

PAINTING TUTORIAL

Susan Irish, of Carving Patterns Online, <http://www.carvingpatterns.com> offered the following painting techniques for painting your carvings.

There are two approaches to sealing a carving for painting with oil paints and which you use, of course, depends on the final effect that you desire. If you want to paint a sculpture in full detail, such as a Pennsylvania Dutch Carving or a brightly colored Santa Clause might be done, then what you are looking for is to not only seal the wood to receive the paints but also to hide the wood and any grain that might show. In this case she uses gesso, an acrylic flat finished sealer that is used to size canvases for painting. Gesso is very thick straight from the jar, so she thins it down with water by at least one fourth (four parts gesso to one part water).

This should create a wash coat that is transparent and very easy to work into the detail of the work. Brush one coat on, and REALLY work out the brush stroke marks. This wash will penetrate deeply into the grain of the wood. Since gesso is acrylic, it is not self-smoothing. Let that coat dry for several hours. When the woodcarving no longer feels cold to the touch, it's dry. This is an excellent time to do a little bit of extra sanding as the gesso will have raised any loose fibers.

For the second coat, she usually thickens the gesso wash slightly. She reapplies the Gesso and again allows it to dry. She will put three or four thin coats on this way to create a totally white base on which to paint without losing any of the detail in your carving. Allow this to dry thoroughly (wet gesso and fresh oil paint = a terrible mess).

Now the surface is ready for your paints whether it is acrylic or oils. Either you may work directly from the white background or you can antique the carving by applying a wash of burnt umber or raw umber oil paint thinned with linseed oil. (Note: I took a class with Al Longo one time and Al paints his carvings in this manner. It is really a unique technique and looks very good on Santas, angels, etc.)

Thin the oil paint just enough so that you can see through it, Susan checks it by putting a few drops on a piece of newspaper. If she can read the words through the color, it's ready. She then brushes one coat over the entire carving and immediately wipes off the umber wash with a clean lint free cloth. After it is well rubbed you can remove even more of the antique from the highlights with a cloth dampened with turpentine. Let this dry several days. When you go to paint the carving with the oil colors the antiquing will show through the color application. Your high areas will have color that blends down into the dark umber recesses of the carving. Wow - La!, instant blending and shading for your carving.

Susan emphasized that it is her preference to apply light coats of clear matte acrylic spray sealer over the entire carving between coats of oil paint. However, she stated that many artists build up the coats without the extra sealer.

The second approach is one that **Susan** uses on definitely grained woodcarvings, such as butternut or sassafras (basswood shows little or no grain and she does not use it here). When the carving is completed, she applies a thin mixture of linseed oil and turpentine, mixed about half and half. She brushes this coat out very well and lets sit for about fifteen minutes. Now briskly rub the sculpture down to pick up any extra oil finish. Again, LET DRY! The next day repeat the oil coating and rubbing and now let dry for several days. At this point, your carving looks very finished with the linseed oil shine.

Now for the fun part, put your oil paints out on a tile and with a very soft brush (sable flat or filbert) pick up just a little color on the tip. Work the color into the brush on the corner of the tile. Then brush on this very light coat to the different areas of your carving. You will barely be able to see the coating. When every area has one coat of color lightly spray the work with clear matte spray sealer. Let dry just for a few moments.

Repeat this process until you slowly built up the color depth that you want, finishing with the sealer. Some carving areas may take six or seven layers for a good color development, especially the yellows and light greens. What happens here is that you create layers of work. In addition, the viewer of the work can see the color but also sees through the color to the beautiful grain of the wood below. It is almost like applying a transparent lacquer look to the image.

-- Susan Irish

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