

The Easel

A Quarterly Newsletter of the Lochac Guild of Painters and Limners



Young Boy With His Drawing
Giovanni Francesco Caroto, 1550-1550, Verona

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From the editor

Greetings fellow artists.

The picture on the cover this issue is a reminder that we've all got to start somewhere with our art. Don't feel that your efforts are not good enough to share or that you've got nothing to teach.

I believe that we all have a degree of artistic talent, and in most cases it's just a matter of finding the right medium and practising - lots. Cennini, in his 15th century manual, recommends drawing every day. Current understanding is that it takes 10,000 hours of practice to become a "master" in any field. So get out there and make some art. And send in pictures....please!

Also, our thoughts go out to the populace of Southron Gaard where there was a major earthquake on 4 September. I was staying there on holiday at the time, and although my house was fortunate enough not to suffer any damage or loss of services, many people were not so lucky. What was really heartening was to see the immediate offers of help and support SCA-wide.

Lady Antonia di Lorenzo
Barony of Stormhold
Editor

About the Guild

The primary aim of The Painters' and Limners' Guild is to advance the study and practice of the medieval painter's art prior to 1600 AD. The Guild shall endeavour to encourage all who are interested in the painter's art.

The secondary aim of the Guild is to recreate a medieval or renaissance guild of painters, and the Guild encourages research and activities towards this end.

The Guild shall promote any form of painter's work which can be demonstrated to have been known and performed in Europe and the Middle East before 1600 AD, including drawing, painting, printmaking and other arts.

It should be noted that Illumination and Calligraphy remains under the aegis of the Lochac College of Scribes and Illuminators.



Dean of the Guild/Newsletter Editor:
Lady Antonia di Lorenzo
antonia.sca@optusnet.com.au

Patron:
Baron Alaine Lorenz

Web Minister/List Keeper:
La Signora Onorata (THL) Katerina
da Brescia
katdb@bigpond.net.au

Website: sca.org.au/peyntlimners

Email list:
Peynters@yahoo.com

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Great Southern Gathering

October saw the second Great Southern Gathering,, this time in Innilgard. The feast hall was decorated with many beautiful painted banners and wall hangings, greatly adding to the pageantry of the event. Among the many workshops on offer over the weekend was a double session one on egg tempera painting - the first session covering how to prepare a panel for painting, and the second session the techniques of painting in egg tempera (notes will be posted on the Lochac Virtual Collegium).

Below are some of the paintings from the workshop.



One of the ideas that came up after the workshop as a possible project to paint using these techniques was a small Italian painted chest or box. While a full-scale wedding *cassone* might be a bit ambitious, a jewellery box or feast gear box is within the reach of even a novice painter. Starting with a plain box, you can dress it up with pre-made wooden mouldings (available from hardware stores), moulded gesso (*pastiglia*), gilding and painting. In the 16th century there were even chests with commercially produced woodcuts glued on to imitate wood inlay.

Here are some websites to get you started:

<http://www.turismo.intoscana.it/allthingstuscany/tuscanyarts/cassone/>

http://www.artknowledgenews.com/The_Courtauld_Gallery.html

<http://www.thecityreview.com/metital.html>

http://www.vam.ac.uk/res_cons/conservation/journal/number_56/cassoni/index.html

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/images/image/49177-popup.html>

http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/pe_mla/w/wooden_panel_from_a_cassone_m.aspx

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Guild news

I am recommending that the title for the head of the Painters and Limners Guild be changed to **Dean of the Guild**. This was a traditional title for the head of a guild, often used by the Guilds of St Luke to which painters belonged. Dean is non-gendered, and avoids any potential confusion between Master of the Guild (the head of a guild), master painter (a guild ranking) and Master/Mistress (denoting membership of the SCA Order of the Laurel). If there are any objections please bring them up for discussion on the members' website.

As yet no firm suggestions or ideas have been posted to the group for the Guild badge. I've now got some moulding compound to make a master mould for pewter casting once we've decided on a design, so everyone try to come up with something so that we can have badges available next year.

Meetings, collegia and workshops

The Melbourne chapter of the Guild meets on the third Saturday of the month at Antonia di Lorenzo's house -see the Stormhold calendar for more details.

Egg tempera workshop at Krae Glas A&S Workshop Day Sat 13 Nov - see the Krae Glas calendar for details.

Workshop on making and using charcoal and drawing chalks at Stormhold Surveying Expedition Jan 2011 - see the Stormhold calendar for more details on the event.

Guild Meeting - Rowany Festival 2011. Details TBA.

Member news and bios

Antonia is going to Italy next May to do a 9-day course in Renaissance Painting and Drawing Techniques. There should be lots of information to pass on after this!

Please send in your news, pictures, short articles or anything of interest for the next newsletter to antonia.sca@optusnet.com.au

Join the email group and post photos and files to the Yahoo group

Join the Flickr group and post pictures of your work for member-only viewing

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Short article: Making and Using Rabbit Skin Glue

One of the ways to increase authenticity in your period art is to make your own materials. Some of the art materials which can be made relatively easily include drawing chalks, ink, paints and tools such as brushes and easels. Rabbit skin glue is used to make the gesso used to prepare panels for painting in egg tempera and oil.

Glues based on animal collagen, such as gelatine, pearl glue, rabbit skin glue and fish glue, have been in use since well before the middle ages and are still in use today in specialist fields. These glues are made by rendering out collagen, one of the structural proteins present in skin, tendons, fish air bladders and other soft tissues. The glue can be dried and in this form keeps indefinitely, and is simply soaked in water and reheated when needed.

Collagen has a curly structure, a bit like a metal scourer, that holds body tissues together. When it is moistened and heated, the collagen melts and untangles and can be painted onto surfaces to be joined, and when it cools again it curls back up, pulling the two surfaces tightly together. The joint can be undone simply by reheating and dampening the area. This makes it ideal for constructing furniture and musical instruments such as lutes which occasionally need to be taken apart for repair or adjustment.

For making gesso, either food grade gelatine or rabbit skin glue can be used. Gelatine, which is a more highly refined form of collagen glue, does not require soaking for as long as rabbit skin glue and has less smell. It is not a very strong glue, but makes a reasonable gesso for small panels. Gelatine can be purchased from supermarkets. Rabbit skin glue is available from art supply shops, but it is possible to make your own if you wish.



To make rabbit skin glue, you will need:

- fresh rabbit skins
- plastic bucket
- hydrated lime
- stirring stick
- rubber gloves and eye protection
- scraping knife
- double boiler
- muslin for straining

Three-quarter fill a bucket with water and add hydrated lime until no more will dissolve. Hydrated lime is irritating to skin and eyes, so it is a good idea to wear rubber gloves and eye protection, but it is not as dangerous as dry lime. Add the fresh rabbit skins and soak for about 24 hours, stirring occasionally.

After 24 hours remove the skins and stretch out on a plank of wood, flesh side down (see photo at left). Using a knife with a rounded cutting edge scrape off all the hair, which should now be quite loose. Turn the skin over and scrape away any fat and adherent flesh. Trim off any bits at the edge which you can't clean, and rinse the skin thoroughly in several changes of fresh water.

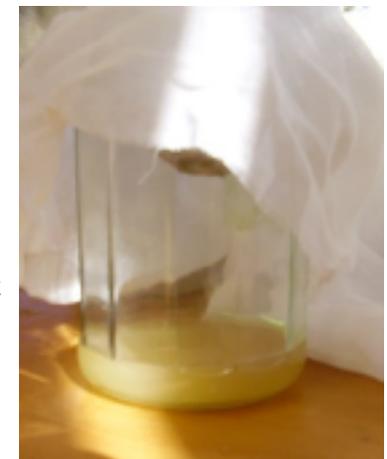
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Half fill the bottom of the double boiler. Chop up the skin, put in the top of a double boiler and just cover with water. Bring the water in the bottom to the boil and simmer for about an hour. You will see the liquid around the skin turn yellow and sticky as the glue comes out. (See photo at right)



After an hour, strain off the liquid through a piece of muslin (see photo below right). Return the solids to the pan and cover with water again. Repeat the simmering to extract the glue for a total of four times. Pour all the completed glue into a shallow dish and let set until firm. Chop up and let dry. As the glue gets drier you can chop it more and more finely. Let the granules dry until quite hard. Store in a sealed container. You'll only get about a tablespoon of dry glue granules per rabbit, which makes the commercially available glue seem like much better value than you might have thought.



To use as glue reconstitute with an equal amount of water.

For panel painting, reconstitute 1:6 for the initial sizing of the panel, and 1:12 for making gesso. Warm the glue in a double boiler to about 40°C and keep warm during use. You may need to add extra water as it evaporates, to keep the glue the same consistency.

To make gesso take 1 measure of diluted glue and add 2-3 measures whiting to make a mixture with the consistency of thick cream.

Reviews

The Structural Conservation of Panel Paintings: Proceedings of a symposium at the J. Paul Getty Museum

http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications/pdf_publications/panelpaintings.html

There are not many extant instruction manuals for Medieval and Renaissance art techniques - Theophilus' *On Divers Arts* and Cennini's *Il Libro dell' Arte* are among the few. A great deal of information on techniques is gained either from painters who are part of a continuous tradition, such as Orthodox Christian icon painters, or from conservation work on existing artworks.

In 1995 The Getty Museum hosted a symposium on The Structural Conservation of Panel Paintings. The symposium notes can be downloaded for free in four sections from the Getty Conservation Institute website. Parts one (3.2MB) and two (2.2MB) contain a wealth on information on the materials and techniques used for panel construction in different parts of Europe (parts 3 & 4 are just technical information on conservation and not highly relevant to the artist). Well worth reading before you start making your own large or composite panels for painting.

The Getty Conservation Institute website also has a number of other free to download PDF publications including their newsletter.