



# Back to Basics

## THE "SOFT" DAGGER STROKE

PART  
II

**AIRBRUSH MASTER TERRY HILL** RETURNS WITH  
ANOTHER ARTICLE IN HIS BACK TO BASICS SERIES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TERRY HILL

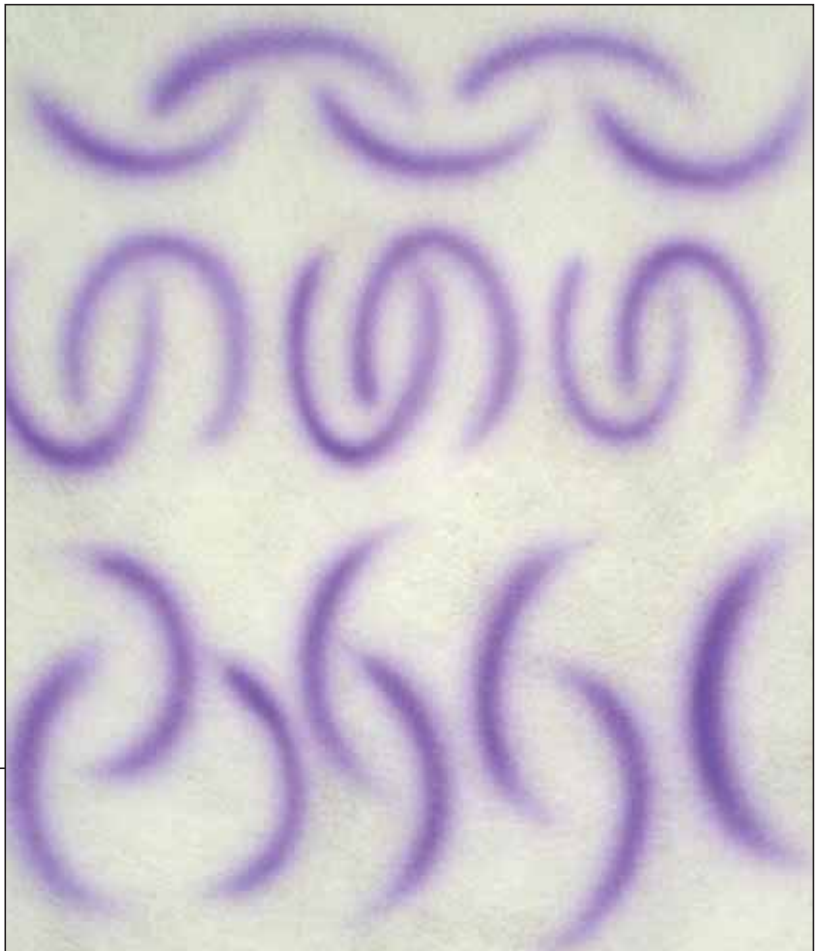
Once you master the dagger stroke, you'll be able to do just about anything with your airbrush.

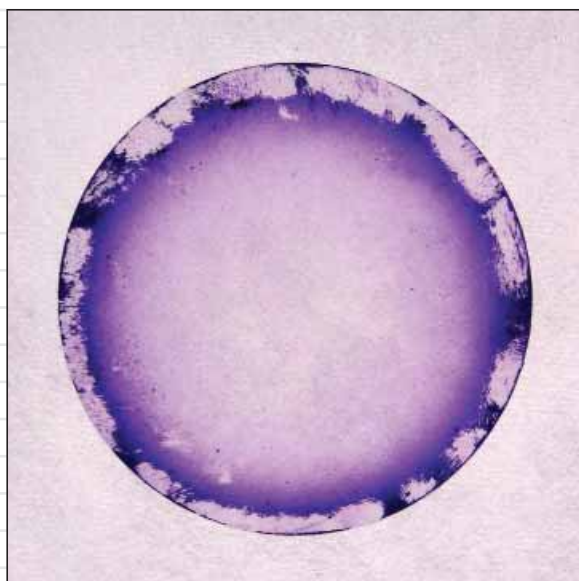
### FIGURE 9 DAGGER STROKES INTO SOFT, ORGANIC SHAPES

These shapes already look like things we might want to paint - eyebrows, waves, fish, and other shapes from nature. There is a dagger on each end of these shapes. Make a dagger stroke in one direction, then go back over the shape in the opposite direction, like a pendulum or rocking chair motion. Make a page of these soft, interlocking shapes, focusing on where you start and stop. Stay soft on the points. Don't bring your airbrush nozzle right down to the substrate before you stop the paint flow.

### A REAL-WORLD EXAMPLE

Now let's assemble our separate airbrush skills to produce some marketable art.



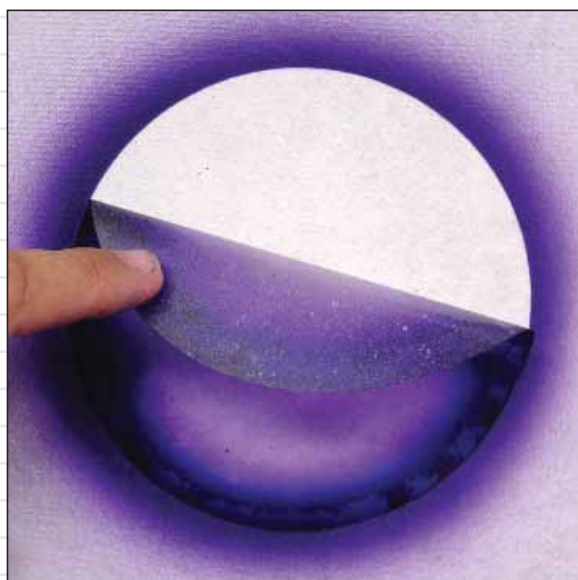
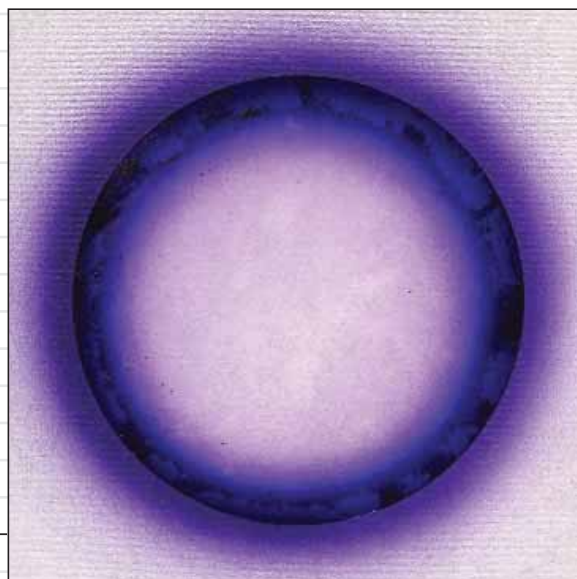


**FIGURE 10**  
**USE A CIRCLE TEMPLATE**

In this example, I'm using a piece of Lexan® polycarbonate as a stencil. It already has paint on it from a previous project which helps you to see where it is. You don't need anything fancy for this; any round shape will do. A round roll of tape, a plastic coffee can lid, anything. Place it on the substrate. Low-tack spray adhesive can help out here.

**FIGURE 11**  
**PAINT A CIRCLE**

Use your new knowledge to paint a consistent circle around your circle template. Keep the airbrush some distance away from the substrate, get a steady flow of air, and begin painting. Follow the circle, first clockwise, then counterclockwise. Try to shoot the paint along the edge of your template. This will create a solid, hard edge when you remove the template, and the overspray will gently wash out onto the substrate to give that classic airbrush effect.



**FIGURE 12**  
**REMOVE THE TEMPLATE**

Take your circle template away. Here, I'm peeling back the stencil I used. This is starting to look great! You'll notice how dark the paint builds up directly along the edge. Go slowly at first so that you can gauge how dark your work is.



# Back to Basics

FIGURE 13

**A 2-DIMENSIONAL CIRCLE**

Now we have this perfect circle, but how do we make it "pop" as a piece of great, quick art? The answer is to use what we know and make it appear 3-D.

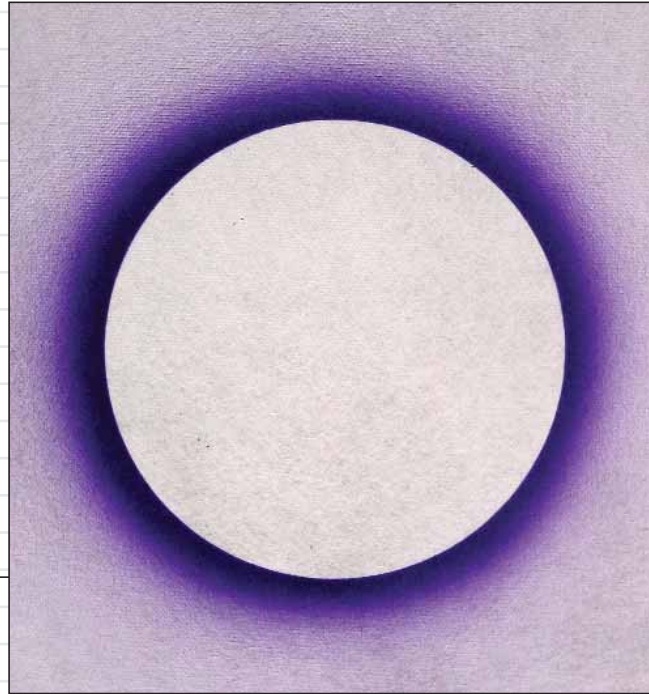
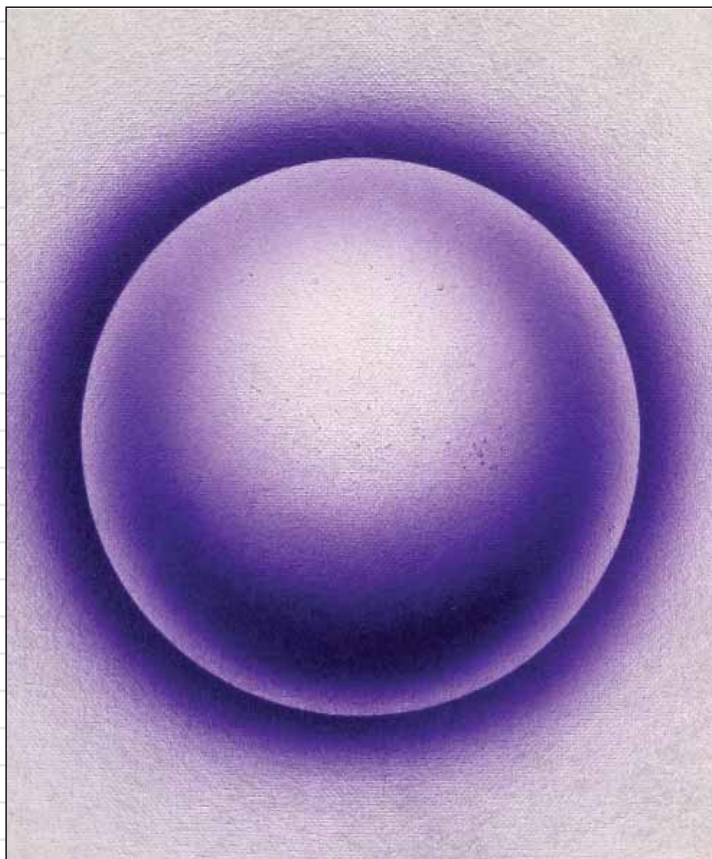


FIGURE 14

**IT ALL COMES TOGETHER**

Now comes the great moment. Look at what you have, what you know how to do, and use this photo as a guide. You can use those nice organic shapes you learned in Figure 9 to fill in the shadow and make the circle a sphere. Light on any object casts a shadow. Begin filling this shadow in using very soft, curving dagger strokes to shape the shadow of the sphere. You'll be moving left-to-right, and right-to-left. You'll also mimic the soft circles of Figure 7. Remember to keep the air on at all times and gently roll the paint on and off as you continue to move in arcs, creating soft blurry daggers as you slowly build up your shading.



Take your time, step back, and think. Keep your strokes slightly away from the already-painted, established outside of the circle. If you shoot some distance inside, the overspray will wash outwards and create a soft edge inside the hard, outside circle. As you spray towards the top, apply less paint. One tip here: beginning artists often try to paint a highlight, the bright spot where the light's shining, with a big blast of white. Things aren't usually that bright, they're more subtle. Notice in Figure 14 that the bright spot on the upper-front of the sphere really isn't that bright. In fact, there's quite a bit of overspray on it. But it's much lighter than its surroundings, and looks more natural.

# Back to Basics

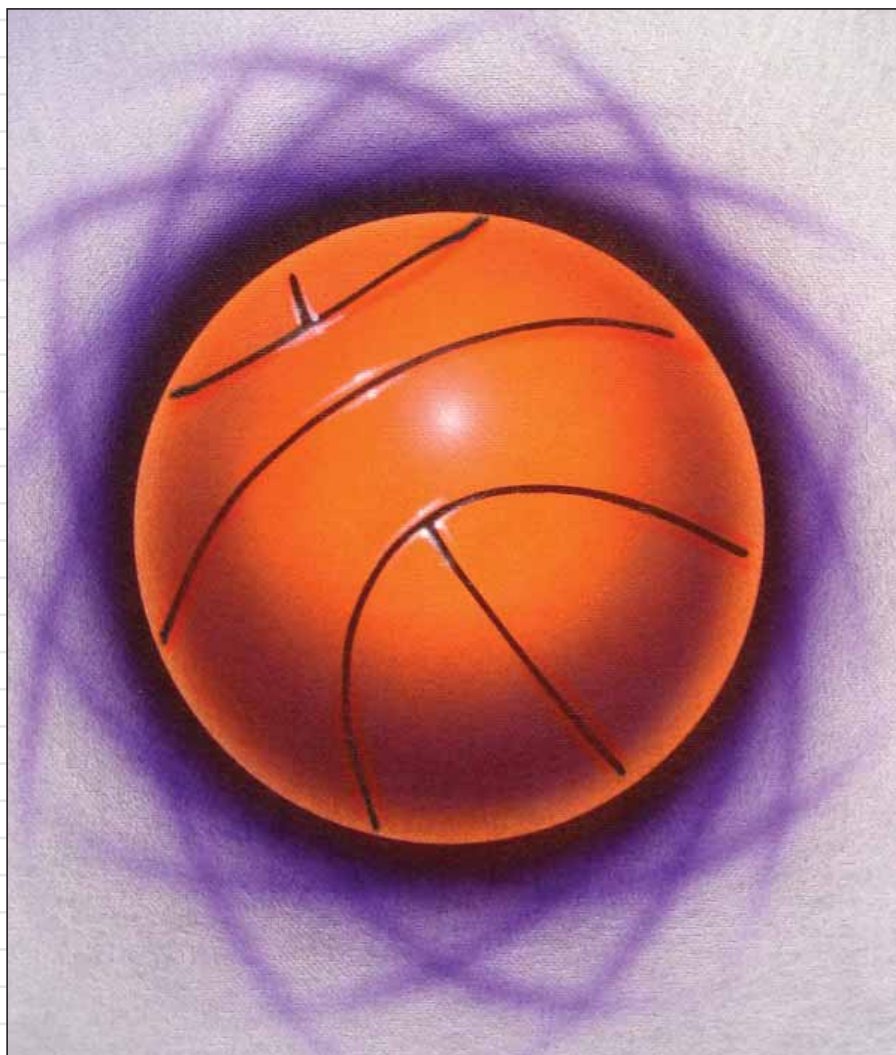


FIGURE 15

## SUCCESS!

The possibilities are endless. Here's a little reward for following along with all these abstract shapes and exercises. Using the same kind of 3-D sphere we painted in Figures 10 – 14, I've added some symmetrical, atomic strokes to the outside. They look pretty tricky, but they're really just soft dagger strokes! Look closely.

After shading the sphere with violet as in Figure 14, I've sprayed a uniform amount of transparent orange over it. The orange and violet together make an earthy brown color as they blend, creating the perfect shading and the illusion of a 3-D sphere. The shading comes through and looks "locked in" as a part of the painting. The detail lines can be freehanded, or can be masked and stenciled with black as I've done here. For final, professional touches, I followed up and sprayed subtle heavier borders of orange along the dark basketball seam lines. And for final contrast, I did add some white as highlights, but notice that it's used very sparingly. A little of that stuff goes a long way. There you go! A saleable design from a simple combination of the exercises we have learned so far. There's really nothing difficult about airbrushing if you'll just learn a few simple strokes!

**Terry Hill** has been airbrushing T-shirts in the Florida panhandle for 22 years. A leading force in the airbrush world, Terry co-designed the air compressor for Silentaire that bears his name, and he has become a leading innovator of new products for the airbrush industry. When he's not working at Airbrush Headquarters in Destin, Florida, he is the director of the distinguished Airbrush Getaway workshops.

