

# A Method of Creation for Digital Painting

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I am revealing my digital art “secrets” to dispel the misconceptions people have about computer-generated paintings being nothing more than photographic manipulation. These stereotypes are encouraged by theories perpetuated by uninformed individuals who do not understand the concept of unaided “photorealism” and the assumption among many amateur digital photographers that creating a digital painting is simply a matter of adding a Photoshop filter to a JPEG with a click of a mouse. I believe that such thinking is wrong-headed. For this reason, I would like to demonstrate my methods.

Please keep in mind that I am the furthest thing from being a trained painter. I am just a cartoonist. Generally, I'm lazy and I lack the practice necessary to create true masterpieces. Nevertheless, I was kicked out and/or dropped out of enough art classes/programs, and paid enough attention as an art model at classes using the Atelier Method, to actually learn something about creating photo realistic images without having to trace a photograph. My proportions, textures, and masses may not always be perfect, but I do follow basic rules that any artist striving for a likeness should aim for. Notice that I said likeness, not copy. This is very important distinction for the debunking the type of wrong-headed thinking that prevents a large portion of the art community from giving digital painting, or for that matter realism, the respect it deserves.



I worked on a digital portrait for my beloved friend, and fellow artist, Ashbet. The splendid photograph by P.L. Meisel pictured here was my inspiration. Observe that photo very carefully, and see how a cartoonist who lacks extensive training, create a work of digital painting without needing to rely on the photo for anything more than reference.



## Line

The first course of action was to figure out the shape of the face as well as the color scheme. I made a very basic gesture drawing to figure out where everything fits in.

## The Color Map

I mass in my gesture. I referred to this rough drawing, as I worked on the final work of art.

## The Cardboard Box Drawing

To prove that it is possible to draw an semi-proportionate image without mirrors, cameras and tracers, I used an Itoya Doubleheader Acid-Free Ink Pen and menstrual blood on a cardboard. I did not use a pencil, since the other media used are more permanent and more difficult to correct.



Admittedly, the use of menses was rather gimmicky and can be fairly characterized as an “icky” thing to do. However, I did it to get the attention of pretentious pseudo-elite who are addicted to theory, to the point where a museum of art would auction off a popular Bouguereau painting after keeping it away from view for years, simply because of the perception that technical competency negates any sense of artistic integrity and true emotion. The finished digital painting may strike some viewers as sterile, and overly sentimental, but the process is anything but “quaint.”

If anyone wants theory out of me, then my theory is that in order to create technically competent beauty, one must have enough emotion to possess the motivation necessary to work on a piece for many grueling hours. In my case, my wrists were so hurt after the piece was done, that my hands were radiating with a stabbing pain sensation that lasted for days. My hands were actually red with soreness. Painting with a mouse at a flat angle is not fun, but it is an experience that I often find rewarding. In digital painting, there is no drying oils or erasers to slow you down and force you to think. Unlimited correction options have the potential of encouraging the artist to push herself to limits beyond what is possible in traditional media. Whether this is good or bad, is a matter of debate, but it is my reality.



*(Note: Digital photo of this drawing varies from the actual cardboard painting. The JPEG was digitally modified in 2005 for submission in the “box doodle project”.)*

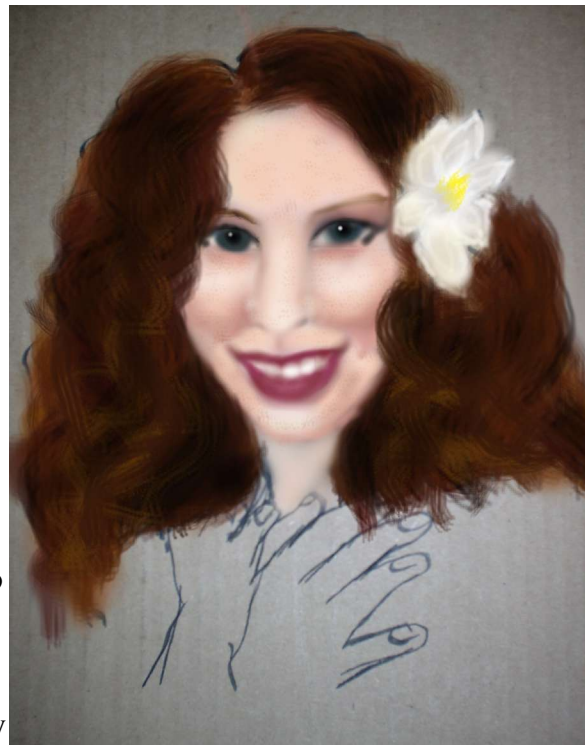
## Mass and Shading

I took a digital photo of my box and scanned it. I then proceeded to use the information I gained from the color map and mass to create a virtual underpainting. Note that my under painting is not very colorful. That's because I was interested in making sure my shading, my texture, volume, measurements, anatomy, blah, blah, blah, was relatively accurate. Notice that I said anatomy. It is ideal to work from a live model when one draws to make sure things such as bone structure are correct. This is absolutely essential in the creation of an accurate representation of a three-dimensional object. Alas, I did not have Ashbet handy, so instead, I relied on my own knowledge of anatomy and devices such as a mini skeleton replica to help overcome the flattening distortion that photography causes when translated into a drawing. Measurements using the original photo and the skeleton (or in a perfect world Ashbet) assist me in the creation of the finished work..



## Corrections

After making the appropriate corrections (except for the nose, I needed to work on it some more,) I created the basic framework for the "photorealistic" likeness with a slight pose shift and dry hair. I left the hands alone on purpose, so the art police can check that this is in fact the same cardboard box drawing.



## The Finished Piece

After making further modifications and refinements (such as adding freckles and creating more definition,) I sent the work to Ashbet. I allowed her to correct some structural problems. Then she took the liberty to crop the image and gave her likeness updated makeup. We fought a tiny bit over the hair, but we eventually settled on a common ground. Finally, I smoothed out the skin surface as much as my software

would allow me. The final piece can be seen below.

I hope that this information proves useful in creating new perceptions about digital art and perhaps, foster an appreciation in more traditional media. People should feel free to “steal” these techniques. As more artists who acknowledge the contributions of the past become proficient in new technologies it is my hope that many of the misconceptions that inspired this article, will eventually fade away. Serious art should be judged by merit and content, and not by the choice of media.



*The digital painting featured in this article is available for \$90.90 (plus shipping, and sales tax) from VAS Littlecrow on a limited-run of fourteen saa paper prints. The original JPEG was destroyed upon completion of the printing to ensure rarity value. The image can be framed upon request for an additional fee. For more information please email [vanesa@vaslittlecrow.com](mailto:vanesa@vaslittlecrow.com) or write to VAS Littlecrow, PO Box 83, Rice, MN 56367.*