

"My Ode to Dali"... a step by step progression

By Kathy Leib



Recently, I spent some time in Barcelona, Spain visiting my good friends David and Silvia(Gallego) Naylor. We took a day trip to the Salvador Dali Museum in Figueres, Spain.

I have not been so inspired in a very long time. I wanted to paint something in tribute to Mr.Dali. I like to paint details and interesting subjects. I wanted to paint something that was well thought out and had some meaning behind it. An image of Dali was to be the focus so this is where I started. At this point I had no clue of what I was going to do with the background. I knew it would come to me while painting Dali.

I started by just 'ghosting in' some color. For this, I use a base mixture of 20 parts Wicked Reducer and 1 part Wicked detail black paint. I keep a bottle of this particular reduction premixed and labeled. This is a typical mixture for 'ghosting in' the shapes however on this painting I reduced even further, as far as 30:1 (reducer:paint) sometimes a bit beyond. I just do it by feel and how it appears. I want a pale watercolor translucency. I am working on an Ampersand gessoed panel. I typically make my own but for the sake of time, I purchased this one. I am using a Harder Steenbeck Infinity with a .15 nozzle/needle and an Olympos HP 100B.



fig1

Now what I have done is just dust color onto my base drawing. It is very IMPORTANT to get your base drawing accurate and proportioned exactly right. If it is not right from the start, the whole thing will be off. You can transfer your concept/image/sketch in a few ways: free hand draw it, use a grid guide, trace or project. I use the project method for accuracy. I use an HB drawing pencil and just barely place my lines, just hitting the land mark edges: rim of eyes, edges of nose, lips, hair and so on....

Now I use just go in freehand and use hand held shields to define edges and shapes, all while spraying very lightly. It is important to keep things light. I usually only dust 1-2 layers at this point.

Now the detailing begins. I use a variety of erasers. My favorites are the pencil style erasers. I prefer vintage ones. In this case I am using one you can get easily at art stores.

You will see in the images below what I am doing. Tiny scribbles all over. I do this in areas where there are VISIBLE pores. Really LOOK at your reference image or where you KNOW they will be visible. Generally speaking, the nose, chin and cheek area below the eyes, have the most visible facial pore textures.



fig2



fig3



fig4



fig5

Now I am moving to the forehead area and the hair.

For the forehead,fig6, I use a linear stroke almost in an x pattern combined in some areas with my scribbling motion. Creating the hair is no different, its just directional linear strokes. As you see in fig1, I starting detailing this early and continue all the way through.

Now the texture of the skin is different in certain areas of the face. You just basically look at your image and decide what works. this is what works for me. As you can see below, here is the detailing I have done to the eye so far.



fig6



fig7

The eye, fig7, is an area of extreme focus for me. I like eyes. I feel they MAKE the painting.

I tend to start my painting, working in the eye area first, then I jump around and develop the rest of the face when I get bored in one area.

I might jump from the eye to the hair...just depends on how I feel at the moment.

At this point I have been working a few hours so at this point I might walk away for the day or take a break. It is VERY IMPORTANT to take breaks. If you paint when you are tired, frustrated or in a hurry, you will make mistakes. It is key to enjoy what you are doing because that will come through in your final product. It is about details and doing your best work. A portrait take me around 40 hours, give or take, to complete. They take intense concentration and focus. I prefer to work undisturbed so finding that kind of time, is difficult....so frequent breaks are KEY.

In the images below, fig9, you see I have added more color, now it is all about layering and detailing. I will continue to use erasers and shields where needed. Now I begin to tweak my paint mixtures, making them stronger for some areas such as the hair. It is important, for hair, to keep the strokes random. Hairs don't all go in one direction. This is not a new discovery, it has always been this way. Hair is messy, they cross one another with wild stray hairs here and there. Mess it up...its about having fun here!



fig8



fig9

In the images below, you can see where I have added more color, tweaked some reduction ratios... It's still all about layers, details and adjusting values now. Keep your light colors light and your dark colors dark. There are very few pure white areas in a painting...color or monochromatic. I like to error on the side of caution and keep things light. Easier to add more paint than it is to take it away.



fig10



fig11



fig12



fig13

Now that I have my main image pretty well detailed and nearly complete with the exception of some value adjustments, I start thinking about the background. I have already laid in a bit of color to start things out.

Now for this part, I have been thinking all along about what to do. I decided with the central image being Dali with the magnifying lens what does this mean/imply? For me it means 'seeing the details' and 'being introspective'. I decided to continue with what I like to do and add some mini portraits in the background. I decided images of those who inspired Dali to paint would be fitting. I did some research and chose: Sigmund Freud (near Dali's leftmost ear, fig15), May West (below Picasso, fig 17), Pablo Picasso (fig17), Georges Seurat (fig18) and of course his wife Gala. I added a couple micro paintings of his most famous work. At the top of his head is "The Elephants", figs 17 and 18, and to the right are portions of "The Persistence of Memory" (as seen in the finished image) and a painting of Gala, "Mi muter des nude...", fig 15.

For these images, I gathered my reference photos and just roughly and quickly freehand sketched these in background by sight. I used no projector or stencils. I painted these in using the same techniques but adding tiny, tiny details with a #00 fine liner brush and reduced paint.



fig13



fig14



fig15

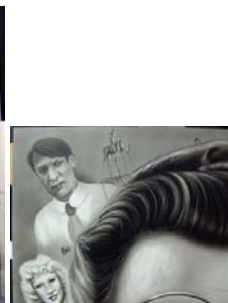


fig17



fig18

Now that the background is complete, I tweak any values and add any tiny details here and there that may have been missed. There are always quite a few. I let the painting rest a few days, looking at

it to see if anything needs to be adjusted. Once I am happy, I clear it with several coats of a UV inhibiting art clear coat. I used Krylon Gloss, UV Resistant acrylic coating. I like this about the best. And now we have our final product as you see below...



I hope this has been a fun and helpful read! Now go create something but most of all...enjoy it!