

Robin's Helpful Hints

Otherwise Entitled:

Silly Things to do When Making Miniatures (or What NOT to do)

By Robin Betterley, Bangor, Maine

Let's talk about painting today. I thought this would be a great time to give some tips and techniques on painting as we're getting ready to launch our new spring line. This is a huge topic so I'm only going to focus on a few of the techniques I often use in our kits.

• UNDERPAINTING •

When I refer to underpainting in our miniature kits, most of the time I want you to use white for the first coat of paint or the underpaint, a nice bright white. You probably groan and say something like, "Why does she always want us to use so many coats of paint?" Aside from the usual reason of building up layer after layer for a wonderful finish, there is a reason for undercoating.

As an aside, when I am doing a watercolor painting, I use a shade of blue for an undercoat, putting it only where I want shadows or darkness. It sure looks funny at the stage of only underpainting as the shapes and design begin to show but everything is blue. This method of painting serves me well. When I lay in the next layer of color, that color will pop against the white background and will be muted, shadowed or darker when it is over the blue underpainting. In watercolors, you are working with paint that is inherently transparent or slightly "see through". This is not the case when using acrylic paint, usually opaque, which is most likely what we use when painting miniatures.

Opaque means that the paint should not be see through, or transparent. Higher quality pigments in a given paint give a more dense finish. How often have you squeezed out a dollop of paint, dipped your brush in and with your first stroke you notice that it looks and feels as though some slimy oil has been added? Well, this could happen if the paint needs mixing as it might have some separation of pigments, binder and the slimy stuff which makes the paint flow well. Or if the paint is old, in which case it needs to be pitched. Or sometimes the ratio of the stuff making

up the paint is slanted toward making it less opaque and more transparent or semi-transparent. There is a time when one might need a more transparent paint and most companies will do the courtesy of labeling the paint as such.

So, back to the underpainting. You may be asking why you should undercoat if the paint you will be using is opaque. Well, the reason for it is that the thickness with which you should be painting a miniature piece is fairly thin. Several thin coats are much better than a thick coat or two. This is true for almost everything although there are occasions when you want a thick build up. A thin coat doesn't always mean a watered down coat. What it does mean is that you've brushed the paint out completely, no blobs, runs or holidays. (A holiday, in painting terms, is an area that the paint has skipped over, usually caused by a depression in the surface. I wish it would be a warm tropical place.) When you paint something white, allow it to dry - this part is essential - then add your chosen color over it, your color will be true and uninfluenced by the color of the base material. This is an easy experiment to try so that you see for yourself the differences. The obvious conflicts to the white underpainting would be if you are using black, dark brown, dark green, dark maroon, etc.

• WASH •

Another technique is called a wash. A wash is basically a paint color that has been watered down to a colored water form of the paint. It needs to have enough pigment left to show, but not so much that it obliterates the previous color. You can use any color to make a wash, a light color over a darker, a dark color over a light, it all depends on the final result that you're looking for. If you have a project that has engraved areas, a darker wash over the area will fill the depressions and yet leave the surface relatively unengaged. Sometimes you might use a wash just to soften or break up the solidness of a color.

• RESIST •

A resist employs using a substance that will impede paint from "sticking". It can be lots of fun to do, but you must go into it with an open mind, as the results are not always certain. One of the terms for this type of work would be to use a frisket. These can be in the form of paper or liquid and they work very cleanly and give pretty good control. In batik, a wax is applied as a resist to the areas where you don't want the dye to penetrate. The technique I'm going to talk about it is using Vaseline. The Vaseline would be applied by a brush or cotton swab to the areas where you don't want the paint to stick. By the nature of this substance, you want to use it where the resist is general vs. specific. If you apply it to painted wood, you can then paint somewhat thickly over the area, and then wipe off the excess paint along with the Vaseline. Where the paint is on the Vaseline it will not stick to your surface. This gives a soft look. You can also allow the paint to dry, then wipe off for a totally different look. This will give you harder lines and edges.

You can use this same resist method on printed paper. The idea here is to make the print of the paper fade into the project, softening the lines. It is a look that gives the feeling of restoration and renovation, great for that shabby chic look. If you are not sure about the inks or the paper, I would recommend doing a test sample first to make sure the petroleum doesn't make the inks run or disintegrate. Note: it is safe to use this technique on any of the artwork included in our kits.

Until next time,
Robin

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Check out Robin Betterley Miniatures website: <http://www.robinbetterley.com/>