

Painting with soil



Soil has been used as paint for many years. Native North American and native Australian cultures both used it as a form of communication.

Soils that are most commonly-used as pigments (a substance that is used for colouring) are red, yellow and orange in colour. These pigments are called ochres, and they get their colour from iron that is present in the soil.

Equipment

Spoon or small trowel
Baking tray or shallow containers
Metal sieve
Tubs or jam jars for storage
PVA glue
Eye dropper or turkey baster if available
White plate
Card and paper for painting on
Paint brushes of different sizes



Collecting the soil

1. Using a spoon or small garden trowel, collect soil from scraped banks, eroded paths and gullies. Try to get a variety of colours and textures. Be careful not to disturb any plants or wildlife as you collect the soil.
2. Put the soil onto baking tray or in separate, shallow containers and leave it somewhere warm for the soil to dry out. Crumble it as it dries.
3. Push the soil through a metal sieve onto a piece of paper and then pour into a tub or jar. Be careful not to mix your soil samples up!

Painting with soil

1. Mix PVA glue and water to form a fairly runny paste. Add drops of the solution one at a time to a small sample of dried soil until it is like paint.
2. Do this for all the different colours of soil. When they are ready, put them on a white plate to use as an artist's palette.
3. You are now ready to paint!



Hints and tips

- Try experimenting with different papers - you may get different results using thick watercolour paper or card compared to paper or tissue paper.
- Use different techniques - use paint brushes of different sizes, fingers or pre-paint the paper with the glue solution and sprinkle pigments onto the surface.
- Take a look at some cave paintings and other examples of pigment art for inspiration (see Resources).
- If you don't have time to wait for the soil to dry, you can use freshly collected wet soil to paint with. Take care to remove stones, animals, twigs and leaves. You will still need to mix it with the PVA solution.
- If you do not have many different colours, try adding varying amounts of charcoal or chalk to samples to produce different shades. Many striking pigment paintings use only one or two colours and explore texture, geometry and brush strokes instead.

Resources

Here are some useful websites on painting with soil that may inspire you!

Painting with Pigments

<http://www.webexhibits.org/pigments/>

Société des Ocres de France

<http://www.ocres-de-france.com/index.php?choix-lang=fr>

The Société des Ocres de France is located in Provence, France. It is a quarry that sells natural pigments from its quarries for painting.

Cave Painting

<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/prehistoric/cave-painting.htm#sites>

Cea Blyth

<http://www.c-blyth.com/>

Cea Blyth is an artist who paints with natural pigments, inspired by art from all over the world.

For more information about soil go to www.OPALexplore.org