

Digital painting tutorial.

Digital painting and illustration using a graphics tablet and PC software.



For this artwork I have mostly used a software program called Gimp (with some Photoshop at the end) but the techniques are roughly the same regardless of what software you are using.

This image relied heavily on photographic references. I started by collecting and taking photos that would help me achieve what I wanted. I gathered references for the figure (my son) as well as the objects on the table and the flying paper.

The screenshot below shows some of the paper reference photos I took.



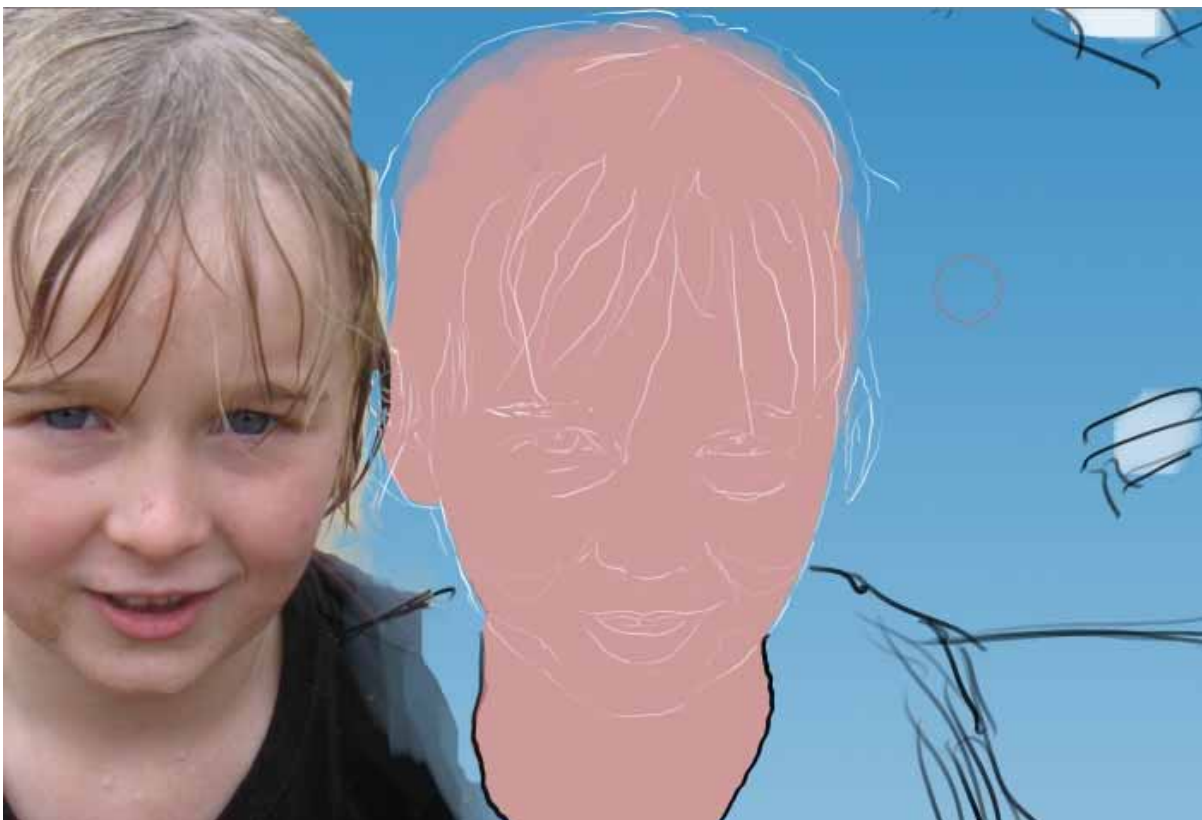
The next stage is to create a new document and dive in! I used a 10 x 8 sized image at 300DPI. I often work to this size as it is a common photo size. This lets me print copies at the local Photo store. Recently I have taken to getting my digital works printed on canvas. The image below shows the illustration in its early stages. Take note of the layers, the sketch lines sit on a layer above everything else. Below that I have some initial blocking in of colour to help me check the general balance of the image. The photo of my son is pasted directly into the image. While I think life drawing is a very important skill to work at and develop, for this image I have chosen to trace the photo and repaint in order to get an accurate portrait as possible. Finally, the overall tone of the image is placed underneath (in this case a blue tone with a subtle tonal fade)



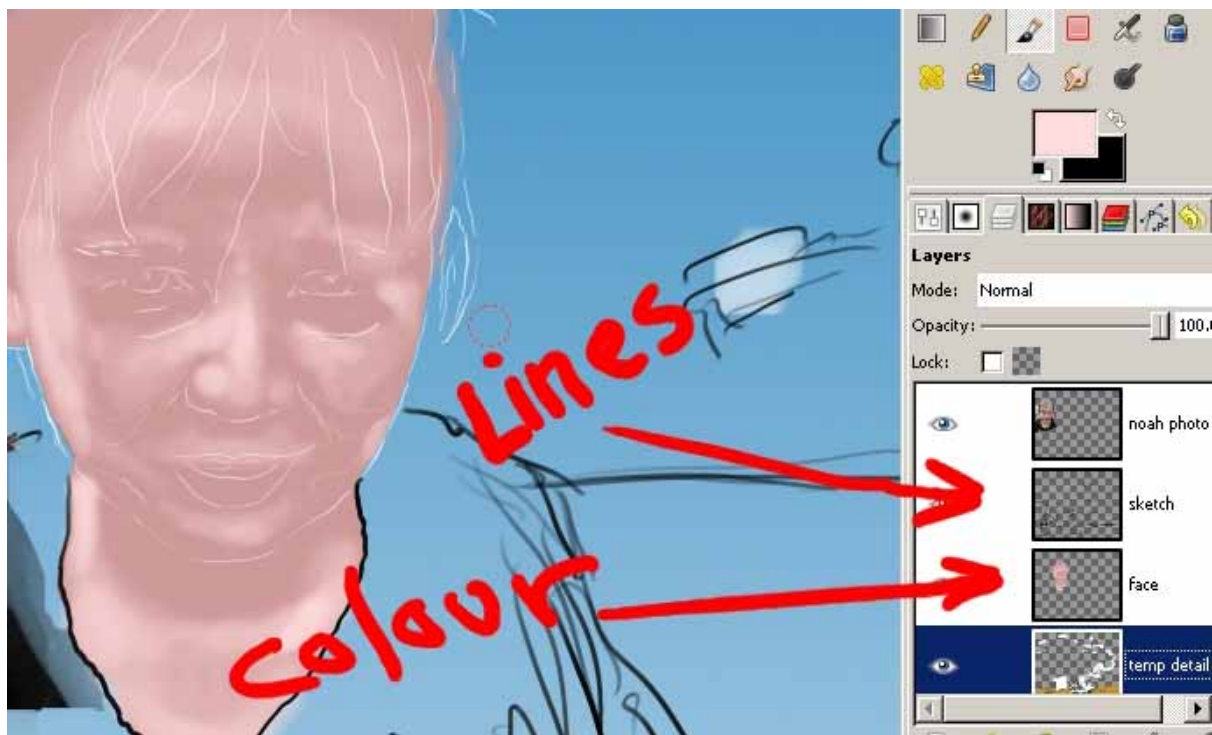
I lower the opacity of the layer containing the photo. Then I add a new layer just above the photo and begin to trace it with a fine white brush. Lowering the opacity of the layer ensures that my white trace lines are clearly visible. When digital painting, it helps a lot to zoom in close while you work on any given area. Here I have zoomed up close to the eye to ensure I get a reasonably accurate trace:



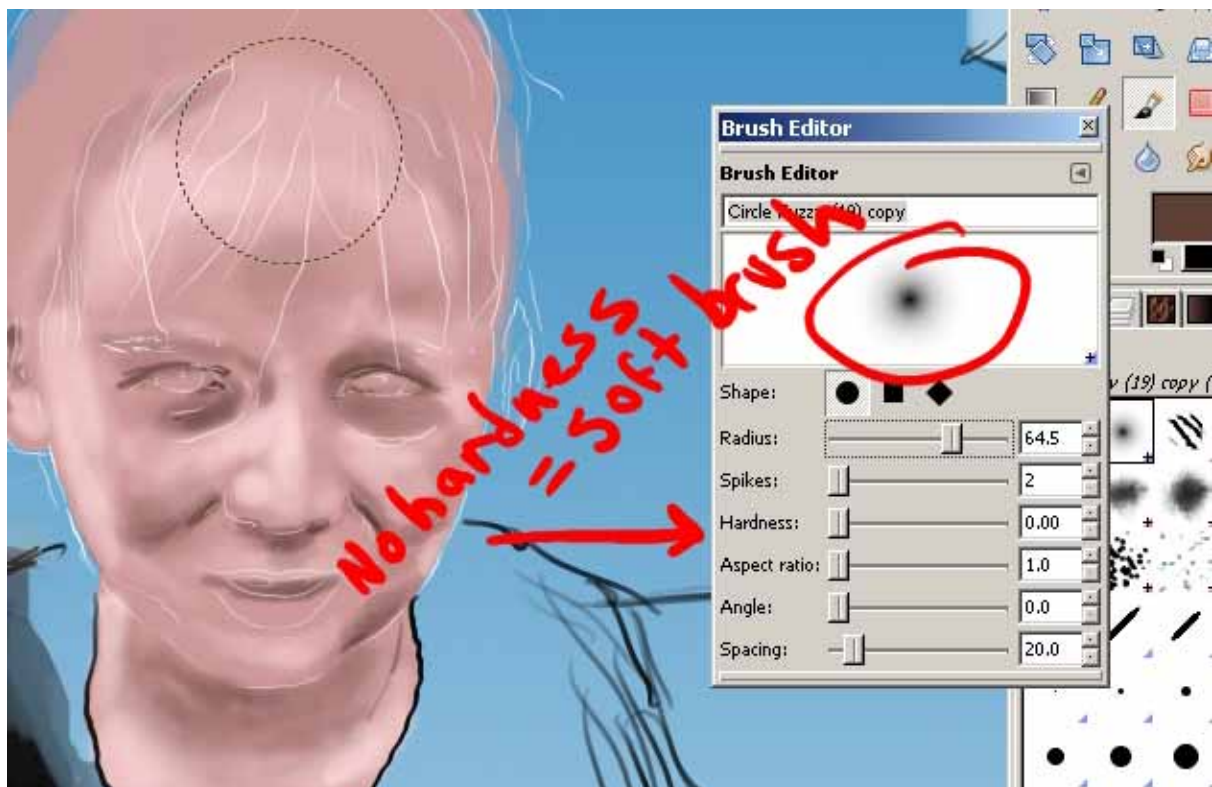
Next I move the photo reference to one side and block in the overall tone of the face, a mid skin tone (irrespective of highlights and shadows) as shown:



I always work from low detail to high detail. I highly recommend working like this, start by **blocking in the basic areas of light and shade, and add the details later!!** You can afford to work quite quickly at this stage and remember that there is no right or wrong, everything can be painted over! Note how the lines layer remains above the layer with the colours at this stage:



The basic areas of highlight and shadow are painted in using a brush with 0% hardness (a soft brush)
Most of the digital painting work I do is painted with hardness on 100% but at this stage I can achieve the tonal variations quicker with a soft brush:



Next I apply a **Gaussian blur** filter to soften these initial highlights and shadows. (Not an essential step but saves me time):



Note how the photo reference layer is still in my image and moved to one side so I can quickly refer to it while painting.



With the underlying basic highlights and shadows in place, **now** I can start to add the details. Zooming up close is a big advantage at this stage, working closely from the reference photo.



The paper (as indeed every element of the image from this point) is painted using roughly the same techniques as were used for the face. Once again I place reference photo(s) into the document while I work as shown:



The two images below show further development. The paper is mostly finished, followed by the painting of the sea (once again working from reference)



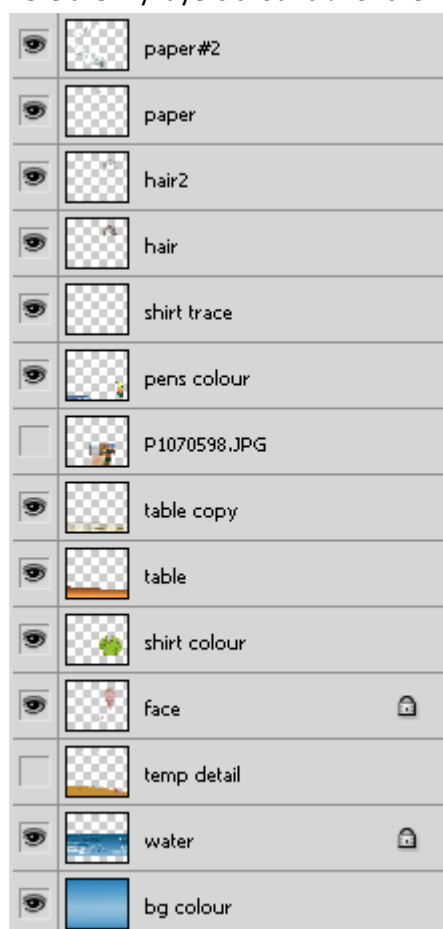
I took photos of items around the house. In this case the pencil tin and computer keyboard:



In my reference photo, my son was sitting down but I wanted him standing in this image so I asked him to model another photo for me. I originally wanted him holding a piece of paper but in the end the table proved too high and it was left out of the image:



Here are my layers around ¾ of the way through the painting:



I didn't used to label my layers but these days I find it is worth taking the extra few seconds to name them so you can quickly find the element of the image you want to work on. Layers, in my opinion, are one of the biggest advantages of working as a digital artist. My background is in watercolour painting. In watercolour you are committed with every stroke you make to paper. If you make a mistake, you throw the painting in the bin! Working digitally, you are free to add a layer and try something out, then if it doesn't work you can simply delete the layer and you have not lost all your work.

Any questions feel free to contact me via my website www.raphroberts.com