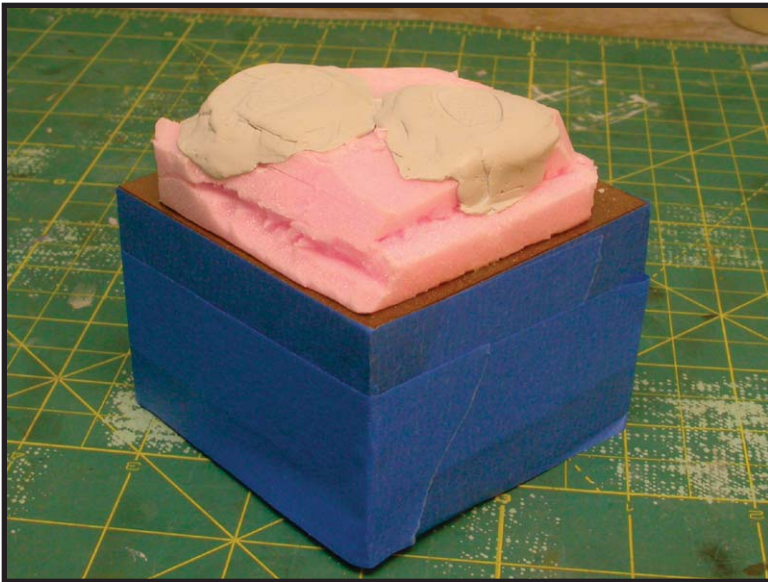


Creating Realistic Groundwork with Textured Gel Medium

Bryan Krueger 2008

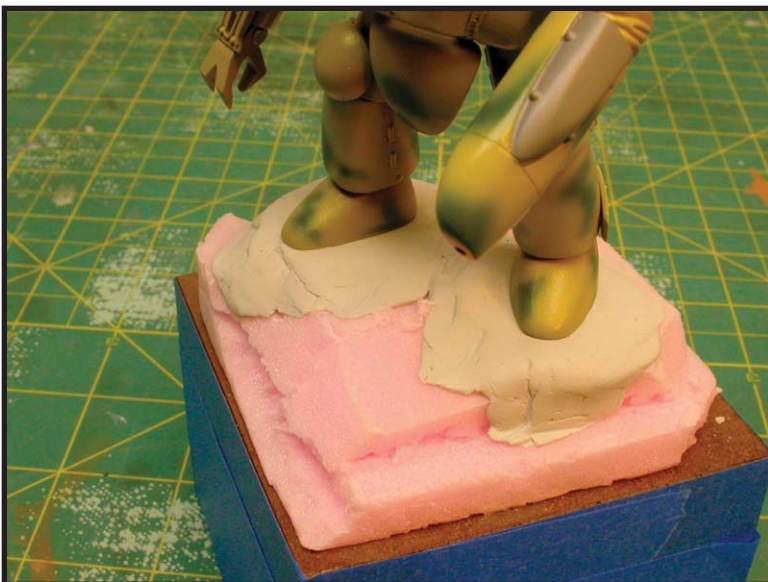
I almost always create a small display base for the models I finish. They are usually small, but they create a physical setting for the model and help establish a mood or feeling for the environment. For years I used Celluclay papier-mâché mixed with glue and water as outlined in the classic "How to Build Dioramas" by Sheperd Paine. While this technique was easy to apply, I was always disappointed with the results. It took a long time to dry, especially thick areas, it required painting, and no matter how much glue I used, it would lift at the edges. I have not had any of these issues once I tried the Textured Gel Medium. This is my third display created in this manner and I am very pleased with the results. I would like to thank Francesco Benedettini for introducing me to the idea of using Textured Gel Medium. The ideas and techniques shown here are based upon his brief tutorial and wonderful vignettes.

Getting Started



Begin by masking off the display pedestal or perimeter frame of the base. This will protect the display from any mess caused in the process.

Pink insulation foam is glued to the wooden base and carved to a rough shape. Epoxy putty is worked onto the foam. The epoxy putty is lightly dusted with baby powder and the model is pressed into the putty as shown below.



This creates a positive area for the model to be pinned and glued later after the groundwork is complete.

Creating Realistic Groundwork with Textured Gel Medium - Basic Materials

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Artist's Mineral Texture Gel

This binds the dry materials together. The Mineral Gel is an acrylic paste that has tiny grains of black pumice stone added to give it texture once dried. The Gel can be thinned and tools can be cleaned with water before the Gel dries.

Considering the amount of loose ingredients added to the mixture in the following steps, Matte Gel Medium would be just as suitable. It is a thick paste without pumice stone added.



Sand and Dirt

The fine sand is from a beach and the dirt is from the back yard. It was sifted through a screen to remove the larger particles.



Herbs and Root Litter

Kitchen herbs, Parsley, Oregano, Thyme, ground between finger and thumb. Root litter is small bits of roots that shake off after dried.

Creating Realistic Groundwork with Textured Gel Medium - Basic Materials Con't

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Small Rocks and Gravel

Small pieces of gravel collected and stored in small yogurt cups. Lids are labeled for easy identification.



Roots

Saved from outdoor improvement projects. Wash off dirt and store in a safe place to avoid being damaged.



Rocks

Rocks have been glued to the foam with Matte Gel Medium

Creating Realistic Groundwork with Textured Gel Medium - Adding Dry Materials and Mixing

Bryan Krueger 2008



Step 1

Determine how much Texture Gel is needed and deposit into a disposable dish. As the Gel is worked and mixed, it will dry very hard and be difficult to clean and remove from your tools and dish. Disposable is better in this case.



Step 2

Add fine sand, dirt and small herbs.



Step 3

Mix thoroughly. A little more volume has been added to the mixture. The mixture may need a little water added to mix easily

Creating Realistic Groundwork with Textured Gel Medium - Applying Mixture

Bryan Krueger 2008



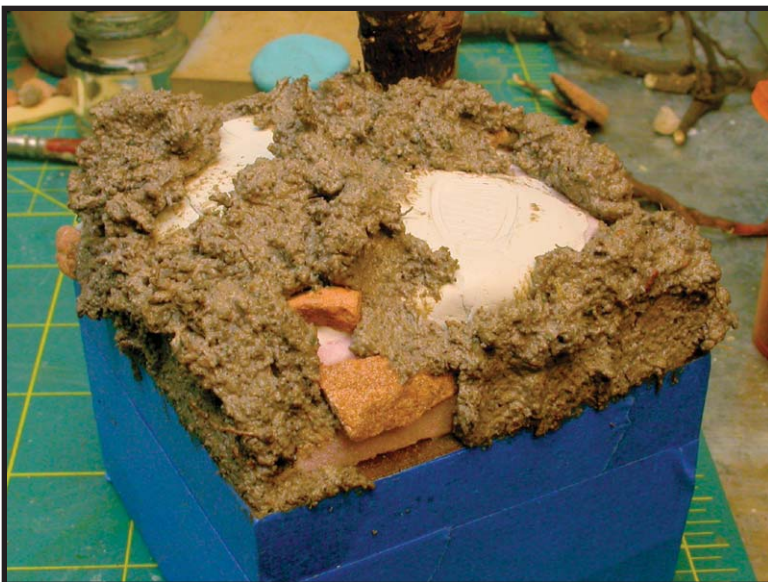
Step 4

For additional textures, add small gravel, root litter, fine dirt and pigments (optional). The pigments used here are MIG Productions Dark Mud and Dried Mud. Just a little was used, the dried pigment is very strong and a little goes a long way.



Step 5

Mix thoroughly. The pigments have created a nice earth color. This can omit painting of the ground work later on.



Step 6

Apply the mixture coarsely with out trying to work it into every nook and cranny. The tree base (shrub root) has been mounted with a brass rod drilled into the base and the root. The small rocks have been glued with Mat Gel Medium as it dries quicker and harder than white glue.

Creating Realistic Groundwork with Textured Gel Medium - Applying Mixture Con't

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Step 7

Work in the mixture with an old brush dipped in water. Not too much water as the extra moisture will cause the mixture to run and increase the setting time.



Step 8

The surface has been smoothed and all areas have been filled in. The epoxy putty foot pads have been kept clear of the mixture.



Step 9

Additional roots and small rocks are pressed into the mixture while it is still wet. A brush is used to blend the pieces into the groundwork.

Creating Realistic Groundwork with Textured Gel Medium - Con't

Bryan Krueger 2008



Step 10

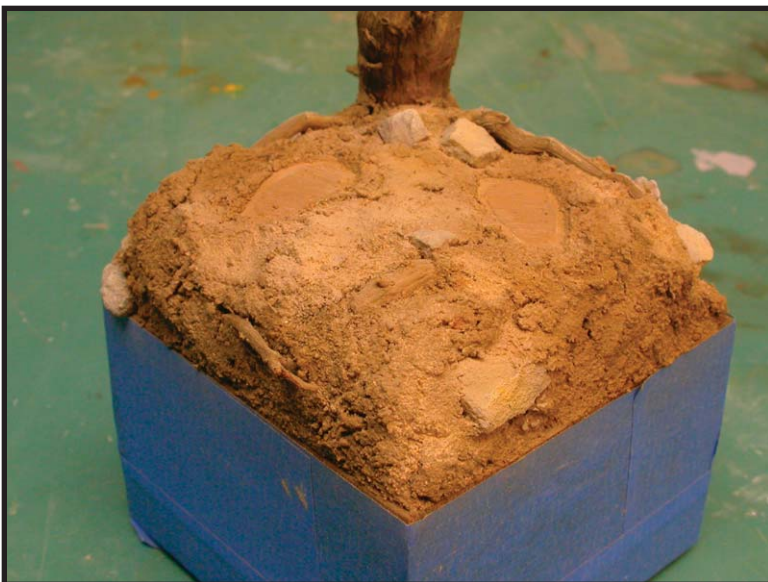
Dust the still damp groundwork with fine sand and fine dirt. This will fill in any last cracks and blend the ground work together nicely. Press into the surface with a dry brush. It is clear why the base needs to be masked off.



Step 11

Fit the model back onto the base. By this time, the mixture is beginning to set up. Move the still damp mixture with the end of a paintbrush or carved popsicle stick to fit the model closely. Carefully remove the model and wash off any residue. Sculpting the groundwork to the model helps avoid the dreaded model floating on the terrain and gives the model some visual weight.

Total time from the first dollop of Gel to Step 11 is approximately 45 minutes.



Step 12

Once fully cured, the groundwork will be rock hard. Any loose sand and dirt can be brushed off. The exposed rocks have been painted with various grays and tans and the base was lightly airbrushed with Polly Scale Dirt to tie it all in.

As a final step, several different colors of MIG pigments have been used to create variations on the groundwork. The pigments were deposited and scrubbed on dry with an old soft brush. They were then set with odorless mineral spirits.

Creating Realistic Groundwork with Textured Gel Medium - Vegetation

Bryan Krueger 2008



Here the groundwork has been covered with vegetation. The tall grass is a mixture of Hudson and Allen and Woodland Scenics grass. The low dried grass is seaweed fibers. The tall grass is held with a glob of Matte Gel Medium and the low vegetation is held with Matte Gel thinned with a little water. Some additional herbs were sprinkled and extra root debris were placed to add some interest. Some of the long fibers will be trimmed and the low grass needs to be fluffed up.

Of note, I have not applied a wash or any drybrushing to highlight the details of the groundwork.

The thing I have finally figured out about groundwork, and I don't know why it has taken me this long, is to add variety of shapes, types, and colors. A few strands of the same height of field grass spaced evenly on flat terrain isn't going to yield the same results seen in nature. Go on a hike, observe the surroundings, and take photos for reference.

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