

SCA Illumination 101

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Becoming a scribe in the Society for Creative Anachronism is one of the most rewarding activities that any creative person can do. For those who get the scribal bug, it becomes an activity that constantly keeps you working, learning, growing, and pushing your creative limits. We welcome anyone looking to join us, help out once in a while, or those who just want to learn a little something new. But, I do give this one piece of honest advice to one and all... always remember that every artist had to start at the beginning, learn the basics, and grow with practice.

Every Kingdom and every Barony have their own standards for how they prefer scrolls to be done. So, please note I am giving my personal opinions and speaking from the view point of being a Scribe in the Barony and Kingdom of Atenveldt.

Materials Used:

This will get you started, but there are many more materials you can work with as you grow into this art style.

Papers:

Parchmentine/Pergamenata- This is a vegetable based paper that provides us with the closest similarity to real vellum possible without really using vellum. It is also significantly less expensive than real vellum. For this reason, it is the paper of choice for awards given in Atenveldt, and the paper that the Barony and Kingdom will supply you with.

Card Stock- 110lb Card Stock is an adequate stock paper for practice exercises, thank you notes, and non-armiduous awards.

Other Paper- All other papers should be reviewed with the Baronial or Kingdom Scribe before working on an award scroll. Some papers that require more cost and practice, include:

*Vellum/Parchment- This is a more historically accurate material.

*Watercolor Paper- 140lb Hot Press Watercolor Paper is required.

Paints:

Gouache- This is the most commonly used and suggested paint for SCA purposes. Gouache can be watered down to look similar to a watercolor paint, or can be used with less water to be opaque. This gives the best hold to the papers used in the SCA. For those just getting started, you can purchase a box of 24 colors of Reeves Gouache for about \$15.

Ultimately, Windsor & Newton's has a higher quality to their gouache paints, but the price is closer to \$6-20 per tube of paint.

Other Paints- Other paints are rarely used or suggested other than "Period Pigments". If you wish to try pigments, please take a class or ask for a tutorial before purchasing the materials.

Metals:

Windsor & Newton Metallic Inks

Other Metals- If you are interested in exploring more metallic materials, please check with your Baronial or Kingdom Scribe for suggestions and information on:

*Liquid Leaf

*Imitation Leaf

*Real Gold or Silver Leaf

Brushes:

Round Brushes

Liners

Chisel Brush

Pens and Inks:

There are many occasions where we use ink pens to outline or provide extra wispy details. The most important point to note in choosing a pen or ink is that you work with archival quality, water-proof ink only. Please get a pen with the smallest tip possible. Here are some suggestions:

Micron- These are disposable technical pens, great for starting out.

RapidoSketch- This is what I use.

Rapidograph

Other Materials:

Pencil

Ruler

White or Kneaded eraser

Razor Blades

Paint Palette

Paper Towels

Water cups (rinse and to add to paints)

Tooth Picks or Palette Knife (for mixing paints)

Putting Paint to Paper:

There are many types of illumination techniques from gilding to ink designs and beyond. But, the most common is of course painting. Here are some steps and techniques that will help you get the best results with a paint brush.

1. Choosing a design

The absolute beginning of working on a scroll, is in choosing a design that is appropriate to the use. Some things to think about are: having space for the text of the award, avoiding strongly overt religious symbolism, the type of award it is meant to be, and historical authenticity of the art.

2. Putting the design on paper

Once you choose a design that you want, you will want to get a good photo copy of the design sized to fit the paper you are using. Please note that you will want to leave at least a ½ inch margin on the paper for framing assistance. With that copy, you can tape the photo copy to the back of the parchmentine and use a light table to then trace the design onto the paper. Some people feel more comfortable tracing in pencil and then going over the design in ink, but in the end you will want to have the design drawn in ink. *** When first starting, the Barony or Kingdom can provide paper with the design already drawn on the paper until you are more confident in inking them yourself.

3. Clean your painting surface

After inking the design onto a paper, or receiving a pre-drawn design from the Baronial or Kingdom Scribe, please use your white eraser or kneaded eraser to erase the entire page. Many times, the oils from our hands can attach to the paper and the parchmentine may have an oily residue on it. That oil can cause paint to not bind to the paper and later flake off. Also clear your table of any food or drinks while you are working.

4. Protecting the painting surface

Please use a clean sheet of paper or a paper towel to place between your hand and the area of the paper that you are not painting on at the moment to avoid re-depositing oils onto the paper.

5. Choosing a paint brush

There are two important things to keep in mind with choosing a brush. First, use the largest brush that you can comfortably fit into the space. This will allow you to apply more paint in a shorter amount of time and to fill the space before the paint begins to dry. Using a small spotter brush in a large space will leave the paint looking blotchy and uneven. Second, when looking to do small details, look at the tip of the brush. A larger round brush of higher quality can come to a finer tip than many of the smaller brushes. It is the tip that is used in those tiny details, so take care of your brushes to maintain that tip.

6. Using and Storing your paints

When you first get your paints, you will want to squeeze some of each color onto your palette. Personally, I use a bobbin box for my pallet as it gives small pockets to keep each color in. However, there are many options. The key is that with gouache, it is a paint that can be re-constituted with water. So, you can squeeze out a decent amount of paint, let it dry, add water to it, and use it again. Before you start painting, make sure you add water to the colors needed, and mix them well before starting. Please note that you never want to use your paint brush to mix paints, please use a tooth pick or a palette knife.

7. Paint Consistency

Paint consistency is the key to making an illumination look finished and high quality. Please refer to the Painting Worksheets for more information and to practice your consistency.

Choosing your colors:

Now that you are ready to paint in your design, the toughest decisions are usually in choosing the colors you want to use. This is where artistic creativity can really make a difference. The same design can be painted by 10 different scribes and you will get 10 different choices. Feel free to explore color options. However, I will make these suggestions:



1. Work from a “Period” color palette

This just means to work with colors that you commonly see in historical manuscripts. Generally, those are going to be your primary red, blue, and yellow along with permanent green, white and black. You will also want to have shades of brown, ochre, and flesh. If you purchase a set of Reeves, you will have plenty of colors to choose from, those are fine. However, I will note that the use of pinks, purples, and oranges were very limited in historical art work. Until you gain some familiarity with the colors that are commonly used in a style or unless you are copying a specific piece of artwork, please refrain from using these colors.

2. When in doubt, look at the original

There is absolutely nothing wrong with simply copying the same color choices as the original piece of artwork. Or, if you want to choose other colors, but are still unsure, feel free to look at other artwork by the same artist, culture, or in the same style for inspiration. That will help you see that Celtic is a mix of bold colors rather than using all the same color scheme.

3. Work from the back to the front

One of the most common issues that an artist runs into is that they start painting the front image first, use every color they have and then can not decide what to paint the background so that the front does not blend into it. Well, let me say that people can wear the same color tunic and trousers, but trees will always be some shade of green. So, start with the background of the design first, then add the rest of the people or knots on top of that so that you know for sure that each one will stand out on top of that background.

4. Don't forget your metals

Yes, you can use gold and silver! Many styles use these as common elements of an image. Please look at original examples and see where they were used. You can use many different modern materials to get those shiny metallic accents. If you need assistance in working with them, please check with your Baronial or Kingdom Scribe.

5. Learn about Color Theory

Color Theory is the study of colors, how they relate and how they mix together. But, never fear, we don't expect you to spend massive amounts of time studying the chemical compositions or anything like that. What we use Color Theory for is to help choose colors that will strengthen each other, or know why you get muddy brown when trying to blend a flower with purple and yellow. Please refer to the Color Theory Worksheets for more practice and information.

Completing the Image:

Once you have painted the base layers, do not despair if the image does not look done. There are several techniques that we use to give an illumination those final finishing touches. Please be patient with the art work until you reach the end, you may be surprised by the results. For more practice, please see the Shading and White Work worksheets.



1. Shading

Shading is the technique of using other shades of the same basic color to create dimension to an object. This really adds to an illumination by making things appear more 3D.

2. Blending

Blending is using multiple colors to give an object depth and realism. Objects such as flowers are rarely just one color, this will help you achieve that extra level technique used by historic artists.

3. White Work

White work is the technique of using white (or sometimes gold or other colors) to apply a small detailed design over top of the painted design to add more decoration. It is a technique commonly used in many "Period" manuscript styles.

4. Black Work

Once an image is finished being painted, there is usually some kind of dark line applied around the edges of the objects or lines in the piece. In earlier styles, a nice technical pen can be used to apply a black line around each line that had previously been drawn on the paper when the design was first applied. This will crisp up the design and give a well defined finishing edge. In later styles, this was typically done using a very dark shade of the color used in that object, and painted on with a brush. In both cases, the line should be as thin as possible and used to help correct imperfect lines. If you are not sure whether to use the pen or paint, ask your Baronial or Kingdom Scribe for assistance.

5. Fixing Mistakes

Yes, you can fix mistakes! Using the parchmentine allows us to be able to scrape off paint or ink with a sharp razor blade if the mistake is severe enough. However, I do suggest that you first fix your scrolls with the assistance of another experienced scribe as there are other creative ways to fix mistakes as well.

6. Signing the Back

Please always sign the back of your scroll so that your name can be read into court. However, please make that signature in a location behind an area of paint.