

How-2: Paint Carved Characters

Tips & Techniques



Carving by Mike Shipley

About this Document

When I first started carving decoys, I could find very little on the basic painting techniques. It took years before I could afford to take classes. This led me to books and magazines articles. Later, the Internet emerged and mushroomed with carving and whittling knowledge.

This document combines much of the information I discovered during this search. This document is the result of over thirty years whittling caricatures. The topics have been collected from club newsletters, Internet articles, class handouts, and books.

I do not claim all the material in this document is original. I have "borrowed" most of the included information from other carvers and their painters. Where possible, I have given credit. This information is not meant to be used for commercial gain.

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Painting Santa

Editor Note: This handout was developed as a class aid for a Santa Claus carving class. The general techniques apply to any caricature carving.
Adjust the *Color Palette* as appropriate to your project. (HMD — 1994)

Assembling Paints

The following table serves as a color palette for painting Santa.

Table 1— Santa Paint Pallet

Color	Manufacturer
White	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Any good quality latex wall paint or acrylic craft paint ■ Folk Art® Tapioca 903 ■ Delta® Ivory 2036
Flesh	<i>Delta</i> AC Flesh 2085
Red	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Delta Tomptre Red 2107 ■ Delta Red Iron Oxide 2020 ■ Delta Tomato Spice 2098
Green	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Delta Dark Forest 2096 ■ Folk Art Green Meadow 726
Brown	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Folk Art Nutmeg 944 ■ Folk Art Spice Brown 2049
Blue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Delta Wedgewood Blue 2069 ■ Deco Art® Uniform Blue DA86
Gold	Delta Gleams 14K Gold 2604
Black	Delta Black 2506

Assembling Miscellaneous Supplies

The following supplies will also be required:

Table 2– Miscellaneous Painting Supplies

Item	Manufacturer or Description
Sealers	Use one of the following to seal the wood and the paint: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Delta® Water Based Varnish ■ Patricia Nimrock® Matte Clear Acrylic Sealer® ■ Matte clear spray lacquer (any brand)
Wax	Use one of the following to highlight: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Briwax® – Brown and Neutral ■ Watco® – Light and Dark (mix: 75% to 25%)
Markers	Sharpie®, Pentel®, or Pigmy® Ultra Fine Permanent Pens
Brushes	Match brush size and type to the size of the project.
Tooth picks	Use for painting eyes
Paper towels	Be prepared!

NOTES:

- The Sharpie marker is the only brand that definitely will not bleed through the sealer. The other brands should not bleed as long as they are NOT used directly on raw wood.
- After application of details with these markers, it is best to let the project dry overnight. This allows the ink dry. Some ink types will bleed (smear) when a sealer is immediately applied after adding these details.
- It is best to mist several light coats of sealer rather than applying one heavy coat and to allow the ink to “dry” overnight before applying the sealer.

Using General Instructions

Before painting, review the following:

- 1 Using an old toothbrush, wash carving with suds only from a liquid detergent— rinse well, towel dry, and then let dry completely
- 2 Pick all "fuzzies" and small chips out of the deep cuts
- 3 Acrylic paint dries rapidly—
 - a Make sure paint stays thin while painting
 - b Thin the paint by adding water to make a wash

NOTE: Add drops of water or wet brush if necessary.
A too thick paint can leave "ridges" in work and it also is hard to apply.

4 Paint all flesh parts, hair, beard, and fur areas with white

NOTE: Put second coat of white on hair, beard, and fur areas as needed.

5 Using desired colors, determine remainder of painting order by trying to paint from the inside out and top to bottom when possible

NOTE: This order will keep touch ups to a minimum.

6 If Santa is on a base, stain or paint the base last—

a Carve off any paint drips. Dilute Nutmeg to a thin wash, if you desire the wood grain to show

b If you do not put *some* paint on the raw wood, the wax finish will be too dark

7 Check for uneven paint lines and touch up these areas.

8 Spray with matte finish sealer, if desired, before waxing—

a Scrub on wax with old toothbrush

b Wipe and buff to a shine

c If the wax is too dark, rub some neutral wax on the desired areas; wipe and buff again

Painting Cheeks

To add blush:

- Mix AC Flesh (or flesh color of face) with Red Iron Oxide
- Paint on the cheek area of face blending at edges with the AC Flesh color (using wet-on-wet technique) if necessary

Note: Sometimes the face is carved in such a way that blending is not necessary.




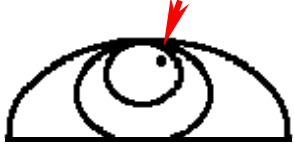


Painting Lips and Nose

To add blush to lips and nose (optional):

- Mix a small amount of Tomato Spice into your mixed cheek color (see **CHEEKS**)
- Paint lips or mouth area

Painting Eyes

To paint the eyes, use the steps described below.

Step	Action	Image
1	Paint the eyeball with white.	
2	Paint the iris with the Wedgewood Blue (or, Blue Heaven). Experiment with the handle end of a brush for applying the iris.	
3	Paint, or dot, the pupil with Black— a toothpick works well for the pupil.	
4	Paint, or dot, the white highlight of the pupil at the two o'clock position— a toothpick does a good job. NOTE — Move the dot (gleam) according to the position of the pupil and the light source.	
5	Using a black fine point art pen, outline the eye.	
6	Try it!	

Highlighting

Use a colored wax or antiquing gel to highlight the small details of your carving.

NOTE: Test highlighting medium on scraps before applying to the project.
The waxes change the depths and shades of the paints.

See ANTIQUING on page 12 for more information.

To highlight:

- 1 Allow the paint to thoroughly dry—at least 30 minutes
- 2 Apply a second coat of sealer and let dry.
- 3 Apply wax—
 - ▶ Mix wax as appropriate (usually 75-25, light to dark)
 - ▶ For paste wax, liquefy or soften
 - ▶ Apply wax mixture, wait 10 minutes and wipe excess
 - ▶ Apply additional coats as desired
- 4 Apply antique gel—
 - ▶ Thin the gel as you would any acrylic if desired
 - ▶ Brush onto the carving
 - ▶ Use a damp cloth (paper towel) to wipe off excess
- 5 Let dry—wax, overnight; gel, 30 minutes
- 6 Apply several final coats of sealer

CITE:

Painting Santa (class handout) Lee & Lillian Perkins: Knoxville, Tennessee (1991)

Used with permission granted from Lillian Perking for use by Whittle Designs.

Using Tips & Techniques

This section describes techniques related to paint carvings. These were not in the original *Painting Santa* handout.

Removing Pencil Marks

First, always make sure the wood you will be carving on has been sanded very smooth—at least through 220-grit sandpaper.

Consider using only a cabinet scraper to get a perfect surface for chip carving.

If the wood surface is not smooth, pencil marks will be harder to remove.

Next, to remove pencil marks from your wood when you are done carving, use a soft eraser like a pink pearl or white draftsman's eraser. Erase gently and carefully so as not to damage the delicate areas of your carving.

For particularly stubborn pencil marks OR for graphite paper marks, use an ink eraser. An ink eraser, usually gray in color, has a bit more bite to it and will remove any remaining marks.

If you are finding that an eraser is not doing the trick, your pencil lead may be too hard or too thick. Switch to a "0.5mm, HB" lead and only make your pattern lines dark enough for you to see them and no darker. A very light sanding after the eraser trick and you will be ready for finishing.

Cleaning Carvings

Use the following tips to clean carvings before painting:

- 1 Draw some warm water in a sink and add 2-3 drops of liquid dishwashing detergent
- 2 Do not submerge the carving; instead dip an old toothbrush in the soapy water and scrub the carving.
- 3 When done, turn on the spigot and rinse the carving to remove all soapy residue
- 4 Immediately towel off all water and blot the carving. Let dry overnight
- 5 Apply a sealer before painting

Sealing Wood

Not all carvings will be sealed, but porous wood types (pine, fir, and even basswood) will accept paint more evenly if sealed. This is important if you are striving for a soft even look. If the piece is small and you want it to be fully colored (example, Christmas ornaments) then this process may not be necessary.

- 1 Use a spray with very low percentage of shellac—
Zinsser Bulls-Eye Shellac Sealer & Finish® works very well. Shellac content is only 12%. Check Ace Hardware® stores and some True Value® stores.
NOTE: Use an inexpensive clear, matte spray lacquer as a quick drying sealer
- 2 Find a calm area outside of the house—
 - a Hold spray can approximately 12" from the carving and apply one coat to all surfaces
 - b Use a sweeping motion and do not allow the spray to pool in any one area
NOTE: Do not apply more than one coat.
- 3 Allow sealer to dry at least 2 hours (overnight if possible)

Eliminating Raised Grain

Washing and spraying may raise the grain slightly. Use a steel wool pad to eliminate glossy areas and areas with raised grain (fuzzies). Wipe down the carving to remove any dust. The carving is now ready to paint.

Painting with Acrylics

Acrylics are water based paints and are sold in either liquid form or in a tube. A wide variety of colors are available including fleshtones and Christmas colors. This is helpful and reduces the amount of mixing to obtain the desired tone. Acrylics are rarely applied directly and should be thinned with water (even liquid forms). The exact ratio is not important, but a mixture of three parts water to one part paint is about right. The goal is to create translucent water based stain that will enhance your carving, not hide it.

A pre-sealed basswood carving will take approximately two coats. Additional coats may be added depending on the desired effect.

Making Washes

Acrylics are rarely applied directly and should be thinned with water (even liquid forms).

- The exact ratio is not important, but a mixture of three parts water to one part paint or 15–17 drops of water to 1 drop of paint
- The goal is to create translucent water based stains to enhance your carving, not hide it

TIP: Paint a sample of your mix over a newspaper. If you cannot read the print, add more water to your mix.

Blending

Occasionally you will want to highlight features (rosy nose, sunburned cheeks, and such). This is accomplished through blending, usually during the final coat. To blend:

- 1 First, apply a normal wet coat of paint to the area (cheek or nose)
- 2 Switching to a dry brush (any soft bristle brush), lightly dip the end bristles into the color to be blended; immediately dab the brush into a paper towel to eliminate excess paint, which may have been picked up
- 3 While the surface is still wet, use the blending brush to apply highlight; the result is a soft blending of one color into another (example, cadmium red can be used on noses)

Dry Brushing

Dry brushing is a technique that is used to highlight areas that were previously painted and have not dried. You might use this technique to add gray streaks to the hair or to paint a stubble beard. On an old hobo with a graying beard, I would paint the entire face, including the beard, with fleshtone. Later, I would dry brush white across the stubble area. A black stubble beard could also be done the same way. When dry brushing, use a stiff, short bristle

brush. Load your brush (dab off any excess on a paper towel) and apply the paint across the raised stubble or hair).

Antiquing

When the carving is completed it is also sealed. Applying an oil based antiquing will not spoil your work. Instead, it will enhance it by softening the bright colors and providing definition. The dark antiquing will flow into the bright recesses (example, eye lids, edges of the mouth, buttons, belt buckles, and such). Brushing or wiping will remove most of the antiquing. However, the antiquing in deep areas will stay and provide much needed contrast. This allows important detail features to be easily seen.

With a dry brush, or a brush dipped in paint thinner, it is possible to remove nearly all the antiquing that was applied. Since the carving was already sealed, it will not absorb most of the antiquing. You are in control and can decide how much to leave. A thin coat rubbed into the carving will have a softening effect. This is important if you are trying to show aging or wear. If you want the colors to remain bright, but need the contrast in certain areas, use the finish selectively.

Antiquing (brown or black) can be obtained from most hardware stores. A quart will last a very long time. Place a small amount of the thick antique mix in a small cup and thin with boiled linseed oil, available at craft and hardware stores. The mixture is simply brushed over top the painted surface (requires total coverage). Larger, stiffer bristle brushes work best to apply the mixture. Keep a second brush on hand to remove most of the mixture. Use a brush dipped in paint thinner to brush out unwanted mix that exists in hard to reach areas.

The oil based mix will give your carving additional protection and a soft glow. Periodically, you can freshen it up by brushing a light coat of linseed oil on the entire surface and rubbing it with a soft cloth.

Antiquing is an option that you may not want to use. If you like bright colors, you may not want to soften them by antiquing. On the other hand, it may be just what you need to finish carving that Old World Santa.

Make your own antiquing stains using the following recipes:

RECIPE 1:

Mix equal portions of Japan Dryer and linseed oil with about 4 oz. of turpentine and color with oil based artist color such as raw sienna. Mix thoroughly.

RECIPE 2:

Mix in a baby food jar, fill jar to the shoulder with linseed oil. Add one-quarter inch of oil color (artist burnt umber).

- Add to or subtract from the amount of oil if the mix too dark or too light
- Ensure that the oil color is mixed thoroughly with the linseed oil

RECIPE 3:

Using one pint of Minwax® natural stain, add one-quarter inch of oil color (artist burnt umber. *See notes on Recipe 2.*

See **HIGHLIGHTING** on page 9 for more information.

CITE:

Painting Caricatures with Acrylics, Fred Key, Southeastern Woodcarvers Association Newsletter, April 1998

Stopping Color Bleeding

This section describes a technique to keep paints from bleeding and to highlight low relief features.

Where two different colors meet, for example, arms and sleeves, beard and chest, and so forth, make a knife cut at the dividing point. The following figure shows how this works.

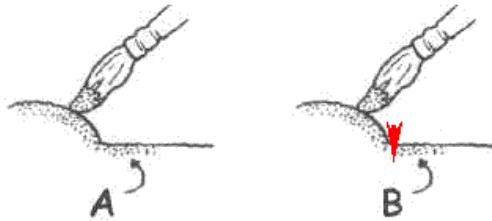


Figure 1— Stopping Color Bleeding

A normal cut (A) allows the paint to bleed into this area.

A knife cut (B) helps stop the paint from spreading onto the next surface.

This cut does two things:

- 1 Fibers the wood, thus preventing one color from bleeding into another
- 2 Provides a channel for the finish to flow into, thus distinguishing the two features

Relief carvers could use this technique to highlight low reliefs after the stain or finish is applied.

NOTES:

- Make a cut by doing only a simple stop cut. Do not make a notch by doing a V-cut.
- Make these cuts after sealing the carving. This opens the channel for the thinned paint (wash).

Mixing and Painting Colors

When applying paint (oil or acrylic) to a carved project, thin the paint to a watery consistency so that a little of the grain shows through. This technique is referred to as a wash, and it may require several applications to achieve the desired effect.

Using washes, instead of heavy coats of paint, prevents the project from taking on the appearance of a piece of plastic or glazed ceramic.

The carving is only as good as the way it is finished. A good finish enhances a mediocre carving.

When air brushing, use Gesso as a sealer before applying paint. The paint adheres better and gives a professional finish.

Mixing Colors

The tables in this section provide general descriptions for mixing colors

Table 3– Yellow and Yellow Ochre Mixes

Add	Result
White to yellow and orange	Peach
Orange to ochre with a small amount of green	Mustard Gold
White to yellow Lemon	Yellow
White to yellow ochre	Beige

Table 4– Red Mixes

Add	Result
Red to blues and greens	Graying color
White and yellow ochre to red	Flesh tones
White to red	Pink tints
Blue to red	Darker red
Yellow to red	Lighten towards orange
White to crimson	Bright Pink
A little white to blue and crimson	Violet
Black to red	Rust tones

Permanent green light is your best green because it is neutral and can be shaded to either lighter or darker.

Table 5–Green Mixes

Add	Result
Yellow ochre and a little red	Olive Green
White	Lighten the hue
Burnt sienna	Dark, rich green for leaves, trees, lawns, and foliage
Yellow ochre to previous mixture	Highlights on trees and foliage
Blue to green	Turquoise
White to previous mixture	Aqua

Table 6– Blue Mixes

Add	Result
Ultramarine blue to any color	Darkener or for intense hues
Red to blue	Purple
Black to blue	Dark Blue
White to blue	Lighten for blue shades
Green with a little white to blue	Prussian Blue
Green with a little red and white to blue	Cool Gray

Use Burnt Sienna alone as a rich rust color.

Table 7– Burnt Sienna Mixes

Add	Result
Yellow ochre to Burnt Sienna	Lighter Beige Rust
Black to Burnt Sienna	Burnt Umber
Red, Blue, and White with a tint of black to Burnt Sienna	Violet Gray
Burnt Sienna	

Color Formulas

The following table provides specific formulas for mixing colors when pre-mixed colors are not available.

Table 8– Color Formulas

Result	Mix
Flesh	8 parts yellow ochre + 2 parts white
Lips and cheeks	6 parts white + 2 parts red + 2 parts yellow ochre
Light blonde hair	8 parts yellow ochre + 2 parts white
Dark blond hair	5 parts yellow ochre + 5 parts burnt sienna
Light redhead	8 parts orange + 2 parts white
Dark redhead	7 parts Grumbacher reds + 3 parts orange
Light brown hair	5 parts burnt sienna + 5 parts yellow ochre
Dark brown hair	5 parts burnt sienna + 2 parts ultramarine blue
Dark green	7 parts permanent green light + 3 parts burn sienna
Light green	7 parts permanent green light + 3 parts burn sienna
Olive green	8 parts Hansa (or cadmium yellow medium) + 2 parts black
Light pink rose	6 parts thalo (or alizarin crimson) + 3 parts white
Dark rose	9 parts thalo (or alizarin crimson) + 3 parts white
Warm light blue	7 parts ultramarine blue + 3 parts white
Cool light blue	7 parts manganese (or cerulean blue) + 3 parts white
Turquoise	4 parts manganese (or cerulean blue) + 4 parts permanent green light + 2 parts white
Dark blue	8 parts ultramarine blue + 2 parts burn sienna
Prussian blue	6 parts ultramarine blue + 3 parts permanent green light + 1 part white
Lavender	4 parts ultramarine blue + 4 parts thalo (or alizarin crimson) + 3 parts yellow ochre
Rust	8 parts Grumbacher red + 2 parts black
Antique red	7 parts thalo (or alizarin crimson) + 3 parts yellow ochre
Deep red	7 parts thalo (or alizarin crimson) + 3 parts burnt sienna
Cool gray	5 parts manganese blue + 2 parts Grumbacher red + 2 parts yellow ochre + 1 part white
Warm gray	5 parts ultramarine blue + 2 parts Grumbacher red + 2 parts yellow ochre + 1 part white
Gray green	5 parts permanent green light + 2 parts ultramarine blue + 2 parts yellow ochre + 1 part white

Converting Colors

★ Reproduced from the October 2000 JRWC newsletter

REMEMBER:

- You can paint oil-based mediums over acrylics, or water based mediums.
- DO NOT paint acrylic mediums over oil-based mediums. The oil-based mediums bleed through the water based mediums.

Use the following chart to make color conversion for oils and acrylic paints of popular manufacturers.

Table 9– Oil to Acrylic Basic Conversion Chart

Oils	Acrylic Manufacturer & Color Equivalent			
Color	Delta	Accent	DecoArt	Folk Art
Prussian Blue	Prussian Blue	Prussian Blue	Prussian Blue	Prussian Blue
Paynes Gray	Midnight	Paynes Gray	Black + Uniform Blue	Paynes Gray
Burnt Umber	Burnt Umber	Burnt Umber	Burnt Umber	Burnt Umber
Burnt Sienna	Burnt Sienna	Burnt Sienna	Burnt Sienna	Burnt Sienna
Naples Yellow	Pineapple	Devonshire Cream	Moon Yellow	School Bus Yellow
Chrome Oxide Green	Chrome Green Light	Green Olive	Mistletoe	Green Meadow
W&N Olive Green	Forest Green	Pine Needle Green	Dark Pine	Southern
Remb. Naples Yellow Lt-X	Pale Yellow	Adobe Wash	Taffy Cream	Buttercream
White	White	Real White	White Wash	Wicker White
Cadmium Yellow Lt.	Luscious Lemon	Yellow Light	Lemon Yellow	Lemon Custard
Yellow Ochre	Antique Gold	Golden Harvest	Antique Gold	Harvest Gold
Ivory Black	Black	Black	Black	Black Ivory Black
Alizarin Crimson	Sweetheart Blush	Bordeau	Burgundy Wine	Marron
Cadmium Yellow Medium	Yellow	Sunkiss Yellow	Cadmium Yellow	Yellow Medium
Cadmium Red Light	Fire Red	Vermillion	Cadmium Red	Red Light
Cadmium Red Medium	Crimson	Nap. Red Light	Cadmium Red	Christmas Red
Dioxide Purple	Purple	Dioxide Purple	Dioxide Purple	Dioxide Purple
Pthalo Blue	Manganese Blue	Ultramarine Blue	True Blue	Thunder Blue

Caring for Brushes

Cleaning brushes immediately after use will allow the same brush to be used in other areas and for other colors. It also eliminates mistakes.

Use the following tips to extend the life and use of the brushes:

- Rinse the brush thoroughly and shake the water from the tip
this also forces the bristles to realign themselves in a pointed position
- Tap the brush on the side of the water container to rinse
- Place the clean brush on a paper towel or in a brush holder
- When finished painting, clean brushes with brush soap or any non-detergent soap (Ivory®); rinse well
- Work additional soap into bristles—
 - ▶ Pull and shape with your fingers into the original brush shape
 - ▶ Lay flat until dry
 - ▶ Store the brush with the bristles *UP*
- While painting never leave bristles touching the bottom of the water container

Processing, Cleaning & Finishing Projects

This section summarizes the processes the editor uses to complete a whittling project.

Processes

Whittling is as much about completing a process as it is about artistic inspiration. Most whittling projects follow the following path:

- 1 Receiving inspiration
- 2 Designing patterns and templates
- 3 Cutting a block or blank
- 4 Roughing out
- 5 Detailing
- 6 Cleaning up
- 7 Finishing project
- 8 Displaying project



Steps

The following table summarizes the steps that I use to clean and finish my projects. Where possible I have included drying times. Use the topics in this document for specific techniques.

Table 10– Cleaning & Finishing Processes

Step	Action
1	Cleaning up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Smooth and round-up as desired ■ Brush the carving with the toothbrush to remove loose chips ■ Clean-up the fuzzies, sanding if desired ■ Damp brush the carving— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Using a toothbrush and soapy water ◆ Pat dry and leave to dry (overnight) ■ Spray with quick-dry lacquer to seal the wood and let dry (20–30 minutes)
2	Finishing project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Paint and touch-up— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Let dry (overnight) ◆ If possible, leave the back (bottom) unpainted to show wood grain ■ Spray with acrylic sealer and let dry (20–30 minutes) ■ Apply antiquing gel or highlighting if desired— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Wipe the gel down from the middle to the sides ◆ Feather the wiping or color to the edge to achieve a light-dark effect

Step	Action
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Leave highlighting in the crevices and creases ■ Re-seal with acrylic sealer and let dry (1–2 hours) ■ Attach ■ Attach— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Or glue any required hardware and let dry (see adhesive's instructions) ◆ Any bases or add-ons ■ Sign and date the project ■ It is done!!

*A bad finish can ruin a good carving.
A great finish can enhance a so-so carving.*

Finding Stuff

Sealer

Any clear, matte lacquer available at home stores and WalMart paint departments

Finishes

Watco® liquid wax: Available at Woodcraft, Lowe's (special order), and online at:
http://www.woodnshop.com/Watco_Satin_Wax.htm

Paints and antique gel: check your local craft supply store

Knives & Wood

The following table lists a few suppliers for tools and materials.

Table 11– Recommended Suppliers

Mountain Heritage Crafters	800-643-0995	www.mhcrafter.com
Woodcraft Shop	800-397-2278	www.thewoodcraftshop.com
Smoky Mountain Woodcarvers	800-541-5994	www.woodcarvers.com
Texas Woodcarvers Shop	800-752-9781	http://www.texaswoodcarvers.com
Little Shavers	206 767-7421	http://www.littleshavers.com/
Whittler Bob	N/A	www.whittlerbob.com

Your eyes do *not* deceive you.
This page is truly blank.



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