

# The Art of Deception

by Philip Hitchcock

Painted faux finishes...the ultimate lie!

How to pass them off for the real thing!

It has been said that the best liars are not those who look you dead in the eye while lying through their teeth but those who slyly intermingle little falsehoods with the truth; giving you just enough of the real deal that you'll swallow the whole story. It's like a high society garden party where you can't tell the real Chanel dresses from the K-Mart knock-offs, because you have every expectation that they are all real. A good faux finish ("false") finish is like that. It delivers what you are already expecting to see. For example, in a wood finish you expect to see grain. In a marble finish you expect to see veining. With metals like bronze, iron, and pewter, you have an expectation of color and an oxidized patina, such as a verdi (green), rust, or a blackened tarnish. It is the metal finishes, particularly the bronzes, that we will discuss.

## Delivering the Goods

When we mention "finishes" and "patinas" in this context we are talking about paint. I primarily use water based

acrylic paints to achieve my finishes but I have seen beautiful treatments done with oils and even shoe polish. Regardless of the medium, *faux finishing is the application of pigment to make something appear to be made of something it's not.* It is a painter's alchemy ... changing plaster into bronze!

## Reactive and non-reactive paints

Most of my finishes involve opaque paints and translucent washes. There are, however, paints available that are designed to behave like their real life counterparts.

"Reactive" paints consist basically of a two part kit: There is a base coat which contains real particles of metal, and a topical solution, which acts as a catalyst to speed up the aging process. Generally, the method is as follows: A base coat is applied and allowed to dry. A second coat of base color is applied, and while it's wet, a clear bluish oxidizing solution is sprayed on the surface. A bonafide chemical process occurs and an oxidized finish develops once the paint has fully dried. It is especially convincing with finishes like iron oxide (rust!) where the oxidization appears chalky and raised. One of the drawbacks of

reactive paints is the loss of control you have over where exactly the finish develops and how saturated it becomes. It can be random and uneven. What's more, left unsealed, reactive paints will continue to change over time. Changes will occur even if the oxidizing solution is not applied.

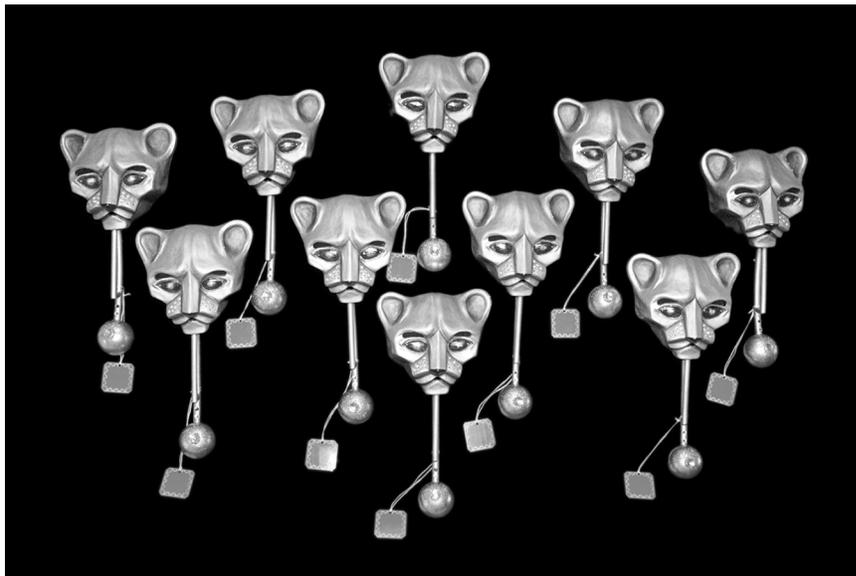


Photo 6: The Jaguar Masks were based on a Cartier cufflink design. The original ten masks, commissioned for a Halloween fund raiser, are shown here in a platinum finish. The blue Sapphire eyes light up!

Non reactive paints, on the other hand, are nothing more than

garden variety acrylics, which offer greater control as long as you have a good eye for color and a painterly feel for the play of highlight and shadow. There are two-part kits available, which may have components like "base coat," "aging solutions," and "patinas" but you are essentially buying two, pre-mixed colors of paint. I prefer mixing the colors myself.

## The Ground Rules

When attempting to do a good finish, there are a few things to keep in mind.

**-Faux Finishing is a process.** There is no “one step” method.

**-Always go for a specific match.** I am often asked to do a bronze patina. “What color bronze?” I reply. There are many shades of bronze including golden bronzes, reddish bronzes, green bronzes and black bronzes. Choose specifically.

**-A base color is actually many colors.** Cosmetics are used to even out skin tones. But actually any area of skin is multi-colored with pinks and browns, reds and yellows, just as a natural bronze surface may have copper, gold, and even green hues.

**-Throw away your brushes.** Well, not exactly. Although brushes are still necessary, they don’t have to be expensive. My favorites are the cheap 59 cent one inch brushes. But you will also want to use other things like sponges, rags, sprayers and even flicks from your fingertips, to apply paint.

**-Leave no stone unturned.** And leave no surface unpainted, either. Nothing spoils a finish more surely than seeing the white from the plaster show through. Check your sculpture from every angle.

## Materials

**Metallic Paints in a variety of colors:** (Liquitex, Goldens, Modern Masters and Metal Effects are all very good.)

*Statuary Bronze*

*Antique Bronze*

*Iridescent Bronze*

*Copper*

*Copper Light*

*Gold*

*Stainless Steel (Coarse and Fine)*

*Silver*

*Pewter*

## Other Basic colors:

*Dark Umber*

*Raw Sienna*

*Black*

*White*

*Red*

*Yellow*

*Blue*

*Thalo Green*

## Palette or mixing surface

**Sea Sponges** (forget about utility sponges!)

**Paint Brushes** (don’t forget the cheapies)

**Spray Water Bottle**

**Rags, Paper Towels**

**Krylon clearcoat spray** (available in Gloss, semi-gloss and Matte)

## Preparing the surface

The usual surfaces for faux finished sculpture include plaster, (as well as hydrocal and cement) fired ceramic, and various cast plastics such as urethane. Plasters and plastics usually require no sealing or primer, although it certainly won’t hurt to use one. Ceramics tend to absorb paint so I always prime them with a spray primer like Krylon or, if I’m hoping to smooth the surface as well, I use a thick latex house paint to seal, smooth and prime.

## The Base Coat

To demonstrate this technique, I am applying an antique copper bronze finish, with a “liver” patina on a primed Jaguar Mask made of Urethane plastic. *(I was commissioned to sculpt and cast ten of these masks for a Halloween fund raiser. The jaguar design was inspired by a Cartier cufflink so the masks were finished in a “faux platinum” and had light-up, sapphire eyes! The rods mimicked the rods of the actual piece of jewelry.)* Paint two or three coats of your base color to get a nice rich, saturated finish. In the third coat, while your paint is still wet, begin to sponge or stipple other colors into the surface.

In the example shown, I have built up two layers of Metal Effects “Statuary Bronze.” In the third coat I have sponged Liquitex “Iridescent Bronze,” and Goldens “Copper Light.” The colors should be blended and transitions feathered.

The surface will appear mottled and uneven. Allow this coat to thoroughly dry. Next, apply the “liver” wash. Mix “Dark Umber” and “Mars Black” and thin it considerably with water. Sponge the paint solution all over the sculpture. Keep sponging the surface to move and remove the paint. (It’s okay to use a cloth and brushes.) I like to emphasize the shadow areas but still leave a thin film on other areas. Some people like it darker, some lighter. When you are

forth on the surface to leave whispers of color. You may use a fine brush to touch up areas with the brown or the gold. Seal the sculpture with a coat of Krylon Semi-gloss and a top coat of with Krylon Matte Varnish.

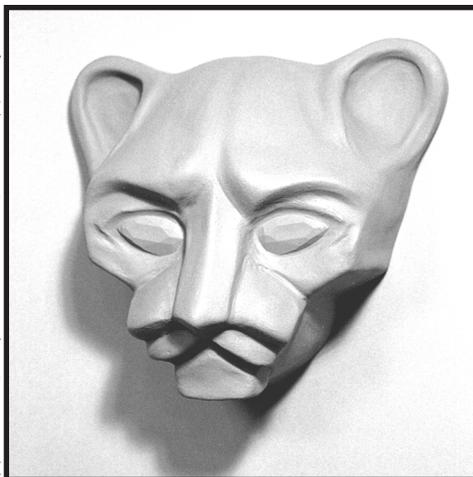


Photo 1: A cast urethane “Jaguar mask” is sprayed with two coats of Krylon primer gray.

### Other Color Recipes

For an aged **pewter** look, try Goldens “Stainless Steel Fine” as a base coat with a wash “Mars Black” and just a touch of “Dark Umber.” Drybrush with Liquitex “Iridescent Silver.” **Verdi** washes are made with “Thalo Green” and a light gray. For an outdoor, **blackened bronze**, try a base coat of black washed with a blue-gray. Drybrush with “Iridescent Bronze.”

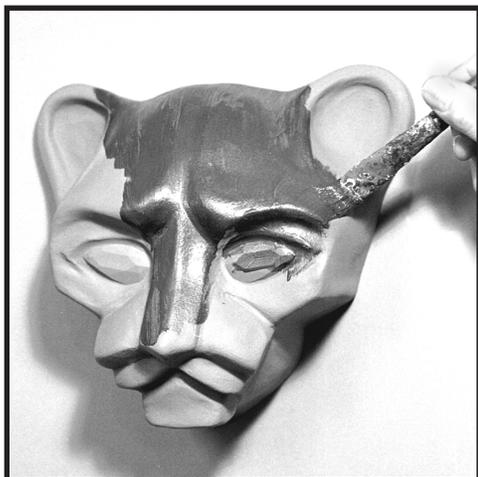


Photo 2: Two coats of acrylic paint (Statuary Bronze) are applied and allowed to dry.



Photo 3: Additional colors are sponged into a third coat of wet paint. The colors are mottled and blended.



Photo 4: A “liver” patina (a wash of black and dark umber acrylic paints) is applied.

satisfied, let it dry. You may repeat the process to darken it further. Now you’re ready to pull up the highlights. One effective technique I use is “drybrushing.” Get a stiff, cheap brush and coat the bristles with a little mix of “Statuary Bronze” and “Pale Gold.” Now remove most of the paint until the bristles are nearly dry- hence the term drybrush. Begin dusting the areas you’d like to see highlighted. Just wisk the brush back and



Photo 5: Highlights are “drybrushed.” The finished is sealed with a spray varnish.

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