

Paper Bags – Dyed and Painted

This technique will give you a strong, highly textured paper to use for your collages.

Start by obtaining ordinary brown paper bags from the grocery store. Soak each bag in water – completely submerged for at least 30 minutes. The bathtub or a large bucket will do nicely. The glue that holds the bag together is water based and will soon dissolve. You can help it along by occasionally agitating the water.

Remove the bag from the water and carefully un-fold it. It will be a rectangular shape. Then squeeze the bag tightly in your hands to expel most of the water. The bag will squeeze down to the size of a grapefruit or smaller. Then carefully un-fold it. Some tears may occur but that is not a problem. Set the bag out in the sun to dry – usually about 30 minutes on sunny days.

The dried bag will now have large wrinkles – too large to work with. So, take the bag to the ironing board and give it a quick ironing on both sides. This flattens out the large wrinkles but leaves the thousands of small wrinkles in the paper.

Now you can color the bag. The wrinkles will give a great textured look. Basically you can do this with PROCION dyes or Acrylic paint.

The PROCION dyes are inexpensive cold-water fabric dyes that are normally used for tie-dying clothing. They are quite colorful and completely transparent. The Jacquard company makes them and they are available on-line or at some art stores (Dick Blick, etc). Just “Google” PROCION DYE and you will see more places to purchase them.

Mix the dye (a powder) at one half teaspoon per cup of water. Apply the dye to the bag by painting on with a brush, dribbling on, spraying on, or any other way you can imagine. Be careful to not use too much dye. It should not puddle, it will take forever to dry. Remember that once it dries you can go over again with a second layer to make the color more intense. Or you can use a different color – like a watercolor glaze to make a third color.

Once dry the colored paper can be used whole or in torn-off bits. Let your creativity run.

Caution – the colors will run if you get them wet again – just like a watercolor. So keep them dry like you would for any of your art. When you glue a bit of colored bag onto a collage, use a minimum of water in the glue.

The opaque acrylic paints work much better than the transparent acrylics while the acrylic iridescent paints work particularly well.

Wayne J. Hoffman, May 2007