

Oil painting medium Part 3

Techniques and Procedures

Apparently, there is some gossip that is saying Gandalf is 'not a happy bunny' because we are now well into these tutorials with still no sign of figure painting techniques. And rumour has it that unless I start directly I risk being turned into a slug. So, as I am not really keen to go in the direction of becoming a slug, we will now start to look at the processes, procedures and techniques for painting figures.

Introduction:

To paint figures in oils means learning a completely different technique, and there is no doubt at all that it is quite different to other paint types. The medium that comes closest to oil painting techniques is Enamels in so much that blending can take place for a reasonable length of time, but that's about it. Those of you that paint in Enamels may find some of these techniques familiar and here it's just a case of adjusting to the different media. However, the most immediate differences you will notice is the consistency of the paint, the method of application and it's unique blending properties.

There are really only two methods of painting with oils both of which are related to the consistency of the paint. By this I mean to what degree the paint is thinned prior to use. One school of thought suggests that paint is thinned to the consistency of Enamels and used in much the same manner. On the other hand using paint straight from the tube is the other accepted method. There are of course variations of these two, with painters arguing on what is **the** correct consistency for best results, but (yes you've guessed it) the only one that is 'spot on' is the one **you** use and are happy with.

You may have noticed in previous tutorials I 'hate rules' such as 'must do this' 'never do that' and so on. Art is a very personal thing and when a teacher delivers artistic instruction it is more along the lines of 'suggestions' rather than strict laid down procedures. I have painted figures with oil's for may years and I still don't class myself as an expert because there is always something new comes along. So what follows is an appraisal of the methods, techniques and procedures that work for me when using this medium and I will assume that you have no experience using artist oil colours.

Basic Palette:

This basic pallet is all you need to start painting figures.

- Flake White
- Ivory Black (opp)
- Blue Black
- Burnt Umber
- Yellow Ocher
- Scarlet lake
- Ultramarine Blue
- Prussian Blue (opp)
- Alizarin Crimson
- Chrome Yellow
- Chrome Green
- Burnt sienna

Care and Storage of Paints.

Some oil colours are expensive so it makes sense to look after them. Oil colours will last for years as long as the tube cap is tight and there are no breaks or holes in the tubes and it is probable that you will only ever buy your colours once because they last so long. All you have to do to keep your oils in good condition is keep them cool and clean the top and cap after using them. The latter is important as the paint will clog the tube top and eventually it will 'weld' its self to the tube permanently.

Brushes:

As we have discussed brushes in detail in tutorial 1 all we need concern ourselves with now is care and storage. At the end of your painting session rinse in thinner then in warm soapy water, reshape the point and replace the clear plastic tube to protect the point. Store your brushes point up in a jar or flat in a shallow box.

Thinners:

My techniques for painting with oils uses no thinner at all but if you wish to thin the paint use best quality artists grade turpentine, available in any good art shop. Turpentine has a strong smell and if it bothers you, a low odour product is available. When using turpentine be aware that very little is needed to thin paint. It is also very flammable so if you need a pipe of 'Long Bottom Weed' go out side?

The only thinner I use is white spirit which I use to clean brushes.

Mixing pallet for oils.

As previously discussed oil paints by their very nature contain oil and this property can be a disadvantage. Very oily paint will tend slide about over the area being painted and some of the blending qualities will be lost. When this happens the tendency is to blend away in a forlorn hope of solving the problem, unfortunately the end result will be what I term a 'mud fault' and I will come to that a little later. One method to solve excessive oil is to use a 'cardboard pallet', which will soak up the unwanted oil and make the paint much easier to use. I use 'index record cards' which can be bought cheaply from any good stationery shop. Mixing paint on the card will draw out more oil but be careful not to let it go too far so as it can't be worked. As you gain experience with the medium you will learn which paints are oily and those that are not. For this reason I use a card pallet for the raw paint straight from the tube and ceramic pallet for mixing the latter being nothing more than a white tile or an old CD case.

To illustrate how to apply these techniques and procedures I will explain how this small vignette of two wizards was planed, painted and finished. The project only needs very simple applications of the techniques and procedures as discussed in previous tutorials. Also the main bulk of the painting uses a limited pallet of colours and is a good way to start.

Painting with oils
Project 1

Alatar and Palando

Of the Istari

To the student of J.R.R Tolkien's writings, the 'Istari' or Wizards will be the well known as the characters, Saruman, Radagast and Gandalf, who appear in the classic work The 'Lord of the Rings'. There were however five Istari who arrived in Middle Earth in the year 1000 of the third Age. In his book entitled 'Unfinished Tales' published in 1980 Tolkien gives a collection of narratives ranging from the Elder Days to the end of the War of the Ring which includes an account of the Istari and is the only instance where all five are discussed. In addition to the three above there were the Blue Wizards or 'Ithryn Luin' and are named as Alatar and Palando. They played no part in the Lord of the Rings and all we know is that they were associated with Oromë and they journeyed to the farthest regions of Middle Earth where they remained.

The idea for this small vignette came about when I was reading the Unfinished Tales and discovered two 32mm figures from Mithril Miniatures that I purchased many years ago and although the figures were old they were undamaged and cleaned up nicely. Initially the figures were sold separately but they complemented each other so well the composition of the piece was more or less ready made. I imagined these wizards in dark blue robes and if set in a winter scenic environment would create a strong contrast of colours using a very limited pallet.

For this project I will explain how I painted the various parts of the figures. My usual sequence is to work from top to bottom and from the inside out. The illustration below gives a pictorial summery of the painting process.



Dark blue caps

Faces and skin

White beards

Medium Blue Robes

Red scarf

Polished steel sword

Black staff's

I approached this little project in my usual way of building and finishing the base completely before starting to paint the figures. The Ground work was made with Das cold cure modelling clay and Milliput putty. A very basic foundation base area was made along with some creeping foliage continued around the contour of the display base. More clay was added and smoothed out with a wet brush to create the impression of deep snow. After removing the metal base from the figures I decided on the final positions and pushed them into the wet clay. Once the clay was dry I adjusted the impressions to give a nice tight fit then painted the base with Plaka acrylic giving the snow two relatively thick coats of white and dry brushed the foliage to give a frosted effect. The title plate was made via a computer and printed onto cream coloured paper, cut out with a modelling knife and painted to give an old worn appearance.

Basic Technique

Under painting.

If there is such a thing as a critical factor when painting with oils it has to be the under painting. As we have previously learned oil colour has properties that do not occur in other paint mediums and one is its transparency. If you try to paint directly on a white or grey undercoat you will find yourself in trouble right at the start of your painting session. To achieve a solid covering with a paint that has a high transparency such as Alizarin Crimson will take many layers resulting in a surface that is more or less impossible to work with. To avoid this problem we have to follow a procedure that will make the colour work properly, and this means under painting correctly. To do this the under painting has to match the finished colour so when laying in the oil colour its transparency will act in your favor. This does not mean you have to spend hours mixing colours, all that is needed is a reasonably match. I always keep my under painting on the bright side so the finished colours will give a warm finish, if you prefer a darker finish then under paint with darker tones. I use Pelikan Plaka Acrylic's for my under painting although I have to say that these produce a surface that is not that easy to work with as they tend to soak up the oil colour rather quickly. For the novice I suggest using another brand such as Andrea or Vallejo Vinyl Acrylic Paints. Always allow your under painting to fully dry before starting on the finishing oil colours.

Laying in the base oil colour:

I paint my figures exclusively with artist oil colours using them straight from the tube without any thinner. The technique is to lay in a base colour first *then using a dry soft brush, remove the excess paint until only a very thin, smooth covering remains.* The painted area is then left to set for about 15 minutes after which the shading and highlighting is applied allowing the paint to set again from time to time. To avoid waiting time I always paint 2 or 3 figures at a time. I find the key to using oil colours in this fashion is the smoothing out process and giving the paint time to set. Oil colour dries by oxidation and the short setting time starts the process working which in turn allows the paint to become more controllable.

Mikes Mud Fault

Before we get started lets discuss what I call, the 'mud fault'. One of the biggest problems that I've seen with oils is overloading the brush. Because of its consistency and texture it's easy to put too much paint on the model and you end up shoving a lump of paint all over the place. Eventually all the colours blend together and you end up with varying degrees of mud. So you have to learn to judge the amount you need much more than with other paints. The placement of colour onto the figure is very much a case of a 'little goes a long, long, way'.

Painting The Faces and Skin Tones:

Not 'fleshes precious' paint **Skin Tones !!!** you get flesh from a butcher!

To paint the skin tones you will need the following colours:

- Burnt Umber.
- Titanium white
- Yellow ochre
- Burnt sienna

The faces and hands were given base coat of burnt umber well applied and smoothed out. Next remove the excess paint with a clean (size 1) dry brush pulled across the area, leaving dark colour in the shadow areas and a thin stain on the highlights. The colour I use for skin tones uses a base of titanium white mixed with yellow ochre and blushed with small amounts of burnt sienna and a little burnt umber. The faces on these figures are very small due to the beards and facial hair and only a small amount of skin tone was needed. Finish with a little crimson for the lips, white and a dot of blue for the eyes. The beard, hair and eyebrows were painted light grey left to dry then highlighted with titanium white.

Painting Cloth

The base colour for the robes is a mix of ultramarine blue, a small amount of Prussian blue then darkened to the required shade with blue black. This was applied as previously described then shaded with straight blue black and highlighted with progressively lighter tones of the base colour finishing with white smoothing, thinning and blending as each layer is applied. The cloak and hats used a mix ultramarine and blue black to give an indigo tone, then shaded with straight blue black and highlighted with titanium white.

The scarf was given a base coat only with a mix of scarlet lake and crimson darkened with a little Chrome Green, Oil paint reds are difficult colours to work with, if lightened with white the colour turns pink and darkened with black a dirty brown is the result, also reds take a long time to dry so the shading was left for later attention. All the colours were then allowed to dry and cure for 24 hours. The scarf was still workable the next day so a darker tone of the base colour was used for the shades and lemon yellow with a touch of white for the highlights.

The remaining staffs and sword scabbard had a base coat of blue black with a touch of lamp black then highlighted with grey mixed from the base colour and white. Finally the cords around the waste were painted white with a little shading where necessary.

Drying time:

Unlike acrylic paints, oil paints dry by oxidation instead of the evaporation of water. This means that oxidation chemically changes the paint's composition by absorbing oxygen from the atmosphere. No advice here except patience but if you're already a model builder and painter patience will be an attribute you already have. Placing your figures in a warm dry place helps and some will dry perfectly well overnight. Reds and white are the slowest. The up side of this is that you can work on a figure for many hours even days.

Glossy finish problem:

There is no doubt that some oil colours dry with a semi gloss finish and if left untreated can spoil a model. However, as your skill develops you will begin to observe that thin layers well blended and smoothed will invariably cure this problem. When painting this project no attempt other than correct technique was used to obtain a matt finish on the figures. Only the scarf's have a slight sheen on the finish, which is due to reds being a difficult colour to work with.

Painting Black:

The small amount of black used in the project was a simple application of black highlighted with greys and whites. This is fine for small parts but if your figure is clothed with black garments then a different technique should be used. A straight black base colour highlighted with greys and white will look 'flat and lifeless' so to gain a little sparkle dark browns can be used along with other dark colours. Adding a little red, blue, or green to make your black warmer, or cooler, and to take away that flat, papery appearance it has when applied to a large area. A black garment is not truly black all over; it has lights, shadows, and reflections that break it into many different shades. Too much white in any colour makes it what I call "chalky," a fully descriptive expression, because such colours do appear to have been smeared with white chalk.

Remember that when painting with oils 'black is not really black' at all it is just a very dark colour. Try these mixes to create dark clothing:

- Burnt Umber with a little Prussian blue.
- Burnt Sienna with a little lamp black and Prussian blue.
- Burnt Umber, Alizarin Crimson and Green.

A simple technique for black clothing:

1. Under paint with black acrylic to give a sound opaque covering.
2. Lay in your dark colour and smooth out to a thin stain.
3. Dry allowing the paint to fully cure overnight.

4. Lighten your dark base colour with white.
5. Load the tip of a moist brush with your light colour and paint onto the highlight areas. Allow to set for a few minutes then blend the edges using a fine dry brush.

Hints and Tips:

When working with artists oils keep the following in mind. Here are some common faults and remedies:

Fault:	Remedy:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excessive paint on the figure: 	Use less paint on the brush. Load the tip of the brush only. Spread out thinly. Use a second dry brush if necessary.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greasy consistency: 	Too much oil, place colour on a card pallet. Allow the paint more time to set. Occurs if paint is thinned with oil.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of tone: 	Don't over blend the edges. Use less shading. Let the paint set first.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of control: 	Remove some colour with a dry brush. Paint is too oily remove the colour and start again. Don't over blend the colours. Let the paint set prior to blending
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Runny consistency: 	Don't use brushes that are still moist with thinners. Use dry brushes only.

What if it all goes horribly wrong ?

Identify and evaluate what went wrong and learn by the experience. is the simple answer. If necessary make some notes to refer to next time. This medium takes time to learn but it is worth the trouble in the end. Oils can make figures glow and the colours if used properly can add a touch of realism that other mediums cannot.

Finally, one of the advantages of oil paint means disasters can be easily remedied by removing the paint with paint stripper and start again.

Summery:

There is not much more that I can say on painting with artists oils other than practice to get a feel of the medium. If there is any one part of the technique I would single out for special attention it has to be the amount of paint you use. Keep the layers thin and don't forget to smooth out with a dry brush. There is no doubt that users of acrylics will find this medium very different, and it will take time to learn the techniques and procedures, but after a few practice runs the learning curve will start to yield some positive results. For my part I love painting with oil colour, the diversity of colour and the brush control of the medium and gives me what seems to be an endless variety of options.

Introduction to part 4.

Here I will discuss other options to consider with regard oil paints and some of the more modern developments with the media. Traditional artist oils are not the only type of this medium available to the figure painter. Two in particular are well worth experimenting with.

As usual with these tutorials, if you have any comments or questions related to the contents you can e-mail at mike@bunn955.wanadoo.co.uk and I will do my best to answer your queries and provide further guidance. In the mean time, I hope you will find something useful here that will enhance your knowledge, skills and techniques and give you encouragement to try my approach to this subject.

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Mike