



Das Boot Airbrush!

IT HAS BECOME SOMETHING OF AN AIRBRUSH PHENOMENON; A trend that started slowly and has been building for the last several years. It is yet another way for the consumer to set himself apart in an attempt to describe who he, or she is. It has also become another way for the artist to ply his trade and maximize the creative output as well as the financial input. It has become a staple on the internet as a product and something to be admired.

I'm referring of course to the customized shoe... the airbrushed shoe. >>

I, and many other airbrush artists, have been painting on shoes and boots now for many years... 20 or so for me. So it's not something that has just jumped out of nowhere. It has only been recently however that the customized shoe has taken such a prevalent spot in the airbrush production world. I guess all it takes is a few decades or so to really get some legs (pun intended) on an art trend. So where did this recent revelation come from? Allow me to explain.

I was recently talking to Craig Kennedy from Createx about their new additions to their textile paint line (more on that later) when I asked him if there's anything that he gets questions on that hasn't been covered. His answer was immediate.

"Shoes. I get questions every week on the correct prep and application for painting shoes."

Now why hadn't I thought of that? It's so obvious. I can't remember, in recent issues at least, the approach to painting shoes being covered.

So of course I called Cliff at *Airbrush Action* to see what he thought. I think his response was something along the lines of "Sounds good to me, Kent." That was all I

needed to hear.

The first line of business is getting the idea of what to paint taken care of. My process is to try and pay attention to current trends all over the American and world landscape. Anything from content, to color, to execution are the things that

2Pac or Biggie, whatever is the current word or phrase that is most popular ("pimp," "playa," "pimpette") a picture of Chuckie from *Child's Play* (this one I have no idea), some type of gangster (Scarface, Tony Soprano...) and the list goes on. Now there's nothing wrong with wanting that subject on your shoes or painting that on someone else's shoes. I do it all the time. You just won't see that here. I think that you deserve to see something fresh and different. And besides, the application is what's important here. The "what" will take care of itself when you go into work.

So for me, what is it that I see as trends out there? Well, the first visual trend started with iTunes and its subsequent marketing campaign. I'm talking about the silhouetted



catch my eye. Then I try and mix that in with what I personally find interesting. Last, I try and make sure that it's relevant to the material and the look that I'm going for. Now, there is also what is most popular to paint at my shops as well. This is also what you'll see when you Google "airbrush shoes"; the same thing seems to pop up time after time after time, etc... let me see if I can run down the list with you: a portrait of

and detailed figure. Remember all those commercials with the all black silhouettes of the man or woman dancing? It's still going strong only it seems to have shifted to more print sources. The second thing that struck me was the concentric circles mixed with a sort of pinstriping effect. I first noticed it when Jen and I went to see *Love*, the Cirque du Soleil show at the Mirage in Vegas (another reason to go to an Airbrush Getaway, people!). I





3.



4.



5.



6.

thought “Now that look is original and cool,” (my two basic criteria). I also liked the warm palette of yellow, red, oranges, and maroon. The last trend that seems to make its way into many of my creative decisions, is of course, the female figure. This is a timeless and sexy way to express yourself and, it shows no sign of slowing down. It took me a good hour to think through how I wanted my images to translate onto my boots. Oh, I also chose to paint on black boots for three reasons: One, these boots offer a lot of surface area to paint on (I’m a size 12). Second, I’m just not going to wear Air Jordans unless I’m playing hoops. And, this shows yet another example of how to paint on black. Pay attention this time! Sheesh... Where was I... oh yeah. After running through the layout and with all of the trends swirling around in my head, it’s time to get going. Booyah!

The first step is to clean off the shoe. Because it’s leather, like many of the shoes that you’ll be painting, you’ve got to clean

it and take off the oily topical layer. This can be accomplished with a little isopropyl rubbing alcohol and a rag. Saturate your rag and give your boots a good going over. I also like to remove the laces so they don’t get in the way or get paint on them. After making sure that your boots are dry, the next step is to lay out your design with opaque white because these are black boots. If these had been a white shoe or boot, I would have gone right into whatever color was relevant for my design. Createx recently sent me a new white and asked me to check it out. What better timing than to give it a go on my shoe project. This would certainly put it through the rigors. The thing that first caught my eye was the powder-like look when putting it on. It sprayed cleanly and with a great edge. The next thing I noticed was the ease at which the white flows; very little tip build-up as well. Last is the covering ability—excellent as well. This new color, called “Super White,”

will be available soon. Anyway, let’s take a look at that initial layout.

PHOTO 1

I’ve opted to try and combine the trends described into one interesting and cohesive look. Here you can see the beginnings of that mixture; the silhouetted female “devilish” image mixed with the circles and striping a promising start. Here is where application is vitally important. You’ve got to keep it light. Too many times I see or hear from an artist that their surface begins to wear and look heavy, or even crack. This initial painting is the reason for that failure. If you go too thick, the paint will lose its natural flexibility. And that’s not good especially if we’re talking about leather shoes or a jacket. You see, leather isn’t porous like a shirt. The paint won’t “soak” into the fabric. It sits on top and continues to layer as you apply more paint. So remember to keep it light.

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PHOTO 2

Next, I want to establish my color palette. I've opted to keep it warm with a blend of Brite Yellow, Fluorescent Orange and Brite Red. I think it works best with the subject matter as well. At this point I'm just concerned with the blend and not so much with the detailing. Keep in mind the overall look versus the separate parts of the shoe.

PHOTO 3

I used Burgundy to start to separate the form and the background. Notice the detail in the hair and the body taking shape. I

also used it to add depth to my circle and striping pattern.

PHOTO 4

I needed to enhance and highlight certain areas of the design. I focused on the light source for the circle and striping as well as the figure itself. This is a process of adding white and then pushing it back with the Brite yellow, Red, and burgundy until you get the desired result.

PHOTO 5

Here's the finished design complete with

highlighted tail and flames. I'm eventually going to add lettering to the other side of the boot, but for now, on to the next foot!

PHOTO 6

The process here is virtually the same but the content is going to be different. I cleaned the shoe with rubbing alcohol and layed out my figure with the Opaque White. I carried over the idea of the concentric circles and the striping motif.

PHOTO 7

Now it's time to add some color. For this side I cooled things down a bit with Caribbean blue and Violet as my main palette. You can also see that I used some Opaque Black to bring out the eyes. The definition in the clouds were achieved by using the black of the shoe and the white to enhance the areas that you want.

PHOTO 8

I added highlights once again for added depth and vibrancy.

PHOTO 9

Here's the finished design. I'm going to add lettering to both boots, and call this combo "Sinfully Righteous."

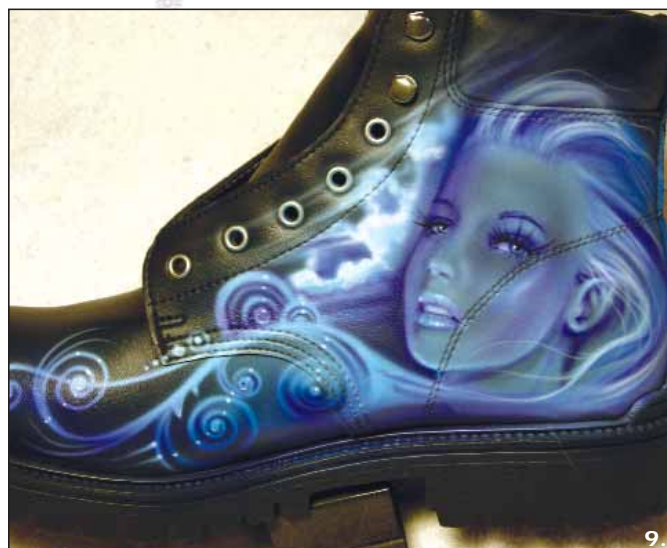
The devilish beauty will get the Sinful treatment while her innocent counterpart will become Righteous. Although the fonts, styling, and palettes are different, the process is the same.

PHOTO 10A & 10B

Again, I layed out the initial design with the Opaque White. What's the rule? Keep it light!

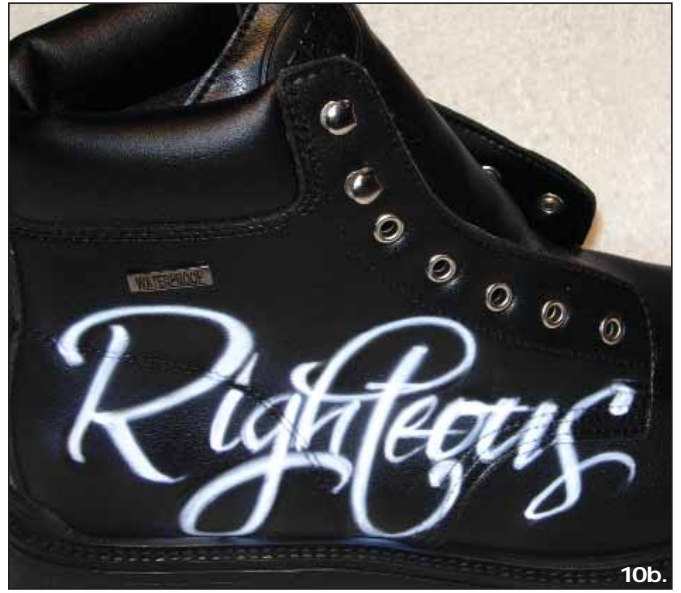


Boot It Up





10a.



10b.



11a.



11b.



12a.



12b.



PHOTO 11

I added Brite Yellow and blended in Fluorescent Orange, Brite Red, and Burgundy. I also added some striping and circle patterns as an edge to the letters.

PHOTO 12

The finished product! The white was used to add sharpness and to edge the lettering.

To finish off the boots you also need to give it a light protective coat. Coast Airbrush has Save T that works equally as well for this application. If you don't have that handy, use a matte finish aerosol spray and apply it in 2 to 3 light coats. I hope you enjoyed this quick demo. Remember that the content may change, but the application is the same. Now go kick some shoe butt! ✉



PRACTICAL APPLICATION UPDATE ICE PEARL AND HOTROD SPARKLE

A few issues back I did a demo of a new technique combining the T-shirt world and the Ice Pearl from House Of Kolor. The results, if you remember, were fantastic. Well I'd like to give you an update on how it's been working.

I have since incorporated its use at Valleyfair amusement park here in Minnesota. I have numerous displays with the sparkle already added. The displays themselves really stand out, especially when the sunlight hits them throughout the day. We charge an additional \$3 for any kind of sparkle application. In the article I combined the White Ice Pearl to the Createx extender, which acted as its suspension agent. I have since modified my approach. The Ice Pearl did not suspend as well in just the extender as I had originally thought. In order to get the desired amount of the "glitter look", I had to add a certain amount of Ice Pearl (that I broke down in the first article) that hindered its ability to flow smoothly. I think the fact of having to use it outside in the heat and humidity may have also affected its ability to flow. I needed to find an alternate approach. I contacted Craig Kennedy from Createx to see if he had any suggestions. He told me that they make a similar product already mixed and suspended in their Auto Air line. So I had him send me some of what they call

Hotrod Sparkle. This flowed much better and more consistently than the Ice Pearl in just the extender. However, because I'm putting it on fabric, the Hotrod Sparkle alone lacked the vibrancy that I got in the Ice Pearl combo. The solution?

I'm now taking the Hotrod Sparkle as my base with the pearl already mixed and suspended and then I'm adding about half of what I was using of the House of Kolor Ice Pearl White. The best of both worlds! The flow is excellent, the vibrancy and the glitter effect is tremendous and it just plain works awesome! One of the things that I didn't see coming is the request to put it on all of the different peripheral items that we carry like the bottle and can cozies, the keychains and especially the lanyards. Who knew? And like I said, all sparkle add-ons are an extra \$3 regardless of what it is. Conservatively I estimate an additional 80 to 100 items a week where the sparkle is added totaling an additional \$240 to \$300 a week in revenue. All for about 10 seconds extra of work! That's \$1000 to \$1200 a month for a minimal investment.

If you haven't ordered the Ice Pearl and Hotrod Sparkle and added it to your display, I think you're really missing out. Give it a try! ■

