

PLACING YOUR DOLL IN AN APPROPRIATE PRE- RAPHAELITE SETTING

by Rachelle Spiegel

While there was an emphasis on direct observation of nature, resulting in a trend to realism in Pre-Raphaelite painting, the Pre-Raphaelite group was fascinated by Medieval culture, believing it to possess a spiritual and creative integrity lost in later eras. This was all overlaid with the spirit of Romanticism and suffused with the spiritual significance of art.

Creating an environment

There are many options involved in this process. One can attempt to exactly reproduce the scene in miniature – placing the scene in a frame and cropping precisely where the actual painting begins and ends. This requires somewhat advanced skills in using your computer’s graphics capabilities. Another, much simpler approach would be to incorporate elements of the background into a vignette of your own composition, or to create a roombox, filling in the areas not seen in the painting with appropriate period pieces or natural items that would appear in the environment.

There are several environmental themes that run throughout the bulk of Pre-Raphaelite art. In this article I will concentrate on scenery that would be appropriate for two of the Lady of Shalott paintings (see below) The techniques used in these settings could easily be adapted for use in settings of many of the other artworks in that style.

Scale of the scene – Assuming that the doll you wish to incorporate into the scene is 1 inch scale, all the elements of the scene need to, either be in the same scale, or, particularly in the case of an outdoor scene, could have forced perspective by having objects successively become smaller as they recede from the foreground. To duplicate a scene exactly, measure the figure and use that measurement in proportion the height of the doll you will be using, to determine the size of the roombox or display platform and any items in it. Compare the size of each item in the picture to the height of the figure to calculate the required dimensions for that item.

If you do not attempt to exactly reproduce the scene, simply using one inch scale furniture and accessories, or in scale boat and vegetation should do the trick



Waterhouse – The Lady of Shalott -

The basic scene is of a lady in medieval costume (our miniature doll) in a boat – not larger than a rowboat with a low prow reminiscent of a Viking ship- floating in a placid river with a background of hills and trees and a foreground of reeds or rushes. The side of the boat is draped with a tapestry.

I am going to assume that we will be using either a roombox for our display, or an open platform with a back wall (possibly side walls as well), that will hold a printed or painted sky and distant scene.

If you attempt to exactly reproduce the scene, you can use a graphics program to copy the original picture and resize it to one inch scale. Then select and remove each item that should not appear in the background because it will be a three dimensional object in your scene. You will need to fill these areas with appropriate substitutions. In reproducing the outdoor scene, you can paste in distant hills and trees, copying them from other areas of your picture as needed. For an interior scene, sections of wall can be copied and pasted into the blank space. Unless one has great skill with computer graphics, this technique might prove to be far too complex. Instead, a re-scaled photo of a similar scene could serve as the backdrop. You can also choose to draw or paint your own backdrop.

Since the lady is in the boat on water, some consideration has to be taken for the base of the display. First, you should determine the depth of the river. You will be using some sort of chemical (see materials list below) to create water. It will need a base or substructure to contain it, especially if you are building your hills with builders foam or styrofoam. The depth you need will be partially dependent on the boat you use for this scene. You will need a strong base for your landscaping. A sheet of 1/2" plywood is the obvious choice here. Have it cut to the total area of your display. You can build up the hills with styrofoam glued to the base, papier mache, or air drying clay such as Crayola's Model Magic, which is very lightweight when dry. First draw out a plan and decide how high any elevations have to be. For the river area, carve out an appropriate depression, place a can or deep plastic lid in it, or line the river area with plumber's putty or gesso, or glue a piece of aluminum foil into the environment to hold the "water". Paint the base of your river a dark brown and paint the sides of the container, gradually lightening the color as you go up. Glue sand, rocks, moss, plants, etc to the bottom and pour a thin layer of the resin, clear silicone, or other product you are using to simulate water, following the directions on the package. Let this set up. Then add plants, reeds, cattails, etc. and add another 1/4-1/2 inch layer of your "water." Allow the material to become thick and gooey before placing your boat into the water. Wait for the water to set up completely before continuing. Add a final layer of floating plants, debris, etc. and another thin layer of water. Set lily pads or anything else that should float on the surface when it is just barely sticky or the item will sink. You might want to splash a little of the "water" on the shore, or inside the boat to make things appear wet.

Inside the Boat

Seated inside the boat is the lady with loosely flowing hair (not typical of the medieval period) in a simple, romantic, white gown with trailing sleeves, of a style that was popular about 1200. She has a dark colored girdle showing below her waist. The boat is draped with a tapestry. Some links below deal with embroidery and tapestries of the

period. You can make your own, or print one from a photo (see link to tutorial for printing on fabric using your home computer), but the easiest way is to acquire one from a miniatures dealer. SP Miniatures has several available that would work.

Landscaping

For the riverbank and/or hills, you can apply a thin layer of material such as Celluclay or ClayMache II, covering everything. This stuff dries hard as a rock, making a very stable foundation for the landscaping. Rocks can be made from chunks of these materials or by crinkling up some aluminum foil, placing a dollop of wet plaster of paris inside, allowing it to dry and painting it appropriately. You can also use Creative Paper Clay, do the detailing on the rocks and ground and then paint with acrylic craft paints. Landscaping materials can include ground foam for grass and small bushes, trees, plants and flowers. You can make plants from scratch, purchase kits or purchase ready-made plants.

To add moss to rocks and riverbank, grind up used floral Oasis. You can use a cheese grater. This substance won't react badly with the resin water. Glue the ground foam to the surfaces with white glue and let dry. When you add the water, some of the oasis will absorb the resin and its color will change so that some of it will appear wet. You can apply a dirty water wash to further change the color. Finish with a coat of matte sealer.

To create cattails, roll some air hardening clay into small cylinders, skewer and glue on to cut pieces of rigid floral wire, letting the very tip break through the top end of the cylinder, and let dry. You can glue a layer of brown HO Railroad ballast or brown sand or flocking over the cylinder for texture – or just paint the clay greenish brown. Cut long spears of green paper or ribbon for leaves. Staggering the heights, glue together in clumps.

Reeds can be made from large dry pine needles. Paint them with dark green paint and cut them to about 1 1/2" long. Glue in clumps where desired.

Trees

Again, you have a choice of crafting or purchasing your landscaping items. Certain preserved natural grasses that can be obtained at a craft supply have a structure that looks like the trunk and branches of a large tree. Directions for crafting your tree using this type of under structure can be found here:

http://www.floodland.nl/trein/info/model_en_5.htm

Or, you can begin with a real tree branch that is the shape of the basic trunk and largest main branches or with a bundle of pieces of 16 gauge bare copper wire. Look at photos of real trees (or the real thing if you are lucky enough to have one nearby) to ascertain appropriate shapes. Trees mentioned in the poem are willows and aspens. Twist together additional wire to create the upper limbs. Leave about an inch untwisted at one end. Use 5 minute epoxy to attach the upper limbs to the trunk. Apply a thin coat of glue to a section of the bottom of the trunk and roll out a thin sheet of paper clay and attach around the trunk in sections, starting at the bottom. Score with a stylus or small stick to rough up the clay so it looks like bark. You may have to wait a while to let the paperclay harden a bit in order to complete the scoring part of the project. When the tree is dry, apply washes of acrylic paint in appropriate colors for your tree. The most efficient way to apply leaves is to use landscaping foam in greens and browns.

Materials Available to make water

Scenic Water info at <http://www.scenicwater.com>

Flower Gel, one brand is called Everlasting Elegance and is sold at most of the usual chain hobby stores.....Hobby Lobby, Michael's, etc

“Acrylic Water”. Available at Walmart

Realistic Water from Woodland Scenics. It is a one-part product, used right from the bottle. No heating or mixing. It is important not to pour more than 1/8 inch at a time. It will dry in about 24 hours, depending on humidity and temperature.

Everlast 2-part resin can be found. at your local auto supply store. It is almost, but not completely clear.

Envirotex is a two part resin that can be found in craft stores.

Clear DAP caulking. It can be smoothed over prior to setting by simply wetting your finger and smoothing the surface of the caulking. Found at Home Depot and most hardware stores.

GE Clear Caulking smooth the surface by dipping a finger into plain rubbing alcohol (isopropyl alcohol) and spreading the caulking with your finger. The alcohol also slows down the setting of the clear GE Caulking and allows for more working time. Available at hardware stores.

Sources for a Boat

A prolonged search for an appropriate boat has unearthed a few possibilities, but short of making your own boat from scratch (see below), for an authentic looking, period craft, a great deal of approximation and adjustment will be required to reproduce the boat in the picture. Children’s toy boats are rather inappropriate and, while there is a very active miniature shipbuilding hobby, adaptations will require some imagination, as the bulk of the available kits are replicas of large historic ships. Except for the modern scale miniature boats available through doll house shops, ready made models and even the kits are rather expensive.

Miniature shops do carry scale boats, but they are modern. Options of a rowboat, canoe or sailboat are available online through Earth and Tree <http://www.dollhouse-miniatures.com/catalog/enter.html> . From their home page, search for boat. ... Then .adapt however you wish to replicate the picture.

You may also want to look at:

Model Boat sites:

<http://www.modelboat.com/index.html> (Possible adaptation of Dory kit without sail)

<http://www.bluejacketinc.com/index.htm>

http://www.modelshipmaster.com/products/other_types/othersssss.htm Very expensive model ships – has the only realistic old fashioned rowboat I found in my search.

Making your own boat from scratch

You can make your own boat from scratch using card or balsa or basswood. To make realistic wood you might find an appropriate scrapbooking paper or score the wood to look like slats. A set of patterns that you may want to adapt have been created by dollist member Renaissance Le Corbeau. **(See part 3 for boat plans)**. I have done a very quick mock-up from index weight card and found I needed to modify the plans because of the nature of the materials. I added a long, double pointed strip as a bottom between the two sides, folded into 3 sections longitudinally. I used the center of the strip as a boat bottom and the two sides as long tabs to glue the bottom of the boat together. For the front and back of the boat I simply glued a narrow seam between the sides. This looks something like the front and back ends of a canoe. I narrowed the seat pattern to fit my structure a little better and glued it between the tops of the sides at about the center of the boat. Because of the nature of my materials I was unable to use the cover pieces that were provided. I cut out a copy of the prow design and attached it to the front. My mock-up is only glue-tacked and stapled, but you can get the idea from the photo.



Landscaping Materials

<http://www.topez.com/landscaping.php>

<http://www.miniaturetree.com/viewcategory.asp?DirID=81>

Your local miniature shop is always a good source for landscaping materials. Hobby and craft stores and model railroad stores are also good places to find what you need.

Following is a list of articles in various miniature magazines on the subject of miniature landscaping:

Topic	Magazine	Issue	Page
Water Plants	Dollhouse Miniatures	March 05	p.34
Landscape - tips for trees, bushes, hedges, planter"	Miniature Showcase	July 1993	p.20

Lily Pads	Nutshell News	May 1994	p.82
Water Lily Flowers	Dollhouse Miniatures	July 2000	p.62
Cattails	American Miniaturist	June 2006	p.32
Cattails	Nutshell News	Feb.1987	p.115
Tree	Nutshell News	June 1989	p.112
Tree – from branches	Nutshell News	April 1992	p.96
Tree – From dried flowers	Nutshell News	April 1991	p.90
Tree – From stalks of dried flowers	Dollhouse Miniatures	Oct 1997	p.94
Tree- Oak	Miniature Collector	April 2000	p.22

Inside the Boat –

The following is a listing for sources of items to fill the boat and complete your scene:

Tapestry

An entire site devoted to Medieval embroidery and tapestry.

<http://www.advancenet.net/~jscole/medembro.html>

Medieval tapestries for sale at SP Miniatures at reasonable prices:

<http://www.spminiatures.com/medievalother.html>

Miniature needlepoint kits for 1/12 scale dolls houses, suitable for dolls' house wall hangings or as miniature pictures for the home. Designs based mainly on Celtic, medieval, and Tudor artwork. Kits include 22 or 24 count fabric, backing fabric, braid or ribbon, DMC stranded thread, needle, color block chart and key, sewing and finishing instructions

<http://www.knighttimeminiatures.co.uk/>

Tutorials for printing on fabric:

<http://www.rebeccachulew.com/ezine/printingonfabric.html>

<http://www.cynthiahoweminiatures.com/fabricprinting.htm>

General Printables tutorials

Printies in Paint <http://www.geocities.com/justauntb/index.html>

Printables tutorial <http://68.38.137.242:8090/dh/Printabletut.html>

Candles

There are three candles burning near the prow of the boat. Candles are easily made in miniature from round toothpicks, painted white. Since the candlesticks are barely visible, almost any kind of candle holder will be useful. SP Miniatures (see above) sells candlesticks appropriate to the period.

Sources

General information about the Pre-Raphaelites was obtained by searching the web, starting with the Pre-Raphaelite entry in Wikipedia and following a number of links off of that site. Although I am not able to credit particular individuals, with the exception of the paper clay expert Rik Pierce, for the discussion of an interior scene, (there were so many individual contributors) a great deal of my initial miniatures research was done in the Tips Archives of the online digest Small Stuff

<http://www.miniature.net/smallstuff/tips.htm> . Additional information was gleaned from the NAME official website, <http://www.miniatures.org/> , magazine articles accessed through the NAME magazine index found on that site under Resources/ Tips and Projects, and personal experience in constructing miniature environments.