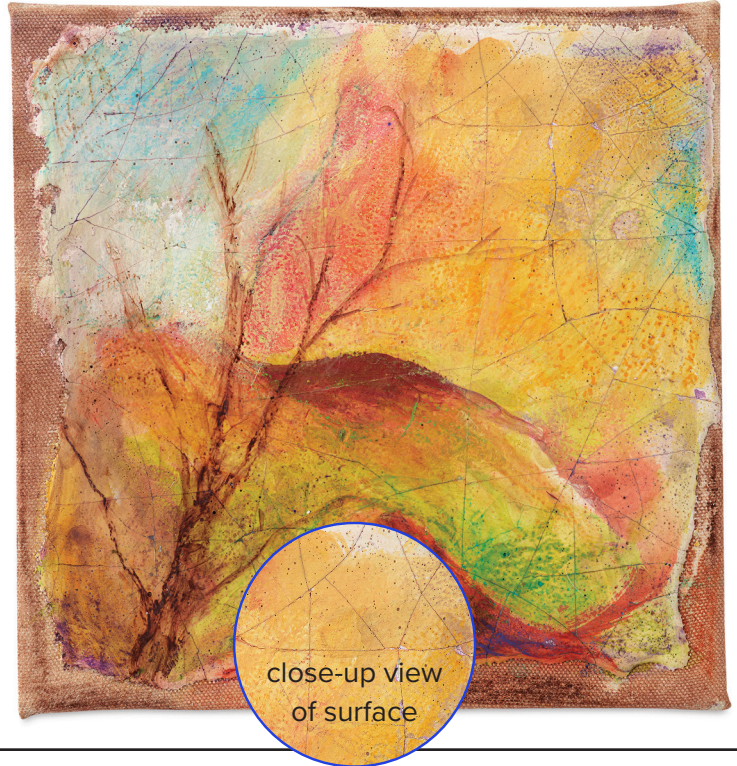
Much of the knowledge we have of prehistoric and ancient life comes from wall paintings that have survived in protected areas such as caves, tombs, and the inner walls of buildings. Scenes and symbols allow us a glimpse into human stories from another time and cause us to speculate about the artists and their communities. To put something up on a wall assigned supreme importance to it. As techniques developed, wall paintings became known as frescos. This Italian term translates to "fresh"—a reference to the plaster surface on which the artist(s) worked.

"Buon" fresco (meaning 'true' or 'good') is the most durable process. Pigments are mixed with water and painted directly onto wet plaster, drying into the surface. It was a costly and time-consuming process, but worth the effort because it was intended to last for many generations. Michelangelo used this technique when painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. "Secco" (or 'dry') is the term for painting done on dry plaster using a binding medium to adhere it to the surface. It is a much less intensive process, but also less durable. Da Vinci's mural The Last Supper is an example of a secco fresco that has required extensive restoration in order for it to be enjoyed, even in its deteriorated state, by visitors today.

Painting on plaster is not just for walls - plaster is a lovely surface for many traditional and contemporary mediums including watercolor, fluid acrylic, gouache, colored pencil, pastel, and more. This lesson provides instructions for preparing a plaster surface and offers suggestions for using various painting and drawing mediums in a "secco" manner.

While creating artwork on a plaster surface, students can consider the objectives and obstacles faced by fresco painters throughout history and answer the question: "What would you like people to know one thousand years from now?"

Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.



close-up view
of surface

Required Materials

Activa Art Plaster, 5 lb (33525-0005); share two across class

Blick Economy Cotton Canvas Panel Classroom Pack, pkg of 24, 8" x 10" x 1/8" (07015-1012); share one across class

Blick Unprimed Cotton Canvas, 9.5 oz. folded 36" x 72" (07377-0172); share two across class

Richeson Plastic Painting Knives, large plastic "Scotty" #1 (03105-0020); share one between two students

Materials for Painting, recommend:

Blick Studio Pastels, classpack of 144 (20016-1449); share one across class

Conté à Paris Sketching Pencils, set of 6 assorted (20425-0069); share one between two students

Royal & Langnickel Essentials Gouache Paint Set, 12 colors plus 2 brushes, 0.4 oz tubes (00911-1009); share 3 sets across class

Blick Scholastic Short Handle Wonder White Brush, round, size 6 (05857-1006)

Tortillons, classpack of 36, assorted (22855-1036); share one across class

Blick Masking Tape, natural 3/4" x 60 yds (24149-1034); share four across class

Delta Sobo Craft and Fabric Glue, 4 oz (23820-1004); share six bottles across class

Blick Artists' Acrylic Matte Varnish, 16 oz (00623-1056); share one across class

Optional Materials

Chipboard, 22" x 28" x 30 ply (13115-2232); share one between six to nine students

AWT Plastic Spreader, 12" (40212-1012); share six across class

Blick Studio Palette Paper, 50 sheet pad, 9" x 12" (03063-2023)

Ready to order materials?

Go to www.DickBlick.com/lesson-plan/fresco-panel-painting to access a product bundle for your convenience.

Preparation

1. A rigid backing board will be required to support frescos. Painting panels are pre-sized and provide warp resistant longevity. Heavy chipboard is an economical alternative. If using pre-cut panels, move to next step. If using heavy chipboard, cut to desired size.
2. Determine the size of the panel or board that the painting will attach to, then cut the unprimed canvas at least 1" larger on all sides, leaving extra for wrapping and attaching to the back of the panel. For this example, an 8" x 10" panel would need a 10" x 12" piece of canvas.
3. Center the panel on the unprimed canvas, face side down. Mark the sides with strips of masking tape, then set the panel aside.
4. Cover work surface and tape waxed paper or palette paper onto the surface so that the plaster won't stick. Place the raw canvas over it, tape side up. If canvas isn't flat, tape down the edges.
5. Mix plaster with water (approximately 60% plaster to 40% water ratio) to the consistency of sour cream. Plan for a minimum of 1/2 cup of wet plaster per 8" x 10" piece. Always follow product instructions for safety when mixing plaster. Scoop from the bowl onto the center of the unprimed canvas using a cup. Use a palette knife or paint spreader to move the plaster from the center to the masking tape. Create a smooth surface or add texture as desired. Thickness of the plaster should be about 1/4". If desired, leave a small amount of canvas showing and create a soft, free-form edge with the plaster.

NOTE: Smooth drops of leftover plaster onto scraps of canvas to create small portions. These are very useful for experimenting with various painting or drawing materials and techniques, learning about how each responds to the plaster surface, before creating a finished fresco panel. Dried plaster pieces can also be removed from the mixing bowl and saved for this purpose.
6. After plaster dries, apply glue to the front of the panel and use palette knife to spread it evenly across the surface. Place the plaster piece on top so that the canvas back comes in contact with the glue and the tape edges align with the panel edges. The weight of the plaster is probably enough to provide firm contact, but a heavy book or two may be placed on the plaster while the glue grabs hold, if needed.
7. As a final step in preparing the surface, remove the masking tape and wrap the edges of the canvas to the back of a panel. Square the corners by cutting from the edge to the corners, then wrapping and gluing the canvas to the back of the panel. Trim away excess with scissors.

Process

1. Determine the subject of the fresco painting and make a preliminary sketch. Erasing is not easy to do on a plaster surface, so it's best to plan first. Reflect on and discuss the objectives of fresco artists throughout history. Michelangelo, DaVinci, Raphael, Fra Angelico and those who commissioned their art designed scenes of great meaning and importance — with the intent of them inspiring people for centuries. In the manner of the great fresco artists of the past, pose the question: "What would you want someone one thousand years from now to know?"

2. Paint directly onto the plaster surface using pastels, watercolor, gouache, or acrylic colors. Liquids absorb instantly into the plaster and dry quickly. Colors may lighten as they dry, because they are affected by the opaque white of the plaster.

The chalky surface provides a perfect tooth (a fine texture) for pastels, colored pencils, charcoal and graphite. Try using a blending stump to help push the medium into the tooth to make it more permanent. Pastels can be dispersed and affixed to the plaster with a small amount of water. Draw first, then add water to the pigment with a brush.

NOTE: Use scraps of dried plaster saved from the preparation process to experiment with materials and adding water.

3. Once the painting is finished, it can be sealed and protected. A matte spray or liquid varnish will keep the flat look of the plaster intact.



Step 1: Prepare surface by mixing plaster and smoothing it onto a piece of unprimed canvas.



Step 2: Glue canvas to a rigid panel, wrap the edges and adhere them to the back side.



Step 3: Design and execute a painting or drawing on the plaster surface. Seal when finished.

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Options

- Prior to sealing, the plaster surface can be fragile. If desired, frescos can be purposefully cracked in order to create a more antiqued look. Follow with matte medium to strengthen.
- Pastel can also be purposefully scratched or chipped away to create areas of bright highlights prior to sealing. Use a wooden scratch tool or modeling too.

.National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 1: Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 10: Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experience to make art.

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding

