

Decalcomania

Oil Painting Class Sadie Murdoch

Today we are going to look at Decalcomania, how to do it, who else has done it before, and why it's a great way to make paintings.



Oscar Dominguez, Untitled, Gouache on paper, 1937.

Decalcomania is essentially a technique in painting where random effects are generated by applying pressure to paint between two hard surfaces. This can either be done between a piece of paper and a surface such as a sheet of acetate or wooden board. Or it can be done between two sheets of acetate, squeezed together from which a 'print' is then taken.

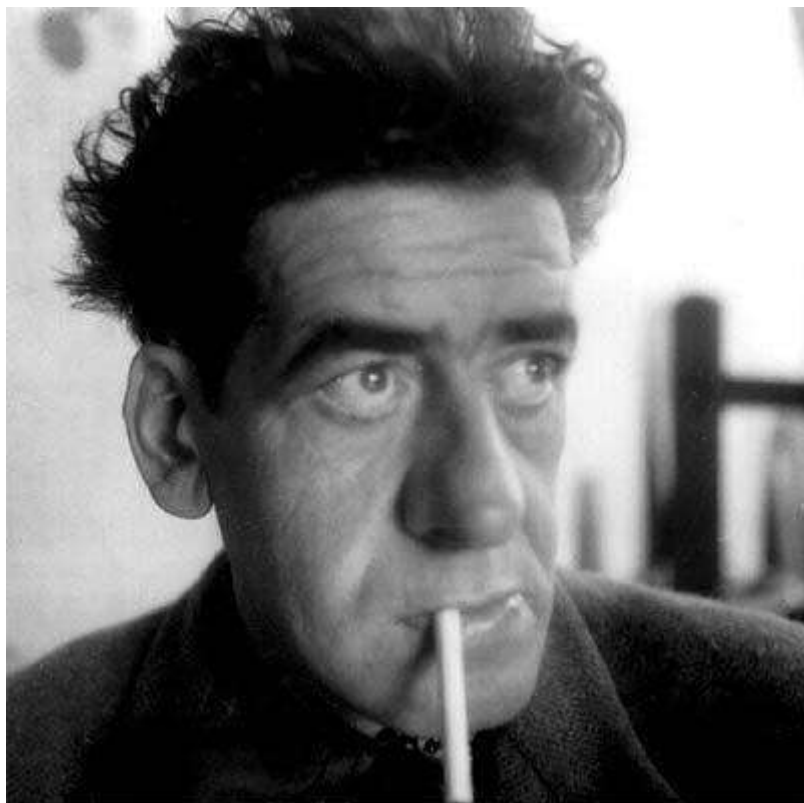
The advantage of using a clear acetate sheet is that you can see what you are doing, and add paint and move the surfaces around as you do it...

Here's what you need:



Acrylic or gouache paint, sheets of paper, brushes, cloths/sponges, a work surface that can be wiped down - you can also do this on the kitchen floor. You also need a sheet or two of acetate or some other hard surface.

The word decalcomania was first introduced in the mid-1930s by the Spanish Surrealist artist Oscar Dominguez.



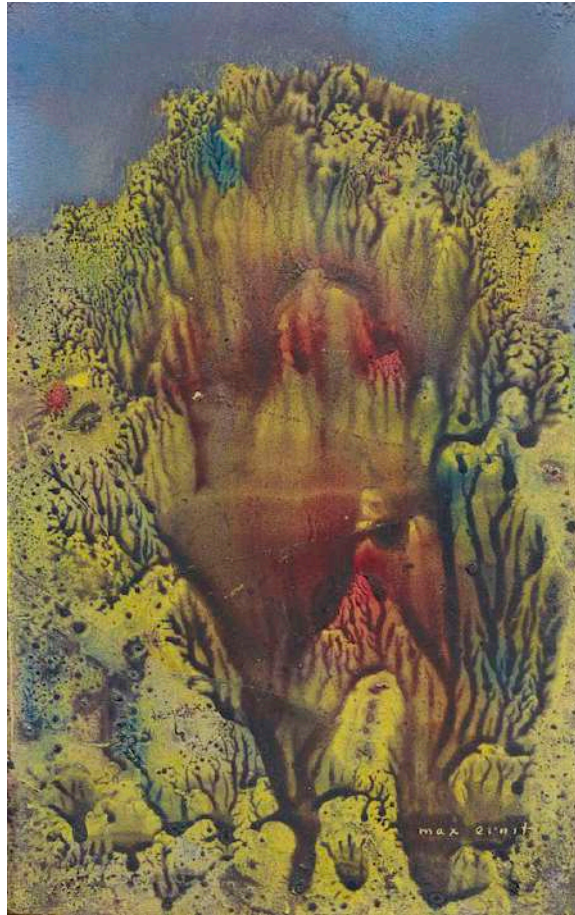
Oscar Dominguez

Oscar Domínguez was in Paris at the same time as other Surrealist painters who were experimenting with 'automatism' - art made without conscious thought processes. Domínguez made a series of untitled paintings using blobs and strokes of gouache which he applied between two sheets of paper, then gently pressing and rubbing the two pieces together, then pulling them apart.



Oscar Dominguez, Untitled, Gouache on paper, 1936.

You know when you look at clouds in the sky or a marble wall and start to see 'images' - faces, landscapes, strange creatures? Decalcomania harnesses this way of seeing and allows us to generate random forms and textures, which we can then add to and thereby 'draw out' our own images. Because the brushstrokes are not visible in the usual way, it gives the impression that the shapes and surfaces have arisen by themselves, 'naturally' as it were. This gives the work a quality that is extremely convincing and as we see in the work of Max Ernst, often quite hallucinatory.



Max Ernst, Untitled, Oil on canvas

Max Ernst was another Surrealist artist who lived in Paris at the same time as Dominguez, and he made a series of paintings called *Europe after the Rain*, in which he made extensive use of decalcomania plus other the techniques Ernst invented such as 'frottage' and 'grottage'.



Max Ernst, *Europe After The Rain I*, Oil on canvas 1933.



Max Ernst, Europe after the Rain, II, Oil on Canvas 1940 - 42

Europe After The Rain II is one of his most famous paintings, portraying a ravaged, monstrous landscape that is reminiscent of the carnage of WW I and II, featuring what appears to be twisted wreckage and eerie hybrid figures.



Max Ernst Europe after the Rain, II detail 1940 - 42.

Now we are going to make a decalcomania painting. First squeeze some paint onto a hard surface; make sure the paint is liquefied overall. Then press the other on top - if you are using a clear acetate sheet you will be able to see what's happening as you press. Rotate and smear the paint to get further effects. Then when you are ready - no hurry! - pull the two sheets apart and press a piece of paper against the surfaces - both will give you a 'print'. Here I used copper and silver gouache:



You can also put paint on one piece of paper and then put another on top and press - then you get two 'mirror' paintings to work on, like these examples I made here:





You can do more than one layer, but remember, if you use acrylic, the paint will dry quickly on the sheet and you won't be able to wipe it off! If you are using gouache, ok, if you are using acrylic, clean your surfaces once you have finished.

Then - take a look at your decalcomania painting. What does it remind you of..? Add paint in similar colours to create your image. Remember - less more.. Here's one I made with two different layers, one in black gouache and the other in silver acrylic, which then became a strange horse, with a rider in a storm:



