

## Mithril Modelling Guides

Although I have had some experience with Acrylics I cannot admit to having extensive skills, therefore I have asked David Daines to write this tutorial. David is an accomplished figure painter with considerable experience in painting figures of all scales. His work with Mithril 32mm figures can be seen in the Mithril Gallery. His latest piece of 'Halbarad' is a wonderful example of a figure painter's skills and includes some water effects using clear casting resins. David works almost exclusively with acrylics and has developed some unusual techniques using chalk pastels.

### Acrylic painting medium

Using modern water based Acrylic paints and other media.

By

David Daines

As part of Mike Bunn's excellent new series on 'how to do it', Mike has kindly invited me to write a small article on the use of acrylic/water based paints including the use of chalk pastels.

As a UK collector of various kits/figurines ranging from Mithril Miniatures to large scale vinyl and resin 'Garage' kits, *AND* being an extremely impatient modeller of the 'let's get this one finished so I can start on the next one' mentality, I need to work with a medium that does not require long drying times and can achieve results fast! For me water based acrylics fit the bill perfectly.



I would point out that for my part this is not an endorsement of any particular brand, nor is it a 'how to do it' exercise, I firmly believe that the only 'way to do it' is by experimentation and personal choice; use articles such as this as a guide rather than the law (that way you can't blame me if it goes wrong!). Some paints mentioned may not be true acrylics – I really do not know what the difference is between an acrylic and gouache, and why some 'acrylics' seem to paint without a problem whilst others do everything but give problem free results. I would also mention that the products mentioned are those that are, or have been available at some time or another in the UK, but I suspect that in most cases availability is worldwide.

Why acrylics? Well as mentioned sadly I fall into the impatient painter category and try as I might, I have never been able to master the use of oils or successfully blend enamels anywhere near to the standard the experts in this field achieve, or to the standard I would expect of myself if using these paints. But this is only part of the reason.

Some of you like myself may not restrict yourself to metal figures or resin miniatures and may also build and paint large scale figures many of which are made from a semi-soft plastic material called 'vinyl'.

Whilst I enjoy the medium of vinyl one drawback that is constantly mentioned is the type of paint *NOT* to be used, i.e. anything other than water-based, so I have been rather forced down the acrylic path as much as anything else (although I personally think this is a manufactures' disclaimer more than anything else). But as these articles will appear on the Mithril Miniatures/Prince August web sites I will restrict myself to their use on the figures closest to our hearts which are of course white metal.

## **Paints.**

So what brands of paint are out there? Well to be honest there are so many brands of paint available some aimed at the figure hobby market, some at painting pictures, some are general purpose, the list goes on, and if you are unsure of which brand to go for perhaps invest in one or two pots, tubes or tubs and see how you like them, or read articles, ask other painters what their favourite brand is and why.

My own favourites have changed as I find newer brands that I like, but in the past I have used the following brands quite extensively:

- Games Workshop (GW) – these have tended to be a 'work-horse' paint for me although I rarely buy the figures, but I did find they produced a batch that seemed to dry out within a few months unlike their original paints, which have remained *paint* for years. The latest mix seems to be ok however. GW paints also have complimentary inks to use with them for washes, fine lining etc.
- Humbrol Acrylics – these were (and hopefully still are) a nice paint to work with providing a wide variety of colours and generally giving a nice matt finish. I have no experience of the gloss finish paint.
- Vallejo Vinyl Acrylic Paints – I have just started using these and so far I like them a lot, not least because you only need to squeeze a small drop out. Like GW they also have a range of complimentary inks. I have read that the metallic paints may not have performed too well but I can't comment, as I haven't used any. These, without endorsement are now my paint of choice.
- Tamiya Acrylic, apart from Clear Red for blood and gore, this is best used through an airbrush on larger kits, unless you can enlighten me on how to paint it without the paint streaking. This is classed as acrylic but has its own thinner and cleaning fluid. Other 'Clear' colours can be used effectively for shadowing and sealing armour, just be careful with applying it especially by brush as it can cause other paints to bleed.
- Artists water colours, i.e. Daler Rowney, Winsor & Newton (go for the best you can afford, i.e. Artist and not Student) – I find water colours quite useful for painting fine detail and enabling blending of colours. One word of advice, and it may be worth bearing this in mind for any medium, is to test for light fastness and waterproof finish. Some paints will fade with exposure to light and some may not dry 100% waterproof. *I have been there!*

- Freak Flex – from Badger, this is thinned acrylic very useful for airbrushing but also handy for Mithril's. I've not tried it for block painting on a large scale so I can't vouch for its coverage abilities but I have painted it on by brush.

I have used other brands with varying results so try to use a paint that suits your own tastes, needs and budget.

It's worth noting that technically speaking you only need the following paints as a minimum requirement.

- Red.
- Blue.
- Yellow.

These are the three primary colours from which all other colours derive, add to that

- black
- white

Some metallic paints, usually gold, silver and perhaps copper or bronze, and that should be as good a starting place as any. But you won't be happy with that for sure!

Keep in mind though that most of the manufactures have ranges in excess of 200 colours; great if you can afford it *AND* difficult to resist even if you can't!

As you build your paint collection you will probably want to add some grey, brown, purple, green, and flesh tones as at the end of the day it will save the need to mix and match previously mixed shades. Like most paints correct storage is important to prolong their life-span and various tricks can be applied such as keeping the lid free from excess paint and preventing air getting in.

### **Inks.**

Basically I find inks to be useful for applying a wash to a figure. A 'wash' can best be described as just that and I have found that it is useful for creating shadows, bringing out highlights and useful for fine line painting; see the following passage for more detail on washes. Quite often the colours available will match the paints they are designed to compliment. Inks are also useful for colouring those tiny spots of figure that you may have missed with the paint.

Last but not least is the use of **Chalk Pastels**. Not an acrylic, but a VERY useful medium.

For those who admire the subtle shades achieved by the airbrush but do not own one, pastels can offer a cheaper alternative and indeed can be more easily adapted to the smaller Mithril scale.

To use pastels the basic principles are as follows:

Firstly experiment with the medium. Like most techniques pastels do require some understanding, for example when I first started using them I had applied some nice effects to a figure, they really gave it a nice blended look, but when I applied a spray sealant lo and behold the colours vanished. Why? Well a basic rule that seems to apply is that you can successfully use a dark pastel on a light background, but reverse the process and once the sealant goes on that's it, effect lost. You could take the chance of not sealing the pastel, but I do not think the risk is worth it to see a miniature ruined by careless handling.

I tend to use chalk pastels and like paints and brushes, the better the quality that you can afford generally speaking the better they are, but you may find cheap pastels that do the job just as well. I haven't tried oil pastels to date so cannot comment on their suitability.



To apply pastels the figure should ideally not have any gloss sealant applied, you may get away with matt sealant between coats, but do experiment first.

Take the pastel stick and rub it over some sand paper so that a good residue is left behind then using a brush (that you will never be able to use for painting again!) pick up some of the colour and brush it into the areas you want to colour. You may be left with a miniature with

coloured dust on it but you should be able to blow it away so it cleans up (try and avoid getting spittle on the figure as it will clog the pastel up).

Keep repeating this until the desired effect is achieved and you will be surprised at the subtle results that you can achieve. Pastels can be mixed to achieve different shades.

When you have finished apply a SPRAY sealant and admire.

### **Techniques.**

I said this would not be a 'How to do it' article as such so I will really just explain some of the basic techniques I use, and again I urge you to develop your own preferences based on my comments.

When painting a figure as a general rule I usually prime with white, even Mithril Miniatures so that less opaque colours don't become 'muddied' or have to have several coats applied; yellow and red seem particularly weak in this respect. This isn't a hard and fast rule and many figures are painted directly over the grey undercoat.

If possible I will start by painting a figure including skin tones in the same order as getting dressed, and again where possible painting weaker colours first. If it is a horse, then I will block in the main colour first. My method is to try and get as much paint on the figure as I can, by that I mean paint as many different areas as possible so that I can maintain interest and also get a feel for how the finished figure will look.

Once a figure is blocked in with colours I will then try and add the finer details such as eyes although now (due to age!) I find it easier to give the impression of the figure having eyes that try to paint them in.

Once I used to always paint the face first to give some life to the miniature, but nowadays I paint this at any stage - it doesn't seem too important.

Once all the fine detail is added I might highlight the figure with a dry-brush technique to highlight raised detail and this is simply a case of using a fairly large brush with short bristles. The technique involves wiping most of the paint off on a cloth or kitchen towel then lightly flicking over the surface of the figure to bring out the raised details. This does take practice but once mastered the effect can be very pleasing.

Once upon a time every figure I painted was dry-brushed with Citadel Rotten Flesh because for me it seemed to work.

Depending on your preferred techniques you may choose to give the figure a wash with ink or thinned down paint bearing in mind that if you apply a wash after the dry-brushing then you will probably alter the colour of the highlights. Sometimes it doesn't matter that much, the effects can still be just as pleasing.

Talking of washes this is something that I find can be a very hit and miss affair, sometimes it seems to work just fine, at other times you can be forgiven for wondering why did you bother, when the wash appears streaky and not at all as you imagined it would look, but I have settled on what to me seems to give a pleasing effect and that is to use a thinned down wash of Folk Art's Liquorice paint. I tend to apply this wash once everything is done and I've identified any areas where the paint may have missed.



Why this colour, well I really don't know it just seems right for me and I'm happy with the results as it seems to work with most figures although for the pale limbs of an Elven princess it may be just too much darkness.

You can make washes from a paint as well and it is just a matter of getting the consistency right to suit your needs. I have found that if a wash is applied after a figure has been sealed it can be blended by using a weak car windscreen wash mix and the edges can be blended in quite nicely. My own experience of using washes is that they seem to bring a lustre to certain colours.

I have had little luck in blending acrylic paints even when using a damp brush and watered down paint!

So that gives an introduction to the paints, inks and pastels don't forget that all important work tool:

### **Brushes.**

As always buy the best you can afford and look after them well. A water-based paint can ruin a good brush just as easily as a solvent based paint if you do not look after them. I have seen it suggested somewhere that man-made (fibre) brushes can suffer if used with water-based paints. I don't know how true this is but you may wish to bear this in mind. Of course, if you can afford it acquire a separate set of brushes for metallic paint (as well as a separate water jar).

Don't forget if you 'ruin' a brush, don't chuck it, you may be able to use it for pastels or even dry-brushing both of which I have covered.

As a rule you do not need to have every size of brush the important thing is that you keep it clean and look after it. fine lines can be painted using 'large' brushes.

Well folks, that about sums up this article. I hope the information is useful and as I said before I have tried to steer clear of the in depth "How to do it" approach and have deliberately avoided any 'in progress' figures to illustrate the points. This is about practice and experimentation.

### **ONE FINAL POINT (or two).**

I often have painters come up to me and say "I wish I could paint figures like yours" (I often wish I could paint figures like theirs!). All I would say to anyone who enjoys the collecting and painting of miniatures is to do just that – ENJOY THE COLLECTING AND PAINTING for the fun and pleasure of it, don't be so self-critical that you lose the enjoyment.

I personally think that one of the best secrets to successful painting is to know when enough is enough! Just because you have 200+ colours to choose from doesn't mean that you have to try and use them all on one figure.

I hope you have found the article informative, for some it will be nothing new, but others who are new to the hobby may be in a better position to proceed with their next project. Images of my Mithril figures can be found in the Fans Gallery section under David Daines, where I regularly send Micheal O'Brien the latest creations.

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**Many thanks to David** for this contribution to our series, which gives us more techniques to try. His use of pastels is a new technique to me and I have bought a few to experiment with on my next figure.

In his writing David asks the question what is the difference between Acrylic and Gouache? also why some Acrylic present problems when applied to figures and especially large surface? So here are a few notes, which may help you to understand this medium.

### ***What is Gouache.***

*Gouache is not an acrylic it is a heavy, opaque watercolour paint, which has been used for centuries in fine art and in design applications. It results in figures painted with the medium that are richly and vividly coloured. Gouache consists of pigments in a water-soluble binder called Gum Arabic with preservative and plasticiser called Glycerine. Gouache is thinned with water, the same as watercolour or acrylic paint and can be intermixed with other water/acrylic mediums.*

*After gouache has dried, it can be re-wetted - this is because there is no chemical change during the drying process. While this makes it convenient to rework a figure, it also makes the work vulnerable to water damage. Water resistance can be achieved by adding small amounts of acrylic matt medium. Care needs to be taken, however, as some colours can change or darken.*

*The pigments in gouache are of various types. Some are natural products, such as earths, umbers and ochres, while others come from metal (cadmium, cobalt, titanium) compounds and are referred to as 'traditional' pigments. Modern pigments are also widely used, in addition to the traditional ones, and these are generally organic dyes and compounds derived from petrochemicals. The pigments used are the same quality as those in transparent watercolours, but are not ground as finely because gouache is not used in the form of a wash. It has a greater proportion of binder to pigment than in watercolours, and so can be used as opaque paint.*

*This type of paint is not easy to work on its own but mixed with acrylic it will give the paint a much brighter and vivid colour. Next time you buy paint's buy a small tube of Winsor and Newton Gouache and give it a try.*

### ***Troublesome Acrylics.***

*The quality of paints today is extremely high and manufacturers usually test and retest paints before putting them on the market. I believe that 'Under Mixing' is the common fault causing problems. Shaking the bottle or a quick stir of the jar or stirring on the pallet is not enough. Like most liquid paint Acrylic is susceptible to separation during storage and unless the colour and the carrier are fully amalgamated together problems will transpire. Finally when thinning acrylic paint use an acrylic thinner it works better than water only.*

*I hope these notes will answer the questions above and help you to avoid problems in the future,*

*Regards*

*Mike Bunn*