




Artist PROFILE

Mike Mitchell
COUNTRY: US
CLIENTS: Threadless, Skyline Design, Image Comics



American artist Mike Mitchell recently graduated from The American Academy of Art with a BFA in Illustration and is now working as a concept artist for RavenSoft in Madison in Wisconsin.
SirMikeofMitchell.com

DVD Assets
 The files you need are on the DVD
FOLDERS: PSDs, Screenshots
FILES: Final.tif
SOFTWARE: Photoshop CS2 (demo)

Photoshop PAINT CREEPY PORTRAITS

Mike Mitchell shows you how to create a portrait that will catch anyone's eye – not to mention their imagination

While the ability to paint a realistic portrait is admirable, painting portraits that are limited only by our imagination is much more fun. It enables you to fully flex your creativity and use a fair bit of artistic licence.

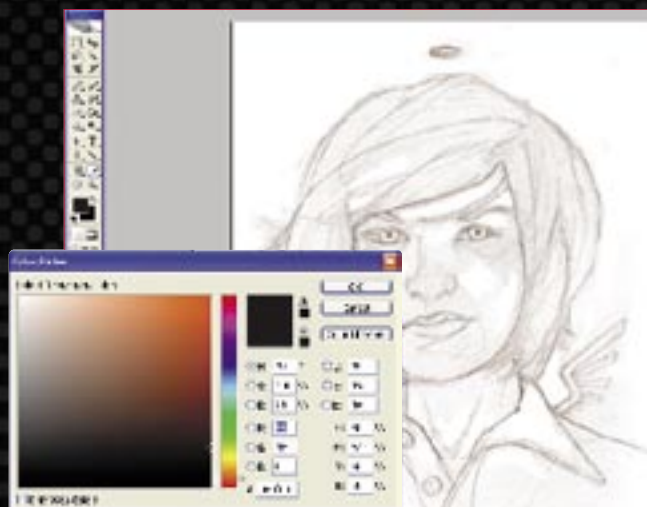
While I don't personally go crazy with my artistic licence, I do like to take advantage of it. I do this by combining

humour, creepiness, and a bit of design in an attempt to keep my portraits a few steps away from reality. I find it intriguing when a portrait enables people to decide for themselves what's going on in the image, rather than telling them explicitly what they should think about it. I always try to keep that in mind while working on a portrait, or any piece for that matter.

For this workshop, you will only need a pencil, some paper, a Wacom tablet, and Photoshop with its default Round brush. A basic understanding of the anatomy and proportions of the human head, as well as some knowledge of light and colour, will also help you greatly. I've included working PSD files on your free DVD to help you understand my creative process further.

1 The sketch

After gathering some reference I grab a pencil, some paper, and begin. When I do portraits, I prefer to keep my sketch simple and loose, with an emphasis on proportion. If my sketch isn't working out, no matter how much time I've spent on it, I toss it in the trash and start over again. In my experience, the best portraits always flow nicely right from the beginning. Making sure you really like your sketch, and seeing that it's evenly proportioned, will save you heartache later on.



2 Scan it!

I scan my illustration into Photoshop, and double check to make sure everything looks good. Then I put the lines on to their own layer in order to paint under them. I prefer to use Load Channel as Selection>Select Inverse>Copy/Paste, as it seems to get the smoothest lines. Once this is done, I will usually colour the lines with a dark red or brown using Lock Transparent Pixels. This enables me to only colour the parts of the layer that are drawn or

PRO SECRETS

Lock Transparent Pixels
 Make good use of this tool. It enables you to have controlled chaos on the layer you're working on, by locking all parts of the layer that haven't been painted on.

Painted on. If you haven't tried this before, do it! After I've coloured the lines, I click Unlock Transparent Pixels again to unlock, and begin cleaning these lines up a bit. How clean you make your lines is up to you, but I prefer to keep mine somewhat messy, because it gives my portrait a sketch-like quality.

3 Block in that colour

Now I'm ready to start colouring under the lines. I like to block in each major item (hair, skin, shirt and so on) →





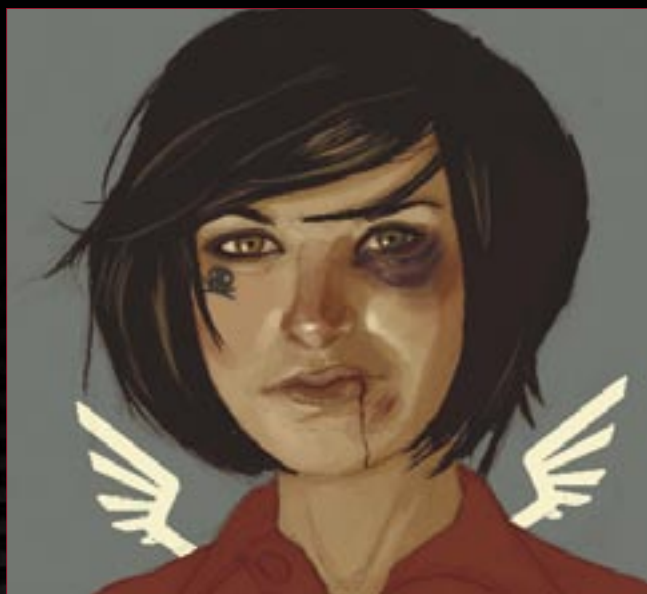
on to its own layer. Once each item is blocked in, I hit Lock Transparent Pixels on each of these layers. I then name the layers in an attempt to keep things more organised, which will save me time later on. This is a good point to start creating a colour scheme for your portrait, and since everything is already organised on to its own layer, I will be able to change the colours later on if those that I initially choose aren't working

4 Face the truth

First, I concentrate on the face, so that I can be sure the portrait is going to work. I then get it to a place where I feel it's solid, and begin tossing on some shadows to get the form going. When choosing shadow colours, keep in mind that shadows are transparent, and should represent the colour that they are covering. It's best to stay away from dark greys, since they tend to give off a muddy appearance. When dealing with skin, I usually select a colour that is darker, and also a bit more saturated than skin that has been exposed to light. I proceed to add some colour into the warmer areas of the face, in an attempt to bring some life to my portrait.

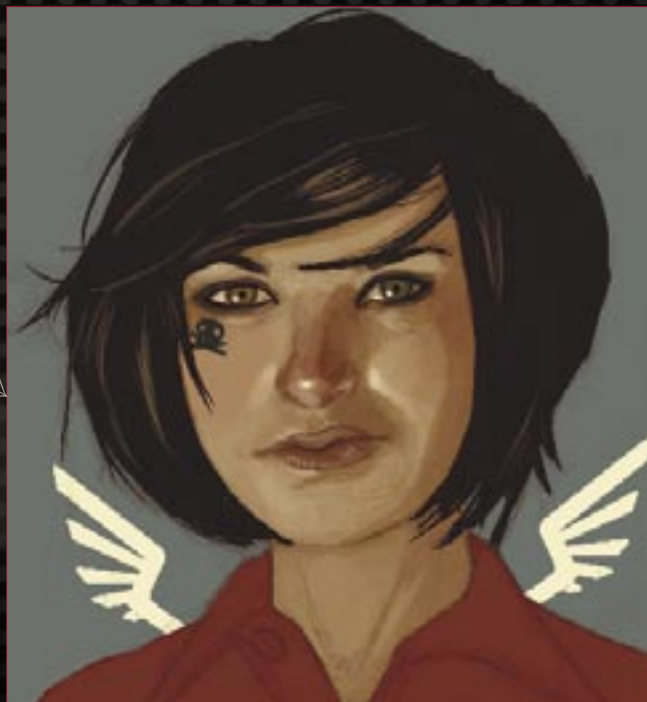
5 Let there be light!

Now that I've finished my shadows, I can start adding in lights to further bring out the face. For the skin I use a super bright, warm yellow on a low opacity. I then concentrate on bringing out the lights in the eyes, but make sure not to overdo it. It's important to keep in mind that the whites of the eyes aren't purely white and tend to have a tint of skin colour in them.



6 Adding character

At this point I have a foundation going, and can bust out a new layer. Once I've done this, I am able to add some of the more fun elements. I decide that I would like the girl in my portrait to have a bit of an edge, so I add some heavy liner to her eyes. I also include some scrapes and bruises in an attempt to create a back story. As I said before, it's always interesting to make a portrait from which people can draw their own conclusions about the character.



7 The other stuff

Now that the face is solid, I can begin working on other parts of the portrait that have been neglected. I begin by adding some light and shadows into the hair, so that I can bring it closer to where the face is. I also add a temporary gradient to the background in order to add some depth.

8 Refinement

This is the stage I tend to spend the most time on. I begin by erasing some of the original linework, replacing them with hard edged paint, and adding some reflective light into the shadows. I also boost the contrast between light and shadow in the face. This is a good time to concentrate on cleaning up the messier aspects of the portrait, and to carefully examine and refine the details.





9 Glow time

For this step, I concentrate on the halo and wings. I love a flat, graphic, and intensely illuminated element, so I begin by brightening them up. I then duplicate its layer twice, and add a tiny Gaussian blur to one copy, and slightly more of a Gaussian blur to the other. This creates a nice glowing effect. At this point I'm feeling satisfied with the state of my portrait, but as with all illustrations it's good to take a break, and come look at it again later with fresh eyes.

10 More refinement

After coming back, I realise quite a few problems. First, the skin needs a boost of contrast, so I work on bringing that up a bit (Adjustments>Brightness/Contrast). I also notice that the face looks too wide, and the composition appears to be somewhat off. I fix this by selecting every layer except the background, and begin resizing. I continue fixing any minor problems I come across, such as the hair above the eyebrow, and a few patches of skin. At this point, I begin to feel that there is something lacking in my illustration. I like where it's at, and I feel that it's a quality portrait, but it's not as creepy or



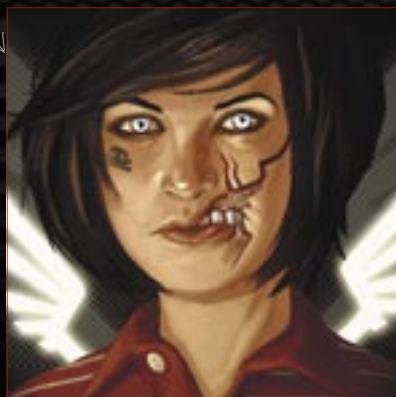
eye catching as I intended it to be, so I start thinking about what I can do to fix this problem.

11 Getting creepy

As if an indie, battle hardened angel wasn't a weird enough combination, I go on to add a damaged cyborg element. I also remove the black eye and bloody lip, in an attempt to keep my portrait from looking too complicated. It's not really my style to be grotesque, so I try to give the skin a more plastic quality, while keeping the damage simple. Again, I go back and do some slight refinements. I soften the shadows on the nose and face, and also add some stripes to make the shirt interesting.

12 Atmosphere

I'm not a huge fan of giving my portraits elaborate backgrounds. In some cases, an elaborate background fits perfectly, but I feel this portrait will work better if the emphasis is kept on the girl. I decide to just keep it simple, adding some dark gradients behind and in front to help focus attention towards the face.



13 Adjustments

Adjustments are great for bringing everything in your portrait together. However, they are extremely powerful tools, and if used incorrectly, can cheapen your portrait. Normally, I use only a few adjustments in the last stage. In this case, I boost the brightness/contrast a little, and use Colour Balance to really bring it all together. This is easily my favourite of the adjustment tools, and it works well when trying to unify your palette. For midtones, I slide it slightly towards red, and in highlights I add some green.

14 Finished!

That's it, I'm finished, and I am thoroughly creeped out by what I have made, and I like it! ●

PRO SECRETS

Shortcuts
Memorise shortcuts - knowing the shortcuts for the tools you use most is extremely beneficial. It saves time and keeps you focused on your piece.

