

portrait painting from photographs - making a start -

Our aim today is to share with you our love of painting, to demystify the genre of portraiture and to give you the tools to pursue the experience of painting from a photograph at home. Let's get cracking!

Paulina & Suzon

Getting ready

A good reference

We want our reference to be of good quality (not pixelated).

The best reference images are those where the lights and shadows can easily be distinguished, preferably with the light hitting the face from one side (the picture below is a good example).

We can work from a screen but often printing on paper makes it easier.



Knowing your medium

Gouache and watercolour are both water based, gouache allowing for more opaque approaches.

In both cases, we use the paper as our purest white, which means building the picture from light to dark.

We'll play with wet or dry applications and use different brushes for a wider range of marks.

By having some paper aside we can try out tools and mixes as we go!



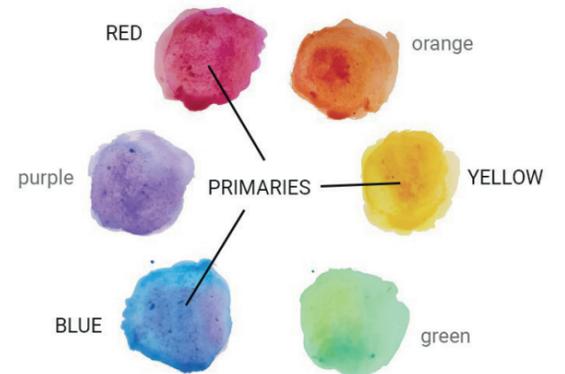
Colour introduction

Colours are a whole subject in itself and like most things, it is much easier to understand it through trial and error!

The colourwheel shows us that we can create all colours by mixing the primaries (Yellow, Red and Blue).

Secondary colours are obtained by mixing two primaries (Orange is Y+R, Green is Y+B and Purple is B+R).

When it comes to mixing colours, we're also thinking about tones (light to dark) and saturation (grey to fully saturated).



First steps

Rehearsing

Doing some quick little sketches of our painting will help us visualise any problems in advance.

With those thumbnail sketches we can think about composition (we might want to crop it or change format) and main areas of contrast (lights and darks).

When looking at our reference, we squint and blur our vision to reduce the level of detail and focus on the big shapes.



Deciding on the atmosphere

Every decision will influence the atmosphere of our future piece.

What is in focus? Do we paint the background or keep it abstract? Are we leaving a lot of paper showing through?

Choosing our colour scheme also makes a huge difference: colourful or subdued? naturalistic or close to a monochrome, like sepia?

We are also free to change to colour of some elements like clothes if it serves the overall image.



Blocking the drawing in

Some people use a grid, some draw free hand: it is a different experience that won't give the same result.

Free hand drawing allows us to understand and learn about our picture throughout the process.

We're looking at the big shapes, vertical and horizontal connections, angles, negative space and geometric shape. This is not a 'pretty' drawing but a useful map that will inform the painting process.



portrait painting from photographs - developing the painting -

Using the reference

Painting what we see

Easier said than done, but let's try to look at our reference in an abstract way, as if we were seeing it for the first time.

If we're not thinking about nose, fingers or hair, we can focus on the main shapes and determine their tone and colour.

This way, we are finding the planes of the face, which relates to the structure of the subject, alternating between light and shadow. What is true for a box will be true for more complex shapes: this is one way to break down what we see.



Shapes over lines

We want to fully embrace the fact it is a painting, so unless it is for aesthetic reason, we want to avoid lines.

When we are tempted to draw an edge, it means that two areas of contrast are meeting. How am I able to see those two shapes as independent? Is this one darker? more saturated? redder...?

Trust the process: it's always magical when the figure appears from those carefully observed marks.



Evaluating and improving

Painting is alternating between being creative and stopping to evaluate and adjust. Take breaks and step back!

To spot our mistakes more easily we can use a mirror to refresh our vision. or check the tones by taking a picture and applying a black and white filter.

If something doesn't feel right in the painting, there's always a reason! It's up to us to have the discipline to make necessary changes.



A painting in its own right

Emotion over photocopy

Let's remember that photography already exists, what we are creating doesn't have to be an exact copy. Our personality and artistic freedom will make it a beautifully unique painting.

It's all about trusting ourselves and our decisions and allow emotions to be part of the picture!

At the same time, don't worry about 'knowing your style', this is something that comes naturally through practice!



Mark making

We want to celebrate the fact it is a painting, done by the human hand!

As we get to know our medium, tools and references, we can make more informed decisions. Some people prefer to paint the same picture a few times to reach the control they like.

Watercolour is unforgiving in some ways, but it also generates unexpected marks that are beautiful. Happy accidents are definitely part of the process!



Knowing when to stop

The beauty of painting is often in its capacity to suggest. No need to render everything or to explain too much, the audience will actually love being active and 'fill in the blanks'.

Variation in detail will also bring certain areas in focus and add to the mood of our picture.

If we think about it, that's also how our memories are: not fully defined, evocations more than clear pictures.



portrait painting from photographs - going further -

We truly hope you enjoyed this introductory workshop and that you feel inspired to keep painting!
Painting portraits and using photographs can inspire us in many directions; here are a few possibilities:

Illustration

Playing with background, patterns and stylisation.



Abstraction

Playfully simplifying to find connexions.



Symbolism and narratives

Adding meaningful elements to tell stories.



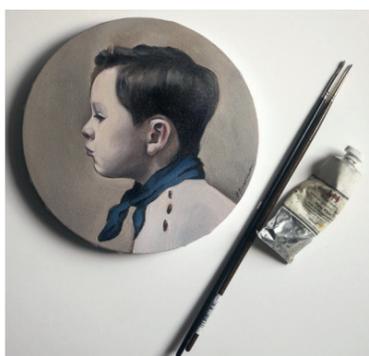
Collage

Overlaying various photographs to revisit memories.



Changing medium

Oil, ink or pencil...each one opens up possibilities.



Working in series

Exploring your family's eyes for unique Xmas presents!



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I am a self taught painter & illustrator. When I think of art, I see a combination of intellect with aesthetics and emotion.

In 2016 I established About Face Illustration, which is a commission based painting studio, and it has now become a full time job.

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Painting and drawing are at the core of my practice. From life or photographs, it's always an opportunity to explore myself and the world around me.

I'm about to graduate from a Portraiture Diploma in London, through which I'm also exploring sculpture and etching.

Suzon Lagarde

