

DEFINING SURFACE TEXTURE IN PORTRAITURE

by

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art

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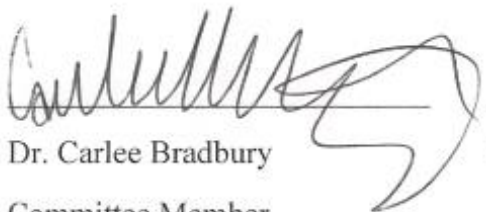
  
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## Abstract

This thesis covers the particular steps and techniques involved with my production of graphite and watercolor portraits. The introduction explains my personal view of the relevance of a portrait and how more traditional mediums are capable of capturing more of the likeness and personality of an individual than mere photographs. Through developing an intimate understanding of my subjects, I recreate what I see through traditional art mediums. This progressively broadens my depth of perception and my understanding of reality, which, in turn, enriches my appreciation of perceptive existence.

I begin my thesis by explaining my artistic approach along with my visual and historical/cultural influences. In producing artwork, I have very little visual influences from other artists. Much of my aesthetic influence has more to do with various cultures from ancient history, when artwork was meant to be functional rather than mere decoration. Art, especially portraits, had more of a purpose then. For example, many rendered likenesses of ancient Egyptians were thought to occasionally house the souls of the deceased individuals. In ancient Rome, actual realism was meant to honor the individual as well as the characteristic visual traits of his family. I try to keep this in mind when producing my own artwork, to be functional as well as decorative.

In my portrait artwork, I put strong focus on likeness, expression, and surface textures. Experimenting with various artistic mediums allows me to capture likeness, expression, unique character, and a nice variety of textures with transparent and opaque watercolors. Watercolor is commonly an unforgiving medium. Through my study and experimentation of techniques in other mediums, I have formed a process that makes

watercolor much more forgiving and adjustable. The strong focus on detail and study of surface texture in my paintings broadens my visual interpretation and, in turn, directly reflects back into my drawings. I go on to describe reference material and the process on how I digitally adjust images (photographs) in order to help establish a strong sense of contrast in my finished artwork. Drawing and watercolor tools and materials are thoroughly covered, which also includes different surfaces and how they perform. Step-by-step tutorials of my portrait drawing and watercolor painting techniques is also included. The thesis is concluded with my future plans for my artwork.

I plan to continue to develop my artwork regardless of my profession (whatever it may be), but I do not desire in any way to simplify my artwork to make it more marketable. I have a deep appreciation in understanding how I develop my drawings and paintings because this act of creation has many benefits. The techniques I learn through creating artwork continues to progressively expand my visual boundaries and interpretation. I create what I am capable of seeing. As I learn more, I see more. This, in turn, expands my depth of perception, increases my range of emotion, and enhances my appreciation of life.

Eric Beavers, M.F.A.

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## Introduction: The Purpose of a Portrait

In several major key periods in my artistic development, when things began to go stale, I asked myself, what is the real relevance in all the study and time included with rendering a realistic portrait with traditional mediums when we have the convenience of a digital camera and ease of photo editing today? Why all the effort when a portrait can simply, and almost immediately, be captured with a camera? What I have come to see is that photographs might be accurate, but they lack the boldness and underlying character that comes out in portraits developed from more traditional mediums.

Photographs are also captured very fast, and a camera is a machine that essentially does the recording. The photographer is only responsible for telling the machine what to record and then aesthetically manipulating the raw material that was captured. Portrait photographs translate emotions and personality based on what can be recorded in a split second. Though I truly appreciate photography, I prefer to produce art primarily through other mediums. More traditional portraiture, such as drawing and painting, delivers emotions, likeness, and character through what can be perceived, understood, translated, and then manually recreated by the particular skill level of the artist by both time and study. I find this much more to my liking.

Through portraiture rendered using traditional art techniques, I recreate what is perceived primarily through developing an intimate understanding of what I am looking at. This increasingly deep interpretation of the inner character of the individuals in my portraits, as well as the interpretation and dissection of the beauty of various textures, has a continuous enriching impact on my unique appreciation of the experience of perceptive



existence. Studying and producing artwork is an essential part of my life; I cannot imagine how I would see the world otherwise.

## Chapter 1: Art and Perception

### **Artistic Problem**

In my graphite and watercolor portraits, I put precise, strong focus on likeness, expression, and surface textures. From progressively developing drawing skills and experimenting with other media, such as acrylics, inks, and oils, I have developed a unique way of combining transparent, semi-transparent, and opaque watercolors. This assembly of paints is used to capture likeness, expression, unique character, and a nice variety of textures such as skin, hair, cloth, plastics, metals, etc.

Watercolor is, in many ways, a very unforgiving medium, meaning that many mistakes are often not possible to correct. This is generally true of all transparent, semi-transparent, and opaque watercolors. Underlying layers of paint bleed through and commonly greatly affect the upper layers. Special care must be given between the layers of color in order to achieve the most desirable effect. What is unusual and unique about my particular combination of these water mediums is that when layers of transparent, semi-transparent, and opaque watercolors are combined and applied in particular ways, they actually become a fairly forgiving medium. Being more forgiving, it can also be more precise. Using these different types of watercolors together greatly extends the level of detail attainable compared to using any one of the mediums alone.

This development and understanding of surface texture in painting reflects back into my graphite portraits. Paying more attention to the outer layers of my paintings has caused me to notice more of the outer layers of my drawings. Also, since the finishing layers of my watercolors incorporate line and crosshatching techniques, my drawing

techniques reflect back to my painting. The techniques involved in developing my drawings and watercolors complement each other very well.

### **Approach and Assessment**

I draw and paint what I see; that is what I have always done. As I perceive more, I render more. Through time and experimentation, a number of personal approaches and techniques that I have accumulated developed much on their own. Primarily, what I am most aesthetically interested in is the finished product. The techniques before the final layers are less important because a particular end can be achieved in a number of different ways. I personally judge the value of my artwork on how well I captured what was intended to be captured. In portraits, for example, I strive above all to capture likeness, expression, and unique character. If those three primary aspects are not met, I feel I have a failed portrait, no matter how well any other texture or rendering in the piece of artwork came together.

I tend to drift toward older individuals for the subject matter of my portraiture because it is easier to interpret their unique characters through the extra lines and textures of their experienced and weathered faces. This intimate study of their visual representation, along with the developed perception of their inner personality, greatly broadens the range of my perceptive insight as I recreate their likeness.

### **Visual Influences**

Being primarily a portrait artist, I focus more on the uniqueness of the subject at hand and, with maybe one exception, really don't have much of any direct strong outside influences with this form of art. There is work by other artists I like or admire in some manner, but I do not intentionally try to copy their styles or color schemes in my own

professional work in portraiture. Importantly, this only applies to art techniques regarding my portrait work in pencil and watercolor. The techniques used with working in other media are also used to experiment with watercolors. Regardless of what techniques I used to build up the underlying layers of a watercolor portrait, the final layers are almost always drawn or painted on with an assortment of texture and liner brushes.

If any one artist has had an effect on my perception of detail in portraiture, it is Andrew Wyeth. The detail he was able to capture in his dry brush and egg tempera paintings inspired me to experiment with opaque watercolors. I did not study the painting techniques of Wyeth; he never really described them in any detail. He preferred to work in seclusion, even in secrecy at times. He did this to allow himself to become completely engrossed in his subjects, be it an inanimate object or an actual person. He saw the creative process as being very personal and very private. His obsessional study resulted in extremely detailed paintings with strong contrast and many varieties of textures.

Because of my strong affinity for the results Wyeth achieved with tempera and dry brush techniques, I decided to try to incorporate more opaque watercolors into my painting technique. All at once there was a whole other level of perception that I had come to be aware of. I had partially rendered this outer surface before when working with semi-opaque watercolors, but not at this level. This big boost in perception came about while I was in the process of first experimenting with this new technique to get a combination of watercolors to simulate the look of tempera. The result is that I developed a unique way to capture a large amount of surface detail combining

transparent, semi-transparent, and opaque watercolors using primarily drawing techniques with liner brushes for the final layers.

### **Historical/Cultural Influences**

I do a lot of reading on ancient cultures and religions. I primarily do this ongoing study to increase my perception of physical and non-physical interpretation, which affects the depth of my artistic insight. These studies on different outlooks of spirituality and being have always interested me, even when I was very young. What I find most fascinating is that artwork had a different purpose and function in ancient times. It was meant to be primarily functional, to serve a purpose instead of just being decorative. Research in ancient art is very useful in gaining a different perspective, even relevance, of anyone's personal work.

The study on Egypt's royal portraiture has changed my own artwork in a number of ways. The most prominent is the view I have on the actual purpose of my work, in both a physical and spiritual nature. In ancient Egyptian times, the depiction of a passed individual was often primarily meant to serve as a vessel for his or her soul to inhabit. Placed in an area where offerings could be received, these portraits allowed the spirits of passed individuals to gain sustenance from the actions of the living. This is not the general use of a portrait of the deceased today, which functions as a mere memoir to the person's past living memory.

This functional purpose for the rendered likeness of an individual in ancient times has caused me to reflect much more on the subjects of my work in portraiture, especially if the individual is already deceased, which is common in my commissions. The probability that the soul of an individual has any connections to idealized images of his

or her likeness inevitably has caused me to form a much deeper consideration when rendering the portrait. Studying ancient Egyptian culture has allowed me to see more of a quiet dignity that can be captured in the subjects of my artwork. Subtle adjustments here and there are accented to project the best various underlying strengths and qualities of different individuals. Though this is a form of idealization and Roman verism (ultra-realism), it better captures and immortalizes the unique personalities of my subjects.

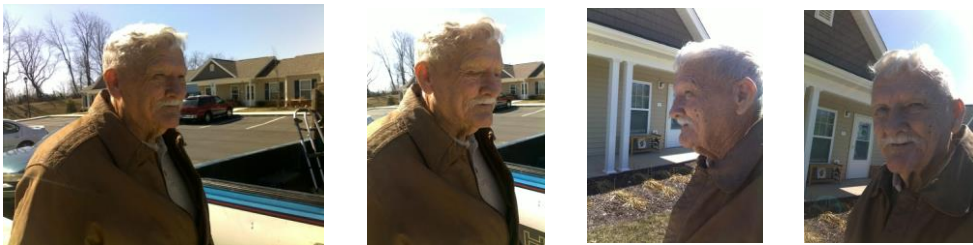
I have also found inspiration in Roman imperial portraiture and its links to royal iconography and ancestor worship. I became interested in this topic because of the intricate underlying imagery associated with ancient Rome's richly symbolic portraiture. This symbolism includes ideas associated with particular types of poses, positioning, facial expressions, age of the subject, clothing, included iconography, and physique. In my own work in portraiture, my subjects center on the elderly working class. I primarily focus on capturing likeness, experience, and dignity. Roman portraiture incorporates distinguishing ancestral traits that proclaim heritage along with a variety of poses and expressions that project confidence and legitimized power. Much of ancient Roman portraiture, as found in the Old Republic, strongly focused on experience and dignity. Roman verism in their portraiture has strongly affected both my graphite and watercolor portraits, especially in establishing the final layers in rendering the subjects of my artwork. This research in Roman artwork and culture greatly added to the subtle expressions in my own work in portraiture.

## Chapter 2: Reference Material

### **Working from Photograph**

I enjoy working from life when it is possible; but in my artwork in portraiture, in both graphite and watercolors, I primarily work from photograph. This is done for two main reasons: (1) because it is more convenient (less time consuming for the artist and sitter), and (2), a good number of my commissions are of individuals who are deceased.

One of the main issues that arises from working from photograph instead of life is that the particular image being referenced might not actually capture enough of the character of an individual in order for the artist to do an accurate portrait. The one photograph only captures one moment, which is often not enough to understand the subtleties of the relationship between an individual's facial features and their facial expressions. This is easily remedied by obtaining several photographs of the same individual from different angles, as well as different lighting, in order to gain a better understanding of the subject's particular facial sets and movements to better capture his or her likeness. In most of my portraits, the majority of the subject's face is rendered using only one primary image as reference material. Choosing the primary image is the first step in creating the portrait, however, the final details are captured using a variety of photographs.



*Figure 1*

## **Digital Image Adjustment**

The next step in my particular system of portrait drawing, after choosing the primary photograph, is adjusting the reference material, that is, boosting the contrast of an image, using a simple image editing program, to achieve a pure bright white and a deep dark black within the color and/or value ranges of the image. This is a necessary step with almost all reference material in order to help produce a drawing or painting with a wide range of tonal values and a strong level of contrast.

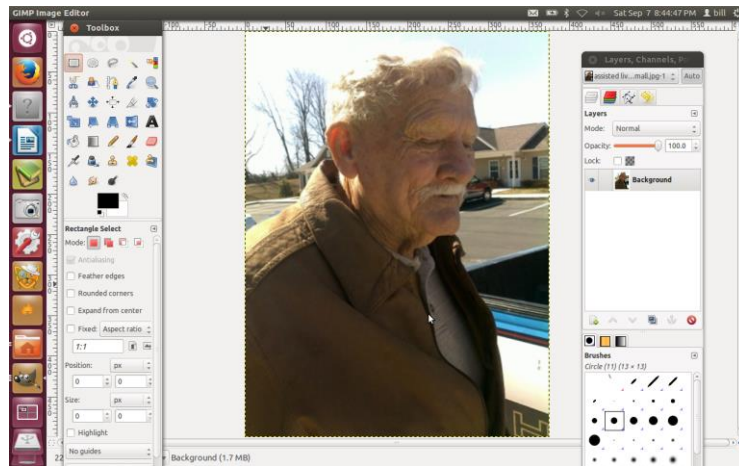
### **Image Adjustment for Graphite Portrait Demonstration**

Image adjustment can be simply accomplished with a large variety of image editing programs. Essentially, the only requirement of the editing program is to have adjustments for brightness, contrast, and color saturation. Being able to adjust the color saturation is an essential feature for editing colored images to be used for painting, but it is not necessary for adjusting images for work in graphite if there is an option to change the color scheme of the image to grayscale.

Once the primary reference image has been selected, the steps for adjusting the image for a graphite portrait are fairly simple:

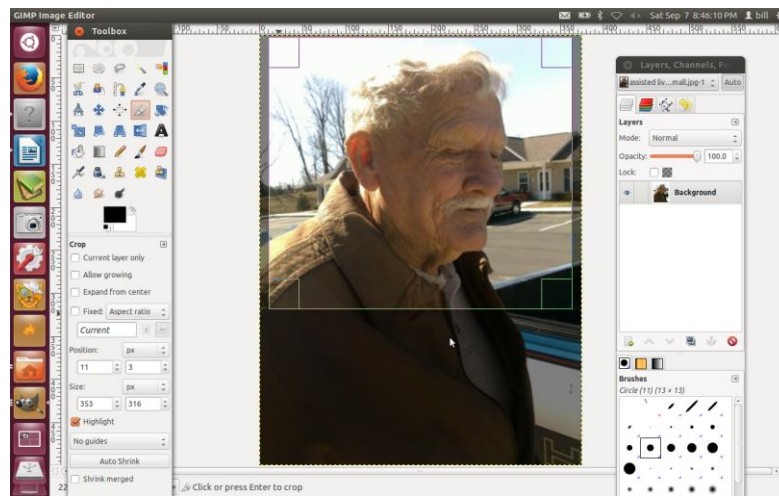
- 1) Open the digital image in the image editing program of your choice (I prefer GIMP Image Editor, as in Figure 2).





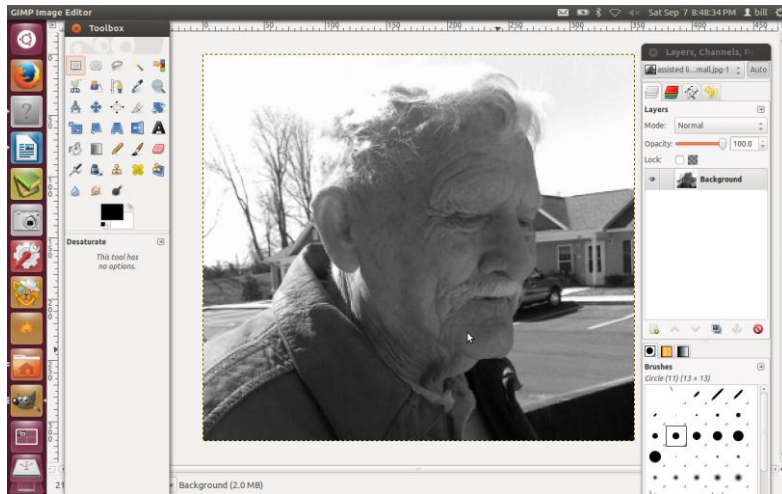
*Figure 2*

- 2) If necessary, crop off parts of the background. Doing this helps adjust the composition as well as isolating the components of the image so more of the editing can focus on the primary subject (Figure 3).



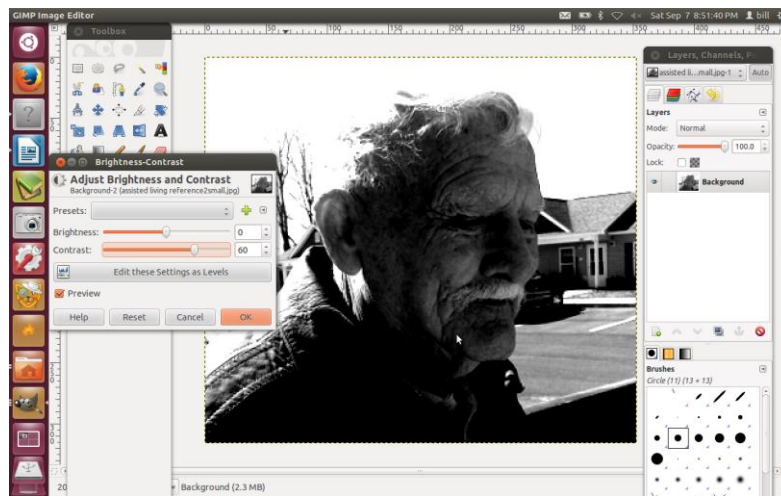
*Figure 3*

- 3) Desaturate the image, meaning remove all of its color. If there is no desaturation option in the particular image editing program available, the same result can be achieved by converting the color scheme to grayscale (Figure 4).



*Figure 4*

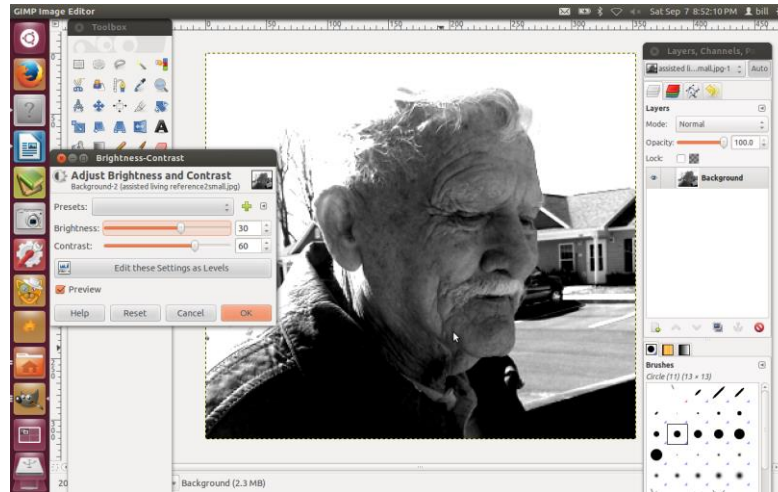
- 4) Raise and adjust the contrast until the image looks just a little too dark. It is typically better to overshoot this goal rather than to undershoot it (Figure 5).



*Figure 5*

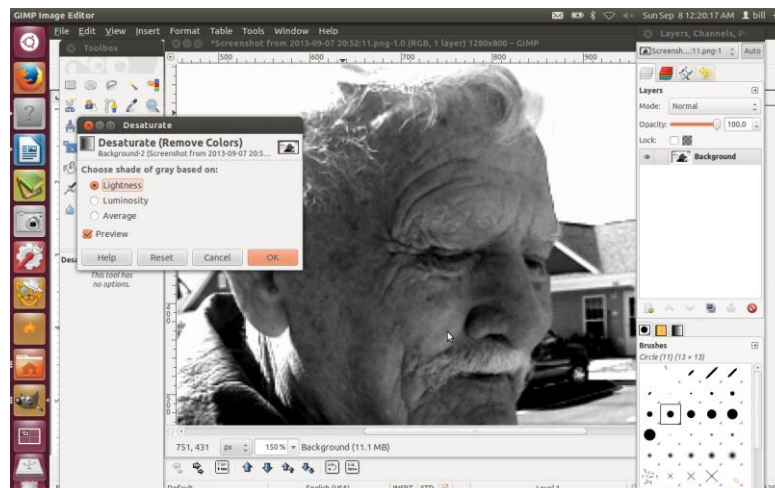
- 5) Slowly raise the brightness to increase the transparency of the image and bring out more of the subtle details. Be careful not to bring the brightness up too much or the darkest values of the image will be lost. However, if the image still does not have the desired range of tonal values after the brightness has been adjusted,

then the contrast and the brightness (in that order) can be further increased to bring out more texture (Figure 6).



*Figure 6*

- 6) Due to a few stray colors that can spring up, sometimes it helps to desaturate the image again after the desired effects are achieved. This will commonly happen, especially if large adjustments were made to the contrast and brightness. It does not happen, however, if the image's color scheme was formatted in grayscale (Figure 7).



*Figure 7*

7) After the desired textures are achieved, the image is saved and ready to be used.

### Image Adjustment for Watercolor Portrait Demonstration

The levels for adjusting the reference image for a watercolor portrait can sometimes be more subtle than for a graphite portrait, but it still takes just as much consideration.

1) Just as with the graphite portrait, open the image in the preferred image editing program (Figure 8).

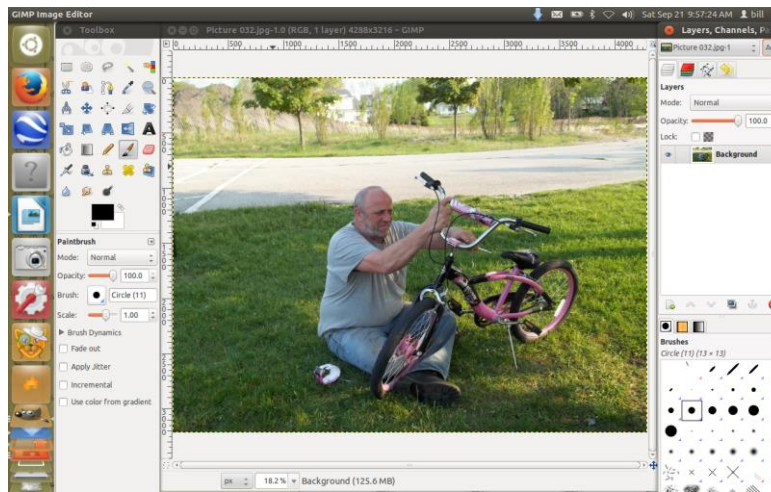


Figure 8

2) Crop the image to isolate the composition and main subject (Figure 9).

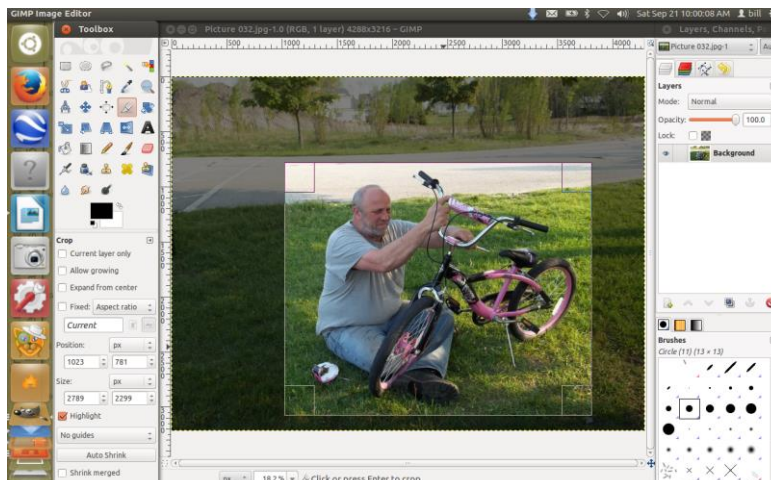


Figure 9

- 3) Increase the brightness first to lighten up the areas of interest. It is typically best to overshoot this goal instead of undershooting it (Figure 10).

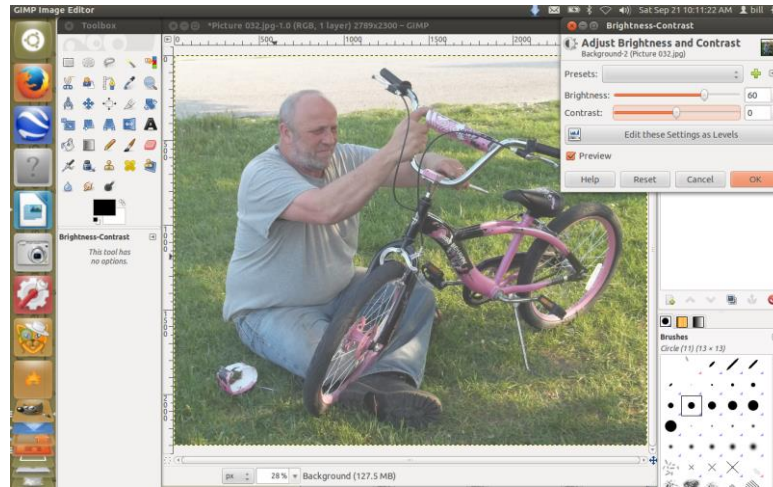


Figure 10

- 4) Then slowly increase the contrast until the preferred range of value is reached. If too much detail was lost from the reference image and/or the areas of light have become overly large after the contrast has been adjusted, then start over at step 3 and increase the brightness a little less before adjusting the contrast to create the darkest values (Figure 11).

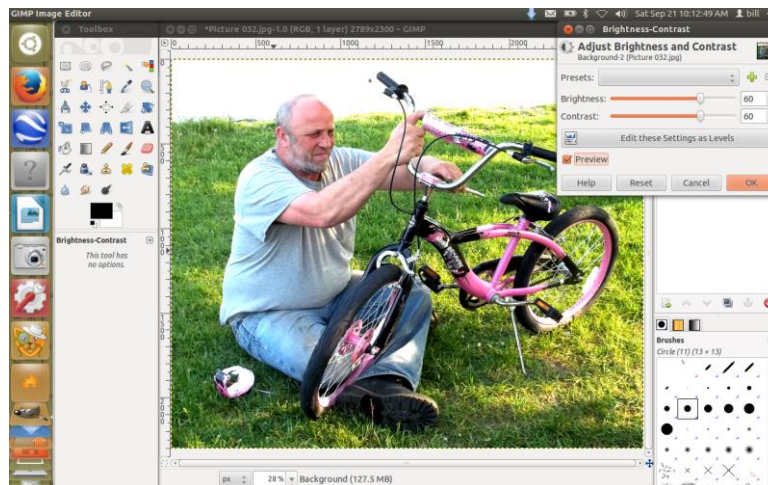
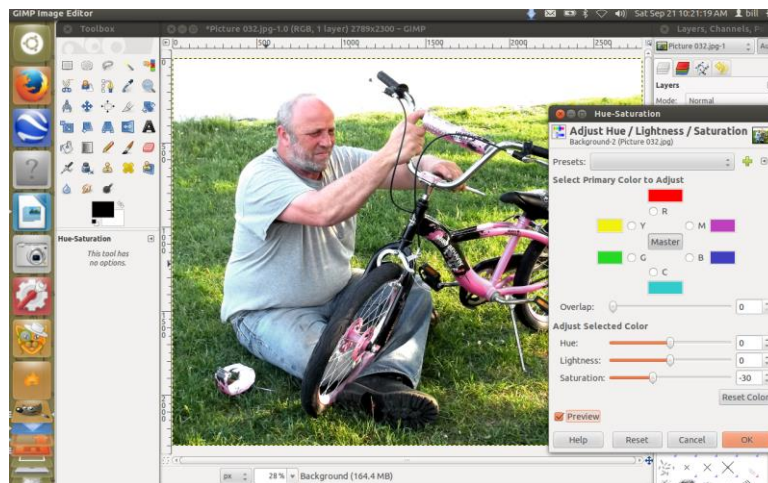


Figure 11

5) Once the contrast has been adjusted, it is very likely that the reference image will be oversaturated with color, meaning the colors are too bright, especially if the adjustments to the image were anything more than minor. To remedy this, slightly lower the color saturation of the image a little at a time until the desired result is achieved. The final result should be similar to the original image, saturated to taste, with a much broader range of contrast (Figure 12).



*Figure 12*

## Chapter 3: Drawing Tools and Materials

With most art materials, one typically gets what one pays for; however, this is not always true if the artist understands what he or she is looking for. In general, tools required for drawing are simple, inexpensive, and easy to find.

### **Basic Drawing Tools:**

- assortment of 0.7mm mechanical lead pencils
- no. 2B or 4B Graphite Stick (also called graphite crayon)
- white vinyl eraser
- kneaded eraser
- paper towels
- 12” ruler (or larger)

The preferred types of mechanical pencils are the inexpensive, plastic, multicolored, off-brands. Though a few may not work properly, a wide assortment of light and dark leads is found in the cheap variety that is easily comparable to, and sometimes even outperforms, the more expensive leads. The cheap plastic mechanical pencils also typically weigh half of what the more expensive ones do, which makes the inexpensive ones much more comfortable to work with and an all-around more practical tool. The leads in these pencils are also commonly darker than the more expensive ones, which really makes the inexpensive mechanical pencils a refreshing bargain.

Graphite sticks can be found at most art stores and they also can be ordered online easily. They also occasionally can be found in hardware stores, marketed as graphite log marking crayons. If graphite sticks or crayons cannot be found, then dark, softer-leaded carpenters' pencils are the next best thing. These larger sticks of graphite are used

for covering large areas with shades of gray, as well as producing bold lines and rendering certain textures.

The vinyl and kneaded erasers are not always as easy to find as the other drawing materials. Though not completely necessary, they are essential for ease of work. It is a good standard rule to avoid colored erasers, as the dye can be transferred to the paper. The rectangular white vinyl eraser is ideal for cleaning smudge-marks from large areas or for removing and correcting big mistakes in the layout. The eraser on the back of the mechanical pencil is very similar to the larger white vinyl eraser. It is used for small corrections and cutting out highlights and it can substitute for the larger vinyl eraser, but it wears out fast under heavy use. The kneaded eraser is for making subtle adjustments to the different values in the drawing. Its pliability is useful in forming shapes to lift graphite out of tricky areas.

Paper towels and various tissue papers are great for smudging and blending graphite on the drawing paper. They blend graphite much better than fingers, and keep the workspace cleaner by keeping more unwanted smudges off the drawing. Different types of textures of tissue papers have different types of blending qualities. Rough-textured paper, commonly found in industrial paper towels, and rough pieces of fabric are great for even blending. Softer textured tissue papers are equally useful. They are very handy in lifting layers of graphite off the drawing surface, which effectively lightens dark areas.

### **Drawing Surfaces**

One benefit of working in pencil is that drawing paper is reasonably inexpensive compared to other art surfaces required with other media, such as stretched canvas and



prepared hardwood panels. Paper, as a whole, is a more practical and readily available surface for producing graphite portraiture. However, finding quality drawing paper for rendering portraits in graphite can be a difficult search. In my experience, most standard and high quality drawing papers have surfaces that are too soft and/or too thin to stand against the many layers of crosshatching and scribbling involved with producing the highly detailed textures and contrasts that can be achieved in graphite portraiture.

### **Drawing Paper vs. Watercolor Paper**

In my portrait technique, standard drawing paper stretches, warps, and buckles under the stress of applying the multiple layers of graphite. The surface of the paper is also commonly damaged in the darker areas of the rendering due to the heavily repeated application of graphite, resulting in upraised fuzzy-textured spots. Many of the higher quality drawing papers are thicker, which partially resolves the problem of buckling, but they are also generally soft. This means that the paper does not contain much sizing. Sizing is a kind of glue that can add durability to the drawing surface, which is lacking in soft drawing papers. Even higher grade drawing paper can easily develop the fuzzy spots found on the lowest quality of papers. These two main problems when working with drawing paper do not occur when working on better-quality watercolor paper.

There is typically more sizing in better quality watercolor papers, which provides a much more durable surface compared to standard drawing paper. What makes this appealing is that it takes a considerable amount of effort to damage the surface of this higher quality paper with graphite. There is also little to no warping in watercolor paper compared to what occurs when using standard drawing paper with graphite in multiple heavy layers for highly detailed and contrasted portraits. Watercolor paper outperforms

drawing paper for rendering fine detail in graphite portraits on all perceivable levels if the right surface texture can be found.

## **Texture**

The texture of the drawing surface sets the primary level of work a particular portrait will require. Practical selection of surface texture for each individual drawing speeds the work. This also allows the best qualities of the paper, in its surface's relationship to the layered semi-transparent marks of graphite, to best represent rendered texture.

There are pros and cons to both smooth and textured paper for drawing purposes. A rougher surfaced paper is nice for producing a variety of randomized textures in graphite, but it is very difficult to achieve even blending and precise line quality on the irregular surface. A smoother surface works well for rendering a large amount of precise detail, but every bit of texture and illusion of irregular surface must be completely and painstakingly rendered from scratch through many layers.

The ideal situation is to have at least a small variety of papers to choose from, varying from smooth to rough, when deciding to draw a portrait. This can be frustrating due to the fact that most watercolor paper manufacturers produce surface textures just out of the range for work in detailed graphite portraiture. Cold press is generally too textured and hot press is commonly too smooth. Fortunately, some watercolor paper manufacturers do produce finer textured cold pressed or more textured hot pressed papers; this is where superior quality drawing paper is found. My drawing paper of choice is Saunders soft or hot pressed 90lb watercolor paper, though there are other equally good products available. The two main features to look for in the watercolor

paper is the hard sizing (for the durability of the surface), and the texture of the surface (to aid in the ease of rendering as well as the final aesthetic appeal of the artwork).

## Chapter 4: Drawing Technique

When drawing a portrait, it really speeds the process along if the basic boundaries of the shapes are established before the layers of tonal values are applied.

### **Basic Layout**

This is the first step of the actual drawing and is a bit tedious compared to the remainder of the process. The general idea is to produce a simple transfer of the primary reference material, preferably in graphite, to the prepared drawing surface (Figure 13). This can be done in a number of different ways, such as laying out a moderate sketch using a traditional grid, enlarging and



*Figure 13*

blocking out the composition from a projector, or by simply tracing a quick gesture with the use of a light box. Regardless of the transfer method used, there is no real need to try to capture any fine detail at this stage; this will be worked out in later steps. Leaving out the details at this stage also keeps the rendering looser and overall easier to adjust. The focus is primarily to correctly establish the boundaries of general shapes. Care must be taken not to make the lines too dark when establishing the basic layout. They will probably need to be erased and adjusted later.

### **First Layers: Isolating Black And White**

I start the layers by locating the darkest areas in the sketch and then loading them with graphite till they are as dark as is possible (Figure 14). This is done in order to get a good handle on the darkest value achievable in the sketch; everything else will be lighter.



*Figure 14*

The next step is to locate the lightest areas. The outside borders of these bright spots are lightly outlined and



*Figure 15*

then

everything else but these whitest areas is lightly shaded (Figure 15). This step takes care of isolating and preserving the brightest values of the composition. With the lightest and darkest areas already isolated and defined, the rest of the drawing has a way of working itself out on its own. The many shades of other areas will fall between these two extremes.

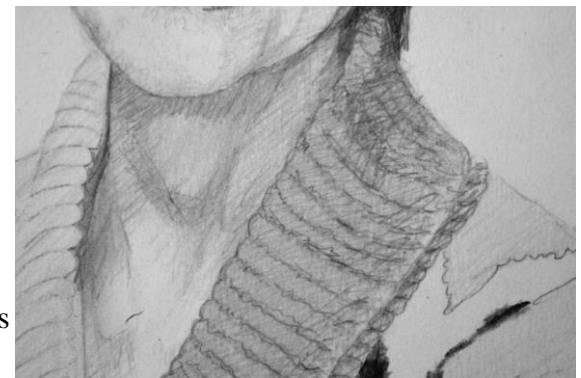
## Middle Layers: Developing the Middle Values



*Figure 16*

The many values get built up in these steps. When layering a portrait, I generally start with the eyes; they are the most important characteristic in capturing likeness. In these layers, the value and underlying texture is built up in the lightly shaded area between the absolute whites and the deepest darks of the sketch (Figure 16). I start this by rendering the pupils, irises, and areas around the eyes to help correctly establish the values (as well as the personality of the subject) in the rest of the portrait. The eyes are a central focus in portraiture, so strong contrast is used to direct the eye to attract attention and interest. In most cases, the areas of the eyes contain the most contrasted areas of the whole composition of the portrait. This has a way of immediately engaging central focus.

I mostly finish the eyes before moving on to surrounding areas (Figure 17). If they are not right and the likeness is not captured, then there is no need to continue to any other part of the portrait. Requiring much less precision, the rest of the portrait comes together fairly quickly.



*Figure 17*

## Final Layers: Rendering Surface Texture

As I build up the layers of graphite, to render the illusion of any particular surface, I pay special attention to the outer/final layers. I constantly discover more and more different graphite scribble patterns and techniques to simulate a variety of textures as I make the final adjustments in values of light and darkness of the rendering. This is the fun part of the drawing where I can really let a sense of Roman verism come through. The final layer is more lines and shapes rather than shades of gray. This is where all the surface texture is rendered. When the various surfaces have been touched up to the desired degree, the sketched portrait is finished (Figure 18).



*Figure 18*

## Chapter 5: Watercolor Tools and Materials

**Tools** (in addition to the drawing tools):

Standard Equipment:

- Big watercolor palette with a large mixing reservoir (for mixing and storing paints)
- Extra-absorbent white paper towels (for cleaning/shaping/preparing brushes, blending, correcting painting mistakes, and general clean-up)
- Large container for holding water (to dilute paint and clean brushes)
- Clean tape that leaves little to no residue (to mount watercolor paper and occasionally attach reference material)
- Light-weight support (such as 1-inch Styrofoam or Blue-board) of sufficient size to mount watercolor paper

Extra Equipment:

- Toothbrush
- Acrylic matte medium glaze
- Spray bottle
- Strong/opaque white gesso

Brushes:

- One-inch (or larger) wash brush (for wetting the paper, blending, and applying paint over large areas)
- 1/2 to one-inch bristle brush (for creating irregular washes and patting/scrubbing in irregular surface textures)



- 1/4 to 1/2-inch angular brush (for accurately rendering transparent and opaque layers containing medium to small shapes)
- 1/8 to one-inch flat brush (used similarly to the angle brushes, except for more distressed textures)
- Liner or script brush (for producing various line quality and detailed surface textures)

### **Information on Brushes**

Brushes, along with the rest of the standard equipment, are essential tools in producing quality watercolor portraits. Watercolor brushes tend to be very consistent with price vs. quality. The cheapest brushes tend not to hold enough liquid/paint to be a primary paint brush but, at the same time, they are easily abstractly manipulated. The more expensive brushes hold their shape and also can carry heavier loads of paint/liquid, but they are generally not nearly as flexible or manipulable as the inexpensive brushes.

As far as my painting style goes, I prefer the middle quality of brushes for watercolor. They function as expendable workhorses to produce textures that would destroy even the expensive and more durable brushes and they hold more paint than the less expensive brushes. But I don't completely limit myself to middle-quality brushes. Having a variety of both quality and cheap brushes is very helpful at times as well. Regardless of how much they cost (omitting the ridiculously expensive), all brushes have their uses.

In general, the middle-grade brushes tend to be the most versatile and practical brushes. There is also an added bonus. The middle-grade brushes, being less durable and destroyed faster under aggressive use compared to the more expensive and stiffer

high-grade products, still have some very practical functions after their original shape goes irreparably astray. These ‘hairy’ brushes are useful for applying a variety of textures that are unique to their particular shape, using a variety of paints, not just watercolor, that is not always possible with other brushes.

### **Watercolor Paints**

Below is a list of the required watercolor paints involved in my painting style. Quality of paint really does matter when painting with watercolor. Paints with the strongest pigment load possible are the most desired. The higher cost of these strong paints will not disappoint. On top of being a more beautiful and workable medium, a small bit of this concentrated color goes a long way compared to other watercolors. Generally speaking, it takes much less of this more expensive watercolor paint to do the same, and indisputably better, job of the less expensive paint. Below is a list of the basic colors used in watercolor paintings.

- **Black:** black is a useful color when working with transparent watercolor. Mixed with any number of other colors, black can produce a beautiful variety of color temperatures in unique grays, greens, and purples.
- **White:** white is not needed for transparent watercolor paintings, but it is absolutely essential for working with opaque watercolors. The stronger and more opaque, the better.
- **Colors:** at least one of each range of color temperatures is needed in transparent, semi-opaque, and opaque colors in my opaque painting technique, while my semi-transparent painting generally only requires transparent and semi-opaque paints. The ranges needed are:

- Warm reds (bright, cadmium, scarlet, Indian, etc. )
- Warm blues (ultramarine, bright, deep, bronze, etc.)
- Warm yellows (cadmium, sun, bright, Indian, hansa, etc.)
- Cool reds (carmine, rose, alizarin crimson, magenta, etc.)
- Cool blues (Prussian, cobalt, pthalo, cerulean, etc.)
- Cool yellows (lemon, transparent, bismuth, etc.)

### **Watercolor Surfaces**

There are a variety of surfaces available for watercolor painting. These painting surfaces are basically narrowed down into three main groups: boards, canvases, and papers.

Watercolor board is strong, doesn't buckle when wet, and requires no backing. On the other hand, it's heavy, hard to crop, and expensive. The painting surface of the board tends to be too dull, completely smooth, and rough on the brushes. The surface also tends to be too absorbent, and strong colors bleed easily and do not really lift off.

Watercolor canvas is preferable to watercolor board but it still has its drawbacks. The basic advantages of watercolor canvas are the endless clean lifting capabilities, ease of cropping, and lower cost. Its drawbacks can be worked around to some degree, but this takes a lot of time. The trouble with watercolor canvas is the way the surface holds paint. The canvas texture of the painting surface doesn't work well with watercolors at all. Washes of paint do not granulate well and the canvas is also not a very bright white. Paint barely sticks to the surface, and even dry paint smears with a misplaced fingerprint, while upper layers of paint dissolve lower layers. Like watercolor board, watercolor canvas really does not seem to work well with watercolor paint.

In the end, watercolor paper seems to be the surface that watercolors work with best. There is usually a decent amount of experimenting when finding, and appreciating, a quality watercolor paper that complements one's own painting style. However, there are generally two main drawbacks when working on paper: warping of the paper when wet and high vulnerability of the surface when the lifting of paint is required (this is especially bad in low-quality brands). Fortunately, these problems are easily scaled down by using the right kind of paper.

Heavier/thicker watercolor paper (300 lb.) buckles less dramatically when wet and eliminates the majority of problems caused by heavy warping with thinner papers. Some of the better-quality watercolor papers actually have a very durable surface due to the quality fibers as well as the quality and amount of sizing in the paper. Many of these papers can take a lot of abuse before the surface shows damage.

As with drawing paper, the ideal watercolor paper depends a lot on the artist's current personal tastes and the particular textures to be rendered in the artwork. Again, as with drawing paper, a rougher texture is good for producing a large amount of rendered texture, but it can be tricky with detailed washes and line quality. At the same time, a smoother surface is good for producing fine detail, but more of the texture has to be rendered from scratch through overlapping layers of paint.

If possible, it is handy to have at least a small variety of papers to choose from, varying from smooth to rough, when deciding to paint a portrait. At this time, I prefer Arches cold press, Strathmore Gemini cold press, and Saunders cold and soft press watercolor paper for painting watercolor portraits.

## Chapter 6: Watercolor Technique

I might get ideas from different images or doodle for fun, but I rarely get much use from studying the drawing or watercolor techniques of other portrait artists. The few times I have worked on drawing and watercolor exercises and studies of others, I found the experience to be tedious and uninspiring, mostly teaching me that I preferred other ways to use these mediums to produce my artwork.

My graphite drawings, in having perceivable individual layers, speak for themselves. There is no real mystery in interpreting the steps on how the artwork was put together. This is not the case with opaque or semi-opaque watercolors. The covering capabilities of these mediums make the techniques involved with creating the artwork much more difficult to decipher, let alone plan, because many of the under-layers can be mostly hidden in the final product.

Experience with other media, such as ink, acrylic, and oils, has allowed me to come up with my own unique techniques when mixing transparent watercolors with semi-opaque and opaque watercolors. I find that many of the watercolor techniques I use are unique to me; I also rarely see anyone else using this particular combination of mediums.

### **Basic Layout**

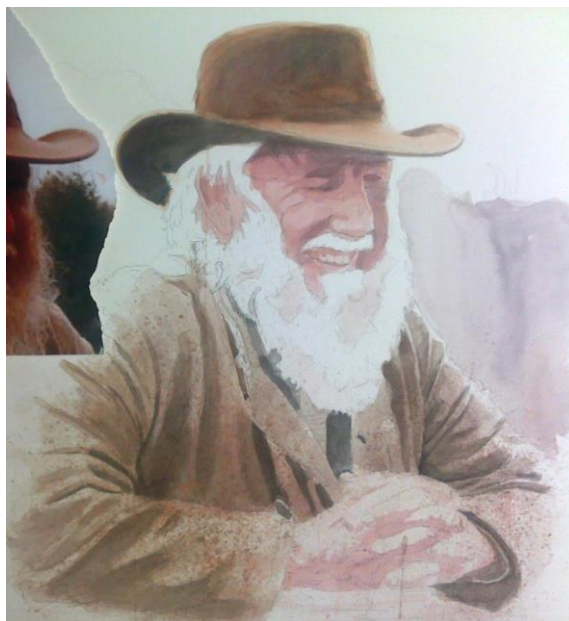
As with drawing, the first step of my painting is sketching out the layout. I do this to establish my boundaries, which is essential before starting any accurate portrait painting in watercolors. Using any transfer method of choice, establish the basic layout of the large shapes as done with a graphite portrait.

## Layout Details

When the largest shapes are accurately defined, take time to define some of the more subtle forms and shapes within the more detailed areas of the to-be painting. These more refined areas include details found in the face, hands, jewelry, clothing patterns, etc. Be careful not to draw over the areas meant to be kept white; sometimes marks over these areas cannot be fully erased.

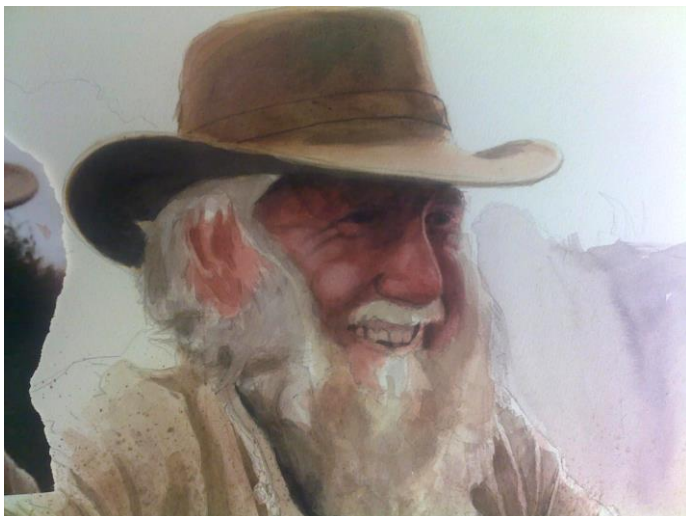
## First Layers

Generally, I begin my watercolor portraits with much the same steps many other artists use, with layers of washes of transparent watercolor to define tones and shades (Figure 19). Starting with the darkest spots, I begin to lightly color the layout and establish the basic large shapes, tones, and values in the painting.



*Figure 19*

More of the white of the paper is reserved in these first layers and these highlights are steadily carved and refined with the addition of new layers. In doing this, the basic shapes of the various components quickly begin to take shape. Also, I splatter and flick paint in the more roughly defined shapes of the composition at this beginning stage. This is a very useful technique to lay a good foundation to help build up heavily textured areas.



*Figure 20*

### **Second Layers**

Once the desired tonal and overall value effect is reached, the washes are then detailed with darker shapes and lines rendered with finer brushes (Figure 20). The chisel and liner brushes are very useful in these more precise layers. I take some

pains to save the white of the underlying paper for the brightest areas in order to reach the right accuracy of the surrounding values and colors.

### **Third Layers**

After the detailing second layers are added, the artwork is then slightly textured to pull more interest to the surfaces of the portrait (Figure 21). This is accomplished primarily with two techniques:



*Figure 21*

spattering and drawing.

Great surface detail can be created by carefully splattering thin layers of transparent and semi-opaque watercolor using a toothbrush or stiff-haired paintbrush. Drawing techniques, using a liner brush, can further define textures, patterns, and shapes. These marks and splatters really stand out when using semi-opaque watercolors over transparent watercolors. The watercolor can easily be finished with this type of surface detail acting as the final layer.



*Figure 22*

#### **Fourth Layers**

For my opaque watercolors, I push the painting layers even further. When the artwork is near the end of being a completed transparent watercolor painting, lacking only a few final details, I then purposefully dull the majority of the whites that I had

saved in the earlier layers (Figure 22). I typically do this by applying transparent and semi-opaque watercolors in especially heavy texture effects. These are the same techniques used in the third layers, intentionally pushed much further. This procedure knocks everything back from the surface of the painting. Knocking everything back is a very necessary step. It has to be done in order for the opaque layers to be capable of bringing the surface details forward. The strong opaque watercolors are then applied to the painting.





*Figure 23*

### **Final Layers**

These final layers basically involve applying opaque paint in various ways, using numerous application techniques, to create the illusion of whatever surface texture is desired (Figure 23).

The general process of rendering a randomized or precise texture or pattern is fairly simple but tedious. After the basic areas of surface texture are blocked in with opaque watercolor, transparent watercolors are then applied over the opaque layers to add further detail. Much of the final surface detail requires a lot of various drawing techniques using liner and/or script brushes.

### **Problems and Solutions**

Combining transparent and opaque watercolors was a bit tricky at first and I ran into a few problems with this development. The first and most obvious problem was that the white watercolor paint has a graying or cooling effect when painted on top of or around warm colored layers. I remedy this by covering the white layer with a color that is used to render light itself, hansa yellow. Even a very light layer of this unique color makes a considerable difference in bringing life back to the newly white painted areas, nearly completely eliminating the graying effect of pure white.

Underlying opaque watercolors also tend to bleed through the upper transparent colors, making the final product dull and muddy at times. By adding a little extra binder to the mix, this problem is resolved. The procedure involves either mixing a small bit of acrylic matte medium with the opaque paint before it is applied to the painting or by brushing a thin layer of watered down matte medium over the dried opaque layer already on the painting. The areas where I want opaque under-layers to bleed through are left alone. As stated before, the application of these final opaque and transparent layers can incorporate a number of drawing techniques including line quality, cross-hatching, stippling, and layering using the liner brushes.

## Chapter 7: Future Plans

Due to the rapid changes in my personal artistic development, I try not to make specific long-term scenarios for my artistic career. In the future I have no specific plans other than to keep developing my artwork. Through rendering what I see and feel, many new levels of perception come to my attention, which applies to more than just expression of art. I have no problem working in other fields to support myself if need be, but I have no desire to adjust my primary artistic development to produce simpler or easily mass-produced paintings incorporating just a small number of interesting layers and techniques. Though I appreciate abstract pieces for what they are, I prefer to lean towards more planned and controlled methods as the primary focus in my current artwork.

I do not put much weight to any work which I completed that came together by accident, since its main focus cannot be recreated because too much was left to chance. I deeply appreciate understanding how I put my paintings and drawings together. I base much of the sentimental value of my artwork on the new techniques I learned through creating them. If I did it once and understand how I did it then I can easily do it again, only better, because of my deeper visual understanding through the artistic experience.