

***The Red Tower Rapier Tournament Scroll,
Master and Painted
by Serena da Riva***

The Materials

Paper: 100# Smooth Bristol Board

Pens: Tape calligraphy nib and fine point metal crow-quill nib

Ink: Black Sumi Ink by Yasutomo

Gouache: Pebeo Extra Fine Designer Acrylic

The Source Material

A Book of Hours, Use of Paris, mid 15th Century

A Book of Hours, Paris, 1407

Contents:

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The Commission

Baron Borgar the Bright, Baron of the South Downs, commissioned me to create a Master scroll to be used to recognize the victor of the Red Tower Rapier Tournament. This Master was use in this year's tournament, but it is also intended to be used for years to come. This presented as specific set of challenges to design towards.

The Challenges

When designing a scroll that will be used over and over again I felt it important to provide a design that would allow each successive illuminator to embellish and interpret in their own way. The first issue was to select a source inspiration. I spent some time looking at very late period illuminations I could not find any that had references to fencing. I was also seeing two tendencies in the late period scrolls; they were either incredibly elaborate or simply elegant. While this would make for a beautiful one time scroll I did not feel they left enough room for the creativity I wanted to encourage in the subsequent illuminators. Considering that the Red Tower Heavy Tournament has been won by the same person for the last three years I think it is essential to have the room to make it look very different. So I discussed the issue with some Rapier Fighters and explained my problem finding Rapier in illuminations. The result of this conversation was a better understanding of the direction I needed to go, the fighters said that there were all kinds of personas among the fencers and just about any time period would work.

Being no longer restricted to very late period I started moving back the timeline. I thought about the different decorative techniques used in illumination and decided to pursue acanthus leaves. There are numerous ways to paint acanthus leaves and each one results in very different looking scrolls. In searching for acanthus leaves I came across some beautiful leaves from 15th Century French Books of Hours (3) and I had found my inspiration (Illustration A). So with this I had my acanthus leaves, then next challenge would be to incorporate the Rapier theme.

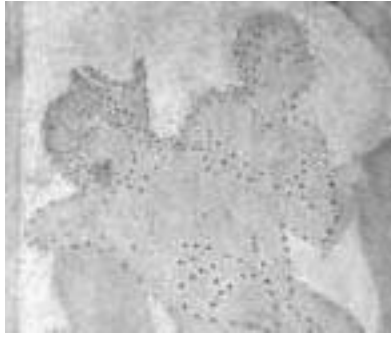
In many manuscripts there are beasties hiding among the acanthus leaves, so I decided to add some beasties that were maintaining Rapier accouterments. Looking through 15th century French Illuminations I finally came across a beastie that fit my needs, and it was on the cover of an Illumination book (4) he was already maintaining a stave so it was easy to change it to a rapier (Illustration B). A second beastie based on the first was added looking into a fencing mask.

With these elements I still felt the scroll was a little bare, so I decided to turn the tails of the beasties into acanthus leaves. This added complexity to the scroll and pulled the layout out of the boxy shape that it had. With the tails above and below the text it leaves plenty of room for further embellishment at a later date.

The Techniques

With the inspirations pieces in hand I transferred the images onto the scroll by means of a light box. While the equipment used was decidedly modern, the technique of tracing is period. Cennini in his *Craftsman's Handbook* provides instructions for making tracing paper and suggests that you trace
“...from paper, panel or wall, which you want to take right off, put this tracing paper over the figure or drawing ...” (5).

The medieval scribe did not have the advantage of a light box, but Cennini also provides a technique for transferring the image onto the final page. This technique is called pouncing and it involves pricking fine holes along the lines that you need to copy and then positioning the parchment over your page. You then take a bag of charcoal or pumice and bounce it against your pattern and the pigment transfers the dots to the page where you can then connect the dots. There is evidence of this technique being used in illumination in the *Aberdeen Bestiary*. Several of the images in the manuscript have the tell tale holes around the original painting where they pricked through the original and into a second sheet which they then used for a pattern (1).



The view from the back on The Creation of Eve, Aberdeen Bestiary (1)

After transferring the basic elements onto the scroll I drew in the rapier accouterments and the acanthus leaf tails. I had not transferred all of the little “booglets” that surrounded the acanthus leaves in the original. After some thought I decided to leave it that way, future illuminators may choose to add them in, or they may choose to add something different. I prefer to leave a little “blank slate” then dictate the flourishes.

The Calligraphy

To determine the correct calligraphic hand I consulted Marc Drogin’s book on medieval calligraphy. By looking at the original hand and comparing it to the exemplars and dates that Drogin supplies I decided that the original inspiration scroll was written in Gothic Littera Bastarda. In Drogin’s book the author provides facsimiles of several manuscripts from each era and it is these facsimiles that he uses for the basis of his ductus. One of the examples that he sites for the Gothic Littera Bastarda hand is a manuscript from his personal collection that is a French Book of Hours circa 1520 (2). This confirmed my conclusion that Gothic Littera Bastarda was the correct hand for this project and I utilized Drogin’s ductus, modifying slightly based on the hand in the original inspiration piece. The most evident variations from Drogin’s ductus is the ascender on the ‘d’, ‘b’ and ‘h’. In a departure from the original piece I chose to use Drogin’s lowercase ‘f’, I was unable to do the necessary pen manipulation to get the fat body on the upright.

I then wrote out a sentence the length of the lines I had drawn to get an idea of the amount of space the hand was going to take up. The next step was to write the text for the scroll. I wanted to incorporate a small initial capital with a tower in it, so that restricted me to letters with large openings in the middle. ‘O’, ‘D’, ‘U’ and ‘C’ were all possibilities, after playing with wordings I settled on ‘Unto’ and worked from there. Many scrolls in the SCA have a large illuminated capital as the opening word of the text; I wanted to avoid this appearance because many of the leaves I have been finding have the capitals at the beginning of lines just about anywhere they fall. Placing the capital on the third line fulfilled this desire without unbalancing the layout.

The Painting

This being a Master Scroll the next step was to copy it onto another sheet of Bristol. That accomplished I set about painting the first scroll to be awarded. Under other circumstances I would not even consider presenting a painted copy in an A&S competition, but I felt that in this situation it was acceptable.

For this first scroll I decided to stick to the colors that were used in the inspiration pieces. The final painting was accomplished using acrylic gouache, mixing paint to achieve color as close as I could approximate. The first step was to lay down the solid background colors in each area, each one being the light tone of the respective color. After all of the image was painted in solid I went back and shaded with a shadow version of the corresponding color and blended the colors together to achieve mid-tones. This worked until I got to the pink. When I tried this technique the color became much too

dark, so I chose to make an even paler highlight color and blend together. This produced a more acceptable result. You can see how the darker red looked if you look at the daisy shaped flowers.

For the gold work I used acrylic gouache instead of shell gold. The shell gold that I have been able to find does not give as nice of a gold as the acrylics, so I stick with them. Based on the inspiration piece I added highlights in a reddish orange. I then freehanded the details in the rectangular blocks. The final step was to come back with the crow-quill pen and ink back in all of the black lines and draw features onto the beasts and the rapier accouterments.

At Red Tower I requested permission of the Red Tower Rapier Champion to keep the scroll so that I might enter it into this competition. Once it has completed that task it will go to its rightful owner. The Master will then go to Baron Borgar and I look forward to seeing what artists choose to do with it in years to come.

Bibliography:

- (1) Arnott, Michael, and Bevan, Ian. "Pouncing". The Aberdeen Bestiary. <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/bestiary/codicology.hti#pounce>. 12/04/2003.
- (2) Drogin, Marc. *Medieval Calligraphy: Its History and Technique*. New Jersey: Allandale, Osmond & Co., Publishers, Inc., 1980.
- (3) Griffon's Medieval Manuscripts. <http://www.griffons.com/w3griffon/cgi-bin/webcart/webcart.pl?CONFIG=mountain&ZOOMPAGE=YES&OCATS=Catalogue+Number+2283&ZN=TEXT&CODE=106>
- (4) Lovett, Patricia, *Calligraphy & Illumination: A History & Practical Guide*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2000.
- (5) Thompson, Daniel V. *The Craftsman's Handbook: "Il Libro dell'Arte" Cennino d'Andrea Cennini*. New York: Dover Publications, 1960.