

Magical Modeling Paste

by JACQUELINE SULLIVAN

One of my very favorite mediums to play with is Acrylic Molding Paste (also called Modeling Paste). For me and my art and collage work, it's all about texture and one of the best ways to get a textural surface is by using this paste.



The background of this collage was created with light molding paste over black gesso. The molding paste was spread on one piece of paper that had been previously painted with black gesso. After the gesso was dry, the molding paste was spread thickly over it. Another sheet of paper was put on top of the molding paste and twisted slightly. The paper was then pulled up, forming peaks and valleys in the molding paste.

But just what is it? Molding, or modeling paste is an acrylic medium that is filled with solid material. The result is a thick "pasty" white substance that can create a controlled textural surface. Molding paste is an opaque white when it dries.

I primarily use the Golden brand of molding paste, although I have used Liquitex and other "store brands". Each brand has its own unique qualities and I recommend that you go in with a few friends and each buy a different type/brand of the pastes and/or other mediums and do a small study to see which you prefer.

Golden makes three types of molding paste. There is molding paste, light molding paste and hard molding paste.

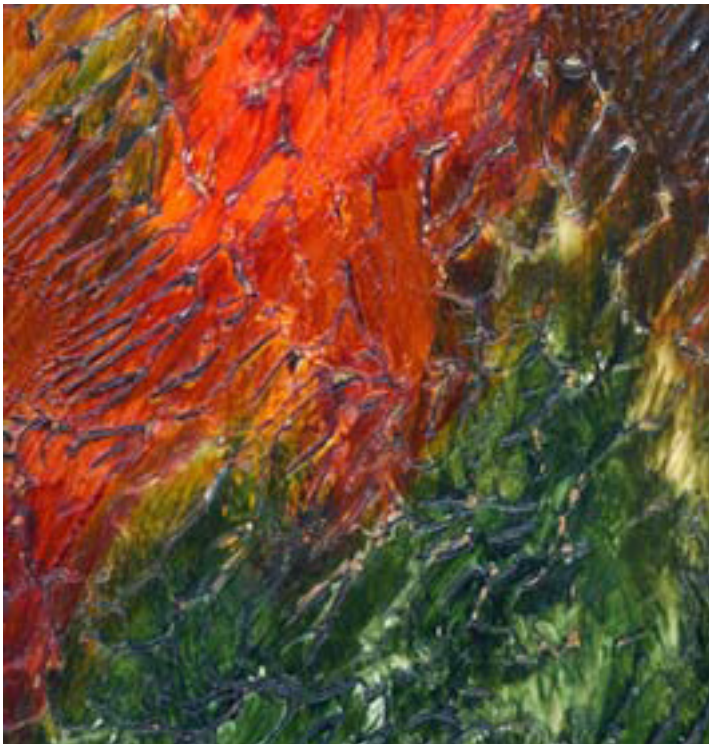
The light has a very light foamy sort of texture and does look a bit different from the others. It is particularly good for cards or altered books where you want the effect of molding paste without the weight. It is also a bit more flexible than the other two pastes, making it better for altered book pages that are going to get moved about a bit more. It is also good for very large works of art. The work will have less overall weight. This product can also be used as a lightweight "filler" for paints

Molding Paste has a slightly grayer color than the light molding paste and a higher density. When dry, the surface of molding paste is quite a bit harder than the light molding paste. It does not hold as high of a peak as the light molding paste. You can carve into molding paste.

Hard molding paste is not as flexible as either molding paste or the light molding paste. The hard molding paste can be shaped with a knife, carved and /or sanded. The only time that I have ever used hard molding paste was to obtain a smooth raised stencil on a piece of furniture. I was able to sand it smooth enough that it became an integral part of the furniture surface.

When using molding paste, I use either paper or canvas for a substrate. The paper that I favor is 140 lb. cold press watercolor paper. It is heavy enough to take the weight of the paste. But it is still light enough to tear and cut easily to build up layered collages.

You can add acrylic paint to all of the molding pastes to tint them. But the pastes are white and therefore they lighten the color that is added. If you add red to molding paste you will get pink. Some of the blues, browns, etc. work better than the red, but I still find that it dulls the colors more than



Another example of pulled molding paste. This was done with regular molding paste. It was on 140 lb. Watercolor paper. It was then painted with Quinacridone Nickel Azo Gold, Quinacridone Burnt Orange and Jenkins Green. After the paint dried it was coated with Gloss Polymer Medium. Once the medium was dry foil was applied to the peaks of the texture, using an iron.

I like. I first build my textures with the molding paste and then paint them with fluid acrylics. This also allows me to blend and glaze with the color, getting a good mixture of color and texture.

My favorite thing to do with molding paste is to stencil with it. You can use either plastic or brass stencils to do this. You will get a sharper definition of your image with the brass stencils. But sometimes, the plastic stencils are a better choice because you get a better integration with the surface. For background textures I prefer less definition. For textures that I am going to use as a focal point I like the higher definition of the metal stencils. The best tool that I have found for stenciling with molding paste is a plastic palette knife. The handle of the knife keeps my fingers out of the paste and the flexibility of the knife allows me to push the molding paste down into the open areas of the stencil.

I place a "glop" of molding paste – either the regular or light molding paste – onto the stencil. I then scrape it over the stencil evenly with the palette knife. Once it is spread evenly over the stencil, I take the side of the knife and scrap off the excess paste. The only paste then left is that which is in the open areas of the stencil. The other areas of the stencil have been scraped almost clean. Once you

have reached this stage, carefully and slowly lift up the stencil. Voila! You will have a raised image on your paper or canvas!

For a slightly different technique, put a small amount of molding paste onto your substrate before putting down the stencil. Then proceed as above. When you pull up the stencil it will pull away some of the previously laid paste and you will get the image from the stencil on top of another texture (see Asian Woman collage for an example of this technique).

In addition to stencils I also put push and scrape molding paste through sequin waste and various types of produce bags. Using these things you can get various shapes of texture, circles, square and diamonds.

Another way that I get texture with molding paste is by "pulling" it. To accomplish this, I use two pieces of paper. Spread the molding paste on one piece of paper rather thickly. Place another piece of paper



This little flower was stenciled onto 140# water color paper. It was a brass stencil. IT was then allowed to dry and painted with Quinacridone Crimson, Ultramarine blue and Pthalo Blue. Once dry, it was coated with gloss polymer medium. After the medium was completely dry, gold foil was ironed onto it.

on top of this and twist slightly. Pull the two pieces of paper apart and you will have an organic looking "hills and valleys" type texture. If you are not pleased with the way that it looks, just do it again! The more you twist, the more "plant-like" the texture becomes. For variety, I like to coat the paper with black gesso first. I let the gesso dry and then do the "pulled molding paste". Since the molding paste is translucent, the black shows through. Then if you paint the molding paste with transparent colors you get a very "shadowy" look. The background of the layered collage in the photo was done this way.



These textures were made with brass stencils and molding paste. After the texture was dry, I painted it with Quinacridone Violet, Anthraquinone Blue and Turquoise Phthalo. After the paint dried it was coated with gloss polymer medium. After the medium was dry, gold foil was ironed on to some of the texture.



In this collage, I first painted a piece of 140# watercolor paper with Quinacridone Burnt Orange and Raw Umber. I then glued the portrait of the Asian woman onto the surface, using gloss polymer medium as glue. I then applied a small amount of molding paste around the portrait. While the paste was still wet, I stenciled the spiral design with a plastic stencil. When I pulled up the stencil I had a combination of the pulled molding paste and stenciled molding paste techniques. I then painted the texture with a combination of Quinacridone Burnt Orange, Raw Umber, Jenkins Green and Quinacridone Nickel Azo Gold. After the paint was dry, the entire collage was coated with a thin layer of Gloss Polymer medium. Once the medium was dry, gold foil was ironed onto the texture in a few places.

You can also stamp into the molding paste. Since it is sticky and rather hard to remove, I wouldn't recommend using your favorite rubber stamps in the paste. I use the cheap foam stamps that are made for stamping walls. The image that you achieve by stamping into the paste is very indistinct, but can be quite beautiful when it is painted. The leaf texture in the photo on the following page was done this way.

I allow the molding paste to dry before I paint it. The time will vary depending on how thickly you have applied the molding paste and the humidity conditions. It is usually at least 45 minutes before I feel that the surface is dry enough to paint. I paint with Golden fluid acrylics. You can thin them with a bit of water, but if you get too much water in the paint the molding paste will resist the paint. This



To achieve this texture I spread a thick coat of molding paste to a piece of 140# watercolor paper. I then stamped into it with foam wall stamps in various leaf shapes. Once the molding paste was dry I painted it with Quinacridone Nickel Azo Gold, Jenkins Green, Raw Umber and Iridescent Copper.

is where you will find a real difference in the various types and brands of molding/modeling pastes. They all take the paint a bit differently. I usually start painting with Quinacridone Nickel Azo Gold. It is a very transparent color and is a very warm color. An under glaze of this color imparts a warmth to all the colors on top of it. I then proceed, painting and mixing the color as I go. One of my favorite combination of colors is Quinacridone Nickel Azo Gold, Quinacridone Burnt Orange, Jenkins Green, and Iridescent Copper. These are Golden colors, but you can formulate a similar palette with other brands. I like the intensity of the Golden colors.

After the paint is dry I will sometimes coat it with a thin layer of gloss polymer medium. This is a fluid medium that dries to a high gloss. Once the medium is dry I can "foil" the textures. For foiling I use Jones Tones foil or other foils that are made for the printing process called foil stamping. With light heat from an iron, you can iron the foil onto the gloss medium. The heat from the iron slightly softens the

medium and causes the foil to stick to it. The little stenciled flower in the blue picture has had gold foil ironed onto it.

I will often work for several hours creating all sorts of textures on paper. Then, on another day I will paint and foil the textured papers. They then go into the basket of "collage papers". I will later dig through my collection and build my layered geometric collages, which I have become obsessed with over the last few years. Cutting up the papers and using part of the stenciled image or a foiled high point of a texture is great fun.

Because the molding paste is so flexible, it can also be used for book covers. I sometimes just fold the papers in half and sew some signatures in, forming a small highly textured journal. I also do my techniques on book board. I then sand and paint the edges. I drill holes in these boards and bind them with a Coptic stitch to form a larger journal.

Start playing with this versatile medium and see what sort of textures you can come up with. I guarantee you, if you like textural surfaces, you will become as addicted to this medium as I am!

This article originally appeared in *Just Paint, the newsletter for Golden Artist Colors*, Issue 6, December 1998.

Jacqueline Sullivan teaches molding paste techniques in her mixed media classes at various art retreats around the world. They are part of the class that she will be teaching in Tuscany, Italy October 13 - 20, 2007. These techniques are also featured on her DVD that is being published by Creative Catalyst Productions (ccpvideos.com). Her web site is www.jacquelinesullivan.com.

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