

Image Transfer Techniques

The following notes explain different techniques for transferring images on paper to another surface, using acrylic mediums.

Image transfers can be very successful as the focal image and at other times just to add some atmosphere to an art work. An image transfer is, to put it simply, the act of transferring an image from one source to another. Depending upon what material you want to transfer onto will depend on what type of transfer method you want to use. The appealing thing about transfers as opposed to just taking the image itself and gluing it down, is the transparent effects you can get from transfers-- allowing you to layer images or let the surface design show through e.g. such as a patterned fabric or wood grain. The final outcome can look as if it has been there forever or was printed or painted on as opposed to just glued. Depending on the method, some transfers create a lovely aged and distressed image due to the natural imperfection of the technique.

Acrylic mediums can be used as excellent transfer agents. By using an image that is printed on coated paper, i.e. glossy paper such as magazine or colour photocopy, that image can be transferred to any surface that will bond to acrylic medium. This includes cloth, paper, and panels. The image is glued face down on to the substrate and allowed to completely dry. Once dry, the paper that the image was printed on can be removed by using water as a solvent. Through soaking and gentle rubbing the paper coating and the ink (the image) that was printed upon it will transfer to the substrate. This can also be done multiple times to layer images. Successful transfer is determined by a few factors. Smoothness of surface and compatibility of materials are important considerations so pre-coating and sanding is a good preparation. Speed of process and completeness of bond will affect transfer. Quickly and completely rolling or rubbing down the image will insure good contact and good transfer.

Acrylic Transfer onto Paper, Wood or Fabric

Nearly any gel, medium or acrylic paint will lift an image. Gel gloss and matte medium are suitable. Images printed from a laser printer, toner based photocopy or ink jet printouts either on paper or transparencies work for this method. This method is good for paper, wood, or fabric.

Turpentine Method

To transfer a photocopy image onto fabric, place the image face down on the fabric and rub the back of the photocopy with a turps-soaked rag.

Remember to mirror the image in the copy machine or your printer if there is text or it will come out backwards.

For acrylic transfers, take the image you want to transfer and lay it image side up on a piece of wax paper to keep it from sticking to the table. Apply a healthy coat of medium to the image you want to transfer. *Note: If you are using an inkjet transparency as opposed to a paper printout, apply the medium to the surface you want to transfer to instead of applying to the transparency.*

Remember to only apply it to one side of the paper - the side with your image. Begin smoothing the medium out across your image. Make sure to not leave any blobs. You can use a brush if you would like (or your fingers, as it is easier to get a feel for how much medium is on the paper). It takes practise to work out the right amount of medium. Basically, you don't want it too thin but you also do not want it to be too thick.

Once you have coated the entire image carefully lay it down on the surface you want to transfer to. Smooth it out with your hand. And holding it down a bit at least until it adheres, begin to burnish it across the back starting from the middle. Use circular motions and just work your way to the edges. You want to press down with a fair amount of pressure but not so much that you distress the image underneath. Also, you don't want the image to move - this can happen if you have too much wet medium. At this point set the piece aside to dry for a few hours or overnight. You can speed this up with a blow dryer or heat gun. However, if you are using ink jet transparencies it's not necessary to wait for the piece to dry. With an ink jet transparency, after about a minute or so of burnishing pull up a corner and peak to see if the image is transferring well. Burnish more if it is not fully transferred and lift off the transparency if it is. The transfer is complete if you used an inkjet transparency. If however, you have used a paper printout then go onto the next step.

When you use a paper printout set it out for a few hours or overnight to let it dry. When it is dry take a wet but not dripping washcloth and lay it across the back of the paper that you are transferring from and let it sit for a minute. Slowly and lightly begin pressing the washcloth around the paper until becomes more transparent and you can see the image underneath. Starting in the middle of the paper take your fingers and slowly rub the back until the paper starts to come up. Working slowly and occasionally applying more water when needed, rub the entire back until another large layer of paper is gone. At this point as the image dries there are usually some bits of paper left leaving a sort of white haze. Leave this for 10-20 minutes, letting the newly surfaced image dry out again. Then start this process of wetting and rubbing over again until you have removed all the paper bits the image is crisp and clear.

Image Transfer onto Canvas Panel or Cardboard Using Modelling Compound

Materials: Canvas panel or cardboard, photocopied picture of whatever you desire, modelling compound or gesso, brush or palette knife

1. Apply modelling compound to your canvas panel or cardboard painting. Place the photocopy face down.
2. Let it dry.
3. Lightly wet the back of the photocopy with warm water. Water must be warm in order to be successful.
4. Rub paper from the canvas panel/ cardboard.

Image Transfer to Stretched Canvas using Gesso

Materials: Gesso, Stretched canvas, Sponge Brush, Ice block Stick or Spatula, Laser or Toner Copy of Image, Water.

1. Make sure you have a laser or toner copy of your image. An image with high contrast is good. Remember that your image will transfer the mirror image.
2. Paint a nice layer of gesso over the stretched canvas going first in one direction and then in the opposite direction.
3. Paint a layer over your paper image, again in a nice layer covering the complete picture with the gesso.
4. Place the painted image on top of the wet gesso painted canvas. Be careful to not let the paper slide over the surface; start smoothing the whole thing out.
5. Use an ice block stick to keep smoothing the paper down. Some gesso will squeeze out the sides - wipe this away. It is important to really rub down the image into the surface of the canvas.
6. Once you have it all rubbed down well, you can let it sit overnight or you can gently use your hair drier and dry the whole thing. You will want to make sure the paint is completely dry.
7. Once everything is dry peel off the paper. It is strange since only the very top layer of paper will peel off, leaving the image and the top layer of paper.
8. Now using your finger dipped in water you will rub off the remaining paper. Some small pieces will be left, so just get it as best as you can.
9. Coat the whole thing in gel medium or an acrylic sealer to seal it when the artwork is finished.

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