

## Black Hours

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In the latter half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (1450-1500) there arose a style of manuscript painting known as Black Hours, so called because it was used primarily in personal books of hours, or the prayer divisions of the day. This style was achieved by painting carbon black onto a piece of vellum or parchment, which unfortunately makes the work highly susceptible to flaking and destruction. There are only seven complete Black Hours known today but the number of single pages kept safe between acrylic glass panels attests to a much larger number having been made.

The Black Hours style was executed by a select few of the master illuminators in the Bruges region of Flanders for patrons all over Europe. This specific style of book seems to have been mainly commissioned upon the death of a close relative and given to the survivor in their time of bereavement.

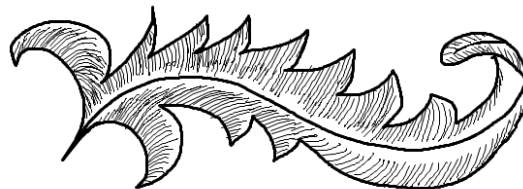
Examples are:

Black Hours of...	Charles the Bold	Upon the death of his father
Sforza Black Hours	Galeazzo Maria Sforza	Upon the death of his father
Blessed Mary Black Hours	Maria of Castile	Upon the death of her husband

The inks used for the calligraphy were gold and silver, to stand out against the black ground. The paints are usually a limited palette of blue, white, gold, old rose, flesh tone, chartreuse, and grey. Some extant examples are very simple like the Morgan Black Hours, using only blue, white and gold, while the Sforza Black Hours shows a wide variety of colors. In fact, the Hours of the Blessed Mary are executed in only gold on the black ground, which is striking in its simplistic beauty.



Acanthus without Shading



Acanthus with Shading

As with most examples of illumination from the 15<sup>th</sup> c., the acanthus leaf is the most prominent factor of the illumination with additions of vines, fruit, animals and heraldry as the pieces get more complex. Because the ground is black, the shading of each item is done in reverse, leaving the darkest parts plain black and sketching in lines to brighten where needed. This reverse shading is seen on all the pieces and takes a little practice.



Example of Vine Work

First lay out your borders and bars, as needed for the piece. Then sketch in the acanthus leaves and various filler in white pencil. It is nice to take into consideration the recipient's heraldry, if applicable, as well as references to areas of interest or the award they are receiving (strawberries for a Duke or Duchess, animal affiliations, laurel vines for Laurel). You will want a black eraser so as not to smudge the black paper when adjusting lines.



Various Flowers and Plants



Various Birds



Various animals and a Demon

For the look of the Morgan Black Hours, fill in anything not to remain black with blue. Finally, edge and highlight the sketches with either gold, as seen in most of the clips above, or paint in polychrome as in the Sforza Black Hours. For color ideas, there are links to the digitized copies of both the Morgan Hours and Sforza Hours below.

When the time comes to tackle the writing, there are many examples of bold gold capitals, surrounded by boxes of chartreuse. As mentioned above, the calligraphy was done in gold or silver ink in Black letter or Gothic hand.

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#### Bibliography and Resources:

*Masterpieces of Illumination.* Ingo F. Walther & Norbert Wolf. Taschen: Cologne, 2005

*Calligraphy School.* Gaynor Goffe and Anna Ravenscroft. The Reader's Digest Assoc, Inc. Pleasantville, NY. 1994.

#### Digital copies of Extant Black Hours:

<http://www.themorgan.org/collections/works/BlackHours/>

<http://www.danielmitsui.com/hieronymus/index.blog/2269500/prayer-book-of-galeazzo-maria-sforza/>

<http://learn.columbia.edu/hispanic/monographs/black-hours.php>

If you would like, I have an alphabet of capitals available for tracing or inspiration. Feel free to contact me for this sheet or any questions you might have at: [felicity@faerhaga.org](mailto:felicity@faerhaga.org). Good luck with your Black Hours!