

WOODLEY ON FLATS

Jim Woodley reveals why his flats 'glow'.

Collecting flats has never been very popular in this country mainly due, I suspect, to the reluctance on the part of the public to purchase figures from abroad, coupled with a perhaps understandable apprehension of the best method of painting them. Add to this a certain amount of apathy on the part of the manufacturers to supply dealers outside Germany, and the net result is that, apart from a small band of dedicated collectors, the flat tin figure is virtually ignored.

I think this is a pity. The authors of these small gems had long ago achieved a high standard of accuracy and animation, which the makers of the modern solid have only attained in recent years and with a considerable difference in price and output. Fortunately the durability of the moulds allows today's collector the pleasure of painting the works of the "Alt Meister" Ludwig Frank and other notable engravers and one must not forget the steady stream of new figures still being produced.

Painting flats is a skill which can be acquired, perhaps more easily than animation or scratchbuilding. All one needs is a critical eye, a steady hand and a small knowledge of art techniques. My own particular style, described by a recent contributor as "glowing" evolved due to influence gained from my job in the printing trade. As I recently discovered, the style is akin to the "inner light" technique employed in the 15th and 16th centuries by the German artist Albrecht Dürer. You learn something new every day!

Cleaning

All newly purchased figures have some degree of flash which must be removed before undercoating. The tools required are similar to those used on conventional figures, i.e., a craft knife - I prefer a Swann Morton No.3 handle with a No.11 blade (better for the awkward bits), a set of Swiss files and a Historex mousetail file are also particularly useful. A further aid at this time would be a low powered magnifying glass, say 3x. To enable you to have both hands free it should be either of the watchmakers eyeglass type or mounted on a stand.

Removing flash is not the most enjoyable part of the hobby but it does give you a chance to examine the figure closely. Understanding its design will pay dividends later when you commence painting and some care must be taken when cleaning, for misinterpretation of what is flash and what isn't could leave you with a damaged figure, so if in doubt, check both sides carefully. If any small blow holes occur, these can be easily filled in with plasticine or something more permanent such as Milliput.

Undercoating and priming

I prefer to use Humbrol Authenticolour white, either MC13 or H16, as a primer. This should be well diluted with thinners and then applied in three to four coats allowing plenty of drying time in between. The result should be a smooth opaque base with little or no loss of fine detail. Anything less than this could affect your colours as most oils have some degree of transparency. I am only too aware that this is a laborious job but the end result is worth it. Of course, if you are fortunate enough to own an air brush, results can be obtained much more quickly.

Equipment

One important fact must be emphasised before we proceed any further. To be successful in painting flats, one must be able to miniaturise one's technique down to the scale of the figure. This will entail the use of some form of magnifier, the finest brushes available, the right medium, and in some cases the right paint.

Magnifiers

Just how far you wish to go in super-detailing your figures will govern your choice in this matter. Several painters use a type of surgeon's spectacles known as a Bishop Harman Loop and these can be purchased from shops specialising in medical equipment; Wigmore St., London is a good place to find them. The lenses on these spectacles are angled, so although both eyes are used, you have the illusion of viewing through one lens. The magnification is about 3x but with a little practice they can be used with a hand-held lens. For something more powerful I recommend a Linen Tester. These lenses usually come incorporated in their own folding stand although I prefer them hand held. They can be found in optician's, scientific and optical shops and sometimes even stamp dealers. I use a 6x or 8x for general use and a 10x for faces. I also have a 16x for facial wrinkles, pupils in the eyes etc. but I do not recommend prolonged use as the depth of field is rather critical.

Brushes

Only the best is good enough I'm afraid; Winsor & Newton's Series 12 treble Os or if you prefer a longer point, Series 7. At the price they are today it's worth taking your magnifier with you to check before you buy. I get some old fashioned looks from shop assistants but I do get decent points on my brushes! Even after buying brushes as tiny as these they can be too thick for very fine detail such as eyes or in between fingers etc. I am not a believer in trimming a brush down with a knife, I much prefer natural wear. If I need a

fine point in a hurry I use the brush for undercoatings, making frequent checks so as not to overdo it and the moment it's worn in I promote it to better things.

A brush for fine lining is worth its weight in gold so look after it. After use wash well with turps or white spirit, then wash again with water and soap, leaving some soap on the hairs, bring them to a point before storing. This will keep the hairs from becoming brittle. Another method which seems to work well - keep a jar of cold cream handy and use in place of soap and water.

Holder for figures

A simple but effective holder can easily be made from a piece of $\frac{1}{4}$ " thick corrugated cardboard, roughly 4" x 5". Cut a long slot, preferably against the grain, $\frac{3}{8}$ " from the bottom to slip the figure in. Cover the card with black cartridge paper (obtainable from art shops) and stick it down with double-sided tape, for easy replacement.

One last optional extra is a pair of fine pointed tweezers. These will ensure the speedy removal of the flat painter's curse, the numerous fine hairs which float in the atmosphere just waiting for the chance to alight on your freshly painted figure.

Paints

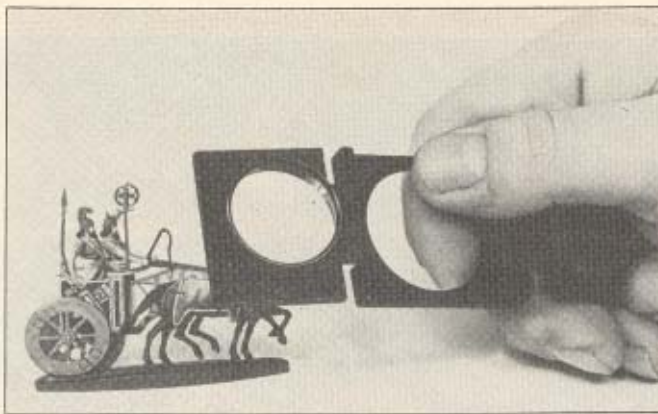
To most modellers the various products of Messrs. Winsor & Newton and George Rowney need little introduction. A few exceptions apart, they adapt well to the demands of painting in miniature. Prussian Blue, Vandyke Brown and a couple of greens seem to be the chief offenders with pigments that are just not ground fine enough and the result on flats anyway, is disappointing. For the same reason I cannot endorse the Alkyd series by Winsor & Newton. George Rowney, although possibly less popular than its rival, is slightly more adventurous in the range of colours. Always on the lookout for smooth transparent colours I have found Transparent Brown, Brown Pink, Alizarin Green, most useful. They also maintain brown ochre in their series.

Not so well known, or stocked, is their small series of nineteen fabric paints. These paints or more properly, inks, are designed for use on materials, although they perform equally well when used conventionally. They cover and dry well and require no special mediums. Definitely worth trying. I regret that for obvious reasons I cannot conduct a nationwide survey into oil paints but in the eternal quest for the ultimate in and around London, these alternatives have come to my notice.

C.R. Robertson, Parkway, Camden Town, market their own excellent series of paints and mediums and are also agents for the Dutch firm Rembrandt. Wide range of colours, smooth ground. Availability does tend to depend on stocks. **E. Ploten**, 273 Archway Road, N.6., carry an extensive stock of French *le Frank* paints. These are also very smooth but tend to be somewhat oily in texture. Drying time is rather slow and use of a siccativ is recommended. **John Keep & Sons**, 15 Theobalds Road, London WC1. Don't be put off by the exterior of this shop. They do sell artist's oils! These come in large tubes, some unusual colours, gold colour (non metallic) and the only Cyan Blue I have found in a tube



Right, the Linen Tester is handy for flats as shown here. Refer to the text for the author's description of this optical aid and where to buy them. Opposite bottom, one of the author's flats photographed out of its box against a hand to show the size of the figure and the minute detail Jim Woodley manages to paint into it. This standard is reached with a lot of practice and patience.



— they call it Signwriter's Blue. Their Intenso paints, although oil bound, display some of the characteristics of acrylics. Used with white spirit as a medium, they dry fast to a satin finish. Suitable for base colours, but do not blend too well. **Adana Ltd.**, 8 Grays Inn Road, WC1. This firm sells equipment and supplies for the amateur printer. They have a small selection of letterpress inks in plastic tubes, also a neutral coloured drier which will also accelerate the drying of oil paints. The inks are similar to the aforementioned fabric paints.

Methods & Mediums

Painting methods vary widely and there are as many styles as there are painters. The reader looking for information on paints other than oils must I'm afraid be disappointed. I have always used and preferred oils and so cannot comment on anything other than them. The two main methods of painting are either to "work it wet" and blend the colours, or "glazing", i.e., paint a tint or a full colour over dry paint. I use both methods as required but tend to lean towards glazing as it keeps the colours bright and is ideal for very fine work.

The best all-round medium I have found is Winsor & Newton's "Liquin". Originally designed for their Alkyd paints, it works well with oils, does not degrade light colours and assists drying, in short, the perfect glazing medium. Of course the use of oils will result in a shiny finish to the figure which may not be to everyone's taste, so use of a matting agent must be employed. I have never favoured matting agents which have to be mixed into the paint. They are difficult to control, often retard drying and the end result is dull and lifeless.

I firmly believe that flats look better with a satin or eggshell finish, rather than dead flat, so I recommend the use of one of the following: **Winsor & Newton's** Matt Varnish. This must not be applied until the paint is thoroughly dry. Is milky in appearance and must be heated before use until clear. **Robersons**, Parkway, Camden Town, sell a similar one which does not require heating. In lieu of these, **Ronseal's** Clear Matt finish, a polyurethane varnish is available from hardware shops.

Before painting can commence there are several further points to consider. Depending on the individual skills of the designers and engravers, the 30mm figure will often display a surprising amount of detail, and the painter should try to look upon himself as the last link in the partnership and aspire to the rule, "If they were good enough to put it there, then I should be good enough to paint it". Without

the end in mind, the results will be little better than factory painting. I realise that to the beginner especially, this may sound a little high-minded, but as one who has, on occasion, competed successfully against large 3-dimensional figures I feel that I have made my point.

Due to the lack of a dimension the illusion of depth can only be achieved by the subtle use of light and shade. Without this, the figure will live up to its nickname and remain flat! Unlike a conventional artist the painter of flats will not have the benefit of a background to project and enhance the figure and rarely will he be able to indulge in the luxury of a model to guide when painting. It is true that some figures have been inspired by illustrations from books or famous paintings etc., but it is just as likely that the source could be a rock carving or a woodcut which would be of little use as a guide.

So what can be done to overcome these obstacles? I cannot pretend there is any easy answer. So much depends on the ability and determination of the individual. Observation, practise and patience bring their own rewards, so try not to expect too much too soon. Remember the old saying "every picture tells a story". A wealth of useful ideas can be gleaned by studying the works of artists and illustrators. Most good art shops sell the "Walter D. Foster" and "Grumbacher Library" series of specialist books on art techniques. For horses at least four inexpensive breed books, beautifully illustrated, are available. It is worth starting a scrapbook for magazine cuttings (not necessarily military) showing interesting examples of light and shade. Collectors of ancients would do well to invest in a good book on artist's anatomy. The possibilities are endless.

Painting

When filling in your basic colours try to keep your painting in proportion to the size of the figure. That is, use as little paint as possible. Remember it is far better to use two thin coats than one thick one. Use of "Liquin" will help the more troublesome paints to flow smoothly and so avoid unsightly brushmarks and filling in of fine detail. I find it best to work "wet" when painting flesh, using white with Mars Brown for basic shading as, unlike some browns, it does not go gray when mixed with white and is ideal for lining in anatomical detail. When completed to your satisfaction allow to dry thoroughly. Then mix a transparent orange from Indian Yellow and Alizarin Crimson. Tint generously with our old friend Liquin and brush lightly over the area, keeping an eye on the back of your hand as a colour match. If desired, a little white may be

brushed in at this stage to restore highlights and to give a translucent effect over the muscle shading. I find a red-orange best for Europeans; Orientals are better served by using Transparent Brown and Brown Pink, again allow to dry before dark shading with Burnt Umber.

Highlighting and Shading

The first step must be to establish the point source of light. I prefer "from the left and above" myself. The Old Masters mainly used "high and slightly to the front and side" with the exception of Rubens and Titian who preferred frontal. The main point to remember is once you have made up your mind stick to it. Nothing looks worse than a group of figures with the light coming in all directions. I usually tackle highlights first before going on to the shading. Worked wet, white will successfully highlight a number of colours, but there are equally some, when treated thus, that will look most unnatural. For these an alternative approach is necessary. If you have followed the advice given on undercoating your basic colour can be gently wiped off, where required, with the tip of a finger. Often this will give a fair indication of highlights. The area can then be re-worked to remove harsh lines. Allow to dry, then brush a light tint of the colour to finish. The theory up till now has been, work light to dark making full use of the transparency of paint over a good white undercoat. However, sometimes the reverse is in order. With browns and reds I lay down a coat of the base colour and allow to dry. I then work over the areas to be highlighted with a little of the base colour mixed with some orange as this blends more naturally with white. Again, allow to dry, then brush over a light tint of the base colour to blur any harsh lines. Black can also be treated in this manner using equal amounts of Raw Sienna and Raw Umber mixed with white. Experience will show you how much. For the best results work wet, as this gives a slightly silvery highlight.

I usually find that glazing is the best way to handle shadow. It allows you to experiment with less risk to previous work. It also enables you to graduate your colour through from light, to medium, to dark. Although this could take several thin applications to achieve, you can at least ensure that you don't go "over the top".

White shaded with black or Paynes Gray is a mistake often made. These tend to degrade the colour and the result is disappointingly dirty. There is a choice of three mixes which I prefer to use; Violet with Raw or Burnt Umber; Burnt Sienna, Alizarin Crimson & French Ultramarine; or equal parts of Yellow, Magenta & Cyan Blue. The last mix is composed of the process colours used by printers. The equivalent in oils would be Lemon Yellow, Magenta and Prussian Blue. By varying the proportions in these mixes, and tinting, you will find they will also shade a variety of other colours. So it is worth keeping some ready-mixed on your pallet.

Where shadow is concerned, blue will nearly always have a part in it, usually combined with a darker shade of the basic colour. Thus Brown Ochre plus blue will shade yellow. Alizarin Crimson or Carmine plus blue will shade red. Viridian plus blue will shade green. Blue itself, light to medium, use a darker shade plus Magenta. For dark blue Magenta alone should suffice.

These are just a few suggestions which hopefully will get the reader started but I must



stress, however, the need to experiment – for in that is the road to your own individual painting style.

Buying Flats

For reasons previously stated the amount of new and secondhand figures in this country is very small. Seagull Model and Under Two Flags are the best places to get started as they usually have some in stock. Buying direct from the makers is not difficult, once tried. Payment through a bank is accepted, provided this is prompt and all charges including postage are covered. Small orders, say under £5, are, I'm afraid, usually ignored. Delivery times vary according to pressure of work and stocks etc. Lists are, without exception in German, but are reasonably easy to translate with the aid of a dictionary and a bit of common sense.

Above left, a Burgundian Standard bearer by Tilo Maier. Above, a display of the author's flats slotted in black felt backing and stored in photographic paper boxes. Right, this Macedonian war elephant is by F. C. Neckel. Below, one of a pair of Egyptian boats by W. Hafer. Photos: Alec Gee.

The firms listed below have all had experience in dealing with foreign orders and in most cases English is understood.

Aloys Ochel, Feldstrasse 24b, D-2300 Kiel, West Germany.

F.C. Neckel, Ledergasse 46, D-7321 Hatzenhofn, West Germany.

W.H. Hafer, Felsburgstrasse 15, 3500 Kassel, W.Germany.

H.G. Scholtz, Knesebeckstrasse 86-87, 1000 Berlin 20, W.Germany.

Tilo Maier, Münchaurach 131, 8521 Aurachtal, W.Germany.

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