Illumination: Easy Tricks for Detail Work
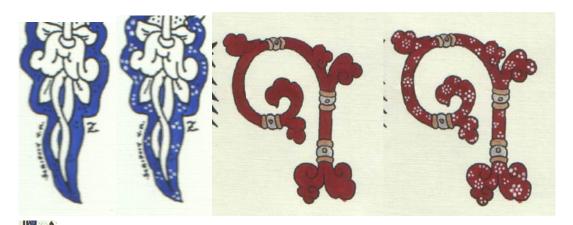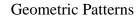## Lillias MacGuffin

Dots and Clusters

These patterns date back as far as the Roman Empire, in the first century AD, and are normally found on White-vine work illumination of the period, though these patterns work very well as space filler on some of the other charter designs as well. Pliny the Elder used this style in his book *Historia Naturalis;* as shown in the example here is from that text (found at http://www.sil.si.edu/ [1]).

This pattern requires only a fine tipped brush or, if you prefer, a toothpick, which keeps its tip and makes a rounder shape more easily.

Once you have completed filling in your large areas with color, let them dry completely. Then take your brush or toothpick, and get wet paint on just the end of it. Make sure your white is not too watery, or that you have too much paint, or you risk getting too much on the page at a time. Only a small amount of white, refreshed frequently, is necessary.

Once you have paint on your implement of choice, place your dots close together in groups of three in a triangular pattern, a straight line in small spaces, or in groups of six or seven with one in the center, resembling a flower. Touch the brush to the paper lightly; you should not need to press down to make a small dot.
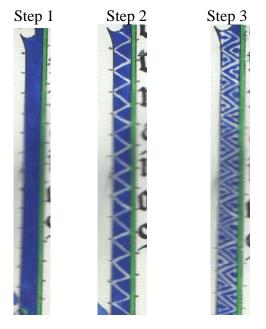
Geometric Patterns

These patterns go well on any of the charter designs that have long, thin, straight geometric spaces that need to be filled. Most commonly you will see these on French scrolls in the gold-vine and leaf motifs. This example is from *Les Grandes Chroniques de France,* a compilation of illuminated stories of the Kings of France up through 1461, done in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The example given here is a simplified form of this. (Example found on Princeton Webpage[2])

Once you have filled in your painting area, let it dry completely.

Step 1: Use a straight edge – a ruler is easiest – to mark the middle of each of your pattern elements (such as the zigzag and small half-triangles as is demonstrated below). In consistent increments – usually about a quarter inch – go up one side of the painting area and mark lightly in pencil. To make the pattern alternate properly, when you get to the top, make your first mark going down the other side equidistant from the marks on the other side, then continue to mark at the same size increments as the marks going up.

Step 2: Paint your zigzag. The lighter you put your brush to the paper, the thinner your lines will be. The heavier you press, the thicker.

Step 3: Add the details between each zigzag. These are little half-triangles with feet. They follow the shape of the zigzag.

Step 1   Step 2   Step 3

This trick can be used to measure for a variety of shapes. Use marks to help with keeping curved lines or circles consistent as well.

Highlight and Shadow

Lining elements like vines and leaves in white is an effective and simple way of making a scroll visually interesting. Black – or a darkened version of your base color -- can also be used opposite white in order to create a shadowed effect. Also, using a lighter version of your base color can be effective in layering highlights. The example here (from *The Ascension*, done in Italy in 1450, from *Illuminated Manuscripts*[3], cover art) uses all of these techniques, as well as some more complicated shading using the lighter color over the base, or simply shading with white to create the same effect. Shading with white or black and not mixing

separate colors requires more control over the thickness of your paint to vary the translucence.
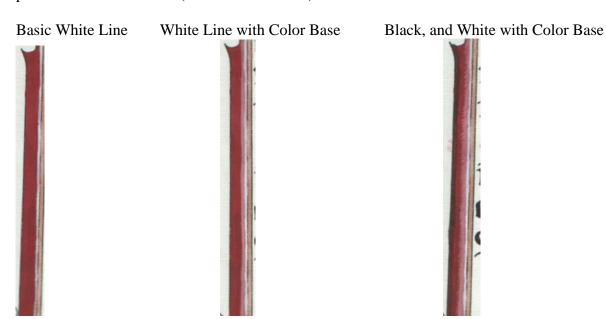
Lining a vine or other long element involves choosing one side, and following the outline, whether it curves or not, until it ends. Leaves can be lined on just one side, or follow the outline all the way around. **Note on lines:** You do not have to make your entire line in one stroke! If you need to pick up your brush, make sure to go back a little but and start 'on' the existing white paint, then draw down and push out with the brush lightly until the line continues at the same width.

Some charters work better with just the simple line, sometimes it works well to go more detailed, whatever you prefer. If you want to make your line more visually interesting, and add more shape or depth to your design there are several things you can do.
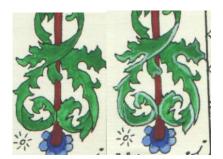
Option 1: You can layer a lighter color of your base (mix the base with white to get the color you want) between the base color and your white line by putting it down first and the white over it. Make this lighter color a thicker line than your white so that it shows up.

Option 2: Use black along the opposite side of your element than the white line.

These can be applied straight or, if you feel comfortable, once they are on you can use a slightly wet brush to blend your black or white into your base color. Another, more period, blending technique involves using your color on your brush and doing tiny 'hatch marks' that overlap your base color to make it look blended without having to try and actually blend the two colors. On straight vines and spaces with the full shading, it is not uncommon to have subtle patterns painted over this as well. (Not illustrated here)

Basic White Line   White Line with Color Base   Black, and White with Color Base

White Lines on Leaves   Black and White detailing on Leaves.

Something important to remember; when painting is that modern mundane ideas of precision are a much different standard from those held by the painters of these pieces. If you look at period details, they are not always 'perfect.' Dots are not always completely round and may vary in size. Coloring is not always completely even. Lines are not always exactly straight. The overall effect is the goal, not necessarily that everything looks exactly right even up close at the range we have painted it. Strive to do well, but do not be afraid to mess up and try again! Those little details add character to a piece! It is the effort that is put into it that will show through in the end

Art Sources:
All painted examples created by Lillias MacGuffin using designs from Ansteorran Charters, except those noted below.

Bibliography:

[1] Smithsonian Institution Libraries
        http://www.sil.si.edu/digitalcollections/incunabula/CF/incunabula_enlarge.cfm?id=21

[2] http://www.princeton.edu/~romance/images/gchrdefr.jpg - no longer available

[3] Anderson, Janice. *Illuminated Manuscripts*. TODTRI Book Publishers: New York, NY. 1999.
        ISBN: 1-57717-155-1