

SHLEPTICHKA LIVES!

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For centuries, scenic artists have found traditional tools of painting such as brushes and rollers quite inadequate in creating deeper and more interesting textures. Our search for a better painting tool, to realize our vision, has taken us to the strangest places and caused the most peculiar behavior. When ordinary paint brushes would not do, we tied them, taped them, and cut their hair. We resorted to sponges of all sizes, sorts, and shapes – from natural to man-made, round, oblong, and square. We have used rags indescribable, ops and push brooms, metal and plastic combs, sand, gravel, foam, burlap, feathers, and bamboo.

Just when we thought we had exhausted techniques and tools to suit our painter's sprite, we discovered flogging of the flat – not to punish but to beautify. To this end, we tied strips of muslin to a stick and slapped it on the surface to create wide ranges of color and contrast.

By far the strangest painting tool to date comes not from a paint store, fabric store, or even the hardware store. Amazingly, it is found in the janitorial supply area! Thought to be a distant relative of the 15th century feather fan, the feather duster becomes a versatile instrument of painting in the hands of a creative scenic artist.

In combination with other scene painting techniques such as spattering and scumbling, the application of the feather duster (called schleptichka) is very effective in creating interesting and deep textures. The basic three-value scheme (base, light and dark) illustrated here serves well for a basic texture and for giving a nice deep base to wallpaper, stone, and stucco.

THE PROCESS

Step 1. Starting from a neutral prime coat, do a random scumble of the entire surface with the three colors. (See figure 2)

Step 2. Dip the feather duster in the paint, beginning with the darkest value.

Step 3. Holding the duster vertically, by the end of the handle, apply it a couple of times to a pallet or scrap of ¼" plywood, to remove excess paint. (See figure 3)

Step 4. Again holding the duster vertically by the end of the handle, and using a twisting motion with your wrist, apply at random to the flat. Do not push down too hard, or you'll get a blob. (See figures 4a and 4b)

Step 5. After you have a fairly even coverage with the darkest value, repeat with the other two values of the hue. (See figures 5a, 5b, and 5c)

Step 6. Spatter evenly with the lightest and darkest values.

Voila! A great texture which can be used as-is for a stucco effect, embellished with a stenciled wallpaper pattern, sponged and mortared for stone, or used in any way your imagination inspires.

Feather dusters come in many sizes and types. I have used turkey, chicken, ostrich, and combinations. In my experience, the best ones are made of long ostrich feather alone or in combination with Asian chicken feathers. These dusters are not always easy to locate. Here is the address of a good company: Texas Feathers, dba TxF Products, 2702 Morris Sheppard Drive, Brownwood, TX 76804. The website URL is: <http://www.texasfeathers.com/> . Also, check with your favorite theatrical supply house to see if they have added these great products.