
Calligraphy on Unconventional Surfaces with Maybelle Imasa-Stukuls

Chapter 1 - Calligraphy on Unconventional Surfaces

Overview

I love it when clients ask me to work on other surfaces other than paper. Once you understand the basics of thick and thin and where they fall in the letter form, you can apply this to a larger scale, for instance, on wood. We're going to create a table number on a chalkboard surface using acrylic paint. I'll also show you how to make a menu using a chalk pencil. Another popular request is when clients ask me to mix a custom color using a Pantone swatch. I'm going to show you how to mix a beautiful aqua-blue ink using gouache.

Materials

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- In addition to your calligraphy kit, you'll need a few extra items. For the table number, you will need a piece of wood. This has been primed with chalk paint and I've cut it to five by seven. Water, a container for mixing, white acrylic paint, a black eraser, a chalk pencil or markers, and assorted brushes, and a pencil. For the custom mixed color, you will need a paint swatch of your choice, a container for mixing, assorted gouache, which is opaque watercolor, gum arabic, a dropper, and the final paper that your artwork is going to be written on. All of these items can be found at your local art store if you don't already have them.

Unconventional Calligraphy

Table number using acrylic paint

- I always begin my process with a pencil. In this case, we're painting the number three. I prefer "no" for number. Looking at the size of this, I want it to be fairly large because this is going to be seen from a far distance, possibly at night. I want it to be somewhat centered, but I'm not too concerned with that. When I'm drawing this, I'm going to keep in mind where the thick and thin lines occur, when I do this in a small scale. I'm happy with the placement of this number. If you've made a mistake, feel free to erase and start over. I'll start mixing the paint now. I'm gonna squeeze just a little bit on here. For this, I like to use acrylic paint, and just add a little bit of water. I'm going to mix this to a consistency that I like to use with the brush. What I'm looking for here is an even mixture. The consistency of this is like a heaving whipping cream, but you're going to want to test this to make sure it's to the opacity that you prefer. I'm going to set this aside and test this on a scrap piece. I'm also bringing in another brush. Testing how this will paint on, also, checking to see the mixture. Now it's looking a little bit too transparent for me, so I'm going to add more paint to the mixture. I always like to use a different brush for mixing, so that I don't ruin my liner brush. I see that I've mixed in too much pigment this time, and it's a bit thicker than I'd like on my brush, so it's not going to flow nicely. I'm adding just a tiny bit of water now. Grabbing my mixing brush. Let's test this and see. Now I'm going to paint over this first number, what's going to happen is, I'm not going to get that same fluid line as once before, it might eventually look traced, but I do want that outline,

that crisp outline, on the edge, so I'm just gonna go on the inside. So, I'm just going in to cover those areas, of course, this is my practice. If you go outside the line, it's all part of the charm. It's okay. Okay, I'm happy with the way that looks, so we're going to go to the final. Because the "no" on here is so fine, it's going to be really tricky to do with a paintbrush. So I'm going to go ahead and use my nib, but just know that you'll damage your nib in this process. I'm painting onto the nib with the same mixture that I'm going to use to paint the larger number. The same techniques that you would use on paper are being applied to the number. The hairlines aren't showing up as I'm creating this in the upstroke, so sometimes you have to fake it. In this case, I'm going against what I just taught you, we're just darkening up that line. Sometimes you might need a little bit of water to lubricate the tip. I'm looking at this, and I want the thick and thin lines in the letter N to be a little bit more obvious, so I'm going to go in again and darken this middle stroke. Just gonna go on the side. Again, over here. When I'm doing this tapping, I was just adding a little finials to the end of my letter. So, tapping in this period for that number. I'm gonna get this brush point as fine as possible. I am trying to get a really fluid line here, trying to achieve the same thick and thin that I would with a nib, but in a larger scale. Obviously, this would be very hard to do with a tiny nib. So I'm trying to get it in one stroke. You can always go back in, if you make a mistake, and if you have extra paint, you can touch up, but I think that looks good. The top portion of this number three looks a little odd to me, so I'm gonna go in and just go along side, and paint it. And then I'm going to thicken up the bottom portion of this three. I notice that, as I'm doing this with a wet paintbrush, it's making the number look a little more transparent, so I'm just gonna let this dry. Just gonna go in with a brush, and touch up the areas that are a bit transparent, trying to be as careful as possible not to hit the edges. I'm using a flat brush to fill the inside. I'm gonna go in with a liner brush to this area here, just to get a cleaner edge. I noticed this area here needs a little bit of touching up as well. The last thing I want to do to this is just add a little point at the tip of this number three. I'm gonna add one to the bottom, as well. The rules of thick and thin will apply to all your numbers, and you can create these for birthdays and anniversaries. Feel free to experiment with other surfaces and scale.

Chalkboard menu

- Something that I'm asked quite often to do is to create a chalkboard menu and it's something that I like to do at home for my twins. This is a chalk pencil. This is the kind of mark it makes. Letter M. This is a colored pencil. This is an aquarelle. This is a Bistro Marker and a fine point Posca Pen. I'm also gonna test the chalk. Looking at these, I'm just looking for the look I'm going for and also, which one's gonna smudge. The first pencil, the chalk pencil, it smudges just a little bit, but it has that chalk feel and I'm able to get a little bit of the details. This one is too light. The aquarelle is too waxy feeling and the Bistro Pen is a little chunky to me. The Posca Pen would be great for something really tiny and the chalk, obviously is gonna smudge and I have to write quite a bit bigger with the chalk and since my space is just a five by seven chalkboard, I'm gonna choose... I think I'm gonna go with this chalk pencil. Because you can only write with one line weight with this pencil, I'm gonna go back in and thicken up the letters. Because this is gonna smudge, I'm going in now to thicken up where this happens in my natural, regular calligraphy writing. The first thing is tomato soup. Thick line for the T, thick downstroke for the O, lower case M, downstroke on the A, this T, O. This pencil's getting quite dull as I'm writing with it, so you're gonna need to sharpen it. No meal's complete without dessert. Tonight it's brownies. If you were worried at all that this was going to smudge, you could spray a fixative onto it. Menus like these are a fun way to add calligraphy into your everyday life.

Create custom colors using gouache

- It's very rare that I buy colored ink and use it straight out of the bottle. Sometimes I'm working with a bride using a particular color palette and when she says blue, I'm thinking of a different blue. So it's good to have a reference such as a pantone color swatch. In this case, we're going to be mixing pantone #319, which is a turquoise-y blue. I went to the store and I purchased turquoise gouache. Gouache is an opaque watercolor. When I look at this, it's in the same color family, but I need a much lighter version than what's in the tube. Squeeze out a tiny bit into the jar, knowing that we're going to add white to this mixture. I like to mix more than I think I'll need, because very often there will be other projects added later. It's easier to mix the color now than to match it later. Since I know there's a lot of white in this color, I'm going to add a little bit more of the white. Go ahead and mix this without any water. You're gonna want to make sure that you get all of that blue pigment equally distributed in the bottle. Looking at this, already I know I need to add more white. You'll want to mix this completely before adding any water to it. You won't know if this is the exact color until you test it on the final paper that you will be using. This is looking close. Let's add water and test it. We're using distilled water because I'm going to need to keep this for a few months. Looking at this, you want to make sure that all of that pigment is mixed well. I can see some of the white sitting here at the bottom. Paint a little bit onto the nib. I can tell that this mixture is a little bit too thin just by the pooling right here where it sits on the surface. I'm looking at this drying now, and it's looking like it's almost the exact color, but since this is going into the mail, I'm gonna want to add some gum arabic to it, to waterproof it. Once I do that, I know that it's going to darken the ink mixture just a little bit. That was about ten drops. It's still looking a little bit thin. I'm adding more of the white gouache. We'll test again and see what happens. I'm gonna see if I need to add even more of the gum arabic to this. The way I'm gonna test it is to moisten my fingers and just run it across the letters. Continue this process until you have the right color, consistency, and your ink is no longer smearing. This is looking good. We're gonna label the bottle, know how I love to label, and now we'll start addressing the envelopes. I like to have a drying rack handy so that I can stack the envelopes like this. When working with custom-mixed colors, I like to paint onto the nib versus dip because I find that I have to stir this mixture often. I'm not really worried about centering the information so I'm just gonna go ahead and write. Let this one dry. These techniques will take you from hobbyist to professional. These are some ceramic plates that I painted with glaze using the same techniques that we used in the painted table numbers. Once you understand the principles of modern calligraphy, you can apply this to any surface.