



Photoshop & Painter

MODERN CLASSICAL PAINTING

Artist PROFILE

Marta Dahlig

COUNTRY: Poland
CLIENTS: Complex Arts, PosterLounge, Ballistic



Born in 1986, Marta Dahlig is a young and talented artist who has

been working with Painter for years. She's a freelance illustrator.
www.marta-dahlig.com

DVD Assets

The files you need are on the DVD

FOLDERS: Sourcefiles, Screenshots.

FILES: MartaFinal

SOFTWARE: Painter X, Photoshop CS2 (demos)

Marta Dahlig shows you how to add classical painting qualities to your everyday works

Despite the passing of time and constant technological advances that change the ways art is produced, classical masterpieces remain as captivating as ever. They are, even in the modern day and age, an ultimate source of inspiration to succeeding generations of artists, both traditional and digital.

These old paintings possess a set of unique qualities which, even though they're hard to nail, make them stand out still among modern artwork.

And so, one might ask the questions: What's the essence of this style? What is

it that makes a 'classical' painting? And how can this be achieved?

In contrast to modern realism, classical stylisation goes far beyond technicalities. Its secret is not to rely on the brushes used, but instead to focus on the recognition and correct implementation of all the key elements that form the 'soul' of old masters' paintings – the subject and colour choice, composition and understanding of anatomy.

Because most of the work is done inside the head on the level of planning the image, this workshop will be mainly

theoretical. This time, I'll concentrate not on how, but what to paint. I'll share some hints and tips regarding the mentioned key elements throughout the whole process of composition and rendering. Where applicable, I'll also describe the differences between modern and classical ways of depiction of certain elements, and I'm going to explain how to simulate traditional techniques with digital media.

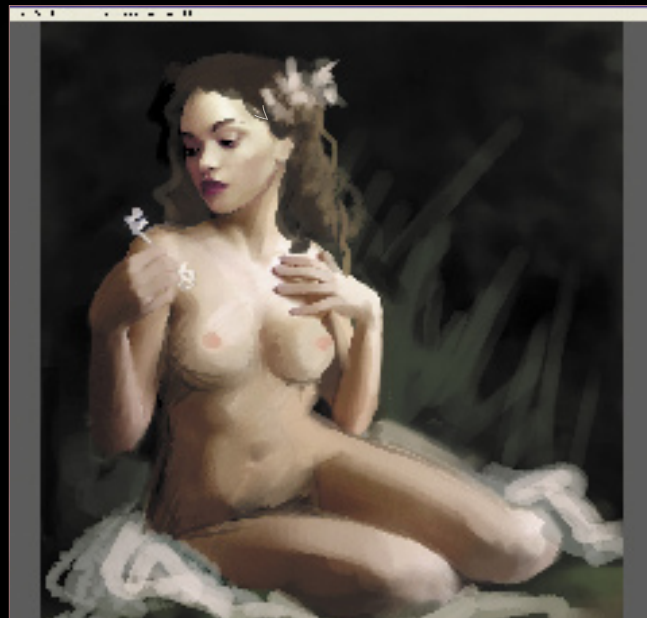
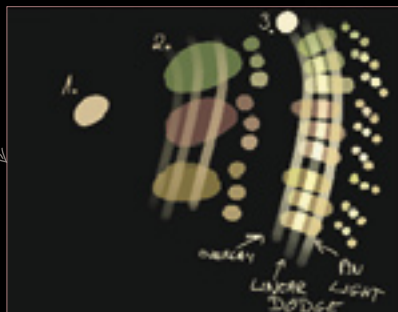
As my study subject, I chose late 19th and early 20th Century paintings, especially those of Lord Frederick Leighton and William Bouguereau.

1 Getting started

The first step is to choose suitable content for your artwork. There's a huge variety of subjects that can be found among classical paintings and, for this workshop, I chose something I personally find to be the essence of the classics – a female portrait, set in a natural environment.

2 Choosing colours

While it's quite easy to think of colour themes in your head, it's often tricky to actually choose particular shades. I have, however, some tricks which help me out in the process. Start



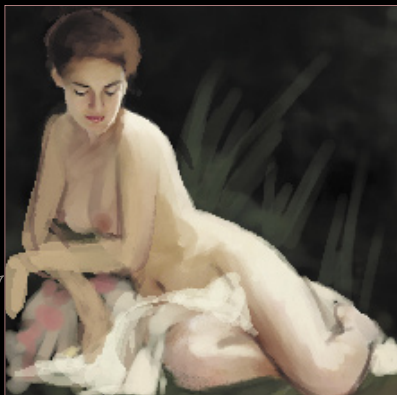
by picking one main colour that will be the skin's mid-tone (1). Then, mix that colour with mid-tones chosen for the foreground and background (2). To grab nice hues for highlights and shadows,

apply the colour of your light source using the different brush modes available in Photoshop on top of the skin tone results from step 2 (3).

3 The sketching begins

Once you have the basics defined, you can start the actual sketching process. However, there are a few things that should be understood beforehand. The definition of beauty has changed immensely over the past centuries and so women perceived as beautiful 100 years ago had qualities significantly different than the modern icons of beauty. Furthermore, over the past few centuries the actual anatomy of women has changed.

I will be mentioning these distinctions throughout the workshop, but for now three basic differences are needed for initial sketching: smaller height of women in the past, which directly affects the proportions (shorter limbs), their wider hips and general figure plumpness. In short, avoid painting slender, willowy models and try to give your character some stereotypical feminine qualities. ➔

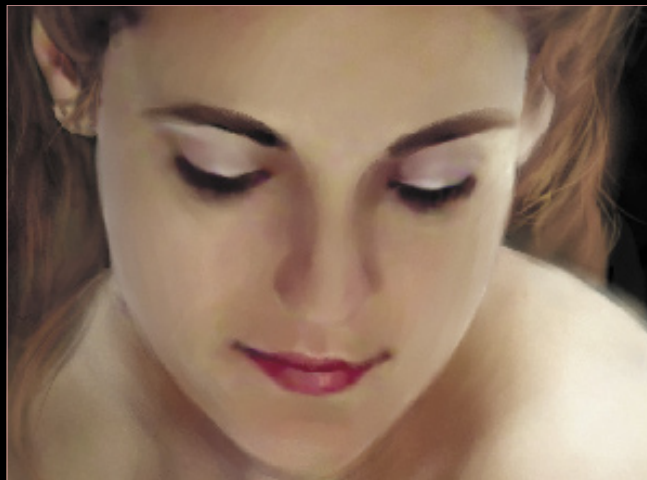


➔ **4 Still sketching!**
 Sometimes, as it was in my case, one sketch isn't enough – my character simply seemed to be too bulky and “not enough Bouguereau”. This was caused by two factors: general pose stiffness and the heavy body build – it's extremely important for the character to remain graceful and natural. A way to avoid rounded figures looking unattractive is to paint a character of a delicate and slender build (longer neck, delicate arms and so on) with some excessive tissue over certain areas.

5 Blending and texturing
 A rather common practice in realism nowadays is to replace careful shading and blending with an excessive amount of textures. These effects are still stunning and make an artist's work easier. In the case of classical stylisation, however, I advise you to refrain from such practices. The point of this style is to hint at the details with the typical brush set, just like the masters did, rather than actually paint them with any shortcuts such as photo brushes.

As the figure constitutes the main focal point, our goal is to achieve a realistic skin texture without using any actual textures. This can be done by balancing rough and smooth blending.

Rough blending of the blocked colours can be done with Blender, but might need to be smoothed further with an



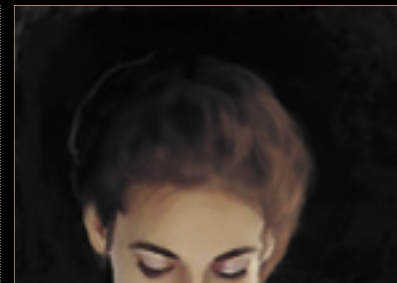
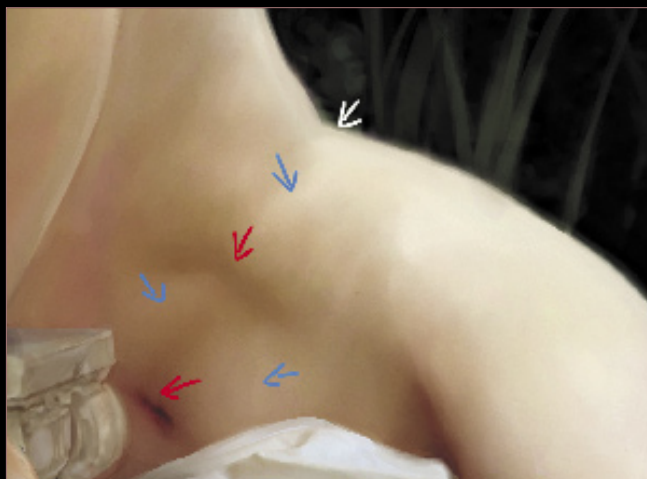
PRO SECRETS

Doing research
 When trying out a new style, be sure to study the chosen subject thoroughly. Shallow understanding will always result in poorer outcomes and shallower ideas, so it really pays to spend a lot of time beforehand gathering and analysing various references, and preparing yourself for the challenge.

airbrush or perhaps Painter's Just Add Water tool.
 It's important to use these methods simultaneously. Limiting yourself to one will result in either a blocky (Blender) or plastic (airbrush) shading. Plumper parts (arms, thighs) should be underlined with more blending, while parts with varying convexity – stronger differences between shadows and highlights – such as knees, breasts, feet and neck might benefit from rougher blending.

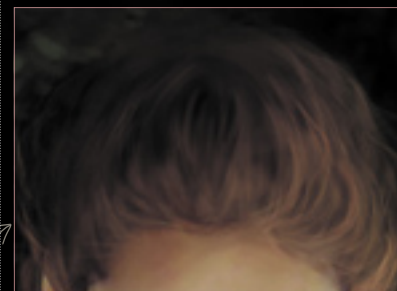
6 Defining facial features
 Now, let's move on to the face. First of all, refrain from portraying any bold facial features such as a strong jaw line, cheekbones, puffy lips or a big nose. The face ought to be soft and subtle, so give it a round shape, full cheeks, little lips and a small, straight nose.

As for facial expressions, avoid portraying strong emotions and giving the character eye contact with the viewer. The vast majority of classical females are staring somewhere into the distance with



either a calm facial expression or a shy, pensive look.
 There's one thing to keep in mind at all times: a popular modern style of leaving the character's mouth slightly open was widely avoided in the past!

7 Painting silky hair
 There are two main things to remember when painting hair: first of all, it should always look combed and tidy, so avoid any messy freefalls, loose strands or fancy hairstyles. Keeping it simple grants the best effects. Secondly, it's not excessive texturing and shading – every strand that counts in this case, but achieving a general feel of softness. The hair should seem silky and smooth. In order to achieve this effect, rely solely on the airbrush tool. Start with choosing the mid-tone of your hair colour and mark the shape of the hair. Afterwards, choose a lighter colour and mark the main highlighted strands.



8 Smooth strand texturing
 Gradually move on to smaller and lighter strands. The more you draw, the more realistic the hair will look. Remember to constantly switch between hues and, if you work in Photoshop, brush modes during this step.

9 Apples, pears and tissues
 While it's important to mark the plumpness of the character, it's crucial not to go overboard with it (unless you're aiming at a more Rubenesque

stylisation). When it comes to larger body shapes, we can specify two basic types: apple and pear. The apple is characterised by excessive tissue being gathered around the stomach, while in the pear type the tissue is concentrating in the hip-thigh area, with waist remaining thinner. The pear is obviously much more feminine, and that's the most advisable type to choose for our classical females.

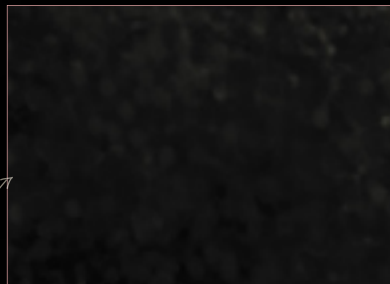
Underline the softness of the stomach and the slight convexity of it with additional shading (red arrow). Extra tissue gives otherwise flat areas some convexity and so adds some extra highlights accordingly (blue arrow). To underline the general softness of the body and, at the same time, enable it to blend with the background better, pick an airbrush of a skin colour and run with it over the edges of the body (white arrow), creating a glow.

10 B for better breasts

The classical way of painting breasts differs quite a lot from the modern trend. Instead of double D, stay at size A or B without underlining the cleavage. Breasts should also remain of natural shape (they are, after all, made of fat tissue), so avoid that unnatural silicone-like firmness. Remember to keep the nipples small, too.

11 Hands and feet

The feet should be kept small and the hands delicate and slender, the base of the palm being not too wide and fingers long and narrower at the tips.



12 Sketching the background

As the character is our main focal point, the sole role of the background is to fill the space around it. It shouldn't be too detailed nor drag any attention away from our female, and so a simple forest is going to serve this purpose perfectly. Of course, painting trees and leaves is a very time-consuming thing to do, but the point of the stylisation is to merely hint



at the level of detail, without going completely overboard.

To render a painterly forest, choose a dark green shade of your liking and make some general colour blobs in the background, marking the depth. If you have any trouble planning the background, study some classical paintings for inspiration. In my case, analysing Bouguereau's *Biblis* turned out to be a wonderfully educating experience for my work.

13 Leaf blobs

Now pick a lighter colour and with Painter's Chalk or Charcoal brush, with Jitter set to around 4, make some coloured dots, which will simulate blurred leaves. Play with hues, angles and brush sizes, constantly making those blobs. Once you're satisfied with the results, lower the Jitter to 1 and, on top of existing dots, make small dots of a different hue to enrich the green.

14 Grass made easy

Painting grass is quite similar to the technique we used for the background. First, do some non-contrasting blobs of various colours with a Jittered brush (just like in the previous step). Now create a new layer (which you'll need for the next step) and one by one, do some separate leaf blobs of different colours and brightness, some short lines simulating blades of grass, stick and so on. ➔➔





moods, original poses, to adding interesting elements and so on. While preparing this workshop, I wanted my painting to retain a 20th century spirit, yet still be original and separate itself from the classics. This decision brought led me to add a little surreal twist to the image. My initial idea was a subject every human being can relate to – problems with finding true happiness in life. To graphically depict this, you can see I've added a keyhole near the woman's heart and a key in her hand.

If you're lacking inspiration, try to start by thinking about some metaphors that you'd like your painting to carry and imagine ways of depicting them. If that doesn't work, start from the other end – think of an element that's very unfitting for the image and then associate some meaning with it.

17 Expanding the meaning

If you haven't already, try to consult others about your ideas – you might end up expanding your ideas further. In my case, I felt the keyhole and one key weren't enough, as they didn't permit much room for imagination and



interpretation. I wanted to hint at a sadder, darker side of my idea, for happiness isn't easy and sometimes seems impossible to find. So, I painted more keys that my character had discarded because they didn't fit.

18 And we're done!

After you've got everything in place – the character shaded, background done, the narrative elements added – take one last critical look at your painting. Is there anything else you could do? Or anything to improve? Play with your work: flip it horizontally, fiddle with saturation and check whether Photoshop's Colour Balance tool can offer any nice results.

15 Rendering water

Painting water is no easy task, especially when it comes to colour choices. When painting a stream, for example, create a colour that's a combination of greyish blue and make use of the existing greens. For the latter, create a temporary transparent stroke over the painted grass and use the Eye Dropper to pick the colours.

To indicate movement, add some highlights over the water surface with a colour lighter than the base. If you want to create a nice texture over the water, copy the layer created in the previous step containing the leaves and blades of grass (not the base colour blobs), drag it on to the water surface and change the layer mode to Soft Light. You might want to adjust the layer's saturation and opacity.

PRO SECRETS

Cropping

Working with images where only a part of a character is shown can sometimes be very tricky – an artist has to decide what to show and what to crop out of the picture. It might seem tempting to show as much of a character as possible, but sometimes it's much better to give up some details for the sake of composition. For example, in the case of bust portraits, it's more efficient to crop the top of the head as well – otherwise the image might look crammed and the character 'stuffed' inside the painting.

16 Turning surreal

It's always a good idea to add some narrative elements to your painting in order to enrich its meaning. There's a unlimited number of ways to do so, ranging from depictions of intense

