Paint a
Bride's Box

TEXT AND IMAGES BY LINDA CARTER LEFKO

MATERIALS

Brushes:
2" foam polybrush
Filbert, Loew Cornell Series 7500 size 10, for base coats
Square shader, Windsor Newton Regency Gold series 580 $^1/_4$",
    for large areas and bands
Scrollers, Loew Cornell Series 7050 Script Liner sizes 2 & 6,
    for stripes and clusters of brush strokes
Finepoint, Loew Cornell Series 8350 Mixtique Size 1,
    for curlicues and fine work
Deerfoot stippler, Loew Cornell Series 410 size $^3/_8$", for foliage
Paint: JoSonja acrylic matte finish pigments: Warm White, Cadmium
    Yellow Medium, Norwegian Orange, Prussian Blue, Carbon Black,
    Burnt Umber, Napthol Crimson, Burnt Sienna, Brown Earth,
    Forest Green
Stain: Medium/dark brown Minwax oil stain,
    for exterior sides and lid only
Media: JoSonja Flow Medium; JoSonja Kleister Medium
Miscellaneous:
Tracing paper
Cloth rag
.01 Micron Pigma pen for tracing pattern onto tracing paper
Saral white transfer paper
Stylus
Ruler
Sandpaper
Palette and palette knife
Paper towels
Container for water
Masking tape
Tack cloth
Piece of chalk

In the German states and German-influenced areas of the young United States, a groom often gave his bride a brightly painted wooden box for her trousseau, bridal crown, and bouquet. This project shows you how to create a large bride's box typical of those painted in Thüringen (in the central part of what now is Germany) around 1850.

The design is adapted from an antique bride's box formerly in the collection of the Historical Society of Early American Decoration at Cooperstown, New York, 1978. The floral border painted on the box's side panel is reminiscent of country tin painting done in the northeastern United States during the 1800s. The couple depicted on the lid and the inscription (which translates as "The talk about love will give me much pleasure") confirms that this is indeed a bride's box.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Assemble the listed materials. Enlarge pattern to fit box—box shown is 11" x 19". This pattern is adaptable because undecorated areas at either end of the box allow for size differences. Trace the box lid circumference on a sheet of tracing paper and fit the enlarged tracing underneath. Trace onto tracing paper with the Micron Pigma pen.

2. Stain the box using a small rag. Let dry for several days.

3. Using the foam brush, paint the exterior sides and lid with one coat of Forest Green. Paint a piece of poster paper this background color so there is a surface for testing colors and brushes. Sand the box through the paint to the stained surface in likely spots for wear—on the sides where you grasp it to remove the lid and slightly on the box edges. Let the

background dry thoroughly, or cure with a hairdryer to speed up the process.

4. Read the entire set of directions at this point, so you have an understanding of the complete procedure. For each step in which a new color is mixed or a new brush is recommended, test and practice on the painted poster paper background before painting on the box.

5. Place transfer paper between tracing and the box surface, chalky side down. **Lightly** transfer the outline of the hill onto the box lid with the stylus.

6. Fill in the ground behind the people and trees with pale blue using the foam brush. Squeeze out 2 dollops of Warm White the size of a dime on a palette. In another spot, squeeze out Prussian Blue the size of a pea and a touch of Carbon Black. Use palette knife to mix blue and black together. Mix a touch of the blue/black into one dollop of white. Mix Kleister into both piles of pigment in a ratio of 3 parts Kleister to 1 part color to make the pigment transparent.
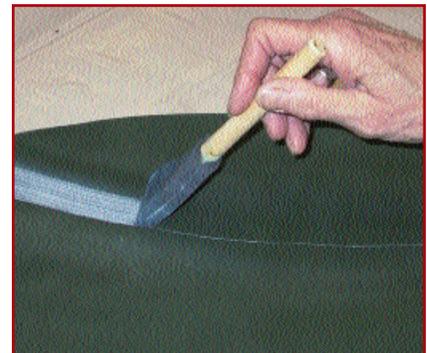
Wet the foam brush and pinch water out. Side load the brush with warm white by brushing it back and forth on half of the brush so you have a gradual intense-to-none load of paint. If the brush is too dry to swipe all the way across the top of the hill on box lid, dip it into a little water and dress it again in the pigment. As soon as you have the white on the box, dip the same brush into the blue/white mixture and dress it back and forth on the palette. Finish painting the rest of the ground with light blue.

Quickly dip a piece of paper towel in water, fold in half, and wrap over thumbnail. Use your middle finger as a

bridge on the side of the box and wipe the edge of the blue/white ground back with your thumb $^3/_4$" back from the edge, leaving the background paint of the box exposed along the bottom border. Dry thoroughly.

7. Again, using transfer paper between your tracing and the box surface, place your tracing in position and **lightly** transfer the outlines of the base coats onto the lid and sides. Base coats are those that have detail on top of them, but **do not** transfer any of the facial details, buttons, etc. Transfer only where the color changes are—face, jacket, pants, dress, scarf, etc. Use the ruler on the sides to be sure you have tracing placement straight. Tape it with masking tape and slide transfer in between to make it easier to do the repeated border design.

   Note: When you are placing the side panel pattern on the lid edge to transfer it, point the arrow left and toward the band at the top of the lid edge. On the box bottom, point the arrow right and toward the band at the box bottom.

   The tracing fits around the box by repeatedly placing it 1" from the previous tracing. Brush strokes fill the area between the base coats and make the design appear continuous.

8. Mix a light putty color by adding a touch of black and Burnt Umber to Warm White. Add 2 parts Kleister to 1 part pigment. Use the filbert brush to paint all the roses on the side panels—outside petals first, then fill in the cup. Use the square shader to paint the man's pants with the same color. Add a bit more Kleister to the paint to achieve a transparent look. Paint the lady's hat, ribbon, and dress, brushing up and down to minimize brush marks. Dry thoroughly.

9. Mix a pea-size drop of Warm White and a dash of Burnt Sienna to make a pleasing flesh color. Use the #6 script liner to paint arms, hands, neck, and faces of each figure. Remember, fewer brush strokes make for an even basecoat.

10. Mix Prussian Blue, a touch of black, and a touch of white. Use the square shader to paint the man's jacket and hat, taking care around the hand.
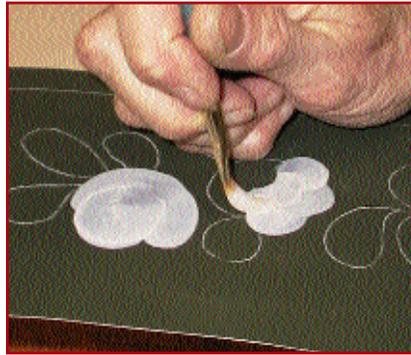

   Add a lot more white to get a medium blue. Paint the blue flower below the 3 orange berries and the 11 blue leaves on each section of the border pattern. I find it easiest to do the first side panel section, then take a piece of chalk and mark all the blue flowers and blue leaves and complete the rest.

   Using the square shader and Kleister mixed with the medium blue, paint a band along the bottom of the lady's dress, wiggling the brush back and forth so it appears to be lacey.

11. With the same brush, paint the lady's shawl and man's belt Norwegian Orange. On the side panels, paint the orange flower next to the blue one, the center of the blue flower, and the 3 orange berries above it. Complete this on each of the repeated motifs around the side of the box and lid.

   Mix a puddle of orange with Flow,
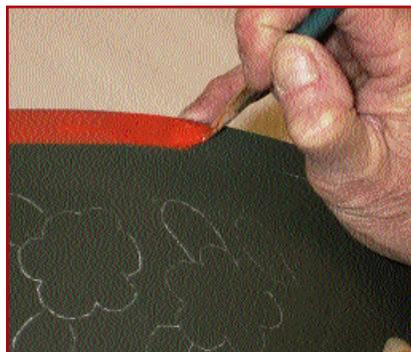
2 parts paint to 1 part medium. (Flow makes the paint feed for a long time without changing the color.) Load the square shader with paint. Holding it perpendicular to the surface, paint a $^1/_2$" band all the way around the box side, both top and bottom.

12. Using the #6 script liner, paint the tree trunks with Brown Earth.

13. Mix Forest Green, Cadmium Yellow, Prussian Blue, and Carbon Black to contrast with the box background. Using the deerfoot stippler, dampen the brush with water and put it into some Kleister. Push half the brush into the green paint mixture. With a pouncing motion, stipple in the foliage. Use the same technique to paint the foliage on the ground.

14. Add some of the green foliage pigment to white, a little at a time, until you have a medium green. Paint the 5 green leaves and center of the orange flower on each section of the side panel motif around the lid and the bottom panel.
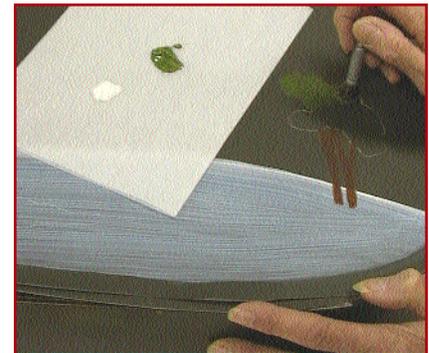
15. This completes the base coats. Use a hairdryer to cure all painted areas. If the base coats are cured, you can easily remove any brush work errors without damaging them.

16. Detailing is also painted from light to dark. Wet the #2 script liner, dip it into Flow, and dress it back and forth in white pigment, filling the brush. Practice on the background paper first, then paint a stripe around the top of the lid on the inner line $^3/_4$" from the box edge, following the area where the ground color was wiped off. Use your pinky finger to steady the brush as you go around the box.

   Using the same brush and Flow, paint the highlights on the lady's hat and dress neck edge.
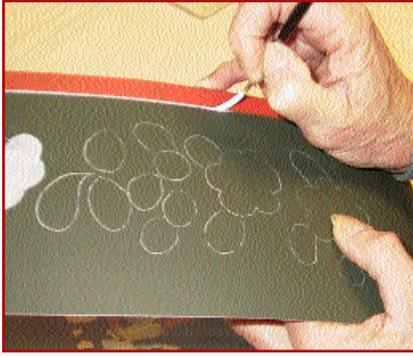
Paint another white stripe on the edge of the orange band on both the lid and bottom, toward the body of the box.

Paint white brush strokes on the roses, leaves, and blue blossom on each of the side panel motifs, lid and box. (Clean the brush completely once in a while for a fresh start.)

17. Mix Cadmium Yellow and Flow. Using the finepoint, paint in the lettering so that it at least covers your tracing. (The tendency is to trace to the inside and then paint to the inside, making the lettering smaller than it should be.) Using the same brush, drop in the round buttons on the man and the earrings and necklace and scarf detail on the woman with the yellow.

Switch to the #2 script liner to paint the right side of the tree trunks, the brush strokes on the ground, and the stripe around the circumference of the box at $^3/_8$" from the white stripe. Use the script liner to paint the brushwork on the leaves, vermilion base coats, and dots on the roses on the side panel.

Dip the deerfoot stippler into Kleister and work it through the brush on the palette. Pick up some yellow on the foot of the brush and pounce it on the trees and bushes to highlight them.

18. Using the stylus and transfer paper, **lightly** add the face detail. Mix Napthol Crimson and Kleister, then dab in a little cheek color on both figures with the finepoint brush. (If it appears too dark, tap it to remove some pigment.) Paint the mouths on both faces. With the #2 script liner and crimson, add brush strokes on the left side of the roses and the left side of the orange flower.

19. Use Burnt Umber and the finepoint brush to paint the eyes and noses.

20. With black and the #2 script liner, complete the brushwork on the leaves of the side panel sections and the feet of the people.

Note: After the box is thoroughly dry, you can coat it with paste wax to protect it. Antique boxes have no protective finish. ★

Linda Carter Lefko is a historic decorative painter, researcher, teacher, and co-author of *The Art of Theorem Painting*. Her work can be seen at www.lclefko.com.
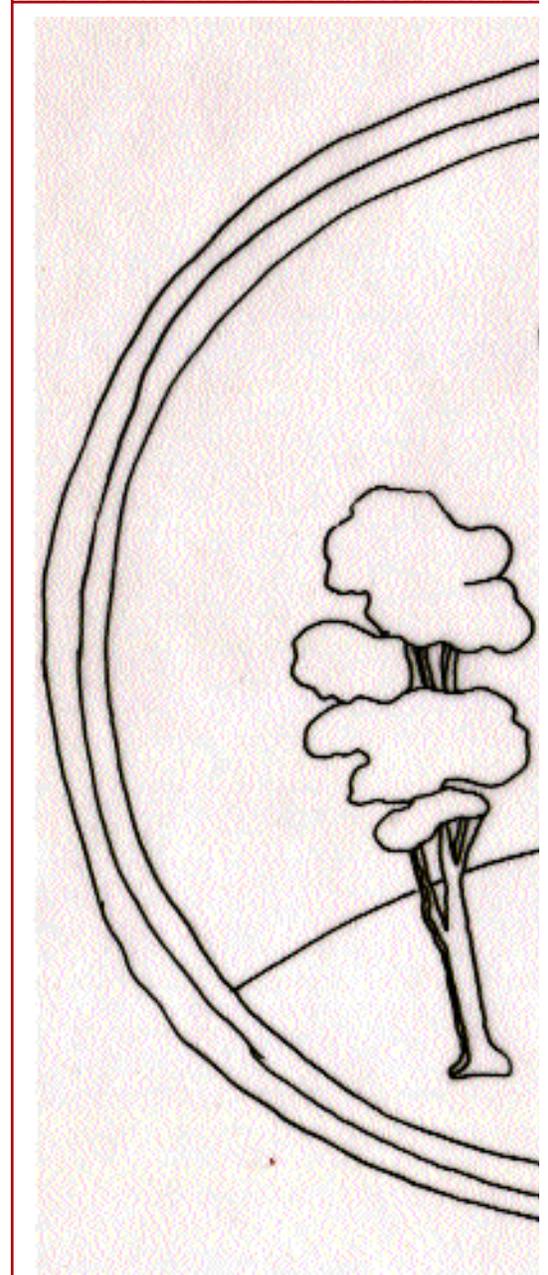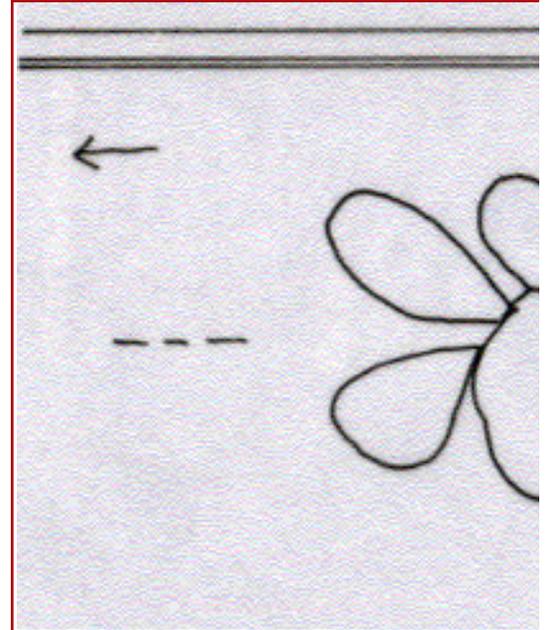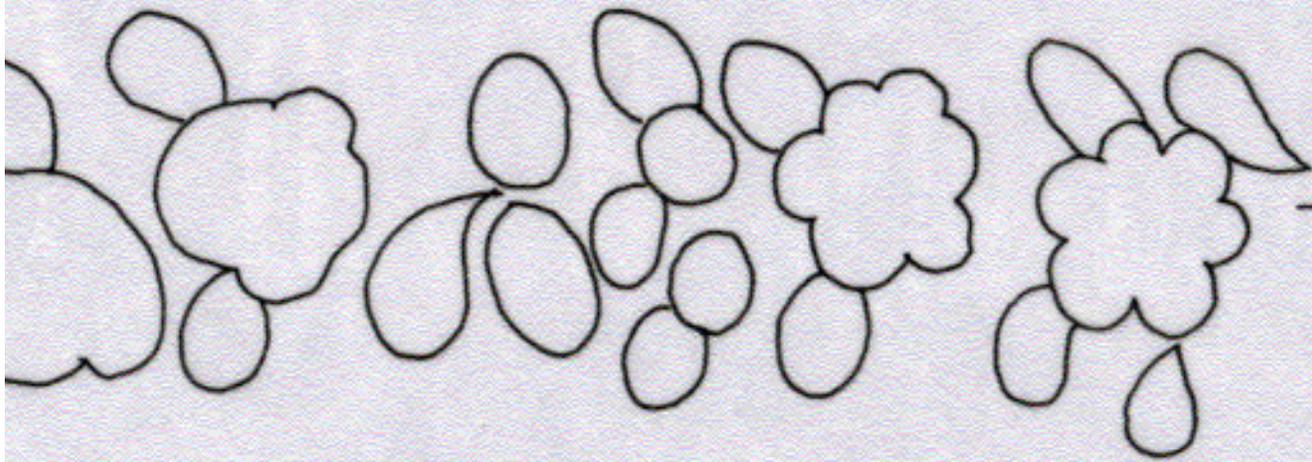
Daß Gespräch von Liebessachen
Wird mir viel Vergnügen machen.