

White Work, Black Work and More

In the finishing stages of many illumination styles, it is common to apply detail lines around an object or even on an object. It is important to study the style that you are working with to know what finishing touches apply.

1. Black Work

In most illumination styles, it is suggested that you retrace the original black lines of the design to produce a crisp finished line. This is accomplished using a technical pen with archival quality, water-proof ink or with a very thin brush tip and black paint. Most beginning scribes find using the pen to be easier, but feel free to try both. When using a pen, please purchase the smallest tip you can work with. Ideally for a Micron, use the one that is labeled a .005. For a Rapido series pen, that would be a .18. Below, paint in the designs as you wish, but then go back and re-draw the black lines that were there originally to see the effect.



2. White Work

White Work can be a defining characteristic of an artistic style. For example, Romanesque illuminations will use lots of white lines, dots, and patterns to add decorative details. Gothic illuminations will commonly use white patterns on top of primary color blocks to create a background pattern or embellish a border. Other styles will use it to create that extra touch of highlight that gives an object a 3D feel. There is nothing intimidating in working with White Work, but it does take a little practice in handling your brush. So, let's get started.

To begin with, you will want to get the correct white. Many kinds of white paint will bleed with the colors that are painted below it over time. Thus it will look like pink on red instead of white. To avoid this, you want to choose a permanent or bleed-proof white. Many scribes use Dr. Ph Martin's Bleed Proof White. Personally, I prefer using the Windsor & Newton's Permanent White Gouache. Once you choose the white, you will want to add enough water so that it becomes the consistency of melted ice cream. Too much water will pull color up from the bottom layer.

Next, you will choose a brush that has a very fine tip. I would suggest using a liner brush, but the tip is the most important. Once you dip the brush into the paint, slide the tip of the brush on the edge of your palette to remove any excess paint. If there is too much paint in the bristles, the line will appear much thicker than intended. Finally, apply the paint. Use the columns on the next page to practice design patterns of dots, lines, and curves.



3. Blue Work, Red Work, Gold Work etc...

Blue Work or any other color of work refers to the same techniques as White Work, but done in that color. So, keep practicing on those patterns.

4. Diapering

The technique of filling an otherwise empty background with a pattern is called diapering. Diapering is particularly common in Gothic illuminations. There are styles of diapering that use simple White Work lines to paint a diamond pattern with small white dots in each corner of every diamond. Or there is the popular style of painting alternating squares or diamonds in red, blue, and/or gold. There are many ways of diapering a background. Below, I will ask you to paint in the grid with a pattern of red, blue, and/or gold squares. Then use your Black Work to re-ink one half of the lines for comparison (rulers are permitted). Finally, add some kind of white work design into the Black Worked side. This can be dots in the corner or red squares, circles in blue squares, or what ever you like. Just look at the difference between the finished and unfinished sides.

