



✓ PINK PORTRAIT

Here's another installment of what it takes to survive in the T-shirt world. Although portrait work, much like caricature, doesn't account for a large percentage of my overall volume, the importance of a nice portrait on display cannot be overlooked. The instant attraction of the customer to a well done painting of someone they know, and hopefully like, will inspire them to stop and check out more of your work. Anytime you can get a prospective customer to slow down and take a longer look at what you've got is a good thing. So, let's delve into the knowledge and steps needed to complete the T-shirt portrait.

T-SHIRT TACTICS

By Kent Lind

One of the challenges for me is to find an appropriate subject to airbrush onto my shirt. In other words, who should I paint? Here are my criteria: Who do I like and find interesting, and who would the customer be able to relate to (or, who's hot at the moment). I try to find a balance with just a little bit more weight placed on my own personal likes. After all, it's a lot more fun painting something for display that you find exciting to do. Now that's not to say that the portrait jobs you get as a direct result of your display will be someone that you personally find interesting. In fact, most of the time they'll be people that you don't know at all or are relatives or family members of your customers. But you should take care to spend the same amount of time and energy on every piece that you do. The perception of you as an artist delivering quality work time and time again is extremely important. That's where repeat customers come from. For this piece I tried to think of someone that has a ton of energy, charisma, and broad general appeal. It was actually my daughter who first recommended Pink to me and I thought that she fit the bill perfectly. I like to use Google images for my photo references, and in this case it worked great. So, with our image ready to go, let's take a look at the process.

WHERE TO START

The first thing to do is prep the shirt. For some this simply means stretching your shirt over the board and away you go. For me prepping involves spraying the shirt first with Createx Transparent Base and then heat-setting it for a smooth, nap-free surface. Then, I put the shirt on the board and tape off all of the areas that I want to keep clean. For this portrait, I covered the neck and sides with masking tape and taped back the sleeves. The next step is to transfer the image onto the shirt using Artograph's Super Prism opaque projector. I only use the projector to establish the major markings and shape of the portrait. Then, I hold the picture and sketch the rest of the detail. I believe there's somewhat of a loss of information during the projection stage if you use it for too long. You really need your own drawing skills to get a feel for all of the detail. With the prep complete, we're ready to paint.



This first step is important because it sets the color basis for the rest of the image. Since I'll use this color and various forms throughout the painting, it really needs to be the hue and value that I want (in other words, the color and shade). This first color is a mix of Createx light brown, transparent base (to maximize flow and reduce value), and golden yellow to shift it a bit more to the ochre side. Remember to make enough for the subsequent colors. Typically, four ounces is just about right. Also, here you can see the photo reference I used.



Here's the completed first step. Don't think that you'll "tighten" it up later and be real loose. You've got to start tight and clean to keep the entire piece sharp during the whole process. Also notice my soft pencil marks that outlined the rest of the image.



To add more color I airbrushed a wash of Golden Yellow and Flamingo Pink over the entire image. This allowed me to further match the flesh tone with my reference. The important thing is to not get heavy handed in this application. Too much will muddy it. Notice that I added a bit more of the Flamingo Pink to the cheeks and mouth.



Next, I brought out some of the detail through the highlights using a mixture of opaque white, Transparent Base, and just a drop or two of light brown and golden yellow. The goal is to achieve about 50% coverage of a full-strength opaque white—that's about a 1:1 ratio of base to white. The additional colors are added to offset the inherent blue effect of the opaque white, especially when mixed within a warm palette. Notice how effective this blonde mix is with the previous wash as a background.



To add more depth I used a mixture of 70% of the original brown mix to about 20% to 30% of Dark Brown. You must use your reference as a guide to match colors. A trick I like to use involves a blank, white piece of index card with a circle punched in it. Then, I find the color I want to match on my reference and place the circle over it for a clean view of the color I want to achieve. Once the mix is ready, put a swatch on that same index card and compare the two colors. A word of caution: don't go too heavy with your mix because you can't take that color out once it's added, and it's tough to correct. Notice that I've darkened areas in the eyes, nose, chin, and anywhere necessary.



I continued to darken the flesh where necessary. I took the second brown color and poured about 50% of what was left into a new bottle. See how I'm always working off of the original mix? I like to

do this because it helps with the continuity of the painting. Then, I mixed dark brown (about 25%) and violet to really give it a deep, rich effect. Again, you must use your reference to gauge your progress. I actually added drops of black after I shook it because it didn't have quite the intensity that I wanted. I used to not use black at all (for fear of killing my paintings!), but after talking to Dru Blair and looking at his incredible work, he convinced me to go with my instincts and add black where necessary. By the way, I could only hope of understanding color like Dru. He truly is a master. Here you see more of the areas darkened. I also added Brite Red (sparingly) to the lips. And to round off this step I used the blonde to highlight the lips and anywhere else it was needed.



Her hair is tricky because it's extremely light, and most of the shape will be determined by the background. I took our original brown and very, very lightly started to add some weight and depth mainly to the roots and short hair by the face. Next, I used the blonde color, and then Wicked Opaque White to really make the strands pop. Fluorescent Pink was then used to lightly wash over certain areas where needed (again using the reference often). After that pink wash, I returned with Opaque white to reinforce the highlights.



With the clothes, it was just a matter of really studying the reference and following the pattern. The red is straight Brite Red out of the bottle. To shade the folds I went with Medium Gray out of the bottle once again. I wanted a color that could transition well between the red and white areas easily and the gray fit the bill perfectly.



For the background, I masked off the main figure and the secondary figure with wax paper. Do so by very lightly spraying 3M Super 77 adhesive to the wax paper (notice how we do a lot of stuff very lightly!), apply to the shirt, and then cut extremely lightly around the images with a new X-Acto blade. This leaves the rest of the shirt exposed while the figures are perfectly protected. Next, I started on the outer corners and blended burgundy into brite red and then airbrushed fluorescent pink in a circular pattern toward the center of the design. Then, using Pearlized gold and a straight edge, I added a "ray" effect emanating from the center. The pearlized paints from Createx are semi-opaque and I had no trouble getting the desired look.



I removed the wax paper to work on the secondary image. The shape of it is actually a silhouette of Pink in a different pose. I wanted to use this space to add elements that I found in my reference and the flowers seemed the perfect fit. My intent was also to make the flowers look dated, or have an old school feel as far as color and application. I started with a light brown mix to get all of the flower shapes, and then sparingly added fluorescent pink and leaf green to give it some more color. I also used the light brown to model out some of her body for a more rounded effect.



Here's the finished piece with the tape removed. Adding this type of look to your display will certainly draw in those casual passer-bys, and is great to further enhance your skill level and enjoyment. Next time we'll finish our "Survival Guide" with the ever popular cartoon/heart design and animal portrait. ■

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