

The Techniques and Secrets of Beautiful Glass Painting—Silhouettes

Design, Fabrication, and Text by David Williams and Stephen Byrne

This is the first of a four-part series that will share techniques for silhouettes, shading, tracing, and highlighting when painting on stained glass.



Glass

Amber Streaky or any Light-Colored Glass

Reusche & Co. Glass Paint

DE401 Tracing Black

1139F Umber Brown Red

Mix Tracing Black and Umber Brown Red in the proportion of 6:1, respectively

Other Materials Required

Scrubber

Painting Bridge

Pointed Wooden Stick

Thin, Wide Brush

Blender Brush

Fine Tracing Brush

Here's the stained glass window we designed and painted for Kate Charles, the crime writer. As you can see, the window depicts a medieval angel, some special bars of music, Kate's dog, and a silhouette of Kate and her husband. This made us think that there are such marvelous uses we can all make of stained glass silhouettes. That's why this first project looks at how they're done.

You can paint a silhouette in two different ways, each having its own particular benefits. One way is to cover the glass with thick paint. Then when the paint is dry, you pick out the desired shape. (This can cause a lot of dust.) The other way is to trace the outline of the shape and then fill it with thick paint. This is the way we'll show you now and is, in fact, the same one that we used to do the lettering on ten stained glass windows that we made for the Houses of Parliament in London, England, a few years ago.

When we teach students in our studio, we begin with a whole day of painting silhouettes exactly as we'll show you now, which is excellent for improving how you trace. The effect it has had on our students' tracing ability is extraordinary. They also make the loveliest stained glass decorations.

Here is the glass that we are going to show you how to paint.

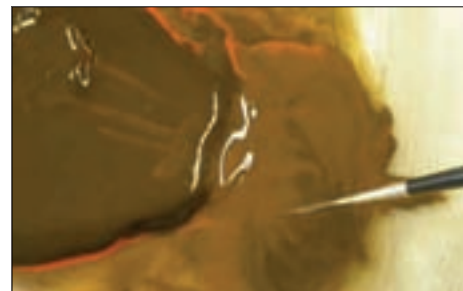


You'll find a full-size copy of the design at the end of this guide. You'll also find three other designs included as well.

There are seven stages to painting this stained glass silhouette, which we will explain in turn:

1. Cut and clean the glass.
2. Prime the glass with a light undercoat of paint.
3. Lightly trace the outline of the shape.
4. Strengthen the outline.
5. Fill in the outline.
6. Sharpen the edges of the outline.
7. Fire the glass.

One point we need to make before we begin is that we always paint with a *lump* of paint.



We then dilute the lump a little at a time to the consistency we need for the kind of painting that we want to do. When we're not painting, we cover the lump. That slows down the rate at which the paint dries out. Every so often, we remix the lump and clean our palette.

Painting with a lump is far more economical than painting with a teaspoon of paint. That is probably different from what you've read before. And this certainly won't be the last time that our techniques will be different to what you read and see elsewhere. Our techniques work, however. We use them each and every day. We're a busy studio that specializes in designing, painting, and restoring stained glass windows of the highest quality. You'll find our website details at the end of this article.

Now let's begin!



1. Cut the glass to size. Groze the edges so you can handle the glass safely. Grozing also stops the sharp edges from ruining your brushes. Then clean your glass. The piece of glass we've chosen to work with is a piece of amber streaky, but any piece of light-colored glass is fine for this project.



2. The next stage is to prime the surface of the glass with an undercoat of light-colored paint. Here's the reason. Painting on glass is difficult. Painting on *bare* glass is as hard as it gets. It's so slippery! So why paint on bare glass? There's absolutely no need for you to do that!

If you were decorating a room, you'd always paint an undercoat. The undercoat serves two purposes. First, it provides a key so that later layers go on better. Second, it's easier to paint layer-by-layer than to do it all in one go. Believe us—it's the same with glass painting.

To begin applying the undercoat, take a thin, wide brush; load it with light paint; and paint light, broad stripes over the whole surface of the glass. As needed, while the paint is wet, take your blender and smooth the stripes away so that there is an even, light coat of glass paint over the whole surface of the glass. Let the paint dry.



3. When you've finished, your glass will be painted with the light and even undercoat.



4. The next step is to copy-trace the outline of the design. Start by placing the glass on top of the design.



5. Take a fine tracing brush. Mix some paint that is a little darker than you used for the undercoat. Load the brush. Make a careful trace of the design.



6. While you are painting, remember to move the glass and design so that you can paint each stroke comfortably.



7. Each time you load your brush, test it on the light box first. If the paint comes out right on your light box, it'll come out right on your glass.



8. When you've copy-traced the design, let the paint dry thoroughly. Here's how our own glass looks at this point.



9. Now it's time to strengthen the outline. Put the design on one side where you can see it. Use the same fine brush as before. Mix some paint that is the same consistency as before. Load the brush. Paint over the lines again to strengthen them, painting over them as exactly as you can.



10. Remember to keep repositioning the glass as you continue to work so that you are comfortable painting it. Also, always test the paint on your light box before you use it on your glass.



12. Now it's time to flood the outline as you see here.



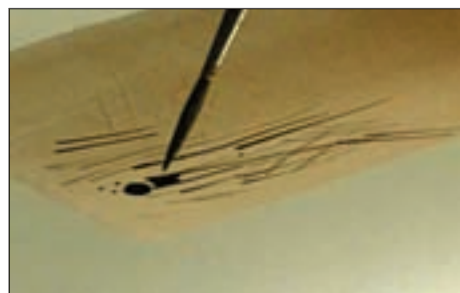
15. Use your brush to *carry* thick, dark paint between palette and glass.



11. Are you wondering why we suggested that you paint the outline in two stages? Our answer is that it's easier to control the paint if you *build it up gradually*. We know that most books suggest you need to trace in one go. Some books even say that it's impossible to paint on top of *unfired* paint in the way we're recommending here. But the truth is different. In fact, we sometimes paint as many as six layers on top of one another before firing our glass *just once*. In this case, by building up the outline in two stages, we are maintaining control of our glass paint.



13. Mix your paint so that it is the consistency of thick, melted chocolate.



14. Test the paint on your light box first. It simply must flow from your brush.



16. The paint simply must pour off your brush and find its own level.



17. While you are filling in the design, remix and retest your paint often. *See the sidebar for five important tips for achieving success with this stage of the project.* When you've finished filling in the design, let the paint dry before you pick it up to look at it.

The Five Secrets of Successful Flooding

1. Always test your paint on your light box. To test your paint, load your brush and hold it vertically close to the top of the light box. Then the moment that the brush tip touches the light box, the paint should flow out into a small, dark circle. If your paint doesn't flow easily, it's too thick. If your paint flows uncontrollably, it's too thin.

2. Never begin flooding right next to a border. Start away from a line and then let the paint pour off and roll up against it.

3. If the space is tight (for instance, in the claws), carefully *drag* paint into it.

4. Once the paint has left your brush, *never* touch it. If you do, it will probably blister in the kiln. Always let the paint find its own level.

5. Continue without stopping until you've finished the whole design. If you stop halfway, you'll leave seams.



18. Now you're going to make some high-lights. Take a pointed wooden stick and test the resistance of your paint by cutting through the various test patches on your light box.



19. Hold the glass firmly. Carefully pick around the outline of the silhouette. As you do this, you can correct small defects.



20. Always move your glass and your painting bridge so that you can work comfortably and safely.



21. Take a scrubber and clean around the border of the glass.



22. Fire your glass. With thick paint such as this, let the paint dry by holding the glass at 210°F for 30 minutes before ramping to your top temperature of about 1250°F (depending on the manufacturer's instructions) and holding there for 3 minutes.



That's it! Try this several times, always remembering the five secrets that we mentioned earlier, and the technique is sure to become part of your repertoire. Imagine the lovely silhouettes that you'll soon be painting!

In the next project, we'll show you a wonderful way of shading *before* you trace. And, of course, you'll only fire the glass once . . . *after* you've traced! Did you think that was impossible? Well, we'll show you how. It'll all be in the next issue. Until then, thank you for reading this article. Every best wish from us to you.

If you have questions about kiln-fired glass painting techniques, please e-mail us at studio@williamsandbyrne.com, and we'll answer as many of them as we can.

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You'll find this and loads of other great projects in the Fall 2008 issue of Glass Patterns Quarterly.

Visit www.williamsandbyrne.com to see their gorgeous watercolor designs and painted glass or to download valuable information and their book, Glass Painting Techniques & Secrets from an English Stained Glass Studio. These resources will help you change the way you paint stained glass.

David Williams and Stephen Byrne (on the right and left, respectively) are steeped in the traditional ways of designing and painting stained glass. They are also great believers in innovation and teaching. When they teach, they always learn a huge amount. When they innovate, they burst at the seams until they can tell their discoveries to anyone who'll listen!

Design is paramount as well as being the place where Williams and Byrne inject their greatest creativity. Once the design is made, it's simply a matter of deciding which techniques to use. If they don't know them already, they set about inventing them. Each window that they create is designed and painted to chime perfectly with its particular architectural setting. You'll find many beautiful examples of their exquisite design, painting, and restoration work at www.williamsandbyrne.com.

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