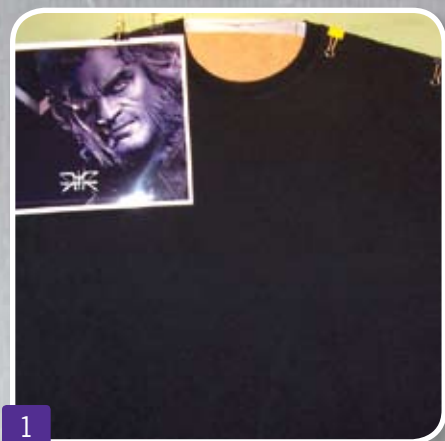




AN UNCANNY BEAST

LEARNING TO AIRBRUSH? LOVE THE FORGIVING T-SHIRT BY LUC BOVIN

In just three years, with lots of patience and perseverance, I've learned to airbrush on various surfaces, such as cars, motorcycles, helmets, scooters, murals, canvas, guitars, T-shirts, denim jackets, etc. Each requires a different technique, but the one most instrumental to my progress has been that used in painting T-shirts. This surface has afforded me, with the aid of simple shields, the best freehand practice possible. T-shirts are very forgiving, especially when using white on black. The following step-by-step details a T-shirt painting I did a couple of years back.



1



2



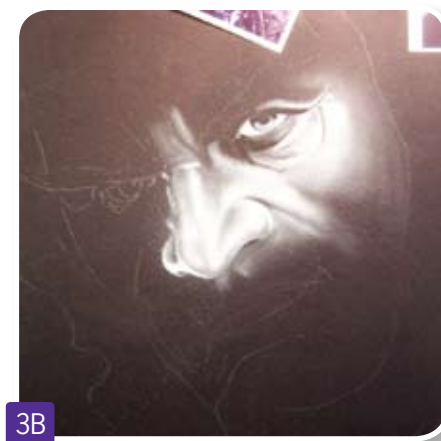
3A

1. I fitted the shirt over a quarter-inch Masonite panel cut to size and laminated with aluminum paper (not visible) to facilitate heat-setting. Paper clips held the fabric in place. Using an Iwata HP-BCS airbrush, I sprayed a fairly thick coat of Golden's GAC900 Fabric Painting Medium over the entire shirt. After it dried, I heat-set the paint with a hot iron over parchment paper—the same kind used in cooking—for about two minutes. Before heat-setting it's important to read the paint manufacturer's directions and make sure you're ironing in a well ventilated area. I repeated this step twice to create a super smooth surface and eliminate the so-called fuzzies. If you slight or overlook this step, the fibers in the fabric will have a tendency to stand up and catch the undesirable overspray when airbrushing. Proper preparation of the surface is key to producing a crisp, well defined painting on T-shirts.

2. Using an Artograph Super Prism projector, I transferred the subject onto the fabric, tracing only the main lines, facial features, and highlights with a

fine white chalk pencil. No need to get all the details or you'll lose them when you start painting. Look for key reference points. With the subject traced, I framed it with low-tack masking tape to protect surrounding areas. This was important because on the right side of the shirt the hair stopped in a very straight line. Note that the fabric was wrinkle-free. Now I was set to shoot paint.

3 A&B. With Createx white acrylic paint, I started on the predominantly white areas such as the highlights. When working on T-shirts I use at least four airbrushes at the same time because of variations in the levels of paint dilution. I mostly use an Iwata gravity-fed HP-CS and a side-fed HP-SBS from the Eclipse series; they do very well with the thicker paints like Createx. I mixed the white with Createx Transparent Base to a ratio of about 2:1 and worked at about 40 PSI. That allowed a better flowing paint, forced it deep into the fabric, and let me achieve the transparency level I needed to sculpt my subject. I concentrated on the bright highlights



3B

while making sure not to lose the dark areas. Also, I paid attention to the reference picture without getting lost in details. Don't try to over-detail at this stage; keep it simple.



4



5



6



7A



7B



7C

4. Here, the face is painted almost all in white without much detail. I shot a bit of black on the nose and eye areas to re-establish shading lost in white overspray.

5. I worked with black over the white for more detailing. Here again I employed levels of paint dilution to create various effects and obtain different levels of transparency, such as in the shadows under the nose and lower lip.

6. More black detailing. I paid close attention to the various levels of shading and to the soft and hard edges. That's key to producing depth in painting. Hand-held shields helped me achieve the various hard- and soft-edge effects.

7A, B&C. Here, I came back with white to put more emphasis on the bright highlights and detailed the eyebrows, beard, and hair. I constantly worked back and forth between the black and the white to get the desired effect, using masking tape to hide the leather collar while working on the beard.

8. Using over-reduced Pthalo Blue, I misted over the white areas. Do this in light coats because you can always add paint to get the desired effect, but too much can spell disaster.

9. Again using white to accentuate the highlights and black to redefine the shading, I paid close attention to small facial details, such as the wrinkles around the eyes, mouth, and lips. I also added white to the eyebrows and hair. I painted the leather collar brown, with subtle highlighting for the texture and the stitches.



8



9



10



11/FINAL

10. Finally, with the aid of several hand-made acetate shields, I painted the *X-Men* logo white.

11 FINAL. After removing the masking tape, I applied two coats of Golden GAC900 over the entire painted area, heat-setting between coats for three to five minutes. That gave the finished shirt a very smooth appearance. GAC900 is a liquid acrylic polymer emulsion that, when heat-set, offers a soft hand-laundering stability.

Luc Boivin is a self-taught illustrator for whom the airbrush experience began in May of 2005. He had often watched airbrush artists on television doing their magic on custom cars and bikes but had never before seen first hand, much less wielded, an airbrush. He read as much as he could about what he calls "this beautiful tool" before buying one and starting basic exercises. From that point on he's been hooked. Check out his work at www.lucboivin.com ■