



Painting Instructions on Concrete Statuary

By Shelly Speedling

Every year we have customers wanting to paint their concrete statues themselves and obtain the knowledge of how to take care of them once placed in their yard. For years we told people to bring statues indoors in the winter time if at all possible. However, what we began hearing back in the spring is that the car door hit it or the bike fell into it. Most people just don't have adequate storage space, and with each move of an item, you take the chance of breakage. So, we now tell our customers to enjoy it via the winter through the window with some following advice. Here are some my tips about painting as well as statue care below.

- Make sure your concrete lawn ornament has sat for at least three weeks after it was poured so that the moisture has dried out of it.
- Wash your concrete item off with water only. If it is a smaller item, you could place in a sink, or if it is a larger item, use a garden hose. Remove all the dust, dirt, and flakiness off as much as possible. Allow to air dry. Do not add soap.

We use turntables to place our concrete statues on. Granted, we are painting up to fifty items at a time. For larger items such as cows, horses, or deer, we have acquired special carts over time. Some being old railroad carts and our latest is a hydraulic cart we bought through Northern Hydraulics. This cart is able to lift heavy items

up and down simply by pumping a foot pedal. This works extremely well so that one doesn't have to squat down to paint. I myself many a times have found myself on my knees in order to paint something on our carts. This may be fine for someone of my age yet, but anyone suffering from back or leg pain would definitely benefit from the hydraulic carts. I believe ours was around \$180 or so.

We like to use exterior latex house paints or stains suitable for concrete. We are a firm believer in using products that are easy to wash up, plus we have to worry very little then about

hazardous waste materials. We have had good luck using flat finishes from Diamond Vogel, Sherwin Williams, and Mautz Paints. We tend to use flats in paints and stains because they seem to adhere better especially when using multiple paints together.

My husband and employees usually basecoat all of our items that are going to be getting a 'drybrushed' finish. This may mean it is base coated in black, blue, gray, brown, or whatever color. Then, they thin the paint down around 15% because they feel it absorbs into the concrete just a bit better. Before basecoating, the



SVJ Creative Designs' employee Nel Garness airbrushing cow on low to ground cart. No more of the bending down with the hydraulic cart. See other photo



Nel Garness showing the ease of airbrushing detail using new hydraulic cart at SVJ Creative Designs, Kellogg, MN. Bought at Northern Hydraulics.

washed and dried statues get blown off with the airhose just to make sure no other dust particle has settled on it from moving it from our trailers to the paint studio.

Then, they apply the base coat finish with an airless sprayer, usually the items are tipped on their back so that the underside and topside gets painted first, then that is allowed to dry, then they come back and stand the items up, and proceed painting the remaining surfaces. They get very particular in coverage and make sure they spray into all crevices. They never rush the basecoat process.

Use common sense when finishing with paints or stains. Make sure that there is adequate ventilation whether it be fans, open air or an installed ventilation unit. Also make sure you are using a mask, gloves, apron, or paint suit whenever possible. Apply paint finishes lightly and allow adequate time in between drying coats. Always read directions thoroughly on whatever brand you are using.

We allow a 24 hour time period before we seal with an exterior concrete

sealer. We use a brand called SPECCO but there are other good ones out there as well. It is also a plus to have the brand you use at your counter for your customers to purchase. What I have found is that customers like to use the products that the producer uses if at all possible.

I can count on only one hand how many times we have had a paint peeling problem. I credit that with properly applied methods from start to finish in the painting end of things..... and we have been doing this a long time!

Sealers come in the form of

sprays or brushing on. We use the brush on method. Once again we wait the required time between suggested drying times to reapply another coat. ****Please note that if you use a sealer, make sure that it is compatible to your paint finish.**

Once again, we use all water based products so we also use a water based sealer. This is what we suggest but we do know other companies may use more oil based products so in that case you should use similar when sealing.

What works for one concrete lawn ornament producer may not work for all due to climates and techniques. Your sealer however should say that it is NON-YELLOWING. You would hate to paint an eagle only to seal it with something that will give it a yellow tinge when it is suppose to be a white head. It should state this on the label before you purchase.

There is a type of finish from Modern Options/Triangle Coatings that

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we use to make items look rusty. It is an expensive process but well worth the time and money. This is the only exception I have found so far that I would not seal this finish. I did seal it on one occasion and the beautiful rust finish I was aiming to achieve, went from a beautiful cast iron look to a blah dark brown! This however is how we learn.....and perhaps it was something else on my part, but I don't do that anymore and I love the results of this paint.

If you are thinking of airbrushing, you may want to take a local class first. We do use airbrushing on several items and we use Smith Paints out of Pennsylvania for that. Smith paints can also be used for surface painting with a brush too. If you look at last month's issue (May) of Concrete Today, in my column Ornamental Express, the photo of my paint studio shows some fairies that were all airbrushed with Smith Paints. However, depending on what airbrush gun you use, those companies may rec-

ommend certain airbrush paints that run better through their particular airbrushes. For me, I am open to trying any companies' products to test them out, but for now, I use a Paasche airbrush and airbrushing paints from Smith Paints.

You will hear various ways to protect the life of a statue. Some good, some not, some questionable. I can only offer what we tell people. Place your concrete statue on rock or patio block so moisture drains away from the bottom. Never place it directly on the grass or dirt or sand. That tends to hold moisture in and over-time could draw up into the statue. For birdbath care, take a sponge or even a toilet bowl brush (non painted concrete) and wipe out at least on a weekly basis.

Same for fountains. Fountains and birdbaths are beautiful but they will gunk up with debris, algae, dirt, you name it. They need to be kept clean. In the winter months, it can be hard work to disassemble a birdbath or fountain, but if for instance on a birdbath, if you could simply turn the bowl over onto the pedestal or set it leaning against so snow and water cannot accumulate. Freezing and thawing of that ice settling can crack a bowl. So for future money savings, take time to winterize because otherwise you could be looking for replacement bowls in the spring! Also with fountains, drain the entire fountain of course and remove the pump. Make sure any place where water/snow could collect and freeze is covered. Make sure the covering is not airtight however because being airtight traps moisture and you could find a piece on your fountain crumbled the next spring. Depending on your fountain or birdbath, some people place a board with a heavier rock overtop of openings, some put a tarp (on non painted concrete) overtop, with holes in so it is not airtight, and what we have done to our 5 tier fountain in our personal yard the past

three years is we shrink wrap it in a manner so that water and snow cannot collect, yet it is not airtight. My husband uses a hot, match tip to place holes in several places in the shrink wrap. He does not use a knife or scissors because that has more likely a chance to continue ripping. We too at one point and time dismantled our backyard heavy five tier fountain and would place in a shed only to be put back up again in the spring. At our shop, we tended to have sold our larger fountains by fall and would have maybe only a handful of smaller ones inside which we would drain and they could remain assembled then.

Also, we recommend resealing your painted concrete pieces once a year. If the item is in the shade you could possibly go 2-3 years. It is good though to get customers in the habit of resealing. Resealing will keep statues looking great! If you can give your customers reminders about that too in the fall and spring via mail outs or newspaper ads, that will get them thinking about your place too for possible Christmas gifts or Mother's Day gifts.

In some upcoming Concrete Today issues I will give you painting techniques, including antiquing, drybrushing, rusting, Italian finishing, and other custom detail painting by hand or airbrush. Step by step photos will be included so keep looking for the

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Shelly Speedling - Owner of SVJ Creative Designs together with her husband David. SVJ Creative Designs produces concrete statuary and decorative ironwork.



SVJ Creative Designs also creates custom iron railings for homes and businesses. Shelly and Dave have three children ages 17, 15, & 11. They reside in Minnesota.

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