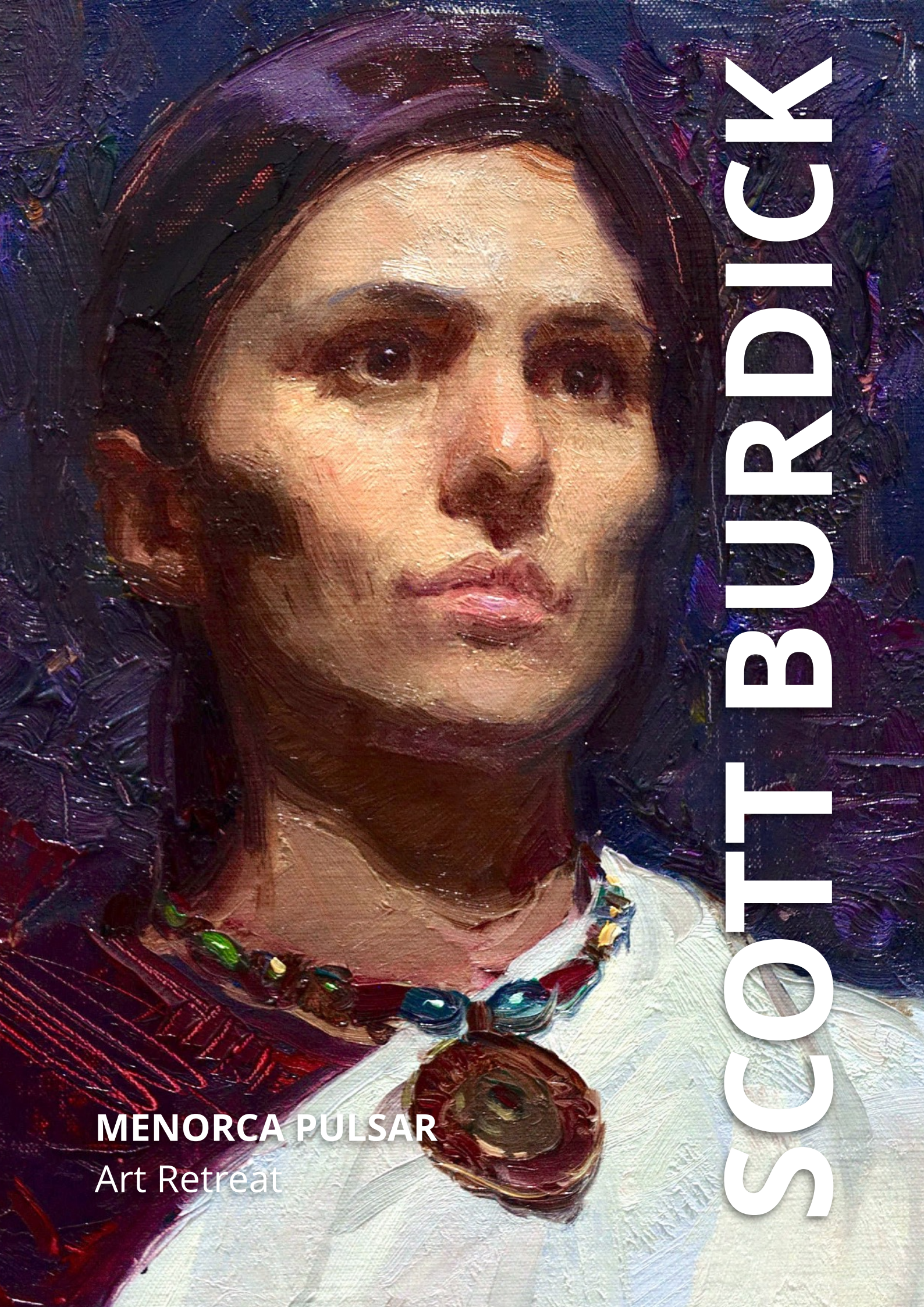


SCOTT BURDICK

MENORCA PULSAR

Art Retreat

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS BOOK

My name is **Carles Gomila**, artist and co-founder of **Menorca Pulsar**. **In this book I will explain everything I learned at Scott Burdick's workshop, organizing every note and picture I took**.



While there is nothing like attending a workshop and living with the teacher and his tribe at our Art Retreat, I understand that not everyone can attend, either because of money or because of dates. So if you could not come, I'll explain everything to you here in the simplest and most summary way possible. I hope you enjoy it and take advantage of it.

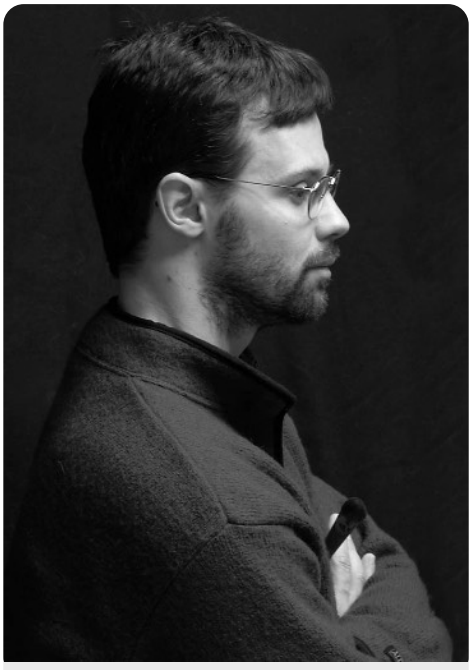


Carles Gomila, January 2018, Menorca.

This booklet was originally written in Spanish and has been translated into English by **Jorge Fernández Alday**, the other co-founder of Menorca Pulsar. That's it, my friends, everything you see is done and organized by us, two simple guys. We are very crazy, but we love it! 🤪

WHO IS (REALLY) SCOTT BURDICK?

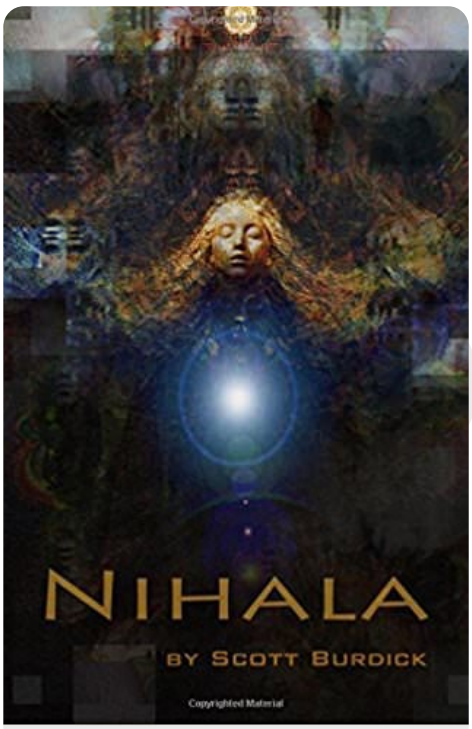
Scott Burdick is a vivacious but calm guy who does not look his age. When you chat with him, it does not take long to suspect that an intellectual beast hides behind his modesty, but he pretends nothing. And he explains what he does as if it was nothing.



Chicago, 1967. Married to artist **Susan Lyon**.

If you ask him for his opinion about a challenging topic, his answer will never be black or white. As a painter, he knows that the world is made of colored grays and as an artist, he knows that he must absorb all that's good in this world: literature, cinema, philosophy, history, science... He is a simple guy with a simple life, which makes him a great artist and teacher, as well as an excellent conversationalist.

After spending five days with Scott Burdick I believe that his best virtues are the ability to concentrate, the ability to work, and the ability to understand that anything is possible if you have enough patience. In a dispersed and immediate



Nihala, his last novel.

world, focused and patient people shine like a supernova.

And Scott Burdick shines despite his modesty.

It’s these virtues that push him to wake up at dawn and start writing before you start painting in your studio. Didn’t I tell you? **He also writes novels!** This is Scott Burdick, a calm but tireless man. Simple but wise. Balanced, tenacious, patient.

He is one of those guys who, although being open and sociable, will not waste time on social networks. You’ll find him writing and painting.

And that's very cool because that's what being an artist means.

WORKSHOP SCHEDULE



Below you'll find all the details about Scott Burdick and Susan Lyon's portrait workshop.

You can watch the video we made HERE



«I am not concerned with getting a likeness. My focus is on getting the drawing, shapes, values and colors correct, and trusting that this will result in a likeness.» — Scott Burdick

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN?

Scott Burdick and Susan Lyon are a super and charismatic couple of artists who make a perfect team.

This is an academic workshop, complete and full of fundamental methods. It will force you to ask the right questions in order to observe only the essential in the model, opening your eyes well to see color and squinting to see value.

Very briefly, this is the knowledge you'll get from this workshop:

- ✓ You'll learn to paint in a reflexive way, not reactive.
- ✓ You'll learn to be responsible for the process, not the result
- ✓ You'll learn to think plastically, not just developing paintings.

- ✓ You'll learn to really enjoy those good habits that were always suggested, those you're not applying because you find them boring.

OIL PORTRAIT PAINTING

Attendants will paint five portraits, one per day, with a different approach to each model. Exercises are designed so drawing, value, color and technique are deeply absorbed.

Each day starts with a different model, different lighting and different approach. Live demos and master classes will be done in the morning and in the afternoon it will be your turn with personalized attention.

You may find five demo mornings too much, but it's not with these teachers: this couple are so skilled, they know so much and are so devoted to sharing their knowledge that you will not want to miss a single minute.

...And their approaches are so different that you'll have the chance of studying and comparing two completely different master's techniques.

DAYS 1 & 2 — VALUE

These two first days you'll be working on drawing and value, and you'll start to internalize this workshop's motto: Squint and compare. Slow down. Work carefully.

Something will click deep inside you and you'll start noticing, like magic, that your painting transforms.

DAYS 3, 4 & 5 — COLOR

These last three days you'll explore color and be painting thicker, more focused and more decisively. There'll be a deep talk about how to handle paint, how to mix colors and how to build shape.

Make sure you bring enough oil paint because we're going to load our brushes a lot.

SUPPLIES LIST

Brushes
Scott Burdick recommends buying brushes at **Dickblick** or **Rosemary & CO**.
He also insists on bringing some big brushes, because if you want to cover big areas easily you'll get frustrated if you don't have them. Bristle fan brushes are very good for painting big blocks with interesting brushstrokes and scrubbing.



Bristle brushes:
Dickblick — he likes series 5150 & 5131, and suggests 2, 4 & 6 sizes.
Rosemary & CO Ivory Long Flats — 6, 8 & 10 sizes.
Rosemary & CO Ivory Filberts — 4, 6, 8 & 10 sizes.

Mongoose brushes:
Round — 3 & 4* sizes.
Filbert — size 1*
Long Filbert — 4, 6, 8 sizes
Long flat — 4, 6, 8 sizes

*These are his favorite brushes when painting small head studies.



Others:
Kolinsky sable pointed round, good for details — size 3 You'll also need a painting knife about 1,5 inches long.

Oil paints and solvents
The brands Scott Burdick mostly uses are *Winsor & Newton* and *Rembrandt*. You can use any other professional oil paint brands, though he suggests these.



The Gamsol solvent is completely odorless and it's the best one, Scott Burdick will not accept any other inside the studio.



These are Scott Burdick's oils: *Gamblin*, *Winsor & Newton*, *Rembrandt*, *Michael Harding* & *Sennelier*.

Palette

Titanium White
Cadmium Yellow
Yellow Ochre
Cadmium Orange
Cadmium Red
Alizarin Crimson
Transparent Oxide Red or Burnt Siena
Viridian
Cobalt Blue
Ultramarine Blue
Ivory Black

Supports



Scott Burdick recommends **CENTURION** panels, 9x12" up to 12x16". Besides that, if model composition requires it (props, hat... etc) you could use something bigger, about 16x20'".

Recommendations



Wet box — You'll need a "wet box" for carrying panels. You can find them at Raymarart.com and Canvaspanels.com, both sites sell them with a soft foam interior, just make sure to buy a size that fits the size of the panels you bring. Scott Burdick always travels with them.



Hat or cap — Scott Burdick always uses them to avoid parasite lights.



Camera — We won't work from photographs, but he recommends taking pics of the demos and models so you can keep working on your paintings once back home.

SON TRIAY, ART RETREAT



Watch the video

Son Triay house is located on a high plateau of Menorca's countryside, surrounded by 126 hectares of agricultural land, pastures, and forests. Its quiet gardens are just a few kilometers away from south coast virgin beaches.

This mansion is one of the best examples of neo-colonialism architecture, influenced by Palladio, a legacy of British domination in Menorca.

Before the 19th century its name was Binicalsitx, but after being burnt down by north African Berber pirates in 1800 it was renamed as Son Triay.

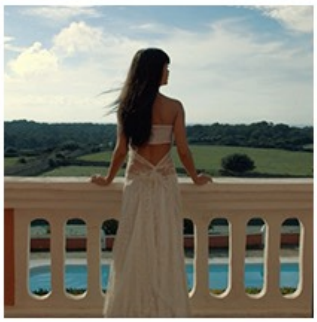
In 1995 the house changed its use and became an agrotourism spot, keeping its original features, rural tradition, and typical products manufacturing function.

Today, it's our Art Retreat at Menorca Pulsar.

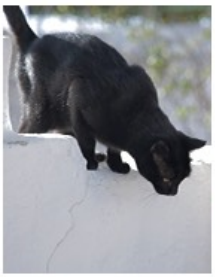
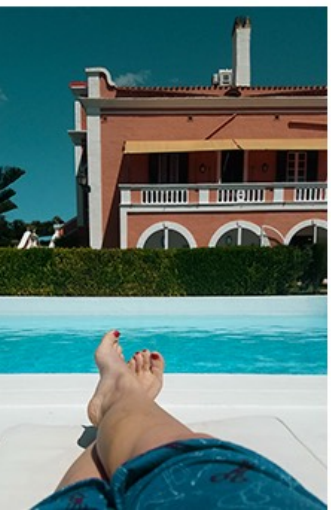
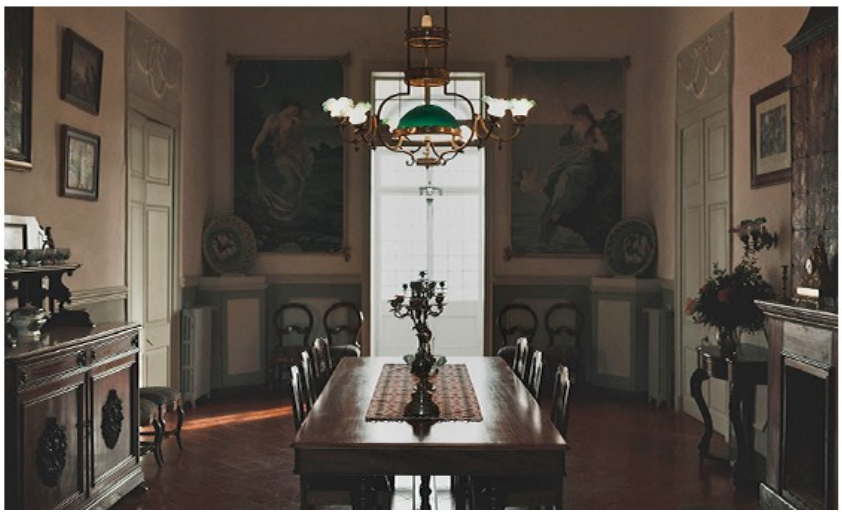









I.

RECOMMENDATIONS

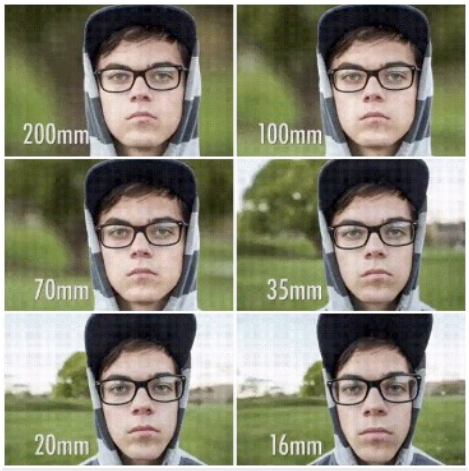


Anders Zorn showing off his minimalist palette.

GET A HARMONIC PALETTE

Mixing colors is not a piece of cake. And a palette with many pure colors will be very difficult to handle. So you'd better have a palette of base dull colors, and a few vivid colors as support.

The most versatile, reduced and harmonious palette always consists of **a pair of weakened colors plus a third pure color**. For example, Anders Zorn's palette has a weakened blue (Ivory Black + Lead White), a weakened yellow (Yellow Ocher) and a pure Cinnabar Red. And with this, you can get (almost) everything, and in the most harmonious way possible.



Sequence of the same person, photographed with different photographic lenses.

The differences in proportions are huge.

BEWARE PHOTOGRAPHS

The difference between man and machine is that man is able to establish priorities.

Using photographs is useful as long as you know how to take them and they are not your only reference. Ideally, you should have several quality photographs from various angles to get an idea of the structure, and not get trapped by copying outlines.

A bad photograph distorts angles, values and color temperatures. So if you do not know what you're doing, you'll start from an erroneous reference. You can bet that's not good for your painting.

II.

LEARN HOW TO START



Costa Dvorezky is the living proof that freedom of expression does not have to be at odds with discipline.

THE BEST WAY TO START

Do not stress when you start. I know there is a lot to do, but everything will be done. Prepare all your materials beforehand, arrange them as in a ritual and take it easy.

There are a million ways to start a painting, but all of them need big decisions and coherence over any method. It doesn't matter how you do it if you make meaningful decisions and are consistent with them until the end. The decisions about what you are going to paint and what you are going to discriminate, what to *lose* and what to detail, what to dramatize and what to mitigate... is what really counts.

All these decisions —and not the methods— are what projects your artistic identity. The more dramatic your decisions, the more dramatic your style will be.

But that does not mean you should not study technique. In fact, the more perfect the technique, the more freedom you will have to let loose and paint your own way without depending on the model.

VARYING THE EQUATION IS HEALTHY

It is good to try new ways of starting because this way we avoid systematizing our process. When we depend too much on a system we tend to take few risks and to accommodate ourselves, losing



Richard Schmid with his famous color charts. An exercise that, according to Scott Burdick, is not really *necessary*.

freshness and limiting ourselves with a mannered and self-paying style.

Scott Burdick does not like formulas because they are dead-end roads. That's why he never starts the same way. In fact, he does not believe that the color charts recommended by Richard Schmid are necessary either since an excess of concern for methods can block you.

As a general rule, **the less inhibited you are, the better**.

ANTICIPATE FRUSTRATION

It’s always the same: you start the painting with a huge energy, and you think 'this is going to be something big, I'm going to nail it'. But as you progress you realize that the world is cruel, that painting is super difficult and that in the end, you will not be able to nail it as much as you thought... Little by little you accept it and settle for, at least, doing it fine enough.

Scott Burdick says that this happens to all artists, so you're not alone 😅

This becomes more evident in large paintings, where there is always a moment of frustration that asks you to stop in your tracks and think deeply.

It is time to turn off the enthusiasm and think coldly as if you were planning the perfect crime. That's where you regain your energy and optimism, and you accept what you got saying

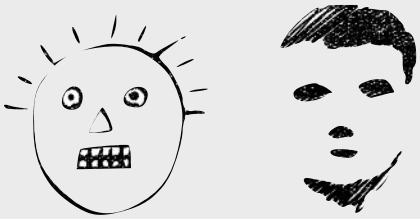
'well, let's do the best we can in the time we have.'

And well, that's the best attitude when starting a painting: **doing the best you can in the time you have**. It's that simple

III.

LEARNING TO OBSERVE





Ⓐ You draw what you know, without consulting the visual information.

Ⓑ Visual information is interpreted through observation.

Image from the classic **The Practice & Science of Drawing**. A wonderful book, highly recommended 👍🏻

Observe the model without rushing and do not be intimidated by the fact that he will be there for a limited time. Yes, I know: time flies. But do not stress. Leave the brush still for now and take your time to observe. Turn on your brain, take a breath and observe. Just observe.

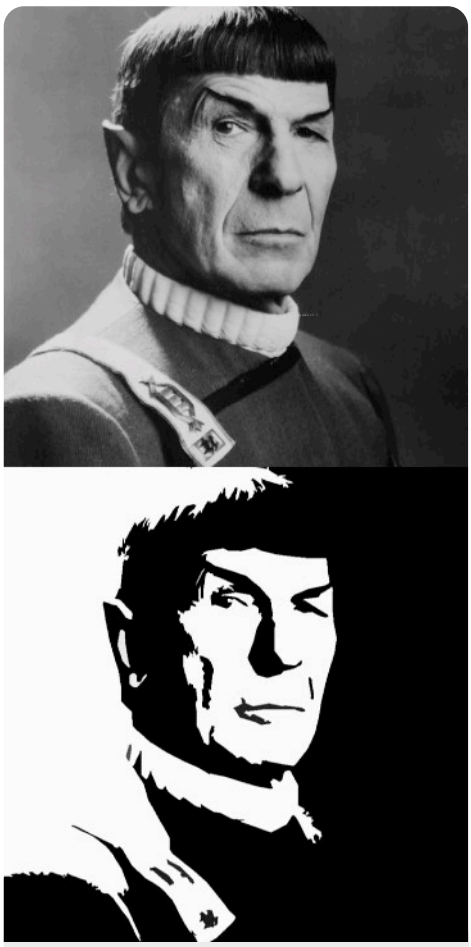
Already calmed down? Well, now you must start thinking visually, not intellectually. **Forget the names of each color, the muscles structures and all traces of verbiage**. Assume as soon as possible that you'll have to solve this with paint, not with words. Stop that inner voice.

Oh, and do not ask yourself, "How can I make my painting look like the model?" Better ask yourself "what the model would look like if he was made of paint". This visualization is very powerful.

Think in terms of light and color, not entities. This means that you should avoid drawing *with lines*. And, above all, you should avoid *drawing people*. Rather than observing the outlines, you must visualize the limits of the big shadow masses because you are not there to paint a person, but the light that reveals that person.

Surely you already know the trick, but I can't continue without recommending that you slightly squint when you observe. Don't exaggerate, just observe what the abstract design of light and shadow is like.

By the way, you just have to squint when judging values on the model, not on your painting. When you judge your painting, do it with your eyes wide open, just like when you observe color on the model.



Leonard Nimoy remains perfectly recognizable with a just two values light pattern. 🖐

CAN YOU RECOGNIZE SOMEONE FROM AFAR?

Of course you can and you only need a couple of flat values to do it. We are all capable of recognizing people with very little information.

And that's how you should start your painting **as if you were recognizing someone from afar,** and and keep going with as little information as possible. That's why we observe the model by squinting, to get rid of the information that bothers and to keep just the essential.

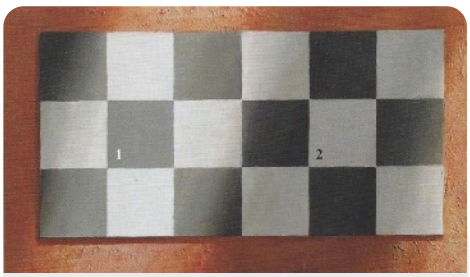
If you think in terms of large masses and avoid worrying about the details, you're on the right track. **The obsession with details is poison for your painting, so at the beginning it will be good to simplify everything in just two values**.

Observe the light pattern that forms where lights and shadows meet.

The moment you assume that you are going to paint light and not people, you should only worry about answering with your brush two fundamental questions:

I. What's in the light?

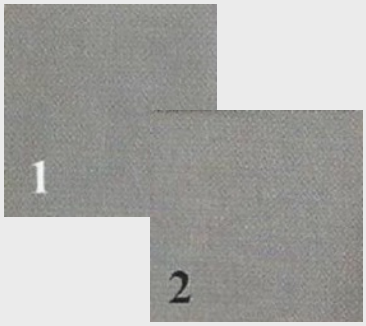
II. What's in the shadow?



You will freak out with this. It is called *the chessboard illusion*, and shows how our brain uses contextual cues to cancel the visual information that the eyes receive.

The dark square in the light (1) is the same as the light square in the shadow. (2) 😜

Check it yourself:



Conclusion: **do not trust your eyes and check everything. Always.**

This illustration comes from the book **Light and Color**, by James Gurney.

CHECK EVERYTHING LIKE A MANIAC

If you start painting shadow shapes without drawing or checking proportions, rest assured that your painting will go wrong. Always measure and check,. There are no excuses or shortcuts for this.

The model is always good, so you should check it constantly with your painting. Double check, and when you're sure of what you're doing, check it once again. Your painting should be subject to a continuous audit.

One mistake that many students make is to change their painting in order to make it look better, forcing proportions and values. In my neighborhood, we call this *sneaking*, and by doing this you will only drag mistakes until the end, making them more and more noticeable. Like life itself, if you are going to change your painting, do it in order to be more faithful to the model, not to your mistakes.

Have you already thoroughly checked proportions and is everything correct? Well, now it's time for values. Check them and compare them all the time. Your painting must be permanently audited.

Paraphrasing master Richard Schmid —and in a way, also master Yoda— Scott Burdick tells us that there are *no good approximations*. It is simply correct or it is not. **In other words, our painting can't be *half well***. Either it is good or it is not. Period.

IV.

LEARNING TO PAINT



«Everything begins as an abstraction. Think first of light and color, and leave subject for the last»

Scott Burdick

DO NOT DRAW. JUST PAINT.

No offense, but you are completely wrong when you think you are painting a person. You are painting light. When you paint, do not think about the entity of the form, but about the pattern of light that reveals it.

Did you know that Sargent preferred to portray strangers? It is even known that he lost the friendship of some of his models since he apparently painted them in a way that they did not see themselves. This is because when we paint something we already know we tend to make wrong decisions or, at least, biased ones.

Could you objectively judge your partner or your children? Hardly. Believe me when I tell you that this happens to all of us... Damn, it even happened to Sargent! The human figure has such a powerful and hypnotic presence that we forget that it is there only because of light that bathes it. We get so obsessed with a glance's features that we forget to analyze how shadows run over the eyeball 😅

SMALL SHAPES WITHIN LARGE SHAPES

Now that we are all grown-ups we have to get rid of this catchy idea: painting well consists of not getting out of lines.

Painting is not about coloring shapes *side by side* as you did in the "paint and color" books when you were a kid. Shapes are painted *one inside the*

other; that is, **by superposition, not by contiguity**.



Beautiful matrioshkas set painted by the artist **Soey Milk**, **Kent Williams**' couple.

THE MATRYOSHKA PAINTING

In a *matryoshka* the small figures are nested within the large ones, cascading into one another.

In the same way, you must understand your painting as a great Russian doll full of shapes, values, temperatures and brush strokes. **Everything ordered from highest to lowest, some things within the others**. In this way, when a *parent shape* is correct, the *child shapes* that stay within it will also be correct.

And that's the real point, because a large shape will only look good if the small variations it contains are totally subordinated, which in turn contain minor variations that do not escape the hierarchy.

The same thing happens with brush strokes: a brush is actually a matrix that will contain several minor brushstrokes that, in turn, will contain a greater number of even smaller strokes. It is the same idea all the time: **starting from the general in order to reach particular**.

Also, small temperature changes are nested inside dominant temperature containers. Like rhythms, compositions, lines, and textures! Everything works the same way! It's a very crazy thing!

These are the size of the brushes you should use, in the correct order:

I. Large and flat brush (large areas of light and shadow).

II. Medium brush, filbert shape (blocking medium values and lights).

III. Small, sharp and rounded brush (details and highlights).

IV. Dry brush or fan brush (blending and softening)

Gradually change brushes, from hard, flat and large, to small, sharp and soft.

Do you get it? It is super important that you understand this concept 100% because it is the cornerstone of every well-executed painting.

So... should I draw or not?

Draw by painting. Do not draw lines expecting to fill them later with fancy colors.

When we *draw* in a painting, we're not really making *lines* but establishing borders between these large light and shadow containers that will enclose all the details inside.

Your painting is shapes, values and temperature changes nested in containers whose edges are delimited by a precise drawing. That's painting and drawing at the same time. **Always building by accumulation, incorporating small shapes into large shapes**.

So another idea that you should banish from your head is that *drawing* is synonymous with reproducing details by drawing lines. In fact, it is exactly the opposite! 😱

DO NOT COPY NATURE. INTERPRET IT.

The hardest skill to learn is simplicity. And it's a deeply hard skill because, as artists, we tend to feel an unstoppable fascination for detail, to enjoy ourselves contemplating life in all its details. Paradoxically, it is this fascination with life that kills our painting.

So no, the icing on the cake is not "those little things". You must overcome your natural inclination to being *wowed* by details and learn how to tame them.

How?

Stop copying.

And the golden rule for overcoming these ups and downs is to understand clearly –crystal clearly– that **big shapes ALWAYS go first**. This necessarily implies making decisions about what you observe. Deciding what to put in and what to leave out, and how to simplify what you have decided to keep. **Painting means interpreting nature, not copying it.**

You may have noticed that inside museums a good painting triggers an emotion from a distance, long before you see any details. So your first concern as an artist is to work on large masses and then think about the details, if you finally decide to put them in.

You must set big shapes first, in the simplest way possible and without getting distracted by details, in this order:

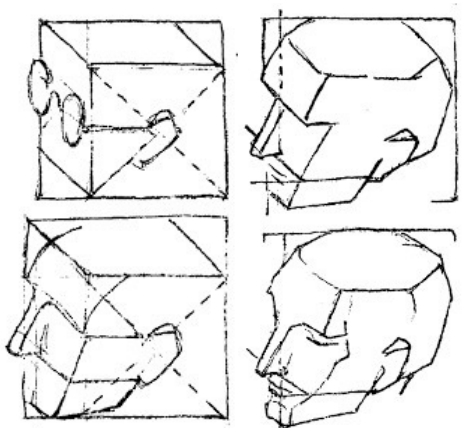
I. Large masses with loose, large, long and loaded brushstrokes.

II. Small masses and accents with short, careful and blended brushstrokes.

Interpreting the head

Mass is what gives presence to a portrait, while details are close to nothing but an ornament. The details in a face are graphic verbiage if you do not express the skull mass before.

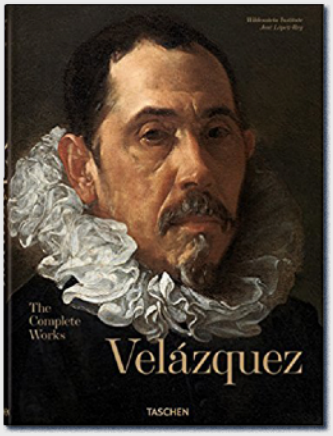
A Christmas tree is covered with ornaments, but it does not mean that it's made of ornaments. The tree is a tree, in the same way, that the head is an egg. And the star is the main



Notice how a head is built: from large general shapes to smaller shapes.

This illustration comes from the book **Heads, Features and Faces**, by George B. Bridgman.

If you want to study Velázquez deeply, this is **THE BOOK**:



A huge XL book by *Taschen* **that you can still get at Amazon for around 100€** 💸💸💸

ornament, in the same way, that the glance is head's main feature.

While it's true that there are details which have a great expressive power, the resemblance in a portrait is always within the big shapes. Most artists spend 10% of their time solving large shapes, and the remaining 90% recreating details. And it should be exactly the opposite! **We should spend most of the time adjusting the big shapes because if they are not right, nothing we put within them will be fine**.

When our large masses are proportioned and in the right place, even if we retouch an eye, a lip or a nose, nothing is destroyed and everything remains in place. A nose, although it's visible in the middle of the head, is nothing other than a form subordinated to head's general structure.

Do you remember what I explained about first finding those essential lights that make us recognize a person from afar? Well, **if those large masses are correct from the beginning, even if we correct face's details, the portrait will always be perfectly recognizable.**

The key is asking yourself: What is the minimum necessary to explain the shape? Find the way to explain the maximum using the minimum, and **do not forget to study Velázquez** to see how he simplified and explained so much with so little.

And when you're wrong, do not retouch. **Mistakes are not solved by manipulating the error, but by painting a rectification over it**. If there is too much paint to do it without risks,

☝ Two super tips to keep in mind:

I. KISS → *Keep It Simple, Stupid*.

II. Do not fix errors by manipulating them. Overcome them by properly painting over them.

☝ More tips:

Do not use black, especially in places that you think are very dark, like the holes in nose and ears.

Be careful to always put a warm dark color, since black does not make a hole deeper, but flatter.

scrape with a painting knife what is wrong and keep working in the area until you solve it.

GRAYS AND TRANSITIONS

Setting the scheme of the darkest shadows and the lightest lights is, in reality, the easiest thing to do. The core is at transitions, that meeting point between light and shadow that determines resemblance in portraits.

How do we get to set this meeting point between light and shadow avoiding a *train crash*?

The short answer is: **do not mix paint, build it**.

Thinking that colors are applied on the canvas and manipulated there in order to get the desired effect is a bad idea. Nothing to do with that. Colors should not be *mixed* but built *one inside each another*

Oh my God, Russian dolls strike again! 😅

Imagine two sets of matryoshkas, one of white dolls and one of black dolls. Do you think it is reasonable to exchange their figures to get a gray one?

Not reasonable at all, right?

Of course not, because by doing that you only get a scramble of white and black dolls, but not a gray doll. The only way to have a gray matryoshka is, in fact, adding a gray matryoshka. That's obvious.

☝ Tips for painting grays and transitions:

✔ The dominant color in the light area is always different from the dominant color in the shadow area.

✔ Mid values belong to light.

✔ As the shapes move away from light and penetrate into shadow, they will begin to be contaminated by the color in the shadow.

✔ The darker halftones on the edges of the shape will begin to become contaminated with the background color.

✔ The most illuminated areas have more to do with the color of light than with the local color of the shape. The local color shows itself in the mid values.

Without touching white or black. Without breaking the magic. Not playing strange games.

But let's quit dolls and go back to painting.

I explained this so that you understand that **you should NEVER mix the light with the shadow in order to obtain the transition value**. If you want a transition, put the damn transition in, but do not expect to get it by magic mixing pears and apples.

If you directly manipulate the paint trying to merge the light and shadow areas, you will only muddy it all up, spoiling freshness and volume. So **the only way not to create a *blob* is adding a mid value between them**, as a clean transition. Without mixing anything, by superposition, in a civilized way. A mid-value in its right place, with its limits perfectly drawn and without altering the light and shadow values' structure.

So when you feel that irrepressible desire to mix on a whim, for God's sake, stop it. Mixtures are made on the palette, not on the canvas. **The palette is the free zone where we test colors before firmly applying them on the canvas**. And when you have the transition value well set on the palette, just apply it between light and shadow. That's where it belongs, do not let any bastard mixture take its place.

These are the key ideas you must remember. They are so obvious that it may seem that it's not worth writing them, but if you analyze your painting you will probably see that you are not applying them:



These are the large blocks of dominant temperatures on a head:

I. Yellow on the forehead.

II. Red on cheeks and nose.

III. Blue, green or gray on the chin.

This image comes from the book **'Imaginative Realism', by James Gurney**. A little treasure.

I. Never mix light and shadow.

II. Do not get transitions by manipulating paint. Mixtures are tested on the palette and applied on the canvas.

TEMPERATURE / COLOR

After painting the great light and shadow shapes, blocked values and transitions, it is finally color's turn. Color does not work very differently from the previous things I mentioned, so we will apply the same praxis:

I. Place large color masses by blocks, with clearly differentiated temperatures.

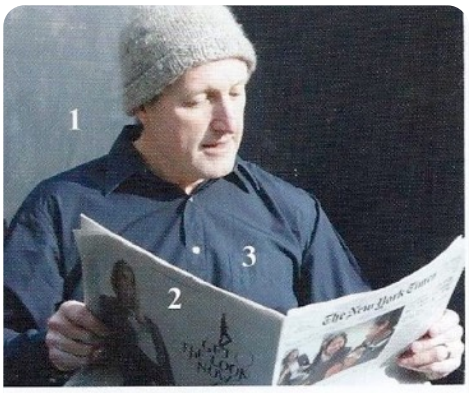
II. Use contrasts with complementary colors to chromatically dissociate blocks of light and shadow.

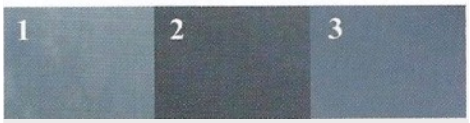
III. Progressively set more subtle modulations, subordinated to the dominant block.

IV. Alternate cool versions with warm versions of the local color to create the illusion of volume: warm → cool → warm → cool...

Do not judge colors because of what you know about them.

You do know that the white area in the eye is, in fact, white, but using pure white paint is always a mistake.





Do not let names and what you know about colors disturb your perception.

In this photograph James Gurney shows you how a *white* newspaper can be darker than a *black* shirt.

The image comes from the book **'Light & Color' by James Gurney**.

If you step away from your prejudices for a moment and look at the eye you will see that the white area in there is, in fact, a much darker gray than you would have suspected. Observe, measure and check thoroughly before letting yourself be carried away by what you know. **Flesh is not orange, nor the eyes are white**.

V.

CONTRAST
FOCUS
BRUSHSTROKE

CONTRAST

I love this part 😏

This is my favorite concept because it requires a great psychological depth, strategy and large doses of intuition in order to persuade the viewer. Contrast is an interactive process that induces you to believe that your portrait is not a painting, but a person.

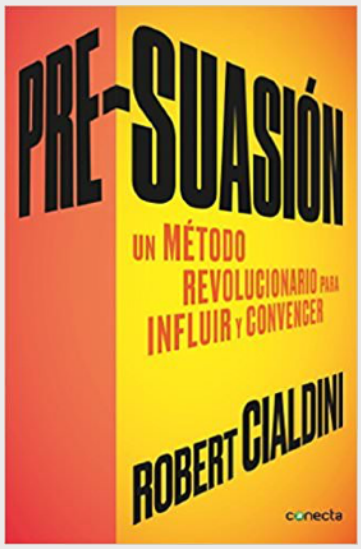
We convince using our intelligence, and we persuade through emotional games. In other words: **a painting is the medium we use for *hacking* the viewer's brain**, making him believe that an inert painting has body and soul.

On this subject, besides painting, there is a lot of information. Since Aristotle started it all back in 345 B.C. much research has been done on the effect of contrast on the way we process information intellectually, unconsciously and visually.

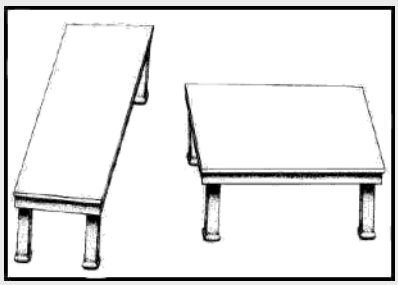
Today, **the most fascinating source of information on this subject is found in marketing books**. It's amazing how much we can learn from other disciplines.

As Aristotle brilliantly expressed, "a fool will try to persuade me with his ideas, while a wise man persuades me about myself". That is, good Aristotle already makes it clear that **we do not see things as they are, but as we are**.

And how are we really? We are the way we interpret information.

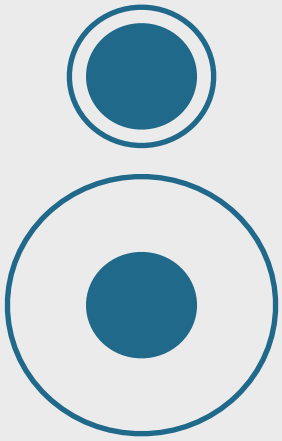


A good boof on this subject are the classic books by Robert Cialdini speak long and hard on this subject. One highly recommended is **Pre-suasion**, where a chapter is devoted to the effect of contrast.



Famous illustration from the book **Mind Sigts** by Roger N. Shepard.

We humans are tremendously subjective as far as perception is concerned: these tables' measurements are the same. Check it!



Delbouf Illusion (1865).

The dark spots are the same size. This is how the visual contrast *hacks* your brain.

Our mind interprets visual information in an automatic and unconscious way and offers a final image that is closest to the reality already known by our brain. What we call reality is the interpretation we make of the external information we receive. Roger N. Shepard, in his book of visual experiments **'Mind Sights'**, said: "Perception is a hallucination guided from the outside."

Hence, many great paintings seem more real than reality itself.

The artist is the guide, and he uses contrast to compare very different things to each other, forcing the viewer to see that one of the *stimuli* is perceived as better or more intense. **If you want to value something in your painting, you should check it with something else of its own kind**.

Do not panic. All this that seems so cryptic is, in fact, very simple when we see some examples:

— Do you want to highlight the glance? Lower the mouth.

— Do you want that forehead to look brighter? Darken the hair.

— Do you want to highlight lips? Increase their temperature while lowering chin's temperature.

— Do you want the foreground to stand out? Mud up, dull, smudge and shatter the background.

— Do you want more definition? Surround it with abstraction.

— Do you want something to look more beautiful? Make the rest uglier.

— Do you want a light to have a lot of volume? Contrast it with flat and indefinite shadows.

— Do you want to emphasize the straight forehead? Put something wavy and soft near it, like a curl.

You get it, right?

The beauty of this idea lies in the power of its simplicity: **we manage to create an illusion by contrast**. The key is to offer a good variety of qualities in simultaneous contrast to create a more convincing illusion, for example:

- Relief vs flat
- Abstraction vs detail
- Straight vs curved
- Vector vs node
- Luminous vs dark
- Warm vs cold
- Focal point vs periphery
- Transparent vs opaque
- Etc.

It's your turn, turn your brain on and create **YOUR** own contrasts strategy.

🤔 Whenever you have doubts about whether your focal point is well established, ask yourself this:

- ✓ Do I efficiently and "exclusively" show what I want to highlight, and only what I want to highlight?
- ✓ Do I strategically group the rest of the elements in order to dissuade the viewer from focusing on them?

FOCAL POINT

A focal point has unique, different and exclusive qualities compared to the rest of your painting. You can get it with a different brush stroke, more detail, a major temperature change, etc. Whatever you do in your focal point, it's got to be "exclusive" in your painting.

Merchandise Theory

It's a theory used in marketing, but it's very handy to explain how to create a powerful focal point. The main pillar in this theory (Brock, 1968) is that the perception of scarcity fuels desire: "Any merchandise will be overvalued to the limit of its availability".

Now change the word "merchandise" for the word "shape". **You will create greater interest and visual weight if you limit the number of shapes you use in your focal point.**

Be very selective with focal points in your painting, and with how much information you put in them. Create a scarcity environment in your painting, and load your focal point with a great abundance of everything that is scarce in your painting. You can combine several scarcities to achieve a more dramatic effect. **Create a great unevenness between the whole and your focal point, and you will gain the viewer's interest**. You will understand it very well with some examples:



If your painting deals with a monotonous theme, your focus will be discordant and strident.

Rembrandt was the king of this.



«The artist should never forget that he is dealing with the whole canvas, not just with one section»

Nicolai Fechin.

✔ If your painting is predominantly gray, your focal point will have a great chromaticism.

✔ If your painting has a predominantly soft treatment, your focal point will have a great hardness.

✔ If your painting is composed predominantly by long, straight strokes, your focal point will have short, undulating brushstrokes.

All parts of your painting should be interesting, but there should only be one protagonist.

The focal point is the result of orchestrating contrasts in your painting, making strategic decisions that lead the viewer to overvalue that area, creating the illusion that it has a unique quality. For that to happen, you must limit your competitors. **The excess of focal points has, in general, a disastrous effect on your composition**.



Example of makeup where there are too many “focal points" competing 😂

This means that if you are portraying a girl with beautiful eyes, pretty nose, and sensual lips, you must decide to highlight just one of those three features. Highlighting all the interesting parts creates an interests conflict and a lack of visual hierarchy that will destroy the perception of the beauty of any of the parts. That *vice* in portraits is known as the "cardboard-plasterboard face" effect, which is exactly what happens when we see a person wearing a poor makeup.

«A portrait is a painting with something wrong with the mouth» —John Singer Sargent.

Although 90% of the time the focal point in our portrait is on the eyes, it does not always have to be that way. In a profile, for example, you can choose if the focal point will be on the nose highlight, or on the whiteness of the nape in contrast to the head.

That said, it's not usually recommended that the lips are the focal point because their temperature change already stands out naturally, so it is convenient to leave them for the end so that they do not go wild and compete too much with the eyes.

The mouth is the most delicate, most subtle spot in the face. But it is not usually the focal point, so it creates some conflict by requiring at least the same work, attention for shape and temperature changes as the eyes, which are the natural focal point in a portrait. Hence, Sargent said that «a portrait is a painting with something wrong with the mouth».

EACH BRUSHSTROKE IS A MICRO POEM

Scott Burdick spoke at length about the brushstroke, explaining that each brushstroke should be conceived as a small work of art subordinated to a larger work of art. Yes, the idea of *matryoshka* painting comes in again.

Through analogies with Chinese calligraphy, Scott Burdick explained that each brushstroke has an abstract beauty with a great emotional charge: direction, speed, pressure, drag, intention...

Each brushstroke tells an individual story, and the set of stories tells a choral story. **Every brushstroke should tell a story, without monopolizing all protagonism in the work**. The brushstrokes are, so to speak, like **story arcs** in the movies.

The brushstroke reveals the shape but has beauty in itself. **It works at a realistic and abstract level at the same time.** It constructs the shape at the same time as it contains abstract information that enriches it with an emotional subtext.

Jeremy Lipking, **Richard Schmid**, Jacob Dhein, Ann Gale, **Alex Kanevsky**... all these great artists work the brushstroke at this level. Take a look at their work and try to imagine the same painting without the brushwork.

Load the brush

Scott Burdick, in the same way as **Hollis Dunlap**, says that there is nothing worse than a painter who is afraid to place paint and that there is no need to use mediums or glazes.

Scott Burdick uses a lot of paint and extends it as if it were butter. **His paint does not color shape, it models it**. He moves paint masses using the brush, sculpting the shape. He drags the impasto

Scott Burdick recommends studying the brushstroke and the use of impasto by Nicolai Fechin, Joaquin Sorolla, John Singer Sargent and Anders Zorn.

indicating the direction of the shape, modeling it, as he introduces changes in temperature.

Unlike artists like **Mark Tennant** or **Richard Schmid**, Scott Burdick does not separate the brushes he uses for lights and shadows. When you use impasto and shadows are not transparent, there is no risk of contaminating shadows with white. It's enough to clean it with a rag before mixing a new color.

There is always a moment to let go

Scott Burdick recommends letting go at the beginning because you're always have time to retouch. In fact, **we're almost always guilty of softening paint too much in the beginning**, willing to perfect it, thus losing its freshness.

So during the execution of the large block of halftones and lights, Scott Burdick has fun working on what he calls "interesting brushstrokes". Loose brushstrokes, large and long, but with a clear direction and intention. They will become the ground where he will work in more detail, progressively reducing the size of his brushes.

Scott Burdick lets himself go at this point because he knows he can't do it when working on details. **The contrast between the great initial brushstrokes and the small and contained ones in details is what ultimately refreshes the result and gives it life**.

BLENDING, JUST ENOUGH

For blending it's better to wait one day, for two reasons:

I. Allowing time to pass helps you make better decisions and evaluate with a fresh mind if it is really necessary to blend.

II. Waiting one day favors the painting to settle and begin to set, making it easier to blend without destroying the brushstroke. When we blend newly applied paint, it is likely that we drag it too much and muddy it, destroying its vividness.

Before blending anything, remember the contrast rule: **for something to look blended you have to contrast it with something hard**. Sometimes the solution is not smoothing more, but hardening other areas.

If you are going to blend, be as austere as possible and preserve the structure. **Do not soften it all, be very selective when it comes to blending**. Work with sharp angles in the focal point, such as the eyes, and never model more than is strictly necessary.

Blending techniques

Blending requires proper control and brushes. The best ones are mongoose hair ones, very gently used, almost without touching the paint. In *low flight*, caressing paint.

You can also blend by making small strokes, very gently, as if it were a swab.

To make soft blending, such as on cheeks or at the temple area, where the hair starts, you can use a soft dry brush, making small strokes on the wet paint and without dragging.

Edge control

As a general rule, **soften the edges if your portrait seems carved in wood, and make them sharper if it looks like butter**. For everything else, use this list to guide you:

✔ Paintings must have lost and found edges.

✔ A cast shadow has a sharp outline that softens as it moves away from its origin point.

✔ The rounder the shape, the softer the edge. The more angular the shape, the harder the edge.

✔ The harder the surface, the harder its edges (a bone has sharper edges than a muscle).

✔ The edges in the shadow are generally softer than those in the light.

✔ The closer it is to us, the harder the edge will be. The farther, softer, looser and blurrier.

✔ The brighter the light source, the harder the edge.

✔ Those edges perpendicular to the light source are the hardest ones.

✔ The human eye naturally focuses on only one area, leaving everything else gently out of focus. Your edges should follow that same blurring sequence according to the focal point.

FINISHING

According to Nicolai Fechin, in order to finish a painting, there must be a balance between idea and technical resolution. His words; 'Not badly conceived but poorly executed!' and 'Stupid, but devilishly well executed!' are used to criticize the lack of balance between idea and execution.

If a painting has a good balance between idea and execution, and efficiently communicates the emotions, it is finished.

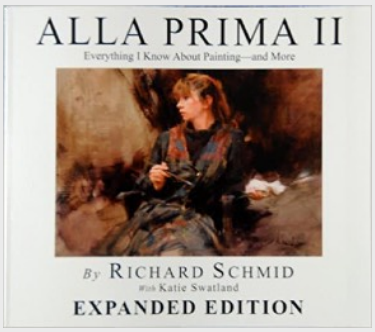
It does not matter if it is in the first phase of execution, without details, effects or refinements. And if you do not stop there, it means that your goal is none other than to show off technically. So check your priorities: Are you painting for showing off or because you have something to say to the world?

It's never easy to know when to say a painting is finished.

As a general rule, when you feel satisfied with what you wanted to express, STOP.

... Your painting is complete 😉

BOOKS RECOMMENDED BY SCOTT BURDICK

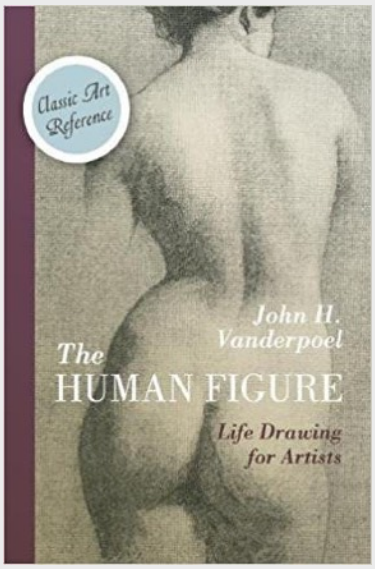


Alla Prima II, by Richard Schmid.

Alla Prima II
Richard Schmid

According to Scott Burdick, this is the great book that every *alla prima* painter MUST study. Period.

The first edition is sold out, but recently the second edition was published, revised and expanded. Surely it will not be available for a long time, so if you're interested in the book, get it before it's too late.

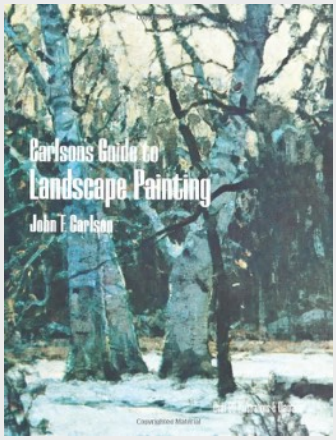


A classic: The Human Figure, by John H. Vanderpoel.

The Human Figure
John H. Vanderpoel

Scott Burdick recommends the study of Vanderpoel's book to understand and simplify the planes of the head and learn to observe their angles in perspective.

This booklet is a "must" that can not be missed in any serious painting studio and you can find it super easy at Amazon for a really cheap price. **Get it and study it deeply, you will not regret it**. You will learn the keys to transform your understanding of human figure structure, and how to simplify it without losing its vitality.



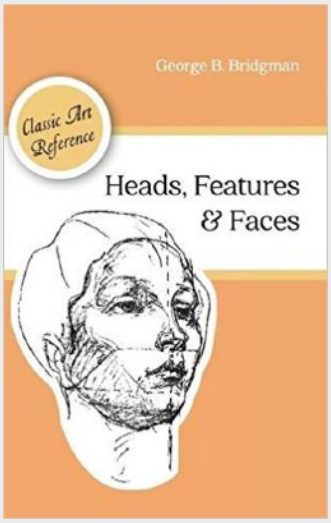
[Guide to Landscape Painting](), by John F. Carlson

Guide to Landscape Painting
John F. Carlson

John F. Carlson is Scott Burdick's reference painter when he talks about brushstroke.

Scott Burdick recommends *Plein air* painting for learning to give more unity in color and for simplifying without feeling intimidated by the fact that you are painting a person.

The study of light and shape without a human presence frees us from a certain commitment and makes us move forward more quickly.



[Heads, Features and Faces](), by George B. Bridgman

Heads, Features and Faces
George B. Bridgeman

George B. Bridgman will help you to understand the structure of the head and to conceive it three-dimensionally.

For portraits, his book Heads, Features and Faces will be super useful, but he has more books which are real gems to aid understanding of the structure and anatomy of human figure:

Constructive Anatomy

Bridgman's Life Drawing

Drawing the Draped Figure

The Human Machine

The Book of a Hundred Hands

VI.

DEMOS



TOMEU

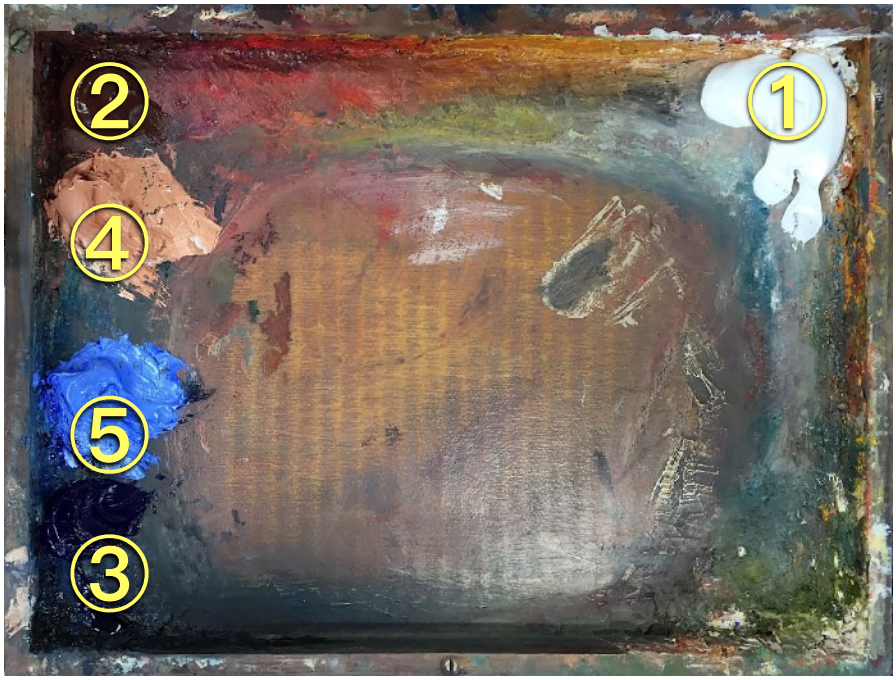
In three-hour demos like this one, Scott Burdick ignores temperature changes and focuses solely on values and drawing.

In the longer sessions, he will plan temperature changes from the first large color blocks.

① Titanium white
② Burnt Siena
③ Dark Ultramarine Blue

④ **Premix I**
Burnt Siena + Titanium white

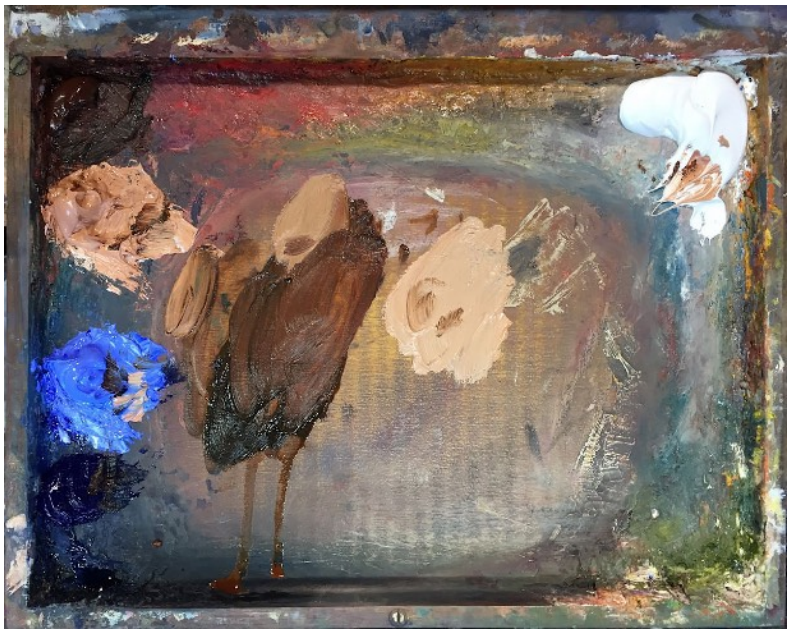
⑤ **Premix II**
Dark Ultramarine Blue + Titanium white



He starts with a basic sketch with lines diluted with a little *Gamsol* and a mixture of Burnt Siena and Ultramarine Blue. He uses a hard bristle brush.

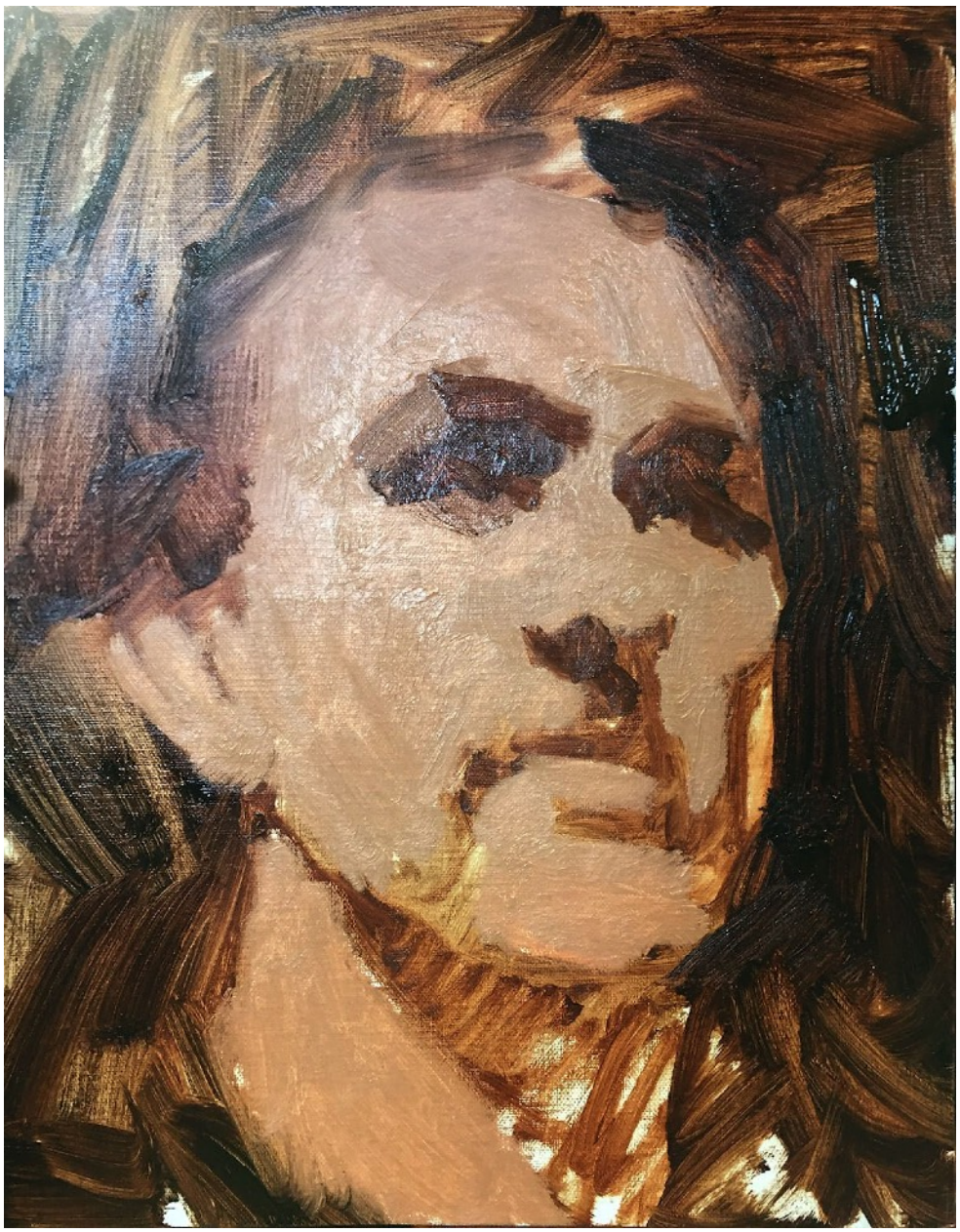
At this time he does not paint color blocks. It is time to make all the necessary measurements and corrections to ensure correctness of the head.





When the large shadow shapes have been established and are properly positioned and proportioned, Scott Burdick proceeds to paint a large patch of color that thickly covers the entire halftone and light zone.

This is the funniest part and, where he allows himself, after the thoughtful exercise of precision analysis and measurement, playing with the brushstroke giving it texture, a variety of drag and direction.







Scott Burdick applies a lot of impasto until the end, without using scrubbing, mediums or glazes.

In this way he manages to model the shape by manipulating the impasto, suggesting the direction of the shape by moving the paint with the brush.



The darker blocks of paint are made with Burnt Sienna, Alizarine Red and Ultramarine Blue (plus a pinch of Titanium White).

He can cool down or warm up this mixture easily, balancing temperature shifts to create volume.

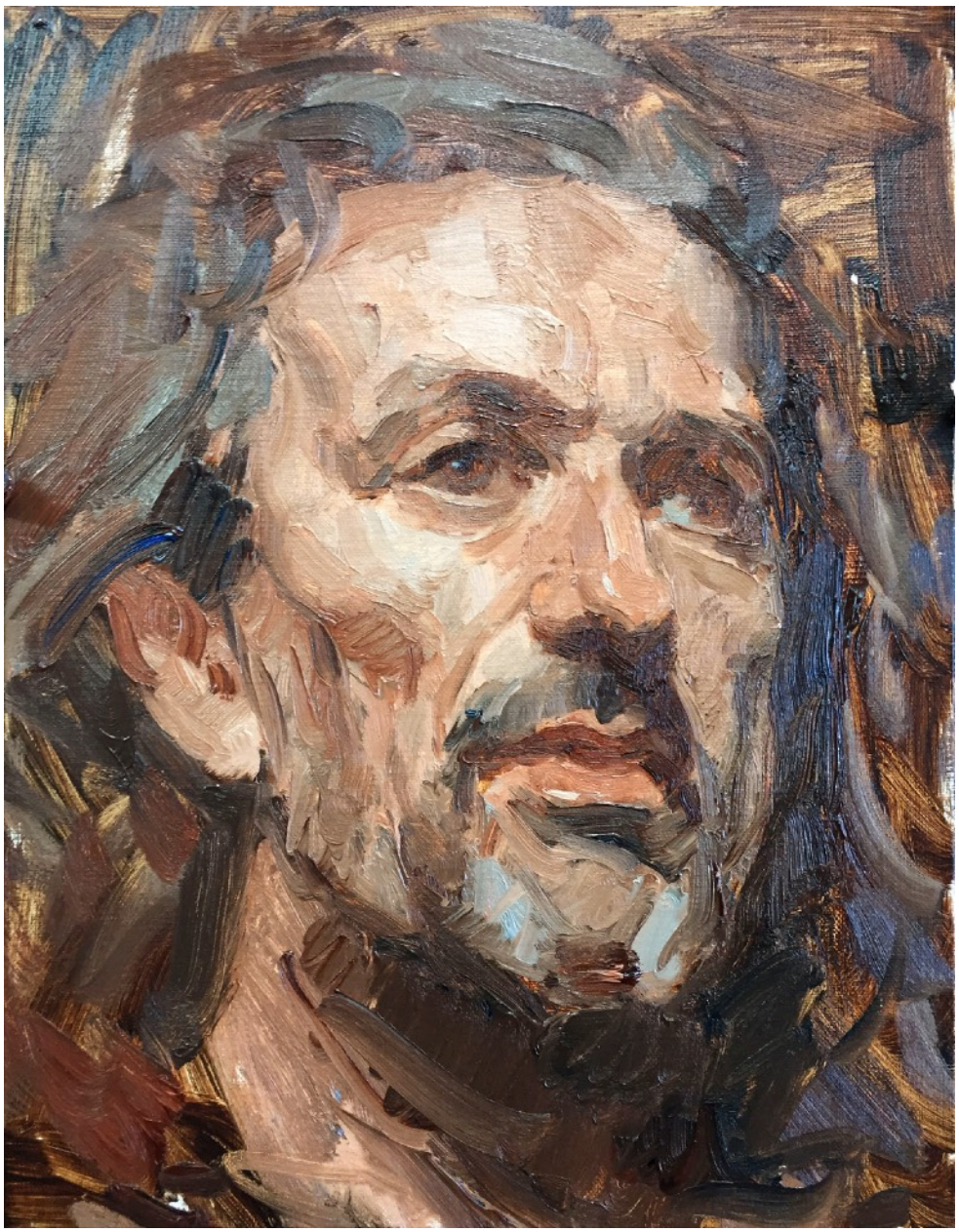


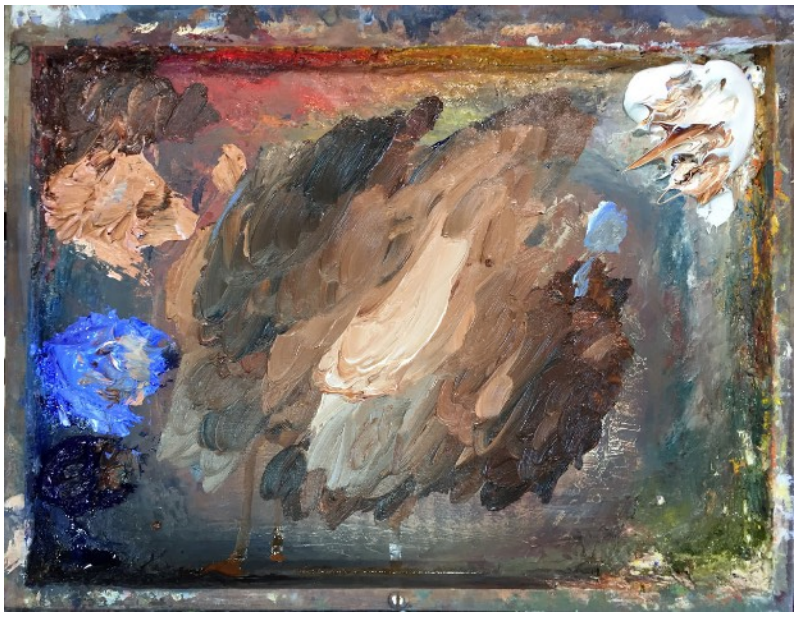


The lightest blocks are painted at the same time as the dark blocks, but without mixing between them.

In this way, the key of light and dark is established from the beginning, without reserving lights for the end, as many *alla prima* artists do.

Scott Burdick's painting is conceived all at once, avoiding sequential methods and never losing sight of harmony.









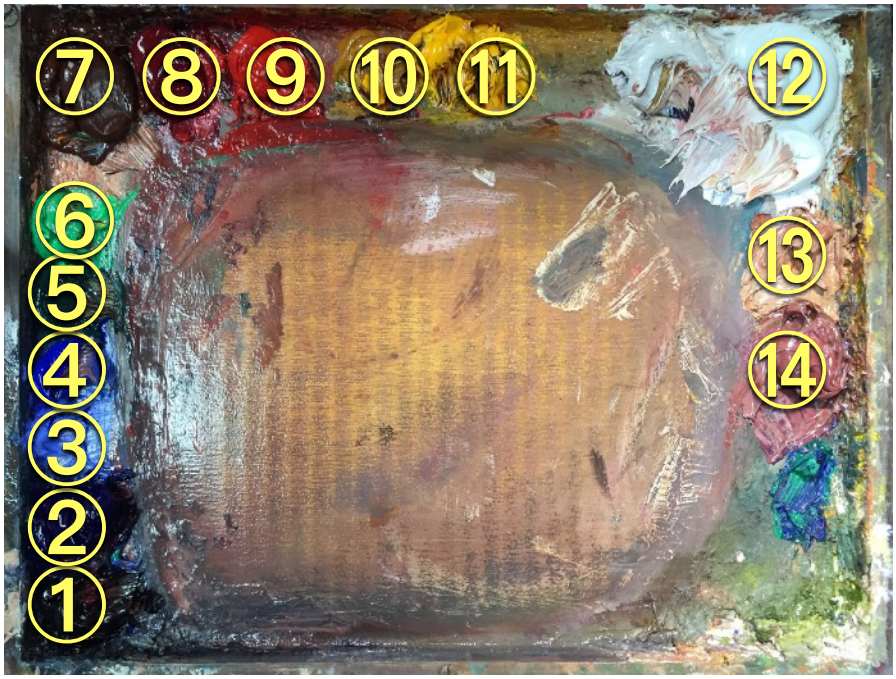
MARTA

In the two short three-hour demos, Scott Burdick will paint the same model with artificial light and natural light, to show the differences.

In these sessions, the temperature changes are planned from the first large color blocks, and the complete palette is used.

① Ivory black
② Ultramarine Blue
③ Premix: Cobalt Blue + Titanium White
④ Cobalt Blue
⑤ Viridian Green
⑥ Emerald Green
⑦ Burnt Siena
⑧ Alizarin Crimson
⑨ Cadmium Red
⑩ Yellow Ochre
⑪ Cadmium Yellow
⑫ Titanium White

⑬ Premix: Burnt Siena + Titanium White
⑭ Premix: Alizarin Crimson + Burnt Siena + Titanium White





He starts with a big flesh-colored mass setting the general shape. It's like a matrix where the smaller parts will fit. Within this big basic shape, the main temperature changes are already beginning to be introduced.

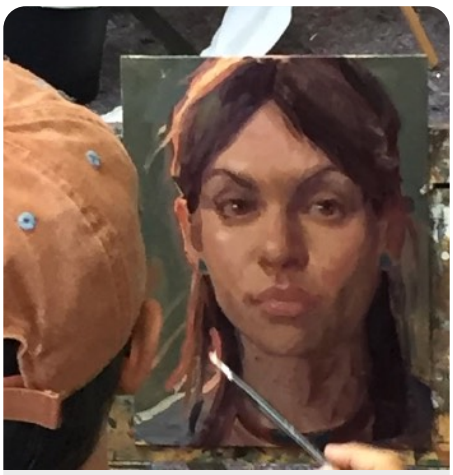
He directly applies color with a generous impasto, without solvent and covering the entire panel from the beginning.

Properties of natural light:

✔ Lighter
✔ Less contrast
✔ More shades of color
✔ More reflected light
✔ More cool colors (blue and green within the flesh)







He always puts the key to dark and light at first.

He adds warm shadows over the large paint patch, delimiting big shapes in a very general way without drawing lines.

He merges shadow shapes, while diversifying them in temperature.

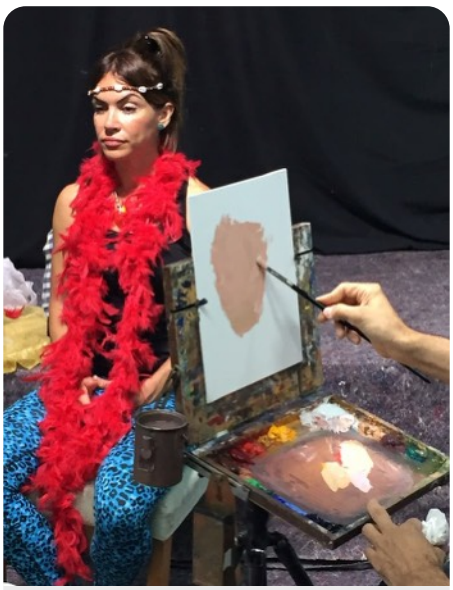
The flat background helps to create emphatic volumes in the foreground by contrast effect.

He reserves mouth for the end so that the dominant warm temperature does not compete with the eyes, the focal point during the execution.









Unlike the previous demo, this portrait is executed with artificial light, so there is less reflected light and warmer colors.

He also starts with a large flesh-colored patch making the general shape.

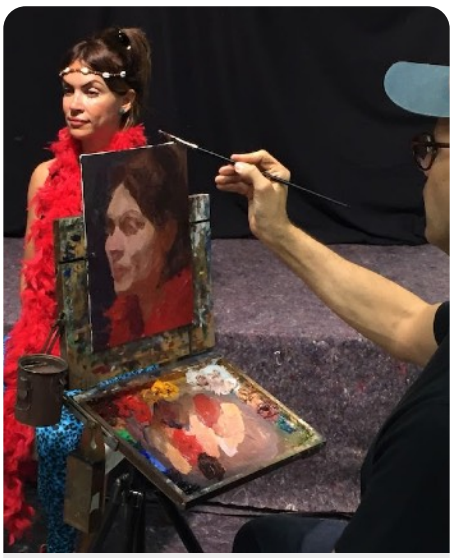
In this large color matrix, large blocks with temperature changes begin to superimpose themselves.

The paint is applied with a lot of impasto and is not manipulated for correcting, but it's retouched by superimposing color, *painting some things inside the others*.









He finishes modeling by placing intermediate values between the light and shadow blocks, and creating cool and warm color sequences along the shape.

He also introduces variety in the textures and sculpts the shape making strokes along the shape direction, creating volume.









JULIETA

In this six-hour demo, Scott Burdick can afford to deploy more resources and bring the portrait to a good finishing level.

In this portrait, you can study how he models and retouches the painting until he gets a perfectly finished portrait.

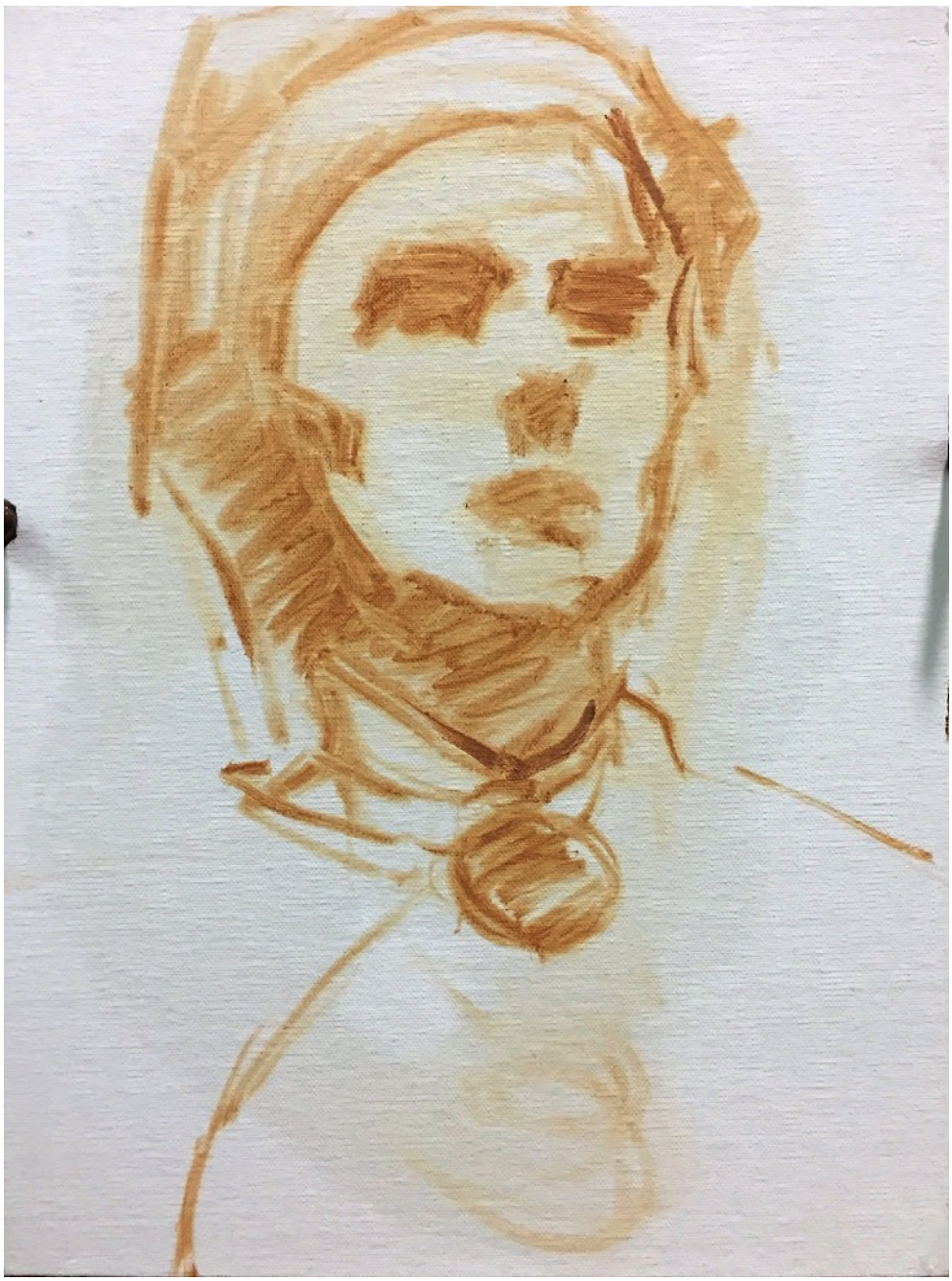
① Ivory black
② Ultramarine Blue
③ Premix: Cobalt Blue + Titanium White
④ Cobalt Blue
⑤ Viridian Green
⑥ Emerald Green
⑦ Burnt Siena
⑧ Alizarin Crimson
⑨ Cadmium Red
⑩ Yellow Ochre
⑪ Cadmium Yellow
⑫ Titanium White
⑬ Premix: Burnt Siena + Titanium White





Scott Burdick blocks the head in, indicating large shapes with color masses and main angles with firm brushstrokes.

The block in is executed with a hard bristled brush and a mix of Burnt Sienna and Ultramarine Blue.

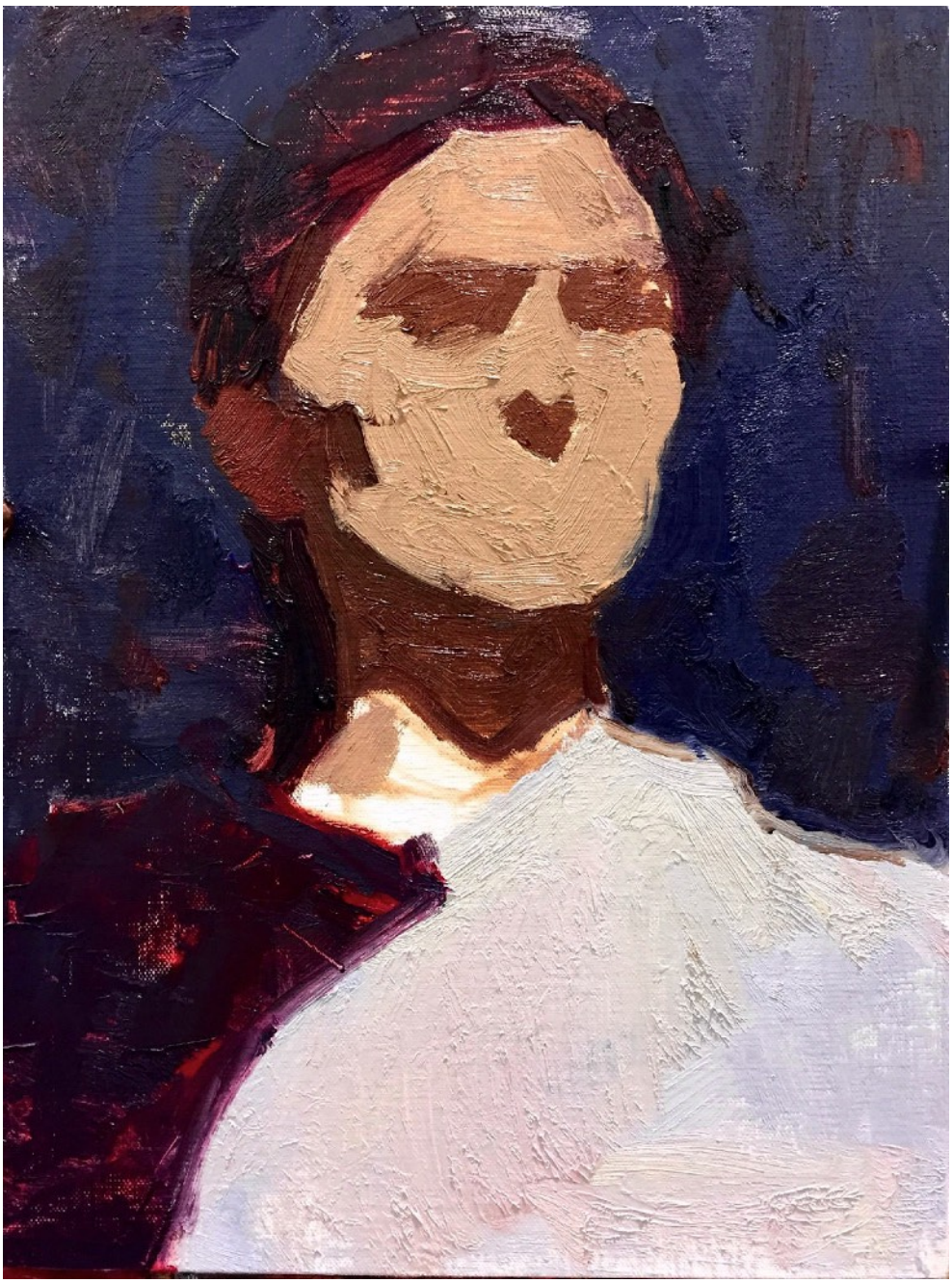




The great masses of light and shadow are painted, without average values. The paint is applied in very thick layers with a large and wide brush.

Now is the time to cover the entire panel with large masses of color impasto, using large and long brushstrokes, as a ground to later work the details on.

Although it's not a phase of definition, Scott Burdick devotes all the necessary time to adjust the biggest shapes before placing details inside them.





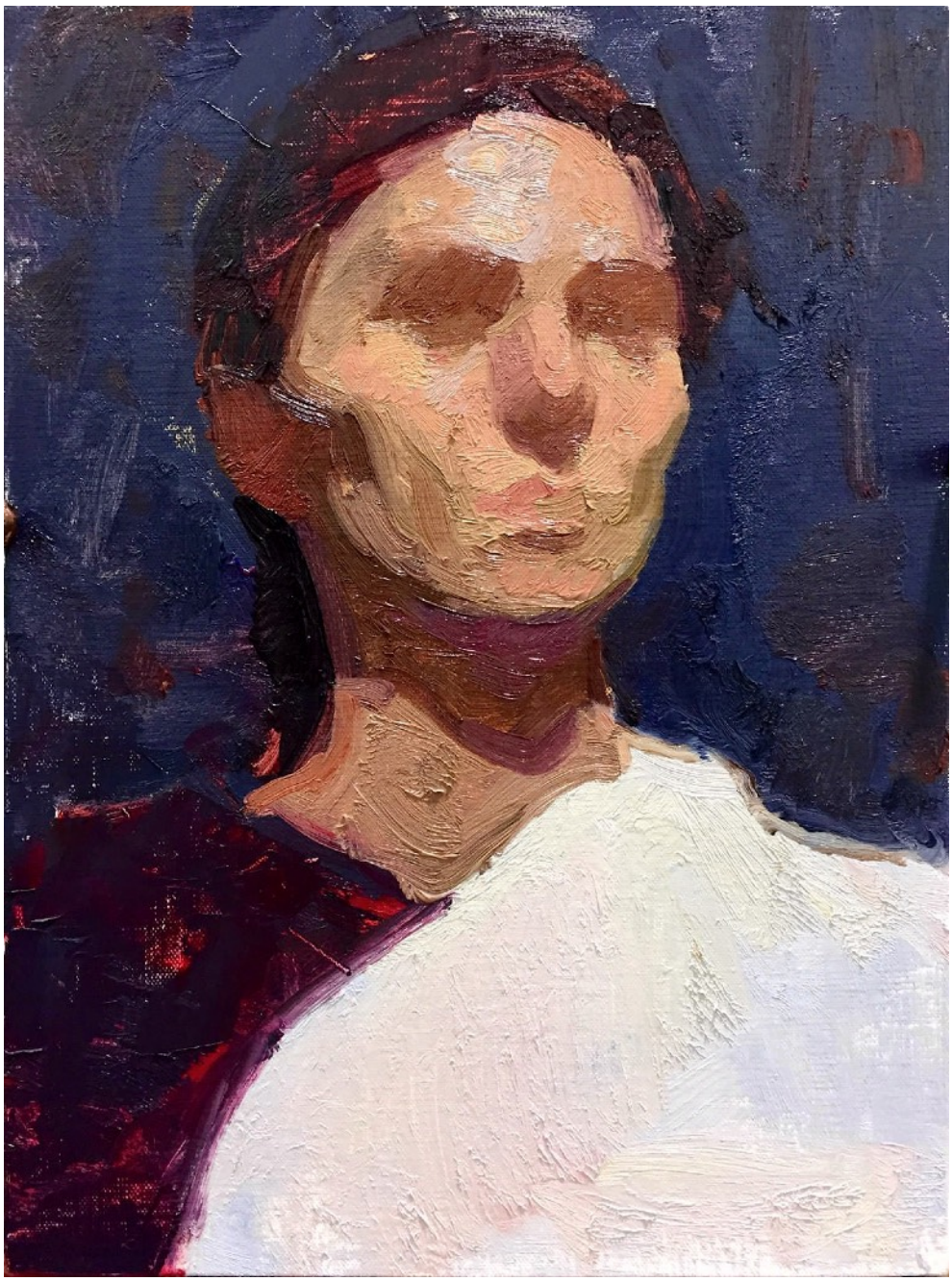


Now it's time to place mid values between light and shadow areas, creating transitions.

The large blocks of temperature changes are fixed and the key of light and dark is established.

He also introduces simultaneous color contrasts: yellow in the lights and violet in the shadows.

Finally he diversifies the nuances of color in the background, participating in the mixtures at the face.







Scott Burdick begins to work more closely in the focal point, detailing the eyes area, while the mouth remains undefined, only suggested by a slight change in temperature.

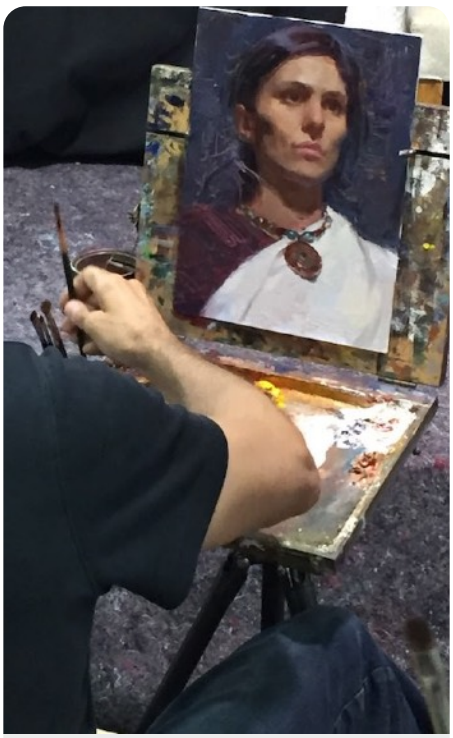
The background gains in texture and diversity, creating chromatic vibration.

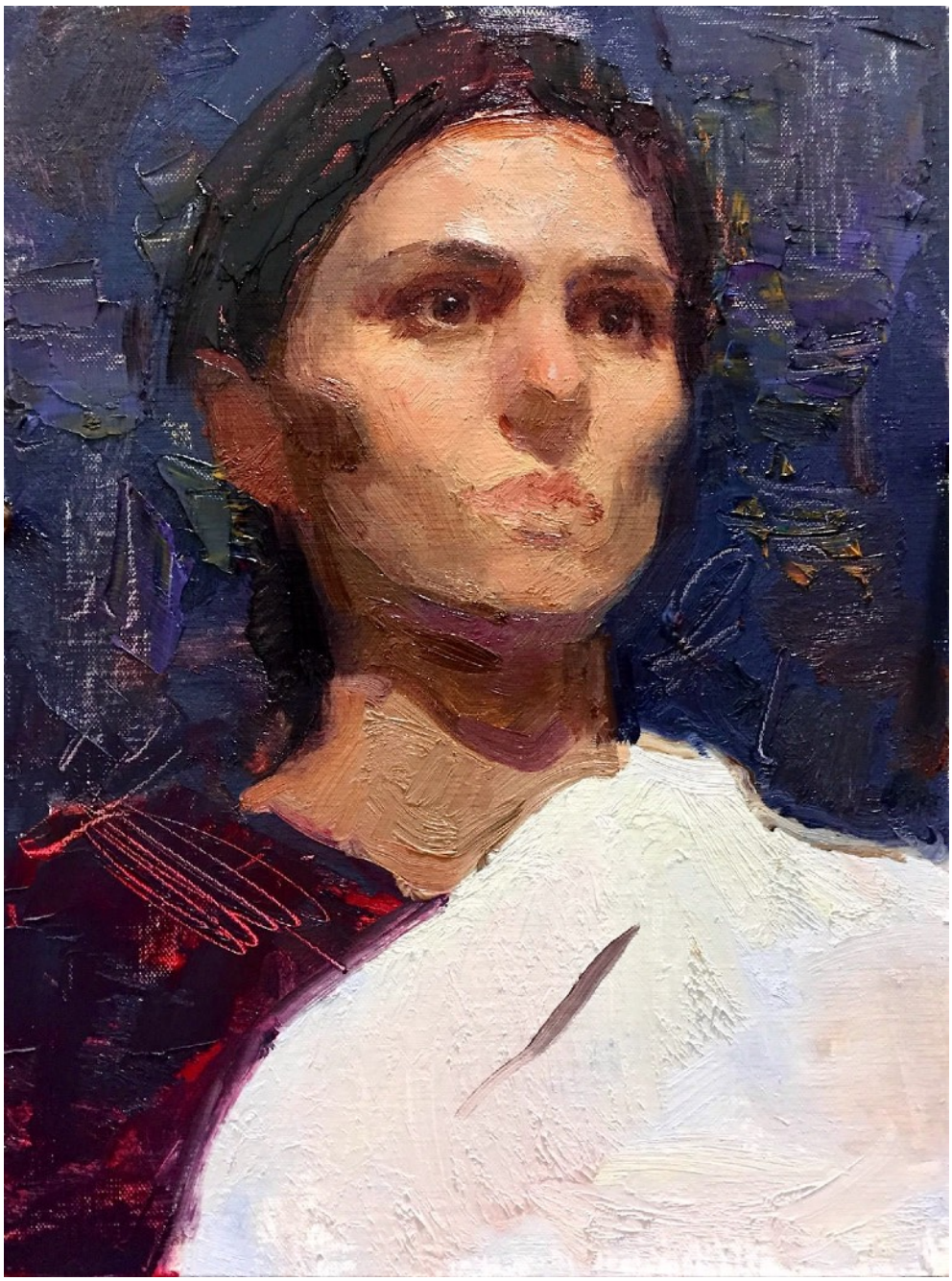
The more rounded forms, such as the cheeks, are softened by dragging a dry brush over the wet paint, following the shape's direction.











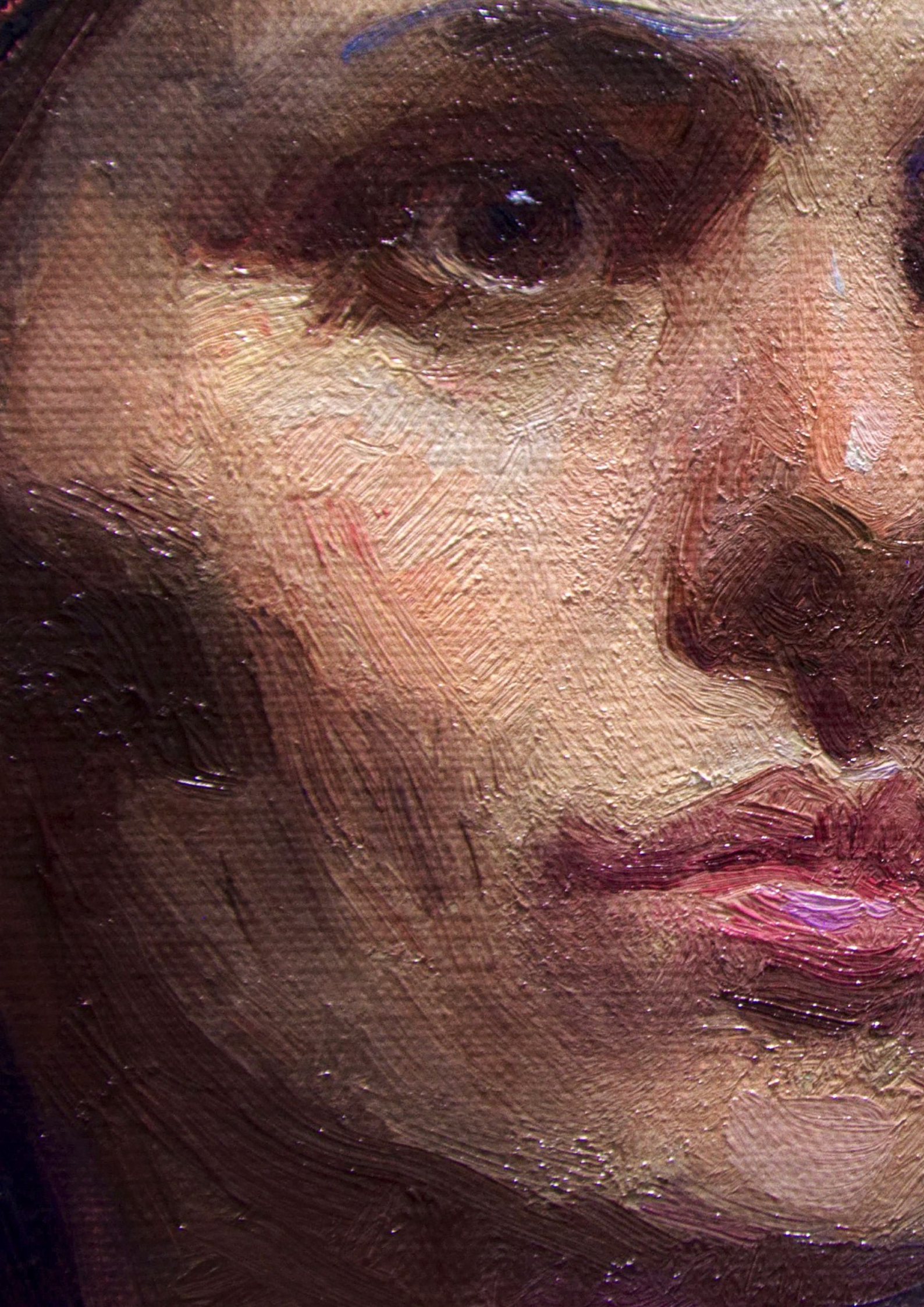
Highlights and accents are added while refining minor temperature changes and transitions.

Scott Burdick is still working on the focal point before he starts modeling the mouth, which he usually reserves for the end.

The shapes of the face soften as the background acquires more body and texture, creating a contrasting effect that enlivens the freshness of the portrait.









Participants

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Jorge Fernández Alday



100% NOIR Pulsar Podcast INTERVIEWS



Do you want to know more about Scott Burdick and Susan Lyon?

Jorge Fernández Alday did an in-depth interview for Pulsar Podcast.

Take a look at the video, It's great! 😌

April 7 to 13, 2025 → Lazaretto Quarantine Island, Menorca (Spain)

