

(Sarah you can change this but I was feeling punky!) ;)

Bite Me!

A Fleabitten Grey Finish Technique For The Aspiring Zen Master

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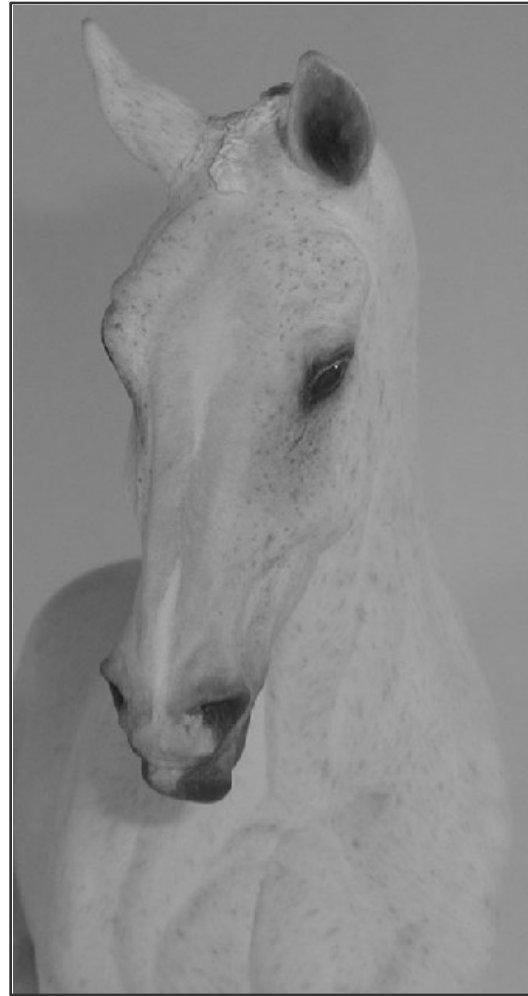
This is not a fast finishing process and it requires a lot of reference materials and it also isn't so forgiving if you are hasty. So there. I've warned you! Don't hate me later if you embark on this project, discover how painstaking it is about half way through, and then have no choice but to finish! The act of the penciling leads to making enough indentations on the surface that these can show through if you give up and try to simply primer and paint a different finish over it. In other words you might just have to strip the entire finish if you give up!

It's easy enough in premise, and I have no doubt that any artist with careful execution skills should easily be able to render attractive hairs with this technique. But please keep in mind the vast difference in quality between many "simple" line drawings; results of these depend on the artist's patience, their planning and their ability to translate what they see in real life into small lines on paper. The one unavoidable denominator all of us may have familiarity with in attempting line and stipple drawings is that they take a good deal longer to create than many other drawing and painting technique ... no matter who the artist is, there is simply a lot more to render using the short line methods.

Despite all of my threats and grumbles that I'd never to do one again, I've been asked over and over how to do this so I compromised and used a medallion; which is infinitely easier in scope, and yet still shows all the technique styles used. I may do a few more full horses someday in the future, but aside from being extremely time consuming, it can get addictive and thus it's quite hard to set one aside and work on other projects once you start. It's very similar to doing ink drawings in that regard.



This tricky arm pit area is done using the same methods as on face in this article, where the hair is shorter.



However, while it's relaxing in that fashion, it is harder on stiff hands for those who might have arthritis issues. There you have it: warning number two.

A third and final warning here: keep your phone at your side and your remote nearby. And to give you an idea of the time consumption: I went through several books on tape in the making of the medallion used here. And this horse is quite simple as far as the challenges go: being a relief it has no arm pits, no tricky hair whorl areas, no knees to blend or underbelly hair to fade out into etc. And like most, those audio books ranged in length from 12 to 15hrs (so in hindsight calculations I estimate that it took me around 30-40hrs or so). My traditional scale horse took several months (around 4-500 hours at least) to create... so this is not something someone does to make money quickly! It's wonderfully relaxing but certainly not a lucrative pastime.

Start With A Plan!

So you've got your horse selected, and you know he'll look stunning in fleabitten grey. You now need to find reference photos. Painters always need these but I must warn that you'll want full 8.5" x 11" sized pages of the clearest resolution possible. I was lucky enough at the time I was doing my first project to be a part time groom at a dressage barn where I had a couple of fleabitten greys to clean daily. It gave me the opportunity to really study how the hairs blended in crucial areas like the arm pits and belly where the grey skin underneath mingles with the fleabites and white hairs. There are many books out there as well which show hair coat patterns – having these available to see the hair's direction is really essential. You will find that it's nearly impossible to "wing it" and guess. Despite having the real thing to easily check upon for reference, I still needed many good quality full sized photos to keep on hand to glance at while I worked. One terrific resource is WebShots albums – where you can search by key words and find un-resized pictures taken from all sorts of angles. Try key words like "grey" or "white horse" as well as "fleabitten grey" and more technical searches. Of course taking your own photos is always the best but sometimes you'll find you can't get a horse with the look that's most appealing to you.

Also, be aware of the breeds and age of the horse you are intending to represent in your model. Many types of pinking and fleabite patterns seem to be more common to certain breeds. Arabs, for example, often have very dense fleabite patterns and their hair coats are usually photographed when shortest – making their fleabites appear almost entirely dot-like. This is probably the hardest to recreate using this method and you might find the more traditional splattered method far easier for those. Whereas Lippizans sometimes have the most minimal fleabite patterns possible (many appear to quite white until you are up close and able to see the few they do have). That would actually be an ideal pattern to try to take on if you are not sure this method of finishing greys is for you! Like any finish, you want to have a clear idea of what you are trying to accomplish. But with this type of finish, going back and starting over is not easy so you may wind up having to put more fleabites on in the end, than you wanted to. White can be applied over the finish, but the density of the fleabites will be very hard to modify backwards – so planning is key.



This Arab/Lippizan cross is only lightly fleabitten year round, but the time of year greatly affects the bite length and definitely masks some of them. In addition to selecting for pattern and density, you will also want to be certain of the reference horse's hair coat length in order to be consistent with your model's intended seasonal coat. It makes a great deal of difference to keep in mind the intended length of the hairs you'll be making and also in how light and dark you'll want to make the areas around the eyes and muzzle. The horse shown here actually has a very dark /black muzzle and eye in his summer coat!

Can I Start Now???

Once you've gathered your reference materials you can now begin! Ok, well, first you must paint your horse white and add some black points with the pink depigmentation you desire. I laugh because it's no small step of course – but honestly, it doesn't matter if you use oils, acrylics, pastels to accomplish that, so it goes beyond what we need to talk about. I've done this step prior to showing the how to stages as it's much like painting any other horse. I will say, however, that you may wish to make darker areas such as knees and hocks *lighter* to begin with. Areas where hair with fleabites will cover darker skin should be slightly lighter, as the blending into these areas will darken them. It isn't too hard to go back and make them darker as well once the horse is sealed... but your fleabites won't show if they are too dark to begin with. So aside from that, it's really a step where anything can be done.

I should mention that fleabites range in color from quite black to very chestnut in color. I honestly am not a color genetics expert, and only go by what I can see – so my best advice on choosing a color there is again, match the breed to the references and get the best possible photos and inspect in person if possible at all. I have mixed in a lighter brown in the past – since this is a black and white article, just treat it like your darker greys. If you are mixing in a few chestnut bites throughout a dark bite coat – just follow your reference (also Figure 12 later on shows when to be adding in emphasis types of fleabites).



Ready to begin now. Note that the horse is already painted with facial markings and depigmentation. Details on the eyes and some hair highlights will be finished at the end, but mostly any details such as shading should be done prior to laying down the fleabites as the many finish layers will coat over finer sculpture detail.

Now for the working materials!

A good quality brand of color pencil should be used. You will want to be making many layers, and since the pencils blend best if they're softer and somewhat waxy, you'll need the fixative between those layers to be thick enough to fully coat over the horse and give texture to make your next layers over. I use Prismacolor pencils. I show here [above] my favorite colors to use:

- **White**
- **Cool Grey**
- **French Grey 10%**
- **French Grey 30%**
- **French Grey 70%**
- **French Grey 90%** (this is basically almost a burnt umber color – which would work equally as well)
- **A blue hued grey, slate or similar color** works well for shadowed hairs in certain areas in horses that need a more grey tone overall (darker greys), and conversely, **if you are going with chestnut colored bites, a flesh color** to modify these with works wonderfully.
- **Charcoal blender “tools”** which are paper and cost around ten to twenty five cents each. I stock up on those and try to not mix colors so that the one I use for white is always used for white, etc. You can sharpen them by peeling but they're never as sharp as when they come out of the package. For what it's worth though, at times you'll want a slightly softer edge (depending on how waxy everything is getting), so you may wish to run a few through a pencil sharpener. They'll get chewed up (not easy to do!). I would REALLY caution about trying it with an electric sharpener. That's probably a little exciting.
- On that note: **A good quality pencil sharpener** is essential as you'll need to constantly re-sharpen to keep your points for making small tiny bites.
- **You will want plastic of some sort to hold the horse with.** While this is sort of a “given” I can't stress enough the importance of having way to hold your white horse after he's been speckled without smudging the pencil hairs before spraying. Also, the oils of your hands, even if they don't discolor your white paint, *will definitely affect the application of good bites*. Plan ahead here. Holding with plastic bag, or if you can tolerate the long term use: wear protective gloves, will save you lots of problems. Remember that horse will become warm with the handling and the finish and undercoated white can get tacky from long term handling. I use plastic shopping bags (preferably

unused) cut up to lay over the surface of my working area and to also hold the horse with to prevent smudges and sticking. Propping up horse somehow with bubble wrap or pillows works well in addition to the plastic bags (keeps pesky issues like ears/mane chips and such from happening while you lay the horse down on your desk to work on of course!). Basically though, however you arrange yourself, just be sure to have a smooth and non-clingy (!) clean material only touching white horse. You'll also continually want to make sure pencil rubbings are blown away too as they can stick to or mark up the horse accidentally.

- **Clean brushes to dust away the pencil debris** are also very helpful to have near at hand.
- Last, but certainly not least: **Dull Coat finishing spray**. I have tried *several* other finishing sprays for this purpose and have found they don't work here – the finish needs to be smooth and not at all gritty to do this kind of layering. Having the feel of paper, not satin smooth, and not noticeably gritty in other words. If you can find a comparable brand – kudos! But it's really crucial that it have these properties to work with the waxy nature of the colored pencils.

Ok, REALLY Getting To It Now! So once you've laid out your materials close at hand, painted and sealed (Dull Coat!) your horse grey and settled on his pinking and hair coat pattern, you begin, much as you've probably guessed: by putting down dots and hairs with a sharp pencil. I like to work in clustered areas and work backwards, from the head back towards the tail. Also, as hard as it is to match up, working on one side at a time is best because you want to prevent smudging in between layers (so the layer you are holding really should be sealed when you work). I think a great deal of my time was spent correcting errors like this on the first horse I tried it on. While you have lots of room for error, it's a great time waster to have to fix a small glob of pencil that got smudged sideways across the coat on the side it was being held onto by.

Begin by putting down dots and short lines as appropriate [Fig 1] to the hair coat. The finer the lines the better, *however* you might wish to experiment a bit and see how the blending will almost obliterate a lot of your work so you don't waste too much time at first perfecting each dot. The direction of the hair coat is formed more from the white and cool grey blending than from the original darkest line.

I like to take a blender tool to the dots at this point and smudge them [Fig 2]. I find working on smallish areas at a time easier. This is, of course, completely a personal preference – I like just a little instant gratification! When smudging; I've noticed that I tend to make a box around them – again, rather counter intuitive at first but if you first cross over the top and bottom of each bite, you'll find then the side blending strokes look rather realistic. STILL; don't sweat the small stuff here! It's got several layers to go before they'll look "deep".

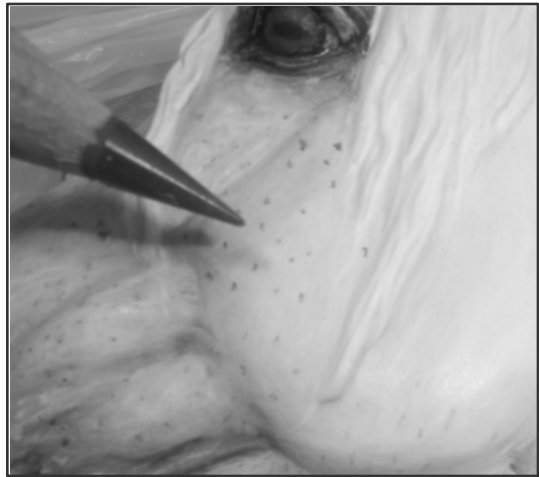
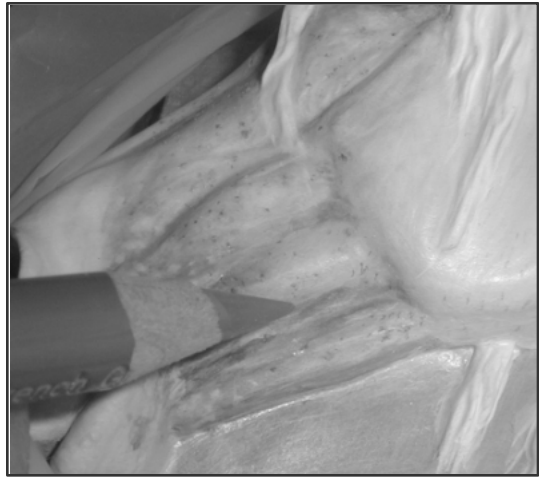


Fig 1 and 2 (above): Almost all bites will begin by apply simple careful dots or lines and then using a blender tool to soften the edges of these a bit. At this stage it's easy to accidentally soften too much and remove the spot almost entirely. Try to just rub the edges.

Figures 3 - 6 show those now blended dots and the next step is to use a slightly lighter pencil to give those bites more faint friends. You'll start to find your groove here (I hope) and see how some bites want to blend more than others. A lot depends on the area of the body and the underlying colors as well. In the last image, [Fig 6] we start to get to areas of the body where the hairs get longer and the blending needs to be more obvious through use of a grey to blend, instead of just the blending tool. What you can hopefully see here is that you want to start with bites in a darker color, then blend out with a light color or a white, and then the blender tool again. Figures 7 & 8 on the next page show how the progression to longer hairs begins.

I think it's really important to stress here that there is not a specific formula for where to place exactly what type of line other than the one dictated by the resin in your hand and your goal. The colors you use in the end, the length of the hairs and all that is "the look" you desire is a matter of what you've selected for your references as the aim of the piece. While these photos show step by step how to create one type of fleabitten grey, it is by no means the only way.

The photos here in figures 3-6 for instance show the dots slowly being modified by different colors and how they look in the end after some blending initially. For a darker/denser fleabitten grey however, you'd obviously lay down a lot more bites initially.. YET, you may discover that blending isn't so easy if the bites are extremely dense and you may wish not to blend so much until you get to the second layer. It really is about experimentation and while I start at the head of the horse, you might find it safest to start at the haunches or even on the belly where you can work up to perfecting your own personal technique for the exact patterning you desire.



Figures 3-6 (to the right) show how you will use various shades of pencils to soften the fleabites after applying them.. The top two show the use of a medium to light grey to soften some bites after using the blender tool. This works best in areas where the hair is shorter and the bites are more pronounced. The bottom two images show laying down bites with a darker pencil and then reshaping them with a lighter grey after blending – this works better in areas where the hair coat would be longer.

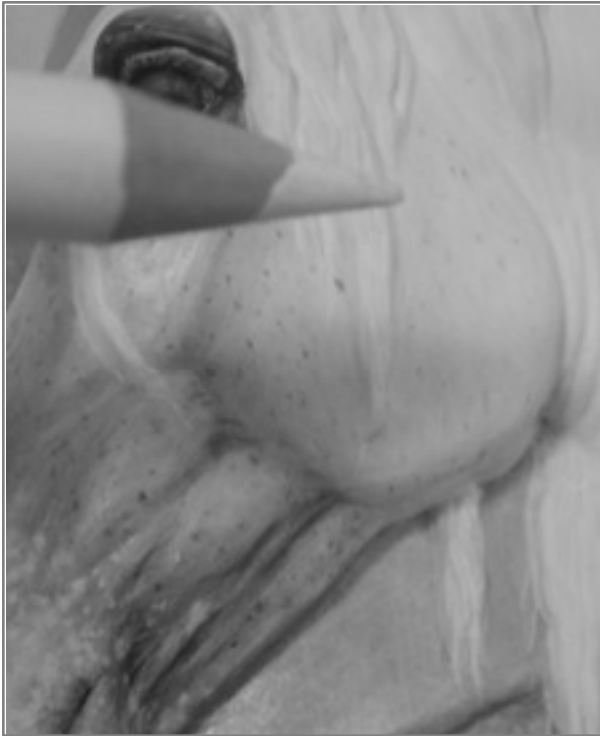


Fig 7 (above): White is used to add more depth to the longer bite hairs. It's waxy properties blend the hairs more smoothly than the blender tool. **Fig 8 (below)** shows the results of this but you have to really study the bites to see how it's blending has improved the "realism". As you can imagine, it takes a few passes to really finally achieve a realistic hair coat look this way. And between each the finishing spray layer is crucial since only so much blending can be done with the properties of colored pencils.



In the first layer it's only a matter of aiming to lay down the colors and the direction! You won't get perfectly soft looking realistic bites entirely at this stage: especially in the areas where the bites are more dots than strokes (shorter hairs will look rougher at first than the longer hairs) or are more clustered. A good example of those longer hairs coming through almost ideally in the first go around is in an area where the hairs are rather simple: for example, around the ears [Fig 9]. White blending alone can create fairly realistic

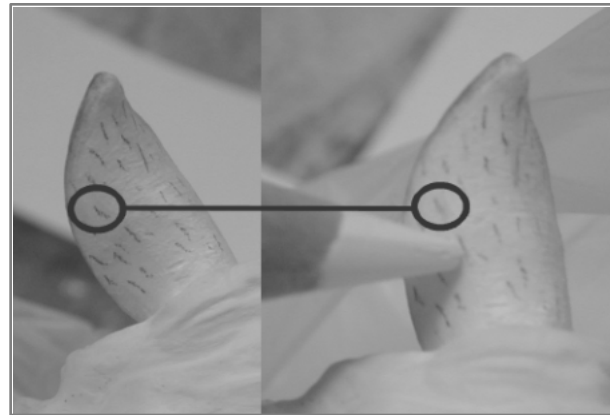


Fig 9: A more specific before and after example shown using only the dark color first and the white after. This works well in many areas and doesn't need to be highlighted a second time – although additional blended very light grey hairs in these areas will still give better effects.

bites there. However even in areas where it might seem that simple bites suffice, using additional fainter colors where body contours need a bit more density of hair coat, are really going to add a lot more depth [Fig 10 & 11]. Wrinkles for example will want high and low lights to enhance them and make the folds have realistic hairing. Start with the lowlights as the highlights will come towards the end with your white colored pencil.

Your entire horse will have a nice unrealistic waxy sheen when you've gotten done with each area hopefully. This is a big part of why you want to use extreme care in not getting hand oils on the horse, Hand oils will soak up in the white and add a grimy appearance that's hard to get rid of! This is also another why the frequent application of layering a protective finish is necessary.

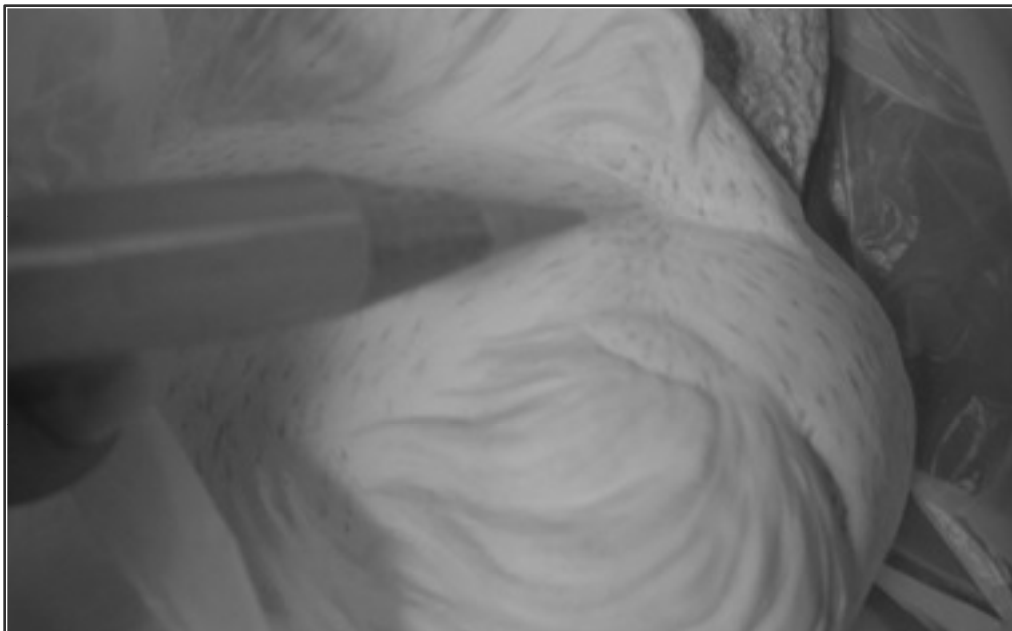
Dull coat time. By the way, I should point out that you will of course be losing sculptural detail with each Dull Coat layer. Just as when you are pastling a piece, where you loose fine hair details under the fixative layers, you might want to emphasize later. If your horse needs to have mane and tail hair groove details for example, it's best to put those in early on, or prior to beginning the fleabites if possible.

Rinse and Repeat!

After a good coating you want to go back over your horse with an eye towards softening up those spots (using white or a fainter grey), especially in areas where the bites are more dot-like than hair-like. You may wish



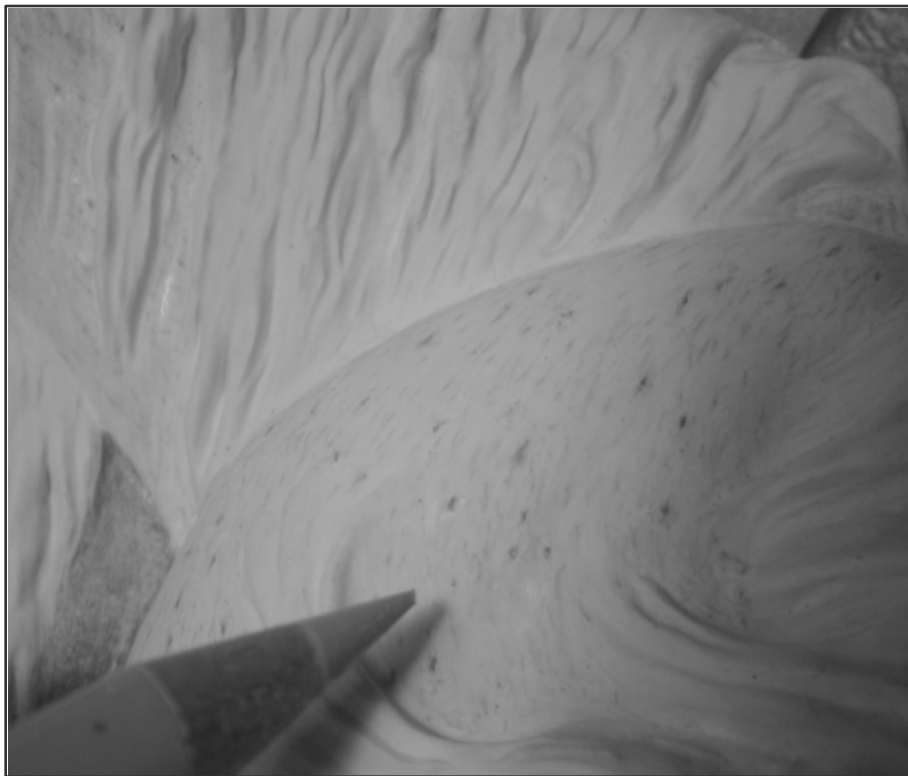
Fig 10 (above) and 11 (below): A more obvious before and after showing how hair blending with grey highlights (11) lends the illusion of coat depth along the horse's topline. You would use this in areas where the hairs would appear to have a darker appearance, such as the contours of the groove down the back.



to reiterate here to redo the strength of many bites as well. Sometimes it will take simply remaking the fleabites, sometimes the bites will look best being fainter, while others will look best by being redone. Figure 12 and 13 show this well. Blending the dots in some spots with a white or light grey, and in other areas by remaking them in a darker grey or chestnut, or even creating new ones will bring out a more realistic look. In this photo. This is where the blender tool is useful to understand: if used with blending dark colors it will add more shadow to the area. Fine where the horse has dense spots or dark skin... but on areas like the belly and rump where the hairs are often most sparse you wouldn't want to use it too liberally with a dark color – so blending is often achieved better only with the light greys or white there. The waxy aspects of the pencils give far better shadowing in these areas.



Fig 12 (above) and 13(below): After a Dull Coat layer of finish is applied, going back and adding additional fleabites (12) and then smoothing them out (13) with grey adds the bigger more pronounced fleabites.



I think the transitional blending is the hardest aspect to explain in all honesty. I've taken photos at nearly every step of this horse's finishing. Still, they just seem to leap from same old, same old rough looking spots to suddenly, "how'd-you-do-that!" smooth ones. *It's the blending that's really key here.* It takes several layers and a LOT of patience. I think I said once, when asked somewhere, that each bite requires about 4 strokes of color each... well, that's kind of an over-simplification. You lay down the "bite" and then you smooth each side. In the next layer that bite will be modified by white or light grey or another darkening again. Then in subsequent layers you may still want to do more blending of lighter tones will make it truly look like it has that depth of hair texture that fleabitten horses are known for. So yes, 4 colors each is

rather true, but the trick is how to combine them. It's fun to look at in the end but it really takes looking at real photos all along and liberal doses of creativity and imagination on your part towards slowly evolving it into the result you want. It's very similar to pasteling in the 'vision' aspect – only it is not nearly as quick to do, obviously, so it's easy to stop short of achieving the really deep looking blending.

Now, If you are the sort who needs to take notes to remember how you achieved a color combination, then you will probably want to take notes on how you accomplished one side or area to remind yourself when you encounter the same sort of hairing in other areas. It will be a while before you get the entire horse covered and even longer (and many layers later), before you call any section "complete".

Take heart though! The fun steps are coming now that the basic bites are in place and a layer or two of blending is really making them smooth out. The wax of the pencils after the first layer of spotting will be impossible nearly to blend them over after a basic smooth out. Your next layer makes things begin to "soften up" and is far more rewarding! When blending after a layer of finish, they miraculously start to become soft and subtle. You will probably, especially around the eyes and muzzle and areas where hair gets fine and dust-like, wish to repeat this step several times. I think in only a few areas (very simple bites like across the rump here) have I managed to get away with only two coats – and this because I chose to do rather sparse and longer fleabites on this medallion.

I also repeat the white-over technique for highlighted areas. You can go over the fleabites repeatedly with more white and again use your tools to brush off most of the to feather the bites' appearance. I find that best only for the areas of the thickest coat however. Going around bites in most areas and then blending is going to add the most depth to them and still keep the right color to your undertones. In areas such as grooves, a light grey adds a lot of depth without making the horse looks so "furry" and winter-coated.



Fig 14: A close up showing a combination of areas after final blending. Note that I chose not to give this horse such pronounced fleabites below the eyes. Had I decided to, I would use several more layers to build up the effect. After you are satisfied with the fleabites, going back and redoing white markings, mane and tail hairs, eyelids, pinking etc where you want these brought more to the forefront helps to add more realistic levels to the finish work as well.

When you have successfully driven yourself mad, you are probably close to completion! ☺ It is now time to return to your detailing. I like to go over the eyes, muzzle markings, and add details to the pupils and mane/tail hairs last. Suddenly this makes the horse have a lot more life! Of course, like any finish, the last touches involving the glossing need to be saved until you are 100% satisfied with the coat. But here's a few final views showing how the blending steps come together.

The last touches of softening can be done a variety of ways besides pencils (and perhaps easier than with pencils!). Use of oils (although I dislike the fact that they yellow), lots of white pastel dust, or with highly skilled application of thin layers of white acrylic washes can really do wonders to blend in dark skin to the haired areas.

This image shows the end result of layers of pencils at their starkest so you can sort of visually dissect what you hope to accomplish with this method. Essentially you want to avoid the waxy pencil-look and this takes time, experimentation and a LOT of patience. A good deal of it will depend on the darkness of the

gray skin underneath.

The finished horse is shown in Figure 15 – note that I opted to still keep the fleabites to a minimum! If I'd wanted to make the horse have denser or stronger flecked fleabites, it's still an option at this point.

*I think I should close by pointing out that this is by no means a strict disciplined endeavor where you absolutely *must* do step one before step two. My methods outlined here were borne of experimentation and I fully believe that someone will come up with improved ways to simplify it or even make the finishes more lifelike. All artists are aware that they don't make a brush stroke the same way all other artists do. This is no different. It's about exploring a medium not normally utilized for the entire body color of a finished resin. I wish you great creative insight and much inner peace (as you will certainly need it!) in undertaking this project. Happy hairing!*



Fig 15: The final completed piece. I've used a luminescent finish to the medallion behind the horse to help it "pop" from the relief as it's otherwise a matte finish which makes it very soft. What doesn't show here is that the mane and tail have a good deal of yellow, off white low lights appropriate for a horse who's mane has clearly been neglected a bit. A huge variety of mane and tail hair options exist when making fleabitten greys, as with any grey! This coat color offers far too many variables to cover entirely in one article but it also provides an infinite amount of flexibility in experimenting with effects if you are willing to tackle it!