



Activity Guide: MAKE DO Scagliola *by Chalk Plaster*



Activity Explanation

Scagliola is a traditional plastering technique used to imitate marble and other semi-precious stones.



What you will do during the activity

Traditionally scagliola is produced from gypsum plaster, dry natural pigments and pearl glue. Our MAKE DO version uses more readily available materials which can produce a similar effect.



How long it will take

- Preparing and mixing materials: 30-40 minutes
- Initial setting time: leave overnight
- Finishing: 5-10 minutes
- Optional filling and polishing: completed over 1-2 days

What you'll need

- Gypsum plaster (casting plaster)
- Gelatine Powder – you will find sachets in the baking aisle of most supermarkets. Adding gelatine to plaster can be really useful, not only for making scagliola, but also when casting. Adding just a small amount of gelatine to the water you use for mixing your plaster will extend the setting of the plaster and give more time for air bubbles to escape from the surface of moulds.
- Pigment – Here we used paprika as an alternative to expensive natural pigments. There is a growing community of makers and artists who produce their own natural pigments from materials they find within their local area. Check out [@worldpigmentday](https://www.instagram.com/worldpigmentday/) - <https://www.instagram.com/worldpigmentday/> for some inspiration.
- Coarse sandpaper – we used 80 grade.
- Mould – We used a stiff plastic pot.



Method

1. Prepare the gelatine following the guidelines on the packet. One sachet is mixed with one pint of water. This will produce much more gelatine than you will need to produce the small piece shown in the guide. However, you can keep it and continue to use it over a number of days. If the gelatine sets, simply gently reheat it (in a microwave or bain marie). Leave the gelatine to cool for 5-10 minutes.
2. Measure out a quantity of plaster and dry pigment to a ratio of 5 parts plaster to 1 part pigment. Thoroughly mix the plaster and dry pigment. If you would like to create different tones of the same colour roughly divide your mixture into two halves. Set aside one half, this will be your darkest tone. Take the other half and add the same quantity of plaster powder. You can repeat this process again and again to produce lighter and lighter tones. We used six tones to make the piece shown in the guide.

3. Create a well in each of your mixes of coloured plaster. You can do this with the back of a spoon. Carefully pour in a small amount of gelatine and mix thoroughly – keeping each mix separate. Add the gelatine sparingly, you will probably need a lot less than you think. The mixed plaster should be dough-like - a similar consistency to firm mozzarella cheese.
4. The gelatine slows down, or retards, the setting of the plaster so you have plenty of time to combine your different tones. Now you can be as creative as you like! You could tear up the tones into small pieces dust them in plaster and mix them together, or layer and cut them into pieces. How you arrange your colours will have a real impact on the appearance of your finished piece. Experiment!

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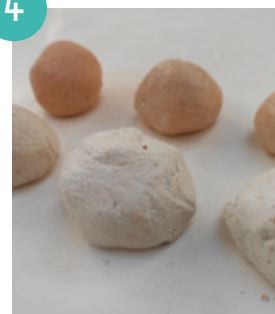
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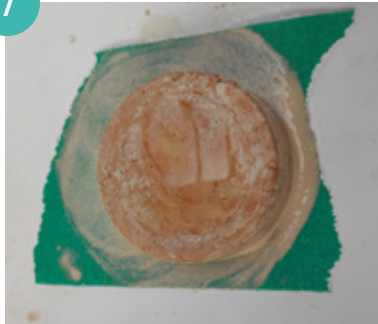
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5. Bring it altogether and compact it into your mould, or form it into whatever shape you like and leave it overnight.
6. In the morning the plaster will be set hard. It will be harder and much more scratch resistant than unmodified plaster. The gelatine acts in a similar way to the acrylic polymer additives in commercial products like Jesmonite AC300. Take the plaster out of your mould.
7. In order to reveal the pattern within the plaster you need to remove the surface layer of the set plaster. Traditionally this would be done using different grades of abrasive stones starting with pumice but you can use sandpaper instead. Here we used 80 grade sandpaper. Wet the plaster before beginning and rinse regularly in clean water as you go.

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8. You can end the process here, but if you would like a finer finish you can mix up a small quantity of pigmented plaster with gelatine and use it to fill any holes or bubbles on the surface. Damp the surface of the plaster first. Once this has set, gently sand the surface using a finer grade of sandpaper. You can continue this process using finer and finer grades of sandpaper until you achieve a polished finish.
9. Leave the plaster to dry for several days. As it dries the colours will become less vibrant – this is particularly true for ‘make do’ pigments like paprika and turmeric. You can revive the colours by wiping the plaster with a little oil once it is properly dry. You can repeat this process a number of times. Leave the oil to soak into the surface.
10. Once the surface of the plaster no longer feels oily you can polish the surface with a wax polish.

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The Maker Chalk Plaster

Ffion & Steven Blench met whilst studying sculpture and critical fine art practice, respectively at Brighton University. After University Ffion undertook an apprenticeship in plastering at Telford College, before going on to work as a plain and decorative plasterer in Edinburgh and Steven worked as a decorative arts cataloguer for the Royal Collection Trust. In 2016 they formed Chalk Plaster which specialises in designing, restoring and producing decorative plasterwork.

plaster-design.com
[@chalkplaster](https://www.instagram.com/chalkplaster)



MAKE is a new manifesto for craft in Scotland.

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