

How to Work With Pigments

Working with artists and modeling pigments provides the modeler with another avenue to realistically weather your model in an operating environment. This weathering can run the gamut from heavy, wet mud, to a dry desert dusting. Because of their fine grit, pigments realistically replicate the scale size of dirt and dust while offering the subtle texture not always available with an airbrushed weathered finish.

Like any other finishing medium, care and practice must be taken as you develop your skills and style if you choose to incorporate pigments into your weathering repertoire. From woodworking to armor modeling, a good result starts with the proper tools and materials. Bulk artists pigments are available from most artist supply houses such as Dick Blick. However, these colors are very basic and would require quite a bit of mixing and measuring to achieve the shades we use in armored vehicle weathering. While there are several companies that now make pigments designed for the scale modeler, I use Mig Pigments. Not only are their colors specific to various conditions and effects, they also provide a line of complementary products to assist the modeler.



Mig Acrylic Resin



Mig Thinner for Washes



Mig Pigment Fixer



Mig Assorted Pigments

An assortment of brushes is important in applying pigments. You will need to have some soft round tip brushes for applying and blending dry pigment. You will also want a soft bristle brush to apply thinner or fixer (I use dedicated brushes for each purpose). Additionally, you should have some fairly stiff brushes for applying thicker mud applications. Of course, as with most finishing techniques, toothpicks and small cups for mixing and holding pigments are a must. Finally, the old hair dryer that you used to get your 1970's Keith Partridge hairdo will help dry the layers of pigment.

The first step in using pigments is to determine the environment you are trying to portray. Heavy wet mud, dry light mud, general loose dirt, desert sand and dust, rust, and smoke.

For example purposes today, I am weathering the sample M3 Stuart with a medium fresh mud coating on the left rear suspension, a lighter, dry mud on the left front suspension, and a dusty wash on the left front fender. I am also going to rust one of the mufflers.

The first step is to mix up the shade of pigment you want to use. For this example I am using Mig "Dark Mud" and "Dry Mud". I will use "Dark Mud" for the newest dirt. A 50/50 mix is used as an intermediate shade. And, I will use straight "Dry Mud" for the lightest dusting.

I usually work with the darkest, thickest layer first, and use lighter and dryer layers on top. As a general rule, the lower on the vehicle you are, the fresher and darker the dirt and mud.

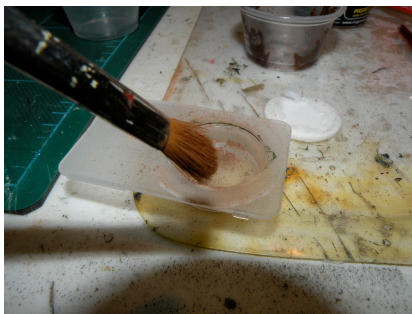


To create the base layer of dark mud, I mixed the "Dark Mud" pigment with the acrylic resin medium. I do most of the mixing with a toothpick. The texture you end up with is up to personal taste. I prefer a slightly dryer, Plaster of Paris feel. It is at this point you can mix in static grass to add further texture to this layer.

Once you have the “mud” mixed to the consistency you like, you next apply the mix using a stiff, short bristled brush, as you would putty, etc. Remember to keep in mind where heavy, fresh mud or dirt will accumulate – mostly on horizontal surfaces and in nooks and crannies. That said, it would also build up on the lower vertical surfaces as well. Also bear in mind that wet mud one day, dries to hard dry dirt the next day. Also, mud that collects near exhausts, etc is likely to be dryer than on other parts of the hull.

After the base coat of fresh dirt / mud has dried, you will apply the intermediate coat. To do this I simply mixed a 50/50 blend of the two pigments, dry, in a cup. This mix is then applied starting at the higher levels of the mud layer and extending further up the vehicle suspension.

Once the intermediate layer is applied, then the lightest coating of “Dry Mud” is applied at the highest points on the suspension. Once this is done, you can fix the pigment in place with either thinner or pigment fixer. When you apply the fixing agent, use a soft brush and simply touch it to the surface gently and allow the fixer to flow off of the brush. Do not apply brush strokes unless you want that effect in the pigment.



Mixing Dry Pigment in a Cup



Applying Dry Pigment



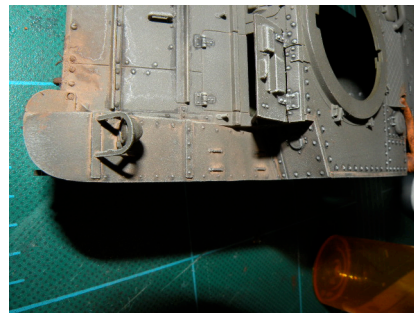
Pigment Fixer



Applying Pigment Fixer

To apply a thinner layer of dry dirt and mud, you use the same basic approach with the three layers of color. The biggest difference is that you do not use the acrylic resin to create the heavier layer. Since you are trying to produce a thinner layer of dry dirt, you will mix the pigment with a small amount of fixer to create a thicker paste. This is applied in the same manner as the heavier mud discussed previously. The intermediate and light layers are applied as before. Again, once you have applied all of the layers, fix the pigment.

Finally, applying a wash with pigments is very similar to the method used with oil, enamel, or acrylic paint. Using the thinner for washes, you can dissolve the pigment into a solution where the appearance and consistency is that of heavily tinted thinner. This wash can then be applied as a broad wash over all surfaces. The pigment will settle around the raised details and in the corners. When dry, it will provide a very nice effect of dust and / or dirt. Once the pigment is dry, you can take a soft brush or Q-tip to remove the excess pigment from the open areas to accentuate the wash.



Another very good article on using washes by Adam Wilder can be found at the following web link:

<http://www.armorama.com/modules.php?op=modload&name=Sections&file=index&req=viewarticle&artid=1221>