

Assignment: Paint a John Singer Sargent copy using my method. (Copy the attached Sargent)

I've chosen this Sargent portrait crop because of its strong and simplified organization of values / strong single light source.

By studying the work of skilled painters you can see their choices, their edits, how they organize and simplify. And if you don't have live models, this can be a very good way to study portraiture.

Sargent himself learned a lot from copying the masters, look for his copies of Velazquez paintings, note that he doesn't "copy" them exactly, but really observes and uses the exercise as a tool to gather information.

http://www.jssgallery.org/Paintings/Head_of_Aesop_Copy_after_Velazquez.htm

- 1 Spend 3, **Max 4** hours on this.
- 2 Use Zorn Palette for this (cad red, yellow ochre, ivory black, titanium white)
- 3 I would paint from a screen if possible, I have a monitor for just this purpose because getting good color in print-outs is very difficult.
- 4 I wash my paper with a 50/50 linseed- gamsol medium and a tiny bit of black paint, this allows "erasing" with a clean brush also dipped in the medium (for at least an hour before it soaks in).

- **Use these studio practices to remain objective, or regain objectivity.**
 - Set a timer and take five minute breaks (set timer for breaks too) every 20-25 minutes.
 - On the break turn your painting to the wall and DO NOT look at it until the break is over.
 - **Objectivity is your most important tool.**

- **Read through my method in the section below** before you begin painting. Then follow my method and all of my steps when you make your copy. But try to paint from the original Sargent painting not from the visuals of my demo. Look back at my demo if you lose your place. I stopped at 3 hours and you can do the same, a study isn't about "finish" it's about doing your best within the parameters.

Brushstrokes don't have to match the original or mine, just process, to be clear.

Don't forget that step 4 is to bring one small area to completion before moving onto any other area, I recommend an eye.

Remember to write down any questions that come up for you. This way you have points of focus for your next attempt.

Breathe and have fun.

"Moment to Moment"

My thoughts during an Alla Prima Portrait Study, duration 3 hours.

JS Sargent Copy

Zorn Palette

F.Forte

Step 1) Mix up the average dark (average in value and color) of your subject. Remember that each subject is different so no formula for finding "average" will work in every situation. Think about which choice will allow the most ease going forward and don't take the word "average" completely literally, it's really a simplification of concept to get you started.

- Use this to draw your subject, with a small stiff bristle brush. Draw with straight lines for greatest accuracy. Use dry paint, no medium, or very very little medium. You are drawing the dark shapes but not filling them in, **DO NOT FILL THEM IN!**
- While drawing with one small bristle brush, I like to use another clean bristle brush with a touch of turp/medium on it as an "eraser", to help correct and perfect my drawing. Clean it thoroughly after each correction.
- The way to apply this dark paint is thin/dry (not thinned by turp/medium, but pushed into the canvas with your brush) it should feel a bit like drawing with charcoal.

Step 2) Once you have your drawing mapped out and all of your shapes are accurate, you may then fill in your darks. Fill them in uniformly, you do not want to create many new values or shapes within the darks at this stage. Keep the paint thin and dry (but not so thin as to change your intended value). This will give the effect of transparency, which is what you want in your darks. It is not possible to get actually transparent darks with this palette, because the paints are not transparent. For me, being in control of the consistency of my paint is one of the most important tools in creating successful work.

- As you paint alla prima you should start with your darks, keeping them as thin and transparent looking as possible, then as you build up to your lights you will allow yourself to use thicker paint. Your lightest lights will be the last thing you paint and they should be the thickest.

BREATHE! observe for a bit before you go forward.

Step 3) Now we will begin to consider the light side of the face. First mix the average light, you should test your choice by placing only one brush stroke of what you have mixed directly adjacent to your average dark color... consider it's accuracy. If it's wrong: adjust on your palette, test again with only one brush stroke. Continue like this until you are satisfied with your mixture. Then place your average value/color over the entire light side of the face. **Do NOT paint into your dark shapes!** Keep your paint thin, as you will be building up and you don't want to saturate the support with paint too early.

- As you commence with each step, if you see that you must correct your drawing, **DO!** I correct and perfect my drawing by tiny degrees the entire time. Try for a likeness, it will teach you far more than settling for less!
- At this point you should ideally have a likeness with the drawing, general values and color.

Step 4) Next I like to begin with a focal point, 99% of the time this will be an eye. Paint it to "finish" (what ever you decide is finished is finished). In my opinion it's finished when it says what you intended it to say. If you don't know what that is... stop and think for a minute.

- The eye is an excellent starting point because in that small area of the portrait you can usually find a full range of values, dynamic edges, as well as both warm and cool colors. So, you will be able to discover how you intend to resolve the entire sketch in this small area and then translate that information onto the rest of the portrait without

risking ruining your strong start.

Step 5) Move out from the eye/initial focal point, bringing the rest of the light part of the face up to finish. **Ignore** the darks until you have completed rendering the lights up to where the lights *just* meet the darks. I try not to jump around too much, instead traveling to the area nearest the last completed area and working on it next. As in: first paint the eye and next the cheek and next the nose....and so on.

- You will see more detail than you can accurately paint in 3 hours! SQUINT!!! SQUNIT! squint! You must be able to see the most important relationships first, these are the aspects of your subject that are really necessary to record in order to paint a pleasing likeness. So..... SQUNIT!
- Also ask yourself what interests you most in your subject, this is what you should formulate a plan for trying to convey.

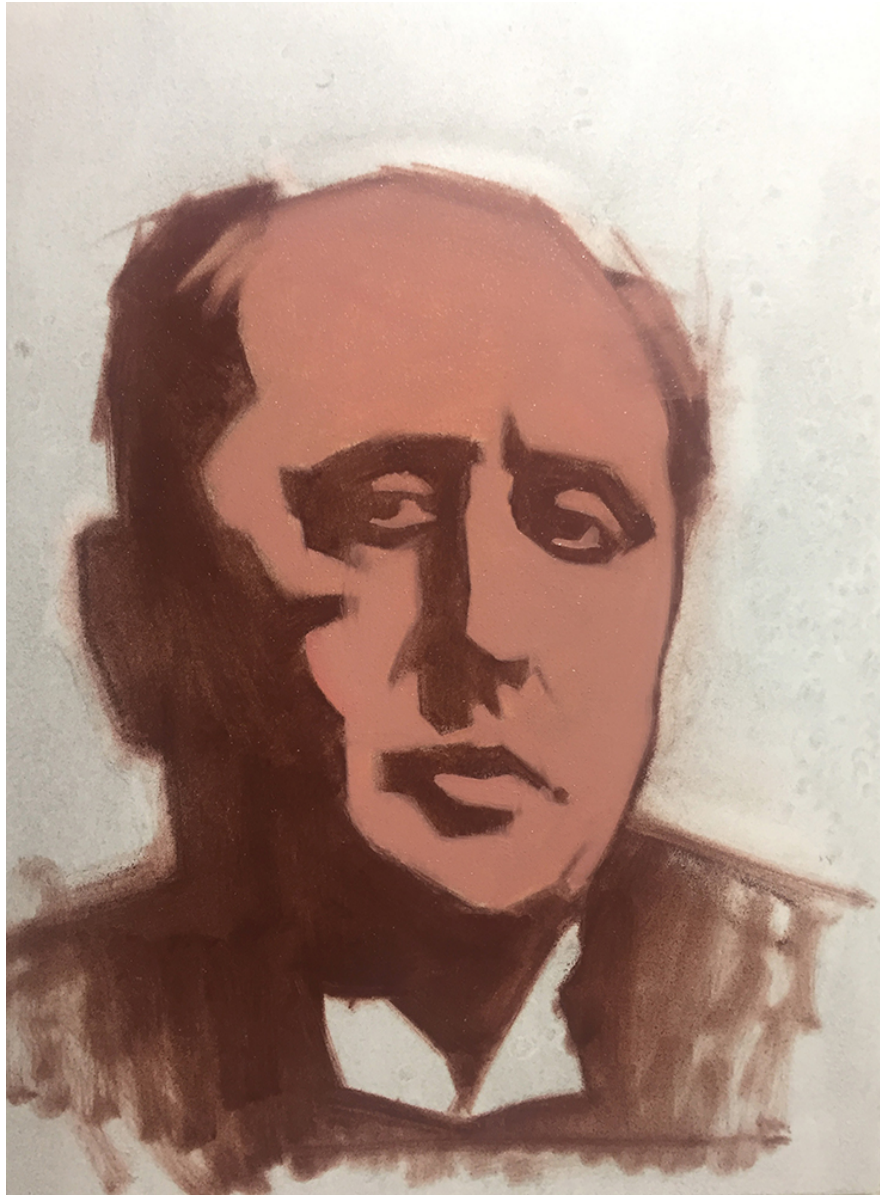
Stop at your time limit. If you are painting in a class or uninstructed group, this is easy. If you are making a master copy, or working on your own in another way it's much more difficult. **3-4 hours is a good amount of time to stop.** It will be frustrating and you will fail many times, but when you've done it repeatedly you will find that it hones your ability to prioritize. You will become more economical with your actions and thus energy, creating your own solutions that are the beginnings of your personal voice as a painter.

Some tools for when you get frustrated:

- 1) Take a break, step back and breathe!! When you are breaking do not keep looking at your painting, you need to try to re-gain objectivity in order to see where you should make adjustments.
- 2) Get a bigger brush or simply re-simplify: if you lose the big light and darks pattern that you established in the beginning of your study, you may be focussing too much on detail, especially detail in the darks. Step back, squint, and then re-simplify with a big brush. Scraping may also help if you have so much paint that things are getting messy!
- 3) Use a mirror or turn your painting upside down in order to gain a bit of objectivity.
- 4) Stop blending! It's much too difficult to predict what will happen to your value and color if you are smooshing paint around continually on your canvas. Instead think: "One Color One Stroke"
- 5) Make sure you have ample paint on your palette at all times, if you run out STOP right away and put out more.
- 6) If you run out of mixing space on your palette STOP right away and scrape it clean.
- 7) Practice mixing with your brush. If you mix with a palette knife it is likely that you will mix large piles of paint that are not quite right... but you will use them anyways. If you mix with your brush you are likely to test for accuracy more often.
- 8) Make sure you clean your brushes often and always know what color is on your brush, you don't want to use one brush the whole time (unless you are a brush cleaning NINJA!) and have surprise colors seeping out of it!















A tad more John Lithgow than I'd intended... but oh well!



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