Transfer Techniques
Adding Transparent Textures, Text and Images to Collage
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Basically, a transfer is the process of putting an image from one substrate/surface onto another substrate/surface. Transparent or translucent transfers are used to create layers and depth within the collage that opaque paper copies cannot. The considerations when selecting a specific transfer method are the surface, cost, time, complexity, toxicity and ultimate use. Some methods require considerable effort and complex processes and others are quick and easy. Understanding the chemistry involved in each method does require some experimentation and study as well as safety when working with any chemicals.

The addition of transparent wording, images and textures from a multitude of sources can add interest within the layers of collage. Since most of these methods involve using copies of the original materials, the imagery can be used many times either for testing design possibilities or as a personal icon/statement or to tie together a series.

Most of the transfer techniques work best with black and white copies. These images and textures will take on new life when transparent paint is applied. Further, black and white imagery and textures automatically create value changes within the painting.

Collecting Source Materials:
The first step is to acquire a collection of interesting images, textures and written words that express the creativity of each individual. Personal drawings are the first consideration. Pen and Ink drawings or calligraphy reproduce best on black and white copies. However, graphite drawings can be photocopied extremely well onto tissue paper. Color images such as painted images or backgrounds require a color copier or printer although black and white photocopies can be made of any color image or texture.

Seek additional materials from old books, magazines, newspapers, antique papers, old maps, etc. Almost all printed material can be photocopied as well as enlarged or reduced to suit. Do not overlook photographs, particularly old black and white or sepia photos, as only copies will be used not the original. Obviously, the quality of the reproduced copies is of up most importance.

Save the inside printed textures from safety envelopes. The variety of printed textures is extensive as well as inexpensive. The envelopes can be used directly in
collage but copies allow freer use of a rare example of texture.

Photocopies can be made of natural materials such as weeds, leaves, flowers, etc.. Black and white images may be in silhouette rather than in detail. For better images, set the photocopier to the Photo setting which improves image resolution. Color copies can be made on a printer and printed onto transfer papers.

Although printed, handwritten or calligraphic text is a personal expression it can also provide background texture. Foreign languages or scripts such as Hieroglyphics (Egyptian and Mayan), Greek, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic and even pictographs can tie imagery to a culture. For instance, Sumi-E ink painting transfers should be paired with Chinese or Japanese script for a consistent cultural message or with another language for a discordant/surrealistic message.

Do not overlook rubber stamps as a source for not only imagery but also background textures. Make a good stamping and then reproduce in the size required. Although most copies will be transferred using one technique or another, the copy itself can also be used in the collage to create an opaque passage. Remember, it is easier to integrate torn paper edges rather than cut paper edges into a collage.

**Direct Transfers:**
To make a direct transfer use a photocopy or the original source (such as newspapers or magazines) to directly transfer that image to the work. This process relies on using either toxic or inert solvents to activate the printing inks. The direct transfer methods are for those with no patience. All images transferred directly will be reversed from the original image. To transfer wording, have a mirror image copy made at a copy center. Further, imagery can benefit from mirror image copies.

**Colorless Blender:**
For photocopies (from a copier not a computer printer), use a colorless blender (#P-O) from Chart Pac. Tape the image face down on the work to prevent slippage and saturate small areas of the back with the solvent in the pen. Replace the cap quickly as the solvent in the blender will dry out quickly. Stand the cap up while using the pen and quickly insert the pen into the cap rather than fumbling to replace the cap.

Use a metal spoon to burnish the back of the image to transfer the ink and continue this process for the rest of the image. Use only black and white images not color when using the colorless blender. Transfer images to watercolor paper and color can be added with either watercolor or acrylic paint, colored pencils or chalks. The image is permanent and will not run. The drawback to this process is the strong odor so always
work in a well ventilated area.

Transfers can be made onto a surface coated with gesso or directly onto paper.

**Oil of Wintergreen:**
Other toxic solvents that work less well or have other deterring features are Oil of Wintergreen (pharmacy), Xylene (hardware), and some fingernail polish removers. Oil of Wintergreen is an essential oil combined with a carrier oil. These oils will prevent paint from sticking and should be used only in the top layer of the collage.

Saturate a cotton ball with one of these chemicals and coat the back of the image (place face down on the paper) and then burnish the back with a spoon to transfer the image. All of these are toxic and should be used with caution. They represent a transfer possibility but other methods work better with less exposure to toxicity.

**Gel Medium:**
Gel Medium can be used for a variety of techniques including direct transfers. Use a basecoat of Gesso as a ground. Use a color or black and white photocopy and trim around the image to reduce the amount of background paper that must be removed. This method works best with printed inks used in newspapers.

Place a smooth layer of Gel Medium over the gesso and lay the image face down in the medium, burnish the back of the image with a spoon and smooth out wrinkles with a paper towel. Allow the gel to dry for several minutes (hours or overnight) until the back of the paper is dry to the touch. Soak the transfer and allow the paper to become saturated. Let the transfer stand for a few minutes. Wet fingers and begin to carefully rub off the backing paper. Direct Gel transfers work only for the first layer in a collage next to gesso or paint. It will not work over other transfers or collage.

The drawback to this method is the fragile nature of the transfer. Even with careful rubbing the image can be abraded easily. Use this when the image requires an aged or worn appearance. Use the Goldilocks’ system: medium: not too wet/not too dry; pressure: not too light/not too heavy. Allowing the medium to dry longer makes the image less fragile during the removal of the backing paper.

**Photo Emulsion:**
Polaroid film is no longer produced but an alternative is available from Fugi Film: Fugicolor 100C Film. This is a photographic (chemical) process that requires a film developer and day lab enlarger to do the process. For information about photo emulsion
transfers refer to
www.alternativephotography.com/wp/processes/fugi/fugi-image-transfer. The process
is basically to remove the emulsion layer in water and then placed on a substrate. The
old Polaroid film could be rubbed onto paper before the photo was completely developed.
This is an extremely expensive method of producing transfers.

**Heat Tool:**
Use a Versa-tool (www.walnuthollow.com) with the Transfer Point (flat, circular point) or
an iron for heat transfers or a tacking iron. Place the image (photocopy or laser print
copy) face down on the surface and tape in place to prevent shifting. Use a protective
sheet like baking parchment over the paper image when using an iron. Apply heat to
transfer using a continuous, circular motion. Lift the copy to check on transfer
process.

Acrylic paint creates a plastic finish when dry which may be damaged (melt) with heat
so never apply the heat directly to a painted surface. Gesso is less reactive to heat.
The Versa-tool has 11 points for a variety of techniques including pyrography, soldering,
stamping (3 designs), cutting (foam core) as well as transferring. The tool can also be
used to burn the edges of collage papers.

Transfers can be made to a surface coated with gesso or to paper. Use imagery that
has strong lines rather than intricate detail. Darker copies work better than lighter.

**Indirect Transfers:**
The indirect methods involve covering or coating the image with a product and then
removing the backing paper to reveal a transparent image. The images are clear and
the only concern is disguising the thick edges created while making these 'decals'. To
make a semi-transparent transfer simply remove less of the backing paper in certain
areas or the entire image. It is difficult to adhere one slick surface to another. Use
dental pumice or artist steel wool (without oil) to slightly abrade or rough up the film
for better adherence and to reduce shine.

Most of these techniques require removal of the backing paper with water. Make a
screen for the top of a water bucket to strain as much of the paper pulp/crumbs as
possible. For paper that is cotton rag or paper than can be reused to make handmade
paper, this pulp can be collected and reused. Paper with unknown content should be
disposed of in the trash. Never dump paper pulp down a sink. Pour filtered water
outside to water plants.

**Clear Packing Tape/Clear Contact Paper**
Coverings include clear packing tape (glossy finish) and clear/translucent Contact Paper (matte finish). These can be used with any printed image. Both require heavy burnishing to adhere the inks to the sticky backing.

Overlap strips of packing tape for large images. Wet the fingers and begin to gently rub away the backing paper from the image. When clear of paper crumbs, adhere to artwork with Gel Medium. Since the images are sensitive to abrasion, remove paper carefully. Or use this method to make aged or worn images. Contact paper is more difficult to thoroughly remove the backing paper from than tape.

Contact Paper as well as tape transfers can be cut out around the image. It is not easy to tear edges and the cut edges can be difficult to hide. These transfers should be isolated by placing Gel Medium under and over the entire transfer as they are not archival. The long term stability (discoloration or disintegration) of these transfers is uncertain.

**Liquid Sculpey:**
Printed images of all types can be coated with Liquid Sculpey. This non-toxic product is baked in a toaster oven or an oven at 275° for about 10-12 minutes or at 250° about 15 minutes. The thin clay film will burn quickly so watch the process. The film can range from clear to a honey color when burned slightly.

Spread the Liquid Sculpey over the face of the image using a spreader or a brush. It might be best to cover the pan used for baking with Baking Parchment or with Aluminum Foil. This product works with black and white, color and original images. For a guide in using Liquid Sculpey see: www.sculpey.com. Remove backing paper when cool using wet fingers. Film is very flexible and sturdy. The image quality is very precise and the film can be torn and stretched. Adhere with Gel Medium.

**Encaustic Wax:**
Encaustic Wax can also be used to transfer images from black and white and color copies, ink jet and laser prints, carbon and graphite paper as well as graphite, charcoal, pastel and oil drawings. Trim the paper close to the image to reduce the amount of paper backing that must be removed. The backing paper rubs off of the wax easily. Images can be layered within the translucent wax to create depth. It is simpler to embed a tissue paper transfer in the wax rather than removing backing paper.

Place the image face down onto a smooth, flat waxed surface that has been fused within the last half hour. Works in both the encaustic medium or the pigmented paint. Rub the back of the image with an etching burnisher (or a metal spoon) using an overlapping
circular motion to transfer. Wet the back of the paper and rub with fingers to dissolve the paper. Some paper can be left in the wax as the next layer will cause the paper to become transparent. Refer to information at www.rfpaints.com.

**Caulking:**
A less effective product for transfers is Tub and Tile Caulking available at hardware stores. This method will transfer both black and white, color and magazine images. Spread the caulking on the face of the image with a spreader. Allow to dry and soak and wet the back of the paper and gently rub off the backing paper. Start in the middle and work to the outside edge. The recommended product to use is Elmer’s Press and Seal Grouting.

**Acrylic Medium/Gel Medium:**
The most versatile product for making transfers is Acrylic Medium or Gel Medium. Both Matte (for a translucent effect) and Gloss (for a clear, shiny image) can be used. Gel Medium requires 3 coats with a brush or spreader and Acrylic Medium needs 4-6 coats using a brush. The larger the image the more coats should be applied to prevent tears in the film while removing the backing and moving the transfer.

Coat color and black and white photocopies as well as newspaper or magazine images on the side with the image to be transferred. Allow the medium to cure (overnight is best for a transfer that is less fragile and for paper that can be scrubbed off with a green scrubbie pad or a denture toothbrush). Soak the coated paper in water (surface may become milky) and then rub off the backing paper leaving the transparent image on the film of medium. Adhere with acrylic medium. The film will dry clear.

Make several transfers at a time for efficiency. Transfers will stick to each other so keep them separated with wax paper or plastic sleeve protectors. Transfers can be prepared months ahead of use. Remove the backing paper when ready to use the transfer as the film will quickly become brittle with the paper removed.

Gel transfers can also be applied to fabric (such as muslin). Coat the fabric with at least one coat of gel medium and allow to dry. Prepare a gel medium transfer and remove the backing paper. Adhere the transfer to the fabric with Gel Medium.

**Altering Images with Citra-Solv:**
National Geographic inks can be altered prior to making a transfer. Citra-solv is a cleaning product available at Health Food Stores. Use the Gel form rather than the spray. Lay newspapers outside and open the magazine to the first non-advertisement
Put the Citra-solv in a squirt bottle (Hobby Lobby has bottles with an insert in the cap that prevents leaking and evaporation) for easier dispensing. Squirt with Citra-Solv and close the page. Repeat for the rest of the magazine. Keep the magazine closed for several hours or overnight. Remove the pages and spread out to thoroughly dry. Do not over-saturate the pages. The quality inks used on the clay coated papers in National Geographic will run with Citra-Solv. The distorted images are interesting additions to collage as papers as well as transfers. The best method is indirect Gel Medium transfers. A direct transfer into Gel Medium will create a worn/distressed transfer.

**Printed Transfers:**
There are many transfer papers that are used for photocopying or printing that create various types of transfers. The imagery is copied onto the various papers and then applied to the surface/collage.

**Sheer Heaven:**
Sheer Heaven is a sheet formulated for ink jet printers. Download the 9 page pdf file for using Sheer Heaven at www.cre8it.com. Compose a sheet of images and print onto the suede side of the paper (the other side is smooth). Cut the sheet apart and make a handle for the back using a folded piece of tape. Hold the image horizontally (the inks may run) and spray with 70% isopropyl alcohol (do not use 90% as it will dissolve the image). Immediately, place the image on a porous surface (paper or fabric without any paint or gesso). This paper can then be collaged to another surface. Effects can vary with the texture of the paper used to receive the transfer. Rough paper will accept less detail than smooth paper.

**Lazertran:**
Lazertran is a commercial product that will transfer 'any image to any surface'. It is expensive but the easy to remove decal will stick to anything. Refer to www.lazertran.com. The decals separate easily when placed in water. They are very shiny. Lazertran papers are available for printing transfers with an Ink Jet Printer and the original transfer papers for photocopying.

**Heat Transfer Paper:**
This transfer paper is used primarily for transferring to fabric such as T-shirts or for quilting and can be found at office supply stores or in the fabric decorating section of craft stores. Online view several transfer paper options at www.softexpressions.com Use a printer to copy color images and textures to the heat transfer paper. Iron the
image onto 100% cotton papers such as Rives BFK or Stonehenge. The transfer paper does not tear well so must be cut with a paper cutter or Ex-Acto knife and ruler. Use the transfer paper designed for white/light colored fabrics on white papers and the transfer paper designed for dark fabrics on black paper.

**Lutradur® Mixed Media Sheets:**
Lutradur® is a cross between paper and fabric with many uses: cut and sew, paint, print, dye, distress, draw, collage, die-cut, punch, sculpt, fold/pleat, transfer and weave. The images from the printer have a watercolor or washy effect. Lutradur® has a textured surface that does not accept precise detail as well as Heat Transfer Paper. Adhere with Gel Medium and put under pressure until set.

**Tissue Paper Transfers:**
Black and White images can be photocopied (not on a computer printer) using a personal, straight-line photocopier. Use a backing sheet of regular copy paper with a layer of Elmer's Repositional Glue Stick along the top. Allow the glue to set up and attach a sheet of tissue paper (such as Lineco Acid Free Tissue Paper) to the backing sheet. Tissue paper must be cut to size to go through the photocopier. Chose the most direct line through the copier to reduce the chance that the tissue will peel off and jam the copier. Remove the tissue paper and replace with another sheet for additional copies. Reapply the glue after every 2 or 3 copies.

Tissue paper transfers will become transparent when adhered with medium. Black and white images as well as copies of graphite drawings are suitable for this method. Tear out images leaving torn edges. Torn edges integrate better than cut edges.

Transfers made from tissue paper layer extremely well to create depth. Matte Medium creates more translucent effects than Gloss Medium. These collages can be painted with acrylics using watercolor like washes that add color without covering the transfers. If Matte Medium is applied, colored pencil can be used to color all, part or details in the design.