The Art of Figure Painting
By Anders Heintz

<u>Part 1</u>

There isn't really any magic trick to figure painting. You learn by trial and error and most of all practice. If you want to increase the quality of your already superb armor or aircraft, good figures goes a long way. This is what we will help you with during these short demo's. In part one we will talk about cleaning, assembling, and priming the figures. We will also cover skin tones and the much dreaded painting of the face.

Cleaning the figure

This is an often overlooked process, people cut the figures off the spruce, or cut away the resin casting plugs and call it done, this is not the case. In fact, cleaning the figures are one of the most important steps of them all; a great painted figure will look sloppy if you see the mold lines through the fantastic paint job, hence the quality of the figure will drop tremendously. The process is simple, although time consuming at times. The basic tools used for cleaning the mold lines are: X-Acto knife, fine sandpaper, steel wool, and various files. Once the mold lines are scraped off the figure, go over it with the file to ensure a smooth and proper surface, make sure not to use the file in any one spot to long as that area will turn out flat, and a flat spot on the side of a figures leg doesn't always look very good. Remember to clean all the parts on the figure, i.e. accessories, weapons etc. Now that your mold lines are history, go over the areas with your fine sandpaper and finish it off with super fine grade steel wool, now we are ready to assemble the figure.

Assembling the figure

This is the step where you decide what to glue together and what to paint as sub assemblies. The general rule here is to put as much of the figure together before priming as possible. The less sub assemblies the better. Remember to fill all joints which are bad using the putty of your choice. Some types of putty are: Squadron putty's and Tamiya putty, or you can use two part epoxy putties such as Magic Sculpt, Milliput, Duro (Games workshop Green Stuff) or A&B Putty. I prefer Magic Sculpt above the rest. After gluing the parts together and the putty is dry, go over the puttied areas with steel wool again to ensure proper fit. Attach the figure to some sort of a base to keep you from touching the figure during painting. I usually pin one leg with a paperclip and drill a corresponding hole in a small wood base. Now wash your figure in warm soapy water. An old toothbrush is ideal to apply the soap then rinse it off and set it aside to dry and prepare to prime the figure.

Priming the figure

Some people prime, others don't. In some cases priming is a necessity such as metal and resin figures. I prime every figure that I do. There are several reasons why to prime, you can see all the seam lines and joints you missed, if this is the case, use your files to correct this and prime it again, either strip the whole figure, or just touch it up with a brush. Another reason to prime your figures is to ensure a good foundation for you following coats of paint. There are tons of primers out on the market, I prefer a cheap Wal-Mart kind named Fast Dry Spray Paint by Color Place, and the color I use is 20010 Equipment Gray. Spray the figure in several thin layers, be sure not to cover up any detail. Swing the spray can back and forth, make sure to start to spray before you hit the figure with the paint. Once the figure is completely covered in a nice smooth thin layer, set it aside to dry in a dust free area.

Painting the skin tones

Skin tones are probably the most feared and discussed color in figure painting. The face is usually the first thing you notice when looking at a figure, it will either catch your interest or it will make you look at the figure next to it. So how do we achieve a result that's eye catching? Start off by applying a couple or three thin coats of a flesh color. I only use craft acrylics such Apple Barrel and Folk Art, both available at Wal-Mart, Hobby Lobby and other places who carry craft things, for 44¢-88¢ for a 2oz bottle. The mix I use for the initial flesh color is a mix of Folk Art Terracotta and Apple Barrel White. I mix these until I have a nice skin tone and then apply it in very thin layers, making sure the surface is nice and smooth. After this is dry, usually after a couple of minutes I paint the eyes. The eyeball is painted in a slightly off white color mixing white with brown. Then I dot in the irises with the desired color, usually brown or blue. If it is a large scale figure I will add another lighter color inside the already painted iris and a pupil of flat black is added. Now it is time to prepare the oils for the actual face painting. I use Winser Newton Artist Oils, they have a really fine pigment which gives a nice smooth surface. The palette I use is a small piece of hard card board wrapped in aluminum foil. The basic colors required to paint skin tones in oils are, Burnt Sienna, Titanium White, Yellow or Gold Ochre, and Burnt Umber or Vandyke Brown. Some other colors that would be useful for different mixes would include Cadmium Red, Indian Red, Naples Yellow, Mars Red and Mars Brown. You can use several different mixes to paint your skin tones from the above colors, one of the easiest is Burnt Sienna + Yellow Ochre (Gold Ochre) + White for base tone, add more White and or Naples Yellow for highlights and add more Burnt Sienna and Vandyke Brown for shadow. There are two basic ways to paint the face, the first one is to paint the whole face in a thin layer of either the base color or the first shadow color, and then add highlights and shadows from there. The second way to paint faces is painting in 'block' style, which means that you paint the shadow areas with your 1st shade mix, and then you paint the highlight areas with your 1st highlight mix, be sure to leave a little space in between the two colors so when you blend the two colors together it creates the mid shade or base color. What ever method you decide to use the highlights, shadows and blending are the same procedure. First you have to decide where the light comes from, if it is from above (mid day) or from one of the sides. Once light source is decided add you highlights accordingly on the faces features; forehead, nose, top of cheeks, chin, and ears, starting with your first shade, then add your first shadow under the cheeks, in the ears, on the sides of the nose, under the eyes, neck and under the chin, then use a soft clean brush to gently feather the edges together in a stippling motion. Make sure that when you apply the colors that you keep it smooth and in thin layers refusing paint build up as oils are notorious for brush marks. After the initial highlights and shadows are laid in and feathered it is time for the second highlight, add this to the areas that catches more light, generally on the top parts of the first highlight areas (light source from above), then blend again and add the 2nd shadow color in the deep contours of the figure such as deep inside the ears, nostrils, crease around the mouth, under the chin, and where the head meets the neck (on some figures), and again blend. The lips are painted in a more reddish tone using burnt sienna mixed with white until a reddish pink is achieved and then highlighted with white. It is easiest to paint beards, hair and eye brows after the oils are dry. The hands are painted in the same manner as the face.   The key to paint faces in oils are smooth blending and gentle transitions. Oils dry slowly, at least 24-48 hours, you can however speed this up by putting the figure in front of a 100W light bulb.
Try to put the drying figure in a dust free area, a cut down 2 liter coke bottle is a good cover (just don't put it in front of the light bulb :-))

I hope this short handout will aid in the techniques we will discuss at the meeting (02-11-03). If you have any questions about the above material please feel free to contact me at (660) 382-4600 or email me at aheintz@grm.net. The next demo will include highlighting and shading clothing, leather and detail painting. The other demos will include bases and ground work, converting and the sculpting of figures.