How I paint a figure with acrylics  by Marion Ball

In this article I will try and show how I paint using Acrylics and present it in understandable language based on examples of different figures that I have painted. There is a quantity of literature on using acrylics and everyone praises the technology of the medium. I am of the opinions that once you know the basics of using these paints, know their properties and are comfortable with them, that you should try and develop your own way and style of painting. Naturally you cannot do this with your first figure, it takes a little time and practice until you are proficient enough to go your own way. Patience is the magic word, and taking the time to record what you have done to learn from the mistakes you make along the way, otherwise all that patience will teach you nothing.

So we come to the first important point. Brushes
I tried many brushes out until I found the ones that work for me, and that I was happy with. For me the Andrea red series size 1, Windsor &Newton Series 7 are the brushes that give me what I am looking for and have been problem free in painting figures from 54 to 90mm. I rarely use any smaller brushes
As with the brushes, I prefer to use specific paints and the ones I am happy with are the Andrea, Maimeri Polycolor and Vallejo Acrylics. The Maimeri and Andrea colours dry to a real matt, which is sometimes too matt for the effect that I am looking for, flesh tones for example, in that case I use the Vallejo colours, which have a softer feel and tend to look more silky …which is ideal for faces. This silkiness can be annoying however when you are not looking for it, so I find that each set of colours has its own advantages and disadvantages so as you can see it pays to know which set of colours you want to use at each point in your painting.
I always mix my colours on plastic pallets which are practical and, once they become too clogged with adhesives or paint, can be thrown away (for me this is very practical, because I am too lazy to clean everything completely when I am finished).

As important a tool is some sort of “Mounting “that you can fix the figure to when painting, as you don’t want to touch the figure with your hands if you can help it. The one I have is made from wood, cheaply and simply made this allows me to paint every side of the figure without any problem. Naturally there are other variations but I can only work with my holder. I am a creature of habit.
All the other things such as Drill, sandpaper, eyedropper (or syringe for water) I don’t need to describe in detail, as most people are familiar with them. The next important point, before starting to paint you must clean the casting. Make sure all cast lines; flash or holes are either cleaned off or filled. I then drill and pin any joints using either paperclips or small nails (especially at the arms and legs). I also have made it a habit to put a long pin into a foot, which when finished will secure the whole figure to its base, this is attached with epoxy glue this means that I don’t need to touch the figure much at all when the painting is finished.

The next step is the selection of a wooden base and the creation of the groundwork. The groundwork is made using Pronto or some other like material, and the figures position is marked on this while the Pronto is still soft so the “ground” is quickly ready to accept the finished figure.
Now I am ready to start painting the face and all skin parts, in my view the most difficult part of the figure. The same principles apply, whether painting a face or an article of clothing etc. the basis is the middle colour, mixed to the consistency of cream and with each coating the paint should be diluted a little more.

![Picture 5: Before](image1)
![Picture 6: After](image2)

Once the basic shade has been applied to the face and body I next do the eyes, it’s simpler to position and paint the eyes and pupils at this stage than at the end, as it’s easier to correct mistakes on only one base colour rather than a completed face ….. especially as it usually takes me a few attempts to get the eyes positioned correctly and I find the left hand side more difficult to get even. If you paint a bust you have the advantage that the eyes are quite detailed and positioned correctly, not always the case on a 54mm figure. In order to represent the pupils on a 54mm figure I use the Oil colours: Black, Blue and White, which I apply with the point of a drill or needle. Acrylic colours are not suitable as they dry up too quickly on the brush when used in this small a quantity.

![Pictures 7&8: Eyes](image3)
With a Bust I go over the eyes at the end with a gloss varnish, something I rarely do on a 54mm figure. Once the eyes are finished, I then go on with the rest of the face. You have the middle tone of the colour already applied. Some people may ask exactly how much paint of what colours to use for the face, I will give you a good advice don’t start to count the colour drops. You should get a feeling for the colours and train your eyes for them. Always experiment with them and try out new combinations. I only know for myself, I can only guess for them, and leave it to their own feelings as to what looks right to them and what they are happy with it is a trial and error process to experiment with each time. Only in this way do I keep the colours slightly different each time and a different feel to each set of eyes I do.

But always keep your paint mixes separate and don’t mix everything together. Therefore the palette is great.

![Paint palette](image)

You should always choose a middle colour from you desired base colour. That means for example if you paint flesh start with a bit darker base and work from there up like on a pyramid to the very light tones.

![Paint samples](image)
Some painters’ use up to eight or more different layers, which to me is a little bit extreme and too time consuming, I usually stick to between four or five washes. Simply, you should either darken or lighten the colour each time enough to see a small difference in the tone. When you can see a small difference between the layers then you are on the right path.

Picture 11: Eyes, face with base colour
Picture 12: Face with shadows and lights

Picture 13: Face with highlights no shadows
It is important that you do not cover everything you have just painted each time, but leave some of the last layer still visible otherwise you end up with just the light and dark tones and all the intermediate stages are wasted and you lose the smooth transition of the colours. So in essence each layer should cover a smaller area inside the previous layer of colour.

Don’t be frightened if at this stage it looks quite rough and raw, there are still the darker shades to add, (between three and five washes here are ideal) and these are what give the face it’s character. It is very important to paint all these intermediate shadows. A lot of painters forget this but that is the most important part and without that your face doesn’t get deepness and character. The washes should be quite watery and the amount on the brush should be kept to a minimum otherwise you may “flood” the face and spoil all you have done. It is important to pay attention and stress the areas between the eyes and the nose and the nostrils and cheeks, for this I use a thin wash of black and red.

Picture 14: upper body before
Picture 15: upper body after

Picture 16: Finished face
Picture 17: Celt front
Picture 18: Celt back
When you paint the hair and eyebrows don’t forget to also highlight and shadow these too. Every small detail is important to give the figure “life.”

At the conclusion you can add some “special effects”, like blood or dirt and sweat. I mostly do these with oils and gloss varnish.
Don’t worry if using oils and varnish don’t work for you first time, it takes a bit of practice and patience, it also took me some time to learn the “trick” and get the effects I was looking for.

We now come to the rest of the figure, the Uniform, accessories, weapons etc. The principal is exactly the same as the skin tones. You work from the middle tone and from the centre outwards (or up and down the tonal range). In this instance you can see the difference in two figures that I painted using different colours. It shows that slightly changing the colour can completely alter the character. I kept the shades lower on the right hand figure; one can see the difference of the effect beautifully on the white shirt.

It is amazing how it can look so different in just using altered colour tones.
In order to explain the way I do gold on Uniforms, so that it does not look to lustrous and sharp, I start off by painting the area with a mixture of red and black (to a shade like chocolate). This I touch up and paint with a full yellow until I get the desired effect after which I give the whole area a very thin wash of gold, just dabbing this on. I then cover the whole thing with a silk or gloss varnish.

![Picture 26: Gold laces](image)

I would like to finish here and hope that my explanations have been understood. I should not finish however without adding some of my most useful colour blends and some more pictures to illustrate the article. Try them out perhaps they can give you what you need.

So keep painting and hold always a brush in your hand.

Colour chart is kept separate in articles.

![Picture 27: Cat’s Cradle](image)

![Picture 28: Waterloo](image)