

This was an article I wrote in 2011 for the FFI magazine. Included is a link to the original video on using a simple method to paint poppers that inspired me. Since then, I have used this technique to enhance feathers, to alter the color of bait fish patterns, and to get a more realistic color match to nymphs and dry flies. This article is as an extension of the possibilities when using EP material. Additionally, since 2011 there are now numerous articles/youtube videos on painting, enhancing flies and feathers using many different coloring methods.

Unabridged version

As with any hobbies that can be all consuming, fly tiers are always trying to adapt or improve the flies we tie. We steal shamelessly from each other and then pass along what we have learned. This article is no different.

Recently, I was demonstrating how to carve balsa wood poppers at the Washington State FFF Fly Fishing Fair in Ellensburg, WA. I thought this would be something unique and would draw some attention. To my surprise, in steelhead and salmon country, there was limited interest in learning to carve a popper.

However, there was a lot of interest in the method I used to paint poppers for the show. Basically, I was painting with an airbrush that uses felt tip markers. I saw this demonstrated three years ago on a YouTube video by Curtis Fry.

Since then, I have used a number of different types of markers to paint poppers, touch up/enhance salt water flies, nymphs, dry flies and color feathers when I could not find the material I needed locally.

I use a Copic Air Brush System. It is extremely flexible, requires basically no cleanup and it is a rapid color change system. It only takes about 10 seconds to change colors. Finally, it is fast drying. Too good to be true? Well, you just need to see one work. Curtis Fry's video is still on YouTube! (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ba7zcbFkxvE>)

The setup and use of a Copic or any other “marker type” Air Brush System is beyond the scope of this article, due to limited space. But, let’s just say you connect the airbrush to an air source, put a marker in the holder and spray. To change the color, just change the marker. It truly is that easy. The potential uses of these types of systems are only limited by the creativity of the user.

Below, I will show you some of the potential uses. But, before we talk about the uses there are a couple of things to consider before using a “marker type” Air Brush system. The absolute critical factor is what type of “marker” you are going to use. I basically use only permanent markers. On occasions when I know I will be applying an epoxy type finish or other “non” water based finish, I will use the water-soluble markers which tend to blend a little better.

Another point to consider is where you will get your air pressure. When I am at the different fly tying fairs, I will use a can of compressed air. This can get to very expensive and the pressure varies as you use the can of air. ([Expanding gas acts as an AC unit and lowers the temperature of the can of compressed air in turn lowering the pressure.](#)) Typically at home I use an air compressor with a regulator. Each air compressor is slightly different and you will have to test it out to determine what is the best operation pressure. (I use between 20 and 60 psi.)

Now let’s get to the fun part! You can use the system to paint poppers whether they are a smooth or a rough surface; you can use it to apply the final touches on the head of a larger streamer or salt water fly; you can even use it to dye some feathers that special color you can’t find; and last, but not least, you can use it to put selective barring/mottling on your flies. The key to all of these uses is a little practice.

Let’s talk about painting poppers. In a few minutes, you can spray your popper with several different colors in a pattern that is appealing to you and it will look great. You can improve the appearance of your popper by using stencils to add a pattern. (See pictures below) Create

your stencil, place it where you want a pattern, then just spray. That is all there is to it. Now you can use a hole punch to make 'eyes'. Dip the hole punch into your paint. Then lightly touch the punch to the popper to transfer the paint. Let it dry. More time drying is always better. The final step is to brush on a hard finish. I use from one to three coats.

On numerous occasions, I have used the "marker type" Air Brush system to color feathers. It is best to use permanent ink if you plan to fish with the fly. If the fly is going to be mounted, you could use water-soluble markers; but, I don't recommend it.

I mainly use this technique to dye feathers for tying Atlantic Salmon flies. The trick here is to spray the feathers lightly and let it completely dry and repeat the process until you get the desired color. It is best to start with white feathers, but you can use any colored feather. With a colored feather, the best you can do is to make it slightly darker or create a pattern on feather.

I will conclude this article with a series of pictures that shows you a few of the things you can do with a "marker type" Air Brush system. The limits of what you the system are only limited by your creativity.



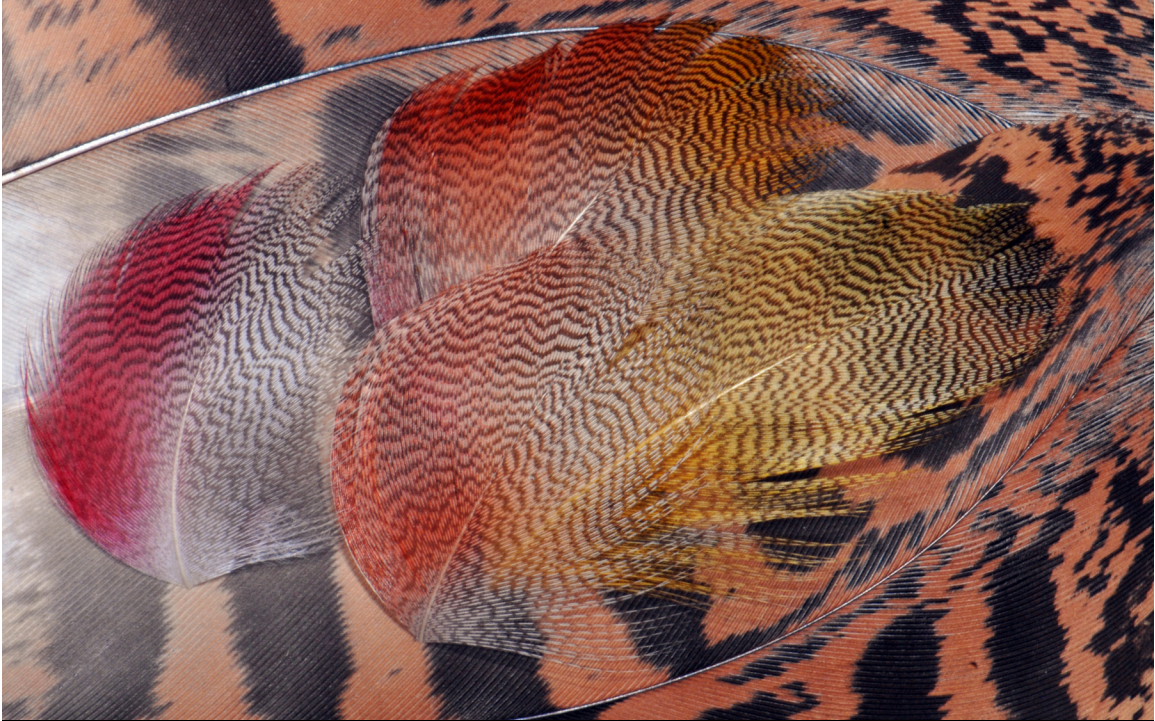
Commerically bought bodies base coat painted with a Copic System



Deciever Type streamers, before and after.



Goose Shoulders dyed with a Copic System using permanent ink



Mallard Shoulder dyed with a Copic System using permanent ink