

Personalizing with Portraiture

Introduction

Not everyone is comfortable drawing people. Our brains are trained to recognize faces in particular, and when something is off or looks weird, we know it immediately. But one of the easiest ways to personalize a scroll is by putting the recipient on it in more than name.

One of the big things when drawing medieval portraiture in the Gothic style is to internalize that the style is just that - stylized. It's not going to look like a late period miniature. It's not going to look like a photograph. It's not supposed to. This makes it a great place to start if you're unsure about including people in scrolls.

Personalizing Awards

Adding portraiture to awards is a great way to personalize it. This is harder to do when you're making blanks and have no idea who the recipient will be. One way to get around this is to make your figures vague. For example, there are some great images of warriors in the *Manesse*, *Maciejowski*, and other Gothic-era manuscripts, where they're in armor save for their faces. If you're doing a blank for a fighting award, this would work just fine! If there is a shield in the image, just leave it blank to be filled in later. You can also use the Royals as your base - the *Gorleston* has lots of crowned women holding things in initials, which can be altered so that they are holding award badges or symbols.



Gorleston, f. 12r



Morgan Bible, f. 43v

Of course, if you know who the recipient is, you can do more. Don't be worried about making the portrait look exact. If you get the hairstyle, hair color, and garb right (even something as simple as the color of a dress or tunic), the recipient will be able to recognize themselves.

What if their persona isn't 13th or 14th century? If you're dead-set on doing a Gothic style award for them (either they don't care, or they really like it), go ahead and put them in whatever garb is appropriate for them. I've done people wearing apron dresses in this style - whatever is going to make that recipient smile.

Resources

If you're brand new to figure drawing, I suggest going out to either your local library or bookstore and getting a how-to-draw-people book. I'd stay away from the massive "anatomy for artists" books and opt for a thinner "how to draw comic book characters" version. You want something that is going to spend a good bit on proportion and how muscles move, and the comic-book books tend to be easier to approach and have more applicable sample drawings. Gothic portraiture isn't always "cartoonish" but it is closer to modern cartooning than it is to modern representational art. I had a book I used to nail down figures when I was in high school, before I even knew what the SCA was - if I still have it, I have no idea where it is. Thankfully, while these books have limited print runs, they cover pretty much the same stuff.

Of course, you have to have some extant Gothic illustrations to get a sense of the style - what poses (particularly stance and hand positions), hairstyles, and fabric draping is characteristic of the period.

Great extant resources:

- The Maciejowski Bible (The Morgan Bible) c. 1250, French (<http://www.themorgan.org/collection/crusader-bible/1?id=200>)
- Codex Manesse c. 1304-1340, German (<http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg848>)
- Cantigas de Santa Maria c. 1270-1300, Spanish (<http://bdh.bne.es/bnesearch/detalle/200519>)
- The Teymouth Hours c. 1325-40, English (<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/record.asp?MSID=8148>)
- Gorleston Psalter c. 1310-1324, English (http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=add_ms_49622)

Characteristics of Gothic Portraits

Faces

- Favored the 3/4 profile view
- Line of the nose connected with the "upstage" brow; "Downstage" nostril defined by a bump
- "Upstage" eye takes up the space between the nose line and the side of the face
- Small mouth and line for chin
- Ears rarely seem - usually covered by hair or veiling
- Curly hair or braids



Manesse, f. 52r

Figures

Though some features like limbs, hands, and necks may be slightly elongated, Gothic figures still follow the majority of proportion rules. To practice poses, use a lightbox or a window on a sunny day (the way they did it in period!) and trace a skeleton over the top of an extant image. Use this to get some poses and play with how the body is positioned.

Fabric and Clothing

The way the clothes drape and fold is important in this style - follow your extant to get a sense for how this works. If you're copying a pose directly or using it as a basis with some slight tweaks, pay particular attention to how the fabric is rendered. Feet are pretty much always rendered as slightly pointed, due to the type of shoe worn. They can also appear smaller than what is realistic - this is okay, since usually you're only seeing a tiny bit poking out from under fabric.

Stylistic Differences

Of course, each artist is different, so while Gothic portraiture has some hallmarks, the style is going to vary slightly from manuscript to manuscript.

The Maciejowski, or Morgan, Bible is a French manuscript from the middle of the 13th century. The figures have a great deal more shading in their faces than in later manuscripts, and torsos and limbs (especially legs) appear slightly elongated in some illustrations. Bearded faces have slightly different jaw lines, but figures are generally androgynous, with clothing, hairstyle, and facial hair being the gender determinants. The faces are primarily drawn in 3/4 profile.

The Codex Manesse is a German manuscript from the early 14th century. It features full page illuminations alongside full text pages with red and blue puzzle initials. The faces of the figures in this book are pretty androgynous - gender is determined by hairstyle, clothing, and facial hair. The faces are primarily drawn in 3/4 profile.



Manesse, f. 63r



Gorleston, f. 128v

The Cantigas de Santa Maria, a Spanish songbook produced in the late 13th century, features both front, full profile, and 3/4 profile. There is significant variety between the styles of the faces and figures, with some having thicker torsos, longer torsos, pointer noses, fuller cheeks, etc.

The Taymouth Hours is a book of hours produced in England between 1325 and 1340. It has some lovely bas-de-page illustrations, as well as some figures in roundels in the calendar pages. The faces are simple when compared to the Maciejowski and even the Manesse, but they are also smaller images (the entire manuscript is about half the size). Male faces are a bit more angular, and female faces rounder but unlike the Gorleston, female facial features take up as much of the face as the male.

The Gorleston Psalter is an English manuscript held by the British Library, and was produced in the early 14th century. It has what we would consider typical Gothic borders of red and blue bar and ivy. The figures all have the characteristic nostril bump, though it is difficult to discern in the smaller drolleries and inhabited initials. Female faces are rounder, with the facial features taking up less head-space. Male faces which are bearded have jaw lines that elongate into the facial hair.

Practice, Practice, Practice

The way to nail down any style is to practice it. Start by trying to copy an extant piece, then try to draw your own original people in the same style. Draw yourself! Draw a buddy! Draw your RPG character! Just draw!