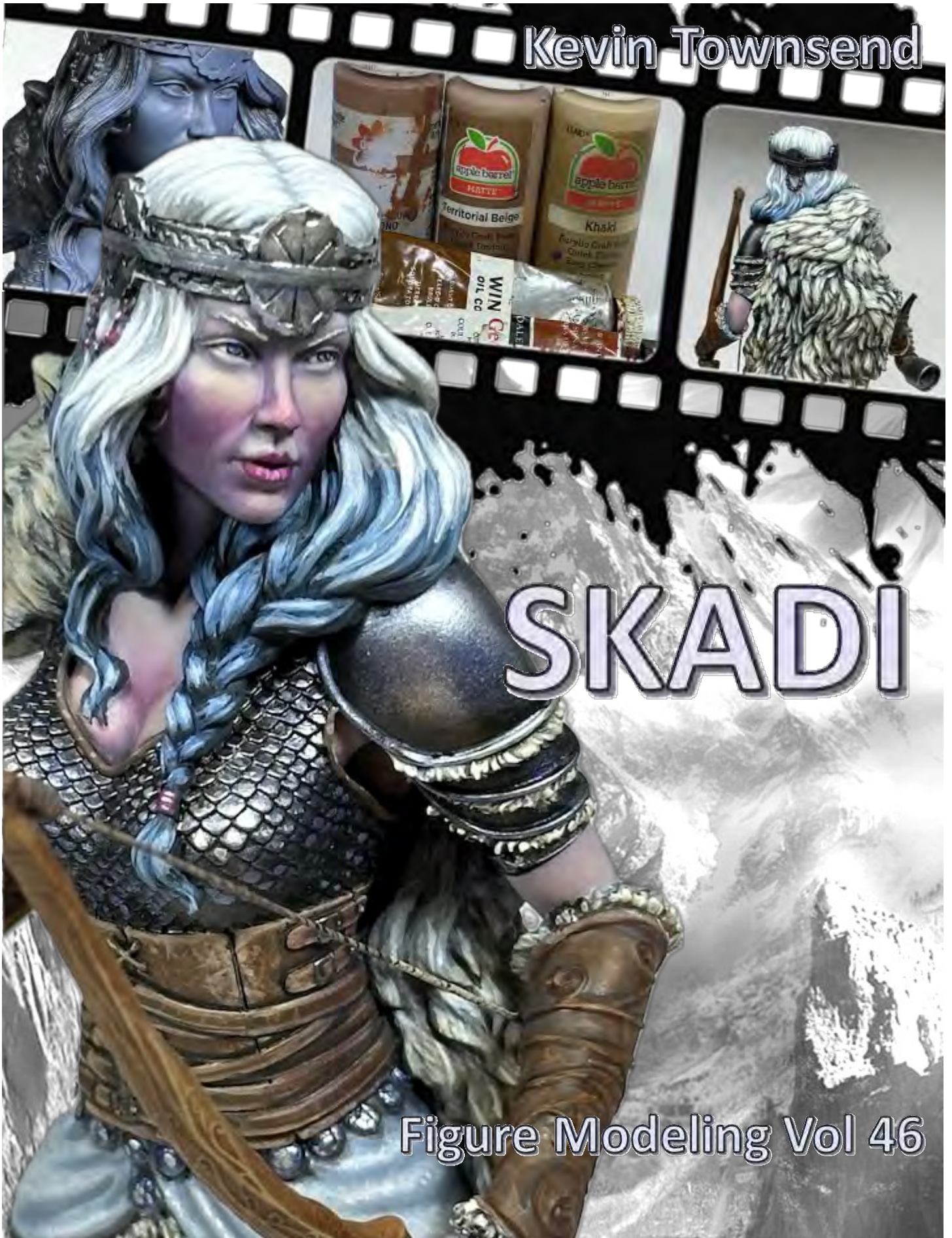


Kevin Townsend

SKADI

Figure Modeling Vol 46







## SKADI

Skadi is a jotunn (giantess) in Norse mythology, known for her independence and fierce nature. She is associated with winter, mountains, skiing, and hunting. She is also linked with vengeance and the wild untamed lands of the north. Her father, Thjazi, was killed by the gods, and she sought retribution. As compensation, the gods offered her a husband from among them, but she had to choose only by looking at their feet. She wanted to marry Baldur, but she mistakenly chose Njord, a god of the sea. They separated because he could not live in her mountain home and she was unhappy by the sea. After an insult by the trickster god Loki, it was Skadi who took a venomous snake and secured it over his head to drip venom on him while he was bound to rocks. Some sources suggest she later married Odin, and she is sometimes described as the mother of the gods Freyr and Freya. Her name may be the origin of the name "Scandinavia".

This excellent figure is NOT meant to be Skadi. The bust, by Ignis Art, is titled "Dziewanna" and is meant to depict that Slavic goddess. That is how most depictions I have seen are painted. I've seen a lot of red hair, green dresses, bronze armor, and brown bears. I chose to go a different route, and she proved very popular at the first show she attended—the 2025 Long Island show—probably garnering more comment than any of my other figures and earning a Gold Medal in the fantasy painter's category.

My sample was given to me by a friend, Floyd Bazin. Floyd is an outstanding modeler working primarily in large scale garage figures, gundams, and model aircraft. Floyd had partially assembled the kit and had put down a base coat of paint for the flesh. As I was going a totally different direction, I removed this paint and reprimed before I started construction. I also improved a couple small details. According to Ignis Art, the kit is in six pieces: the bust itself, the forearms, a hunting horn, and two pieces for the bow. Detail, engineering, fit, and casting are all picture perfect. This is a GREAT bust!

In this volume, we will look briefly at the extra detailing added and then take a deep dive into the painting. We'll look at painting—with brush and airbrush—both flesh and true metallic metals. In the past, we've seen a couple different ways to paint flesh on large scale busts. Here we'll see another. We'll also look at creating all the various textures present on the figure.

*Have you ever thought that something looked “off” on your work, but you were unable to pin-point the issue? Or, when displaying your work in public—at a show for example—do people point out flaws or question choices you had not noticed or given thought to? Just as we should proofread what we write, we should proof our figure work, too. We won’t catch everything, probably, (like the spelling/grammar errors in this series of articles attest to), but each thing we identify and fix results in a better final figure.*

*Some of things we can do to check our work are obvious. Ask trusted friends that will be honest with you for feedback. My wife checked Skadi about every step of the way. She identified that initially I made the area under the cheekbones too dark. She also noticed a couple mistakes I overlooked (we see the model all the time, so that familiarity may cause us to overlook these type of flaws). You can also look at the figure under different lighting, shine a flashlight on various areas, or even simply take the piece into a different room or outside. The change of lighting and or background—i.e. looking at the figure in different conditions than you are accustomed to—will help errors stand out. Another thing we can do is let the figure sit for a few days without working on it or looking at it. When you come back to your desk, you are then gazing upon it with new eyes. Photography helps, too. You can zoom in and enlarge—looking at the figure on your computer monitor at many times life-size. That way, you will clearly see your mistakes!*

*But there are other tricks we can do that may not be so obvious. After you paint the eyes, for example, and you want to make sure they are correct, do the things we said above. And then look at the figure in a mirror. Or take a photo and reverse it. It may seem odd, but irregularities you didn’t notice before will become apparent. Want to check your levels of contrast, and ensure the figure is “readable”? View it in greyscale! This will clearly show where contrasts between adjacent bits is too low. It will also show if we’ve pushed contrasts too far—for example if your face looks like a black and white skull. It will also help you gauge textures and reflections.*



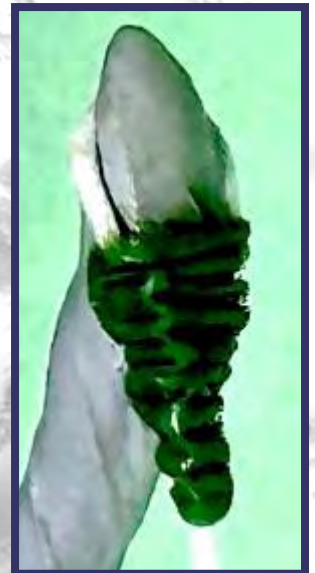
*Left: Eye alignment was checked by looking at a mirror image. She is good to go. This large view also allows us to check details (the texture in the eye brows looks good) and our blending. I did notice a small irregularity in the upper lip, but it is tiny and not noticeable when looking at her in person. I made the choice to leave it be—mostly out of a concern that attempting to repair such a minute flaw would result in more (or larger) errors than I was trying to fix. To me, even enlarged greatly she looks fine.*

*Viewing our figure in grey scale helps, too. Do the contrasts still look good—not too stark or too weak? Either problem will become readily apparent. We can also check the readability of our figure. Without color to give us clues, are the various different items still distinct? Do different textures still look proper? She’s good to go! I’m sure all these checks helped ensure the high-quality result—perhaps my best bust yet.*

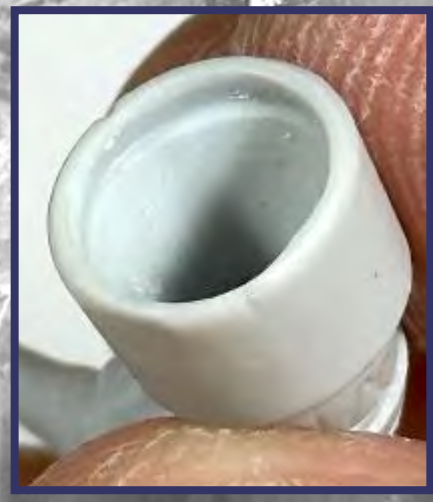
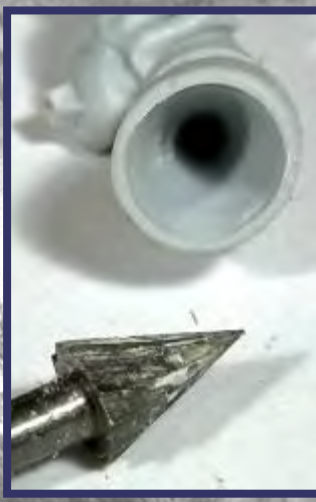
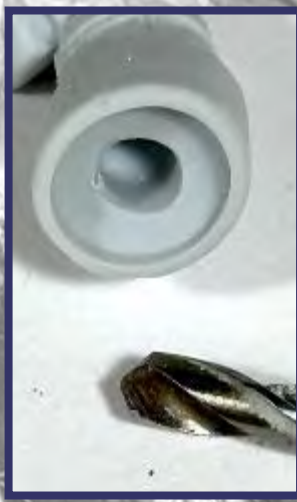








Above are the parts and pieces as I got them from Floyd. I completed assembly, stripped the applied paint, and started over. I added some detailing including a bow string as seen at right. First, I drilled a hole at each end of the bow and tightly glued in a piece of fine styrene rod. To create the loop where the string attaches to each end of the bow, I cut a small groove on the outside of the each arm end and then glued short lengths of the same styrene rod in place creating the loop. To hide the work, a binding was added at each end made from Kneadatite epoxy putty put in place and shaped/textured with a hobby knife blade.



The hunting horn was cast solid, with just an indent in the end. While this works, I wanted to hollow it out more. I started by drilling a pilot hole with a fairly large bit and then, using a triangular router in my Dremel Motor Tool, I hollowed out the recess completely. As seen above right, this resulted in a "rim" or "lip" inside the opening. I hadn't done this intentionally, but when I saw it happened, I decided to keep it as I thought it was a good looking detail. I LOVE happy accidents!





Priming was done in Black. I often use a zenithal prime (black all over and then white from above), but here I stuck with Black only, primarily because that is the best base over which to paint metal, and she has a great deal of metal on her person.

I also wanted to paint her flesh primarily with a cool palette. This included both dark and light blues, violets, and magentas. I must have done it properly—one of the most common comments she receives from viewers is “She looks cold!”.

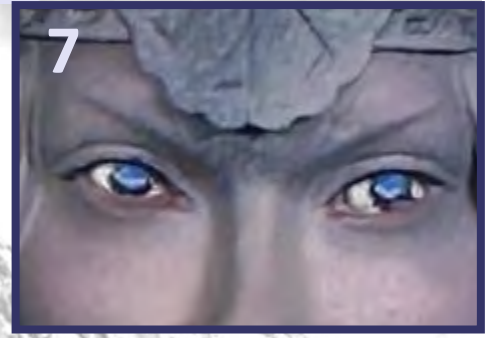
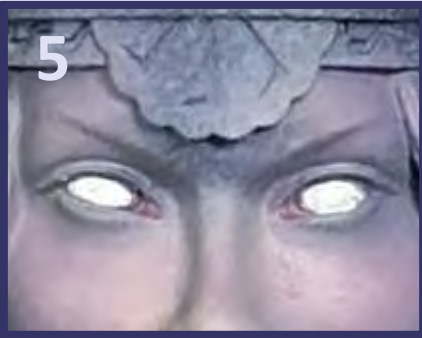
I usually paint eyes first, but then I usually paint everything with a brush. Here, due to her large size, I chose to add initial colors with an airbrush. Not only does this save time, it makes it easy to get smooth blends and transitions between layers. Keys to precisely applying colors are holding the airbrush close. This requires using a low air pressure—I shot at about 10-15 psi. I use a standard Badger single-action airbrush, but it has interchangeable nozzles and needles. For this, I used the “fine” size. To prevent clogs, the paint should be quite thin—thin enough that you need to gradually build up colors in multiple layers. This allows you to keep the layers transparent, letting underlying color show through or to build up to solid opaque layers as needed. I also added a couple drops of Flow Improver into each color flesh mix I used. Color are shown above right.

1. I started by spraying a fairly opaque layer of Dark Sea Blue plus a bit of Magenta (making a nice dark purple) leaving the Black in only the deepest shadows. 2. The first light covered about 95% of this and was composed of a mix of Violet Red with a tiny bit of Salmon Rose. 3. The next light added more Salmon Rose. You can clearly see how each layer covered less and less area, and was applied in a more opaque manner on upward facing surfaces. Remember the stop sign rule discussed in many previous volumes! 4. The final airbrushed layer consisted of Salmon Rose plus a bit of Pale flesh. The result is a great sketch to build upon while completing the paint work with a brush.

### Airbrushed Flesh







The first task I did with the brush were the eyes. These are usually the most important task you do, and are certainly one of the keys to a well-done figure. In this series, we've looked at many examples. Here is another one! Colors used are shown at the bottom of the facing page. 5. The whites—never use a pure white—were painted using a very pale mix of Antique White with a bit of Regency Blue. The tears ducts at the inner corners of the eyes were glazed with a mix of Magenta and Rose Mist. 6. The upper lid and the iris/pupil area were painted using Black. The lower lid was edged with the same color used to paint the tear ducts. 7. The iris was next, leaving a small black outline around the edge. This was painted Ocean Reef Blue—I wanted a nice ice blue color. It was highlighted on the bottom below where the pupil will be using Ocean Reed Blue mixed with Regency Blue followed by straight Regency Blue. 8. Finally, the pupil was dotted in using Black and a small catch-light added in the 2 o'clock position. The catch-light represents a reflection where the light enters the eye. The highlight on the iris represents where the light exits the eye, and thus it should be directly opposite the catch-light. Why was the catch-light put where it was? I wanted my figure to be lit primarily from her front left—the 2 o'clock position matches this. Although I painted a reflection, I still added a layer of Clear Satin. In small scales, the catch-light is sufficient. In larger scales, the satin gives the eyes more life and makes them look more realistic.



Before going too far down the rabbit hole of flesh painting, I decided to paint the metal since most of that would be done with the airbrush. Most metallic paints are difficult to airbrush due to the size of the metallic particles (usually mica) mixed into the paint to provide the metallic sheen. Most also do not thin well. Not so for Vallejo Model Air metallics. These feature very—very—fine aluminum particles and are designed for airbrushing. It seems these days that non-metallic metals are all the rage, and that method—if done well—looks great in photos where viewing angles and lighting is controlled. But in person, to me (your opinion may vary) the method falls short. But pure metallics can have drawbacks, too. The surface can be too uniform and the shine too bright. Therefore, I like to mix my metallics with inks and apply the shades and highlights in a method not vastly different from what we see with non-metallic metals. For this task, I chose to use the Model Air metallic colors of Arctic Blue, Steel, and Chrome along with Andrea Black ink. These colors are seen at far left.



To protect the flesh areas from overspray, these were masked using MIG Masking Putty. Prior to spraying the metallics, I touched up the Black primer (with the airbrush) on areas of the armor the flesh colors had partially covered.





9. The first layer, a shadow color, sprayed overall, was a mix of Arctic Blue metallic and Black Ink. Next, sprayed everywhere except the deepest shades, was straight Arctic Blue metallic. 10. Steel was added to the Arctic Blue and this was sprayed on all metal areas from about a 45 degree angle above. Next straight Steel was sprayed only from the front left at a much steeper angle. With that, the airbrush was set aside and the masking putty removed. 11. The armor was finished using a brush. On the highest highlights (the front of the crown, the front left tip of the shoulder, the rims of the shoulder armor, and the tips of the scales on top of her left breast) Chrome was added. Note that the Model Air metallics brush paint very well, too, going on quite smooth. They are my favorite metallic colors. Straight Black ink was applied to shadow areas and a thin wash of the ink was applied over the scales for outlining. The ink was also painted, with a fine brush, into the recesses of the crown. 12. Here is a view from the non-light side. Note the differences between this and the front left. 13. It is even darker from the back.





13

## Additional Flesh Colors



14

14. With all airbrushing done, attention was turned back to the flesh. Using glazes of the same colors seen earlier, I clean-up and reinforced the airbrushed colors, adding more coverage where needed, providing a bit more variation, and reinforced shadows and highlights. For example, Shadows were deepened under the eyes, under the lower lids, on the sides of the nose, under the lip, and so-on. Highlights were reinforced on the tops of the cheeks, the nose, the top of the upper lip, and the tip of the chin. Additional colors were also applied as seen above. Thin glazes (see the note on the next page about how I apply glazes) of Regency Blue were applied in areas on the sides of the forehead, under the eyes, below the nose, the chest, the backs of her hands, her armpits, and areas where midtones met shades. Burnt Red and then Magenta were applied under her cheeks and between her breasts. The hair was also painted black as a base for the blue and white colors. 15. Additional glazes of these colors were added as necessary to clean-up and blend all the flesh tones. Technically, the scientific term for the process is "F'ing with it until I was happy". The lips were painted in a mix of Magenta and Violet Red. The upper lip was then giving a Magenta highlight along the top edge and the shadow area was painted Violet Red. The lower lip was highlighted first with Magenta and then with Magenta plus Pink. The fingernails (not shown) were painted Violet Red. Leaving an outline of this color, they were Painted Magenta and highlighted with Pink. Next, the blue portion of the hair (see next page) was painted. Study the ultra close-up photos of the face on page 1559 and note the placement of the purples, dark and light blues, reds, and magentas. If you look carefully, they can all be found.



15

## Hair Colors





## Terms and Techniques Reviewed

*I throw around a good number of terms—like “layer”, “Glaze”, “Wash”, and we have defined them earlier in the series. But it has been several volumes since... and many modelers can get confused—especially on the difference between relative thinness and thicknesses of the various methods and their methods of application.*

**LAYER:** *OK, I throw this one around a bit willy-nilly. I usually refer to my method as building up effects using layers of paint like a military Base Defense Operations Centers builds up a tactical picture of their Area of Operations using transparent overlays on a map. When I talk about layers in this context, I can be talking about layers specifically as well as glazes, washes, varnishes, barrier coats, and any other “layer” of colors and effects on a figure. When I say that paint was applied in a “layer” or was applied in a “layer” consistency, I am talking about an opaque or semi-opaque layer, such as a solid base color for an item I would then shade and highlight using either somewhat thinner semi-transparent layers or even glazes. With a layer consistency, it normally about takes two or three coats to build opacity.*

**GLAZES:** *Speaking of which, what is the different between a “glaze” and a “layer” or between a “glaze” and a “wash”. Glazes are thinner than even the thinnest of semi-transparent layers. Glazes generally would require multiple coats to build up even a semi-opaque color. They are similar to what, in the armor model modeling world, are called “filters”. Slightly thicker glazes can be effective as highlighting or shading (dare I say it) layers. Thinner glazes can be used to cover the transition points between mid tones and shades or highlights to “visually” blend the transition together. Check out photos #14 and #15 on the previous page and note how glazes were used to soften the transitions on the cheeks and slightly cut-back the contrast. I often will intentionally push the contrasts between the highest highlight and the deepest shades too far. I will then apply a thin glaze (I usually refer to it as a “blending glaze”), to both cut back on the contrast and visually blend all the layers. So, yes, a “glaze” is basically the same thing as a “layer”, it is simply thinner. There is no set point where a layer becomes a glaze or vice versa. What about differences from a wash? A glaze can be thicker than, as thin as, or even much thinner than a wash. The difference is application.*



*To apply a glaze, first load your brush with the thin (or very thin, or watery) mix as seen at far left. Next is the key: unload the brush by touching it to a paper towel and removing all the excess moisture. This leaves only the thin paint in the brush that you can precisely apply just like any other layer. As there is no water to cause it to run all over the place, it will remain where you place it... it will just be a thin semi-transparent or transparent layer of color.*

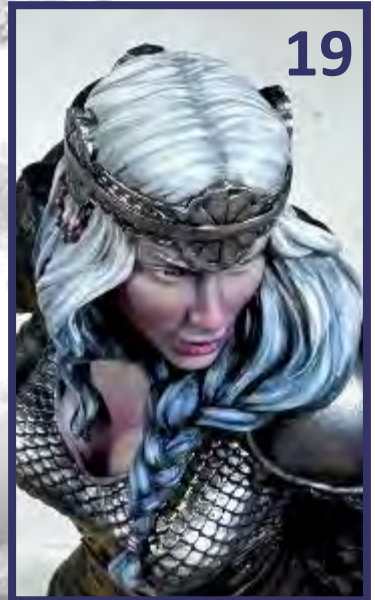
**WASHES:** *A wash is thin paint similar to a glaze. The main difference is that with a wash we do not remove the excess liquid—be it water for acrylics or mineral spirits for oils or enamels. We flow the mixture onto the model and let it settle in recesses. This does not necessarily mean it cannot be precisely applied. Yes, it can be allowed to flow all over creating, but if (for example) you apply it with a fine brush into recessed panel lines, it will only wick into those lines, giving you easy outlining. While I often will use a wash for just such outlining, I rarely use overall washes... except for groundwork which often receives them.*

*While we’re reviewing, let’s use a line or two to talk about brushes. Our work will only be as good as your brushes, so I generally use the best I can get. Many people think tiny details require tiny brushes. Not so. What they require is a good, sharp point. Tiny brushes usually have tiny bodies. That is a disadvantage as the body is what holds paint. With a tiny brush and acrylic paint, the paint can dry before we even deposit it on the model. A well-painted #0 can paint most things these smaller brushes can. I generally use the largest brush I can for any given painting task. For this build, I mostly used the paint brushes shown here—#2, #1, #0, and a #2/0. As busts are rather large, most of the painting, glazing, highlighting, and shading were done with the #2 and the #1. The #0 was used for most of the fine details. The only thing I used the #2/0 for were the tiny highlights, catchlights, and pupils in the eyes. It was also used to pick-out the tiny details on the metal baubles hanging from her corset.*





15. On page 1565 we saw the blue portion of the hair painted and the paints used. Base color for the blue was Dark Sea Blue fading to French Greyish Blue toward the top. Basic shapes and forms were then highlighted by adding Regency Blue. Highlighting next followed the sculpted strands of the hair and added progressively more Regency Blue until that color was used pure. On the top portion, toward the white area, I continued this highlighting up to Spectrum Blue. Next were the white areas. This was applied using the same process. The key to getting these colors to blend together is to merge the highlights (carry some of the blue onto the white and some of white down into the blue) and do the same with the shadows. 16. The base color for the white served as the shadow color and was made by mixing Cold Grey with Granite Grey. 17. The first light, following basic forms, was Granite Grey. The next highlight, following the sculpted strands, added White. The third highlight was White. 18. To further shade, a wash of Ultramarine Blue was applied. In blue shadow areas (such as between the braids), this was straight ink. In other blue areas, it was lightly thinned. In white areas, it was applied very thinly, indeed. 19. Finally, on upper surfaces, some of the highest blue and white highlights were reapplied. The result is an appropriately shaded and highlighted—yet unified—whole. The eye brows were painted in the white hair first highlight color and then individual strands were added using short dashes of the lighter highlight colors. Look at the face close-ups on page 1559 to see this clearly.



20. To create the worn, cracked brown leather corset and bracers, I started by working from dark to light. Colors used are shown on the top of the next page. The base was a mix of Leather Brown, Blue Grey, and Black. The first two highlights, applied in glazes as normal, were Leather Brown followed by Dark Brown. Subsequent highlights were applied in dots, dashes, and hashes to represent texture, wear, and cracking. These were Autumn Brown, Autumn Brown plus Barbarian Flesh, Barbarian Flesh, Barbarian Flesh plus Khaki, and Finally Khaki. 21. The scroll work was carefully picked out using Parasite Brown. This was likewise applied somewhat unevenly in dots and lines to represent wear.



[illegible]

22. The scrollwork was outlining with Brown Ink. Other, non-worn areas, were lightly glazed with Chestnut Ink. Deep shadow areas were given a thin glaze of Eldandil Violet. 23. Outlining of all the various belts and panels were done using Black. Buckles and ties were painted appropriately.



**23.** Keeping with cold and blue themes, attention was turned to the skirt. As this was trimmed in fur, I wanted the skirt itself to appear thick and have a wooly texture. Colors used are shown below right. The base was a fairly light Spectrum Blue. The first highlight, applied as a normal glaze to all highlight areas, was Granite Grey. All further highlights were applied in small dots applied randomly to mid-tone areas and more thickly on the tops of folds and wrinkles. These consisted first of Dolphin Grey. This is very similar to the Granite Grey, just the tiniest touch lighter and greyer. Its purpose was only to provide variation and a hint of texture overall. The next two highlights added progressively more white, and the final highlight, used sparingly, were dots of white. The first two shadow colors were also applied as dots in lower mid-tone and shadow areas. The first added Sombre Grey to the Spectrum Blue base color. The next was straight Sombre Grey. The next two shades were applied sparingly as thin glazes created by adding progressively more Pavement into the Sombre Grey. Use care—it is easy to overshade light colors. Outlining was created by adding Black to the deep shadow mix.

The fur trim was given a solid base coat of Warm White at this point. This included the trim on the shoulder armor and forearm bracers.



Skirt Colors



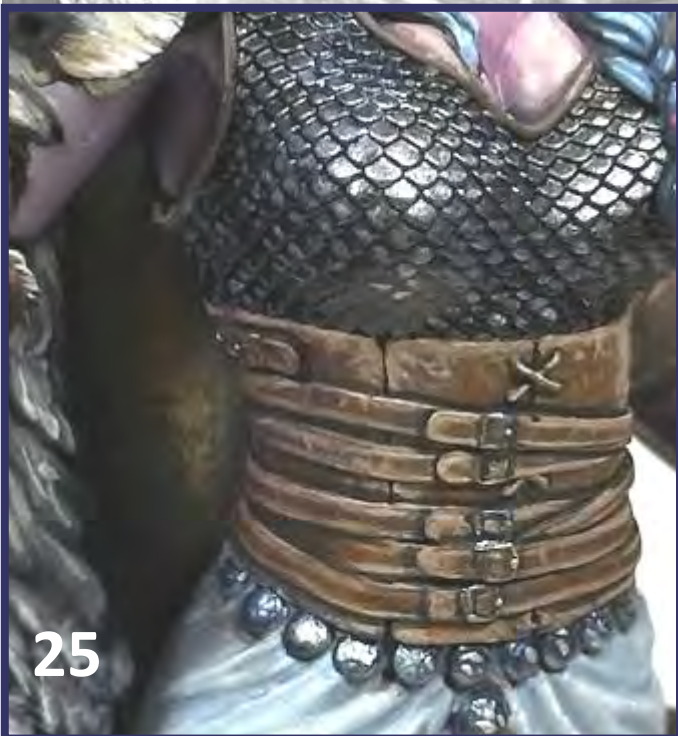




24. To bring out all the finely textured fur, the trim areas were given a wash of a mix of Brown and Black inks. Of course, this really toned-down the white, too, and the trim at this point looked much too uniform and quite muddy. So I went back and picked-out all individual strands of fur randomly using Chamomile, Suede, or Antique White. While a somewhat tedious process, it gave a very realistic result—much better than you would get from superficial dry-brushing.

At this point, all the little baubles hanging from her corset were painted. These used the same color as the armor. They were based using Arctic Blue metallic. Highlights and details (they each have finely rendered designs on them) were added first using Steel and then using Chrome. The buckles on the corset were painted with a mix of Steel and Black paint. Highlights were picked-out using Steel. The ties on her corset were painted Territorial Beige highlighted with Khaki.

25. Back under her right armpit, a bit of the skin side of the bear fur cloak can be seen. But as it is in deep shadow, not much detail is needed. It was painted in a medium tan color, and then shadows were built up first using dark blue grey colors and finally Black. Lastly, I went back in with lighter tan colors and stippled on some texture. This close-up photo also shows detail on the scale armor, leather, and the baubles.



26. Bear fur was generally built-up from dark to light. I used Pavement (a very dark grey color) for the base color. Colors used for the fur are shown on the next page.







Fur Colors



Fur Inks



27



28



29

27. Leaving the Pavement visible only in the deepest recesses, the forms of the fur were built up using a mix of Pavement and Burnt Umber. The first highlight added Chamomile and blocked-in all the basic clumps and forms of the fur. When painting fur, always move your brush in the direction of growth—from the root to the tip. I was still using a larger, #2 brush at this point. 28. I starting adding hair texture to the various clumps and form. The next highlight added more Chamomile, which was followed by a highlight of pure Chamomile. 29. To “soften” the fur, and visually blend the shades into the existing highlights, the fur was given a thin wash of Walnut plus Chamomile. 30. Turning to a #1 brush and using Chamomile plus Antique White, texturing and highlighting continued, but these were focused primarily only the upper two thirds of the bear



30



31

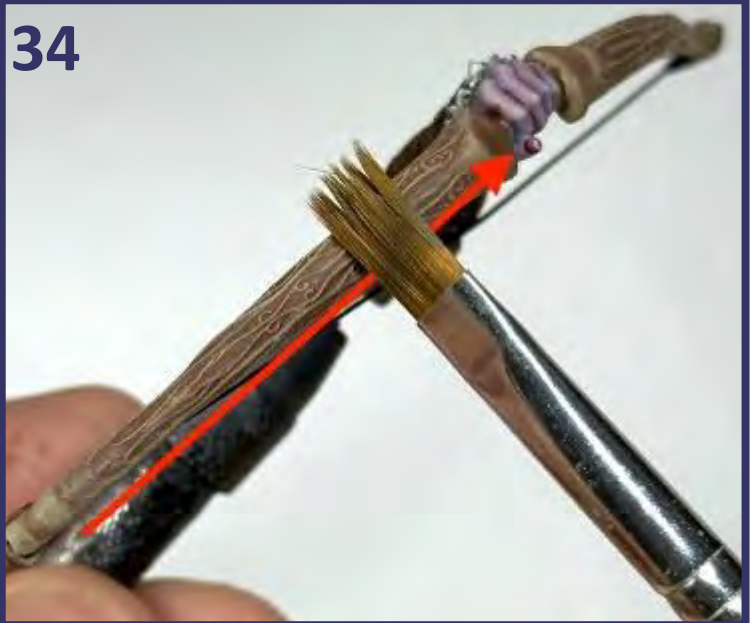


**31.** Covering less and less surface, additional highlights consisted of Antique White, Antique White plus White, and finally—only on a few select points—White. Next, shadows on the lower portions of the fur were reinforced using a thin glaze of purple ink made from a mix of Ultramarine Blue and Inktense Crimson inks applied on in shadow areas. For variation and a bit of weathering, thin glazes of Brown inks were applied—mostly toward the bottom of the fur. **32.** The bear's eyes were painted to represent glass. They were painted Black with a small white catchlight and a coat of clear Satin. The nose was painted Black with a highlight of Pavement and a highlight of Pavement with a small touch of White to make a very dark grey color. Some of the Brown ink was also applied to the sides of the snout for some variation and visual interest. While both her hair and the bear's fur are white, her hair is a cold white tending toward blue while the fur is warm tending toward brown. This contrast both creates visual interest and ensures her hair and the bear fur do not blend together into a single unreadable mass. Even in the grey scale photo on page 1559, the distinction is clear.

Also visible in this photo are the small beads on the loops of her crown. These were painted Magenta highlighted with Pink. The tie on the end of her hair braid is painted with the same colors.

**32****33**

**33.** The metal areas on the hunting horn were painted using the same colors as on the armor. The horn itself was painted from the mouthpiece to the open end with overlapping streaks of color getting progressively lighter and lighter. I started with Black, then went to Pavement, and then Dark Grey, Burnt Umber, Chamomile, Suede, and Antique White. All of these colors were previously used with other items. Leather items were painted in a manner similar to her corset starting with Leather brown, and then building up wear, edging, and cracks by adding progressively more Khaki into the Leather Brown. It was finished using a thin glaze of Brown ink applied everywhere but the edges. Outlining was done using Black.

**34**

**34.** The last item painted was the bow. Colors are shown on the next page. First, the base color of Autumn Brown was applied overall. Highlighting was applied normally using first Territorial Beige, then Territorial Beige plus Khaki, and finally Khaki. Detailed scrollwork and decorative trim on the ends of the arms were painted using Khaki as shown. I used a flat brush with good, flat sides. The tip is irrelevant for this technique. The brush was loaded with paint and most wiped off on a paper towel. Then the sides of the brush were LIGHTLY pulled along the arms perpendicular to the scroll work, depositing color only the raised design. This method is actually similar to dry-brushing was done using only one pass.





35



36



Bow Colors

35. The result to this point is seen here. 36. Oil paint washes blended the colors and helped provide a bit of wood texture. Burnt Umber was used in shadow areas and Burnt Sienna in other areas. Here is the final bow. 37. The bow string was first painted Burnt Umber. Some twist texture was added by painting on diagonal hashes of the base plus Khaki. Straight Khaki was applied to the wrappings on the end servings and nock serving. The various parts left separate were glued in place on the bust (the left forearm/hand/bow and the right hand/horn) and the bust was glued onto the base using a stainless steel rod.



37

Busts generally do not include groundwork. However, here, to reinforce the scene and the character, I added a layer of snow to the surface of the base. I didn't take this all the way up to the figure as I did not want it to look as if she were wading through waist-deep snow. The snow was made from a mix of white glue (Mod Podge), Woodland Scenics "Snow" and some of the old (no longer available) Hudson & Allen "Snow". It was thinned with water to a paste that was applied to the base with a putty spoon. The Hudson & Allen product had a small bit of ground glass or fine glitter than gave the snow a slight twinkle if the light hit it properly. This was minimal, and the addition of the Woodland Scenics material reduced it even more. Still, it makes a nice, if very subtle, effect.



# READABILITY

“Readability” is a term I’ve tossed around quite a bit in this series of Miniature Painting volumes, and I’m sure most of us understand it, but we’ve never really taken a deep dive into it. So what is “Readability”? Those familiar with my “Ten Commandments of Effective Composition” may know my second commandment is “Direct the Viewer’s Eye”. Success or failure of our pieces and our stories rests with the viewer. Readability is part of that communication process – in this case the communication of information to the viewer about our piece so they understand what they are looking at.

We can define the term as “The ability to clearly distinguish the form, details, and features of a model or figure from a normal viewing distance”. In other words, it does not appear to be a confused, muddled mess. It is clear, and all the different articles of clothing, bits of gear, belts, skin areas, and whatnot are clearly defined and can be distinguished from each other. To my mind, readability is one of the most important aspects – if not the most important aspect – of our painting. In some cases, it may even trump absolute historical accuracy. So how do we achieve readability in our miniatures?

The most important aspect is CONTRAST. Good highlights and shadows create a sense of volume and form. It allows elements to stand out. Without contrast, details can become muddy or lost, and vital information is not communicated to the viewer. Take, for example, the drawing of a sphere. If you just draw a circle on a piece of paper... you’ve got nothing but a circle. But shade and highlight that circle, and add a shadow underneath it, and all of sudden you have something that anyone would recognize as a sphere. Contrast also makes our models look more in scale. In real life, natural shades and highlights provide us all the information we need. However, when we scale an object down, it is smaller but the light source is not. Therefore, we need those painted lights and shades to properly convey information our eye expects to see. We must also consider contrasts of texture, too. Leather, metal, cloth, wood, flesh, etc. all have different textures. We must recreate these to create a readable miniature. If all these were painted using the exact same method, we would provide our viewer with no mechanism to distinguish between them other than relative color. To me, this is the main reason why non-metallic metals may look perfect in photos where viewing angle and lighting is controlled... but fail when viewed in person because the texture does not appear metallic and the highlights and shades do not act in a manner real metals would.

Another thing we must do to achieve good readability is to have WELL-DEFINED ELEMENTS. Each item should be distinct from every other item. Part of this, of course, is simply neatness – painting within the lines. As mentioned above, good contrasts help. A big factor, in my opinion is the use of outlining and edging (or edge highlights). These things really serve to make details pop! For an example at the most basic level, imaging a level surface covered in finely inscribed intricate designs or runes. Painted a solid color, these would be difficult or impossible to discern. But something as simple as a wash of a contrasting color will bring them right out. If our adjacent elements are different colors, it makes defining them and separating them easier, but even with like colors, good separation using outlining and edge highlighting will help, as can good volumes, shading, and highlighting. Check out the prohibition protestor shown here (originally seen in Volume 16). Although all three pieces of his suit (trousers, vest, coat), are the same color, they are each well-defined by shade, highlight, edging, and outline. Even slightly varying the hue, saturation or value of similar colored items can help. Varying our highlight and shadows colors helps, too. If we highlight everything with white, all our elements become desaturated and high highlights appear very uniform across the piece. I (almost) always highlight with a lighter version of the base color, or with a light color such as flesh, yellow, tan, etc. The same is true for using only black for shadows. Having a good color harmony contributes, too. A willy-nilly mix of clashing colors is harder to look at than something painted with a harmonized palette.

Finally, CAREFUL EXECUTION will help with readability. This means more than just “painting within the lines” as mentioned above. It also means our highlights and shades are where they should be and are consistent from element to element. If most elements are lit from directly overhead (for example), an item lit from the front or the side will be out of place (unless it is clear there is another light source). We want our paint layers to be smooth with good transitions and no brush marks and no built-up paint obscuring details. We can add well-painted eyes and other small details. Constantly check your work as we discussed on page 1559.

I implied earlier that readability can sometimes conflict with realism. A good example might be a soldier in camouflage. The whole purpose of camouflage, if you think about, is to obscure detail and break-up outlines... in other words, to REDUCE the wearer’s readability. But we must strike a balance so that our viewer can still tell what they are looking at. With good color separation, neatness, and especially good edge highlighting and outlining, we can still achieve a readable result even if it may not be 100% accurate.

This bust is a good example of all the things discussed above. We have contrasts: not only highlighting and shading, but also in hue, temperature, and saturation. Great pains were taken to distinguish between different textures of flesh, hair, fur, metal, leather, horn, and wood. Each element is well-defined and clearly separate from every other element. This is done through color, highlights, shades, outlining, edging and even—as seen with the contrast between her hair and the bear fur—temperature.







Kevin Townsend  
Figure Modeling Vol 46

# SKADI

- Large Scale Figure/Bust Painting
- Airbrushing Flesh /True Metallic Metal
- Painting Textures – Leather, Fur, Hair, Other