

## Demonstration: Painting Figure Flesh Tones with Vallejo Acrylics

Brian Alfano

Using acrylic paint on figures is just another method along with traditional ones of the past, but in the last few years has really gained traction with modelers. Brian developed his technique after seeing an AMPS-CV demonstration years ago. He took the basics and developed his own approach, which is outlined here.

According to Brian, using acrylics is faster and more controlled than using artists' oils. With oils, the colors are blended on the figure to make subtle color gradients that simulate light and shadow. With acrylics, the end result is the same, but the key difference is it uses thin layers that build up an opaqueness that provides the gradient effect.

Brian uses just 4-5 colors from the Vallejo Model Color line, Brown Sand 876, Basic Skin Tone 815, Cavalry Brown 982, Burnt Cadmium Red 814 and Burnt Umber 941.

Brian noted that we all have different skin tones so a single formula is just a starting point. Adjust it to your taste and use different formulas on your figures, especially if grouped together.

Keep two brushes handy for figure work and use them for nothing else. Brian's favorite is a Windsor & Newton Series 7 No.1 or No.2. This brush has enough body to absorb the paint and deliver it to a sharp point without running dry too quickly, as a smaller-sized brush would. However, he does have a 1/0 brush for occasional detail use. Expect to pay \$15-\$25 for the Series 7, depending on the source.

First paint the entire face with Brown Sand. Use a paint mixture of two or three parts water to paint and apply it in 3-5 coats to cover without brushmarks or thick buildup.

Start with the shadows, applying them until dry, then does the highlights. Lips and Five o'clock shadow are the last steps.

Use a palette with wells if you like to keep defined colors in place, or a flat piece of glass if you like to mix on the fly. Whatever you choose, make sure it is non-absorbent. Some even like to use discarded bottle caps.

The paint is thinned heavily, around five parts water to one part paint. Realize that paint at this consistency hardly leave any pigment at all, so it is an adjustment to get used to. But as you apply more the color starts to show. You must be patient about this or you will apply more than necessary.



Brian mixes Brown Sand with Burnt Umber to create a darker version of the face, thins it with a few drops of water (see above) and wipes it across a paper towel to take out most of the paint mixture. If not, the paint will run everywhere when it touches the figure and that is not what it is supposed to do. Roll the brush tip slightly to keep the tip sharp. Apply to the deep lines of the face and areas of shadow, like under the nose and chin.

Apply this in a few passes and then darken the mix further. Apply to only the deepest areas, like inside the nostrils, ears, eyes, etc.

Mix a highlight color using Brown Sand and Basic Skin Tone and apply to the face's high points, like the nose bridge, chin, ears and cheekbones.

Use straight Basic Skin Tone for only the highest points and use sparingly or the figure will be too pale. Lightly touch up areas like the lower eyelids and the outside of the nostrils

Brian never paints eyes or eyebrows as they are too small at this scale to make a difference that justifies the work required to paint them in properly. Brown slits for eyes is good enough.

Lips take a touch of Cavalry Brown, but use sparingly to avoid the lipstick look.

Never use straight black or white as it is too stark and will either wash out or muddy the colors.

If, in the end the contrasts are too stark and not soft enough, a very thin filter of the base color, Brown Sand, over the entire face will even out the tone somewhat. This step is optional and be very careful using it.

Five o'clock shadows can be applied with Burnt Umber with an optional touch of dark blue or grey, if desired.

While knowing a little about facial anatomy helps, a well-sculpted face makes it easier to find and apply the right colors. Styrene figures usually don't have enough definition to bank on, so you'll have to paint freestyle to define the features not there.

Vallejo paints dry in minutes instead of days, and can be speeded up with a hair dryer for almost instant drying.

Uniforms are painted the exact same way, with slightly different approaches to the folds and creases of the material, but the concept is the same.

