

Grey Scale : Painting in Modulation and Light

By Rick Lawler

Color Modulation is one of those techniques that seem to bring out strong opinions on all sides. Some see it as cartoonish and overly exaggerated, while others view the results as artistic and visually pleasing. In my opinion, Color Modulation is best considered as one of many techniques that we have available to us when we go to painting our models. Just as we wouldn't want to always rely upon over-exaggerated dry brushing, we also don't want to each of our models to be overly Color Modulated.

I believe that when used appropriately, Color Modulation is a very effective painting method for bringing life to our models. The use of light and shadow and sharp contrasts help to create volume, define shapes and create visual interests to our finishes. In this short demonstration I will be painting a 1/48th scale Pz 38(t) in the basic German Grey scheme, employing Color Modulation theory to bring added life to the monotone finish.





1 The subject of my demonstration is the diminutive Pz 38(t) from Tamiya. As always, painting begins with a good layer of primer. For this session I chose to use the AMMO grey color as my base, but the white colored primer would have also been a good option.



2 I will be using the AMMO Dunkelgrau modulation paint set for the painting. AMMO modulation sets contain all of the shades of color required to prepare a full spectrum, modulated scheme – from the darkest tones to the brightest highlights. A small piece of cardstock will be used as a quick mask in order to create sharp, contrasting lines and brushes will be used to paint highlights on the smaller surface details. Let's get started.



3 For this model I have decided to combine two approaches to Modulation; those being Zenithal Light (light from above) and Panel Modulation (exaggerating the contours of each panel shape). The first color applied is the darkest of the tones – the Dark Grey Base. At this stage I am only concerned about establishing the areas of deepest shadows.



4 Now I add a second, lighter grey color to the palette. With this color I have purposefully covered all of the surfaces of the entire model in order to establish the base color. The coverage is light, allowing the darker shadow areas to still be visible, but eliminating some of the harsh contrast. I follow by airbrushing the lightest grey tones onto certain areas to create the brightest highlights.



5 One distinctive trait of the Color Modulation technique are the sharp, contrasting edges between surface panels or plates. Using a small piece of cardstock as a quick mask, I spray the lightest shade of grey just along the top edge of the engine panel where it hinges to the upper body. This light edge helps to create distinction between the two panels, while the light tone near the top reinforces the concept of the light source from above.



6 This same technique of a quick mask is used to define one plate from the next. In this instance I am disregarding the idea of light from above; this is done simply to help define the surface shapes and add visual interest.



This photo clearly shows the result of the quick mask. The sharp line of lighter shade of grey provides a clear indication between the two roof panels. Purposefully, the coverage is not complete and the color is allowed the feathers out gradually toward the rear.



Another distinctive characteristic of Modulation style painting is the addition of "exaggerated" highlights on the prominent surface details and features. In this case, I use the lightest grey color with a little added white to hand paint the tanks hinges, clasps, locks, etc. At larger scales, this step can be taken to extreme by painting each bolt head and rivet, but at this small scale (and my poor eyesight) I feel that level of detail is unnecessary.



A view of my Color Modulated Pz.38. When viewing these final photos, notice how I have used light and shadow to help define the round shape of the turret; an example of Panel Modulation.

10 The road wheels demonstrate directional light from the above & front, as well as awareness of the shape. I think that the vision ports and armored machine gun ring stand out nicely against the darker grey background.



Now the question is what to do next? If the model were to be left at this stage I would certainly agree that the Modulated effects are too exaggerated and un-natural looking. However, the Color Modulation painting steps should always be considered as part of a larger process. I know from experience that the next finishing steps will certainly tone down the vivid contrasts and, in the end, create a balanced, visually pleasing model.

Please stay tuned for my next update where I apply Filters and begin the weathering process.