

Weathering With Pigments

by John Robinson



Pigments are not new products, they have been around for centuries! They are in essence the raw material that paints are made from. They originate from minerals and other natural occurring elements in and around the earth's crust. Without going too far into chemistry, Iron Oxide takes on different colors depending on it's structure, but we commonly see the browns and oranges from it. Raw and Burnt Umbers originate as Iron Oxides, as do Raw and Burnt Siennas. Yellow Iron Oxides are known as Ochre, and it is this color that Germany derived its Dunkelgelb color to paint its panzers starting in 1943. Pigments are dry powders that when added to oils, binders, and thinners create paints and stains. Now you that you know the background, the part we really care about is using it with our models. There are many different products on the market. A few of the common ones are MIG Productions, MMP Powders, Bragdon Enterprises, CMK, and Gambin. Gambin is an artist's brand, but the others are formulated especially for modelers and already are mixed to be a certain color, usually an earth tone. They are all basically the same, but some have binders while others do not. Some are also ground finer than others. You make the call which ones meet your needs.

PIGMENT ADVANTAGES:

- Look and act like scale dirt and dust.
- Bring texture to the models surface, which paint can't do.
- Application methods vary.
- Can be used wet or dry.
- Do not expire in their tin and can be reused even after mixed with wet thinners (as long as no binders are present).
- Naturally matte, unless gloss agents are introduced.
- Reversible if effect is not what expected

YES, THERE ARE DISADVANTAGES:

- Durability. Will not withstand handling, especially from our oily-skinned hands.
- Sealing can deaden or obliterate the effects.
- Custom colors are not easy to make unless a wetting agent is introduced.
- Cost, but that is arguable. A little bit goes a long way.

As mentioned in advantage number 4, they are versatile and can be used wet or dry. Wet means mixed with liquid thinners, clear coats, or water; dry is obviously straight out of the container. While pigments will dissolve in a variety of agents, it's most common to use mineral spirits or acrylic paint thinners. It is VERY important to first try this out on test pieces painted with your usual brand of paint. Mineral spirits should

not react with acrylic based paints, but test it to your satisfaction. I have had success using acrylic airbrush thinner obtained in local craft stores. I also exclusively use acrylic paints on my models, either Tamiya, Vallejo, or Gunze Sangyo. I've not had issues with these combinations, but you must make your choice based on preferences and combinations that work best for you.

DRY:

- Brush on with a paintbrush to simulate dusty surfaces. Effects are subtle, which are good in some cases, but may not suit all.
- Slightly heavier applications brushed into corners and crevices, then "set" with thinners. This also works well on tracks.
- Sprinkled dry over a slightly damp surface and dragged downward with a wide brush. This creates streaks like rain does on dirty vertical surfaces.

WET:

- Mix with thinners and use as a wash. The result looks more like actual dust/dirt accumulating around details. Different thinner/pigment ratios yield different results.
- Mix with clear matte finish and stipple onto exhausts for that textured, oxidized look. Light mud is also done this way.
- Mix with clear matte medium gels and dry spackling compound to make thicker mud. Add gloss agents like Future floor polish for a wet look.
- Load above mixture onto a paintbrush, hold near the model, and blow your airbrush at the bristles. A "splatter" effect is created.
- White pigments mixed with water makes a realistic white-wash that can be removed as needed to simulate worn areas.

These are but a few ways to use pigments, I'm sure there are more you can think of if you buy some and tinker with them. They seem to be the "du jour" weathering technique, especially in Europe, and you will see them used on models featured in AFV Modeler, Tamiya Model Magazine, Tamiya Model Military International, and many other magazines.

If there is one modeler that can be credited with making their use widespread, it is Spaniard Miguel "MIG" Jimenez. He is very prolific in model magazines and the Internet. He has a book that brings together not just pigments, but all his techniques called "F.A.Q.- Frequently Asked Questions of the AFV Painting Techniques", published by Andrea Press.

Pigments allow a very realistic and scale effect of vehicles operating in the field. The wash/drybrush techniques developed decades ago are appropriate at times, but it is my opinion that pigments are more forgiving and less likely to be overused, resulting in artificial and toy-like finishes. Give them a try and see what you think!