

I'm Robert Haasdijk, I discovered airbrushing early 2007 when I was looking for a way to do some paintings on a motorcycle. After a short airbrush starters course I found really liked the medium and I've been at it ever since. My motorcycle however still needs to get it's paintjob.

When I just started airbrushing and the Galactictv show was still running I did a piece based on it. Some time has passed since then and I learned a lot of new techniques I thought it would be fun to make something like it to see how it would turn out now.

Normally I start out with a rough pencil sketch of an idea to get the general feel, layout and atmosphere of the picture I want to make. With the idea on paper I start to look for reference material. As this piece was going to be based on the tv series and I wanted to keep it relatively simple I skipped the sketch stage. I had already found the picture of Tricia Helfer I wanted to use and just had to find a reference for the Cylon.

When looking for reference material I always try whenever possible to get it in the correct light. The internet is of course a rich source of reference material as are good old old-fashioned books. Nowadays with most people having phones with cameras it also has become very easy to make your own library of reference shots. Whenever I come across something that might be of use someday I make a quick snapshot. Another neat trick I use a lot (when I need a reference for a hand for instance) is making a photo of myself in the mirror, the beautiful thing about doing that is that you can arrange the light exactly as you would like it.

In this case as it is based on a tv series finding a picture of a Cylon with the right light on the internet wasn't too hard.

After getting my references I used Photoshop to make a very rough picture of how I wanted it to turn out.

I had a few options to transfer this photoshop piece to the paper. Most of the time I either make a mask or use a beamer. As a beamer can be a bit tricky especially with portraits (you have to set it up perfectly to avoid it disforming) and this was a relative simple piece I decided to make a mask. The more complicated a piece the more work it will become to create a mask so when I have a piece with a lot of details I tend to use the beamer as creating a mask in such case would be too time consuming.

I had a friend make a print of it on the scale I wanted to make the painting. When you have it printed always have a couple of copies made. When you make a mistake creating the mask you have a backup and it makes life a lot easier having a reference that is to scale. Next I used the print to make the mask. When doing this I try to find my "base reference points" and really dark areas and cut these out. The mask will only be used to get the proportions right and as a reference for the pencil sketch I will do next.

**(step1)**

With the mask finished I used an Iwata CM-SB to paint the mask onto the paper. When doing I this try not to “flood fill” it and use only a couple of light layers of paint. It will only serve as a guide and you can make mistakes in your mask. When you put it on too heavily it will make it harder to correct mistakes you made in the mask.

For the Cylon I used sepia and for Tricia Helfer I used skin color. I could (and sometimes do) have used sepia on the skin tones also, as I should have cut out only the darker areas but using skin color makes it a bit easier to correct mistakes I might have made in the mask.

**(step2)**

With the basic layout on paper I use a pencil to scetch out my darker and lighter areas. The painting created with the mask is now used as a reference to make constantly check if everything is still in proportion and where it should be.

When in doubt I put a piece of translucent paper on the backup print I had made draw over the part I’m not sure about and put that over my pencil scetch. Any mistakes than become instantly clear and can easily be corrected. I tend to do this a lot as this will be the base of my work, any mistakes avoided now will make it easier later on.

**(step3) (step3a)**

As the Cylonis mainly made up off a few hard lines and shadows this was a bit harder to scetch freehand. It’s a droid and you can’t realy afford to make small mistakes here as they would show up realy fast. I used the translucent paper trick again and used carbon paper to transfer that to the paper so all distances would be correct and the lines straight.

**(step4)**

It’s always good to think about the order in which you want to paint your work to avoid nasty surprises later on. Sommetimes it’s pretty important you do it in the right order, sometimes it doesn’t matter, in this piece it was pretty clear cut as the hair more or less dictated it.

-The background is first as the hair falls over the background and it’s a lot easier to paint the hair over it than it is to paint the background between all the little hairs. I also want the cyborg to fade into the background (though I changed this at the end)

-The cylon comes 2<sup>nd</sup> as the hair also falls over him.

-Next I could do either the skinn or clothing

-Last will be the hair

To do the background I masked off the Cylon. With Tricia Helfer I masked off the whole left side and the right side up to the neck. I don’t want anything hit with ugly and hard to get rid off black overspray but as I want the back ground to be visible/shine through the hair I didn’t mask off that part.

As I don't like to use pure black I mixed black with blue and purple at an about 1:1 ratio. This will look just as black as pure black (as long as you don't use pure black anywhere else) but is just a tad more vibrant than pure black.

Slowly building up layers the background was made black except for the part where the hair would come which I tried to avoid. A bit of overspray there doesn't matter but as an erazor will be used later on to make the hairs the less of paint I have to remove the easier this will be.

With a mix off blue and white the "glow" around the characters was made. As this is meant to fade into the dark background I sprayed this over the masked areas and let the overspray create the glow effect. In the area where the hair will come I just lightly painted it in. This way I don't have to remove ton's of paint when I do the hair and we will get a nice transition between the hair and the background.

For the background I used a badger 360 for the "rough" work. I needed to apply a lot of paint and there was no detail involved. In such cases I prefer a bottom feed that gets a decent amount of paint on my work. As I crank up the pressure when using this gun (approximately 3 bar) its smart to spray over the masked areas, when one spray's towards them there is a risk of paint creeping under your masking material even when applying thin layers. For the lighter color in the hair area I used an Iwata CM-C. It holds a reasonable amount of paint and allows me to be a bit (lot) more careful with the application of it.

After removing the mask I couldn't resist making a start with the hair. With an electrical erazor and an erazor pencil the rough shapes and forms of the hair where erased from the background.

#### **(step5)**

For the cylon I again masked off the places where I didn't want to get any overspray, in this case the background around the cylon up to the point where it would fade into the background and Tricia Helfer.

When masking stuff you already painted you have to be realcarefull when cutting it out to avoid little white lines where you accidentally mask off some of the paper next to where you already painted. To avoid this I Always leave a fraction of a millimeter of the part I want masked visible. This way you are sure you won't get those white lines and depending on how much you leave "unmasked" you can slightly soften up those hard lines you get from masking. As in this case we are dealing with a cyborg I cut it as close as I dared as I wanted a really hard line.

To do the cylon I had a few options I could mask it off completely and cut out each separate piece (method often used on droids, planes etc.). This would require a lot off tedious work and as I'm more than a bit lazy I decided to freehand it as much as possible and do the really hard lines at the end when the darkest colors are used.

I did make some “custom” free hand masks from the transfer paper I used when drawing the cylon. I am pretty comfortable freehanding it all but using a mask for those long hard lines just works a lot quicker.

Using transparent granite grey and an Iwata CM-C I started on the cylon. This will be the base of my work and I try to stay as close to the grey values of my reference as possible. As the darkest colors are a lot darker than the color I’m using at this point I have to keep in mind that the areas that are approximately the color I’m using now have to be lighter. If I don’t do this everything darker than the color I’m using will be exactly the same color and I won’t have a transition in the values there.

If you practice this a bit you will be able to see to what grey value you have to paint what. It can be a bit tricky when you first start using this technique though. I trick I used a lot when practicing this is using Photoshop to lighten my reference picture until the darkest areas where the color of the paint I was using. That way its easy to see to which value you need to paint the rest of the picture.

As I find it hard to keep concentrated on my details when doing pieces as large as this I picked out areas to work on, airbrushed those and went in with my erazors to do the fine details. This (for me) makes it easier to keep the level of detail up if I first airbrushed everything I tend to start out very detailed at the start and drop in level of detail the further I come along.

#### **(step6)**

With the grey I try to approach the grey values as good as I can and where needed texturize those values. Normaly when doing these kind of paintings it is smart to paint what you see but as I found a “smooth” droid a bit boring I overdid the texture a bit to give it a bit more battle worn look.

Although I try to put as much texture and detail in as possible with the airbrush the real texturizing was done with erazors. For the larger areas I used a normal erazor in the transitional areas I went in with an erazor pencil. The realy hard highlights where done with an electrical erazor.

When airbrushing I already kept in mind my highlights and I tried to avoid the realy bright highlight. If its white try to keep it white it saves work in the erazor phase. The same applies to the realy dark areas. As at a later stage I’ll go over this with near pure black I refrain from doing detail work here as you’ll just paint over it and it won’t show, check your reference often to see where you see (even the tiniest amount off) details as you will need to do the work there. Area’s that look black at first glance often contain an amazing amount of detail on closer inspection. Using Photoshop to enhance the light and dark areas can help to spot them.

The realy dark areas (transition into the background) I leave as they are. These will become near black and it will just be a waste of paint to make them grey at this stage.

#### **(step7)**

There isn't a lot of color in the Cylon after close inspection it's only grey and a purplish color. As etac transparent sepia smoke has a reasonably purple hue to it I used that to add the color to it. I use a transparent here as I don't want to mess up the details I just put in, the only thing I want to do add this stage is add some color to the work and darken the grey values where needed. Staying away from the white highlights I carefully apply the sepia. When this is to my satisfaction I go back in with the array of erazors to pick out my highlights where needed.

### **(step8)**

For the darkest color I mixed up black with sepia. The large areas (transition into the background and the right side of the head) where done with an Iwata CM-C in the areas closer to the detail work I used an Iwata CM-SB. As with the grey I now try to get as close as I can to the grey values of the reference and apply detail where needed. To get the really hard lines I temporarily masked off some of the areas (mainly around the eye).

There wasn't much erazor work involved after this as most of the detail made with that is in the lighter areas where I don't go with my darkest color. With the sepia I already darkened the grey values where needed I use the "black" only to touch up in those spots where that wasn't enough.

The black pushed back the sepia a bit so I went back in with sepia and toughed up the transition areas.

With a transparent red the "eye" was colored. With an overly reduced transparent red I sprayed a bit around the eye to create the "glow" effect.

### **(step9)**

To do the clothing I masked off the area around it once again making sure to leave a tiny fraction of the paint in the painted areas visible to avoid those white lines.

With sepia smoke and an Iwata CM-SB the base was put down again looking at the grey values trying to approach them as closely as possible. Near the masked areas, especially where it gets very dark I try to spray over the mask as much as possible.

With a pencil erazor detail in the highlights were done. As there were no hard, small highlights I refrained from using the electrical erazor. For the highlights touching the masked areas (the highlight around the breast) I made sure part of my erazor was always on the mask. This prevents you from damaging your mask and having paint crawl under it.

With a normal erazor I added some structure to all of the clothing a very tedious job that hardly shows until you get really close to the painting, but I tend to find that its these small details that greatly add to the realism of your painting.

### **(step10)**

To add some more color I went in with a highly reduced burned umber. These were just a couple of light layers of paint with which I tried to steer clear of my highlights. As the grey values were already there was no need to do detail work with this color. With a normal eraser I then again texturized all the clothing.

### **(step11)**

With a mix of black, sepia and burned umber the grey values were finished. As this was also the color of the clothing there was no need to adjust the colors. For the large areas the paint was reduced to about 1:2 as I wanted to let all the texture I made with the eraser to remain visible. It's something that hardly shows, it does show though when you don't add the texture (will look too smooth). With a bit less reduced paint the small details were toughed up.

### **(step12)**

A lot of the work I did on the skin was done during the evening using artificial light so the colors on the photos will vary a bit or make a part of the picture appear to be lighter than other parts of the picture.

For the skin I started with masking off the already painted areas, the areas around the hair weren't masked off as the hair will fall over these and some overspray here is needed as background for the hair.

A lot of people, when doing a portrait start with the eyes. There is a good reason for this, when the eyes don't work out you can spend as much time on the rest as you will but it just won't look good. I also used to start with the eyes but by now am confident enough to do them during the skin process. Most of the colors used when doing the skin are also used in the eyes and doing them at the same time as the skin saves some time.

With opaque light flesh tone the base of the skin tones was put in. As this is a portrait it is imperative to keep looking at the reference to make sure the grey values correspond with it and are in the right place. In the lighter areas a lot of the base put in now will be the only paint there is so it pays to make sure to do it right.

With such a large area of skin this step takes a lot of time but this is the base on which the rest of the colors will be built. Any extra time put in at this stage will save time in the later stages.

In this stage, although I put in a lot of detail I work reasonably rough. The further along I come in the process the more tidy I get until I'm at the last final detail stage.

### **(step13)**

With erasers I patched up the highlights and added detail and texture. The electrical eraser wasn't used yet this is the base and the tidy work will come in the later stages. Next I went in

with sepia smoke to put some accents in the darker areas. As I go in with sepia now I could, as I stated at the start, have used sepia also to put my basic layout on the paper.

I now am a lot more careful and don't paint as rough as I did in the first phase especially around the eyes mistakes will take a lot of time to correct so I'm rather safe than sorry. I keep checking my reference, sometimes using the transparent paper trick to make sure the shapes are still correct. As I'm working a lot more detailed now I make use of freehand stencils some of which I cut out myself (like the darkest area of the mouth). When using stencils I tend to go over the edges freehand to make sure I don't get those really hard stencil lines.

#### **(step14)**

With my "darks" in place erazors where used to pick out the highlights and add some more texture. For the realy bright highlights like the nose and the small highlights on the lips I used an electrical erazor. When doing small highlights like on the lips make sure your electrical erazor has a little point (I run it over a small piece of sandpaper to create a point).

#### **(step15)**

The skin tone is achieved by layering serveral colors which together will give you the skin tone. I always find the next step a bit scary as (in my opinion) when the step is complete it looks like crap and you are afraid you messed it all up. It will all come to life and together is the subsequent steps though.

With burned umber I start touching up the dark areas, keeping in mind the grey values and my reference again. I make very sure I don't hit my highlight areas with this color as that will take some work to correct. I can use some of the masks I cut out earlier for the sepia again in those areas where the detail needs to be tight.

I also start doing the small detail work around the eyes now. For this I reduce my air pressure up to the point where my paint isn't vaporized anymore. Then I slowly increase my airpressure till I'm at the point that I have a nice spray patern. For me the lower the persure the easier it is to do the small detail work. It gives me a lot more control and prevents "spiders" when you are working this close to the paper.

After I was finished with the burned umber I applied a with wash. I overly reduced white and went over all the skin tone. This blends and pulls all the different colors together. Especialy in the eyes and on the lips I carefully build this up layer after layer as this gives that "translucent" effect.

#### **(step16)**

To get some color I used brick red ocher and golden ocher. Except for the lip area this was just meant to color the picture so I used a very reduced version of it to leave my grey values intact. For the lips I again reduced my air pressure for some more detail work.

If the colors come out too bright you can use a white wash again. The nice thing about this process is also that if you now notice that your grey values aren't correct you could go in with skincolor, sepia, burnt umber followed by a white wash again to correct mistakes.

**(step17)**

Before I went in with my darkest color I noticed that the highlight on the right on the bridge of the nose was too far to the right. So as described above I went through the steps again to correct that.

For my darkest color I took burnt umber and added some black. I greatly reduced this to darken the skin tones where needed carefully applying thin layers to make sure I didn't take this too far.

With "normal" reduced paint I then did the detail work around the eyes, nose and lips. Again I worked with greatly reduced air pressure while doing this.

To touch up the really small details I used some watercolor pencils in and around the eyes and on the lips. With a little knife and an electrical eraser the final touch ups in the eyes were done. The small hairs on the arm were also done this way.

The close up pictures are of the final project as I didn't think of making those at this point.

**(step 18,19,20)**

For the hair I started with masking of the left side of the face, the clothing and the neck. Basically I masked off all the places where the hair wouldn't overlap those parts that were already completed.

Once you get the knack of it hair is really easy to do, it's just very tedious work. It requires several layers and a lot of detail work of which most you do at the start will be hardly visible. The trick to hair is pretty simple take your time with it and don't rush it. The more time you spend on it the better it generally will look.

With blond hair (near white in this case) I always find it hard to get the colors right. One tends to use yellow and ochers, sometimes this works for me however more often it doesn't.

As I rather find out what works and doesn't work on a piece of test paper than on my finished product I played around with colors a bit till I had the right combination.

I started out with skincolor. With this I mainly looked for my light and dark areas as I did with the grey values. In the lighter areas I also started doing the single hairs. Where with the small detail work around the eyes I tend to reduce my air pressure I crank it up when doing hair. This enables me to make quick strokes and due to the higher pressure there will still be enough paint sprayed on to get a nice "hair line". From experience I know that doing those

single strokes in the dark areas is useless with your first color, subsequent layers will totally cover this up (at least with the way I paint).

### **(step21)**

Erazor time. First I went in with a normal erazor to touch up the large light areas. With an erazor pencil I then added some detail and transition to the darker areas. After this I used my electrical erazor to add the individual hairs. A lot of this will be covered up in later stages but all the work done now will shine through basically the more time spend on this the better it will look. It's easy to get into a trance state doing this as for me it is pretty boring work but always keep checking your reference.

### **(step22)**

What follows is basically a repetition of these two steps where each time I go in with a darker color and use an erazor to pick out the highlights and individual hairs.

When doing my test piece I found that sepia worked nicely as the next color so I went in with sepia to add some more shadow. As with the skin tones I made sure to stay away from my highlights with this color. After adding the sepia layer I went back in with my erazors

### **(step23)**

For the darkest color I added some burnt umber to sepia with a very tiny amount of black. I repeated the earlier process and when I was done with my erazors I greatly reduced the paint and roughly went over the right side of the hair to create some more shadow and make sure the individual hairs I did with the electrical erazor weren't white lines.

As a finishing touch I used the electrical erazor, a white watercolor pencil and a knife to do make some individual hairs where the hair overlapped the cylon and the background.

As this is a relative large piece I did the hair except for the fine detail at the end only using the airbrush and erazors. When doing a smaller portrait the single hairs can also easily be done with a watercolor pencil.

### **(step24)**

With the piece basically finished I went in with my background color again to patch up the transition between the cylon and the background as when the light hit it at a certain angle you could see the spot where I masked off the cylon at the start. When I finished with this the balance of the picture just didn't feel right as there was a too large dark area from the left edge to the breast compared to the space between the arm on the right and the edge.

To compensate for this I masked off the shape of the arm of the cylon and very carefully sprayed a thin layer of the blue white I used to get the light effect in the background. I didn't want it to stand out too much but just break the large black area a bit.

Credit where credit is due, I like to thank Marissa Oosterlee as I learned many of the techniques used for the portrait from her.

The above is a step by step of how I came to the finished piece. This is the way I worked in this case and in no way will I pretend it's the best/only way. A couple of years in the future when I myself have learned new techniques and tricks I might go about it in a completely different way.

That being said I hopes this gives you some insight into the process I used to create this piece and that it maybe even helped or inspired you a bit.