



WE WANT YOU!

**CUSTOM PAINTED MAILBOX STEP-BY-STEP
BY SEAN CAHILL**

In this AirSick step-by-step tutorial, we are going to show you some awesome tips and tricks to creating a killer custom mailbox with a 4th of July theme. Throughout this tutorial, we will be covering distressing techniques, transfer methods, and basic color matching.

...LETS GET STARTED

PROJECT SUPPLIES

- ★ STANDARD US METAL MAILBOX
- ★ AUTO MASK
- ★ SHARPIE / PENCIL
- ★ MASKING TAPE
- ★ DOUBLE ACTION AIRBRUSH
- ★ SINGLE EDGE RAZOR BLADES
- ★ X ACTO KNIFE WITH A #10 BLADE
- ★ LARGE PAD OF TRACING PAPER
- ★ RUBBER SCRAPER
- ★ ELECTRIC ERASER (OPTIONAL)



PAINT

I will be using Wicked Colors by Createx for this project. Wicked Colors is a water based paint system that is versatile and looks great.



WICKED
RED



WICKED
BLACK



WICKED
BLUE



WICKED
YELLOW



YELLOW
OCRE



PTHALO
GREEN



WICKED
BROWN



WICKED
WHITE

In this tutorial we will be stepping up our basic skills and heading into a more advanced area of design and execution. What makes this piece more challenging is the use of several basic skills in succession to create a seamless work of art. These skills include: color matching, basic freehand airbrush skills, basic cutting/masking skills and a decent grip on some freehand drawing skills.

Do not be intimidated by the complexity of the final design. If you have these basic skills under your belt we can break down the design piece by piece, then put it together like a puzzle. I also want to point out that this design is not limited to a mailbox. With a little creativity you can fit this design to several applications.

STEP 1



STEP 2



I start this project with a standard US mailbox that I bought at the local hardware store for 20 bucks. The mailbox has been based in white and has been cleared. In order to get the paint to stick, we will have to scuff the entire surface using a maroon (red) Scotch Brite pad until the surface becomes dull. This is called creating "tooth" for the paint to attach itself. After the entire box has been scuffed to a dull finish, I wipe it down with a wax and grease remover (STEP 2) to pick up any loose debris made by my scuff pad. Once the box is cleaned and free of dust, you are ready to paint.

REFERENCE AND COLOR

Being that American Independence day (July 4th) was right around the corner, I had a definite theme in mind for this project. So I went to the web and started searching for materials I could use for color reference. I decided to give this mailbox a dirty, grungy, torn and tattered look. I also pulled up a picture of good old Uncle Sam that I used as reference when turning him into a bag of bones. I took the color reference picture into Photoshop and used the eyedropper tool to separate 3 main colors.

STEP 3



STEP 4



I then print out my color reference and match all 3 colors using nothing more than some red, yellow, white, blue, green and a little black (STEP 4). I mix each color then test it next to my colored squares. I adjust the color as needed, and continue to test each mix.

PAINT TIP

You always want to mix more paint than you will actually need. This will prevent you from having to color match your already color matched base. Getting a color to match the second time around can be a real pain. So always make more than you need.

STEP 5



STEP 6



ESTABLISHING A BASE BACKGROUND

Before I can transfer the Uncle Sam design to the mailbox I have to grunge things up a bit. I start with my yellow base that I color matched to my reference.

Begin by spraying a random pattern over the surface (STEP 5). While it's still wet I take the scuff pad and begin lightly scuffing the paint, this will create the distressed look I want (SEEN IN STEP 6). I go over the box a few times with the yellow, scuffing each coat as I go to create layers and depth. Feel free to experiment with different scuffing techniques throughout this phase.

STEP 7



This is the result of the painting and scuffing with our primary yellow (STEP 7). Take your time and make sure that you are happy with the overall look of the mailbox before moving to adding the next couple of steps. The key to achieving a convincing distressed effect is a build up of multiple layers.

STEP 8



STEP 9



STEP 10



I add a few drops of black to my yellow and follow a similar pattern laying down light coats and scuffing as I go (STEPS 8, 9, 10). I focus on the edges and corners of the box with the darker color to give the illusion of a heavily worn surface. Note that I am primarily building up the darker mixture around the edges of the mailbox, and leaving the middle sections lighter for my main artwork. This also enhances the illusion that the paint has been worn off over time. Continue with your darker mixture until you are satisfied with the distressed look (STEPS 8 through 12).

STEP 11



STEP 12



STEP 13



RESULT OF CARBON PAPER TRANSFER



TRANSFERRING THE DESIGN

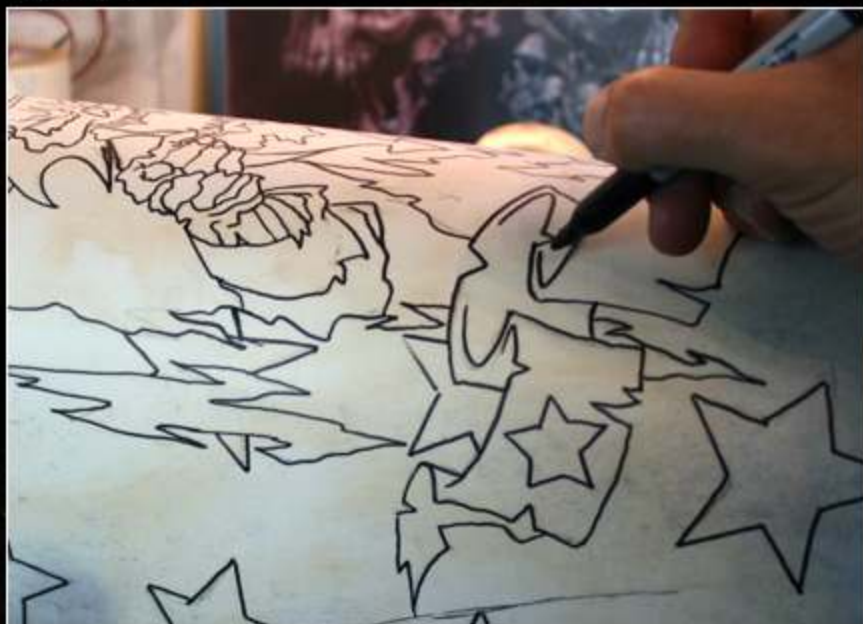
There are several ways to transfer a design to a surface. Each method has several applications, so it is in your best interest as an artist to be familiar with more than one transfer method. For this tutorial I will be using carbon paper to transfer my design onto the auto mask for cutting.

I have chosen to draw my design on translucent tracing paper so that I can quickly make changes if needed. I then cover the entire surface with auto mask, being careful to push all wrinkles and air bubbles out with a rubber scraper. I lay a piece of carbon paper over the auto mask and tape it into place.

I lay my design over the carbon paper, tape it into place, and trace over the lines with a pencil (STEP X). This will push the black carbon onto the white auto mask giving you a perfect image transfer.

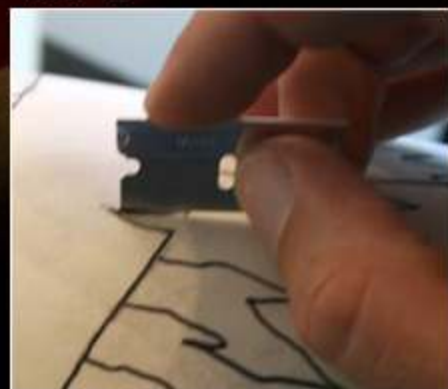
After the image has been transferred to the auto mask. I take a Sharpie pen and go over the entire design as smoothly as possible (STEP 14). I do this so that it is easy to see and follow the lines that are about to be hand cut with a razor blade.

STEP 14

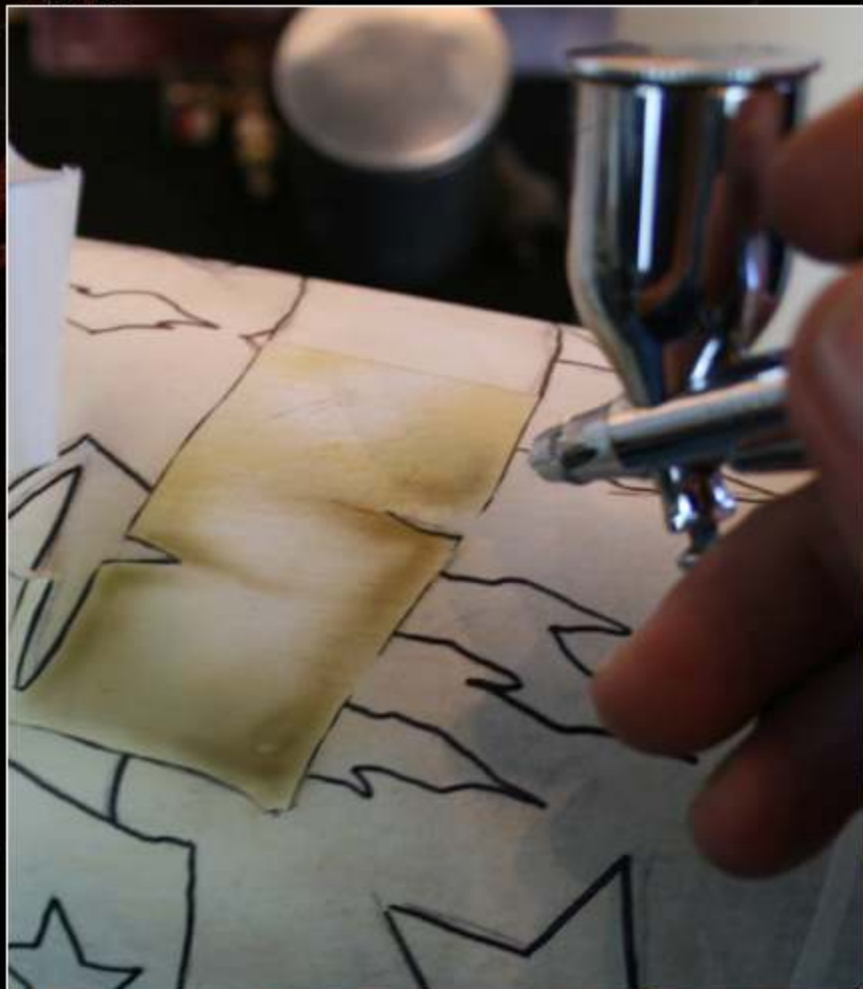


With the design transferred and traced with Sharpie, I proceed to cut along all of the lines with a razor blade (STEP 15).

STEP 15



STEP 16



STEP 17



STEP 18



Start by cutting out the banner. I add a few drops of black to my yellow mix and begin rendering (STEP 16). I start light and build up layers of paint as I go. To keep things grungy, I periodically hit the freshly painted surface with the scuff pad.

An electric eraser is used to remove paint, creating white highlights over the banner's border. (STEP 18)

STEP 19

Cut out and remove the stars, saving all the pieces off to the side for re-masking later. Instead of spraying white onto the stars, I use the scuff pad to remove paint exposing the white base. Doing this will help maintain that grungy look



STEP 19 RESULT



STEP 20



I re-mask the stars and begin unmasking the red stripes. I am using my color matched red with about 10 drops of Wicked Transparent Base. The transparent base gives my red color semi transparent properties. This means that I will still be able to see though the red paint to the grungy base coat underneath.

STEP 21



STEP 22



STEP 23



Unmask all of the red stripes and begin coloring them in using light passes to build layers of paint (STEPS 20 through 23). If you get too thick with your paint at this point, you will lose subtle base textures that you want to keep.

STEP 24



I unmask the blue area, making sure to keep the red stripes and stars covered. If there are places where my tape has been lifted, I will have to stop and fix the problem before moving on. If I leave loose ends I will get bleeding and overspray in places I do not want.

STEP 25



STEP 26



STEP 27



As I lay down the blue I am constantly referring back to the waving flag reference that I pulled from the internet. It helps me to keep things in perspective while I shade and shadow the contours of the flag. I am using the Scotch Brite pad to scuff out the spots in the blue that will later become highlights (STEP 25). I lightly scuff the whole area when I am done to keep the grunge effect consistent (STEP 27).

STEP 28



Pull the masking from the red and white stripes. While continuing to check with my reference picture I begin to shadow and shade the two colored stripes as one (STEP 28) - this will give the flag a flowing look, and add to the dimensionality. I am using my yellow and dominant black mix along with my scuff pad to get the flag nice and grungy looking (STEP 29).

STEP 29



STEP 30



STEP 31



The Xacto-knife with the #10 blade is used to scratch away the paint, expose the white surface, and create bright highlights within the banner (STEPS 30, 31).

You will also use the #10 blade to make dozens of tiny white stitches by carefully scratching away at the red and blue paint along the flags seams (STEPS 32, 33).

STEP 32



STEP 33



STEP 34



STEP 35



STEP 36



At this point in the project I have decided to add some larger ripped areas in the flag. I am doing this to help balance out the existing artwork. So I take a new piece of transfer paper and cover the areas I do not wish to paint. I then draw a few ripped areas onto the masking paper and cut them out (STEP 34). I am using a white basecoat to completely white out my ripped areas (STEP 35). Allow the white to dry completely before moving on. With my color matched yellow base and the scuff pad I paint, then texture the insides of the tears (STEP 36, 37). This area will serve as a background for what is behind the flag.

A mix of Wicked Brown and a few drops of black give me a nice shading color and I apply it to the outside edges of the tear away cut outs (STEP 38). This will give the illusion of depth when the masking has been removed.

STEP 37



STEP 38



STEP 39



Now that the tears have been expanded and completed I re-mask them and start on Uncle Sam. To keep things nice and clean I break Uncle Sam into small sections, starting with his hat. First the red, then the blue, I cut each piece one at a time. As I paint, I periodically use the scuff pad to rough things up a bit. I want to keep the same dingy look throughout the entire piece.

Tips and Tricks

In order to better see the edges I will be cutting, I have taken a piece of red crayon and lightly apply it to the surface (STEP 39). As you can see, the red crayon collects on the edges making them more visible and easier to cut.

STEP 40



STEP 41



STEP 42



By carefully removing, and re-masking the hat in sections, I have much more control over the painting of each individual element. This is known as sequential masking, which is the process of exposing an area that is to be rendered by cutting into the auto mask, then re-masking that area to work on another. You can use a plotter to cut a sequential mask design, but for this tutorial we will be doing everything by hand. This process is time consuming, but the result is well worth the time invested.

STEP 43



STEP 44



STEP 45



STEP 46



STEP 47



Moving to the skull I render the shapes with the Wicked Brown and black mix (STEPS 46, 47). I Build up the facial detail in stages, I don't want to go to heavy with the passes, as this would lead to a much flatter look. I will be using an X-acto knife to add the highlights, so there is no need to use white, or a lighter shade during this part of the rendering.

I am using the same scraping technique with the #10 X-acto blade to add highlights to the skull. I am going for a very gritty and scratchy look with skeleton Uncle Sam, this will tie him in with the rest of the artwork

STEP 48



STEP 49



STEP 50



I move to the beard and then the hands, scraping, layering and re-masking each piece individually. This is tedious and time consuming work but it pays not to rush. Take your time and you will make less mistakes in the end.

STEP 51



STEP 52



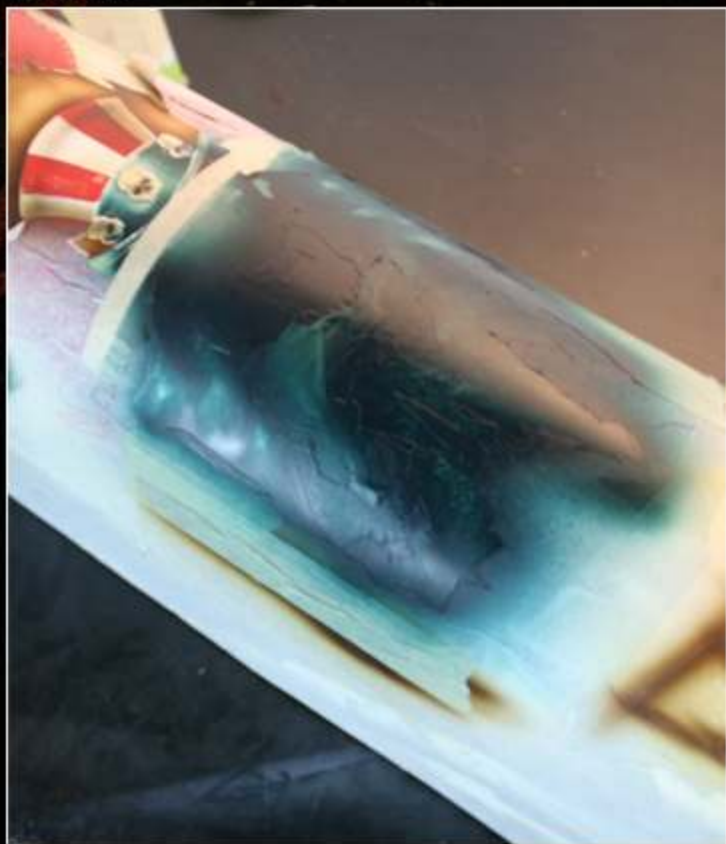
Each small piece of the hands are cut, removed and painted one at a time. Take your time to ensure that each piece is being rendered carefully and correctly.

STEP 53



With the hand complete and unmasked, I spend a little time with touch-ups and blending to eliminate any harsh lines from the masking

STEP 54



I'm using the same color matched blue/green for the jacket. I even add a few drops of black for shading the darker areas behind the tears of the flag.

STEP 55



After I complete the jacket I remove all masking. While looking over the whole piece I see some areas that I will have to touch up. Without masking I use my airbrush, scuff pad, and X-acto knife to darken and lighten certain areas as needed.

Note: Adjusting the contrast of your piece as a whole will make the difference between a flat dull artwork and a deep rich painting.

STEP 56



I remove a little more paint with my X-acto to enhance the edges of the tears. This will just help them to be a little more pronounced

STEP 57



Using the #10 blade I begin to scratch and scrape along the edges of the torn cloth. I lead off the pointed tips creating loose threads that have a real free-flowing look.

STEP 58



STEP 59



As this project comes to a close I add a few finishing touches to really tie the whole piece together: I added blue stars (STEP 58), and strengthened my shadows and highlights to Uncle Sam's beard. Then I scuffed over the stamped lettering on the front and back of the box. Normally a Last name or message would be written within the banner, but since this will ultimately be a promotional display piece, we decided to keep this one blank.

Now that I am satisfied with all my work, I will give the box 3-5 coats of clear to bury any edges my masking has created. Be sure to check out the next page for the final product shots.





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I add a few drops of black to my yellow and follow a similar pattern laying down light coats and scuffing as I go (STEPS 8, 9, 10). I focus on the edges and corners of the box with the darker color to give the illusion of a heavily worn surface. Note that I am primarily building up the darker mixture around the edges of the mailbox, and leaving the middle sections lighter for my main artwork. This also enhances the illusion that the paint has been worn off over time. Continue with your darker mixture until you are satisfied with the distressed look (STEPS 8 through 12).

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RESULT OF CARBON PAPER TRANSFER



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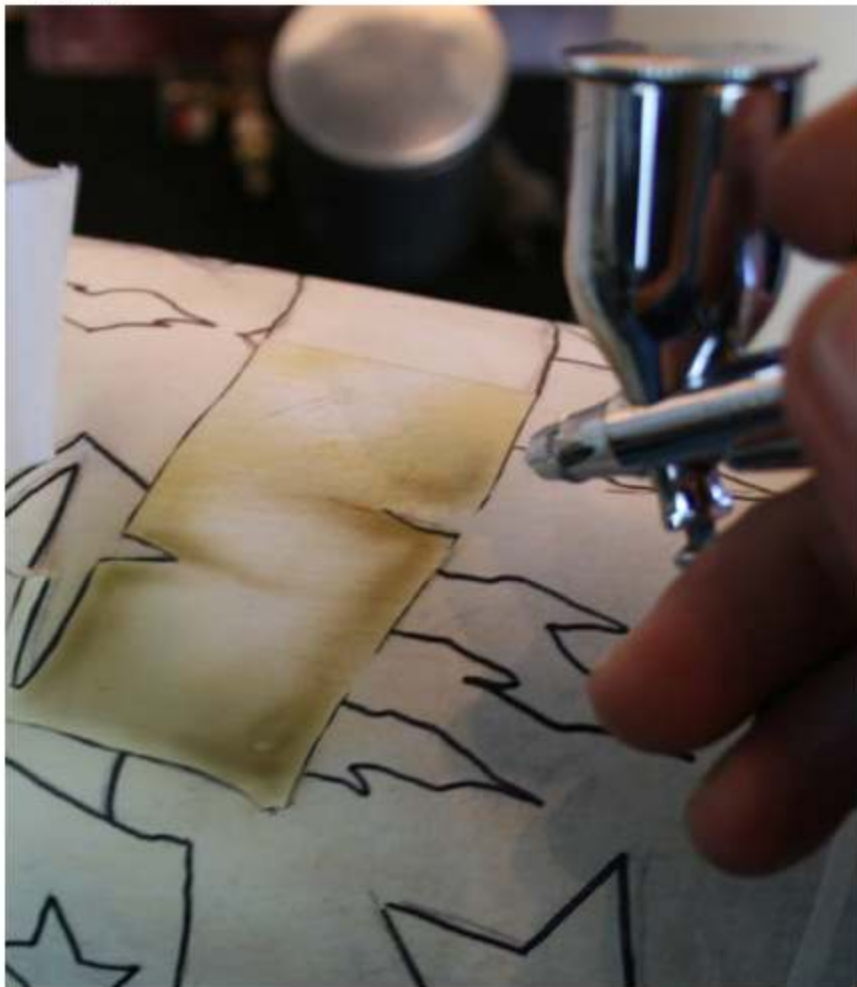


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An electric eraser is used to remove paint, creating white highlights over the banner's border. (STEP 18)

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Cut out and remove the stars, saving all the pieces off to the side for re-masking later. Instead of spraying white onto the stars, I use the scuff pad to remove paint exposing the white base. Doing this will help maintain that grungy look



STEP 19 RESULT



STEP 24



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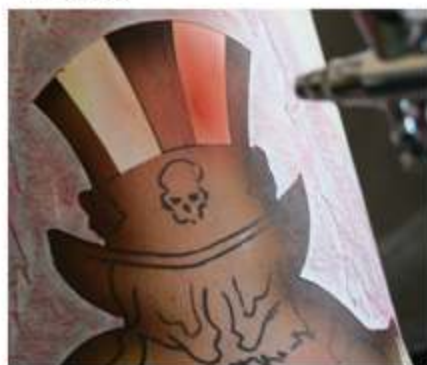
STEP 40



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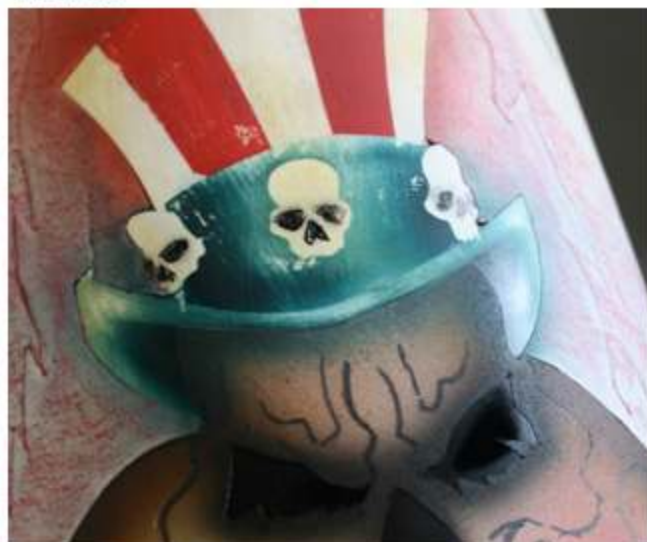


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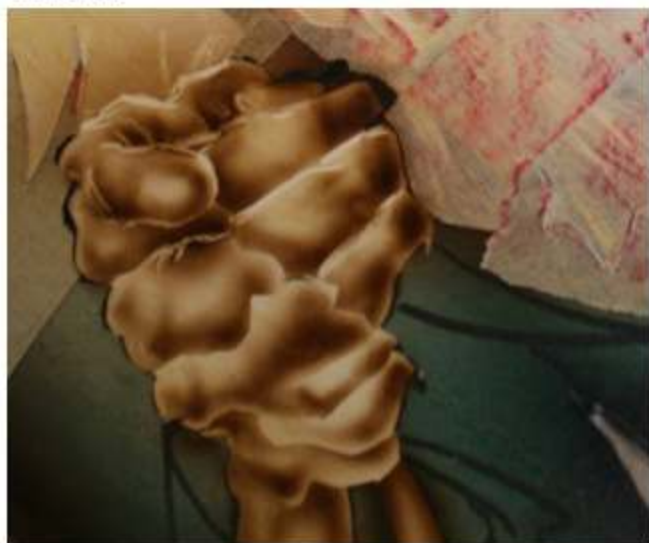


STEP 52



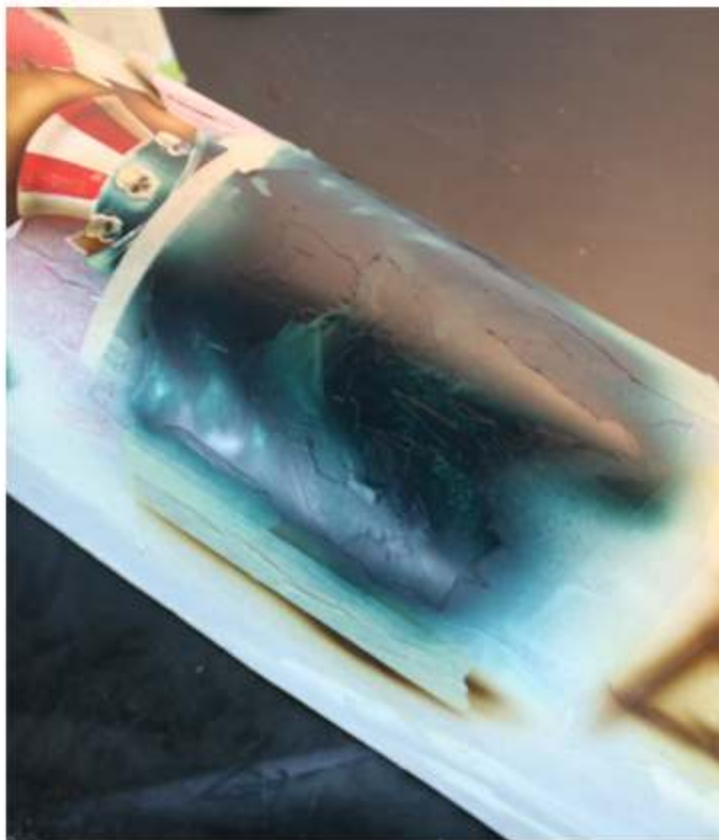
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