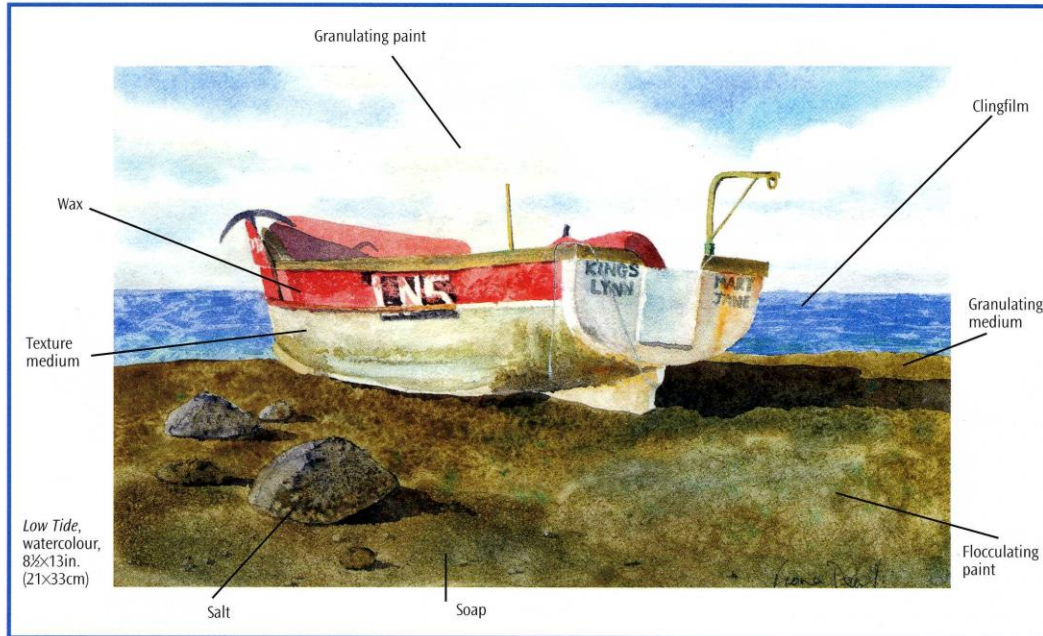Fiona Peart
01451 820014

ASK THE TUTOR

How can I achieve texture in my watercolour paintings?

Follow **Fiona Peart's** simple techniques to add interest to your watercolours

Granulating paint

Clingfilm

Wax

Granulating medium

Texture medium

Low Tide, watercolour, 8½×13in. (21×33cm)

Flocculating paint

Salt

Soap

There are three methods of creating texture when using watercolour:
1 We can use the properties of the paint coupled with the paper surface, and let the paint do the work for us;
2 We can use a product to assist the paint; and
3 We can physically apply the paint in a more creative way.

Any of these methods can be used individually but, by combining them, we achieve some real texture! By using the properties of the paint or a product with our watercolour we can enhance our paintings without changing our painting techniques. In order to apply the paint in a more creative way, however, requires us to develop new painting methods.

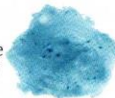### PAINT PROPERTIES AND PAPER SURFACE

When I choose paint, I don't just select it for its colour, I choose it for its properties.

Pigments that granulate cause the colours to separate and settle onto the paper surface, which causes the texture. The rougher the paper, therefore, the more the granulation is evident. French ultramarine is a classic for granulating and is in most people's paint boxes (left).

Pigments that flocculate have a gritty appearance, which develops irrespective of the paper surface, so this texture is possible even on the smoothest of papers. I find these pigments wonderful; it doesn't matter what they are mixed with, they create this effect with no effort at all! I would always have at least one of these in my paint box, such as cobalt turquoise (right). ▶
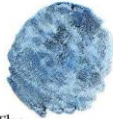
TIP
Rinse your brush out thoroughly before dipping it into your palette or you may have texture where you don't want it the next time you paint!

PRODUCTS TO HELP US

1 Texture medium ▶

Using texture medium mixed with the paint will create a gritty appearance, although it does have a thickening effect to the paint consistency when mixed with it. This can be overcome to a certain extent by applying the texture medium directly onto the paper, then applying the paint. It can also be re-wetted and re-worked which can be very useful.

The surface of the paper changes, of course, which can cause some bleeding of colours, so it takes a bit of getting used to. The colour doesn't have the same moving quality and tends to sit where it's put.

2 Granulating medium

Using granulating medium instead of water will cause any colour to

Granulating medium

granulate, although not quite in the same way as a naturally granulating pigment. The pigment separates into tiny speckles and therefore does not rely on the paper's surface, which can be very useful for getting textural effects on smooth paper. However, the appearance is more like a flocculating texture – causing a gritty appearance – rather than a natural separating of the pigments.

3 Wax ▶
Applying wax forms a barrier so that the watercolour can't get to the paper. It can be applied directly onto the dry paper or a dry pre-painted surface. It's a bit tricky to apply, because we can't actually see where we have put it. However, by tilting the paper towards the light, the wax can be seen as a shiny area. The disadvantage is, of course, that we can't remove it once we've applied it. It sounds like a disaster waiting to happen, but with practice, it's a great way to create texture. Try this simple exercise:
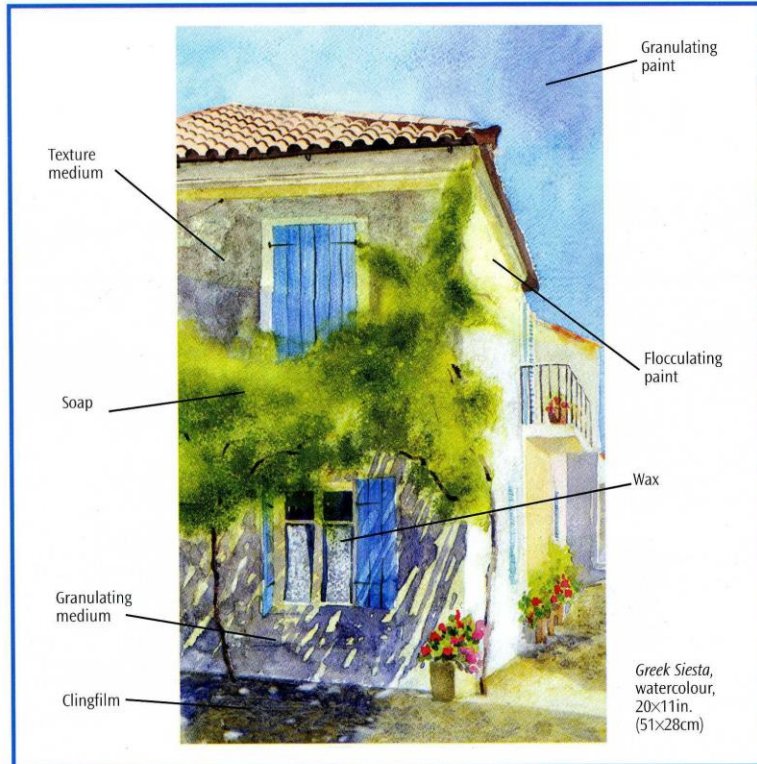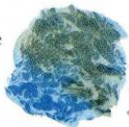*Step 1* Lay a pale wash onto the paper, let it dry, then rub a wax candle over the top.
Step 2 Apply a darker wash to reveal the texture.

Different paper surfaces and the pressure you apply when using the wax will give varying results. You can also multi-layer the wax, applying more pressure with each new layer of paint. Using various colours and letting them merge in between the wax, wet in wet, also leads to some stunning textures.

4 Clingfilm ▶
Using clingfilm is a great way to produce angled or linear-shaped textures. It doesn't rely on the paper surface, so a smooth paper works just as well as a rough one. Apply the colour and, keeping the surface wet, crumple up the clingfilm and place it onto the wet section, pressing down firmly. The film needs to remain in

place until the paint has dried. The disadvantage of this is the slow drying time, but it's definitely worth the wait! Avoid the temptation to lift the clingfilm for a quick look; this will result in the shape losing its crisp edge.
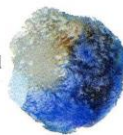
By applying more paint and using the film again once the first layer is dry, further textures can be created.

5 Salt ▶
Salt can be used to create feathering and fern-like textures, which are great for suggesting undergrowth, trees, atmospheric effects, and stone textures.

The salt needs to be scattered onto wet paint, each grain absorbs the paint, which then produces a star burst effect. The more salt we use, the more of an overall texture is created, whereas by carefully dropping individual grains onto the paper we will produce a mottled effect. The wetness of the paper also changes the results – the drier the paper the more the individual grains become evident.
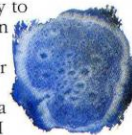
Use different types of salt crystals to create different shapes.

6 Soap ▶
Soap is a wonderful way to create circular textures in watercolour, giving the impression of pebbles or water bubbles. I use ordinary shampoo (not a bar soap) or detergent. I mix it with water then agitate it to create foam, which is applied directly onto the wet watercolour, then left to dry.

It takes a little while to dry but other parts of the painting can be worked on while this is happening.

Greek Siesta, watercolour, 20×11in. (51×28cm)

Labels on painting: Granulating paint, Texture medium, Soap, Granulating medium, Clingfilm, Flocculating paint, Wax

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PAINTING IN A MORE CREATIVE WAY
This requires us to think differently about how we apply watercolour. We can use a dry brush, we can flick or scribble with the brush. We can use various shaped brushes all of which make individual marks and textures. We can apply the paint by using sponges, crumpled paper, polystyrene, sections of card or objects such as twigs and ferns.

Although these effects can seem a little gimmicky, if they are used in a subtle way they can enhance our painting methods and lead us to be more adventurous.