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# in rust *we* trust

FAUX OR REAL, RUST APPEALS

**W**hat is it about the look of something old, worn, used, and decayed that attracts our artistic sensibilities? For me it's primarily the color and texture, but rust also tells a story of time and Mother Nature. Most people try to prevent rust. We artists want to create rust, transferring it from beloved corroded objects or creating it anew with potions, paint, powder, and magic. Lately I have been experimenting with natural rust, which has led me to attempt to create my own form of rusty decay (faux rust) using a variety of art materials.


In order to create real rust, or to make your faux rust look like the real thing, it's helpful to know some basic rust chemistry. Rust is one of the most common forms of oxidation. Iron (or steel, which is refined iron) combines with moisture and oxygen to form a reddish iron oxide—rust. Iron oxide is a larger molecule than iron, so it puffs up and flakes, creating cracks and voids, exposing more bare metal to the environment and creating more and more rust.

The key to creating realistic faux rust is to really look at how rust forms on objects. If you live in a rust-deprived area, check out the photos of rust aficionados online at Flickr.com. The endless variety of colors, layers, and patterns found in natural rust and decay gives you unlimited creative license to combine art and ingenuity to re-create your own rusty magic.

## natural rust

“Moisture” and “oxygen” are the key elements when it comes to creating your own natural rust. You must begin with an object that contains iron or steel (but not stainless steel). Unless you are a metals expert, you probably won't know what kind you have until after you try to rust it. The more iron present in an object, the faster it will rust. The object must be wet or surrounded by moisture, and it must have oxygen for the oxidation to occur. The addition of salt or acid (vinegar) will speed the process along.

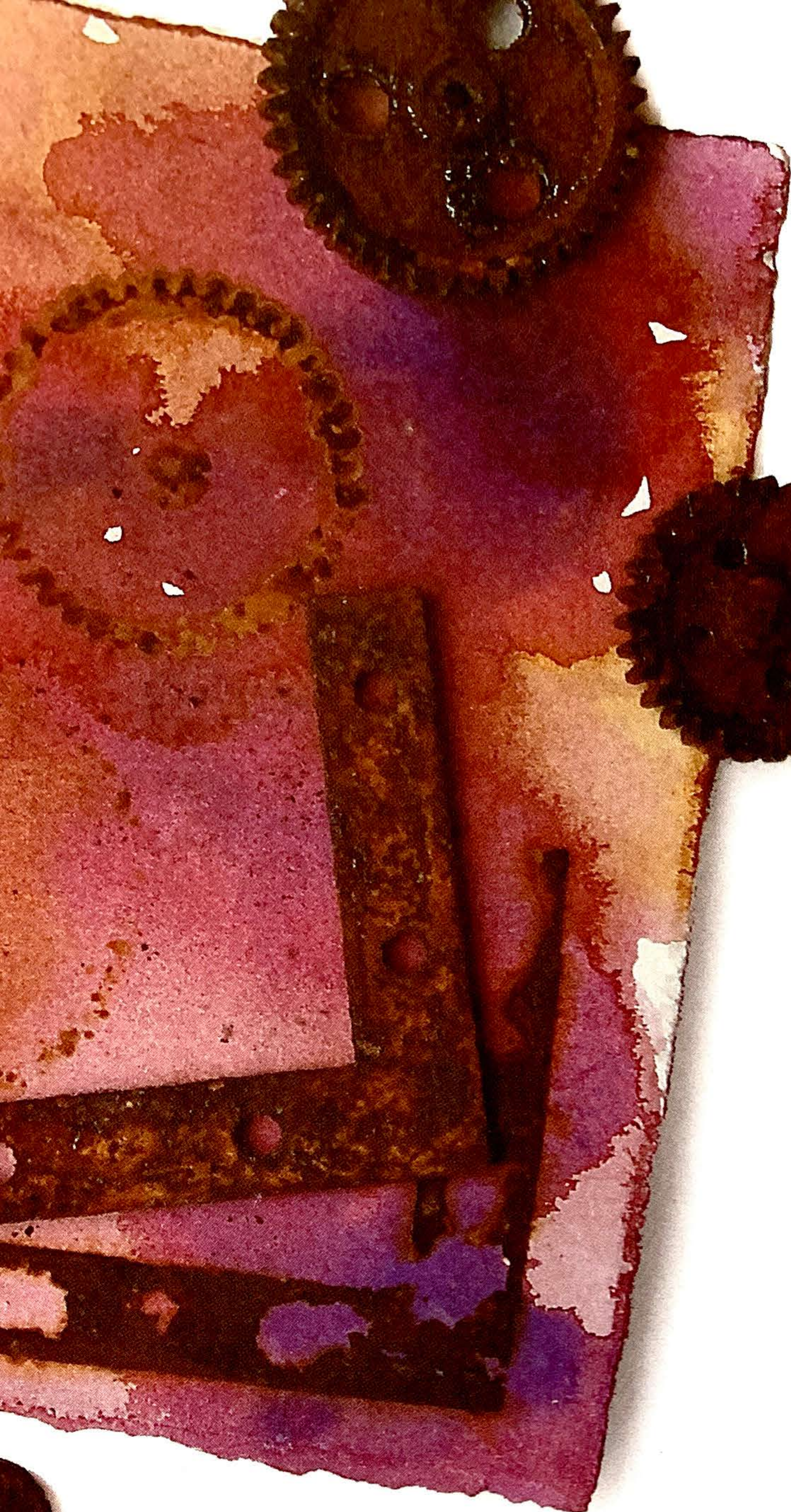
Michael deMeng, known for his rusty creations and author of *SECRETS OF RUSTY THINGS*, says, “If you're in a hurry, you can use vinegar and bleach and throw your metal goodies in. If you have some [time] why not just leave things outside? Let Mother Nature do the work.”



*Above: Rusted hand-dyed and muslin fabric drawstring bags.*

*Opposite: “Time in a Bottle” • 9" x 12" • Rusted fabric and ribbon, faux rusted paper, button, beads, rusted tin bottle.*

*by* **lesley** *riley*



Above: A sample of contact-rusted paper, along with the rusty metal objects that were used to create the rusted shapes.

Opposite: "Rememory" • 9" × 11½"

## natural rust recipes

**caution:** Chlorine gas is formed when rusting with bleach and vinegar. The fumes can be quite strong. Work outdoors or in a very well-ventilated area and consider wearing a respirator. Gloves are recommended when using bleach, as it can cause skin irritation. Also remember: bleach can ruin your colorful clothing, so wear old clothes or protective gear.

### QUICK RECIPE

Create a solution of 2 parts bleach to 1 part vinegar. Let objects sit in the

solution outdoors for 24 hours. Different metals will rust to various degrees depending on iron content. Do not rinse; dry on a surface covered with paper towels or newspaper to prevent rust stains on the drying surface. The more acidic the solution, the faster the rusting takes place.

### HEALTHIER ALTERNATIVE

Use a mixture of either salt and bleach or vinegar and water. It may take longer to grow your rust, but this recipe smells much better and is healthier for you.

### contact rust

You can use rusty metal objects to create rust on other surfaces, such as fabric or paper. Fiber artists have long been rusting fabric for use in art quilts. Collage and mixed-media artists can use the same techniques to rust paper and other non-metal surfaces. Natural materials (fibers, papers, bone) will rust better than synthetics. I rust fabric, paper, and trims by wetting them with water and vinegar and then placing them in contact with already rusted items. Vinegar is preferable to bleach when rusting fabrics, as bleach breaks down and destroys natural fibers. The more vinegar you use, the more the rust will spread on the surface.

One popular rusting technique is to wet fabric with vinegar, put it into a plastic bag with rusty objects, and then place it in a warm, sunny location until the desired effect is achieved—usually about 24 hours.

**note:** *Because the fabric will continue to rust over time, eventually breaking down the fiber, you should periodically neutralize the fabrics, misting them with a*

*solution of baking soda (or soda ash) and water. This will raise the pH and slow the rusting.*

### CONTACT RUST RECIPE

1. Wet fabric or paper with a solution of water and vinegar.
2. Place the wet surfaces in contact with rusted items and cover them with plastic or place them in a plastic bag to keep the contents wet enough for the rusting to occur.
3. Allow for air (oxygen) to circulate—do not seal the bag or plastic and allow at least 24 hours for the rusting to occur. If your fabric/paper dries out before enough rusting occurs, re-wet the fabric/paper by spraying with your water and vinegar solution.

**note:** *If you are lacking rusty items, you can start with unrusted metal, such as coarse steel wool, nails, or wire mesh. Wash your metal with detergent to remove any oils that may be present. Wet your fabric or paper and the metal with vinegar or a mixture of vinegar and water and place them in a plastic bag. The fabric and papers will rust right along with the metal object. I have found that the rust spreads more in a vinegar solution. If you want a delicate rust, just use water.*

### patina-solution recipe for tin

To rust tin quickly, mixed-media artist Jane Wynn uses pre-mixed, processed, green patina solution (like Jax, Modern Masters, or Modern Options). "Because it is tin, it will never turn those pretty green or blue colors like brass or copper does, but it will rust like crazy in five minutes," she says.

Rough up simple tin with 300-grit sandpaper to help remove pre-existing paint or any oil from your hands. This step is very important if you want quick results.





*Above (from left to right): Rust embossing powder on fabric and on painted watercolor paper; garnet gel (painted after application); coarse pumice mixed with nickel azo gold gel on painted watercolor paper (additional paint and ink were applied after drying).*

Working in a well-ventilated area, scrub on some green patina with an old paintbrush that you don't mind throwing away afterward. The more pressure you use and the more you scrub it around, the better the results. You will begin to see the surface change and turn a dark reddish-orange at first and then it will turn blackish-brown. It will begin to rust as it dries.

## **rusting non-metal objects**

What if you have a wooden alphabet letter, or a small, plastic toy that you want to rust? Paint to the rescue! You can either create the appearance of rust using paint and specialty gels (see "faux rust") or you can actually rust it using a two-step process with Modern Options Sophisticated Finishes. Paint your object with their rustable metal primer, a solution that contains finely ground iron particles.

Follow with the rust antiquing solution and within 24 hours you will have a rusty object. Use it as a stand-alone piece or to create patterned contact rust. You can also use the two-step process to rust fabric. It will change the hand of the fabric, making it stiff, but it will still be soft enough to sew through.

**note:** *Sewing rusted fabric and paper is best kept to rust-stained or lightly rusted pieces. Gritty or built-up, dimensional rust will dull your needle and may harm your machine if rust particles break off and fall into the machine.*

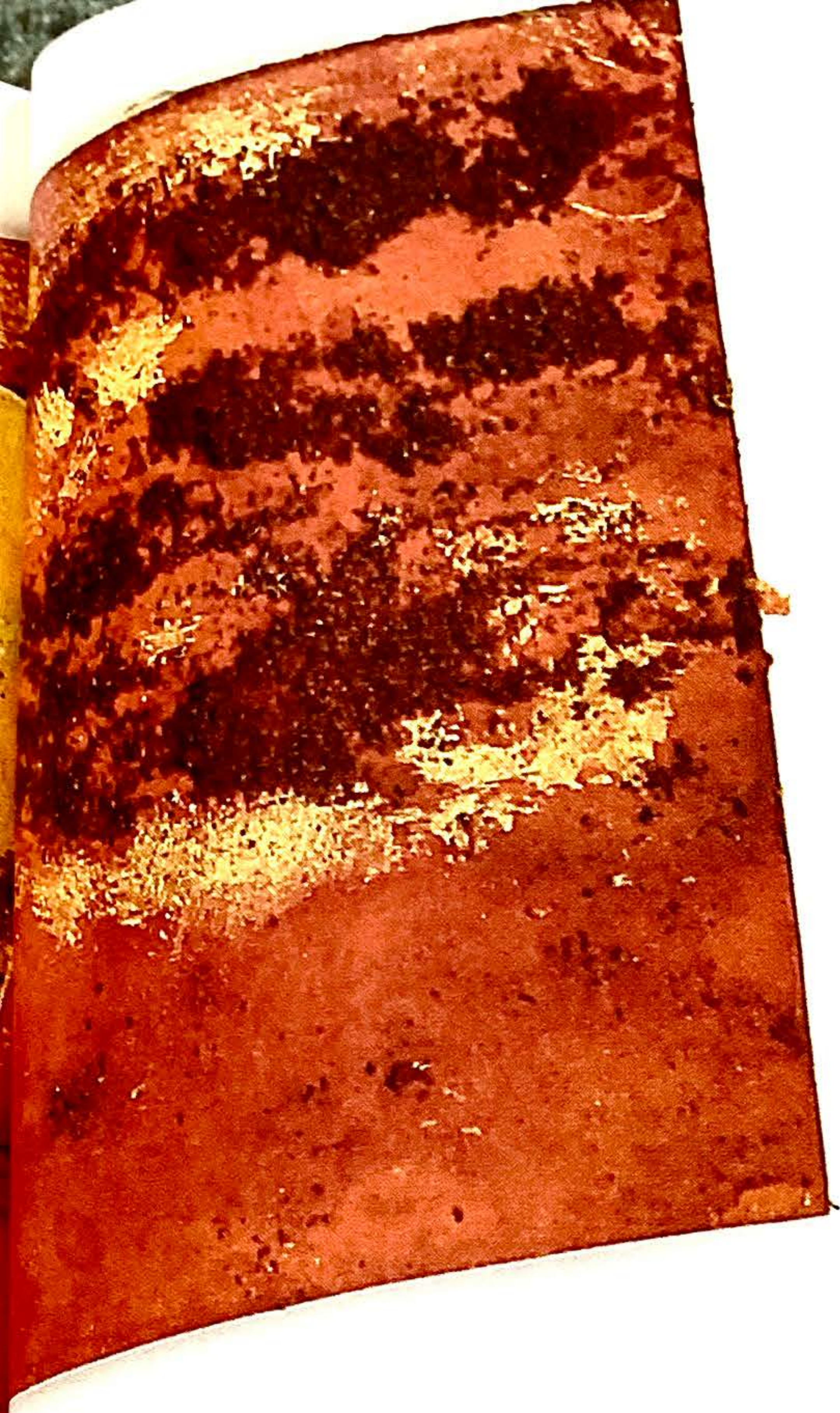
### **tips**

- *Rust unusual, non-metal shapes and objects to use for decorative contact rusting.*
- *When you rust an iron object in bleach and/or vinegar, the solution itself becomes rusty, producing an*

*iron-oxide dye that is great for staining paper and fabric.*

## **faux rust**

Faux rust has advantages over the real thing. It's chemical-free, way more creative, and can be achieved as easily as selectively applying a dab of paint, or more complexly by artistically creating intricately detailed, multiple layers of color and texture. The more realistic you want it to look, the more fun you get to have. I have tried several methods using a variety of products and techniques in different combinations. There are no specific proportions, rules, or restrictions. After studying rust for the last few months, I prefer to create serendipitously as Mother Nature does. I'll share what I have discovered and then set you free to come up with your own recipes and techniques.



## embossing powder rust

A rust-colored embossing powder does a great job of imitating the real thing and is easy to use to create faux rust designs and areas on almost any surface.

### MATERIALS

- Ranger Embossing Antiquities™ in rust
- Ranger Distress™ Ink pad in spiced marmalade
- Ranger Distress Ink Reinker in spiced marmalade
- Golden® Fluid Acrylic in nickel azo gold
- Rubber stamps
- Paintbrushes
- Heat gun

1. Apply ink or paint to a stamp and stamp onto the desired surface, or brush ink or paint onto the surface in selected areas or designs.
2. Sprinkle rust Embossing Antiquities onto the painted/stamped areas and tap off the excess.

**note:** *If any stray embossing powder is still on the surface or caught in the fibers of the fabric, use a small brush to remove it so it does not melt onto the surface when heated.*

3. Heat with a heat gun until the powder turns to (faux) rust. Add more paint to enrich and deepen the color, if you desire.

## garnet gel faux rust

My favorite way of creating faux rust is with coarse garnet gel. Garnet comes from the Latin word “granatus,” which means grain. This gritty gel contains the actual mineral garnet, suspended in acrylic gel. It goes on cloudy, but dries clear, leaving the raised, natural, reddish-brown grit. Paint it on in thick clumps for heavy rust or spread it thin to produce a pitted, early rust appearance.

### ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

- Golden Garnet Gel (Coarse)
- Golden Fluid Acrylic, burnt orange
- Brush or spatula
- Detail brush

1. Prepare your background surface with paint, collage, etc.
2. Apply garnet gel with a brush or spatula to mimic rusting and let dry.
3. Using the detail brush, paint over the garnet gel with fluid acrylics and inks.

## coarse pumice gel faux rust

Coarse pumice gel is another gritty additive that will mimic rust. When dry, it has a concrete color. Apply it to a prepared surface and paint over it, or mix it with paints and/or ink to

give it the color of rust and then apply it to the surface.

### ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

- Golden Coarse Pumice Gel

1. Spread pumice gel onto your prepared background surface, or mix pumice gel with paint or ink to imitate a rust color and spread it onto your prepared background surface.
2. Use a detail brush to paint over and around the gel to add additional tone and color.

## finishing touches

Natural rusting is a continual process. The work you create using natural rust is not archival and will continue to slowly decay over the years. To slow the process, mist fabrics annually with baking soda as described in the note on page 68. Using an acrylic sealer on rusted items will also keep the process in check and prevent the rust from rubbing or flaking off. I recommend Preserve Your Memories II, a light, multi-use acrylic spray. It does not change the color of the rust like many other acrylic finishes do. It is also an excellent finish coat for faux rust. ●

**SECRETS OF RUSTY THINGS:  
TRANSFORMING FOUND OBJECTS  
INTO ART** by Michael deMeng  
**ALTERED CURIOSITIES, ASSEMBLAGE  
TECHNIQUES AND PROJECTS**  
by Jane Ann Wynn  
quiltingarts.com

**Preserve Your Memories II**  
precision-blue.com

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