

Sand Sketching

Suspended in clear glue, simple sand becomes the medium for a resurgent Victorian art known as “Marmotinto”

(art + history)

“Table Decking” was a practice popular in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries. Artists were commissioned to create intricate and elaborate designs rendered in colored sand and marble dust for the banquet tables of wealthy patrons. It was a practice that was probably inspired by a Japanese art known as “Bonseki” or “tray painting.” When the feast was over, the painting was discarded along with the food scraps.

A Bavarian table decker named Benjamin Zobel was distraught about losing his works of art, so he invented a means of permanently affixing the sand to a board with a clear adhesive. On a visit to Alum Bay on the British Isle of Wight, Zobel was introduced to a variety of colored sands and began creating paintings, which soon were in high demand.

As more craftsmen began working with sand, the art became known as “Marmotinto.” Like many handicrafts practised during the Georgian and Victorian eras, Marmotinto did not remain popular for long and, today, these pieces are rare.

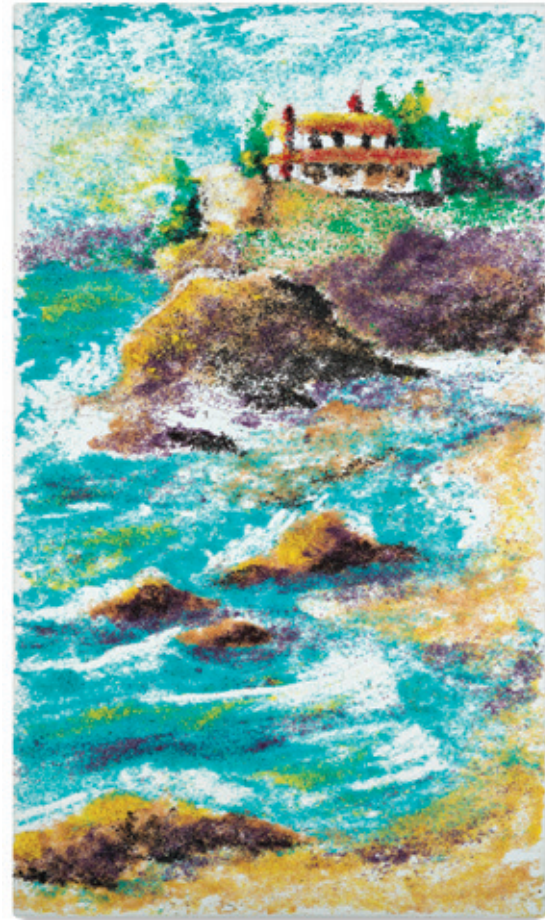
Modern materials make it easy to create sand paintings. The two techniques suggested in this lesson plan keep the sand suspended in waterbased adhesive so the mess that is usually associated with the process is greatly reduced.

GRADES K-12 Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

Preparation

1. Collect clean sand from local sources, if available. Pre-colored sand may be purchased for color variety. Tinting sand with powdered pigment or food coloring is not recommended for this process as it will also tint the glue binder.
2. If using the squeeze bottle application method suggested below, the mixture may be prepared in advance. Squeeze 1/3 of the glue into another bottle or container, then add sand until it displaces the volume of the glue and the bottle is about 3/4 full. Leaving the bottle 1/4 empty will allow room for it to be shaken.

Sand and glue will naturally separate and the sand will settle to the bottom of the bottle. Turning the bottle upside down will slowly remix the sand with the assistance of gravity. For faster mixing, twist off the entire glue bottle top assembly and stir with a craft stick. While using, shake the bottle frequently to mix.



Materials (required)

Elmer's® Washable Clear School Glue, 5 oz bottle (23810-1600); share a minimum of five bottles across class

Colored Sand, 2 lb bags (61006); share 2-3 bags across class

Creativity Street® Craft Sticks, bag of 150 (60401-1500); share one across class

Student Clay Modeling Tool Set, Set of 7 (30361-1009); share one set among three students

Rectangular 6-Well Tray (03068-1006); share one between two students

Blick® Economy Canvas Panel, Classpack of 24, 5" x7" (07015-1000); one panel per student

Optional Materials

Laguna® Ceramic Bisque Tiles, 6" x 6" (32916-1001); one per student



Process "A" - Squeeze Bottle Sand Paint

1. Follow preparation instructions above. Make practice lines on a piece of scrap paper first. When the bottle is used for the first time, the glue will be clear at first. Older mixtures may be thick and difficult to squeeze at first, then will suddenly clear and flow freely.

Process "B" - Palette Sand Paint

1. For students who do not have the hand strength to squeeze a glue bottle or for advanced students who want more control over the color placement, creating small amounts of sand paint in a palette is recommended.
Fill palette wells about half-full with glue, then add sand and mix well with a craft stick.
2. Use craft sticks, modeling tools, or old, inexpensive brushes to move sand paint from the palette to the surface.

Recommendations for both Processes

1. Sand paint may be used on many paper and board surfaces. Heavy application might penetrate paper to the table surface below. While wet, expect some wrinkling or bowing of boards. The surface should flatten out when dry.
- Bisque (matte surface) tiles are the perfect surface to use for this process because they can be easily wiped to correct errors and they are completely rigid.
2. Air bubbles will form with either process. They may be smoothed out or allowed to dry. If left to dry, they will "pop" on their own, but will leave a circular mark.
3. Colors may be moved and blended using wood or plastic tools — they're safe for finger painting as well!
3. Sand density creates shading variations. Areas of the painting where the grains are spread far apart so the white surface shows through will appear tonally lighter. When the grains of sand are densely packed together, they will create a darker, stronger color.
4. Colors may be "mixed," but it's an optical illusion. For instance, a grain of black sand will always remain black but when black sand is combined with blue sand, it will visually darken the color.
5. When finished painting, wipe all tools clean with a paper towel, then rinse them in a sink. Keep as much sand out of the sink as possible. Make sure the glue bottles are closed and the caps are clean.
6. Sand paint will take 3-4 hours to dry, depending on the thickness of application.
7. Sealing or varnishing a sand painting is not necessary or recommended. Protect the sand painting from water and it will remain intact.



Step 1: Mix "Sand Paint" by pouring it directly into the bottle or by pouring glue into a palette and adding sand.



Step 2: Apply Sand Paint to a bisque tile or other rigid surface.



Step 3: Sand density creates shading variations. Where the grains of sand are further apart, the color will appear lighter.



Options

1. Create a natural sand painting, limited to just a few earth colors. A painting that is created in shades of brown is called a “Brunaille.”
2. Sand paintings can be used as a focus for other teaching options. Many cultures are known for temporary sand paintings created as part of a ceremony or ritual. Navajo sand paintings are considered so sacred that designs authentic to their culture are never created in a permanent manner. Modern artists such as Joe Mangrum create large-scale sand paintings that are part of performance or installation art and then discarded.

National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Presenting

Anchor Standard 5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

Responding

Anchor Standard 7: Perceive and analyze artistic work.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.