

# Traditional Carbon Dust Technique

## Overview

*Carbon dust illustration as developed by Max Brödel is quite similar to charcoal drawing. The difference is the values defining the forms are created by applying a mix of carbon and black Conté dust using soft brushes. Additionally, when applied to a white coated illustration board, the highlights can be scratched out revealing the bright white substrate.*

## Technique

### Sketching and Sketch Transfer

1. Draw using carbon pencils (HB, B or BB) on Canson® Vidalon Vellum tracing paper – I recommend medium or heavy weight tracing paper; when you use 25 lb. tracing paper, it's a little too thin. Vidalon is an exceptionally translucent paper that is durable and has a very smooth surface. The paper is resistant to scraping and not affected by repeated erasures. It is also acid free.
2. Using white artist tape, tape the drawing to another sheet of the same tracing paper (Transfer Tracing Paper or TTP). Tape on at least two sides to hold the paper in place. Use a short piece of tape (you're not taping the entire side).
3. Using a bone burnishing tool, transfer the drawing to the second sheet of tracing paper by rubbing the back side of the sketch.
4. Cut the coated illustration board to size, allowing a small amount of bleed area for scanning and handling. An alternative is to cut an even larger photo board (about an inch to two-inch margin all around) and use double stick tape to adhere the illustration board. This provides more support from the photo board and an area you can grasp and rotate the board as you illustrate. NOTE: Never touch the surface of the illustration board with your hands or fingers. Use white photo gloves to keep the board clean. Cut off halfway the cloth thumb, index, and middle finger ends of the glove you place on your drawing hand. Your other hand can use the white glove without alterations.
5. Place the TTP on the illustration board and tape the edges using white artist's tape.
6. Transfer the drawing from the TTP to the illustration board using the bone burnishing tool.
7. Lift one corner of the paper periodically as you transfer to ensure the amount of transferred carbon pencil drawing is sufficient. Keep the rest of the tape secured so the drawing doesn't shift.

## Carbon Dust Application

8. If you are using pen & ink or Micron™ pens, ink on the illustration board before applying carbon dust
9. Starting with your largest brush loaded with just a small amount of carbon dust, begin to model the largest forms in the drawing consistent with your light source. Work very lightly and gradually, building up the tones throughout the illustration. NOTE: You do not often dip the brush directly in the carbon dust container – instead, you are using the dust from the chamois taped, using double-sided tape, to the underside of the container lid. If you do need more carbon dust on your brush, dip directly into the carbon dust container, then tap on the chamois. Test the brush on a white sheet of paper before applying to the illustration. You do not want to brush on carbon dust on a fully-loaded brush since the effect will likely be uneven.
10. You can reinforce your drawing by using your pencils as needed. Also, by burning or trimming a small flat sable brush to a stump, you can make subtle drawing marks that are smoother than using a pencil. A trimmed cork held in a brass ferrule can also create subtle marks.
11. Erase general highlights using a trimmed and rounded Staedtler Mars® plastic eraser held in a brass ferrule.
12. Begin establishing more focused and brighter highlights using a plastic eraser trimmed to about 1 – 2mm width, again held in a ferrule.
13. The brightest highlights are created using a curved blade held almost parallel (slight angle) with the surface of the illustration board – do not dig into the board, but use a light touch gently scraping out the highlights at the desired width. Blades dull quickly and have to be switched out or they will not be as effective.
14. Check your work to see if it has the desired range of value range and details. Rework if necessary and erase any unwanted marks from the white background.
15. Digitize your work by scanning at 300 dpi or higher on a flatbed scanner. You may have to scan in sections and combine the sections in Photoshop.

## *Archival Drawing Surfaces:*

1. Ross Stipple Board:  
[https://www.princeton.edu/~graphicarts/2010/01/charles\\_j\\_rosss\\_stipple\\_paper.html](https://www.princeton.edu/~graphicarts/2010/01/charles_j_rosss_stipple_paper.html)  
No longer manufactured.
2. Video Media Board: White coated surface. No longer manufactured.
3. Medical Models Dull Finish Stipple Board: White calcium coating, no longer manufactured.

4. Color-Aid MI Illustration Paper (not in production?):  
<https://coloraid.com/allsheets18x24.aspx>
5. Laserline Archival 700 Illustration Board (Miller Paper Co. NYC) No longer manufactured.
6. **Currently manufactured:** Ampersand Claybord – this may work?:  
<https://ampersandart.com/claybord.php>

### *Pencils:*

1. Wolff Carbon H, HB, B, BB, BBB: <https://www.dickblick.com/items/wolff-carbon-pencil-multipack-4/>
2. Conté Extra Fine Black (B or softer): <https://www.dickblick.com/items/conté-a-paris-sketching-pencil-carbon-3b/>
3. Erasers:
  - A. Kneaded eraser: [https://www.dickblick.com/products/blick-kneaded-erasers/?clickTracking=true&wmcp=pla&wmcid=items&wmckw=21026-1010&gclid=EAlaIQobChMI8-GLjev38QIVl-azCh1HGusEAQYBCABEgl2d\\_D\\_BwE](https://www.dickblick.com/products/blick-kneaded-erasers/?clickTracking=true&wmcp=pla&wmcid=items&wmckw=21026-1010&gclid=EAlaIQobChMI8-GLjev38QIVl-azCh1HGusEAQYBCABEgl2d_D_BwE)
  - B. Staedtler-Mars White Plastic Eraser:  
<https://www.dickblick.com/products/staedtler-mars-plastic-erasers/>
  - C. Pink Pearl: <https://www.dickblick.com/products/pink-pearl-eraser/>

### *Carbon Dust:*

Created by using a metal file and mixing carbon pencils BB, BBB, and a soft Conté pencil into a metal or plastic container with a secure lid. Using double sided tape, secure a cut swatch of chamois to the underside of the container lid.

### *Brushes:*

1. One very large (#30), round brush (like a makeup brush) to begin the illustration
2. An assortment of flat brushes – imitation white sable will work
3. One small natural bristle brush – you burn away the natural hairs to create a stump
4. Clean large flat watercolor brush to pick up eraser dust

### *Other Materials:*

1. Plastic or metal container for carbon dust
2. Curved blade - X-acto knife or scalpel
3. Bone burnishing tool
4. White Artist Tape
5. White cotton photographers' gloves
6. Double-ended brass ferrule pencil extension (for holding custom shaped erasers)
7. Double-sided tape (if mounting illustration board on photographers' board)
8. Bottle cork (can be trimmed to make marks on illustration board)
9. Pen & ink supplies (if needed)

