

Creating an underpainting in readiness for the colour stage is a classical technique employed by great masters such as Vermeer. He worked upon a grey ground painted across his canvas, produced the drawing in chalk (which was easy to correct) and fixed the drawing in place with a light varnish. From here he worked in black and white oils to create the finished grisaille. I use a contemporary version of this method.

To begin with I make the drawing using a 2B pencil. I never use a rubber for correction, because I don't like the vagueness that smudged pencil creates. If I need to correct the drawing, particularly when the linework has become confused, I paint a white acrylic wash over the canvas. Once dry this 'ghosts' the image allowing me to draw and correct over the top. It is vital that the WHOLE canvas is painted otherwise patches will appear at the next stage. This process can be applied numerous times until the drawing is as I want it. Once the drawing is complete I wash acrylic paynes grey with water over the whole canvas. This seals the pencil in place and produces a neutral mid-toned canvas to paint upon.

From this point I begin to build the tonal areas using titanium white and paynes grey in either acrylic (for speed) or oils for more flexibility. As a way of developing your own approach and 'look' try using colours other than grey until you find an approach that you like. I use grey because it is a neutral background, but that is just my choice. Raw umber is another neutral colour.

## The equipment I use for portraits and figures

1. Cheap acrylics (as I don't need strong pigmentation) in titanium white and paynes grey. I never use acrylic medium, just water, as I don't like the fact that it may feel dry when it isn't and this can lift the next layers of paint - personal choice
2. Belle Arte canvas board - good quality primed canvas glued to MDF to give a solid, long lasting surface that doesn't bow over time.
3. Filbert and square head brushes, sizes '0' to '8', medium fan (blending) brushes, fine sables, riggers, and a flat 2" varnish brush for washes Through personal choice I use synthetic brushes wherever possible, as I don't like the idea of animals being bred for this purpose. I also don't distinguish between acrylic and oil brushes.
4. A maal stick and an overhead light with a daylight bulb
5. A hair drier - drying regularly is essential. NOTE: if the canvas is too hot after use, the acrylics will dry as soon as applied
6. For oils I use my own medium - 4 parts real turpentine, 3 parts linseed oil, 2 parts damar varnish and 1 part venetian turpentine (stand oil can be substituted here). I'll explain mediums in depth in subsequent tutorials
7. A good quality black and white reference photograph, held in place on the easel with snake necked clips. A music stand can be adapted in a similar way which gives a better view of the reference than sticking it over or on the canvas / easel
8. A strong wooden easel - never one of those wobbly tripod things as it is necessary to give the paint a bit of welly sometimes



**A grisaille allows you to focus on tone rather colour. This allows for a much better understanding of how tones sculpt the face. It also helps to get the right tone when mixing colours.**

Once the acrylic background wash is dry, I repaint the outlines, following my pencil lines, with a VERY THIN paynes grey acrylic Too dark and the linework will show through the paint. I then paint a grey wash into the shadow and structural shapes in the drawing - as explained in my last tutorial.

It is better to build the shadows over several coats to avoid putting them in too dark at the start. Patience is the key.

I add more shadow layers until I reach the desired tones.

I then add thin white layers, again avoiding adding too much white too quickly.

As the lighter areas get stronger I gradually increase the thickness of the white over several layers. I add the paint to my brush then wipe most of it off, this gives a pastel like effect when put on the canvas. It can be scrubbed and moulded to the face contours much easier than lots of wet paint.

It is vital to avoid mixing white and grey together rather than layering. Mixing them creates a different colour as the white picks up too much of the blue in paynes grey.

I repeat the process alternating between the grey and the white until I feel the balance is just right. I begin to soften the shapes in the face by adding thinner layers to the edges.

It is possible to use a fan brush to do this but it must be done with small sections of the picture at a time, other wise the paint will dry before it can be blended. Notice how the hair has been added with shapes rather than lots of individual hairs. This is because I only want to understand the hair's structure and direction at this stage. I dry the paint thoroughly after each stage to avoid new paint lifting off what is underneath.

I now decide on the tone I want in the background. Then I make any adjustments to the shadows and add the final highlights with thicker paint.

The main advantages of the grisaille are as follows:-

1. You learn about how the face is made up and gained confidence in your knowledge
2. You get lots of opportunities to resolve structural issues and likeness before adding colour
3. You discover which brush strokes work well so that you can replicate them later.
4. The neutral colour is much easier for making colour decisions rather than stark white
5. You can make a plan for the tackling the next stage

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*Mike Skidmore*