

PRODUCTS



CREATING TEXTURED SURFACES

by Jenny Knott, Rosco Laboratories

Textures can play an extremely important role in theatre design. A designer may wish to create a sense of strong realism or use texture, on its own, to add visual interest and impact. For both scenic artists and lighting designers, a textured set can be tremendously satisfying to work on. A beautifully textured set, whether it has had the techniques of carving or plaster type material applied, will literally be brought to life by lighting, as the three-dimensional qualities will be brought into play by the use of light and shadows.

Learning how to use a wide variety of textures will increase the imaginative and creative uses by designers and scenic artists alike. After having looked at a textured set design, scenic artists may have to ask themselves several questions concerning the texturing process. They might, for instance, ask any of the following: What are the substrates being used? What will stick to those substrates? Will actors be standing on, or climbing over it? What is the budget? What are the time constraints? Texture can often allow you to cut the actual time it takes to paint the set.

There are several ways to achieve texture. Textures can be wet on application, i.e. Rosco Foamcoat, Flexcoat, and Flexbond. They can be pre-molded, i.e. vacuform or pre-cast molds. Or, textures can be created by carving or appliqué, i.e. polystyrene, urethane and extruded foams, fabrics, rope, pasta, etc. Textures that are wet on application are used for re-creating effects such as plaster walls, wood, bark, stone and brick. This texture technique can be very versatile, depending on the thinness or the thickness of the material. A range between very subtle and deeply textured scenic effects can be accomplished by the texture's viscosity and additives. Texture can be applied manually or with a texture spray-gun. Once mixed, other materials can be added, such as sawdust, powdered clay, joint compound, sand, mica, vermiculite, and color for tinting. The choice of texture will depend on various factors, such as availability, budget, and flexibility. It is always a good idea to experiment with a few different methods, as they all have quite unique characteristics, such as:

-Flexibility, which may either mean that a texture cannot be sanded or, if it dries hard enough to sand, it may be too brittle for the substrate.

-Absorbency and non-absorbency will affect the type of painting needed. Whether there is a need to prime should be considered. A highly absorbent texture will soak up paint immediately and could appear too patchy.

Mixing texture is not only messy, it poses health and safety concerns. To avoid unnecessary risks, as well as irritation when you are mixing particulate matter, you should consider taking the necessary precautions, such as wearing a particle mask, respirator with proper cartridges, and wearing the proper rated gloves.

Most textures can be applied with anything, e.g. trowel, putty knife, pastry tube, brush, roller, texture spray-gun, sponge, or hands. Before deciding which technique to use, first consider your desired effect and your time table.

There are many ways to create specific textures for the stage, using many different materials. Bricks, for example, may be appliquéd, carved out of foam, textured, or stenciled. Below, I will address a couple of ways to use Rosco coating materials. You might keep these in mind the next time texture is an element for the stage set or props.

Textured Bricks

There are several ways of approaching textured bricks. I chose this method, using Rosco Flexbond glue, because it is so versatile, has many variations, and is economical. The substrate being used is medite.

1. Prime the clean, dry and dust-free medite, using a wet blend of tinted Tough Prime. A good bond will be achieved when textures are applied over clean and primed surfaces.
2. Using a brush or hand-pump sprayer, spatter with a light, a medium, and a dark mortar color. (It is not necessary to allow the prime coat to completely dry before spattering. A sprayer with water may also be used to add variety to the spatter step.) Let dry.
3. Measure, mark, and apply masking tape over the painted mortar.
4. Mix up the sand and Rosco Flexbond glue in a clean bucket. The ratio of sand to Flexbond will depend on how thick or thin the texture is required to appear. If the texture is stiff, the resulting texture will be very pronounced. If the texture is thin, it will settle out and have a softer appearance. Gradually mix the sand into the Flexbond, stirring constantly. Be sure to test the mixture, to ensure the adhesion was not compromised by the addition of too much sand. (Different colored sands may be used in different buckets or color may be added as a variation).



PRODUCTS

Using a brush, trowel, roller or putty knife, apply mixture over the tape. Application should be uneven for interest. Figure 1.

BE SURE TO PULL THE TAPE BEFORE THE TEXTURE DRIES, OTHERWISE THE TAPE WILL BECOME ONE WITH THE TEXTURE. Let dry.

Figure 2



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

5. Brush or roll on the brick base color. (To preserve the color of the mortar it may be necessary to reapply masking tape.)
6. Using a foam roller that has some of the foam picked out, apply a second brick color. It is not necessary to roll this color on all the bricks. (This is a fast method of applying additional color in a random and more realistic manner.)



Fig. 3

7. Additional colors may be applied using the texture roller. Each additional color should be used less than the previous color. Random application of color will lend visual interest and realism to the brick. Let dry.



Fig. 4

8. Remove masking tape.
9. Utilizing the raised texture, dry brush on the highlight colors. Figure 5
10. Shadows and cut lines may be applied, in order to enhance the illusion of greater depth. Figure 6

The versatility of Rosco Flexbond glue can be seen in Figure Eight on page seven in the photograph of the board with sand, sawdust, clay powder, and joint compound added on the top row. Off Broadway yellow ochre was added on the bottom row to illustrate how the glue dries clear and allows the color to remain visible. Flexbond sticks to many porous and non-porous substrates, yet retains its pliability. It also does not retain any surface "tackiness" when dry, a real plus when folding up soft goods or storing flats face to face.

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Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7
The Finished Product



Fig. 8

OTHER CHOICES FOR TEXTURED SURFACES FOAMCOAT

Textured Travertine Stone

Rosco Foamcoat works extremely well in building up surfaces to simulate different types of stone. Foamcoat is a water-based, interior/exterior, weather-resistant, flame-retardant coating that dries very hard. It is sandable but the longer it sits the harder it gets and

a grinder may be in order. The steps for applying Foamcoat for the stone are similar to those of textured brick.

1. Make sure surfaces are clean, dry, and dust free.
2. Mark and tape off the mortar.
3. Apply Foamcoat, over the taped mortar, straight out of the bucket. (Foamcoat may be tinted or other textures added.) Be sure to leave open areas, for dark glazes to pool in later in the painting process. This will increase the feeling of deep dimension.



4. Pull the tape before the Foamcoat dries or it will become one with the texture.
5. Apply more layers of Foamcoat, letting it dry between the layers until the desired depth has been achieved. It is not necessary to retape the mortar.
6. Paint with thin layers of color until desired finish is attained.



7. Dry brush the raised surfaces with the highlight.
8. Add cast shadows and cut lines.



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Weathered Wood, Carved Brick, and Stucco

Tudor walls can be reproduced using polystyrene, insulation foam and Foamcoat, instead of wood products and steel which are heavy, bulky, and still need texture added.

1. Cartoon then carve the laminated foam pieces. Make sure the carving is deep enough to allow for a texture product to be applied without losing the definition.
2. Surfaces should be clean, dry and dust free before applying Foamcoat.
3. Apply Foamcoat, letting it dry between layers. (The Foamcoat may be tinted and/or sand or sawdust added to give added interest and save time.)
4. Paint according to the elevation or reference material.
5. Other objects, such as bolts, may be added to give additional reality to the scenery.
6. Tinted Foamcoat may be applied to give the impression of a repair.



FLEXCOAT

Quite often, shops forced to choose between buying the expensive decorative molding the designer would like and constructing it out of the objects hanging around the shop. Labor dollars vs. materials dollars. The answer for the “found” object item is Flexcoat. Flexcoat is a water-based, flexible, interior/exterior, weather-resistant, flame-retardant coating product that will adhere to a wide variety of substrates. Therefore, they can be painted with water-based paint.

Frieze using “found” objects

The frieze contained the following items: pine molding, old rope, MDF, anaglyptic border paper, MDF, cardboard tube, pasta twists, and plastic beads on medite.

1. After selecting items and attaching them to a backing board, Flexcoat was applied to fill in the gaps to create the appearance of a unified “carved” object. (Flexcoat may be tinted.) It was then allowed to dry.
2. A second layer of tinted Flexcoat was applied. It was then allowed to dry.

3. Off Broadway Gold was brushed on.
4. Glazes using Clear Acrylic Gloss were applied, dark to light, letting each layer dry before applying another layer to avoid a muddy appearance.
5. Finally, Off Broadway Bright Gold was dry brushed on to increase the illusion of depth.



Stone Wall

Flexcoat was the product chosen to coat the stone wall below, which was constructed with removable stones made out of upholstery foam and then painted.



Flexcoat also makes an excellent opaque medium for translucent drops. 2 parts Flexcoat mixed with 1 part Tough Prime results in a perfect combination of flexibility with opacity. One coat will usually take care of the pinholes.

These are just a few suggestions for using Flexbond, Foamcoat, and Flexcoat to create textured surfaces for the stage. They can be applied to an unending list of substrates. As always, a preliminary test helps eliminate a few surprises. Happy Gooping.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jenny Knott is a graduate of the University of Missouri, Kansas City with an MFA in Design and Technology. Jenny freelanced as a Scenic Artist for over 20 years. She worked for regional theatres such as Missouri Rep, Arena Stage, Guthrie and Goodspeed Opera House as well as union scene shops, and was an artist-in-residence at the University of Illinois-Champaign/Urbana. She is a member of USA 829. Jenny joined Rosco as their Paint Products Manager in July of 2003. She continues to paint on the occasional weekend for the Goodspeed, keeping current with new painters and new ways of approaching paint challenges.