

Antiquers and Collectors

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Why Airbrush?...part I

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Almost every effort to repair a damaged collectible requires some measure of painting. There are several advantages to using an airbrush in comparison to hand painting. Airbrushing will give you faster applications, wider ranges of special layering effects, flawlessly smooth surfaces, sharper stencil design and better sealing of topcoats for gloss or dull glazes. Thus, the effective application of airbrushing techniques plays an important role in the art of restoration.

To fully understand the importance of airbrushing, one needs to be aware of the equipment involved and the various airbrushing techniques available to the restorer. An airbrush allows you to apply various mixtures of paint and other media evenly over the restored area of an object. This is done by "atomizing" the paint with regulated air from a compressor. The hand-held airbrush is a tool that is available in several different designs. These designs can include a simple "single-action" with an external mix and bottom feed or a more complex "double-action" with an internal mix and top or side feeds. All designs are similar in that they have some type of reservoir, cup or bottle for the paint or other medium and a hose that connects the airbrush to an air compressor unit.

For those that use an airbrush, I have one cardinal rule that I can not stress enough. Always clean your airbrush after each application! You may find it helpful to have a second airbrush set-up exclusively for the application of clear paint mixtures such as the finishing topcoats of gloss or dull glazes. This will prevent the possibility of



Nippon Tankard Vase with newly formed spout and airbrush restoration painting added.

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unwanted colors from a previous application sneaking out onto a finished surface.

Selecting the type of airbrush needed for a particular job depends upon a number of factors. To be considered are the thickness of the mixtures to be sprayed, the size and texture of the surface being covered, and the ability of the airbrush operator. For example, if a thick mixture of paint is needed to cover a large area, it is preferable to employ an airbrush with an external mix, large needle nozzle and a bottle attachment. The external mix feature allows the paint to

flow outside the internal moving parts of the airbrush. A large needle nozzle will spray the paint over a wider area while the bottle attachment holds the greater amount of paint needed to cover a large area.

When a finely detailed painting job is indicated, it may be more helpful to employ a double action airbrush with an internal mix and a fine needle nozzle. This provides the user with more spray control. However, it requires more precise handling of the trigger mechanism and, because the paint is moving through the internal parts of the airbrush, will be more susceptible to clogging.

As with most things, the price of an airbrush will vary depending upon the size and design of the device. A simple "single-action" hobby type airbrush can cost as little as \$40, while a more



Paris Portrait Vase with fine detail design requiring special airbrush restoration.

sophisticated 9-dial color combination internal mix chameleon airbrush system may run as high as \$900.

To operate an airbrush, you need a hose attachment. This item may be included in some airbrush kits. However, a kit usually will not provide the type of accessories and hose attachment needed for quality restoration applications. Consequently, it might be wise to purchase the airbrush and hose separately. The hose attachment is best if it is a braided cloth type with an "in-line" moisture trap. The moisture trap will prevent damage to your painting surface caused by water that can accumulate in the hose during an application.

The operation of an airbrush also requires the use of an air compressor. The choice of an air compressor should depend upon how you intend to use your airbrush. The cost of a small portable type air compressor for low usage may vary from \$179 to \$279. Beware, however, that the addition of items for an air compressor such as a regulator, moisture filter or dual valve may raise the cost of a relatively cheap compressor to the level

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of a higher priced system. An inexpensive system will suffice for the beginner, but when your use of the air compressor regularly exceeds two hours per day, a cheaper unit will probably not withstand the stress placed upon it. A larger, more durable air compressor may be purchased from a local hardware store. Unfortunately, most of these units have high levels of vibration and noise as they recharge to maintain the PSI (pounds per square inch) setting needed during airbrushing.

If you plan to place an air compressor near your work area, there are "silent" air compressors that will make use of the airbrush more enjoyable. A "silent" air compressor will normally have to be special ordered and can range in price from \$275 to \$850.

The working environment and intended use of your airbrush will usually dictate the type of air compressor suitable for your needs. The larger "silent" air compressors can accommodate eight or more hose attachments for multiple users, and it is always a smart idea to have a smaller compressor on hand in case the main one malfunctions. An air compressor is a valuable tool and can power not only an airbrush, but an air dremel, air eraser, and some sand etching devices.

Finally, there are advantages to using a bottle attachment for your paint rather than merely mixing the paint into the small cup or reservoir. The bottle attachment lets you prepare and store extra paint, thus eliminating the time to later mix a match of color for additional applications. Moreover, a bottle attachment will offer more control over the drips and spills that can occur with an open cup or reservoir. Of course, the small cup or reservoir provides the user with the ability to position the airbrush down inside an object because it is smaller than a bottle attachment.

Part 2 will discuss specific paint mixtures and airbrushing techniques used in the art of restoration.

DiAnna Tindell is a professional master restoration specialist internationally trained and founder of Tindell's Restoration Schools in Nashville. For more information on this article, visit www.TindellsRestorationSchools.com. See information offered such as airbrush training, faux finish restoration workshops, oil painting & frame workshops and more events, training programs, appraisal and restoration services, videos, books and products.