

My Top 10 Tips On Painting Miniatures

By Justin Lane (Critical Paint)

TIP 1

Prime in Black and Apply Zenithal Highlights - Even if You Don't Use Them.

Experimenting with various priming colours led me back to black, paired with a white ink zenithal highlight. This combination provides an excellent foundation for any miniature. Even if you choose not to utilise the zenithal technique, which is particularly useful with contrast paints, it still offers a valuable guide for understanding light and shadows on your miniature. While I personally use an airbrush for this process, employing the slap chop method achieves comparable results.

TIP 2

Master the Art of Edge Highlighting.

Embrace it in Your Work!

Here's the secret: edge highlighting can transform your miniature painting. Embrace this technique wholeheartedly. By applying edge highlights to every edge, you create depth and clarity in your work. As you gain a better grasp of this technique, you can elevate your skills by using lighter shades for areas that catch the light and darker tones for shadowed areas. This nuanced approach will truly make your miniatures come to life, making them pop with



"Uthar the Destined from Games Workshop, the edge highlighting on this piece gives it the pop it needs to be picked out on the tabletop"

TIP 3

Prioritise Cleaning and Preparing Your Models

Emphasising this tip is essential. If you're planning to venture into the competitive world of miniature painting, this step is indispensable. Equip yourself with a quality hobby knife and sanding sticks, and explore the benefits of sprue goo! In competitive painting, visible mold lines and gaps can lead to quick point deductions. Start your miniature painting journey by developing a habit of thorough cleaning and preparation. Establishing this routine ensures that every new mini you work on is set up for success.

TIP 4

Embrace High Contrast - Push Your Limits!

Here's a challenge that even seasoned painters struggle with. It's all about pushing your boundaries, even if it feels uncomfortable – aim higher! Achieving the perfect contrast is elusive, especially for beginners. Miniatures, being small in size, require intense contrast to make an impact. You want your creation to be noticed from across the gaming table, drawing people's attention effortlessly.



"Alice Cross model from Neko Galaxy Miniatures displays a good balance of contrast and highlights, pushing the highlights to an almost white makes this piece jump out at the viewer"

Don't shy away from experimenting with extremes in highlights and shadows. The key is to intensify the highlights and deepen the shadows. But here's the trick: avoid using just black and white, or you'll wash out the colours. Instead, consider your mini's environment. Is it basking in sunlight? Blend a light yellow gradually with your base colour to enhance the vibrancy without diluting it. Likewise, for shadows, experiment with darker hues like red or blue, depending on the mood you aim to create in your piece.

Remember, it's all about trial and error. Keep pushing until your miniature practically leaps off the tabletop, capturing everyone's gaze with its stunning contrast and depth.

TIP 5

Embrace Experimentation and the Art of Emulation

In the realm of art, embracing new ideas and techniques is the cornerstone of creativity. Don't ever fear venturing into uncharted territories. In fact, in the words of Elena Secret, "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but theft is a sin." If something captivates you, be it a painting style, a specific technique, or a unique concept, don't hesitate to try your hand at replicating it. Create an ideas board for your projects, collecting inspirations that resonate with you. When you stumble upon something that challenges your comfort zone, seize the opportunity to learn that new technique. Embrace the process of imitation and repetition until you master it. Studying what appeals to you and emulating it not only hones your skills but also enriches your artistic vision, fostering a journey of continuous growth and innovation.

TIP 6

Invest in Quality Tools for Significant Improvement

This tip might spark some debate, but here's the truth: the right tools can skyrocket your painting skills. Personally, I experienced a 500% improvement when I upgraded to high-quality brushes and paints. You don't have to splurge on everything; a few key items can make a world of difference. Opt for a good-sized all-rounder sable brush (size 2 or 3) and a fine detail Kolinsky sable brush (size 0 or .00, especially if you prefer small brushes). A regular makeup brush set, a couple of reliable snippers, a sharp hobby knife, and blades are essential additions. If you're like me and find mixing paints a challenge, consider investing in a vortex mixer – it'll save your hands and ensure consistency. Oh, and one more thing: don't overlook the importance of excellent lighting. A good quality bright light can make intricate details more visible and elevate the overall quality of your work.

TIP 7

Master Brush Control

Understanding how to manoeuvre your brush precisely is paramount. This skill becomes significantly easier with high-quality brushes. In "The Art of... Tommie Soule" book, Tommie Soule delves deeply into this topic, offering comprehensive insights into everything from loading and setting the brush to grip and movement techniques. If you're seeking a rich source of knowledge to hone your brush control, this book is my top recommendation. It provides invaluable guidance that can truly elevate your painting techniques.

TIP 8

Elevate Your Miniatures with Outstanding Bases

Picture this: even the most visually unremarkable miniature can ascend to the echelons of miniature painting excellence with a remarkable base. If the miniature itself is the story, think of the base as the environment and supporting characters—crucial elements that enrich the narrative. Here's a crucial aspect to remember: the base shouldn't divert attention away from the miniature; instead, it should draw the viewer's focus towards it. Achieve this effect through clever use of light and shadow, employing complementary or contrasting colours, incorporating movement, and strategic placement within the scene. Even a minimalist base, when thoughtfully designed, can effectively highlight the miniature. You don't have to go extravagant; it's about crafting a base that complements and enhances the story your miniature is telling.



"Scout, Model 'Tinker Bell' from Blacksmith Miniatures base is a mixture of natural and handcrafted 3D assets, one of my favourites I think this piece would be nowhere near as good as it is without the base"

TIP 9



"Teutonic Knight - Order of Cthulhu Model from Michael Kontraros Collectibles - the subtle use of colour really brings this piece to life, the osl and nmm push it further to give an awesome effect"

Master Colour Theory and Its Application

Consider this an essential skill set. Understanding the fundamentals of colour theory is crucial, but delving into its advanced intricacies is akin to gaining superpowers in the realm of painting. Once you grasp these concepts, they seamlessly integrate into your creative process, resulting in a significant transformation in your work. Having a profound understanding of colours, including their properties and how they interact, equips you with a powerful toolset. Knowing which colours harmonise best and in what specific situations can make a substantial difference. Looking back, I wish I had delved deeper into this knowledge when I was starting out. It's a game-changer that enhances your ability to bring your artistic visions to life.

TIP 10

Embrace Lifelong Learning!

Let me emphasise this: it's possibly the most crucial lesson you'll ever learn. There's no mystical concept called "talent." What we perceive as talent is, in fact, the result of practiced repetition (or practice) of a particular process (technique) until a profound understanding is attained, enabling flawless reproduction (skill). In essence, the equation looks like this: (practice multiplied by time) plus technique equals skill. Multiply skill by multiple techniques, and voila, you have what we call "talent."

Here's the truth: everyone starts at the same point. Some may learn faster, but this journey is not a sprint; it's a marathon. Take your time, absorb knowledge from every conceivable source, and remember, inspiration often strikes from the most unexpected corners. Keep learning, keep practicing, and your skills will flourish, transforming your passion into mastery.