

**Koo Schadler**  
**METALPOINT DRAWING**

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The ubiquitous pencil, a stick of graphite inside a wooden tube, wasn't an option for a 15th century draftsman – it hadn't been invented yet. Instead, for fine line drawings, artists drew with a nib of metal placed in a stylus. Most artists favor a silver nib (as it's a relatively soft metal that abrades well and nicely darkens with age), so the medium is commonly called silverpoint. In fact, many metals (copper, gold, brass, platinum, lead, etc.), drawn across a slightly abrasive surface, leave a mark; hence the medium is more broadly known as metalpoint.

Ordinary paper will not work with most metal nibs (excepting a soft, tin or lead). A drawing surface must be coated to create enough abrasion for a metal point to leave a mark (literally, a deposit of metal). Potentially *any* paint or ground (gouache, watercolor, true gesso, acrylic gesso, etc.,) that has sufficient "toothy hardness" (a high solid content + hard solid content) can work for metalpoint. Adding high Mohs Hardness solids (titanium or zinc white, silica, pumice, bone ash, etc.,) can increase abrasion and thus deepen marks. Artists also may color a ground by adding pigments, so as to begin a drawing on a light to mid value surface; metalpoint marks create the mid to dark values, while light values are rendered by "heightening" with white paint or chalk.

Metalpoint lines are delicate and precise, with a limited value range. They are not easily erased. Like an egg tempera painting, metalpoint drawings are generally built up in many, many layers. Over time some metals, such as silver and copper, tarnish; this is a much-prized characteristic of metalpoint drawings.



**Mixing Mediums in Metalpoint.**

The ground in "Henry's Glance" is traditional gesso tinted with green earth. The drawing is silverpoint with a few dark greys (pupils, recess of the ear, shadow under hat) deepened using a graphite pencil. I waited until all metalpoint drawing was complete before applying white gouache for facial highlights and undershirt neckline. Gouache re-instates abrasion, so if a nib were to be inadvertently drawn across the fresh white paint, it could create an especially dark, unwanted mark. The shirt was applied with a brush in India ink; the buttons are gold-pigment, egg tempera paint. By having an understanding of grounds, supports, and metal nibs, I feel free to improvise and mix mediums. *Henry's Glance*. Silverpoint, graphite, ink, gouache, egg tempera on green toned, true gesso panel, 6 1/2 x 4 5/8". Collection Douglas Safranek.



**Black Ground in Metalpoint.** Several layers of Golden Black Gesso (black casein works well too) were applied to an MDF support, mounted to a second, gold-leafed panel (so the piece could be "floated" in a frame). The drawing was initially developed with eight different nibs, but the value range was limited and the image lacked "pop". To amend this, I sponged on a background of Prussian blue pigment + acrylic polymer (as a binder), to contrast (and thus accentuate) "cool" blue with "warm" ochre feathers (drawn with gold, brass and copper points). The black on the oriole is what remains of the original ground. Light colors on the bird are primarily silver, aluminum, pewter and bismuth points, although I also applied a bit of white egg tempera in the strongest lights. The ledge was made by splattering on white, black and grey tinted grounds, with random metalpoint marks applied on top. *Ama Nesciri With Oriole*. Gold, Copper, Silver, Yellow Brass, Nickel, Bismuth, Pewter & Bronze Metalpoints, Pigments & Acrylic Medium, Egg Tempera; on Black Gesso; on MDF Panel; Floated on Gold Leaf Panel. 4 1/2 x 6 1/2". Private Collection



**Above:** Support is 300#, hot press, handmade, watercolor paper from Twinrocker. I began by sponging on a sky transition over the entire surface, using white and blue-tinted, Natural Pigments Tempera Ground. I applied the pattern on the cloth banner using a stencil and white ground; then rubbed the pattern with copper wool for a greenish grey tone; then applied a second stenciled pattern on top with a blue-tinted ground. The ledge was made by splattering on white, black and grey tinted grounds, with random metal marks on top. The drawing was developed in silver, aluminum and copper points, finished with thin layers of white, red, yellow and blue egg tempera paint. When completed, I adhered the drawing to 1/8" fiberboard panel (slightly smaller than the paper, so it doesn't show), then adhered that to a gold-leafed, fiberboard panel so that the drawing appears to float. *Snow Hare & Landscape*. Silver, aluminum & copper points, copper wool, egg tempera, Rublev Tempera Ground, Twinrocker Handmade Hot Press Watercolor Paper, mounted on gold, 6 1/2 x 8 1/2". Private Collection



**Below:** *Lily & Landscape*. Silver, aluminum & copper points, copper wool pad, egg tempera, on blue-tinted Rublev Tempera Ground, on silver leaf support, 7 x 5". Collection Lauren Rogers Museum of Art.

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