



"That's not quite it. Can you keep going?" asked Oskar Eustis, artistic director of the Public Theater.

"Of course," I replied. This is the stuff I love about doing props and I haven't been able to prop a show for this man I admire for seven years, so I was not going to let him down. We were discussing a scene in the Public Theater's Shakespeare in the Park production of *Julius Caesar*, where Cassius throws a big blue paintball onto a Julius Caesar political poster. When I say big paintball, I mean it. The poster was 4'x4'; Oskar wanted it fully covered.

When the rehearsal report first asked for paintballs we ordered some. We thought with enough force the actor could throw the paintball into the wall and get a good splat onto the poster. Once they arrived, we went into the theater's alley to test them out. They were okay—6 out of 10 would break just by throwing them, but the colors were not standing out; they were too muted. We needed another solution.

But paintballs aside for a moment, my assistant props master Alex Wylie and I had two more problems to solve. In the riot as staged, three guys come out and spray-paint blockade walls. Then two more protesters put up four Resist posters. Both things that needed to go up, stay up and then be able to strike easily and cleanly at the end for the next performance.

The posters were easy. We made a wheat paste out of ¼ cup flour to two cups water and brought it to a boil, reduced it, and let it cool. Note that if you don't heat it up to a boil it leaves a milky film over the artwork. I also added some mint oil to the paste since we were outside and don't want to attract raccoons and bugs. The actors slapped the wheat paste on the walls, pop up the posters, and then put more wheat paste over the posters. They would dry by the end of the show but all we had to do was wet them down and they peeled right off.

The spray-paint proved a little more problematic. The posters that were already on the set walls had a thick coating of matte sealer over the top of them so we could spray on them. A few years ago, I worked on the workshop at the Vineyard Theatre of Adam Rapp's *The Metal Children*. We needed to spray-paint on the walls of

that set and used Halloween hair color spray. Since the walls were perfectly smooth, and had a good bit of sealer on them, the actor could come into the hotel room set and spray-paint the walls in huge letters. During intermission the crew sprayed the walls with water with a touch of shampoo and it washed easily away. Boom; done and dusted.

I was expecting the same result outside at the Delacorte Theater. I didn't get it, our test was an utter failure. The plywood of the wall was just too porous and the walls were blue, not tan; the red and yellow colors were just tints and didn't show up at all on the walls or the posters; plus the hair color didn't come off when we tried the black.

I realized I was too confident that my old trick would work and now into tech, I had waited too long to test it. In my excitement about working on show I forgot to stick to the fundamentals—I hadn't done any tests or trials on the surface we were actually using. I thought I had the answers and I was now crestfallen.

Alex then had an inspired idea. What do they spray on soccer pitches and kids football fields?

That stuff has to wash off. We jumped on our computers. It was like a mission critical moment at NASA mission, with both of us yelling back and forth. 'Found it! It's a chalk spray paint! It's on Amazon; we can get it in two days!' 'Oh yeah, I found it in NJ; we can get it tomorrow night!' 'Better, Modell's Sporting Goods has it here in the city, we can get it in the morning!'

It was Testors Spray Chalk. The yellow was outstanding; the blue stood out wonderfully like a sore thumb; and the red worked brilliantly. We let it dry on our test walls, I grabbed a hose and we all crossed our fingers. With the first touch of water it fell off the posters and right onto the ground. The wall and poster looked like it was untouched. I was beside myself and thanked Alex profusely.

As for the massive paintball, we used small water balloons and blue tempera paint. It smashed like a dream and covered the poster with a resounding splat. **S**

