

So, how the hell do you paint 6mm!?!

Well if you have painted larger scale figures and want to give 6mm a try then I can do no better than to quote from Master Yoda; "You must unlearn, all that you have learned." Many of the techniques that work at 15mm or 25mm won't yield good results in 6mm. Drybrushing in particular I have found is not very effective for this scale. So here are some of my tips for painting the little guys.

NOTE: Most of the figures in this guide are from Irregular Miniatures 6mm Fantasy range (www.irregularminiatures.co.uk/).



“6mm dwarves” finished dwarven army, based for the Horde of the Things rules

Opening Remarks

Before getting into the detail, a couple of things need to be pointed out. The first is that I use water based acrylics to paint with, either proper miniature type paints or sometimes artist's tube acrylics. The other thing you need to bear in mind is that I am a very lazy painter. I enjoy painting miniatures - there's nothing like fielding an army that you have painted yourself - but I do it because I have to rather than want to. Ultimately to me they are playing pieces not works of art. I want them to look good, but I don't want to spend so long painting them that I don't actually use them, so I try to get the best look for the least amount of effort. The advice that follows is based on that ethic. Also bear in mind that there are many ways to paint miniatures, this is my way of painting 6mm.

Don't Worry About the Detail

There usually isn't too much detail to worry about in the first place with 6mm figures - although you might be surprised at how much can be crammed into these figures. What you are basically trying to achieve is a good look from a distance - as though you were a god gazing down a massed armies on a distant battlefield, *bwahahahahah*. Also when you are actually playing a game you tend to be viewing the figures from at least a distance of two or more feet. So don't worry about individual figures, focus more on units/bases of troops as a whole. Once they are grouped together and based into rank and file you aren't looking at individual figures anyway - approach painting these miniatures in an almost impressionistic way. They don't need to stand up to close scrutiny when they are held close to the eye; they just need to look good from a

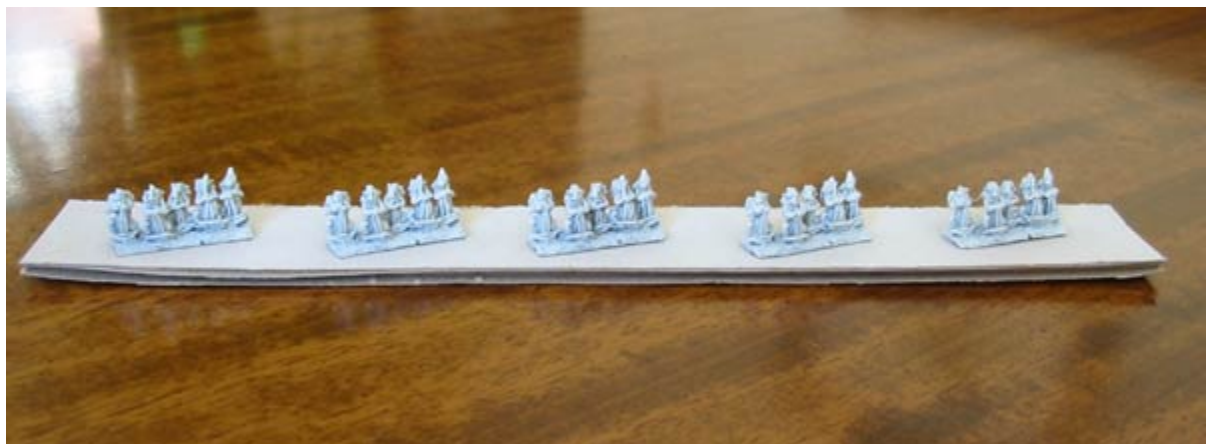
distance. For a better idea of what I mean, look at crowds at football matches. They are at a distance and although the eye is not picking up individuals it still recognises them as people - large groups of people. That is the effect that you are going for (though without the racist abuse and coin throwing hopefully...)

Preparation

Once you have cleaned the 'flash' off, a good tip is to let the figures soak in white vinegar (overnight if possible). This removes any grease and moulding residue from the figures and really prepares the surface nicely to receive the paint. It also has the effect of making the detail stand out a lot clearer. Give them a good rinse in warm water, although don't use any soap as this can cause the paint not to take sometimes. At this stage it is a good idea to mount half a dozen of the same unit type onto a 'painting strip'; short strips of card or wood (6-8" in length). This makes handling the figures much easier and grouping like units together means you can crack through a whole army really quickly.

Undercoat

I undercoat figures with spray paint, car primer to be exact. I used to use thinned down paint which achieves much the same results, but I find spraying is just quicker, easier and worth the extra expense. I generally use either a white or grey primer. Use white if you are planning to have the figures painted in lighter, brighter colours because it really makes difference to the finished paint job. For all other cases I use grey. Even if you are going to give them a darker final look I still recommend using grey rather than black as it will make the colours stronger.



"Ready to go" lizardmen sprayed white and stuck onto a painting strip

Choosing Colours

Less is definitely more at this scale. I generally try to stick to using only between 2-5(max) different colours for 6mm as a rule. If you try to use more colours I find things start to look messy. This isn't a hard and fast rule, certain detail like shields might benefit from the use of additional colours but for most purposes picking 3-4 colours to be used on the figures works better I find. This tip really applies to the rank and file of your troops - the massed infantry that make up most of your army and to a lesser extent mounted troops as well.

For figures like standard bearers or larger miniatures like behemoths, artillery etc. it is however worth putting in bit more time and maybe a few more colours when you come to paint them. It is amazing the difference a single well painted standard bearer, or larger unit can make to an army as a whole. These figures naturally draw the eye so taking the extra time on these types of figures really draws dividends in the long run and greatly enhances the look of your army. You can often get away with a lesser a quality paint job for your troops if you put the time and effort into these types of figures - not that I'm endorsing sloppy paint work BTW ;-)

Base Coat

I generally chose one main colour for an army; green for goblins, black for orcs, yellow for lizard men etc. - having one main colour for an army helps distinguish them on the battlefield, as well as giving them a unified look. After the undercoat this is the first thing I paint on. When I am applying the base coat I tend to use a slightly thinned down paint (see below) and basically paint every figure that colour, all over. I don't worry about the paint going where it shouldn't and don't generally try to keep areas free of paint unless I have a particular reason. You will be painting over certain areas later anyway so just 'splash it all over'. This is for the infantry, for mounted units and large creatures, do the same thing, but paint them the main colour you want for that unit (usually the colour of the mount, beast etc.)

Another Thing About Colour

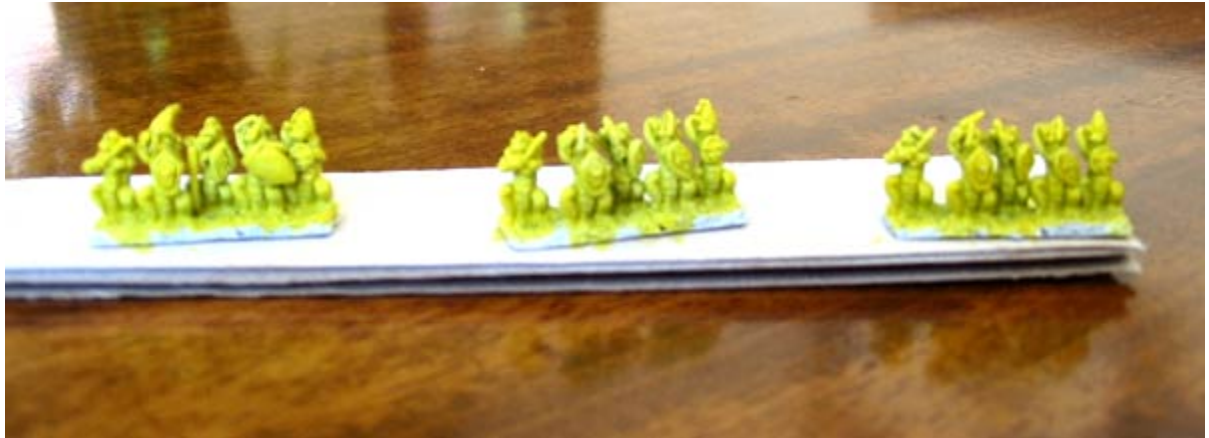
Another tip for the base colour is shouldn't feel restricted in your choice of colours. Colour that may be inappropriate at larger scale often works out really well at 6mm - I have an army of dwarfs that were painted blue as the base colour. Don't be afraid of brighter colours either. At this scale there isn't much miniature to begin with, so even the brightest colours don't stick out too much.

One thing to avoid however is 'strong' colours, mainly black. Never use straight black on anything but the very smallest areas. If you want an army or Black Knights use a very dark grey, but not black. Large areas of black (and to a certain degree white) just don't look right at this scale. They are way too strong. Not sure why this is but I suspect it is because you are trying to give the impression looking at normal sized people at a great distance, rather than tiny people close up. Basically you are trying to 'paint in' the effect of the atmosphere diffusing colour and making it fade somewhat. That's the science, the long and short of it is avoid straight black.

Flat Painting (or Not Quite a Wash...)

I just paint the figures with flat colour. Don't worry about trying to drybrush, or building layers of colour at this scale. I do however thin my paints down a little with water before (or sometimes during) applying it. At this scale thick paint can clog and obscure any detail that the miniature has. Difficult for me to say exactly what the consistency should be, about halfway between a wash and normal thickness paint is a good rule of thumb (see My Technique the 101 below). Because the paint is thinner it tends to flow over the miniature far better than paint 'straight from the pot'. This has a number benefits. 1) It makes it far easier and quicker to paint the figures 2) the paint naturally flows into all the nocks and crannies and 3) because it is nice and runny the paint also naturally pools into said nocks and crannies giving somewhat the effect of a wash. The disadvantage is that it takes a little longer for the paint to dry, though not too long. I tend to speed the drying process by sticking my figures by an open window

in the summer, or by a radiator in the winter (any other season and you'll have to work it out for yourself).



"Splash it all over" the lizardmen with a nice base colour of yellow

My Technique - the 101

My method of getting the paint to the right consistency is not very scientific, but it seems to work for me. I basically load the paintbrush with water, gently shake off some of the excess and then dip the tip into the paint. Work the paint into the brush by gently pressing the tip against the lip of the paint pot and then slap it on the miniatures. Basically I'm trying to mix the paint and water together in the brush.

If you find that when you start applying the paint it is too thick, just add a little more water to the brush and carry on painting. Because the paint is thinner you can actually mix it together on the miniature without ill effect until you get the right consistency. If you find the paint is too thin then just add a bit more paint to the brush and carry on painting. If you ever need to remove excess paint from a figure a good tip is to dry the brush off and then just apply the tip to those areas of the miniature affected; the brush should just suck the paint right up (capillary action don't-you-know).

Paintbrushes

Although logic would dictate that teeny-weeny paintbrushes are the order of the day I actually find that I get the best results using a small to medium sized brush which works for the initial base coat and most of the less intricate detail. They hold a lot of paint and as I'm not too bothered about the paint getting where it shouldn't be at this stage (although see Being Careful below) it means that you can crack through your figures without having to constantly keep loading the brush again and again. I prefer shorter, stiffer brushes myself (oo-er). This is of course a matter for personal taste. The main point I'm trying to make is don't think you need to use itty-bitty brushes to paint these figures. Even the finer detail is better accomplished with a smallish brush that can hold a decent amount of paint (so it can flow on to the detail) rather than some tiny 10-angstrom job. Although you can get some nice brushes from art shops, I find they tend to be a little too flexible to be good at painting miniatures.

Pick Out the Details (Contrast Control)

After the base coat comes the detail painting. Shields, helmets, capes, weapons etc. Go for a nice contrasting colour that is different from the base colour. There are two

approaches you can take. One is to go for a very different colour that really stands out from the base colour. This is the approach I have taken for most of the armies that I have painted. The other method is to use a more subtle colour change for the detail. I have only just started experimenting with this so I don't know if it is going to be a winner or not, but even a slight variation in tone seems to be picked up by the eye and gives a nice effect (see the picture of the lizardmen below for an idea of what I mean).

When painting these details, you can try using brighter colours - yellow, or tan instead of brown for hafts of pole arms for instance, silver for weapons and armour. Because the areas covered by the paint are so small they don't look out of place when painted with these brighter colours. They also make these details stand out far better. The painting of the detail is one of the most critical stages of the work, so care should be taken. This is the stage that really transforms the figures from coloured blobs to massed army.

Being Careful

As mentioned above, one thing to bear in mind is that even though these figures are quite small you should still exercise the same care when painting the detail as you would with a larger figure. A sloppy paint job still looks like a sloppy paint job even at this scale. Perhaps more so because at this scale the eye is given so little to go on, it is trying to distinguish these little lumps of lead as figures. As stated above this doesn't mean you need load the figure down with detail or colour, quite the opposite, but the detail that you do paint should be done with as much care as possible.

Uniformity is a Good Thing

When painting things like helmets, shields, hand weapons, pole arms etc., it is a good idea to paint them all the same colour (unless you deliberately want a very rag tag look for your troops). This again helps to define the figures with regularity and makes the whole army look much more unified. Saying that some variation is a good thing, particularly with shields, but it is still a good idea to 1) not do too much of it, just enough to provide a little variation and 2) try to stick to a limited number of colours as outlined above.

Now You Can Wash

Once everything is painted you can give the figures a wash. This is optional but with 'flat painting' washes work really well and although not essential can pick out the detail nicely. I tend to just use one colour of wash and paint this over the whole miniature. At this scale using a green wash over a red shield won't look out of place. You can either use very thinned down paint or inks. I use Windsor & Newton artist's inks at the moment, but have found them to be a bit hit and miss. They are also quite expensive even when compared with Games Workshop's own miniature inks (hard to believe I know!) so it may be a better idea to use proper miniature inks instead.

Finishing Up

That's pretty much it. Once the painting is done it is a good idea to varnish, to protect your hard work. The best choices are either a satin or matt finish. You can get varnishes especially made for miniatures, but I just tend to use ordinary wood varnish. Even if you want a matt finish it is often good idea to give them a first coat of gloss as gloss tends to be tougher. Then just give them a second coat of whatever finish you desire.



"Job done" detailing picked out in white and tan and then given a wash of green ink

Basing

The final thing to do is base the figures. I highly recommend that you try to make the bases look as nice a possible. You can certainly stick the figures on a piece of green card, but taking the time to make the bases look good really enhances the overall look of your miniatures - even a naff paint job benefits greatly from attractive basing. I use flock (of which there are numerous varieties available) but sand is also an excellent alternative when painted. Use watered down PVA (50/50 mix) when applying flock or sand to the base. In fact I usually use a blob of straight PVA (white glue) to stick the miniatures to base as well - it holds them fine and tends to be less brittle than say superglue (it also makes prising the figures off if you want to rebase them a lot easier). For the bases themselves I use plasticard as a rule. Finally add some detailing, little rocks or different coloured flock to give the base its final touches.

That's it.

Other techniques

The above is one way of doing things, for a really quick and dirty way to paint miniatures you can try this variation. In particular it works really well for 6mm vehicles. With this method, you give the miniatures an undercoat in black, then drybrush it white. The drybrush is applied directly onto the black undercoat. Then you just paint your base colour on top of this. Again use a thinned down paint to do so. What happens is the paint naturally pools into the nooks and crannies (darker areas) and slides off the highlighted areas allowing the white to show through the colour, lightening it. Basically this is a quick method of getting a drybrush effect without having to spend the time to do it. You can then just pick your details and your done. The one disadvantage of this technique is that it can make even the brightest colour seem dull and drab because you are using a black undercoat, which is probably why it works well for vehicles. One thing you could try if you want to experiment with this technique is to use a dark grey rather than a black undercoat, but you will still need to maintain a strong contrast between the undercoat and the white drybrushing.

The Final Word

The last piece of advice I would like to give you is experiment. The above techniques work for me and my approach to painting 6mm, they may not work for you. So experiment. If you are not sure a paint scheme is going to work, try painting a couple of bases to see how it looks. Mr Nitromors will happily remove any mistakes and let you start afresh. I came to the above by lots and lots of experimenting (and I still am). Also look on the web, there are plenty of sites that give great advice and tips on painting miniatures at any scale. Try things out and don't be too quick to destroy your mistakes. Take a good look at them before you dip them in the paint stripper, because you never know when you might hit on something good.

Cheers

agentofping



“Undead horde” another HOTT army