

# PAINTING LEATHER 101

## LESSON ONE

### CORRECTING MISCONCEPTIONS

“I’m no artist; I’ll never be able to color leather pictorial subjects like you”. I have heard this from far too many leather carvers. I have not met very many leather carvers who have a background in art, but that is no reason to impose such limitations on yourself. THIS IS THE FIRST MAJOR MISCONCEPTION.

Listen! Everyone who ever said that to me knew how to eat! They know just how much food to put on their fork, and how to maneuver it to their mouth without spilling it and how to get it into their mouth instead of their eye or nose. Of course, they didn’t always know how to do that. Anyone who has ever observed a baby’s first encounters with feeding itself is aware of what I am talking about.

Painting is like eating, it is something you teach yourself to do. Both are exercises in eye-to-hand coordination. It will be good for you to remember, some messes are not failures, for with every mess comes a beneficial learning experience that ultimately will lead to your becoming a successful handler of the brush and acrylic paints, just as you did when learning to eat.



The point I am trying to make is this: **If you have the “talent” to feed yourself, to pick up an object, to ride a bike, to drive a car, then you have the talent you need to be successful at painting.** All of these, like painting, require eye-to-hand coordination, observation and measuring space and form with the eye and mind, practice and working through any mishaps.

Learning and teaching are joint efforts. I can teach you --- but you must do the learning. What you get from these lessons will depend on your dedication, energy and most of all self discipline. I call this your “want to”. If you really want to, you can be successful. **And probably a lot faster than you even imagined, BECAUSE YOU ARE ABOUT TO RECEIVE A LOT OF GOOD FUNDAMENTAL KNOWLEDGE AS MY GIFT TO YOU.** Many before you have paid good money for this knowledge. So, just because it is free to you, **DO NOT THINK THAT IT DOESN’T HAVE VALUE.**

#### FIRST THINGS COME FIRST

You did not learn to write words until you first learned to draw the letters and understand them. You did not write and compose sentences until you first learned what the words meant. First things come first. All the things taught in these beginning lessons are **absolutely necessary for you to develop if you expect to be successful.**

My method of instruction will be an academic approach, because I know from experience, the knowledge gained from such a systematic approach will enable you to develop your skills more rapidly than the “trial-by-error” and “learn on your own” methods. Learning via the academic method means you will not wait for technical problems to arise after you have begun a painting. As your guiding hand, it is my job to help you build a

rock solid foundation to build upon, and to forewarn you the problems you might encounter and how to overcome them.

The one prerequisite you must bring to my “classroom” is patience. It would probably be a very good idea to make a little sign to put at your work station: **“First Things, Come First”**. This will be your constant reminder that some things simply cannot be learned unless other things are **FIRST LEARNED, PRACTICED, AND UNDERSTOOD!**

## **TWO STEPS TO LEARNING**

You should not be discouraged if you do not master immediately all the things you study. In this academic approach there are two steps to learning. The **FIRST STEP** is to gain a thorough understanding of what you want to accomplish. This step requires thoughtful research and observations. The **SECOND STEP** is to train your hand to put to leather what you have learned. This step requires practice and time. The idea is to become skillful, through practice and knowledge, that you can apply that knowledge instinctively.

You will notice that I will **CONSTANTLY** remind you throughout these lessons to always be a **CONSTANT OBSERVER**. **THIS WILL BE YOUR KEY TO UNLOCK THE HIDDEN TALENT WITHIN YOUR-SELF.**

You are about to embark on the same wonderful voyage of discovery that I did some 55 years ago. On that voyage, do not look for short cuts. Don’t try to force the natural time it takes your eye to “see” and your hand to get accustomed to handling these new tools and materials.

## **YOU CAN LEARN TO COLOR LEATHER BEAUTIFULLY, ACCURATELY AND REALISTICALLY CONVINCING.**

There is no perfect brand named paint. Every line of acrylic paints will have its shortcomings. I have used just about all of them over my long period of painting with acrylics. For many years I used and recommended Ceramcoat paints as my primary brand. In 2008 they reformulated their paints and ruined the quality of the paint. At that time I pulled my coloring course from the market as it was written around that product line. I went searching for another. You may be surprised what I chose.

After a lot of consideration, I decided that I would use the Tandy/Leather Factory Eco-Flo™ Cova Colors® as my primary paint. Usually, the first thing I hear when I mention that to some one is, “they cost too much”! So let me deal with that misconception right from the start.

That comes about because one is usually comparing the cost with what they find in the craft stores, i.e. the Ceramcoat, Americana and Folk Art brands. I get a 2 ounce jar for \$1 to \$2, while Cova Colors® cost about twice that price. I found that the quality of the paint is somewhat better than the average acrylic paint found in craft stores. If you were as familiar as I am with acrylic paint brands you would probably know that paints of equal quality are available from art material suppliers, usually catalog sales or web sites, that cost pretty much the same, some even higher. Of course if you go the tube route, the fine arts paints, the cost is a great deal higher than Cova Colors®.

Well yes, but look at all the colors that are available in the other brands. My answer to that is: I used to think that was a good thing, but now I am sure that is not such a good thing. It was a big consideration when I was trying to determine my choice of paint. It seems so much easier just to reach over and find the color you want and not worry about mixing, or learning how to mix a particular color. But many times I found that even with a hundred or so colors to choose from, I didn’t have the one I needed. That meant I either had to figure out

how to mix the color from what I had or make a trip to the store to see if they had what I was looking for. I would usually come home with three or four bottles that I thought would work (of course only one would, and sometimes not). So much for saving money. There are probably around 200 hundred bottles of paint within arms reach of my painting station at any given time (not to mention the 100 or so that are stored other places). Some I have only used once, maybe 5 or 10 years ago. So I have to look at that cost a little different don't I? \$1 or \$2 for one or two brush loads of paint. I think you get the idea. Sometimes I have searched my stash and found just the right color and found out that I had it so long that it is dried up. So, all things considered I was only fooling myself thinking that I was saving money. Over the years I really didn't give it that much thought, because in the whole scheme of things the cost of paint used in any given project is minimal.

Let me explain to you what I mean about quality. Almost any acrylic paint you purchase will have lasting quality, by that I mean permanency. Where quality comes into play is in its usability. When I first started using acrylics on leather I thought that I would use the best I could find. What I used was Liquitex. But, when I reduced the consistency down to where it was best for painting on leather, I found that they often broke down, and after several months they would even develop mold and stink. After discussing that with the engineers at Liquitex, they recommended that I add a touch of Lysol to each of my jars. That did extend time before spoiling, but when they did spoil you didn't want to be around when you opened the jar. After several years, I switched to Ceramcoat, primarily because of the availability in my area.

After working with the new Cova Colors<sup>®</sup> I found that I could thin them down considerably without them breaking down. This is especially true if I use them, as many of you will, a little at a time and not pre mix them. I also found that using them straight from the container they have just the right consistency for good coverage. That probably doesn't mean much to you now, but it will later. Usually the craft store brands are too thick for use on leather and require some thinning, except the re-formulated Ceramcoat, but whatever they did affected their ability to "cover" another color when required, even their Black.

So, now the remaining problem is: "How do I mix the color I want when I have so few colors from which to choose?" I am currently working on a mixing guide to solve this problem, and hope to have it finished soon. It will be called: "*The Guide to Realistic Coloring Using Cova Colors<sup>®</sup>*". It will not only include a mixing guide, but will explain color to you, and outline a generic coloring system that I have developed over the years to teach you realistic painting with easy to follow instructions.

So, if you are ready to turn this....



Into this .....



Or this.....



into this....

**STICK  
WITH  
ME.**

In lesson two, I will introduce the paints and the brushes and show you how they are supposed to work together.

NOTE: Cova Colors and Eco-Flo are Trademarks of Tandy/Leather Factory