

Surface Texture

BEGINNER

Surface texture is the visual quality of a material: rough, smooth, shiny, matte, grainy, bristly. To draw texture, you do not need to draw every detail — you need to choose the right marks. For rough stone: random irregular stippling and scratchy marks. For smooth metal: clean, crisp edges with very bright highlights. For fabric: soft, slightly fuzzy edges and gentle value gradients. Different surfaces reflect light differently, and it is the light behavior that creates the visual impression of texture.

HOBBYIST

Surface texture is a combination of mark type and edge quality. Smooth surfaces have crisp, defined edges and strong specular highlights. Rough surfaces have soft, broken edges and diffuse highlights. To develop your texture vocabulary, collect reference: photographs of old wood, polished glass, rough concrete, velvet, wet stone. The mistake most hobbyists make is drawing every texture the same way — slightly different hatching with slightly different pressure. Truly different textures require genuinely different mark systems.

PROFESSIONAL

At a professional level, texture rendering is about economy and hierarchy. The areas of maximum visual interest receive the most detailed texture treatment. Background and secondary elements receive implied texture so they do not compete for attention. This hierarchical approach is what separates a polished illustration from one where every area is equally rendered and nothing stands out. Artists like Andrew Wyeth are masters of selective texture — rough foreground grasses in contrast with smoothly rendered skies. The contrast of texture density directs the eye as powerfully as value contrast.