

Materials and Prepping the Image

Hello, welcome to my updated tutorial for making stencil art. I will be going through the steps that I use to take an image, generally a vector from the show, and turn it into a final piece of stencil art. This part of the tutorial will focus on materials and prepping your project.

First off, you want to make sure you have all the materials you will need to start your project. It isn't any fun to get ready for a step only to find out you forgot some crucial material, making you rush out to find it. Here is just a basic list of stuff you will need, with a bit about each one.

- **Spray Paint:** The most obvious part of spray paint art is the paint. There are many kinds available. Finding the colors you want can be tough depending on what you have available in your area. Home Depot and WalMart carry a good stock of paint colors for around three to six dollars a can. Art stores in your area may have a much wider selection of colors in higher end graffiti paints, but those can run up to ten dollars a can. Paint can also be ordered online in vast arrays of colors at sites like ArtPrimo.com. Because cans are pressure vessels they must be shipped hazard ground making shipping more expensive. Look around online and try to find a shop in your area or nearby to have the best chance at finding your colors.
- **Canvas:** I am going to assume you want to paint on something to hang up, not go spray a wall somewhere. I buy canvas at my local art shop. They offer economy canvases two to a package. Look for sales and coupons to cut down the cost.
- **Stencil Material:** There are a ton of options here. Regular computer paper can work fine, but the stencils will not last long after repeated paintings. Poster board, freezer paper, transparency film, the list can go on. Print onto the material if you can, or tape the printer paper onto the second material and cut it out from there. I like to use transparency sheets to make lining up everything super easy. Transparency sheets are more expensive, but can be used many times. Make sure to mask off some of your line-up points to make alignment easier for multiple uses.
- **Blade:** I use a pretty standard Xacto blade, the I have modified a bit to personal preference. Buy some extra blades for your knife, buying #11 blades in packs of 100 is the most cost effective option if you plan to go through a lot of stencils. A sharp knife will make cutting that much easier on you. Get a good backing material to cut your stencils on. I use a self healing cutting mat that I got at a craft store in to protect my glass desk. I also use a single sheet of copy paper behind the stencil to get better contrast when cutting.
- **Masking Material:** The stencil can only cover so much of your canvas. I use Scotch blue painters tape and regular weight printer paper for most of my other masking to keep the paint from going where I don't want it. I use some adhesive to hold down stencils to ensure crisp lines and keep the stencil from moving around. I use 3m Super77 or StencilEase spray. With the Super77 you may get more adhesive on the page than needed and it can lead to residue being left behind on the canvas. Place your stencil on

some clean plastic and lift it off to remove excess residue before placing on the canvas.

- Painting area: Good ventilation is key here. Cover the area so you don't get paint everywhere.
- Other Stuff: Rubber gloves, tape, washers to weight the stencil, and a filter mask are all good to use.

That about covers it for materials. Choosing the image you want to make can be one of the harder parts. When starting out I suggest seeing what paint colors are available and decide based on that. Once you have built up a stock of paint getting an extra can here and there to finish a piece becomes more common.

I will be working on this image of Filly Twilight that I got on deviant art here:

<http://fav.me/d4imkzx>

Prepping for making the stencils:

I decided to capture my screen as I worked in Photoshop prepping the image and talking about layers and composition. So here is your first of two opportunities to watch me talk to myself for a few minutes.

Here is a video of breaking down the image:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhdO-8KVJrE>

Cutting the stencils:

The biggest piece of advice that I will give you for this step is patience. Take as much time as you need to cut out the stencils. Precision is key here to get smooth lines and not to butcher your hands with an Xacto blade.

What I like to do is print out all of my stencils before I cut a single one. Sometimes I will label them with color to be painted and order that it will be sprayed in the final piece.

I cut my stencils out on my desk, with a cutting board backing so I don't scratch the desk. I have a small desk lamp to provide all the illumination to see all the details in the stencil.

You want to work from back to front when painting.

Lets talk a bit about islands. Islands are color regions surrounded entirely by other color regions. If you remove the outer region you will also lose the inner region. There are a few options to deal with these. You can cut connecting lines to keep masking regions connected, or just paint the islands in a separate layer. The second option is what I chose for my paintings. I just find it easiest to never deal with them.

For stencil one, I cut out the entire body outline color. This is the most crucial stencil in the piece. Everything else will be lined up using this one as a guide, so be extra careful with this one.

Stencil two will be the fill color of the body. All of the dark purple will be masked using lighter purple, except for the small amount covered by the lines and the edges of the stencil.

Stencil three is for the outline of the mane and tail. Nothing special on this one, just be careful to cut right along the line so there are no gaps between the purple of the face and the dark blue of the mane and tail.

Stencil four is the main fill color of the hair. Cutting small parallel lines for the hair can be tough, so just take your time. If you work with this level of detail, it is worthwhile to print a few extra copies on regular paper to practice.

Now I start using single sheets for multiple colors. I will do her hair highlights and part of the eyes or mouth. This is just to save on sheets. Cover the area you are not painting with a scrap of paper and weigh it down.

For the eyes I have taken up a new painting order. I paint the iris first, then the pupils and eyelashes, and finally the whites of the eyes. This allows for no islands to mess with.

Video on cutting stencils: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R47gFWAcjY0>

General Stencil Cutting Tips:

- Light: Lots of it. Helps see the sometimes subtle differences in color that are used in these ponies. Don't strain your eyes.
- Sharp knife: Replace dull blades, it will just cause you to make mistakes.
- Sharp knife: Yes listed again, don't cut yourself. When cutting, my fingers get very close to the blade, be very careful.
- Cut less than you originally want: Work in small sections and make multiple passes to clean up areas. You will be less likely to cut outside of the intended area.
- Movement: I like to move the paper more than the blade. I feel I have better control moving the larger paper than the blade.
- Orientation: The blade does not need to be perpendicular, sometimes a bit of angle can help with a curve.
- Practice, cut out lots of stuff before doing your stencils, get comfortable.
- Rubber gloves: I sometimes wear gloves when cutting so my skin does stick to the paper. I have torn and stretched the stencils with my hands resting on them, then moving it.

Painting:

Prepping for your painting:

I like to get my painting area ready ahead of time. I get all the colors I need out of my boxes of paint and keep them nearby. I shake and spray a bit of paint from each to make sure I have mixed the cans properly and the caps won't drip. The little rattle ball distributes the pigment through the aerosol, so make sure you give the can a good shake before each spray.

I like to use background colors for some of my paintings, so that is obviously the first step. When spray painting, go for smooth even passes along the canvas. Hold the can about 8 to 10 inches from the piece. Use a light hand when spraying. A little paint goes a long way. Multiple coats are preferable to too much paint in one pass. Too much paint can make the stencils stick to the previous layer, removing some of the paint and messing up the look and texture of the piece. Again, I will stress patience.

For the Twilight Painting, I just used a nice blue, since it would contrast against the colors of the face and mane. Let the background color dry for ten minutes or so, and make sure it is dry. Now would be when I mask around the edges of the canvas if I choose to do so for the piece. I like to do this so I don't mess up the walls of the canvas picking it up after a layer. It also prevents any drifting mist from test sprays from coming in contact with the canvas. I didn't do it on the filly Twilight painting because none of the stencils came close to the edge of the canvas.

Now we are ready to place the stencils and begin our task of painting.

Line up the first stencil on the canvas where you want it. This is the most important layer, since we will align all other stencils off of this one. I like to not center my images. It is an old throwback to a photography class I took called the rule of thirds. Read a bit about it here:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_of_thirds

Once I have a good idea of where I will place it, I spray on my adhesive and position the stencil. Take the time to make sure it is smoothed out properly to ensure that no gaps get paint mist in them, called underspray. I will sometimes weight around the stencil with washers to hold down areas that may want to lift up.

Now to the main event. I paint with the canvas laying on a paper covered table. Set the canvas down and prep the can. You will want to make sure the cap is clear of built up paint to avoid drips falling on the canvas, that the paint is flowing smoothly, and the can is shaken up well. Spray a bit of paint onto a piece of paper or another box until the spray is consistent in color and dispersal pattern. Now just spray a small amount onto the stencil. A fine mist is all you need. Give it a second to spread out before you add more paint. If you can no longer see the texture of the canvas, you are using too much paint.

Sometimes I will remove the stencil right away, and other times I leave it until it is dry. Usually it

is just to see if I messed something up, though leaving it until it is fully dry is generally my advice. Let it dry completely before the next layer.

Now just line up your stencils using the layers you have already placed and repeat for all your stencils. If you doubled up stencils on one sheet just cover open holes with paper.

When you are finished, you may need to touch up your painting a bit. Touch up includes repairing minor mistakes and painting over stencil bridges. Spray a little of the desired color onto some paper, cardboard, or into a disposable cup. Using a disposable brush or applicator, dab up some paint and apply it over mistake areas. Use as little as necessary, otherwise it will look goopy and uneven. For frequent touch ups, consider buying a matching paint marker for the most used colors (like black).

Because spray paint is not meant to be brushed, touch ups will have a slightly different texture/sheen than the rest of the painting. If desired, a clear matte finish spray can be applied over the painting to even out its appearance.

That is about all there is for steps. The hard part was already done before you got to this tutorial.

Video on painting(45 minutes): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYDLulfNjL8>

General Spray Painting Tips:

- Practice: Don't go try an expensive canvas on your first attempt. Use boxes, or canvas tiles from the craft store. They are usually just a dollar or so, and give you a bit of understanding how canvas will interact with the paint.
- Light: Lots of it. Take care in lining up your stencils. This is much easier in good light. Don't strain your eyes.
- Don't use a lot of paint: Small amounts will keep the paint from pooling and leaking under your stencil.
- Rubber gloves: I wear gloves to keep paint off my hands. Change them often to prevent transfer of paint.
- Goggles or eye protection: Self explanatory, don't get paint in your eyes. It isn't fun.
- Respirator: I started using one after I ended up with blue boogers after a long painting session. Don't damage your lungs.
- Adhesive: Needed to keep those crisp lines. Use a little bit and let it dry before pressing onto the canvas.
- Keep your caps clean: Paint will want to build up on the cap. This can lead to drips on the canvas, which just don't look nice.
- Allow for sufficient drying time: If in doubt, wait another 5 minutes and test it again. It is easy to destroy your painting by being over zealous.

Troubleshooting

| Problem | How to Avoid | How to Fix |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Paint bleeding under stencil | Use less paint, apply multiple thin coats instead of one thick coat, use better quality paint. | Minor bleeding can be painted over during touch up. |
| Underspray | Secure stencil edges with adhesive or weights. Use low-pressure paint. Hold can perpendicular to canvas at 6-12 inch distance. | Mask subject and re-spray background color, or touch up with brush. Underspray does not need to be fixed if subsequent layers will cover it. |
| Overspray | Mask entire area around stencil with tape and paper. | Mask subject and re-spray background color, or touch up with brush. |
| Paint peeling off with stencil | Allow more drying time between stencil layers, use less adhesive on stencil. Remove excess adhesive by sticking stencil onto clean surface and peeling it off. | Minor peeling can be touched up with a brush. Layers with moderate to major peeling should be re-sprayed. |
| Layers misaligned | Use at least 2-3 points for index. Clear transparency stencils are easiest to align. | Noticed early, you can often adjust the following layers to compensate for minor misalignment. |
| Paint splatter, Clogged Nozzle | Clean paint nozzles after painting by holding the can upside down and spraying propellant only (doesn't work on all paint brands). Replace nozzles at the first sign of clogging. | Splatters are of little consequence in solid fills. Gradients, however, are ruined by splatters and will need to be re-done. Check nozzles before painting gradients. |
| Colors incorrect | Test colors before starting. Paint cap colors and online color swatches are notoriously inaccurate. Also, underlying layers will alter the colors sprayed on top. Light colors on top of dark colors may require 2 coats or a white pre-coat. | Get correct color. If a light color is coming out too dark on top of a dark color, re-spray with a white pre-coat or spray two coats. |
| Smudges & Fingerprints | Don't touch your painting with dirty hands or while it's wet. Wear gloves while | Small smudges can be touched up, larger ones may need to be |

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| | painting & change them frequently, or keep hands clean. | re-sprayed. |
| Light or incomplete coverage | <p>Mostly a problem with cheap paint, apply multiple thin coats to get better coverage. High quality paint gives superior coverage with one thin coat.</p> <p>If painting outside, wind can carry away the paint spray before it reaches the canvas. Move out of the wind or assemble a windbreak.</p> | Apply additional coats, allowing complete drying in between. |
| Paint not drying/uneven drying | Mostly caused by cold temperatures. Try to paint in warm and dry conditions. | Put painting in sun, or move to warm location. A portable heat source (heater or high intensity lamp) may help. |
| Stencil does not adhere properly to painting surface | Insufficient adhesive, high humidity, or cold can all cause this. | Re-apply adhesive, or move away from humidity and cold. Alternatively, secure stencil with weights. |
| Blistering/cracking paint | Paints can be incompatible with each other or the surface. Make sure different paint brands do not react adversely when combined. | Usually irreparable. Start over with different paint, or prep surface better. |

I want to thank all the readers of the tutorial and mittens2248 for editing it.