

Painting with Enamels

Methods and techniques for painting figures with enamel modeling paints.

Part of this tutorial is derived from an article by Marijn Von Gils Published in a recent copy of Military Modelling so I can't claim exclusive credit for this technique.

Taking into account all the different types of modeling we have today the paint mediums most commonly used is probably Enamels followed closely by Acrylic.

Enamels are popular for their ease of use, colour range, opaque nature and they dry to a dead matt finish. For the figure modeler these paints lend themselves well to the methods and techniques we employ and some very good models have won competitions using this media alone.

What are Enamels.

Enamel modelling paint is a oil/solvent-based medium with a high ratio of pigment giving considerable covering power. Humbrol is the most readily recognised manufacturer but there are others and most paints are available at your local hobby shop. Enamel adheres well to primed metal and will not dissolve other paints. The first time user will notice straight away when opening the tin that all he can see is a golden coloured oil with no pigment. Like most paints enamels tend to separate out during storage with the bound pigment settling to the bottom with the oil/solvent floating on the top. This is normal and one of the characteristics of this sort of paint and can in certain circumstances be an advantage to the user. On the other hand it can be a pain, because the paint will steadily thicken over time and you end up with a large lump in the bottom of the tin. Enamels are well suited to under painting, washes and dry brushing. Drying time is relatively quick although 24hr is needed for the paint to fully cure. Enamels are thinned with white spirit or turpentine.

Just a thought - Is there anybody out there that has, in all honesty used a full tin of enamel rather than half a tin because the rest has solidified to a useless goo. because I aint that's for sure ?

Clean up.

Clean up is relatively straight forward with brushes being cleaned with white spirit then rinsed in warm soapy water. Try to keep the lids clean around the rim and make sure the tins are well sealed after use.

Priming and under painting.

Once your figure has been prepared for painting 'give it a good wash' using a tooth brush and washing up liquid then pat dry with a clean cloth. I use this procedure as a 'safety thing' to make sure that all traces of grease from hands and tools is removed.

Black, white, or grey primer.

A thousand answers exist for this one. The best advice available seems to be use what you prefer. White primer makes colours go on brighter and is best for anything on which you want that effect. Black primer gives good shadows and is commonly used. Grey is rather neutral allowing for brighter light colours and decent shading. The best tip so far is to experiment and see what you like. To prime my figures I use a thinned coat of white enamel and allow to dry overnight to fully cure. I personally feel the primer coat has no magic attached to it as its only there to give the under paint something to adhere to.

I always under paint my figures with two thinned coats of acrylic to the nearest colour match of the final coat. By using acrylic there is no chance of the undercoat 'lifting' whilst working later. As a further precaution a give the acrylic 24hr to fully cure.

Thinning.

When working I always have two jars of thinner, one to rinse brushes and one clean one for thinning. The basic procedure is to firstly to keep the paint consistency reasonably thin but not too much that it will effect the opaque nature of the medium. You will find that thinning will be an ongoing process when painting with this medium due to the tendency of the paint to dry on the pallet and thicken. Keep the paint sufficiently thin so it will flow naturally from the brush.

one way to use enamels is not very different from the acrylic technique, but enamels have the advantage that they can be blended, a characteristic that I mainly use to refine lines, and to correct mistakes and small imperfections. The basic sequence is to highlight first with more opaque paint, after which the shadows are added with very diluted transparent paint.

Highlights

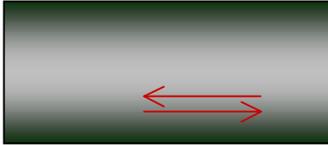
Once the base-coat has fully dried (at least four hours, or even better overnight), apply a slightly thinned coat of the same base-colour. let this coat dry until it just looks dry, but hasn't hardened; a couple of minutes at most. Next, mix the first highlight colour, thin it down so it flows nicely from the brush, but is still thick enough to give good covering power, and apply it to the surface. I try to build up the effect slowly (about four to six passes with gradually lighter tones) and apply the paint as precisely as possible, so the need for blending is minimized. using a clean brush with a minimal amount of white spirit in it (wipe very well on a rag to get rid of any excess) in a very gentle streaking motion with the tip of the brush. This will cause the highlight coat, as well as the base-coat to slightly dissolve again, resulting in a nice blend of the two tones. Fig 1. This blending is the key to successfully painting with enamels, unfortunately if your blending brush is even slightly too moist both base coat and the highlights will liquefy and melt into each other. When that happens curse and swear like a demented Ork as normal, then settle down and remove all of the semi dry paint with a large moist brush, let it dry then start again.

A



Fig 1

B



Two methods of blending enamel paint, use which ever is comfortable for you. Keep the strokes sort for 'A' and long for 'B'.

Shadows:

Applying shadows is usually done in two stages: first, the extreme hard shadows, and then all the rest. The extreme shadows are almost pure black and can be found under collars, lining belts, around buttons, etc. Since they are often very fine lines. Make a lot of use of your clean brush moistened with white spirit to correct any imperfections. The medium shadows are now painted with very transparent coats of very diluted paint. Instead of using four or five gradually darker paint mixes, limit yourself to just two, three at the most building up the effect by layering and varying the consistency and thus the covering power of the paint. Blending is mostly avoided, but sometimes used to correct any imperfection.

Conclusion:

Painting with enamels is not so different from painting with artist oils with the exception of not having the transparent colours to work with. Some really good effects can be achieved with this paint medium mainly due to the fact you have some blending time available. You will not that I have not included a section on dry brushing the reason being that I do not like it and never will. It's ok on bases and ground work but not on figures because it makes the finish look messy second rate. But if it works for you then use it.

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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