

WATER

by Johan Leeflang

Water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink (famous quoted words)

Like rocks, water is an essential component of any layout. It gives a new life to an otherwise dead scenic area.

Water in real life is colourless. Painting water blue makes it very artificial and fairy like. In nature water takes on the colour of its surroundings i.e. the colour of the sky and the light that falls on it.

Real water has been used on layouts but does not appear to scale. It also gets stagnant, attracts mosquitoes, evaporates and is difficult to keep confined.

We have to decide what we want to emulate, a stream, rapids, ponds, lakes, waterfalls or a beach front. These all indicate different moods of water; is it static, fast moving, forming gentle waves or depicting rough seas.

Materials available in South Africa are glass, mirrors, Perspex, gloss varnishes, polymer coatings and textured gel. These materials have different advantages and disadvantages.

In the past, glass and mirrors were used extensively to create “water” but it is costly, heavy and fragile.

Perspex can be used with great effect on large areas. I used it on my harbour scene by cutting it to fit the ship’s hull. I painted the base, underneath the Perspex, a seagreen to match the photo background of the harbour. Darker shades were used for the illusion of depth and lighter colours towards the shoreline. Perspex, untouched can be used to emulate clear calm water.

Invariable the wind blows across water making wavelets. This effect can be created by stippling the Perspex with “Decorating Paste” manufactured by Deco Art and is available from Art Stores. Another product available is “Crystal Clear” by Heritage. These pastes ultimately dry (after about 12 hours) – so patience is needed. Bow waves in front of boats and ships to emulate movement can be created by using these pastes. Also to emulate waves crushing up onto the beach or creating rapids down a fast flowing river.

FALLER sells ripple acetate sheets, looks great, but it is rather pricey over bigger areas.

Unsightly joints in the Perspex can also be camouflaged by using the paste. On my harbour scene I made use of small boats and “floating” things to hide the joints.

“Realistic water” #C1211 and “Water effects” available from Noch / Woodland Scenics packed in plastic bottles are used to create a feeling of transparency. It dries similar to silicon. Creating the foam effect, overcoat it with a white acrylic paint.

I created the waterfall by gluing on a piece of clear plastic (soft, flexible plastic bag will do), cut out to the required shape. When dry, streak on the “water effect” in a vertical direction, from the top pouring it downwards. Together this creates a 3 dimensional effect.

High gloss varnish applied over a surface painted with lighter shades to depict shallow water and darker shades in the deep end, is another method of creating water. For the deep end, use colours like dark green or sea green and brownish to yellowish colours at

the shallow end. It is a good idea to collect photos or pictures of the area you want to depict, using it as reference in choosing colour and simulating the mood. Lakes in Switzerland seem to be turquoise in certain areas whereas Sedgefield in the Cape, the water looks like tea.

“E-Z water” from Woodland Scenics is non-toxic “plastic pellets.” Using a heat gun, melt it down and pour a 3mm layer at a time. The area where this is to be poured must be waterproof otherwise it flows through the cracks; joints etc. and makes a huge mess. The “water basin” area can be painted before, to create shallow and deep ends. Articles such as old tyres, old bashed up metal cars, pebbles (rocks) and any other suitable debris can be “dumped” into the water as long as they can withstand the heat of the melted plastic. (Plastic objects will obviously deform).

In the “modular world” one can show a piece of Perspex in the vertical position at the end of the layout diorama and look underneath the “Water” to show what’s lying beneath the water line at the bottom of the river/lake or sea bed.

On one of my harbour fishing cruisers, I cut the hull of the boat at the waterline and placed the bottom of the hull underneath the Perspex sheet so that you can see that it belongs there and the boat was not just “stuck on top” of the water.

As can be seen there are many ways to emulate “Water”, it all depends on your creativity and your requirements on your layout.

Many layouts that I have been privileged to see in South Africa leave the water finishing touches for a better day but you have to be brave and experiment first on something small before you go the “whole 9 yards”!