



Fundamentals for painting realistic skin and hair

featuring **Isis Sousa**



Hello! I am Isis Sousa and have worked as illustrator/cover artist and graphic designer for the books and music industry for the past 16 or so years! I have also worked as art teacher for kids and teens at the local school and right now I am preparing to enter the films and games industry. Will I make it? Let's see how the future plays out.

I started out in digital painting roughly 7-8 years ago, with Painter and I have used it as my main tool for painting since then. My works have been published in the USA, Norway, Brazil, Sweden, Germany, England, France, Netherlands and even Japan!

I am just another artist who loves to learn and I am glad I can share the little I know with you. Thank you for your time and support!

## The Fundamentals

There are different fundamentals that are universal for all subjects – these are principles of design, composition, values, colors and so on that I encourage you to research, understand and practice. We are not going to see those in this webinar.

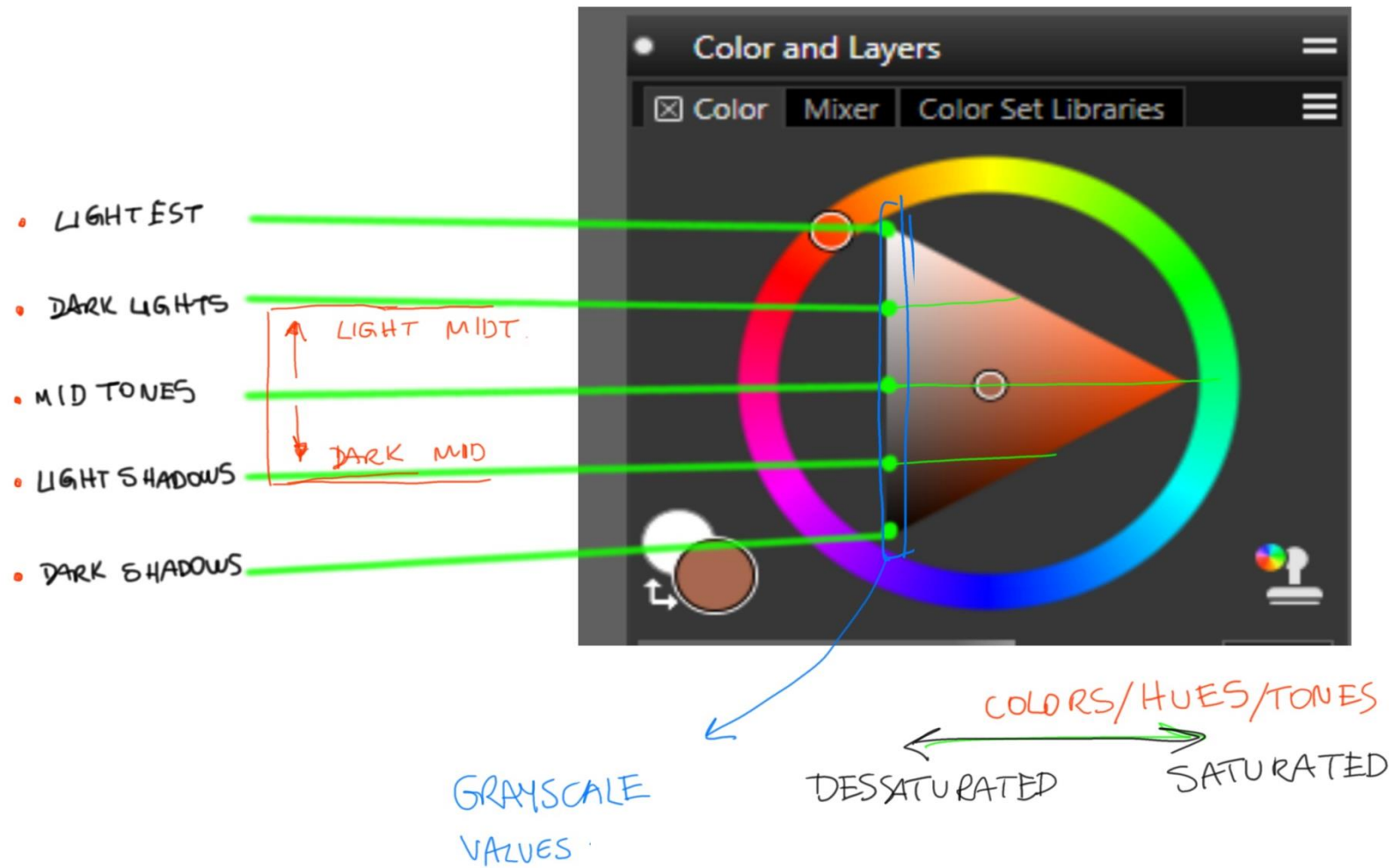
I do have different approaches to painting skin and hair that are a bit more complex than what we are going to study, but I hope this method will make sense and that you can implement it on your learning and practice of these subjects.

Basically, we do a research and gather references, we put emphasis on 'observing' these images and prepare a sketch or drawing. Then we start with a base-tone for the skin, work the shadows, the highlights and last we add some texturing and fix anything that needs fixing in the image.

This method works with any (or most) brush(es) of your choice. Let's get started!

Obs: Before we continue, let's make sure we get used to the value terms in our webinar:

## VALUE TERMS FOR OUR WEBINAR



# SKIN

## 1) We gather references and make observations



References from © Art Models books

I gathered these to show you that there is no one-base color for all skins. This is such a complex matter that varies much from person to person and their ethnical background.

So decide on the type of person you want to portray and do observations on your specific subject.

**Some questions you want to ask:** What colors do I see? Does the skin varies in thickness I different areas? Where are the pores most visible? Does it have freckles or other pigmentation? Is it oily, dry? Both? Do I see veins, if so where? Do I see wrinkles? How does light behave on this material? And so on... Jot down these questions and answers on a paper or sketchbook until you get experienced on the subject and know it by heart.

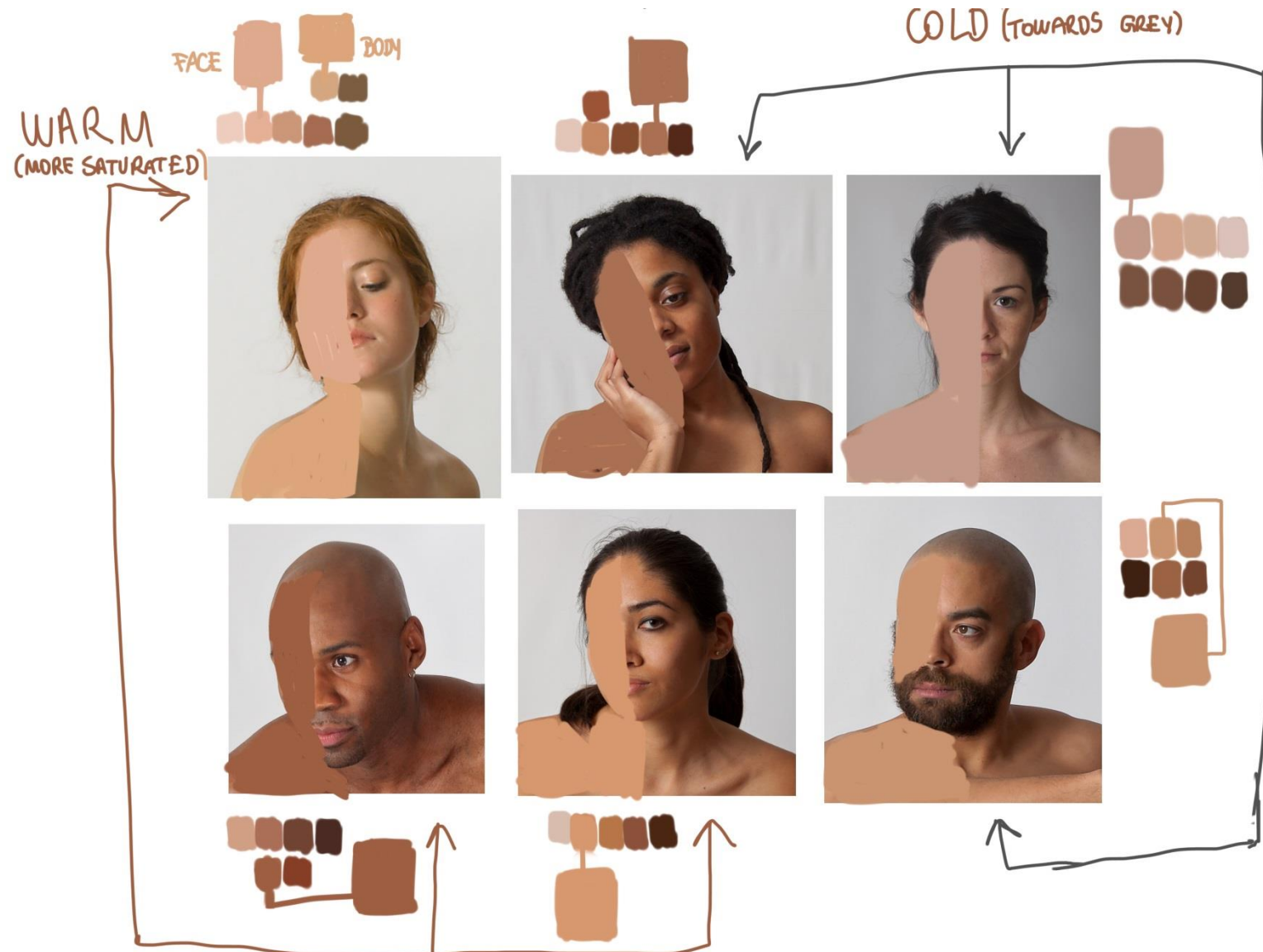
## 2) Let's find a base-tone for the subject we want to paint

References from © Art Models books





You can use the color picker tool and get samples from the highlights, mid-tones, shadows and darker spots. I did it with these references. **Now, find the dominant-base color for that skin.** This is most likely a mid-tone. That's the color we will start working with. I also observed that within these references, some of them have a colder/towards grey complexion, while other have a warmer/more saturated complexion.



### 3) Decide on the subject and prepare your drawing or sketch

For this webinar, I chose this one – then gathered a few extra images of the same model so I could see better the details and quality of her skin and hair. If you don't have art model references in your library, you could use some actor/actress or famous person images from the web for study purposes or if you're not shy, take some selfies and be your own subject – why not?! :-)

References from © Art Models books



## 4) Prepare your drawing or sketch

I normally like to have a drawing/sketch as a guide for the painting work. When I sketch for myself it is very messy, but enough for me to understand it. For a client, I normally do a nicer linework once a first rough draft is approved. Messy or fine line work, whatever works for you. It is at this moment that you can do some effortless explorations. For this class, I want to stick to my reference most possible, so it is easy to see how the principles we learn can be applied – I do however take some aesthetical choices along thew process. As for the hair, since we don't see much of it in the reference, we can try what pleases.



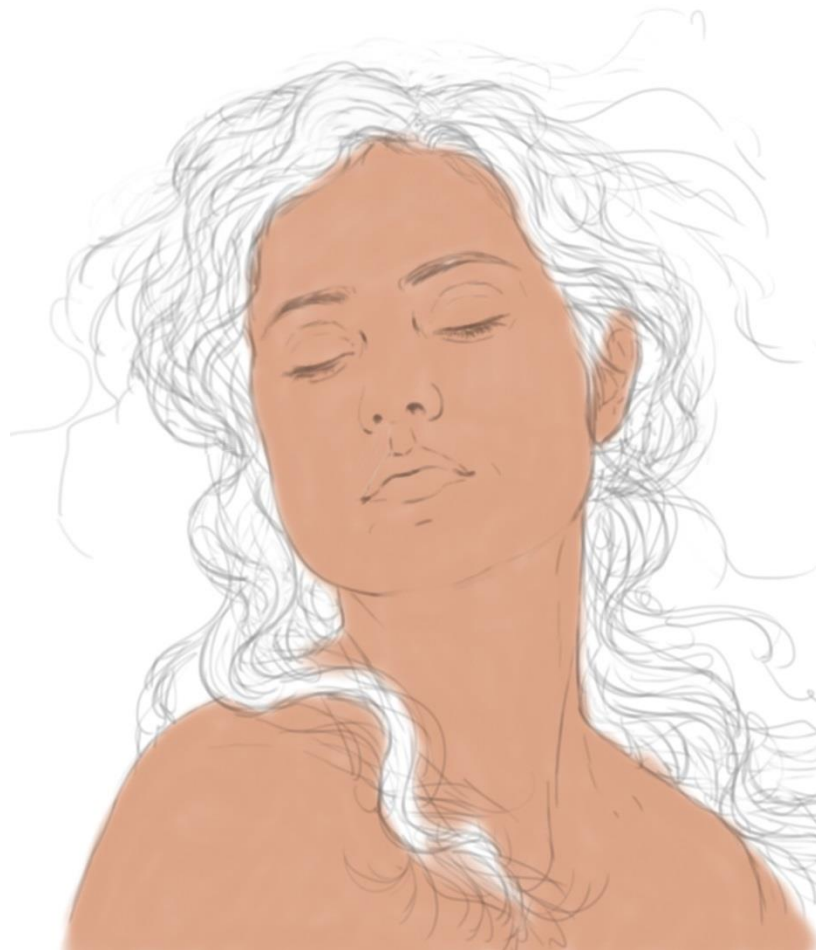


## 5) Base-color + shadows

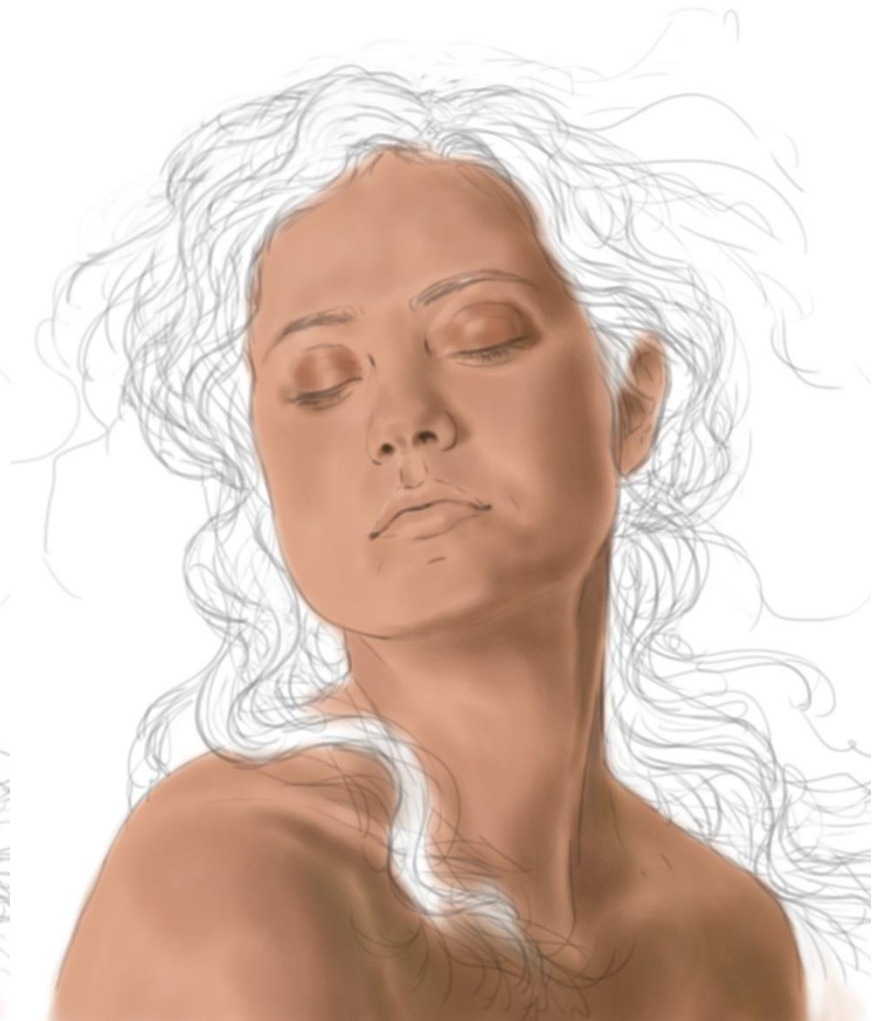
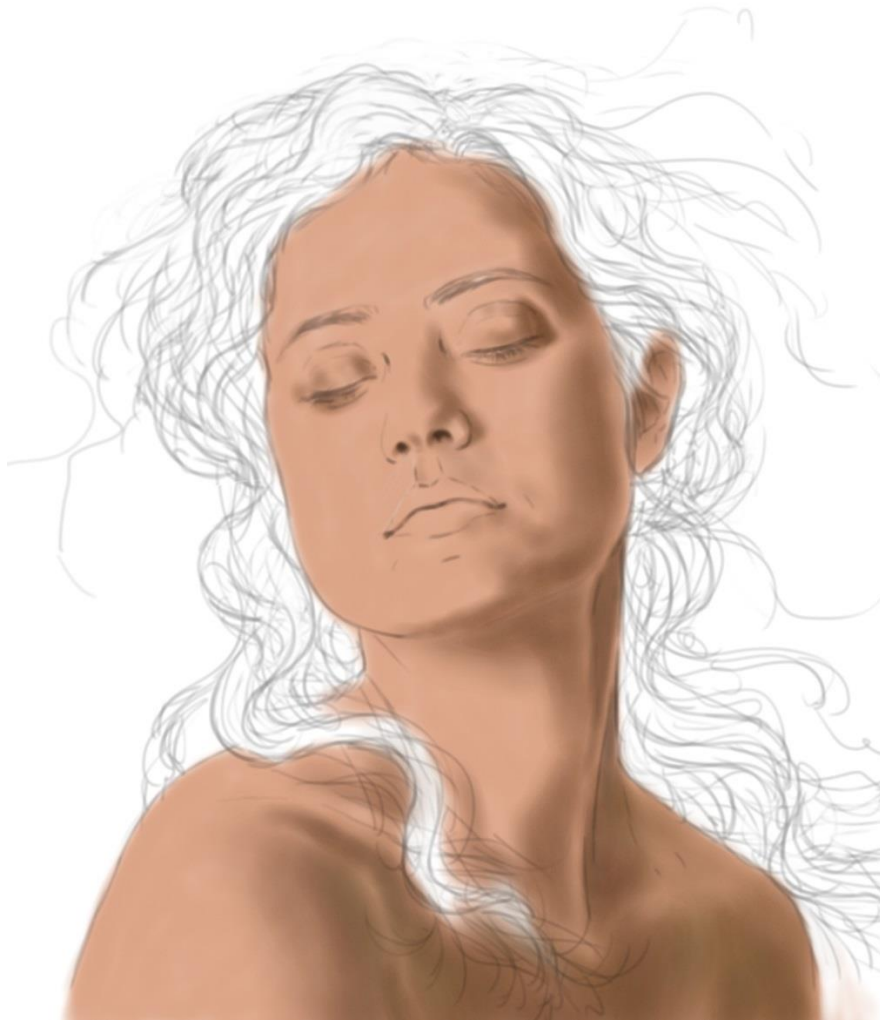
**Paint the base-tone of your subject** on a separate layer, under your drawing. **For the entire process I will have the drawing as top layer.**

**About shadows:** in real life, there is variation of value and color when it comes to shadows. Here we will focus on 'average' color for the shadow and value. We can fine tune the colors later on in the process.

**Observe where the shadows are** and add them to your painting.



darker shadows + lighter shadows (or dark midtones)



## 6) Undertones, eyes, lips, brows, nose

Now, you want to **observe** local **skin undertones** in your reference/s. These are small color variations, like patches of green, grey, blue, purple, reds and so on. Apply them subtly. (You can also improvise on them, making conscious choices for colors if you wish so.) I normally use low opacity layer in normal mode or overlay.

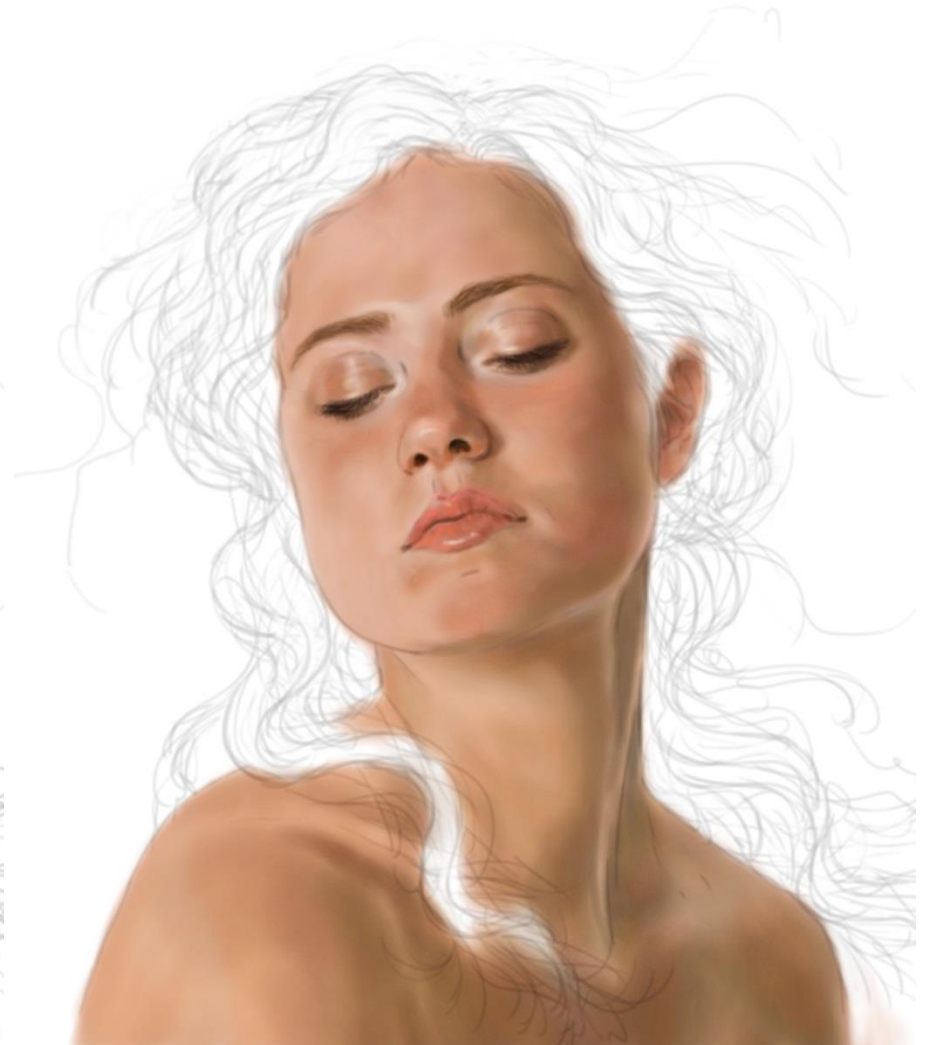
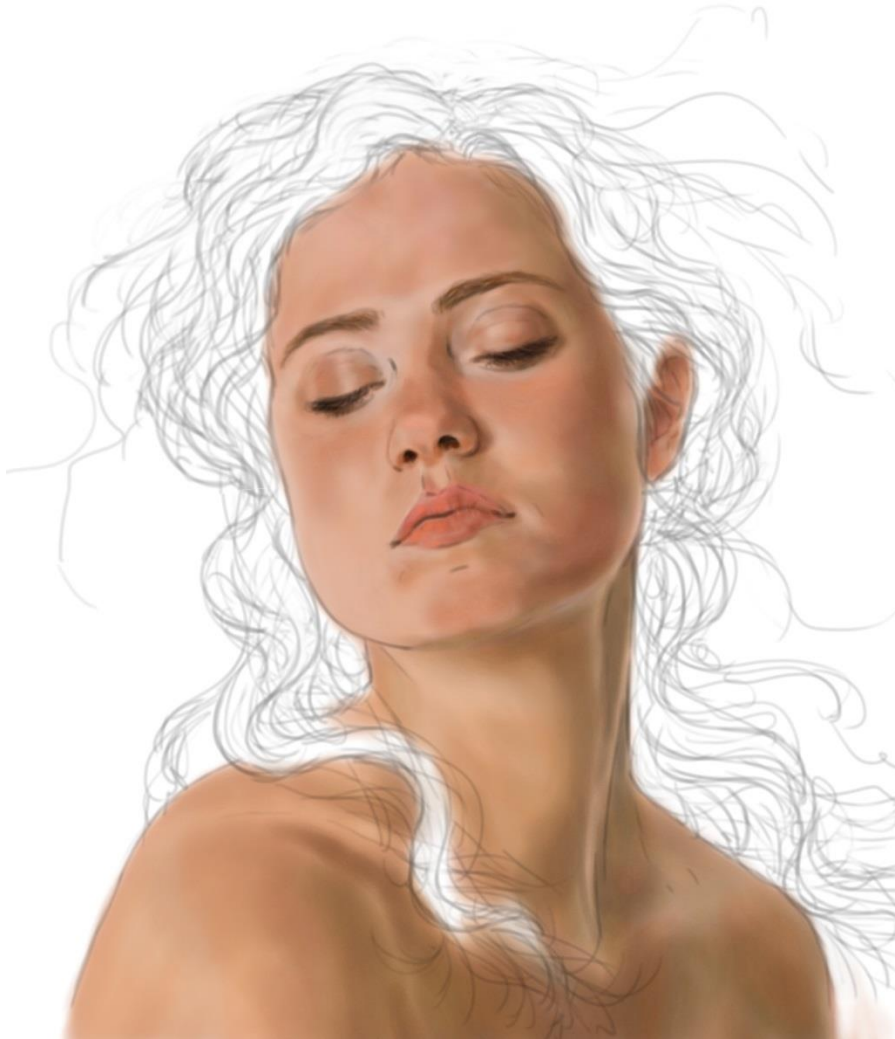
I also start to paint the base-colors for the eyes, nose, lips and brows.



## 7) Highlights

Just like with shadows, when it comes to highlights, those also vary in value and color. You may now observe the 'darker' and the 'lighter' highlights and apply them.

darker + lighter highlights



## 8) Now, we can add some texturing

I do use different methods for painting freckles and pores. For this lesson I have used an airbrush for and here is an easy way to paint these:

### **Freckles**

8.1 - If your brush controls is not open, go to Window> Brush Control Panels > General Brush Controls. Lower on the panel you will see 'Stroke Jitter', slide or type the number to 4.00. You will see that your airbrush no longer has a mechanical line, but 'bubbles' instead.

8.2 – Find a size that would be good to simulate freckles on the skin, paint it on the desired areas. You can use a dark mid-tone, hue within red and orange.

8.3 - Make this layer very low opacity so that the freckles are not dominating. You can try Overlay or Hardlight blending modes and choose one that works for you.

I applied it on her face, neck and shoulders.

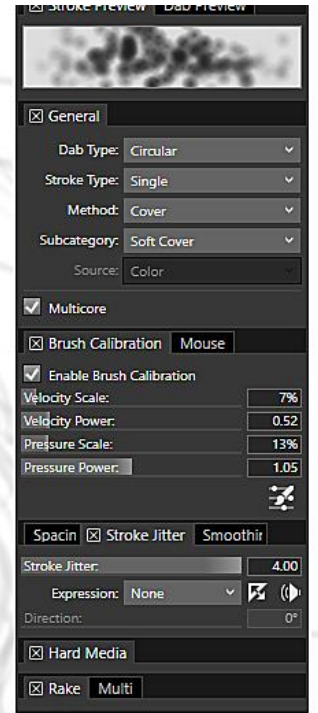
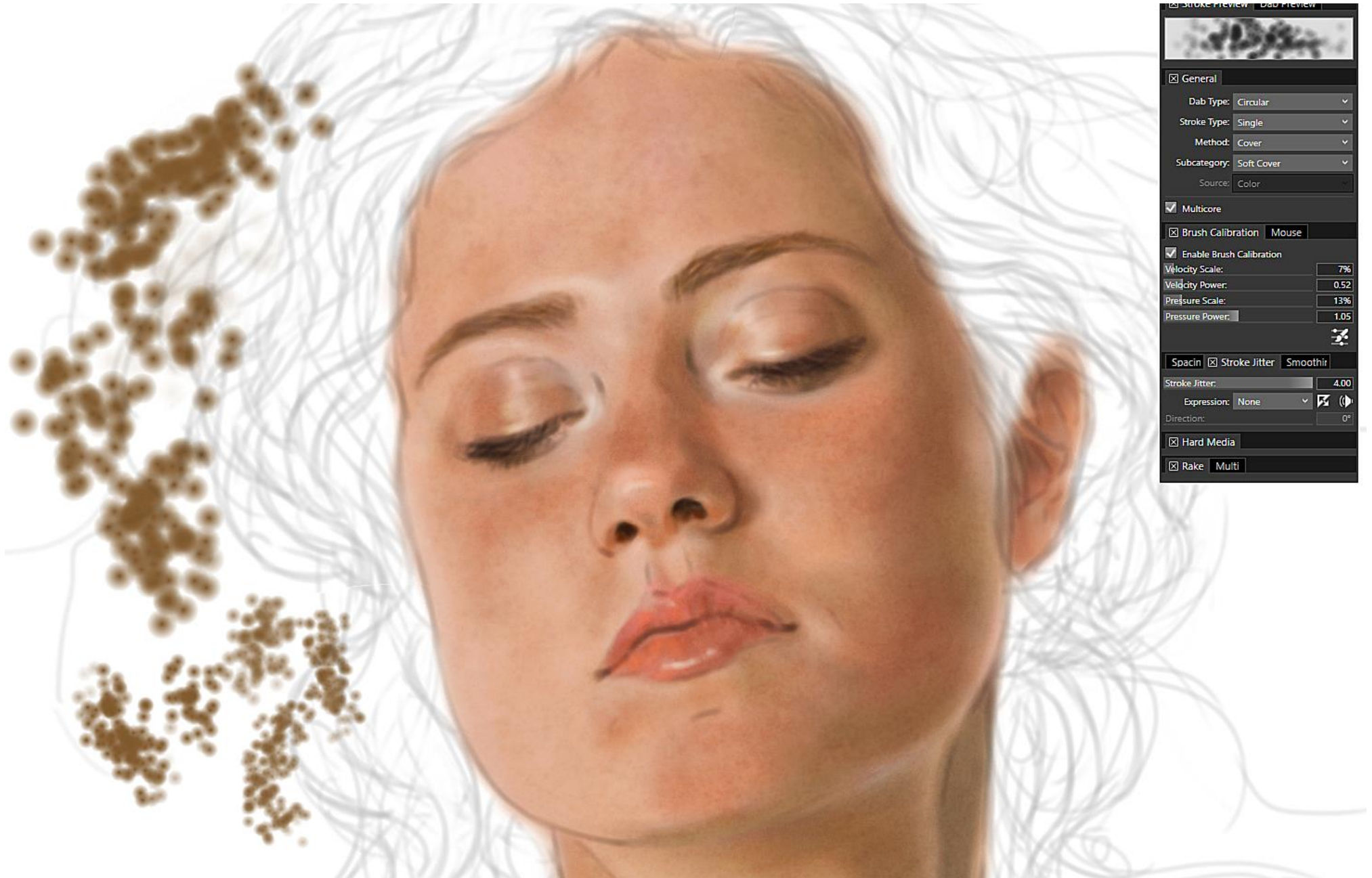
### **Pores**

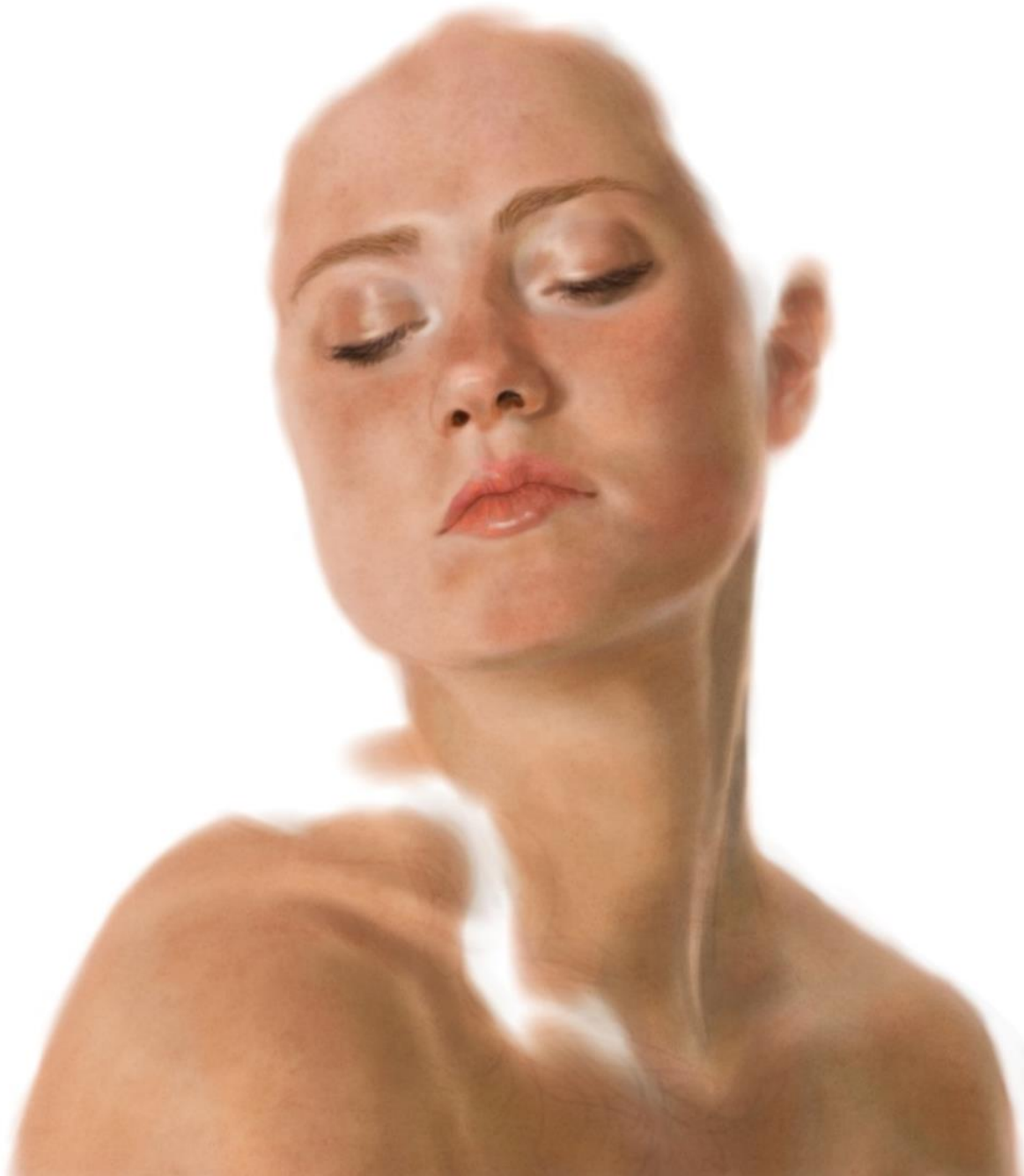
When we observe pores, we see a structure made of dark and light tiny dots.

8.4 – You will pretty much repeat the process, but will use a much smaller brush size, that could simulate pores. In this case, using the same color/value and layer blending modes as the freckles. These will be the dark dots of the structure.

8.5 – You will choose a color/value close to white and repeat the process you did for the darker dots. And these will be the light dots of the structure.







## 9) Finishing

You may want now to make your drawing invisible and work on polishing any details you want in your painting.

In this case, I polished the lips.

You may also want to double check that your image works as a whole and that light/shadows and mid-tones are consistent and that texturing is an accessory to those and not the other way around. You can also refine your colors if you wish so.

# HAIR

Reload & repeat!

## 1) Gather references and make observations

Just wanted to stress here the importance of references, from photographs, film stills or life drawing. I never recommend anyone to use other artist's work as reference because that represents his/her own take on reality, where he/she have done conscious choices to portray things on the painting.

Once you become more experienced you can try improvising more and more and taking other liberties such as doing more spontaneous works.

We will use the same references as we did for the skin part.

I '**observe**' the model's hair and translate that information into the shape and style that I chose. I need to care that the lighting conveys the shapes properly.

## 2) Base-color + shadows

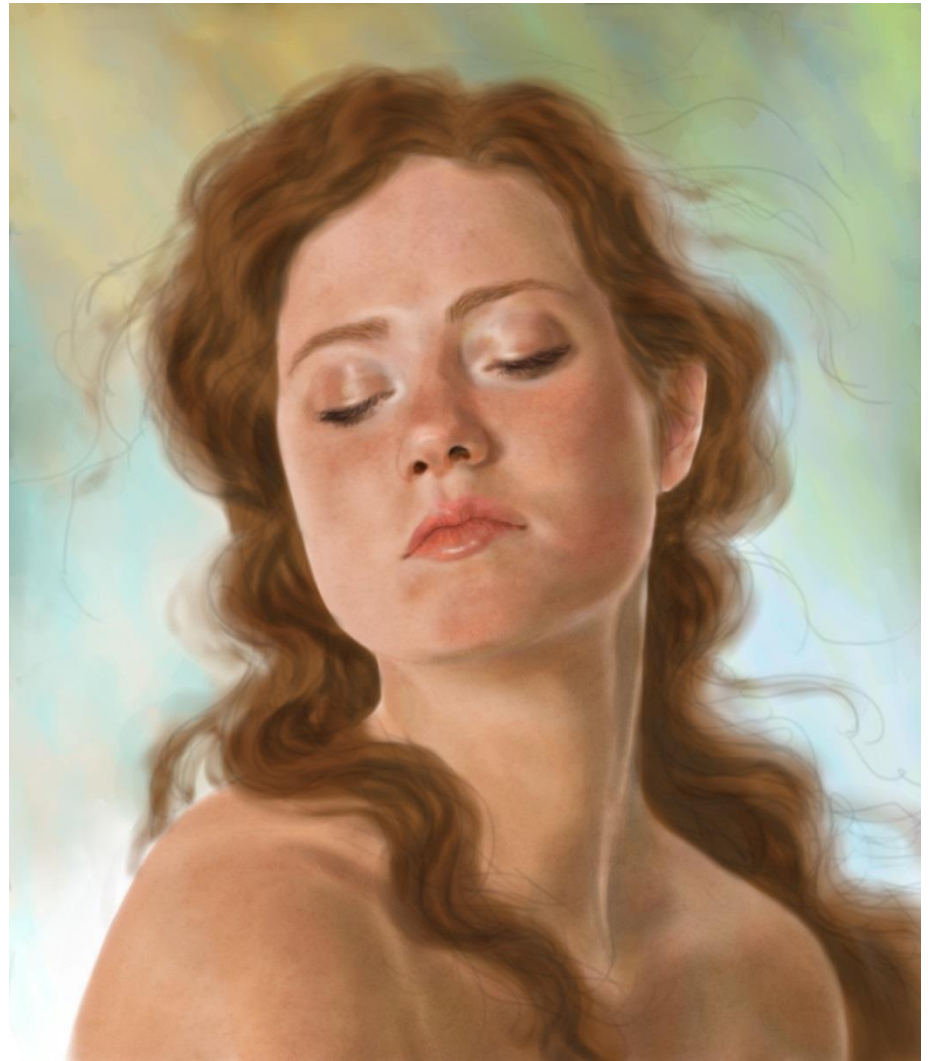
I find the base-color for her hair based on the pose-reference, which is more yellow. The other references (close-ups) show the model's hair in a tone falling to burgundy.

I observe the shadows , the overall darker and lighter shadows and add them to the painting.

**Edges:** I choose to have soft edges for this assignment. However, edges is much of an artistic choice and can be used to guide eyes towards specific focal points. If you prefer harder, more defined edges or mixed edges, that's fine as well.

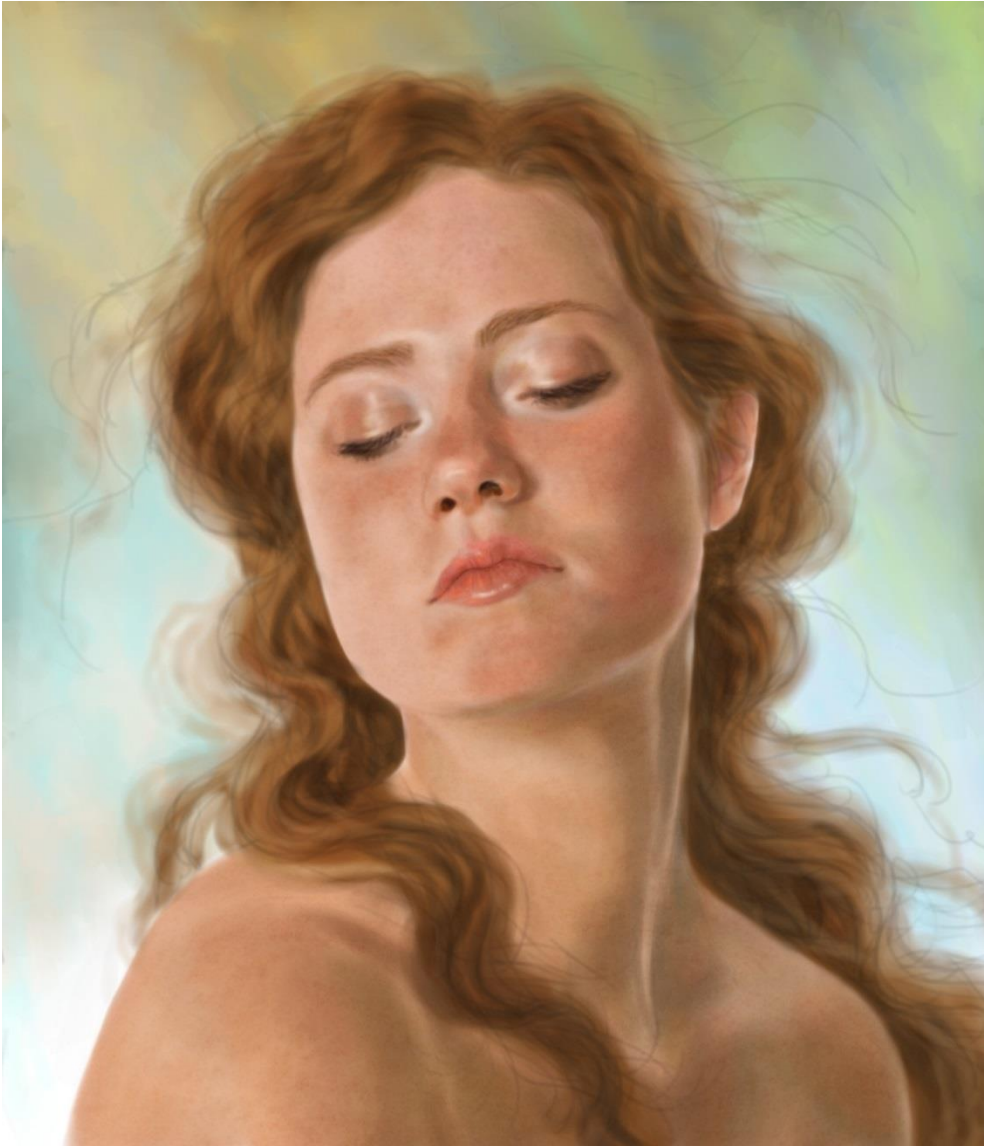
Base-tone + dark and lighter shadows | I use a thick, soft brush here, to define shape

I thought initially to have a plain white background, but then changed my mind and added color and mood :-)





### 3) Lighter midtones + darker highlights



For skin I apply the lighter highlights BEFORE texturing.

For hair, I apply it only AFTER texturing. Now, we work the lighter midtones and darker highlights. Hence all this time I've been taking into consideration the original lighting from the reference, but now I also add the lighting/mood of the background.



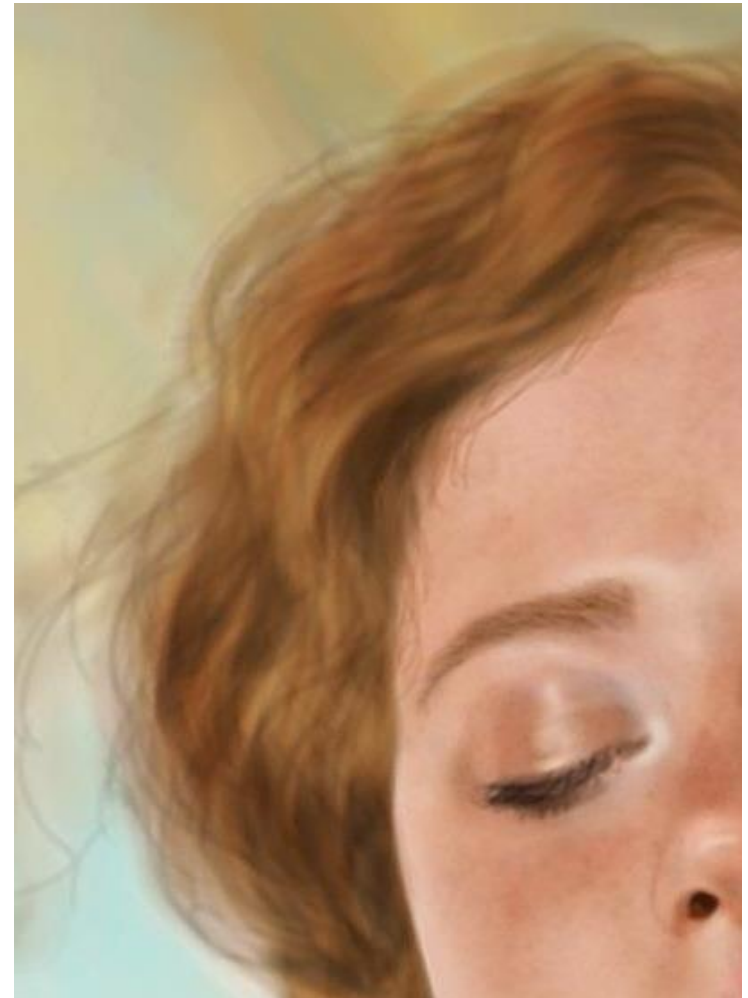
#### 4) Let's refine the structure by adding some texture



Now, I use a smaller brush size in a light value and in Overlay blending mode/low opacity – I go adding some strands that follow the shape or are a fit for that hair type.

I also add a bit of hair to her hairline over the forehead. I pay attention to the tones in the reference.

It is all subtle. We start to have the illusion of 'realism'.

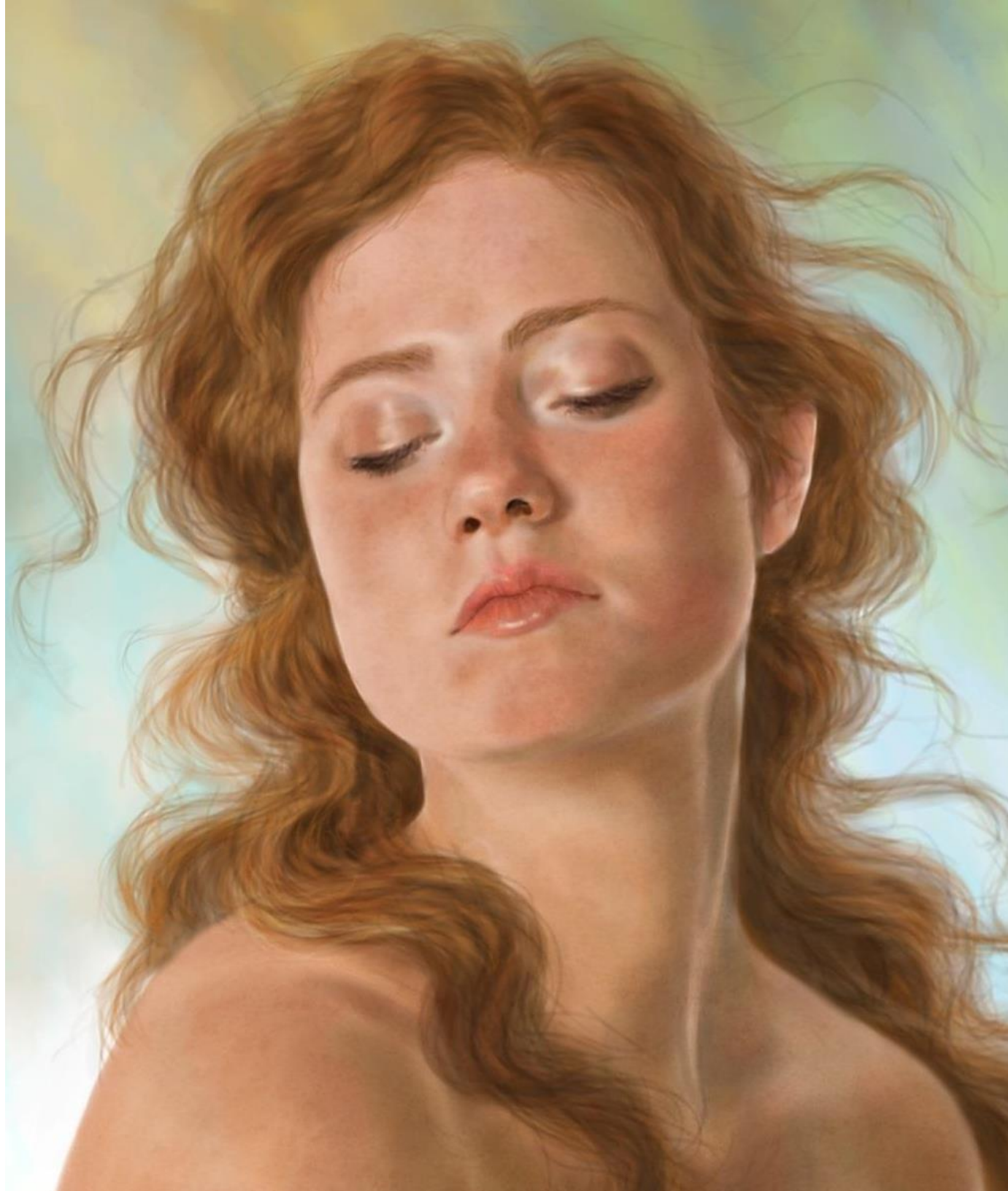




I continue the process over the soft edges of the hair, by using mid-tones (in light and shadow) in a low-opacity layer. Now back to normal blending mode.

Now we have edges that hold visual interest, but at the same time aren't dominant in the painting.





### **Lighter and darker hair structure**

Just like with pores, when we observe hair, it will appear have both light and dark strands in the overall structure. Here's how we do the lighter hair structure:

A) With a light value/color, but a much smaller brush size, you will repeat the previous process overall, except the edges.

B) Now, with a dark value/color and the same small brush size you can repeat it once again, always varying where you place your brush strokes.



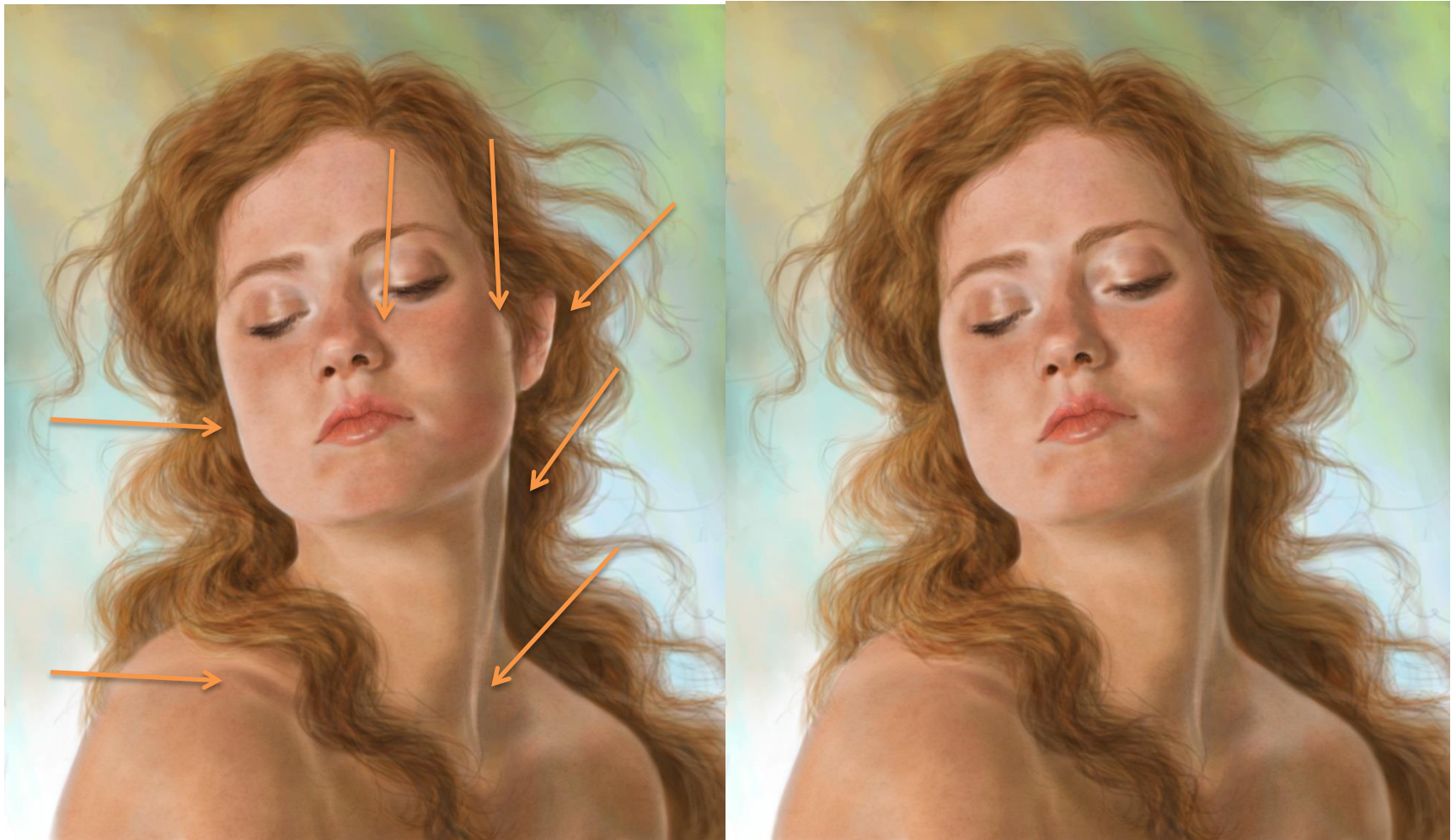
### **Add a little mess!**

With mid-to light tones you can add hair strands that are wilder in nature, that go in random directions, very subtly.

You may add more or less of them, depending on the type of hair type/style.



## 5) Overall image fixes



It is always good to check on your overall painting what is there that can be fixed or enhanced, each time you do significant changes or towards the end of the process. I did some small fixes and adjusted the shades to match the environment/background.



## 6) The final highlights and lighting FX

I use a thick, soft and low opacity airbrush around the hair edges using a very light green/blue, (in overlay/hardlight or normal mode depending on the case) to convey a light matching the environment. I also apply dashes of this light on a few, but specific places on the hair near the face and shoulders, on the lit side of the subject. It is very subtle, but makes the overall image more consistent.

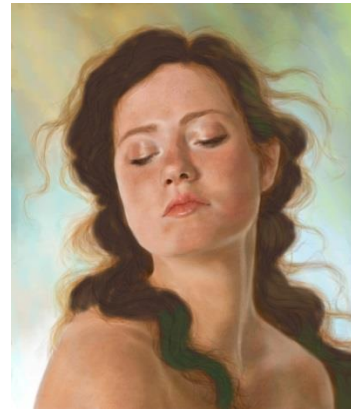




## Final image and thoughts

I chose a darker shade for her hair, for my personal taste.

I did this by using a flat dark/dessaturated brown (with dashes of green for ambient occlusion)



Then lowered the opacity of this layer and put it to Overlay mode. Last, I flattened the image and increased the saturation and vibrancy a little bit.

**I hope this webinar/tutorial has been helpful to you!**

If you'd like to see more of my work:

<http://isissousa.art>

Art Models series (references used for this work):

<https://www.posespace.com/>