

# Airbrush

## What's Happening to My Spray?

Many things can affect paint that is sprayed from the airbrush: hand movement, distance from the work, volume of paint, angle of spray, triggering, air pressure and more. Depending on one or more of these factors, while learning airbrush technique, the beginner will likely encounter various undesirable effects. Following are some to watch out for:

**Barbell Effect.** This is when globs of paint appear at the beginning and end of an airbrushed line. It is caused by hesitation of arm/hand movement at the beginning and end of the stroke. Prevent this by keeping the hand moving before and after the line is painted, i.e., before you draw back on and after you release the trigger. Another type of barbell is the flared stroke, and this is caused by two factors--the hesitation as described above and also the fact that the artist is not moving his entire arm when spraying (but is simply moving his wrist). This means the airbrush is closer to the surface in the center of the movement and further away at both endings.

**Freak Drops.** Every beginner makes these and at first they are fun to do. These are "spider" drops that you get by holding the airbrush in one place and spraying a large amount of paint, so much that the air blows the paint around into a "spider" shape. Again, this is fun for beginners, but you certainly don't want it to happen in the middle of an illustration. The factors for this happening are three: holding the airbrush in one place, too much paint, and being too close to the work surface.

The "centipede" effect is an offshoot of the freak drop. Again, this elicits oohs and aahs when first done, but later is considered a mistake. The centipede resembles just that and is a line in which too much paint was applied, the hand movement was too slow and most likely too close to the work surface, thus blowing the paint into an undesirable configuration.

**Blow Outs.** These occur in freak drops, centipedes and anything else when the artist accidentally applies only air, which then hollows out the wet paint that has been applied. This air pressure, in turn, causes the white of the paper to show through.

**Curved Stroke.** When you make a short, straight line but it ends up being curved, it is because you are airbrushing by moving just your wrist and not your entire arm. When using the airbrush, hold it directly at the work surface and move your entire arm as you spray. Keep your arm, hand, and airbrush straight toward the work--the only way to

achieve a consistent spray of a given width.

**The Speck.** This is always an annoying occurrence. It's the glob of paint that comes out of the airbrush as you begin to spray and hits the work surface (when all you wanted was air)! Unbeknownst to you, this tiny droplet of paint was transferred to the front of the airbrush the last time you sprayed. When the trigger was released to shut off the airbrush, the droplet traveled forward with the needle; it was then blown off onto the work when you next began to spray. Therefore, whenever you start to spray, it is highly recommended that you do a test spray to insure that there is no droplet lurking. A couple spritzes of air and you will know that it's safe to continue. To prevent the speck in the first place, be cautious when turning off the airbrush spray. Don't just flick the trigger off; rather, gently lift it.

There are many variables in the proper use of an airbrush. Practice makes perfect, and having the knowledge to prevent potential mistakes will allow you to spray with ease and encounter minimal frustration.