

Max Hale - Acrylic Portraits - 9 June 2014

Max commenting how much he loves a new venue with new faces to meet, he encouraged us to jot down tips on art as he explains his methods and his thinking while demonstrating, he was relaxed and candid.



He painted on a canvas board with sap green and raw sienna base layer. This provides a mid tone useful against flesh tones. Throughout the study he majored on correct values, lights and tones. He asked David to make himself comfortable without crossing his legs, focusing his eyes on a spot on the other side of the room.



Max uses standard board, a standard pallet and never uses wet pads because he says the water permeates your paints. He would usually sketch to practice where lines go, like a golfer practices his swing. He looks to the shape of the head and face as a map to construct, and checks his measurements with outstretched arm and thumb on his brush handle. He always uses hog brushes to be able to feel the paint going onto the canvas.

Use lines through the face to denote its symmetry, don't make noses too long, check your measurements, the top of the nose is the centre of the head.

The most crucially recognizable area of the face is the chin to under the nose, the mouth gives character - the eyes maybe the windows of the soul but will not give you the likeness of the face.

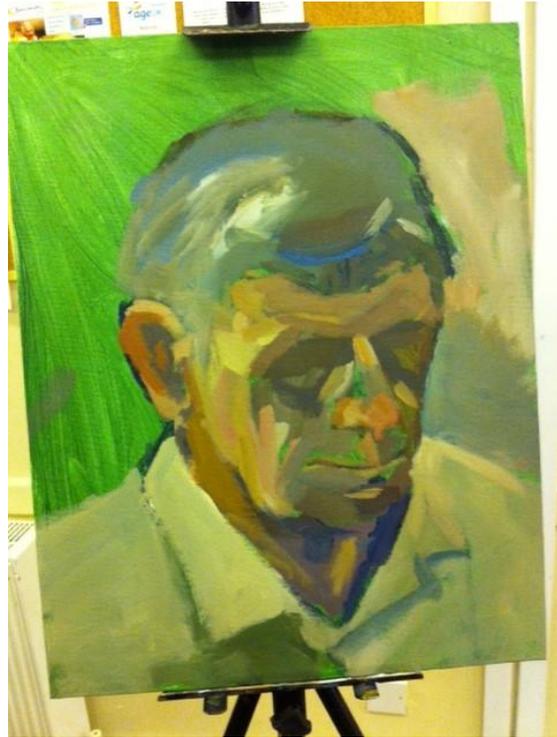
I draw with a dark brush so I can see the key line shape of the face; the cheek bones create the character. I then scuff in the values, tonal images and these flesh tones shape the face. Flesh tones in oil or acrylic can be made up using yellow ochre, titanium white and a fraction of vermilion red. You have to feel what you see, you wear your life on your face and life experiences create your cranial expression. Squint to lose the detail and gain overall form. I will often use window light to gain my inspiration, understand the shapes. Here light on David's shirt is quite bright, the shirt is contextual. The face is everything but cannot be floating without an anchor. I am using a hog brush for soft lines and edges. I only use flat brushes but synthetic brushes give hard wicked lines.

Round brushes give you undefined lines, flat brushes help you to control the shape. Paint in the darker tones overall before refinement. I often do horses using my sketches to understand the form before going further.

Start on a rough form of the total picture because what you do to one side affects the other.

I am going to scuff in a bit of background to help sculpt the face.

It is important to look really hard, look three times longer than you paint. Take time to study the subject, paint what you see, not what you think you know. My inspiration comes from what I see, keep your eyes and vision fresh. Don't worry about the background you can leave areas unresolved - when you have made your statement stop. It is not important to complete every part of the canvas.



I clean my brush all the time, but use little moisture on the brush, drying it on a cloth. I prefer Daler to Windsor & Newton, some paints, in particular colours, manufacturers don't get right. Try different manufacturer's paints of the same colour to see the difference. He then asked David to have a break; it is hard work to sit still for so long.

I have mapped out the basic form and now I shall close in and start to refine. Backgrounds change the value, use the same colour but alter the tones. He then proceeded to lighten the background. The same tone all over will reduce the 3D quality to bring your subject forward. Getting the tone values right is more important than getting the colour right.

Indian red in here will give the face warmth. Understand your pallet, swat up on your colour wheel and know which colour is the correct colour to use. For instance, if you want to make red lighter, don't put white in it, it will go pink, use orange to keep it fresher and cleaner. Read up on what works and what doesn't. He explained about Primary and Tertiary colours and how the latter can look dirty.



Max went on to adjust some highlights and tones subtly amending the form. I am going to use Artist's licence to make the tonal value on the nose work. Do what looks better to you.

At this point he concluded; don't labour on the ears, putting in the glasses by suggestion not slavishly putting in the complete frame. If you can't see something, don't put it in, it is all part of the illusion. Light catching a detail is crucial it makes bits sing and give it life.

In terms of cleaning my brushes at the end, I use a washing up liquid, followed by a brush soap and conclude with hair conditioner to restore the brush.



Thank you Max for all your insights and a relaxed execution of portraiture, shared with humour.

Brooke Snell 13.06.2014
