BASICS OF FIGURE PAINTING

I. Planning and Preparation

Before ever putting brush to paint; even before dragging the shape out of its packaging, you should have a solid idea of what you intend the finished product to be. A single figure will be handled somewhat differently from a grouping, and a single figure standing on a plinth will need a different approach than a single figure seated in a vignette. Thought spent in this planning stage will pay off in the finished product.

Now, for the figure itself. A figure made by any casting method will require clean-up. Casting plugs and sprue gates must be removed and the damaged area restored. Parting lines and flash will require removal and, again, damaged areas repaired. When comprised of multiple parts, parts must be attached and, if appropriate, seams filled. 3D printed figures may need any printed scaffolding removed. In many cases, details damaged during the cleanup will need to be restored.

While figure sculpting is beyond the scope of this article, be aware that the figure may need to be modified so that it appears to be interacting with other elements in its environment. Unless the figure is of, as an example, an astronaut floating weightlessly, the feet (of standing or running figures) must appear to be supporting the figure's weight (rather than hovering magically above the ground). The same effect must be accomplished for any seated figure, in any instance where the figure rests against a surface, or where any article rests against the figure. For figures holding implements, the figure should appear to grip and support the object(s).

Figure 1: Hovering above the scene vs modified to blend into the scene   Hobby Design HD03-0379

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Falcon Miniatures 1:24   Pedro II Admiral Brazil 1870 – Wikipedia.org

Example 2: Figure lightly perched on a chair vs. how a person sinks into a chair

After the figure's pose and animation is flawless, it will still need a good washing to remove any sanding dust, mold release agents and skin oils. Then a good base/primer coat will ensure that all surfaces have a uniform color and surface porosity.

Finally, get a handle on it. Attach the figure to some sort of temporary mounting so that it can be handled without damage, and then set aside to dry without the need to rest against anything that could mar the freshly painted surface.

Warhammer figures via **www.leagueofpainters.com/**   photobucket: maverike_prime's Bucket

Figure 3: Parts and pieces attached to handles and temporary bases for easy manipulation

Tiny alligator clips, wine corks, paint bottles and such things as sand-filled pill bottles are all useful stands. Toothpicks super-glued to attachment points are a good way to hold separate pieces. Stand the toothpicks in modelling clay or floral foam.

II. Painting Order

There are no hard and fast rules as to how to order the panting steps. Use whatever method or procedure achieves the desired result. As a general guideline, however, paint the figure from the inside out, similar to the order in which a real person would dress. For the body inside of the costume, paint the inside of the mouth (if exposed), and then the eyes, followed by all of the exposed skin, finishing with the hair. The innermost clothing should be painted first, taking care not to extend into exposed body parts. Then paint the successive layers of outer clothing, footwear, accoutrements and accessories. The exact order may need to be tweaked where hands overlap implements and hair overlaps costume.

Historex Garde Imperiale (1804-1812) via upnaway.com

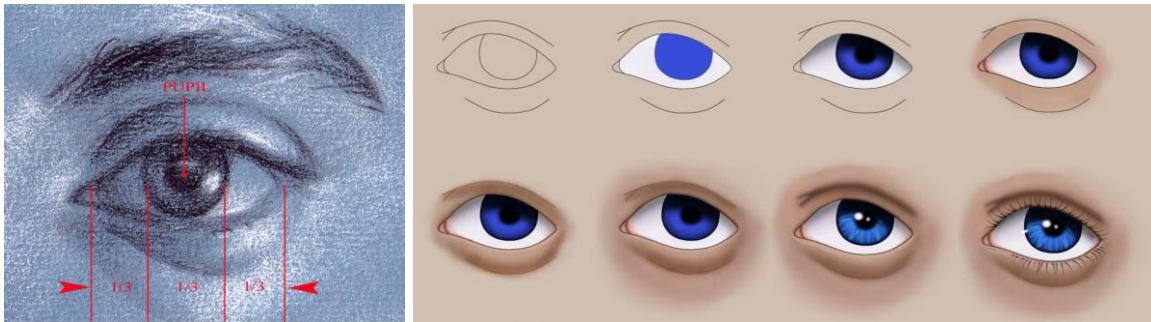Layering in Runway Fashion via curatedconsumption. com

Figure 4 – Examples of layering of clothing

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III.   Face Painting

There are any number of on-line tutorials about painting faces on miniatures, a few of which are included below. Basically:
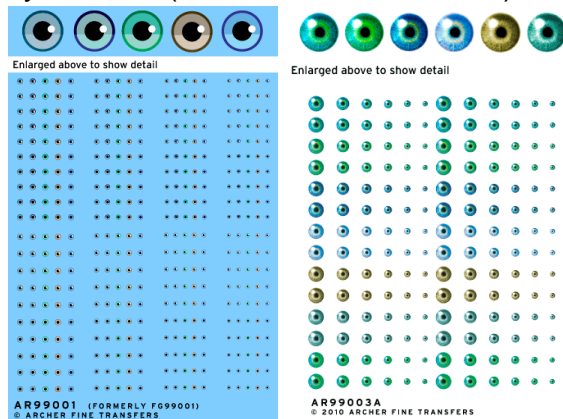
1. Plan what the figure will be doing and where it would be looking, including what levels of action and emotion (static display on a plinth; or, life and death struggle) it needs to portray. Also, determine the light level (candle light or bright sunshine or something in between.) A figure in a scary gothic scene would exhibit deeper colors overall, particularly deeper shadows, than a soldier in the bright desert sun.

2. Determine the eye sight line, and then paint the eyes. Depending on the light level of the scene you wish to depict, the eye lids would be open or in various degrees of closure (wide open for rage, surprise or fear; or, squinted near closed for bright sunlight.) Also, such things as dilated pupils can be used to indicate fright, or just dark conditions.

http://ameralart.com/images/eh001g.jpg
http://orig08.deviantart.net/e712/f/2012/218/7/a/semi_realistic_eyes_tutorial_by_welington_guimaraes-d5a2ym8.jpg

Eye decals (Archers Fine Transfers) are handy in getting the iris to look just right.

http://www.archertransfers.com/

http://www.archertransfers.com/PAGE_EyeballInstructions.html
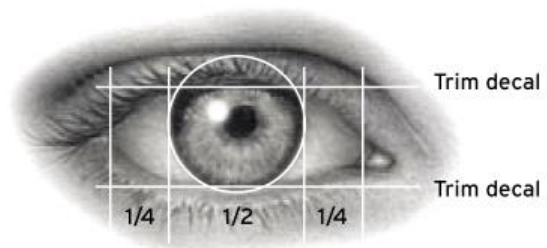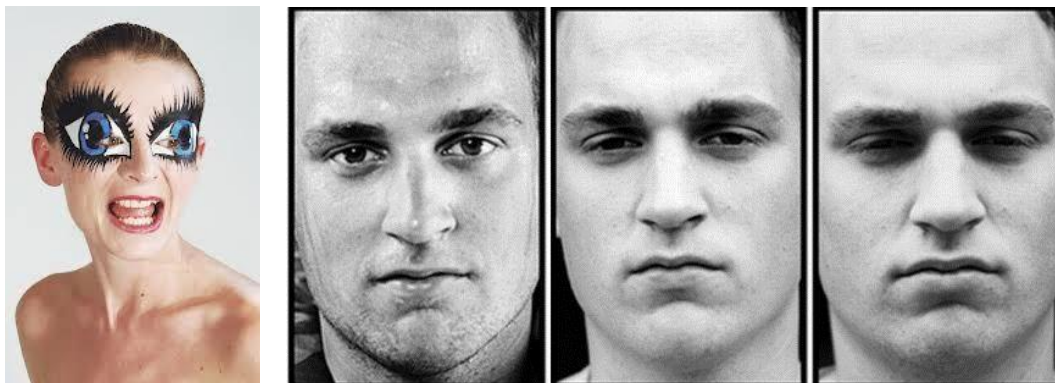https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKDeImMtalY
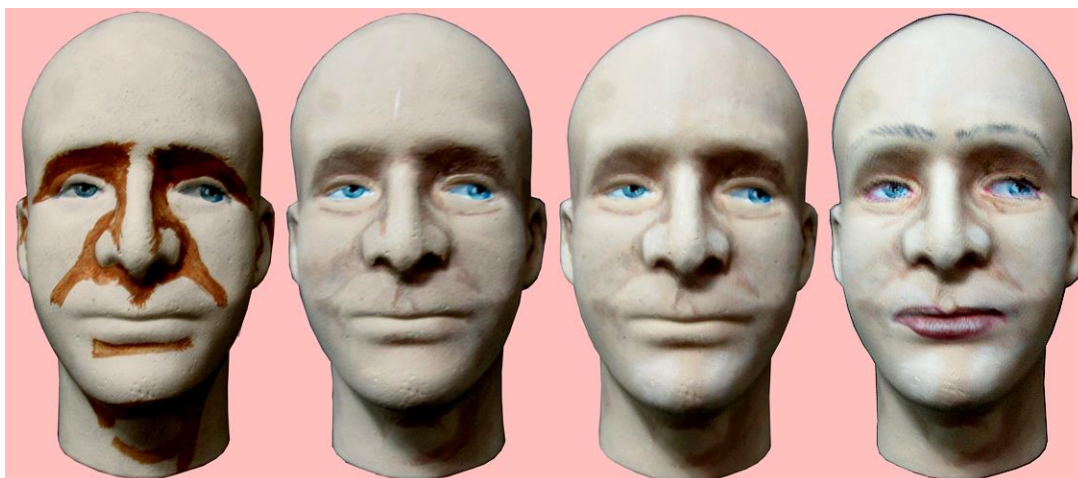
Figure 5 - Eyes

Above all, avoid the doll-eye look. The eye is proportionally only a small part of the face, and the whites of the eye are often not even visible. Also, be aware that in smaller scales, actual white eyeballs become less important. Often, a simple horizontal dark line with a wide spot near the middle is sufficient to convincingly suggest an eye.

Oh no! Doll eyes!   Eyes actually become less noticeable in stronger light
www.pinterest.com   http://img.izismile.com/img/img4/20111221/640/soldier_war_face_640_01.jpg

Figure 6 – Eyes in Light and Shadow

3. Paint the shadows. These would include any areas that would not receive direct light. Next, paint the mid color and blend into the shadows. And then, paint the highlights. Finally, detail the face with lips, facial hair and wrinkles.

C.Schenfeld 2015

Figure 7 – Face Painting Steps

Some on-line tutorials:

http://www.elgrecominiatures.co.uk/contents/en-uk/d133.html

http://design.tutsplus.com/tutorials/how-to-paint-a-fantasy-portrait-from-scratch-with-photoshop--psd-9059

http://www.2paintminiatures.com/support-files/paintingafaceinoils.pdf

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IV. It Gets Hairy

Painting hair can usually be accomplished in three layers. Paint the darkest color first, dry brush heavily with the mid tone, followed by a light dry brushing of the highlights.

Developed from various photos found via google images search

Figure 8 – Hair Tones Identified Using a Color Picker Tool

Alternately, paint the mid tones first, followed by a wash of the darkest tone, finishing with a light dry brushing of the highlights. For lustrous hair, use pearlescent mid tones and pearlescent or even metallic colors for highlights.

Note that for blonde hair, olive is an effective dark tone: and, for vibrant auburn red hair, use purple for the dark tone. For brunette hair, the most effective dark tones are burnt umber and purple-black. For gray hair, start with black or dark gray; and, for white or silver hair, a dark blue-gray works well.
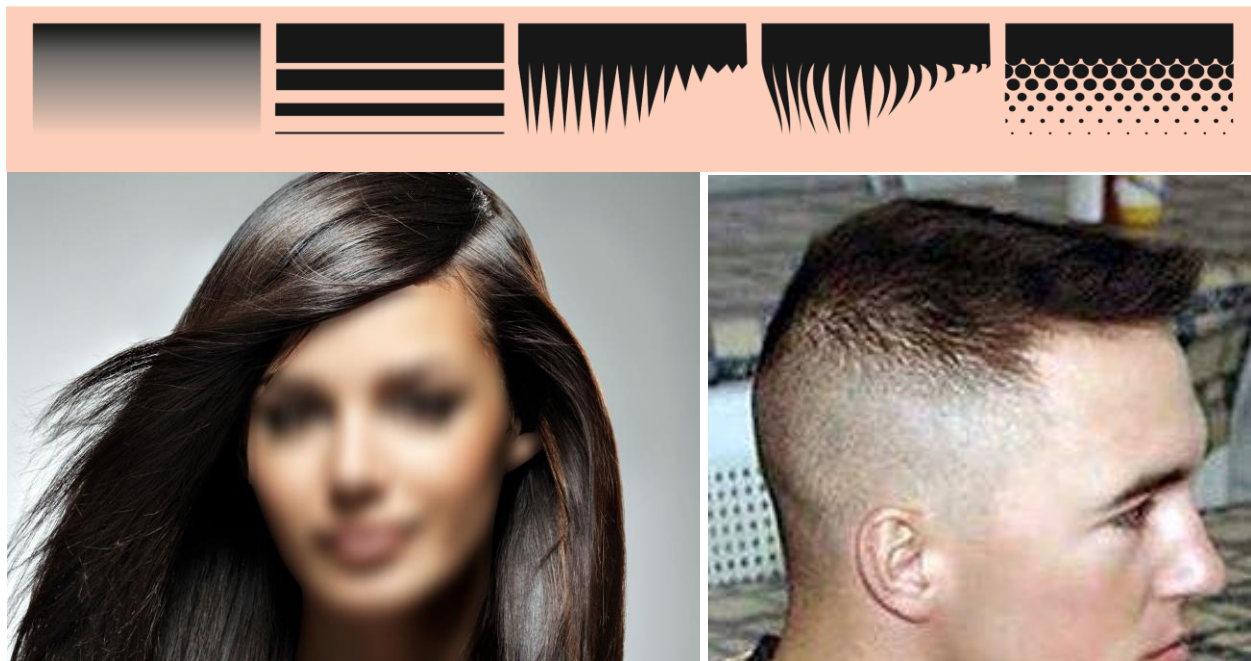
Another something to consider, the environmental conditions grossly affect hair's appearance (condition, straightness or luster), as the model below demonstrates:

Jaycee Yancey photos from **www.tumblr.com**

Figure 9 – Hair Appearance depends on Environmental Conditions

The interface between hair and skin *can* be a hard smooth line, but is more often a graduated transition. In figure painting, this transition can be simulated by careful shading, or by painting an edge comprised of fine lines or stippling.

www.lorealparisusa.com   shanestew.com/best_mens_hairstyles

Figure 10 – Transitions from Scalp to Hair

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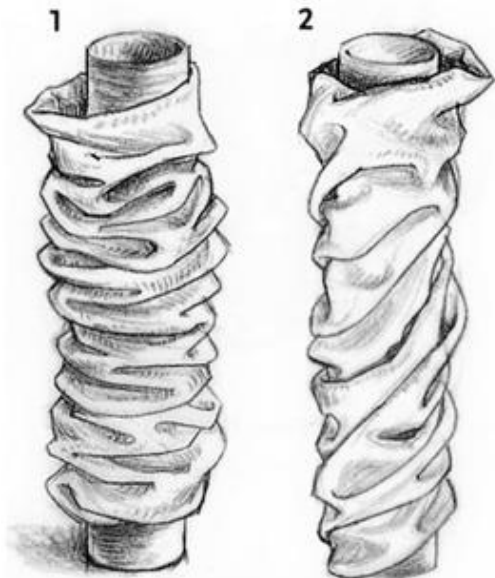Reno, Nevada, U.S.A.

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V.   The Costume

Clothing should be painted in the same order in which the figure would get dressed; that is to say, from the inside out. And then, each individual piece of clothing has its own order of painting. The goal of shading is to simulate or enhance the natural drapery of the cloth. If the pigments you are using are opaque enough, the best order is to start with the deepest shadows, working through higher color values until applying the final dry-brushed highlights. Otherwise, the order is: midtones, followed by a wash of the dark tones, with the highlights applied last. It is really up to you to develop the technique that fits your painting style and renders the results you desire.

https://ruthphipps.files.wordpress.com/   http://www.mightyartdemos.com/

Figure 11 –Composed of Dark and Mid Tones with Highlights Simulates Drapery

Military uniforms present unique challenges because of piping, emblems, insignias and other embellishments. Using the theory that it is easier to paint an edge than a line, piping is best painted before the actual uniform material. Then, the uniform color is painted up to the edge of the piping. Depending on the scale of the figure, the piping may be shaded to enhance its 3D roundness.

Insignia, buttons and braid can be simulated with careful painting, but decals or dry transfers (if they are available) render a cleaner, more convincing appearance. Alternately, insignia, etc, can be painted on decal film, and then applied, which is easier in many cases than trying to paint them directly on the figure.

http://i.ebayimg.com/

Figure 12 – Uniform Piping

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The sheen of the cloth is an important element in providing a sense of realism. For instance, wool is usually dead flat, gabardine has a slight sheen, and synthetic fibers are normally silky. Tamiya X-21 Flat Base can be added to acrylic paints in various concentrations to create a range of sheens, or it can be added to Pledge/Future to create a matt varnish. Decoart DS-48 Pearlizing Medium can be added to acrylic or used as a varnish to achieve a silky look.

http://bonnyblue.net/   www. wikimedia.org (Barbara London seated and Evelyn Sharp)   **http://www.polyvore.com/**

Figure 13 – Different materials have different sheens

Black is one of the most difficult colors to shade, mainly because the range between dark tones and highlights is quite limited. The strategy is to use a very dark gray as the mid tone with the darkest black available used for the deep shadows. Alternately, since matt colors usually appear lighter than glossy ones, painting the clothing gloss "bible" black and bringing out the mid tones and highlights with various amounts of flatting agent is sometimes effective.

http://image.dhgate.com/
Figure 14 – Black Uniform

For camouflage clothing, pinstripes or other intricate patterns, rendered in the smaller scales, paint the pattern in its normal colors. Remember that shadows are generally transparent, so that the pattern is still visible to some degree. Simulate the shadows with a wash of Tamiya X-19 Smoke, and highlights with a light dry brushing of the lightest shade in the base color.

http://bobhudson.com/
Figure 15 –Camouflage

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VI. Warm/Cool Color Effects in Figure Painting

Colors on the right/upper side of the wheel (green, blue, violet) are known as "cool" colors, while those on the left/lower (red, orange and yellow) are the "warm" colors. Be aware that every hue can have a warmer or cooler version. The exceptions are blue and orange, but even these can have versions with characteristics of the adjacent hue.
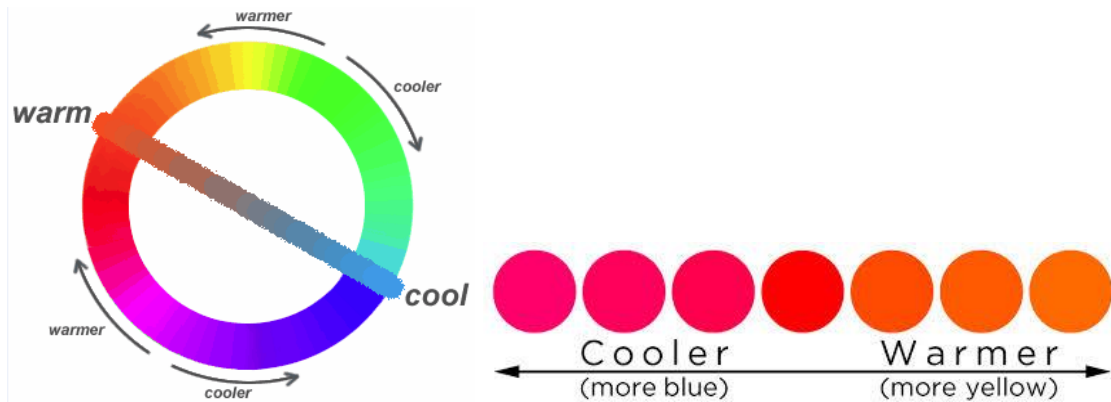

Figure 16 – Warm and Cool Colors

A warm color placed next to a cool version of the same hue can produce an unpleasant clashing sensation. Denim trousers with a teal shirt; or a redhead wearing a purplish red dress are colors that just do not seem to match. The higher the chroma, the more pronounced this mismatch appears. Beyond decorating your kitchen or choosing your wardrobe, warm/cool disparity applies to miniature figures as well. Its considered use for dramatic effect is another artistic tool in the modeler's toolbox.
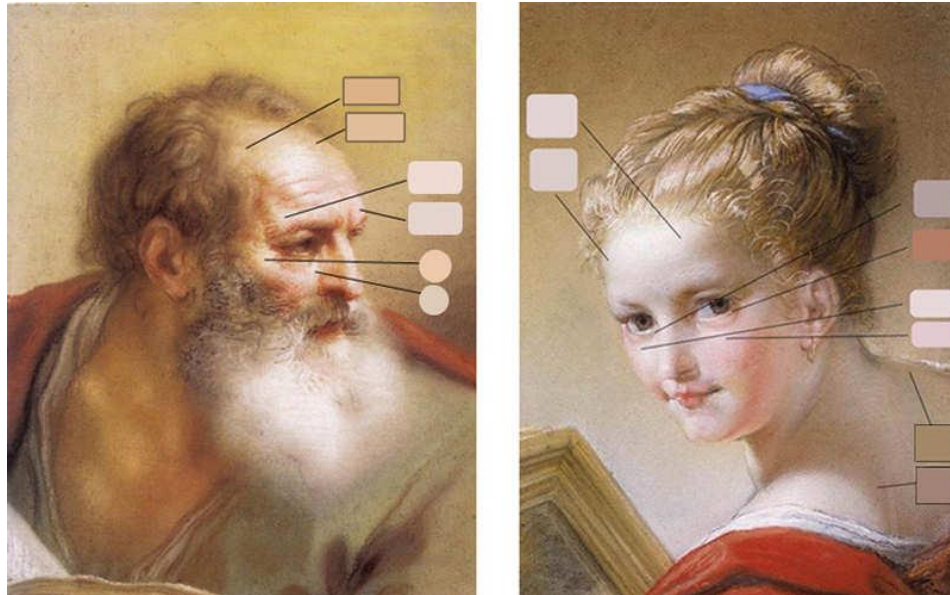

Carole-Anne Mercier via pinterest.com   via lostinaspotlessmind.com

Figure 17 – Cool and Warm Artistic Effects

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For figure painters, warm/cool contrasts can play an important role in delineating highlights and shadows, particularly in skin tones:

Benedetto Luti (1666-1724) via wetcanvas.com

Figure 18 – Shadows and Highlights Accentuated by the Use of Cool and Warm Colors

Outdoors in sunlight, highlights on skin tones tend toward warm hues, while shadows tend toward cool. Indoors or by moonlight, these trends are reversed (cool highlights and warm shadows).

How many figure painting techniques can you spot in this large-scale (1:4) figure?

www.ytinternational.co.uk/
Figure 19 –Putting it All Together

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VII. – Conclusion

You can observe a lot just by looking.   – Yogi Bera –

Studying photographs of painted flats and illustrations in graphic novels is a good way to get a feel for how to render hair and skin tones, since their medium is very much 2D, with the goal of rendering the images to look 3D.

www.illustrationsource.com   ifanboy.com   www.therainbowhub.com   www.etsy.com Art by Shauno

Figure 20 – Artistic Renderings Used to Identifying Figure Painting Techniques

Whether the subject is historical, mythological or fantastical, good observational practices will make you a better figure painter.

various photos found via google images search

Figure 21 – Good Observation is Key to Good Figure Painting