

Shading the world; The Burgundy Region of France, 1410-1490

an overview of some historical shading techniques, and their practical replication in illumination. By HL Osanna van der Linden



The region of Burgundy

The Burgundians were a large group of Vandal tribes, who lived in the area of modern Poland in the time of the Roman Empire. In the late Roman period, as the empire came under pressure from many such "barbarian" peoples, a powerful group of Burgundians and other Vandalic tribes moved westwards towards the Roman frontiers along the Rhine Valley, making them neighbors of the Franks. Their descendants eventually established the Kingdom of the Burgundians much further south, and within the empire, in the western Alps region where modern Switzerland, France and Italy meet. This later became a component of the Frankish empire. The name of this Kingdom survives in the regional name, Burgundy, which is in modern France, representing only a part of that original kingdom. Burgundy has since its start sat in the intersection of three sovereign kingdoms, and is deeply influenced by all three.

Introduction

Ah, those little details that make the difference. Shading techniques vary widely even within regions in similar time periods. We move forward, I would like to emphasize that I am only a neophyte myself. I offer what I have gleaned, from years of pouring over images, and playing with paints, to give you the practical techniques for reproducing that art. I am still learning, and I encourage you to also learn, and use this information as a jumping off point for your journey. Let's Begin!

What do I need?

First you need your tools. You already know most of them, but there are a few things here that help when you are learning to shade.

***Liner and round brushes in small sizes;** Liner brushes, long thin hairs. Golden taklon liners are a good starter brush. Round brushes in a variety of sizes. One teeny liner that you keep reserved for white work.

***Paint pallet;** You must be able to control the viscosity of your paint. You cannot assert any control over something that doesn't move the way you want it to. You must be able to control the viscosity of your paint. You cannot assert any control over something that doesn't move the way you want it to.

***Gouache paints;** you need at least primaries, white and black. I recommend basic primaries, having a few extra colors in your kit Green, purple, and brown. What, 'no orange' you say? You can make a clean orange with red and yellow but a true purple, and sometimes greens are much harder to come by.

***Water droppers;** You must be able to control the viscosity of your paint. You cannot assert any control over something that doesn't move the way you want it to. It moves directly in relation to how wet it is. And how wet the surface you are putting it on is. Water droppers are the preferred way to move water around to your pallet, but you can also use clean brushes or just pour if you are careful.

***Two water cups;** I know, why two? One is for cleaning your brush between colors, and one is for wetting your paint and doing wet blending techniques.

***Paper towels;** to quick fix mistakes, and act as a mask to protect your paper.

***Painter's tape;** don't skimp on this stuff. Buy one of the more expensive brands. I prefer 3M. Use this tape to hold your paper still and to mask areas that won't be painted.

***Mechanical pencils;** for sketching and tracing. This is a personal preference of course. But I find the consistent lines and pigmentation make them the easy choice.

***Erasers;** Always always test these things. Cheap or expensive, I cannot tell you how many times I have gotten a surprise greasy smudge from an eraser I just grabbed. Those things do not come off. Test the it with the paper you intend to use. Different combinations will have different results!

***A light table;** You don't need this. It's a bonus tool that does help, but in a pinch you can use your windows. Myself I used my sliding glass door for years.

***Clear ruler;** I use both Quilting and Drafting Rulers, being see through and the size you need is the important bit. Be careful to keep them clean, they tend to pick up shmutts, and graphite which they can transfer to your paper. Windex or other glass cleaners are a great cleaning solution.

***The original you're working from;** A large color copy if you can manage it. You want to be able to see all the detail that is hiding in the nooks and crannies.

It all begins at the beginning.

Now that you have all your tools gathered, clean off your table, make sure you have adequate light, and get to work. Many of the steps at the start are the same, so I'll detail these here and then we'll get to specific examples.

First, Art. Pick out the thing that you want to recreate. If you can pick something that you can get a high resolution photo of. You'll need to print it, and get a look at it on paper. Try printing it larger than you need it to be so that you can look at all the tiny details.

Copy or trace the art on to scrap paper. Breaking down the shapes will give you new insights into the artist, and how they represented things. Even in a proscribed style, each artist leaves their stamp.

Look closely at the order of the colors, sometimes you'll catch little clues in the enlargement. Colors that obviously overlap. Shading or highlighting that crosses into another object.

Now that you know how the shapes work, time to trace the art on to the good paper. Do this slightly, sometimes the pencil can show through more translucent colors.

Mix up your paint. Rarely do the standard colors on our pallets match what's on the page. Mix test colors together. The colors will always dry slightly lighter than the wet paint is. Swatch them on scrap watercolor paper to make sure they are the right shade.

Most of the time the next step is to lay under coat of any gold, or the scaffolding for any raised gilding. Allow this to dry, and then lay your flats. Now it's time for the fun part. The shading!

Let's Do this thing.

For this study, I've chosen to compare versions of illuminated capitals, of the letter 'S' just examples of how differently artist approach the same subject. I will break down how to remake each of the examples. Please note that these are only representations, and not the only methods or styles in these times and places.

French Burgundy (1410)

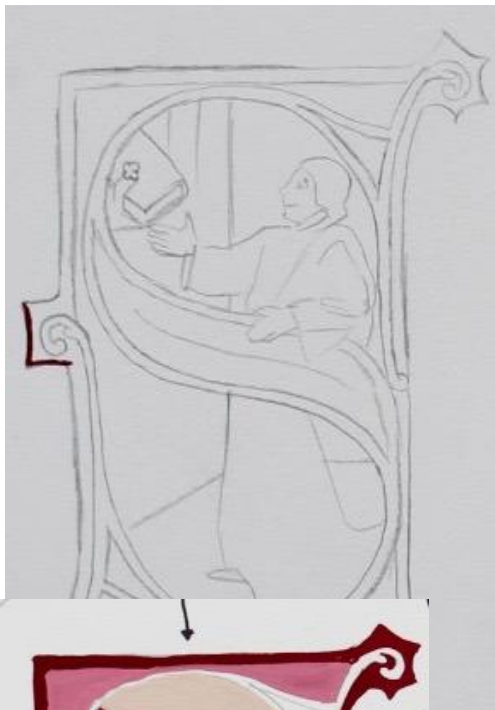
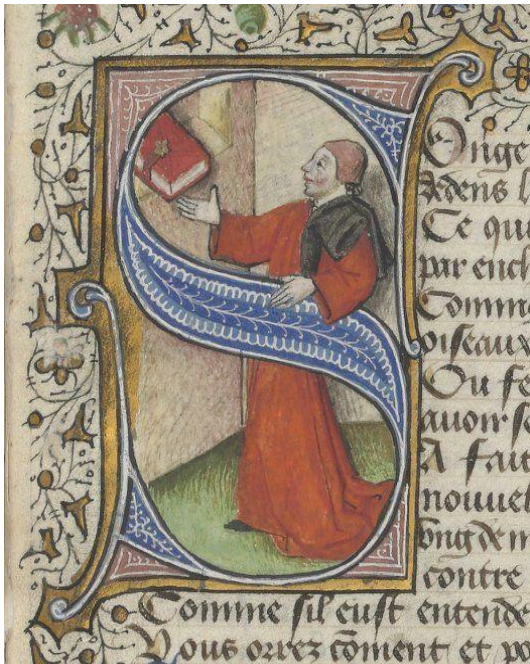
Example: Le Champion des Dames, by Martin Le Franc, prevost de l'église de Lausanne. Made for the Duke of Burgundy Philippe III le Bon

What influences this piece?

This illumination was completed during the reign of Charles the Bold, which was the beginning of yet another tumultuous time in France. It was made for Philip the Good who was Duke of Burgundy from 1419 until his death in 1457.

What's it look like?

It's very naturalistic. The figure is show as it would be in life, and is not idealised at all. There are rudiments of three point perspective, The wall of the building has a corner, and the window ledge have has depth. The shading here is chiefly don't with fine cross hatching, and layering.



Well, how do you do that?

You've got your tools, you've got your art traced onto the good paper, now we paint. Swatch your colors. Experiment with layering. Note that the brown black cowl on his shoulder looks a little translucent. It seems that the brown is the bottom layer, and that black definition lines are placed on top later. The brown is quite thin, you can see the texture of the substrate through the paint. The long garment on the figure is also layered. It looks like Golden yellow under red. I tested it to be sure.

The tomato color is much closer to the yellow with red on top in



person, the yellow has too much chalk in it, and makes the red pinkish when laid on top.

Now you know what colors to lay first. If you've been painting for a while you'll know how to lay smooth lakes of gouache. And I'll tell you that if you want the best application of color to build that's the way to go. But, in this case it's obvious that the original artist didn't do that. So, a thin yellow wash for the garment, a thin brown wash for his cowl. And lay in the rest of the colors as you would normally. Don't forget, the red ground for the gold.

The next step is to add the gold, and start layering the red color into the garment. I used finetec gold for this project, it's wettable watercolor unlike Gold gouache which is typically acrylic and cannot be rewet. It has mica in the paint and shines just like shell gold. If you look closely you can see how the imperfections in my red layer are showing through the gold. Always be especially particular about gold grounds, the reflective surface shows off every imperfection. The spare lines on the garment will eventually be the dark folds from the original.

In this third photo you can see the cross hatch shading on the wall behind the figure. Cross hatching takes a minute to get a handle on, the key is a dry painted ground, and very thin paint on tiny liner brush.

The liquid in the brush sucks out onto the ground, and makes these teeny lines. You can see that my hatching is also over the edge of the letter. When painting things with levels, like back mid and fore grounds, always paint the bottom layer first. You can see I have also applied the thin layer of red to the garment. It's already starting to look like the original. I also painted black behind the white edging of the letter. There is a thin black outline in the original, but something about the raised look of the white made me think that there was a full layer of black under it. Since completing the project I think I was right but wrong. There is an underlayer, but it's blue, not black. If I were completing this again, I would paint the whole letter blue, and then add the white and black.

Here I have added more to the layered crosshatch and added some depth to the book. The darker portion of grass is finished, but is really too dark for the original. I have also started working on the shading of the garment. The technique is pretty simple, you take a

clean wet brush and smooth the lines, delicately pulling the color together. I have also started adding the shadows behind the figure, they are cross hatched in black. Also note the lighter blue line in the 'S'. If you look closely at the original you'll notice that there is a lighter background behind the squigly decoration. That might be because the artist erased the first white decoration or it might be a deliberate choice, either way I felt it was important to include them.



I repainted the white of the S in permanent white at this stage. I wanted the filagree to match, and permanent white is usually the right choice for that.

Here is the final, I have added white details to the metal on the book, as well as the black drop shadow from the original. I have added depth to the garment with like hatches in red. The black out line has been cleaned up, and I added one to both sides of the gold, and on the inside edge of the blue space on the S.

I added the white lines to the pink background, and the blue portions of the S. The background now has six layers of cross hatching in various colors of brown. The black detailing has also been added the cowl thrown over his shoulder. In the original you can tell that this was done last because the white lines overlap the black trimming the S in places.

Final thoughts

He is finished, but now looking at it, there are some differences from the original. The face is not nearly so finely wrought. The hands seem more wooden. The shadow on the windowsill is much darker than it should be. The white line, and the black line on the S should be much closer to the same width.

There are always going to be differences. Being able to see them, to see the flaws is a skill you should develop. You can't fix what doesn't seem wrong. You can't get better when you don't know where to start.



Burgundy Late period illumination (1490-1550)

Example: This initial is from an unnamed Book of Hours was created by the artists known as the Ghent Associates ca. 1490-1500. The manuscript appears to have been originally made for Philip the Handsome, also known as Philip the Fair

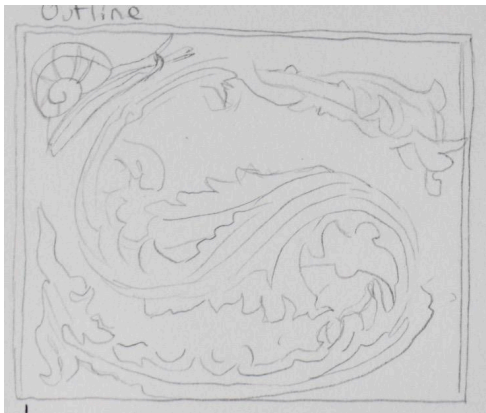
(1478-1506), duke of Austria, Brabant, and Burgundy, and count of Flanders and Hainaut.

What influences this piece?

France of today is not the France of the late 1400s. The art of Burgundy during this time period is heavily influenced by that of the Southern Netherlands, and you can see that in their paint work. After the death of Charles the Bold of Burgundy in 1477. The Dukes of Burgundy were important patrons for the arts, but instead of encouraging local talent in Burgundy, they preferred to order their art from the Southern Netherlands. After Louis XI (reigned 1461-1483) regained control over Burgundy, local production of illuminated manuscripts started to grow. Most successful was the workshop of the Master of the Burgundian Prelates whose regional style became predominant in Burgundy.

What's it like?

In this example you can almost taste the Dutch influence. The smooth curves and creamy blending are very reminiscent. Also many of the forms are taken directly from nature, or an idealized form of nature. Realism is also added by the shading in the shell gold. Note the lack of black. Most of the low lights are done with darker tones of the same color. There are also a lot of highlights here, but not a lot of white. The brights are mostly the lightened form of the medium tone. All of this shading is done with quite wet paint, the transition between the colors are quite smooth.



How do you do that?

After you have your art copied onto your good paper, and swatched your colors, the next step is to lay in the shell gold background. I either use shell gold or a finetec gold palette to reproduce this effect.

Remember to lay the pool of gold in smoothly, by loading your round brush with paint the consistency of thin lotion and outlining sections of the capital, and then filling them in. Normally I would recommend laying a yellow ochre or warm red underlayer for the gold. But this doesn't look like it has one. So lay it flat the

paper and let it dry. Then add a tiny bit of black to a bit of gold to swipe in the light shadow there. Here the shadow is true to life, the light is above and slightly in front of the letter, but there is no shadow at all on the snail. It's inconsistent, but it's there, and you should pay attention to those details. You can also smudge the dry gold paint with a wet brush that had black washed out of it.

Now that you have the gold in place, it's time to paint in the rest of the flats. These are the middle tones of all the other pieces in the illumination. Remember to let adjacent sections dry before painting them in. You need a smooth layer of color to act as the base of your painting. Mix



water into your paint until it is the consistency of cream or thin lotion. Make sure you don't have any clumps or globs on your brush.



Here you can see the start of the shading. I have added a lighter shade of blue to the branch part of the 'S', likewise light pink to the leaf, and light green to the belly of the snail.

I made these colors by mixing the base color with a little mixing white. I tried to follow the curve of the leaf from the original, as well as the bend of the branch. Always have your original close by so that you can check your colors and your shading. What you remember in your mind is often quite different than what is on the back. References your reference image often.



Next step, more color. The darker colors have been added to the edges of the blue branch and deep in all the crannies. This isn't the darkest color of the shadow on the blue sections. But because this one has no blacks, the darkest shadow is actually purple. There's also more highlighting on the pink leaf. The darkest green has also been added to the snail, defining the shell. This is still the ugly stage, but we're almost done. Also note the outlining of the golden rectangle outline is finished. On the original this bit looks a lot like an afterthought, and it doesn't follow the edge of the gold exactly.

In the last panel, you can see the magic of this style is the wet blending. It's the only way to get that smooth creamy feel to the shading. Take a clean wet brush and smooth the edges of the shadow and meld the edges of the highlights. It takes a little massaging, but once you have the hang of it, it is like turning on a lightbulb in your mind. Here the top of the shell has been smoothed, and then highlights in almost white, have been lightly swiped on. The low lights on the edges of the leaves have also been added, further defining the shape. The last of the edging in purple has been added, with a thin liner brush. There are some small detail lines in shadowed places.

Final thoughts

There are a lot of things I would do differently on this piece were I to attempt it again. In the original the



shading is more delicate, and refined. The colors are lighter, aren't as pure.

I think I may have found my favorite style of art!