

# PORTRAITS

**RIGHT FROM  
THE START**

*Painting Creative Portraits in the Traditional Vein*

**HILARY PAGE**



*[www.hilarypage.com](http://www.hilarypage.com)*

*Portraits Right from the Start is dedicated to all who aspire to draw and paint people,  
and to all models and model session monitors who make it possible*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Robert Beverly Hale, my posthumous mentor whose insights and rational approach to drawing opened new worlds for me. Dr. Sally Bulgin, managing editor of The Artist magazine UK, who published over twenty of my portrait and figure articles. The articles form the backbone of this massive project.

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Thank you to the following artists who are acknowledged next to their work: Pat Kelley, Elizabeth Reid, Carol Rensink.

Title image: **WES AND JUANICE OF WATERSEEDGE TERRACE**, 15 x 22" (38.1 x 55.9 cm).

Frontispiece: **BETTY I**, 22 x 15" (58.9 x 38.1 cm)

Second Frontispiece: **THE MUSICIAN**, 15 x 11" (38. x 27.9 cm)

Cover image: **MANDY**, 22 x 15" (55.9 x 38.1 cm).

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Photograph of the author  
by Mary Griffin, Devon, England

Hilary Page is the author of three art instruction books published by Watson-Guption publications: **Watercolor Right from the Start**, **Color Right from the Start**, and **Hilary Page's Guide to Watercolor Paints** together with its on-line updates.

To accompany **Portraits Right from the Start**, Hilary Page is writing a volume on drawing and painting "Life" Figures.

She has written over fifty magazine articles published in "The Artist" UK, and American Artist magazines. She has produced seven art instruction DVD/videos including a DVD on Portrait Painting. She has juried art shows and taught workshops throughout the USA, in England, France, Canada, Mexico, and the Bahamas.

Originally from England, Hilary Page attended drama school in London where her studies included stage and costume design. She came to the USA in 1966 to teach elementary school in Indianapolis. Later she studied at Indiana University's the John Herron Art Institute evenings and worked at a commercial art studio during the day.

After a hiatus for marriage and children, she began teaching watercolor painting in Houston, in the early 1980's. She served as Administrative Director for the Watercolor Art Society-Houston where she founded and ran the model sessions. As artist/owner, she operated Town and Country Gallery for fifteen years - from 1981 until 1996.

Following a sojourn in New York City, Hilary moved to Houston, TX where she has lived with her husband since 1971.

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VANESSA WITH HAT, 22 x 15" (55.9 x 38.1 cm).

# Introduction

I came to write *Portraits Right from the Start* as a result of my teaching an introductory portrait and figure course at a local art group. This starting point led me to teach workshops throughout the USA and internationally.

The only books that I could find on the subject to recommend to my students were either too shallow or too impracticable. To fill the niche I have written *Portraits Right from the Start* and its accompanying volume on drawing and painting "*Life*" Figures.

My goal has been to set down a thorough, easy to follow, practical course that is jam-packed with information. I base my approach on the concept that you can only convey to others what you understand yourself.

I aimed to set down, what I consider to be, the requisite information to enable readers to paint creative portraits in the traditional vein, i.e. an understanding of the human form, its perspective and proportions.

## THE BOOK

*Portraits Right from the Start* covers the head, three quarter and complete figure portraits. It is characterized by carefully conceived, and abundantly illustrated, progressive lessons. Presented clearly and logically, the material includes lessons on the head and neck, features, hands and feet, the young and elderly, perspective, artistic anatomy, shading, commissions and painting techniques.

The information is introduced in the form of step-by-step painting demonstrations and practical, three dimensional learning projects to help with 3D visualizations. For instance, artists are shown how to make a box-head to help understand perspective, and how to make a hand-held clay head as a way to review the head and features. In this way, a complex subject such as depicting the human face and form is made easy to understand and remember

without ever being simplistic.

## WHO THE BOOK IS FOR

*Portraits Right from the Start* is for artists of a wide range of experience. It is for those who attend model groups at the many art schools and art groups throughout the world. It is for teachers and students in schools and universities who can work through the lessons together. It is for seasoned painters who can appreciate the conceptual and artistic anatomy segments, and most of all it's for aspiring artists and beginners who want to get it right - from the start.

## MEDIUM

The information is for all who portray people regardless of medium since understanding the subject is the predominant factor: You have to know the eye to be able to depict it and that applies to every aspect of portrait and figure work. The initial demonstrations describe how to apply charcoal, oil and watercolors. Thereafter most depictions are in watercolor.

## UNIQUE ASPECTS

The use of "massing" is a special aspect of the book. We use it to help solve various drawing problems. "Massing" means that we conceive the human head and figure as the easy to draw, simple forms starting with the ovoid, cylinder, and sphere: We draw the head as a ball and egg, the neck as a cylinder. We then use massing to solve the problem of shading.

We learn the light and shading on the simple curved forms as they appear under traditional, portrait lighting that is above, forward and to the side. Then we apply that knowledge to the complex forms of the face and figure. For example, the eye and tip of the nose are the partial surfaces of a sphere. The length of the nose is the partial surface of a cylinder. Indeed,

every undulation of the body is the partial surface of a curved form.

We utilize the mass conception of the rectangular cube to solve the problem of perspective. Perspective influences every aspect of drawing people and is an essential concept for artists to grasp. The perspective lesson is iconoclastic.

Using the box-head, readers are given clear descriptions of one, two and three-point perspective, and shown how to draw a head in each. Conceiving the head as a simple box, they learn how to gauge the perspective of the model before them. Then they are shown how to accurately replicate the same view when drawing the portrait on canvas.

The box mass conception also helps with placement and measurements of features on tilted and turned heads.

Another unique aspect of *Portraits Right from the Start* is specificity. As requested by workshop participants, I provide *specific* measurements for the head, features and figure. No waffling. I then show how to apply that information when drawing portraits.

## THE WAY TO CREATIVITY

The material is presented sequentially even though the act of drawing requires that we perform many actions simultaneously. This multi-tasking is only possible when the material is so thoroughly learned at each stage that it's relegated to our subconscious to be drawn upon intuitively when needed, thus leaving us free to be truly creative.

*Portraits Right from the Start* is designed to imprint the information in that the material is presented in many ways to cater to our varying ways of learning: visual, practical, analytical and tactile.

I hope that this book will be of great help to aspiring artists in providing the basics, so you have the knowledge and confidence to develop your own vision and style. That is the purpose of *Portraits Right from the Start*.

# 5. PERSPECTIVE

Perspective is a set of rules that enables artists to portray a three dimensional head, or figure, (or any object) on a flat, two dimensional canvas. We gauge perspective according to our viewpoint meaning our line of vision, and the relative position of the subject before us.

Perspective can lift a portrait from the mundane to the spectacular. It influences every aspect of our drawing and is an essential skill for portrait artists to grasp. Knowing it prevents us from depicting the head facing one direction, the frontal features another, and for the position of the ears to be connected to neither. I have frequently seen such blunders at workshops. Some artists balk at learning perspective believing that it is too complicated to understand. But this is a myth. If you dispense with the geometry and just follow the set of straightforward rules as given in this chapter, you will master perspective and be able to use it to advantage in your paintings.

To understand perspective as it relates to portraits, imagine viewing a rotating head stuck on a vertical pole with the head on a level with your head. When stopped so it is directly facing you, you see the head in a one-point perspective view. When rotated to left or right, you see the head in a two-point perspective view. When rotated left or right *and* inclined up down and/or sideways, you see the head in a three-point perspective view.

Traditional drawing requires that we freeze the position of the model before us as in a photograph. From there we determine the perspective so we can accurately depict the head on our canvas. Creativity factors in when we tweak what we see and maybe emphasize a turn or tilt to produce a more dynamic image. This is an example of how knowledge, in this instance knowledge of perspective, enables creativity. Such mastery will forever change the way you approach portrait painting.

The following lessons describe the mechanics of perspective. We clarify, identify and depict portraits in one, two and three-point perspective.



MARTHA, MARIE AND JODIE. *Head studies in One, Two and Three-Point Perspective Views Respectively.*

## PAINTING A THREE-POINT PERSPECTIVE PORTRAIT



◀ I took this "looking down", reference photograph when painting at a model session. I recommend that you use a similar looking down or looking up pose for your three-point perspective portrait, and then follow through the steps as described. I worked at an upright easel.

**Step 1 Drawing** (below left) I made a line drawing to place the three main shapes: (1) oval-shaped head with the neck and hair; (2) square-shaped shoulders and arms; (3) wedge-shaped orange skirt.

To determine the perspective of Ana looking down, I looked at her head through my viewfinder. I then placed my pencil slap across the viewfinder (or it could be a photograph), at the same angle as her eyes. I drew a line to duplicate the angle on my drawing. The rest of the features, the eyebrows, base of nose, and the dots at the corners of the mouth can be drawn as parallel to this eye-line.

To get the inclination of the head and the feel for the front and side planes I imagined the model wearing spectacles. The hinges mark the corner of the front and side planes. The arms that hook onto the ears become the side planes. When the head is looking down the arm and ears move up relative to the position of front features. When the head is looking up the arm/ear points downwards relative to the frontal features.



### MATERIALS:

See page 20

To the paints listed on page 20 I added Genuine Manganese Blue PB33.

I used a 2" flat nylon brush for large areas.



### ▲ Step 1 cont. Painting

To prevent the watercolor paint from dripping down, I didn't have excess water on my brush. I started by painting the light flesh colors, then the skirt and background. I achieved soft edges on the dark shadows by dropping in paint while the first wash was still wet and shiny. When dry I laid in the unifying shadow over the light flesh.

### ► Step 2

During the model break the paint applied in Step 1 had dried. So now I laid in the hair which I dry-brushed on the outside edges to get the fuzzy appearance. I laid in the darker form shadow on the face over the unifying shadow. I then worked on the features. I started the fan with three, bold, shadow shapes that I identified by squinting at it. I got this far by the end of the session.

### ► Step 3 (opposite)

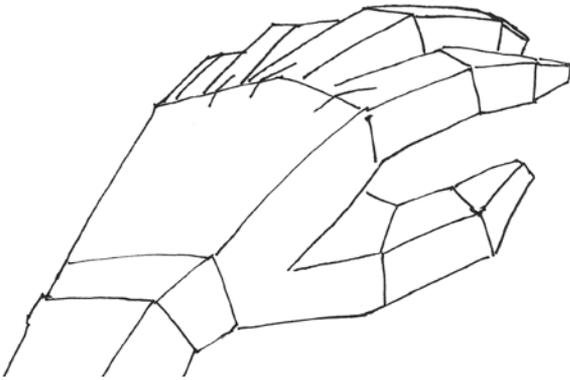
I completed the painting working from the above photograph.





ANA, 22 x 15" (55.9 x 38.1 cm).

## MORE BLOCKING THE HAND

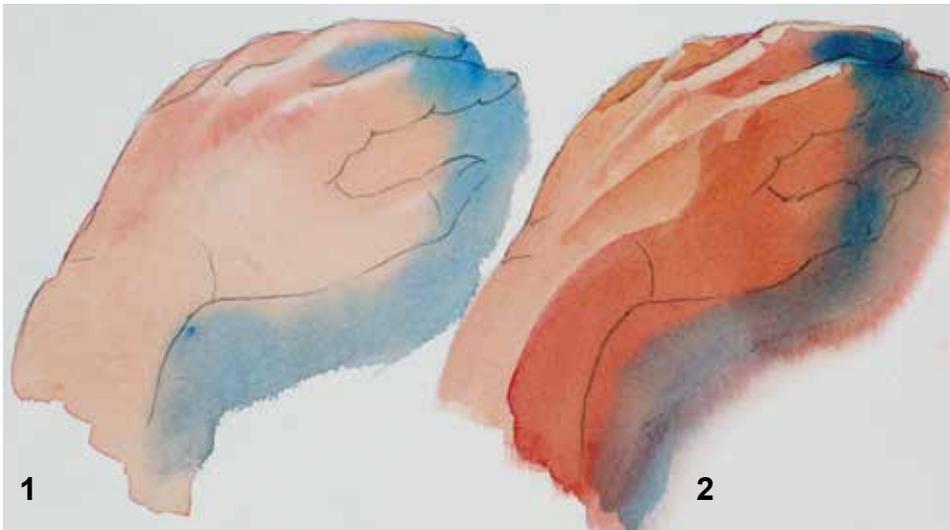


◀ Rest your non-painting hand in the position shown. We'll use this drawing as the basis for our watercolor study.

Box the hand. This time take the drawing a step further and indicate the individual fingers and thumb as blocks. Sometimes it helps to view the hand through your viewfinder to give you edges from which to gauge the angles and perspective of the blocks.

Transform the squared shapes into the gentle curves of the fingers in readiness for painting. Transfer the outline (no shading) to your 140-lb. (300gms), cold pressed (Not) watercolor paper.

## WATERCOLOR STUDY OF YOUR HAND



on the fingers and veins using your clean, damp 1" brush. Do not go back in to the paint once the shine has left the surface.

**Step 2** When the paint is dry, lay in the areas in shadow using the same colors you have on your paper but with a little less water. Remember to squint to assess the values, and to leave the lights unpainted. Note how the form shadow of the index finger and thumb, and the cast shadow are combined as a single shadow.

**Step 3** Work each finger separately first by brushing the dry paper lightly with water. Then add the form shadow. While the paint is still wet and shiny, quickly drop in the slightly blue core shadow using Cobalt blue. The underside of the index finger is dark because it is not receiving as much reflected light as the side planes.

**Step 4** Using darker, cooler, bluer color, darken the edge where the hand meets the surface it's resting on. Finally add the details including the veins, creases and nails.



**Step 1** Rest your watercolor paper on a slightly tilted board and lay in the flesh tones starting at the top of the paper. While

the paint is still wet and shiny drop the blue into the shadow areas. Also while the paint is shiny, lift off the light planes

I knew I was successful at doing a realistic hand because when I saw the painting on the floor. I did a double take. It looked like a severed hand lying there!

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**DVD**  
**"A Portrait of Clint"**

**Hilary Page**

[www.hilarypage.com](http://www.hilarypage.com)



I have made a portrait video entitled "A Portrait of Clint" that you might find helpful. It accompanies *Portraits Right from the Start*. You can watch the drawing and watercolor portrait evolve from start to finish.

**Watercolor Right from the Start**  
**By Hilary Page**

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