

CHAPTER 6

Enamels / Gouaches / Acrylics

In this chapter will be discussed the methods of painting a flat figure using enamels, acrylics and gouaches. I must confess that I don't have a lot of experience from these 3 mediums. So only a brief discussion will take place. For more information about each method I will point out the appropriate reading.

Starting with enamels, there are a lot of resemblances with oils but there is a big difference. While oils need hours or even days to cure so they are still workable, enamels have a much shorter drying time, making things a bit more difficult. When painting with enamels never use the paint straight from the little tin jar. Instead, take a small quantity of paint from the bottom of the jar to your palette and add 1-2 drops of thinner to make a workable mix. It is recommended to use the specific thinner each brand has for its colors. When the new mix is ready and homogenous apply one or two thin coats of the base coat to the figure and let it thoroughly dry. Next day, prepare a shadow mix from the base coat plus the darker tones appropriate from each color. Its very important to make this mixture very diluted and apply it in all the areas that will be in shadow, folds, creases and so on. If paint is not diluted enough you will end up painting dark brash strokes which is not what we are after. Dip the tip of the brush into white spirit and whip it of onto a tissue paper and blend the edges of the shadow color and base coat to get a smooth transition between colors. You may need to do this step more than once, in small

increments so you get the shadow color gradually. When this is dried make a light mixture from the base color plus some lighter tones appropriate for each color you paint and apply them thinned onto the areas that will be highlighted. Do the above technique to smooth the borders of the base color and the highlights. Now the figure has its base color, shadow and high lights applied. You may need to repeat the shadow and highlight steps for more contrast between shadows and lights. Don't underestimate any painting medium. Many people think that oils is the only paint that should be used if an artistic result is what is after. This not true. Bill Horan, Mike Blank or Dough Cohen use enamels exclusively on their round figures with spectacular results. For specific techniques about enamels I strongly recommend Bill Horan's or Mike Blank's books. See Appendix 2.

Gouache is the next examined color of this chapter. It's a not very known painting medium used mainly by the advertisement business. I have never used it, nor I have seen how it looks like at the shops. I have seen painted examples of flat figures though, that are



really amazing at the same level with figures painted with oils or other

mediums. For this I will include a very informative article written by a member of British Flat Figure Society, Simon Hoggett, of which I am a member also.

“Painting Flat Figures in Gouache by Simon Hoggett.”

It is generally accepted that you paint flat figures in oil paints. Well, that's all very well but what happens if you can't paint with oils to save your life? This article will look at one possible alternative that you might not have considered - Designers Gouache Oil paint! I never could get to grips with the horrible stuff, despite studying art to A level standard at school and later doing graphic design at university. Whatever it was that you needed to be able to achieve success with the medium, I just didn't have it! Perhaps it was my lack of patience. Maybe it was the fact that I never knew when to stop fiddling, until the whole lot blended into a uniform brown colour. Of course, if I'd restricted myself to painting figures of female mud wrestlers I could have been a master of the genre. As it was, my efforts looked simply awful. So, the oil paints went in the dustbin, taking a well-deserved place next to the empty tins of cat food and baked beans. I had to find something else. To be honest, when I started modelling it didn't matter much. I was building Historex kits straight out of the packet, armed only with a blunt craft knife and a tube of glue. Not for me the finely customised masterpieces of Bill Ottinger or Shep Paine. Most of mine looked like extras in Dawn of the Dead. As for painting, a quick coat of Humbrol usually did the trick, plus a few rash experiments with acrylics with invariably bad results. The family yawned with indifference which I happily mistook for stunned admiration. Ah, those were the days! But then I discovered flat figures, or re-discovered them really because I had a small collection from my childhood. At that time, my aunt, who was quite a catch on account of the fact that she ran a pub, was energetically courted by the dubious owner of the local militaria shop. As part of his valiant campaign to win her hand in marriage he showered her favourite nephew (me, of course) with gifts of flat soldiers and military books. Unfortunately, she dumped him in favour of her life-long love affair with gin and cigarettes. He sold up and disappeared without trace, broken hearted but no doubt consoled by a fair chunk of her savings.

French Line Chasseurs from



Glorious Empires painted in gouache by Simmon Hoggett.

But I digress. In the early 1990s I began to see beautifully flat figures in the magazines and shows and I was instantly hooked. Flats are like that. It's an instant thing. You either love them or hate them. I loved them. The childhood figures, with bent weapons and broken limbs, injuries sustained in a disastrous skirmish with Action Man in the early 1960s, were marched out from the dark recesses of the attic and became the basis for a new collection. New purchases were added and I started to face the

problem of how to paint them. It's the painting that makes flats come alive and Humbol just doesn't cut it for me. It's too flat, especially on horses. I tried again with acrylics but that didn't work for me either, especially as I failed to screw the tops on the tubes properly and they all went rock-hard overnight. My options were disappearing fast.

Then I remembered Designers Gouache. (Remember, this is an article about gouache!) I had used this regularly whilst at college and for a short while afterwards when working in design studios. This was in the days before computers and all design and artwork had to be done by hand. Whilst rubbing down the Letreset and inhaling Cow Gum fumes I had gained a reasonable competence with the stuff.

It's a water-based paint, but more opaque than standard watercolours. Lots of watercolour painters use it, especially White, to beef up their paints and add highlights. Hence, a traditional name for gouache is 'body colour'. You can find them in all good art shops and most of the bad ones as well. They come in tubes which cost an arm and a leg, but they are a lot cheaper than oil paints. The two main manufacturers are Winsor & Newton and Daler Rowney. Although, there isn't a huge amount to choose between them, I happen to prefer the Winsor & Newton. I find that there's something

odd about the consistency of some of the Daler Rowney colours, although that could be my imagination. But I don't like the horrible stripy design on the tubes anyway. I tend to use a fairly small palette, mainly because I'm a cheapskate, but you do have to watch the transparency and permanence of some of the more obscure colours. Check the label codes closely before splashing out a few quid on some beautiful shade of red that will vanish faster than the pies at the weight-watchers Christmas party. There are several blacks and whites available but personally I prefer Ivory Black and Zinc White because they are most versatile. Avoid Lamp Black like the plague because it is far too 'sooty'. The other colours I use are: Burnt Umber, Burnt Sienna, Yellow Ochre, Prussian Blue, Ultramarine Blue, Cadmium Yellow Pale, Spectrum Red, Scarlet Lake, Red Ochre and Paynes Grey. I also use a tube of watercolour called Neutral Tint which is really useful for shading white.

French Line Lancers by Thiel
painted in designers gouache by
Simon Hoggett.



You will notice that the names of the colours are the same as oils. This means that you can take advantage of all the wonderful colour mix recommendations you find in this magazine. In fact, my colour mixing bible isn't for gouache painters at all. It is the "Oil Painter's Pocket Palette" by Rosalind Cuthbert. If you haven't got a copy of this, I advise you to rush out and bag one right now. This is not an article on how to paint flats. This isn't the place for learned thoughts about chiaroscuro, directional and reflected light sources, trompe l'oeil effects etc. I will leave that

to other more skilled exponents. But I thought I'd share some of my experiences with gouache. A few slightly different techniques are needed to gain a level of success. As with all flats, the first thing to do is get rid of all the flash on the shiny metal figure and cut off any extra limbs on 'combination figures'. Some flats have more arms than a Hindu god, which allows you to create several different figures from the same master. Pure genius isn't it? The cleaning up should be done with a sharp knife and some mouse-tail files. I would also advise having a damp cloth and a glass of brandy close by. The cloth is for wiping up the blood when you plunge the knife in your hand and the brandy is, of course, for purely medicinal purposes. Many flats painters will tell you not to worry unduly about minor pitting in the surface of the figure because the paint will fill it. Well, oil paint might but gouache won't, so you need to make sure they're filled. The figure then needs undercoating. There are several options here. You can spray it with Car Primer but if you don't shake the can well, it comes out like all blotchy like fake snow. This is not an ideal starting point, so shake it until your arm drops off and you have a migraine from listening to the ball-bearing rattling around inside. I recommend that you spray the figure outside in the garden and particularly suggest that you void using it on the dining room table because the paint is a devil to get off the polished wood and all the inhaled fumes make you fall over a lot. Not that I've tried this, you understand. Honest! Some people undercoat with Skull White paint from Citadel Miniatures. If you've got any left over from painting your skeleton army then use that, but otherwise I would recommend Humbrol Matt White enamel, which you should thin down so it doesn't clog up the fine detail on the figure. Many people use two coats of this, allowing it to dry between coats. They say they like the pure white base to work on. I personally only use one coat and work on a figure that is dull and grey to match my winning personality.

Medieval peasants by Golberg
painted by Simon Hoggett



The real problem with gouache is getting it to key to the figure at all. If there is any grease on it at all, then you haven't got a hope in hell. Even the slightest fingerprint will give you serious problems. So the first thing to do is to de-grease it. To do this, I dip the whole figure in a vinegar bath. There's nothing special about the vinegar - I use the regular brown stuff that I put on my fish 'n' chips. I know it sounds bizarre, but it works. I then attach the figure to an old poster paint jar which I use as a holder, without ever touching it with my fingers, and allow it to dry off. I am now ready to paint.

Getting the consistency of the paint right is important. You mix in the water until you've got something that approaches the consistency of single cream. This will be fine for blocking in colours. For the intricate bits you might want it to be a bit thicker, which will allow you to put in fine detail such as braiding and buttons. Because gouache dries quickly, you can add detail in light colours such as white and yellow straight on to dark colours like Black and Prussian Blue only minutes after you have painted it. That means that you can paint a complete figure at one sitting if you've got nothing better to do for nine or ten hours. No more waiting for stuff to dry. On the other hand you can return to a delicate blending job weeks after you've put the initial colours in place.

Gouache dries to a slightly different shade than when it's wet, so you need to compensate for this. Come to think of it, do all paints do that? I'm not sure. Answers on a postcard, please. Anyway, I don't even think about it. It just seems to work. However, you do have to watch it when you're shading and highlighting, because what looks like a slightly lighter mix of your base colour can look much lighter when it's dry.

Shading takes some practice but is very achievable. This is how I do it. I lay down the base colour first and then create a slightly darker mix to block in the shadows. To get rid of the hard edge between the shades, I then take a damp brush (not wet, or you'll take the paint off, which is not quite a disaster but comes pretty close) and feather the edge, blending the darker shade into the base colour. Having done this I mix another darker shade and repeat the process until I am happy that I have the 'depth' I need. The more steps you take the better the result. I tend to go for about three or four. I then use the same process for

the highlights, blending the edges of progressively lighter mixes of the base colour until I'm satisfied - or bored.

A flat-collecting colleague recently said "but surely they aren't waterproof?" Well, true, but this hasn't been a problem since I stop playing with them in the shower! Seriously though, most collectors mount their figures in frames or box dioramas, or display them in cabinets. So, I don't think that their failings in the waterproof department is really a problem. Okay, they won't take rough handling but who's going to do that anyway? If you really must, you can protect the painted figures by spraying them with a matt varnish. This works well, but it does change some of the colours slightly, which can be pretty irritating so I recommend that you do some tests first. I'm not claiming the gouache is the best paint to use on flats. If you're getting good results already, then fine. However, if you struggle with oil paints, why not give it a try. It does work. Well, you can judge for yourselves, from the pictures with this article. Okay, so I'm no Michael Taylor or Ken Pipe but I have achieved a standard that I'm happy with."

Acrylics is another option someone has to consider. They have become a trend lately by the Spanish school of artists and many people use them exclusively for their work. When you get the feel of it, it can become a tremendously artistic medium producing amazing results. Since I never seriously used them in any other way other than undercoating (although I tried a couple of times), I will include an excellent article of Mario Fuentes in this chapter explaining how you can get amazing results using this type of painting medium. Although the article is written with round figures as examples, same techniques apply to our flat figures with minor modifications due to scale or the obvious difference of three dimensionality.

http://www.tfxmedia.com/vallejo/cgi-bin/_modelis.asp?p1=ing&p2=modelcolortecnicas



Above:

Napoleonic Officers. 54 mm flat figures from Glorious Empires painted in acrylics.