

# Masterclass with Saggaf Alhashmi in Portraiture

Saggaf Alhashmi demonstrates  
how to make an oil painting  
portrait inspired by *Head of a  
Young Man with Clasped Hands*  
by Rembrandt Van Rijn

Make your own portrait



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# Materials you will need

- Easel
- Painting surface such as a wooden panel or aluminium sheet or canvas
- Gesso
- Sanding paper
- Paper
- Pan pastel or vine charcoal sticks
- Knife (triangle shape)
- Sponge for pan pastel or paster / charcoal blender
- Black and white charcoal pencils
- Rubber eraser pen
- Eraser
- Printed copy of the drawing (matching the size of the painting panel)
- Graphite pencil
- Tape
- Acrylic paints
- Oil paints
- Oil painting mediums (such as Liquin paste and Linseed oil)
- Brushes in various sizes
- Palette
- Towels or cloth for cleaning
- Spray bottle with water

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## Steps to Follow:

### 1. SELECT A REFERENCE

- Choose a reference, a photo or a real-life model or your own imagination. When using a photo reference, make sure it's in high resolution.

### 2. DRAW A SKETCH

- Draw a sketch using a black charcoal pencil and your reference image.
- Consider the composition of your sketch. Assess the drawing space and select the area on the canvas to place your subject.

- Draw vertical and horizontal lines that intersect in the centre of the head as a guide for the placement of the facial features then draw rough outlines of the figure in a geometrical shape.
- Imagine the same guidelines on the photo while drawing. If you are a beginner, you can draw the lines directly onto the photograph.
- Start with the outer shape of the face to scale and fit in the facial features.
- For example, start with outlining the outer shape of the eye then draw in the smaller details like the iris and the pupil.
- In the beginning, draw simple straight lines and geometric shapes instead of organic shapes, this will make it easier for your eyes to analyse the composition of the face while you fill in the features.
- Use the black pan pastel colour and the charcoal pencil to shade in the dark areas such as the hair, clothes, and darkest shadows.
- Rub the drawing gently with a paper towel to tone down the drawing.
- Look at the light and shadow in the photo and identify the different areas on the face where the light is reflected.
- Use the rubber eraser pen to erase away the dark tones in these areas and emphasise the brightest areas with crosshatch strokes using the white charcoal.
- To create more contrast and give a three-dimensional effect use the black charcoal pencil in the dark areas to create an illusion of depth. Keep in mind that adding more strokes will increase the intensity of the tone.

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### 3. PREPARE THE PAINTING SURFACE

- Select a painting surface.
- Prime the painting surface with 3 layers of gesso to add a grip between the paint and the surface. Wait for each layer to dry before starting with the next one which should take around 5 to 10 minutes.
- After the last coat, sand the surface gently with sanding paper to even it out. Adding water will help to smooth out any gaps.
- Copy the sketch you prepared earlier and enlarge it to fit the size of the panel.

- Add an even layer of pastel on the back of the drawing copy. Make sure to cover the entire drawing area.
  - Attach the back of the drawing copy to the panel using tape, then trace the important lines on the drawing with graphite pencil to imprint them on your panel.
  - Remove the copy when you are done.
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#### 4. ACRYLIC UNDERPAINTING

- Start the painting process by creating an underpainting using acrylic paint.
  - Use a very limited palette of colours, such as white, burnt umber and black.
  - Paint over the drawing using a small and medium brush to outline and fill in the drawing with dark and mid-tone paints.
  - Use a larger brush to fill the background with a darker tone of your choice.
  - Add highlights, look at where the light reflects off the figure in the photograph and apply different values of white to match the photo.
  - When you're filling in areas with your medium brush, make sure the paint is thin enough not to erase your outlines. You can thin acrylic paint by using water or an acrylic medium.
  - As you paint, try to maximize the contrast between the darkest and the lightest values.
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#### 5. OIL PAINTING

- Wait for the acrylic paint to dry completely then switch to oil paints.
- When painting with oils, it's common to use mediums to help you control the consistency of the paint, its transparency and drying time. For example, using Liquin paste will add a shine to the painting, thin the paint and speed up the drying time. Alternatively, Linseed Oil will make the paint dry slower. You can also mix the two to get the shine of the Liquin medium and the slower drying time of the Linseed Oil.
- Mix your own skin tone colours according to the complexion of the subject in your reference.

- a. Mix *Ultramarine, Lamp Black, Raw Umber* for dark shades.
- b. *Yellow Ochre, Light Red, Cadmium Red* and *Tones of Green*, for mid-tones.
- c. *Light Pink, Light Green, Sky Blue, Naples Yellow* and *Light Flesh* Tone as light shades.

Mix these colours interchangeably while painting, evaluating the tones you need to create as you paint different areas of the face.

- Whenever you mix skin tone colours, make sure the colour remains neutral and achromatic by adding the complimentary colour. For example, you can mix *Light Red* with *Yellow Ochre* and *White* to get the mid-tone base, if the colour mixture feels too red, gradually add in *Light Green* to neutralize it. Avoid adding too much to the base at once in order not to make the colour muddy.
- Paint in blocks of colour using a medium or large brush. Squint to blur out the details of the model, this helps to perceive the colour blocks more easily. Use a very minimal amount of the oil painting medium or none if you notice that the colour is transparent.
- After blocking all the colour tones, shift to a smaller brush, make the colours more transparent by occasionally dipping your brush into the oil painting medium to start blending between the colour blocks and defining the facial features using hatching lines.
- To increase the intensity of the colour in some areas refrain from using a lot of medium to allow the paint to appear opaque.
- Add details. Mix and blend between cross and contour hatching, especially in the focal points of the painting, in contrast the other areas will gradually have less layers and hatching lines.
- Be mindful that with this painting style, slow and accurate strokes are more effective.
- Make adjustments while you paint. Ask yourself simple comparative questions:
  - a. Are the proportions accurate?
  - b. Is the colour darker or lighter in this area?
  - c. Does this shape appear thinner or wider?
  - d. Does this detail make the painting appear sharper or softer?

Make quick decisions based on what feels right, then apply one of the earlier steps to complete the required adjustment.

- Add fine details like eyelashes, strands of hair or scars using a smaller brush with very little oil medium.
  - Keep assessing the painting, shift between different steps and paint until you are satisfied with the result.
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# Glossary

**Crosshatch:** Making marks with intersecting sets of parallel lines.

**Hatching:** Shading by making marks with closely spaced parallel lines.

**Painting medium:** A substance that is added to paint to change its state and/or handling properties.

**Gesso:** a coating used to prime a surface to prepare it for painting, it is usually made from a combination of paint pigment, chalk and binder.