

THE BOOK OF -COSPLAY PAINTING- --- WITH BRUSHES AND ACRYLICS



BY SVETLANA QUINDT



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DEAR READER,

Welcome! Or to those who already got my first book: Welcome back! This is the second volume and a straight continuation of my first book: "The Book of Cosplay Armor Making". If you want to learn how to build costumes from the ground up, I recommend you to get started with my first volume.

That said, let's begin!

Welcome to a world of colors, gradients, lights, shadows, tiny details and countless hours with acrylic paints, brushes and dirty clothes full of colored splatter. While creating a prop or armor piece may have cost you just a few hours, the real work starts with the painting. Try to see yourself as an artist now. Someone who can bring a dead, grey object to life just by tenderly covering it with his brush strokes. You have the power to bring something fictional straight into reality. But beware: painting will also cost you a lot of patience, time and nerves. In this book I will introduce you to my own techniques, which will hopefully help you in finding your own way of doing things. So clean your brushes, ready your paint and get a glass of fresh water. A world of colorful cosplays is waiting for you!

May I introduce myself?

Just jump forward if you already follow my work and know every little detail about me - which is kinda creepy I must say. For everyone else: I'm Svetlana Quindt or Kamui as more of you know me by and I come from the beautiful country of Sauerkraut and Bratwurst: Germany. Around ten years ago I discovered cosplay as a truly wonderful and creative hobby. Over the time however I learned to hate my sewing machine and exchanged it for a hot air gun, scissors and glue. Now I'm a full time armor and prop maker and mostly known for my armor costumes from World of Warcraft, Diablo and Starcraft. Many of you may also have found this book through my tutorials, which I love to share with others. In my opinion cosplay is a community which grows by sharing knowledge and experience from every member and since I learned so much from others, I want to give something back.

ABOUT THIS BOOK:

A few years ago many of you already asked me for a book and I sadly never had the time to make one. Now it's finally done and I hope it will be everything you wished for. My main goal is to have a collection of books for all topics that are important for the creation of armor and props. It's supposed to be a guide that helps you during your own projects and that can assist you, if you have any problems or questions. It won't be a step by step instruction for every single bracer, every breastplate, every helmet, every shield, every shin armor and every pauldron you ever wanted, have and will have in mind. That would be just impossible since there are countless amounts of references you can bring to life. But it will give you an idea of how to solve something by yourself.

I will try to give you a helping hand, show you my own techniques and methods I've learned over the years and I hope, that this book will be just the beginning of a big project you have dreamed about for years. I know that there will still be some unanswered questions, but I would like to open your mind to new ideas and help you to find a solution by experimenting, trying and learning by yourself.

And if you still have a problem, you know how you can reach me!

www.kamuicosplay.com

www.facebook.com/kamuicos

www.twitter.com/Kamuicosplay

www.youtube.com/mogrymillian

Here you can find my first book: "The Book of Cosplay Armor Making": <http://kamuicosplay.storenvy.com/>



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Don't just look at references, try to improve them!

A good reference is the base for a good paint job and can be a great help finding the final look of your enormous helmet, your massive pauldrons or your bloodthirsty axe. Colorful artworks with a good resolution, a detailed picture in an art book or a close look at a 3D-model from a video game are a good start, if you think about adding colors, as well as lights and shadows to your still unpainted piece. The best way to get an idea of the final look of your prop or costume is do to your homework.



Sadly, sometimes even this doesn't help that much. Reference pictures can have a lack of details, look really boring and plain, consist only of a few pixels or just have a very weird and unrealistic design. In this case your own fantasy and imagination is required. Painting doesn't mean that you have to copy every single color, shade and every single detail of your reference –

especially since transferring something fictional into reality can turn out pretty boring, weird or inappropriate. Painting means much more finding a way to give something that is unreal and fictional a real and eye-catching look. The goal is not to copy your reference, but to be inspired by it, to find your own style and bring it to life by making it "believable". ■

Note:

Artists sometimes get lazy and tend to draw their smaller details very rough and unprecise. In case of my Wizard breastplate here, the artwork it is based on was nothing more than a blurry mess. I had to think about what would make the breastplate cooler by adding more details and patterns by myself. Same goes for the painting as well. Try to improve wherever you can! It's worth it!

**Note:**

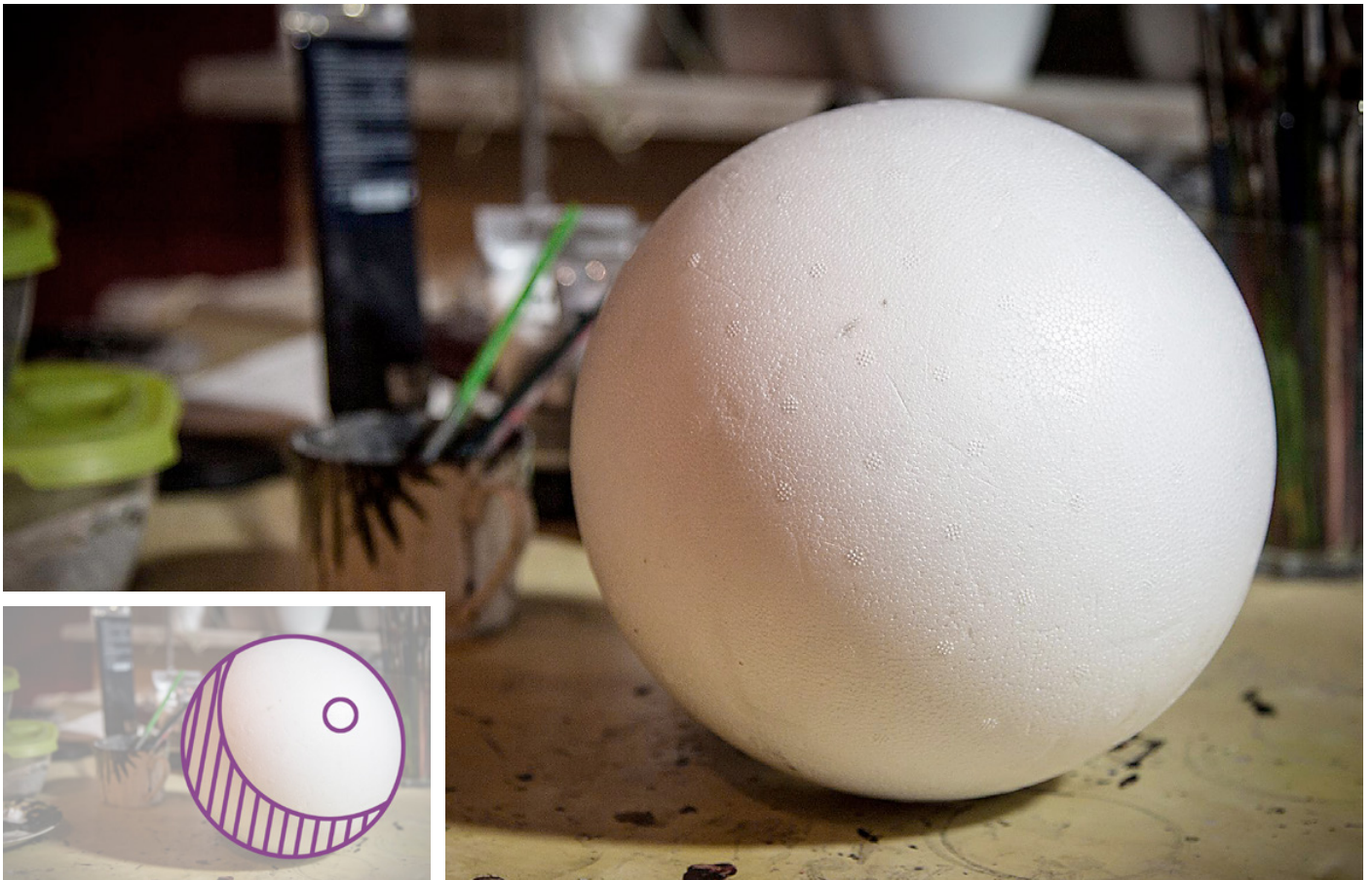
It's not rare that a blade in a reference picture is just plain silver - like real steel would be for example. A painted artwork however will not portray how that piece will look in real life. Real world details like dirt, scratches, blood or other hints of its usage might be missing. When it comes to transferring something fictional into reality it's your job to think about stuff like that and then add these missing details yourself.

Note:

I added little color icons next to every important picture in this book that indicate what kind of base colors I used for that particular part. Everything you see on that piece is either a pure color in different brightnesses (mixed with either black or white) or a mixture of two or more of the displayed colors.

Three-dimensional painting - because everything is better in 3D!

Before you start with the actual paint job, try to think about shadows and lights. It's important that you get a feeling for three-dimensional shapes and get an idea of how light hits and shadow is casted. For that purpose, just take a look at this styrofoam globe and look at its bright and dark areas which are completely generated by light (scribble).



You can see that there is a part in the shape of a moon, which lays in shadow and also a bright, light flooded circle on the top right. There is also a tiny little pretty bright spot in the middle, which reflects the light of my lamp. In addition you'll find soft and hard gradients which change slowly or pretty fast from bright to dark. If someone asks you what color the sphere is, you're going to say "white". That's because it is just that: plain white. Just like the blade of a sword could be "plain silver" or the color of a breastplate could be "plain purple". The trick is not to paint it in only that single color. What makes a painted piece interesting is what light and shadow does with a plain color and

then exaggerating that effect by painting the dark and the bright parts on by yourself.

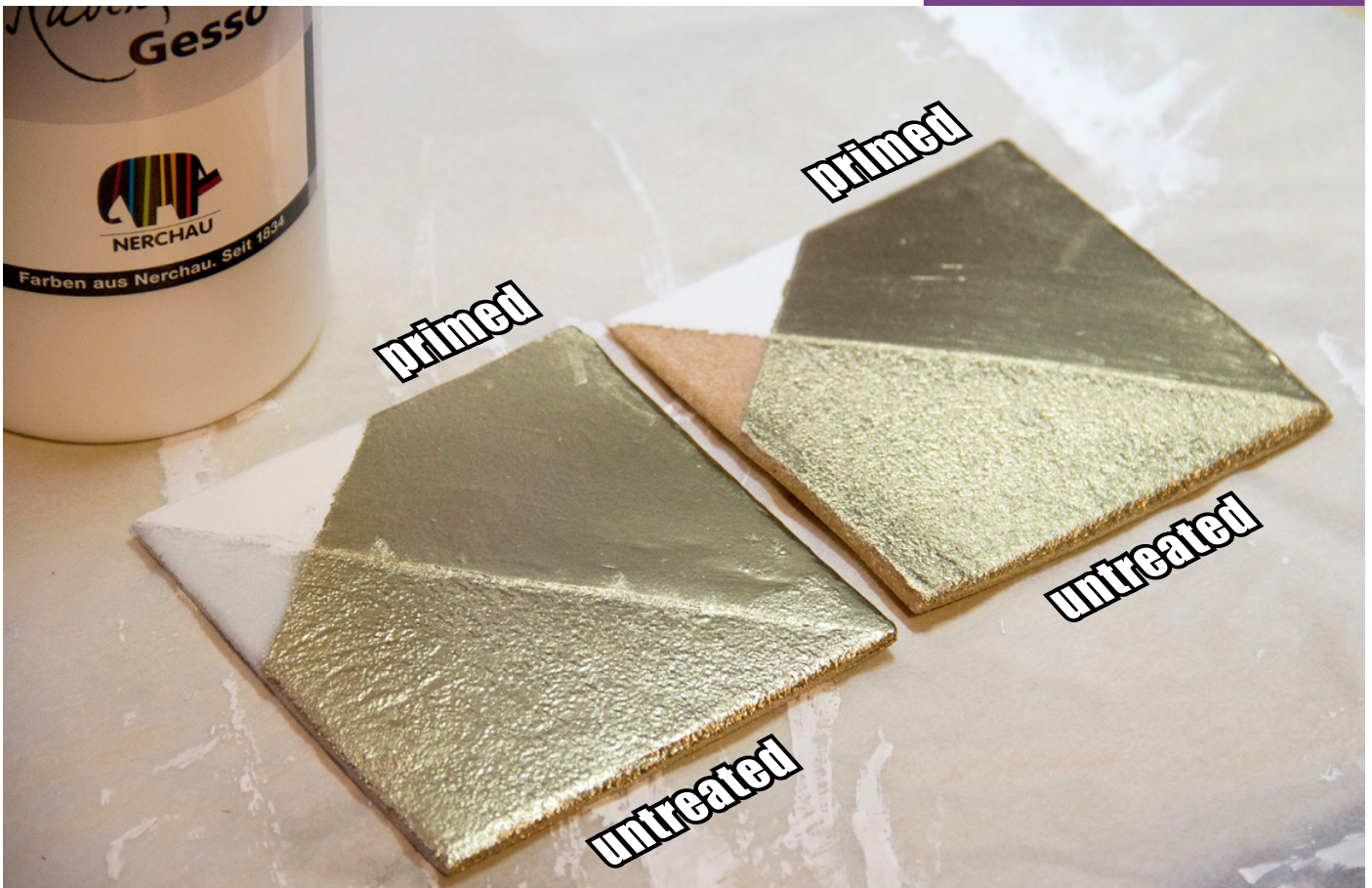
Look around and study different forms and shapes in your household. You will notice that light and shadow will look different, depending on real or artificial light and in which position it stays in front of this light. Now it's your turn to transfer these studies to your prop or armor piece and then exaggerate that to a point where you're satisfied with your paint job.

When you create a costume, always keep in mind that you are trying to fake something: You hide

your hair under a wig, you change your silhouette with cloth and armor, you apply makeup and you may even try to change your expression and your way of speaking. You often also go way overtop, since the appearance and the personality of a fictional character requires exactly that. So also overdo your paint job if you would like to stand out with your work. It's even possible to do it so well that your final prop will look like it just jumped out of a comic book, like many of my own projects. Of course it's also possible to keep everything natural and real-looking. Mostly, this is just a question of personal taste. ■

It's prime time!

If your armor part or prop already has a clean and shiny surface, ready for a paint job, then feel free to ignore this topic. If you're working with rough materials like Worbla, Wonderflex, paper maché or EVA foam then take note that an annoying, time consuming and pretty boring work step is waiting for you: The (🎵dramatic music🎵) priming!



Priming, for me, is one of the most boring work steps. It comes right after the super creative stage of crafting the piece and right before applying the final paint job that finally brings your costume to life. Despite of all that, it's essential to give your costume a smooth, clean and realistic look and this often makes the difference between a nice, or a sloppy paint job.

The main problem with rough materials is the surface. It needs to be prepared for the final paint job. If you're working with EVA foam, then your search for tutorials surely already showed you that it's necessary to seal the material at first with several layers of glue. The same is also required for Wonderflex and Worbla.

Note:

As you can see in the picture, you can also apply paint directly on the material (left is Wonderflex, right is Worbla), but keep in mind that you probably won't like the result that much. In fact it will look like you've just painted over sanding paper. In my experience, most costumes require a clean and shiny surface, since you might plan to build a huge broadsword and try to fake steel or a detailed, clean armor with a silver, gold or bronze coat.

Spray primer

Spray primer is a very easy and fast product to get a nice, clean base for a following paint job. All you have to do, is to press on the can, to spray all around your costume piece, to let it dry and to repeat this, until you are satisfied with the result. Another huge advantage is that you basically can reach even the deepest hole and give even the tiniest details a clean, smooth look. So it's a per-

fect solution, if you have a complicated shape where it's almost impossible to prime every spot equally. In addition, it saves you tons of time and work since you really just have to spray and the final sanding is pretty quickly done. Sadly however, it's also pretty expensive compared to other products (13€ for one can here in Germany) and you're gonna need a lot of it. It also generates

dirt-like dust while spraying, which is really hard to clean once it is dry. So if you choose this option, look forward for a long cleaning period in your workshop or covering the surrounding area with blankets. Go outside to spray, if you have the chance or set up a good ventilation in your workshop. **Covering your eyes, mouth and hands while spraying is an absolute must.** ■



Note:

The staff of my Protoss Wizard costume is a pretty good example for the use of spray primer. I not only had to hurry a lot to finish this prop, it was also very hard to reach every spot when it came to sanding and the final painting. So a spray primer was perfect for the job. Sadly however, I had to use two cans, which are 13€ each and had to cover my whole balcony with a blanket to save it from the devilish grey dust of the spray primer.

Note:

Spray primer is especially good for priming detailed and complicated surfaces like these scales on my breastplate. Applying Gesso or wood glue would have taken much more time. As you can see, the spray is really accurate and you can still see the surface of the underlying material. This is why sanding is important!



Gesso

A primer I used a lot in the past is Gesso. Gesso is basically an acrylic paint with a slightly thicker consistency than usual. It's available in black as well as white but also can be mixed with acrylics if other colors are required. In addition, it gets very hard once it dried and it's even possible to sand it by hand with sand paper or with an orbital sander. Since you can apply very thin and also

very thick layers, it's perfect to fill out bumps, scratches, holes, lines and other spots you may want to get rid of. I, for example, use it a lot to cover seaming lines between two pieces of Worbla. Depending on the thickness of Gesso it can take some hours or even a full day until a layer of Gesso is completely dry and ready to be sanded. For getting a really clean surface it's neces-

sary to apply around ten layers of Gesso and applying this primer is not the main job. Once your armor and props have had around 24 hours to get a solid hard primer, it's time to sand it, sand it and sand it even more. Mostly by hand. Preferably with a lot of strength and pressure and only if you're not able to feel your hand anymore you have done your job well enough. ■



Note:

To shorten the drying times of Gesso, it's possible to use a hair dryer or a hot air gun - very carefully. Once the wet Gesso doesn't shine anymore you should stop with the heating since it's possible to get hot air bubbles between the Gesso and the actual armor or prop. In addition, you can prime many parts at the same time. Just rotate between these different parts so they have enough time to dry while you apply the next layer.

Note:

The Asmodian Gladiator from Aion was my first armor project and it taught me that priming is anything but fast. This costume is pretty flat and has huge and even surfaces. It was a good decision to buy an orbital sanding machine and save a lot of time with that tool. Despite of that, I spent weeks only by trying to prepare this costume for the paint job.

Wood glue

The last primer I prefer for my projects is wood glue. Compared to Gesso and spray primer it's the one that gives you nearly no control over the final product, since you can't really sand it and it's hard to get rid of mistakes once the glue is dry. Despite of that, it's clearly the fastest and easiest way to prepare your prop or armor for the paint job. All you need to do is to apply the glue directly, let it dry for a bit and keep on doing that for

around five or ten layers. Actually it dries pretty fast (around 30 minutes per layer), but you can even accelerate the process by using a hair dryer. All you need to do is to use a big brush and put some here and there to get rid of big drops. Sanding is not necessary.

Once dried, wood glue creates a gummy-like layer over your material. Since it's hard to apply the glue completely even, it can happen that

there are some little bumps, but they will pretty much disappear after your paint job. Since you are now able to directly add colors on this layer, priming with this method is pretty fast, easy and cheap. The only disadvantage is that you are not able to correct holes, seaming lines or any other mistakes. However, for that job you can combine different priming methods and get the perfect surface for the coming painting. ■



Note:

There are surely even more possible primers, which can work even better than the ones I've introduced to you. However, everything I show you is just from my own experiences and not facts written in stone. So if you find something better, feel free to tell your friends and share your knowledge online, since getting better with the support of others is much faster and easier than learning everything by yourself!

Colors, Brushes and more

If you take a trip to the hobby shop to buy some supplies, you'll find a ton of different colors, paints, brushes, sponges, paint tray palettes and even if you have already decided on a brand of color - choosing the right colors to mix them later is a completely different problem.



No matter how you decide, note at first that there are basically no wrong products. Just products that work better and those that don't work that great for giving your props and armor the nice and colorful texture you want. I also already worked with aquarells, gouache and spray paint to name a few and I'm sure oil colors would be able to create a really cool, rough structure as well. Always try out new techniques before you use them on your real armor piece.

If you want to go the save way however, try out acrylics, which still are my preferred colors. Acrylics have the huge advantage that they cover very well, have a huge range of different available colors, are easy to store and mostly very cheap.

Also, no matter which brand you choose, they mostly have about the same quality (at least here in Germany) and can be easily mixed together. Also notice that it's not necessary to find a paint in exactly that special color you need for your costume. If they are available, then sure, it's easier and more comfortable, since you can buy the same color again at any given time. A great working alternative is just too mix colors by yourself and store them in a Tupperware container during the time of the project. As long as you mix it enough, you can use it for every costume part and don't need to worry if you are able to get the same color shade every time you start with painting a new piece.

Note:

If you store your acrylics in a plastic container, don't directly take it out of there, while you're painting. Just put the necessary amount on your mixing palette and close the container again. That way, you avoid drying out the main source of your colors and always have a fresh and clean base color for your next paint job.



Note:

It can take some time if you search for acrylics in a special consistency or if you're not satisfied with a product you've bought. I, for example, have tons of different black and white acrylics, since they sometimes are not that covering, are clumpy or have a weird shine once they are dry. So don't worry if you bought some wrong colors. Acrylics are pretty cheap and it sometimes requires a bit of experimenting until you'll find the right product. And who knows, maybe that half translucent white you didn't like is actually perfect for another project of yours in the future!

Finding the right brushes.

Brushes are the other important part you have to search for and if you already worked with cheap products, you know that when it comes to brushes, quality really matters. Despite of that, you won't need any super expensive brushes made out of unicorn hair and the wood of a 1000 year old tree from a fairy tale. Especially since you will crush your brushes like other people crush potato chips. All you really need to look out for are products with at least decent quality, so that the hairs don't break or fall out constantly. I'm not able to give you any product recommendations, since my stores probably don't have the same products as those in your country. I found the set of my favorite brushes for around 5€ (about 8\$) in the model maker section of an electronic shop, for example.

Note:

Since you most likely will cover huge areas with paint for the basic paint job and will create tiny details at the end, it's important to buy a huge range of brushes in different shapes and sizes. I have really big, rough ones and really tiny, super fine brushes in my brush glass. The small ones may be a bit more expensive than the bigger ones, but you buy a brush not only for one project but rather for your hobby and you will surely use them more than only once.



My most used brushes:

**1**

I normally use big and medium sized flat brushes to make basic paint, priming and sealing. It's always a good idea to work your way from big and rough to small and delicate. I don't use any water at all and just dip my brush into a tiny bit of paint.

2

Big to medium sized flat brushes are what I normally use for making smooth gradients. Personally I find it easier to use flat instead of round brushes, because you can work way more precisely when dipping whole areas.

3

When I'm done with my main paint, I switch over to smaller round brushes for my detail work. I have really shaky hands, so I don't use the smallest ones. Try out how steady you can hold your hands, while drawing thin lines, to get an idea of what size of brushes you are able to work with. ■

Note:

Don't forget to clean your brushes after you used them because otherwise the color will get stuck and you will have a hard time getting it out of your brush again. Also don't forget to take them out of your water cup, for they will deform quite easily overnight if you don't.

Now that we have prepared our armor pieces, treated their surfaces to be silky smooth and got our colors and brushes, we are finally ready to begin painting.

But beware: Compared to building your Worbla or Wonderflex pieces, painting them takes a whole lot more patience. As a rule of thumb: you can estimate that painting a piece takes about twice to three times the time of building it - depending on how much detail you want it to have.

Please notice that everything I'm showing to you is just my way of doing things. There are many different ways to paint, so be open to new things and look for inspiration everywhere.

A clean base is the beginning of a great paint job.

Once you're finally done with sanding and got a smooth, clean and completely structure free surface (if you desire so) – ready your colors and tools: it's time to finally start with the paint job. The first layer of paint will not only be the base for all the following layers but can also already be the first part of your shadows.

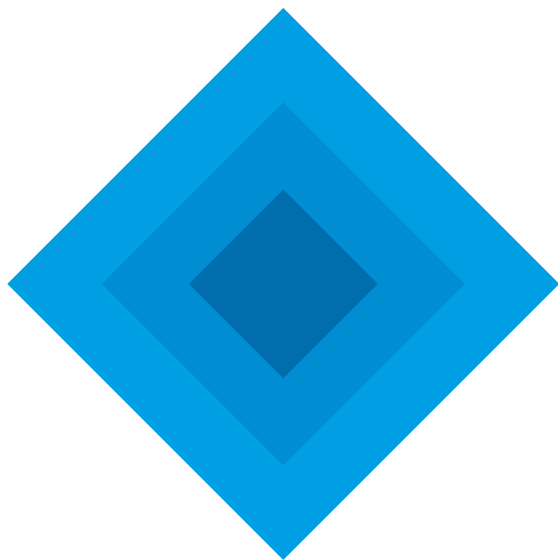


When you are asking yourself which color you should choose for your base, try to think about the darkest spot of your reference picture. I generally paint my costume parts from dark to bright, meaning I start with the darkest shadow color and work my way up the brightness scale until I reach the highlights, which normally come last for me. Since I prefer a very high contrast on my projects, I often use black as a base. If your on-coming armor or prop will be pretty bright, try to find the darkest color you want to use for your shadows and use that. This way you just need to add more and more lights on top and already have a base for adding gradients.

As you can see in my example, I've used grey for the bright parts and black for the dark parts of the helmet for my Crusader from Diablo III. The final paint job will be much brighter, but with these colors all I need to do is to apply more light. Using that technique, I can also save a lot of time that I would normally need to paint shadows on top.

Note:

If you - for some reason - prefer to paint from light to dark and want to apply shadows instead of light, it's necessary to work a little bit differently. In that case use a brighter color as a base paint and add highlights and shadows afterwards. I did that too at first until I noticed that it's much easier and a lot quicker to use the dark-to-light technique.



Using colors that are too close together in saturation and brightness, your final piece may end up looking a bit dull.



If you use a wider range of color and brightness, the contrast of your piece will be much bigger. In the end your piece will look more interesting.



Note:

Applying a base paint can also take a lot of time, if your projects are very huge. In that case, it's a good idea to buy a can of acrylic spray paint and use it for the first layer. If you don't want to get a black carpet, pet or floor at the end, it's also a good idea to save your surroundings and your furniture with a blanket or even better - go outside to spray away. Be careful not to spray too much color on your piece, since it may begin dripping down and forming ugly lines on your otherwise clean surface. Try to spray evenly by going from side to side instead of just spraying on the same spot for too long. Also don't get too close and try to keep your distance while spraying to avoid getting too much color on your piece. Always try things out first on a test sample.



How to paint metals

A metallic look is one of the most demanded paint jobs in the cosplay scene and even if you still haven't "painted" steel or gold, be sure that you probably have to do it sooner or later.

At that point, you'll notice that it can be quite tricky to find the right colors or even to find the right products for the base paint. The main problem of painting metallics is that most of them just don't cover too well. If you use simple acrylics in silver, gold or bronze, you sometimes have to apply the color at least five times until it finally covers perfectly. That's not only very time consuming and boring, but the many layers of brush strokes also often destroy the clean surface you've created with your primer earlier.

One solution for this problem are metallic spray paints, which can already be a great base for the final paint job. This technique however requires a very clean and smooth surface and a sloppy priming would get noticed pretty easily, since the reflective surface will show every single little imperfection. In addition, you can add color gradients and shadows if you're skilled enough and even use it like an airbrush. I, however, prefer it mainly for getting nice shiny edges, which almost all of my costumes have.



The large main areas between the worbla borders are all painted by hand, to give it a more realistic look. Like I explained, I used a basic paint in the color of the darkest shadow and used this layer to add the final “metal-look”. Painting metallics takes more time than you usually need with normal colors. Not only does priming need

to be extra accurate, you also need more layers for the actual paint job. Also you will require a well ventilated room for spraying acrylics and enough safety tools to protect your skin and your lungs from the air born color. At least try to read the safety instructions on the back of the can for a change! ■



Note:

In my mind, cosplay is in every aspect about faking realism – this means you try to create something that looks real and awesome out of something that is not. For that reason, I’m not satisfied with letting the sun be the only one who cast shadows and lights on my pieces. Even when it comes to painting metallics, I prefer to strengthen the look by an additional paint instead of letting it in its original metallic look, like a real knight armor made out of steel would look like for example. Sorry, my LARP friends, I just want to look cool.





Note:

When it comes to gold or silver, I always prefer chrome colors. Despite of their preview on the can looking pretty shiny and way too glossy, the final result will lose this look because of additional layers of colors and the final weathering and varnish. Despite of that, it's always a good idea to test these colors on a small piece before applying it to your finished worbla piece.

You can see the entire painting process of these bracers in my Youtube video (Activate English subtitles in the player options):

<http://youtu.be/xvIKJMOjgKU>

How to paint organics

If you desire a more organic look, like wood, plants, or flesh, it's helpful to count not only on the paint. A good base for such structures is a surface that was already "prepared". Carving random lines, holes, bumps, scratches and other irregularities into the material gives your prop not only more depth, but also a better base for the final paint job. In addition, it's possible to sculpt structures on, like scales on a horn (see next page).



When it comes to sculpting and also to the final painting, it's important to work "wild". Similar parts still need to look different and random enough. Repeating structures should be different and irregular, like in nature itself. Natural, soft colors are also helpful and it's important to always keep the material you want to create in your mind: If you'd like to create wood, don't use

shiny bronze color. Are you working on realistic, bright horns, don't work with pure white and black since these are not common in nature. In general, the most important point is to work a bit more roughly, a bit more vague and also to stay natural in choice of your colors and their shades. Try not to make your final product too shiny by using glossy finish for example, for it will quickly

lose its real look and feel fake. Despite of that, creating special textures like bark, stone, flesh or bone is anything but easy and will cost you some experimenting and practice until you're satisfied with your paint job. ■



Note:

Reference materials like photos are a great help for organic paints. Collect several images and try to find the most recognizable characteristics of the texture you'd like to paint. Do some research on deviantart for example, you'll find a lot of digital painting tutorials online, which can be transferred to your own work and can be a huge help by showing work steps you would not have thought about otherwise.

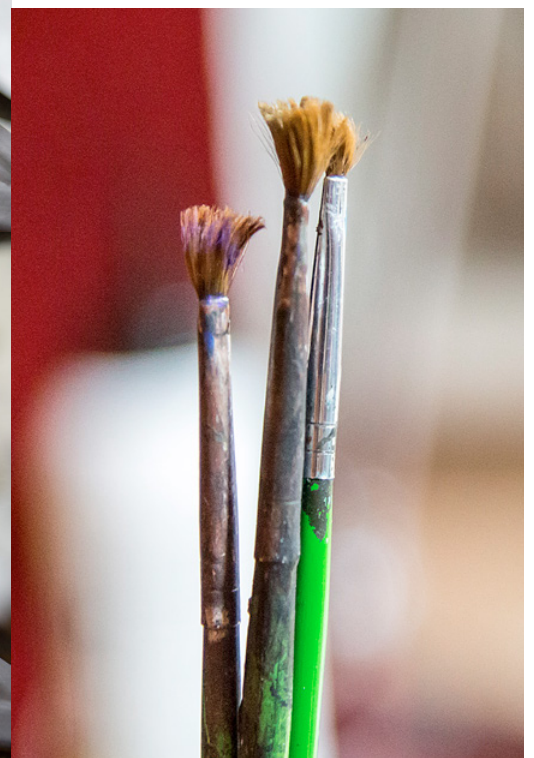


Time for some gradients!

When it comes to gradients, your knowledge of light and shadow is required. When someone asks me how I get my color transitions so smooth, I have only one answer for him. I dab. I dab, I dab, I dab.

Honestly, there are tons of different techniques of how to paint a costume piece. You can use air-brush for adding shadows and highlights, you can work with a lot of water or with no water at all, you can use a sponge, a brush and even a piece of fabric for adding gradients. Naturally, I can only show you my own techniques. For them I generally use just a few simple colors and some brushes that I can torture well.

My way is the dab way! After the base paint is applied, I chose the main color of the piece, add a small amount of paint to the tip of my brush with no water at all and dab from the center to the borders until my brush is dry again. Since the base paint creates the shadows and I add less color the closer I get to the border, a nice gradient emerges quite naturally. Since metallic acrylics don't cover that well, it's necessary to repeat this step a few times until the result is satisfying. This makes it easy to create nice, smooth gradients and the lower layers of colors are better visible. For this part it's not necessary to mix any colors or to work with darker or brighter versions of it. Just give it a go. Don't worry if your brush looks like a cosplayer after a 24h nonstop DragonCon party afterwards, that's quite normal.





Note:

Using one color for the base layer and another for the final look is just the bare minimum you can use. If you like, you can also add shimmers by dabbing different layers of color. In this case for example, the basic paint was dark brown, first dapping layer was brown-bronze and the final layer was pure gold.

**Note:**

The contrast of a piece depends on the distance between the base color and the final color. The darker the base paint and the brighter the final layer the higher the contrast. As you can see the bright and also the dark areas have almost no contrast in this image and shadows and lights almost collapse. This small contrast is useful if you prefer a more realistic look, since only fictional references have huge contrasts which are not really that common in reality.

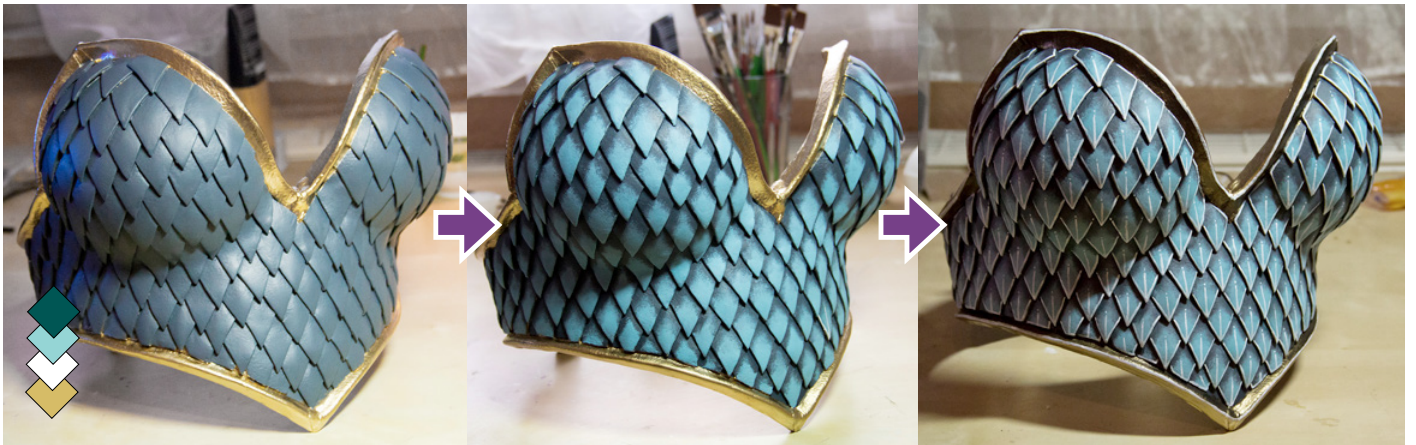
In general this method is already a pretty easy and fast way to give your prop or armor a cool paint job. You are also able to work with a minimum of colors for a whole costume. An example: Gorehowl – an axe I made for a Warrior costume consists only “six” colors, if you count black and white: Black for the base paint, silver for the blade, bronze for the pattern, brown for the front piece, purple for the body and white for the highlight borders. None of these colors were mixed but bought directly from the hobby store in my home town. ■



Use thin shadow and light lines to make your borders pop!

If you'd like to give your piece even more contrast, it's possible to add additional shadows and lights. Since it's easy to make mistakes during the dapping process, this step is also necessary to create clean borders and to add more shiny highlights.

For this step it's enough to work with clean, thin brushes as well as the brightest and the darkest color you use for your piece. In general, when you're done with the actual paint job, just take the brush, dip it into the color of your basic coat and trace all borders again. Also follow all dark areas, all shapes and all details you sculpted or carved on. Depending on the complexity of the piece it can take a lot of time, but this very simple method will give you a clean look with clear shapes and borders. Not everybody likes these thin lines, but I think they add very much to the final look.



**Note:**

The bright lines don't necessarily have to be pure white. You can also just use a brighter variant of your main color. The good thing about these borders is that they disappear if you look at the costume from afar but really add a whole new level of detail if of you look at the armor from up close. Sometimes people complain that they don't like the borders I'm painting but I really like them. To each his own, I guess.

Oh, details, details!

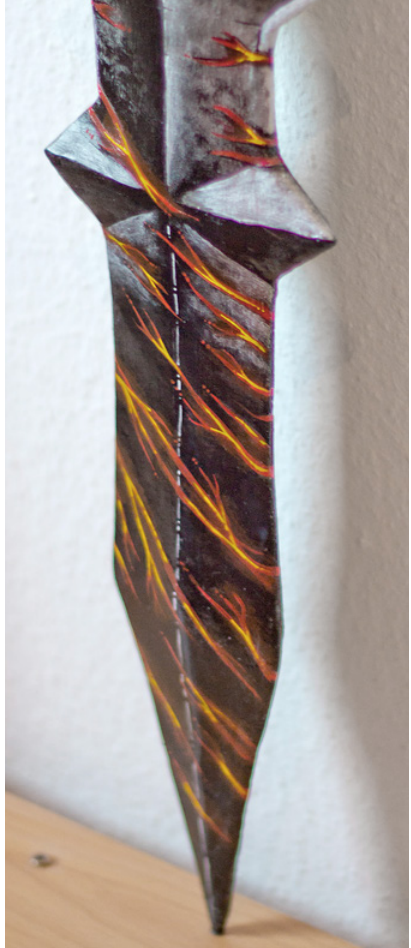
Adding details can make all the difference and can turn a boring piece into something truly special. If you want, this step can cost you far more time than you spent for the whole building, priming and painting process before. It can also just take a few minutes to create magic. The most important trait you need for painting details is: passion.

I recommend you just to take your time. Having super tiny brushes and steady hands are also a huge advantage but this really depends on the look you want to achieve. Over the years details for me especially meant following every border with thin, bright lines. Especially dark paint jobs or pieces with a lot of shadows lose their structures, heights and depths because everything just looks like dark mud. Adding bright highlights however give this mud it's shape back. They help to define the shape, set borders and even let the smallest detail pop out from a short view distance. In addition details allow you to add very bright spots, add tiny structures and separate complicated shapes into smaller, more interesting pieces. On the other side of the coin however this step destroys a natural and realistic paint job. In reality these bright defining lines just don't exist and your final piece will look more like a comic book prop, or a video game texture than a piece from a Hollywood movie. Everybody likes different things and I for one really like that exaggerated cartoon style of painting, especially since it mostly fits the characters I'm portraying. ■



Note:

Try out what kind of different effects and structures you can get when you use different materials for your paint application. Applying color with a sponge or a wet towel can result in a very interesting and distinct pattern. It's also good to try new stuff on a separate paper and not your nearly finished piece.





Note:

In this case I used adhesive plastic foil with a template for the red details. These foils are typically used for painting artworks on fabrics but they are also perfect for acrylic paint jobs. You can also always make your own stencils. The writing however was completely applied free hand by loosely following the reference of some Arabic writings (nothing offensive I hope).

Sculpted details



VS



Painted details

Details can be everything. From defining white lines across your prop, they can be different patterns you've transferred from a stamp or plastic foil, they can be mystical runes and powerful words and symbols or signs. There is no limit as long as your fingers are steady, your patience is fine and your imagination leads your way. In fact, you can use a lot of different stamps, patterns and tools you would maybe buy for other projects but if you keep your eyes open you will be surprised what other people use for their work.

Note:

Sculpting details is always better than painting details on. Even if you can apply almost every shape and line with some brush strokes, it will always look better if these shapes are actually real and not just a flat texture. Over the years and during my learning process I made this mistake a few times but always noticed that real details not only look better but are also more eye-catching than fake ones.

Note:

Details doesn't need to stop with the paint job. You also can add different applications and other special effects. A staff I made for example was finished with multiple large gemstones, glitter around these stones and fake flowers on top.

Make it look like it was used already.

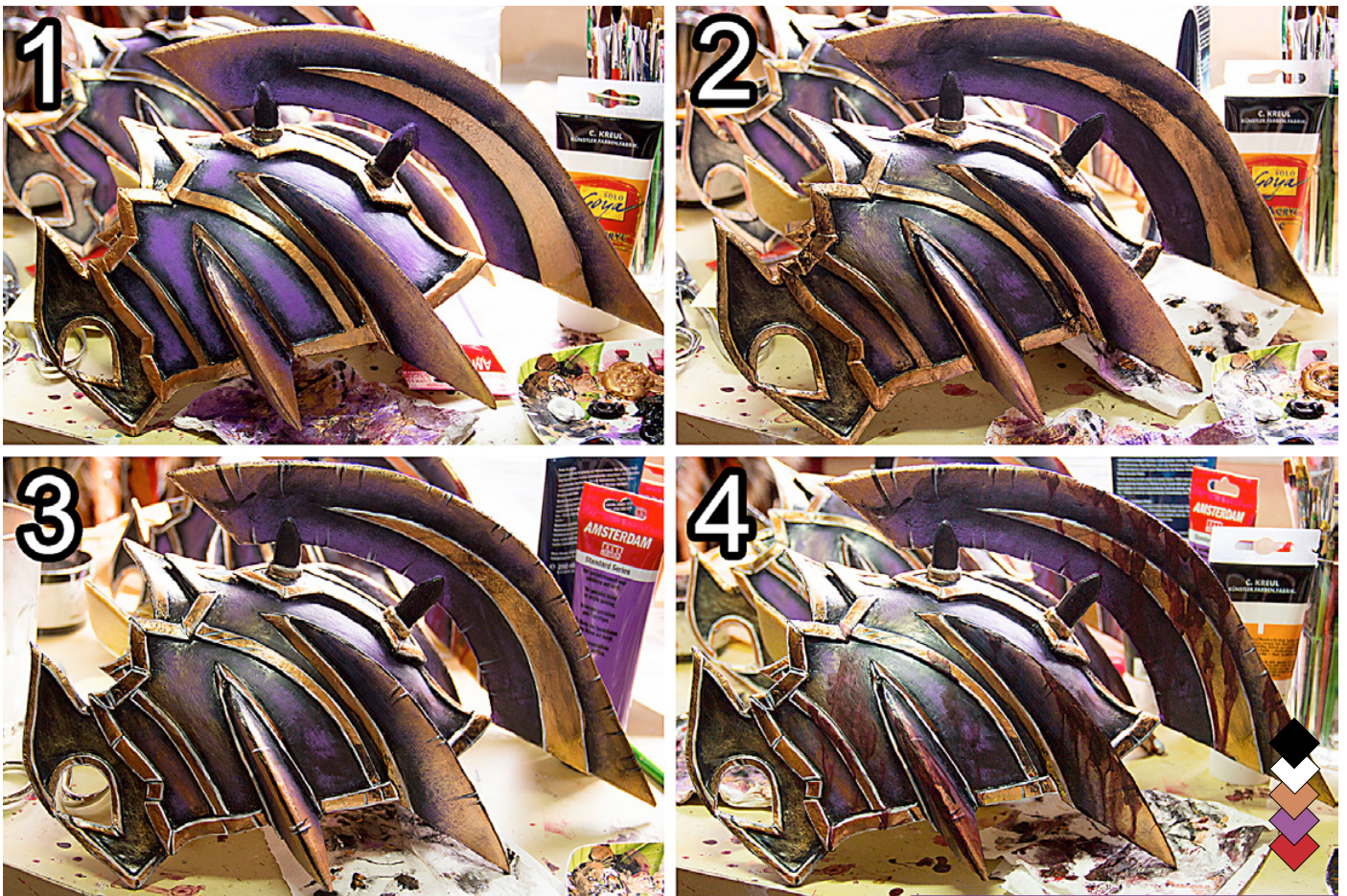
As a mighty, bloodthirsty warrior, what is better than walking around through the depths of hell wearing your brand new and shiny polished armor trying to avoid any scratch and any blood splatter that comes flying towards you? Right: Jump right into the screaming wave of demons and inaugurate your blades and bracers. As you noticed, now we're coming to the fun part!



At first, weathering can be painful for your own feelings and is only recommended for the bravest. Just imagine: I spent 30 hours to create the pictured helmet. It took me five hours to cover it with around ten coats of wood glue. Then 65 hours of base paint, shadows, highlights and the details that followed. I almost died working on

those four horns. And then – after probably 100 hours of work – I dipped my fingers into red and black acrylics and destroyed the whole paint job in less than 15 minutes. Luckily it looked much better afterwards.

Weathering or in this case “bloodening” has two sides: One side is that your piece will get a cool finish which will let it not only look more interesting and real, it will also tell a story. Your armor will show every fight you’ve won, every demon you’ve killed and every battle you’ve survived. People will see the experience of your character, the desire for guts of your sword and you will look like you’ve jumped out of a definitely M-Rated video game. The other side however is that you basically have to ruin all your previous work and there won’t be a way back. Once you start with adding blood and dirt acrylics and it dried you can’t say that you liked the “unused” look better. You will need to finish this project and all the clean shine and glory of your brand new armor will be gone. So you have to make a decision: Do you want to have a cool, pretty piece or do you prefer the real, used look?



Once you made the decision weathering can turn out pretty simple, fast and easy. In general I use only two methods for this look. One is based off black which can be mixed with one or more main colors of your pieces. The Crusader helmet I showed you for example got a treat with black and the warm grey which I already used for the basic paint. For that I just dipped my fingertips into one or both colors and wiped here and there over the armor. To get rid of finger prints you can use fabric, soft or rough paper (newspaper, toilet paper, kitchen paper) and just clean a bit here and there. It’s also important not to add paint everywhere, since the final result should not just look black or

red at the end. It’s important to set “battle scars”, which means you have to think about this imaginary battle. Which parts could get damaged, which parts are involved in a battle and which parts are more used then others? For example: If you’re right-handed you surely have more battle scars on the right side then on the left side. If parts are protected by a shield however, then they are almost not involved in a fight. So, try to spread your weathering well and stop early enough. Keep in mind: You can always add more weathering, but it will be difficult to get rid of too much weathering.

Note:

The grade of weathering highly depends on the character you want to present. Do you like to create a piece for a character who fights from a big distance? A mighty wizard for example surely won’t have as many battle marks as a wild barbarian who uses every opportunity to jump straight into a roaring pack of hell hounds (aka politicians).



The second part of giving your piece a more used look is blood. With a mix of black and red – the more black you add the older your blood looks – you can apply blood in the same way as dirt. Dip your fingers into paint, play around and get rid of too much paint with fabric or paper. Since blood is a fluid it's also possible to give it a more runny look like you see in the image above.

For that step just place a big drop of paint somewhere and carefully add more and more drops of water until the paint starts to slowly run down. Now you need to act fast: Accelerate the running acrylic with a hair dryer while you also secure the paint with the heat at the same time.

It can be pretty tricky to find the right mix of paint and water until the drop starts running and using the hair dryer is an additional difficulty but the result will look really cool and realistic. Note however that at this part you also have to find a point when you need to stop and avoid to overdo the weathering. It's important to place your prop in a way that the line of "dripping blood" doesn't have a weird direction. Take care that once you wear your costume, it should look like the blood ran straight to the ground instead of somewhere else.

Note:

Try to simulate blood-splatter effects by dipping your brush into thick red watery paint and use your thumb to sprinkle the color onto your piece like seen in the last picture on the next page.

Yes, weathering is a pretty dirty work step and your hands will totally look like you just repaired a (bloody) car.



Basic paint and gradients



Rough details



Fine details



Weathering

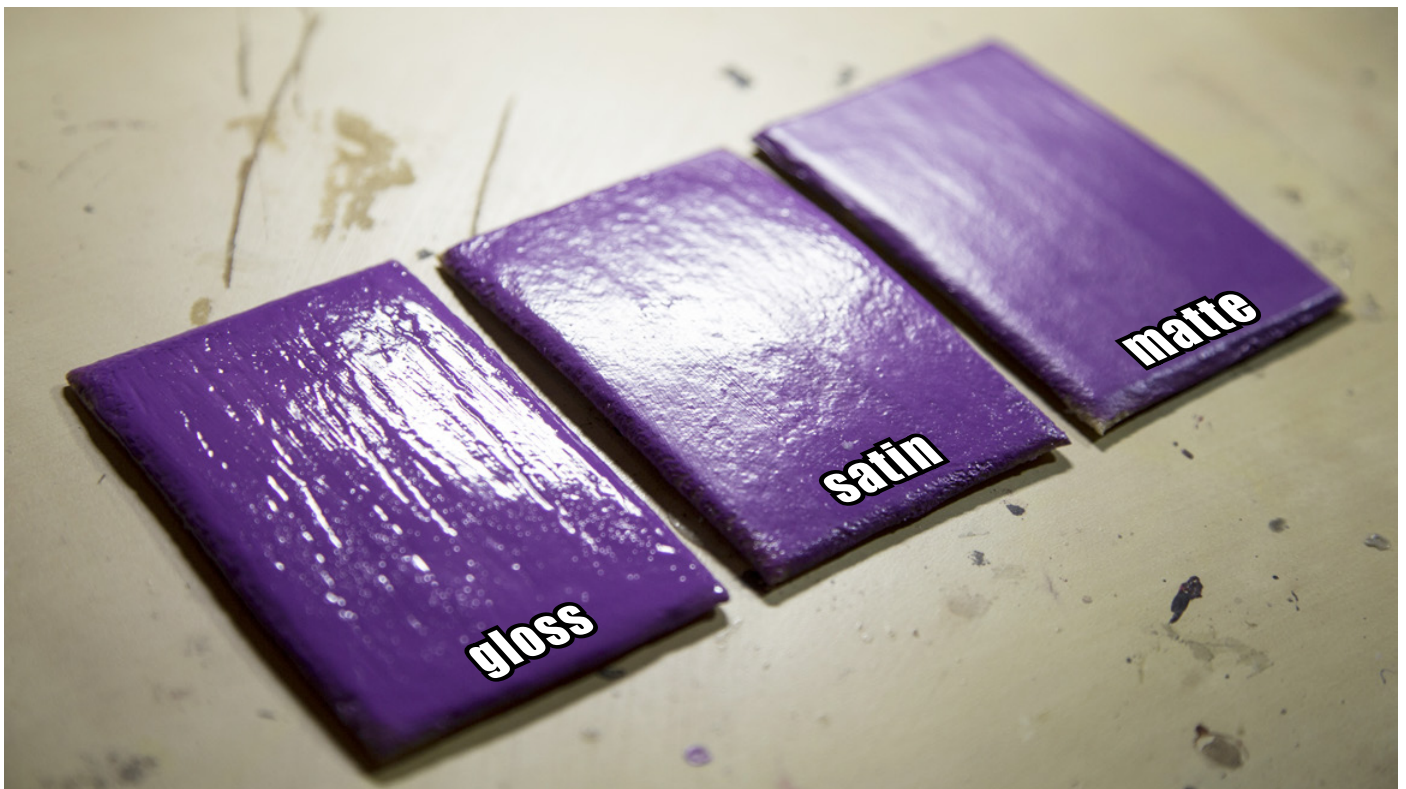


Time to seal the deal!

Once your paint job is done, the final step is waiting for you: The sealing. Nobody will notice this step, but applying a last transparent layer of varnish is essentially not only to save your work from damage, but also to let it shine in all its colors. You'll notice - normally by wearing your costume - that you will get a ton of scratches, bumps and other damages from the costume itself and your environment. Luckily, a simple coat with a varnish layer will give your paint job a perfect protection. But beware: You have to keep the final look of your costume in mind.

There are tons of different products you can buy for this step. At first you have to choose between a spray varnish and an acrylic varnish that you can paint on with a brush. Spray varnish is a great solution for big and/or complicated forms and a fast sealing. All you need is a well ventilated environment, safety clothing and a hard press on the spray button. If necessary you can repeat this step several times to get a thicker coat and a better protection of your paint job at the end. Despite of that, no matter how much spray you'll use, an acrylic varnish will always end with a thicker and in my opinion better layer than a spray varnish. Since you'll need to work with a brush, this method will surely take more time and effort. Be careful not to use too much varnish, for it will create drops that will not look good. Still, it's the best way to get a maximum level of protection.

There are three different kinds of varnish:



Gloss varnish

If you prefer a very reflecting, very plastic like gloss then gloss varnish is your choice. The result of this varnish is a very bright, intense gloss, which looks very unnatural and fake. In my view gloss varnish works only well for small highlights, maybe silver and golden borders or tiny details, but it should never be used for a whole armor or prop piece.

Satin varnish

A satin varnish usually has a silk like shine and gives your prop an almost metal like reflection. So it's a great coat for golden, silver or bronze paintings and it's perfect for armor, blades and metal in general. In addition it looks still very natural and gives everything a precious and valuable gloss.

Matte varnish

The result of a matte varnish is an unnoticeable reflection of light. A good product will seal your painting but your prop will look like you've never added a varnish on it. In that way it creates an almost invisible coat which is a great solution for natural and organic paints like wood, plants or just rough structures like stone.

Now it's about time I got to a few work examples.

I already showed you a few weapons and props during the course of this book. I will cover the construction of these little accessories in my next book about prop making. Please look forward to it!

But for now: Work examples. Here we go!

Work examples: Warrior Tier 5 Armor

Purple, black and bronze colors were almost everything that was necessary for this project. The Warrior armor was one of my first projects that needed look like metal, despite of it getting a pretty colorful paint job. In addition I tried to add a wild, used look for the Warrior, who just jumped out of a blood thirsty battle against the roaring lines of the Horde.



So to give the armor some paint was just the first step. Destroying the work of countless hours by adding blood and dirt was the part which brought the armor really to life. After using black as the base, I've added purple as the main color and bronze for the borders. Shadows and highlights with black and white lines took almost forever but again they helped a lot to display every single detail and also to add scratches on the blades and spikes for example. A rough mix with bronze and black and a childish finger painting over that armor gave it the used, dirty look the warrior deserved.



Work examples: Journey's End

The staff "Journey's End" is a good example of an organic paint job. It was even so convincing that many people got confused and thought it was made out of real wood. This piece however was a massive sculpt out of paper maché. Once the head was done I used a dremel to carve deep, vertical lines over its whole surface. Since all lines were different in their thickness, their depth, and straightness, they looked like the result of a natural growth and were the perfect base for the following paint job.



This following step benefited a lot from this preparation. After adding a basic brown coat and adding the main shadows to define the shape everything else worked almost automatically. By using a thin brush covered with a dark brown shade it was just necessary to follow the carved lines along the surface. While some of them were a bit darker and some of time a bit brighter for and additional irregularities some lines became bronze for a more mystical look. This was even increased by intense sky blue runes and lines which were also carved into the paper maché before the paint job.

Note:

There were several differently colored version of this staff in World of Warcraft. The final version I've chosen however was only a piece of a World of Warcraft action figure. Since my costume was from the game however, I didn't have an official in-game version of the staff at the end. Despite of that I didn't care about that fact since the color combination of blue/brown fit perfect to my costume. This may be a hard decision if you want to work as accurately as possible, but always keep in mind that it's you who needs to like the costume and not someone else.



Work examples: Dragon Staff

The staff I designed for a Diablo III costume worked with a very small palette of colors: Black, white, silver, bronze and blue. The use of fewer colors have a few big advantages: It's not only really easy to set highlights and shadows since you only have to add black and white acrylics, but you are also able to work with creating cool contrasts, clean lines and clear shapes. In addition the paint job was done pretty quickly and you don't get confused how you need to mix this or that color again. I just love the combination of bronze/gold and blue, which not only looks very mystical, but also valuable and elegant. It's the perfect combination for a Wizard's staff.



In contrast to the clean, metallic look of the staff itself, you'll also notice that the dragon has a complete different shape and structure. To give the dragon a more realistic look every scale was completely sculpted and painted by hand. The white lines are like always just an option, but especially in this case you see the reason why I always prefer to add them: You see every single scale even from the distance and the dragon got way more depth and detail than if it were just black with a few grey highlights.

Note:

When working with LEDs it's better to really sculpt the details instead of just painting them on. When the LED casts light on your paint job, it exaggerates every border and makes it really shine while painted-on details would just disappear.



Work examples: Protoss Wizard

The Protoss Wizard was one of my more shiny and clean projects, which required a mystical and at the same time a technical paint job. In addition it was golden, which was the main problem. After experimenting with golden acrylics, I decided that a spray paint in chrome gold would be the best base for this paint job. Since I wanted to create a lot of ancient, old golds, I used a mix of dark brown, bronze and golden colors. While dark brown was the darkest shadow, the following layer of bronze and a golden layer on the top made such a perfect combination that the result looked already pretty old and used and no further weathering was required.



To create such an effect I had to apply the gradient layer twice – at first bronze and then golden – which cost me a lot of time and patience. The brightest parts like the bra cups for example also got an additional highlight of a mix of gold and white. For the final look I've added my typical white lines and the armor got their last details in forms of fine runes of white and blue lines.

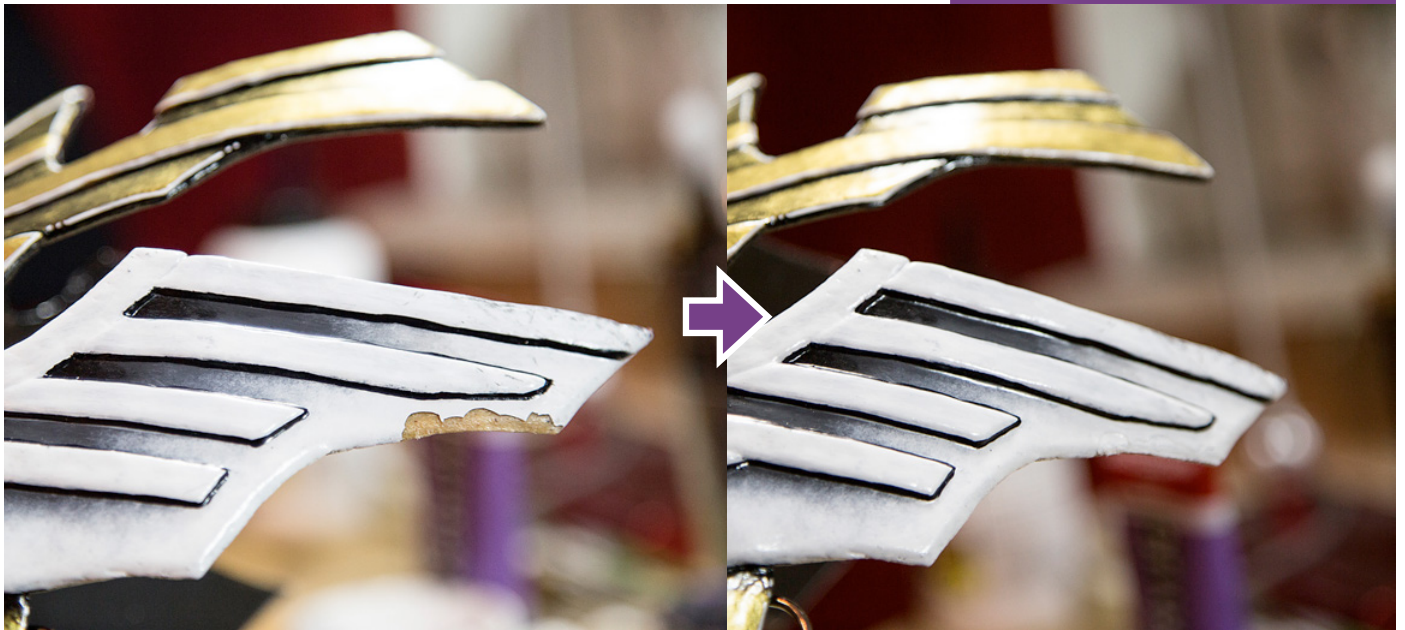
Note:

The bronze spray paint was a great base for this project, since it covers uniformly and even. Normal metallic acrylics usually cover really badly and you have to spend a lot of time until you finally can start with the real painting. This way it was much faster and even more fun.



Oh, no! It's broken. What do I do now?

It's always a good idea to add some emergency stuff to your next convention trip and some good old acrylics can be pretty useful before and after a convention day. Just use your fingers or a brush and cover the biggest gaps with some paint. Since many of my armor and props get a lot of weathering, it's usually enough to fix holes in a paint job with some acrylics in their main color. If your prop or armor material is Worbla or Wonderflex your primer and also the acrylics on it will never become a fixed part of the material and so you're not able to avoid that at critical points the paint job will just crack and fall off if you're not careful enough.



Even if you seal your finished piece with more than enough layers of varnish, there is generally nothing you can do about pieces falling off every now and then. Be especially careful when transporting painted pieces since the paint can crack if your piece gets thrown around too much in your suitcase. Always use enough bubble wrap to prevent that from happening. If you want to know more: transport is a big chapter in my first book.

Note:

When building armor, keep in mind that parts may rub against each other when you walk or move in another way. Since acrylics dry and get harder with time they can crack and fall off quite easily. At least the damages are normally pretty small and can be repaired with just the touch of a brush.

Thank you!

This concludes my second book about cosplay crafting. I really hope these pages were a help and an inspiration to you.

Be sure to experiment with new techniques until you find something that really fits your personal style. And when you find out something new: Share your knowledge with the world and help the cosplay community grow and evolve even further. Because that's what this is all about.

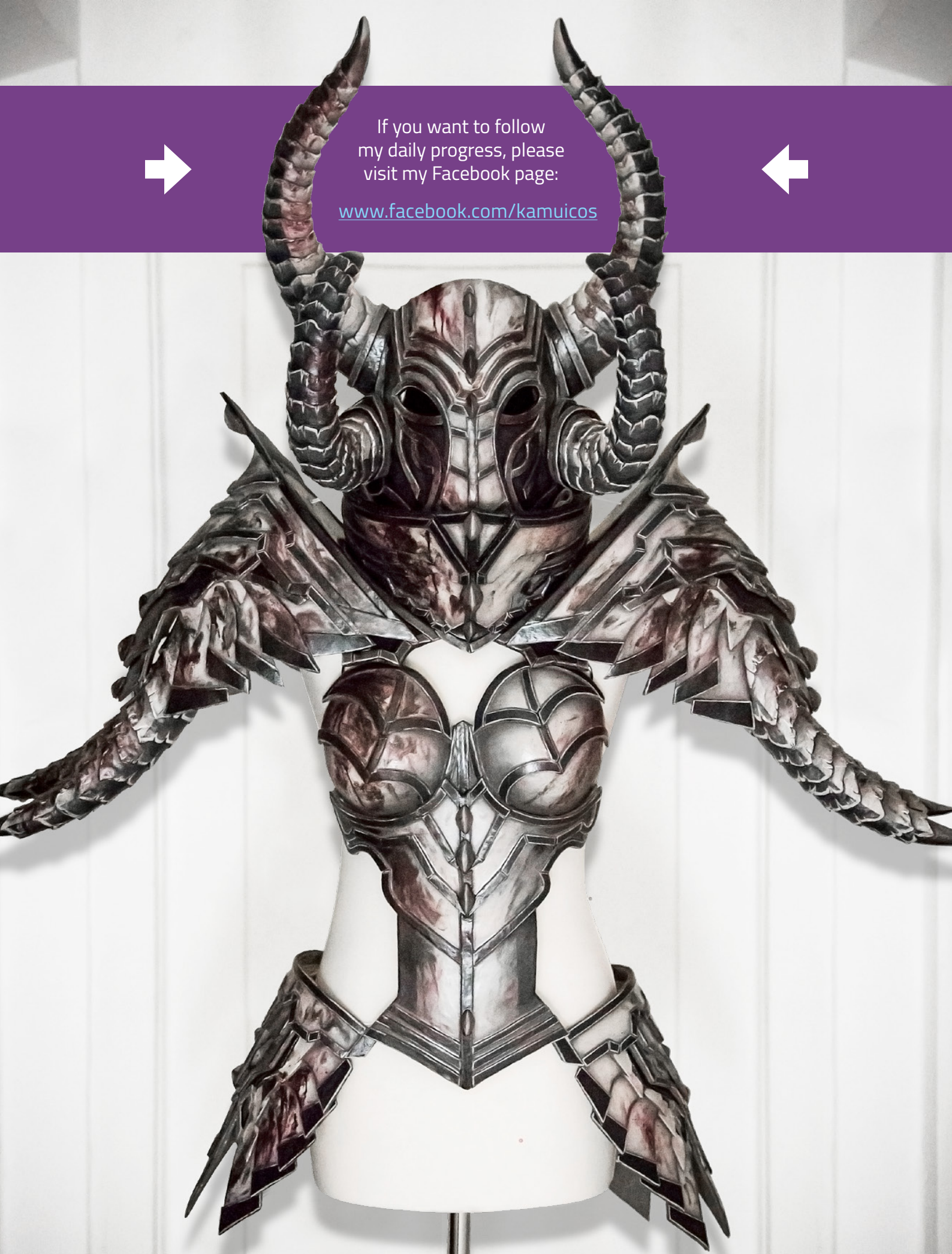
Keep doing what you love, stay busy, creative and let your dreams come true!

TO BE CONTINUED...



If you want to follow
my daily progress, please
visit my Facebook page:

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Click here to find my first book: "The Book of Cosplay Armor Making": <http://kamuicosplay.storenvy.com/>

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