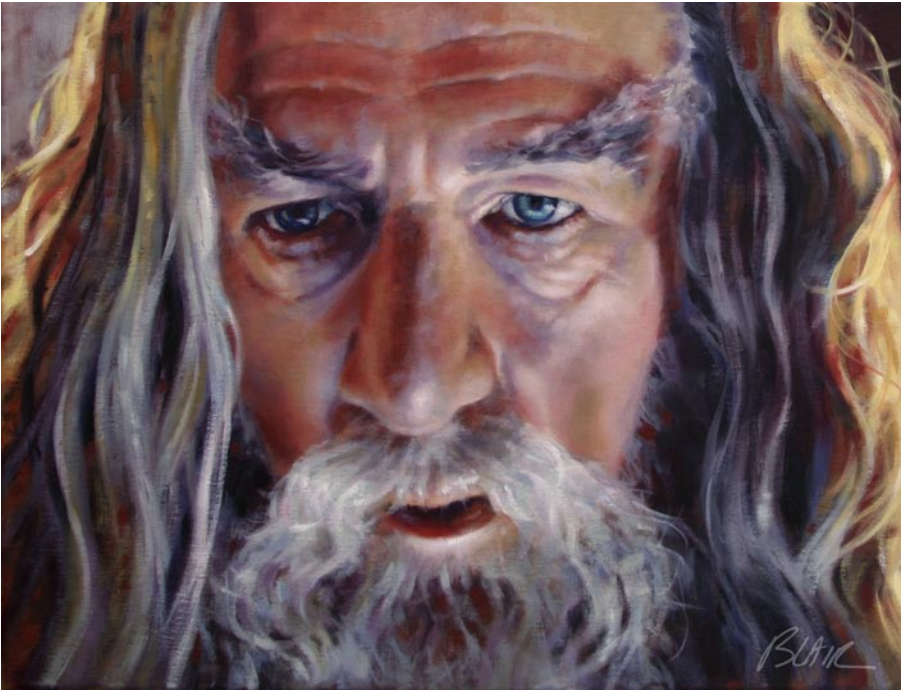


Oil Portrait tutorial by Cynthia Blair



I'm using a scene from Fellowship of the Ring, (movie, 2001) to demo. My subject this time will be our favourite wizard, Gandalf.

at left is the finished painting of Ian McKellan as Gandalf the Grey.

This old man's portrait will present a few different challenges: Wrinkles, skin textures, long beard and mustache, coupled with unusual lighting. (lower right) and backlight.

The idea is to capture the intensity and power of Gandalf the Grey, not to focus on rendering the wrinkles and frailty of old age.

Materials:

linen canvas primed with gesso, tinted warm golden tan

Brushes: Utrecht white nylon flats, in sizes 1,2, 4, 6, 8

turpenoid or turp

palette knife for color mixing

paper disposable palette

oil colors used in this painting:

Titanium white

Cadmium Yellow Med

Yellow Ochre

Vasari Shale (dk purplish brown mix- can substitute Van Dyke Brown, etc.)

French Ultramarine blue

Cerulean Blue

Cadmium Red medium

Alizarin

Note: each session is approx 2-3 hours for this size portrait, which is 15" x 20" On the last session I may spend much more time balancing and making final corrections. but each step is important.

A completed oil painting usually takes me about 3-4 days to complete, with drying time in-between.

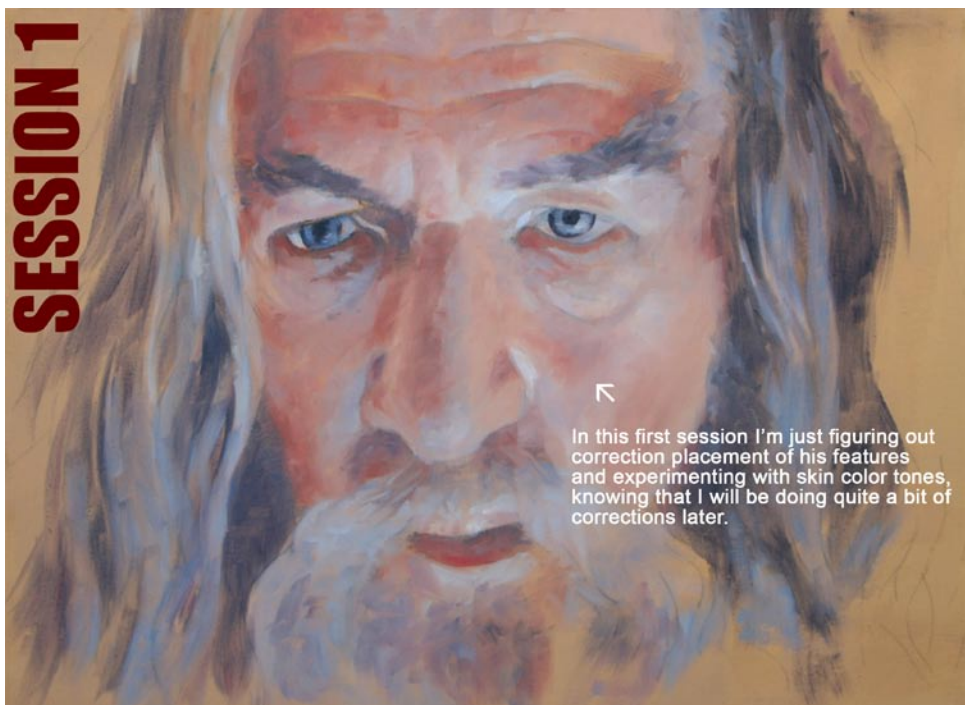
Before Starting: I tint my panel with a light soft warm tan, a color which is part of his skin tones and is present in the reference photo. After my initial base drawing (an outline of shapes only), instead of starting with a tonal monochrome as in the Frodo painting, I am going to try a different approach. Using a process called "oiling up", I lightly coat the canvas with linseed oil, which will help me spread my paints more easily.



Session 1: Roughing in shapes

After selecting my reference photo (at left), I have done a quick line sketch in pencil to map out my shapes. I am very careful to place everything correctly. After “oiling up”, I start working in the direct colors I will build up by layer. No monochrome this time. I apply the first layer thinly, concentrating on value and color temp (warm or cool) as I go. The paint is a bit transparent because of the light layer of oil underneath. This I let dry before I add the second layer.

note: working from web photos and film stills are difficult, it is better to work from a model or at least a high quality photo!

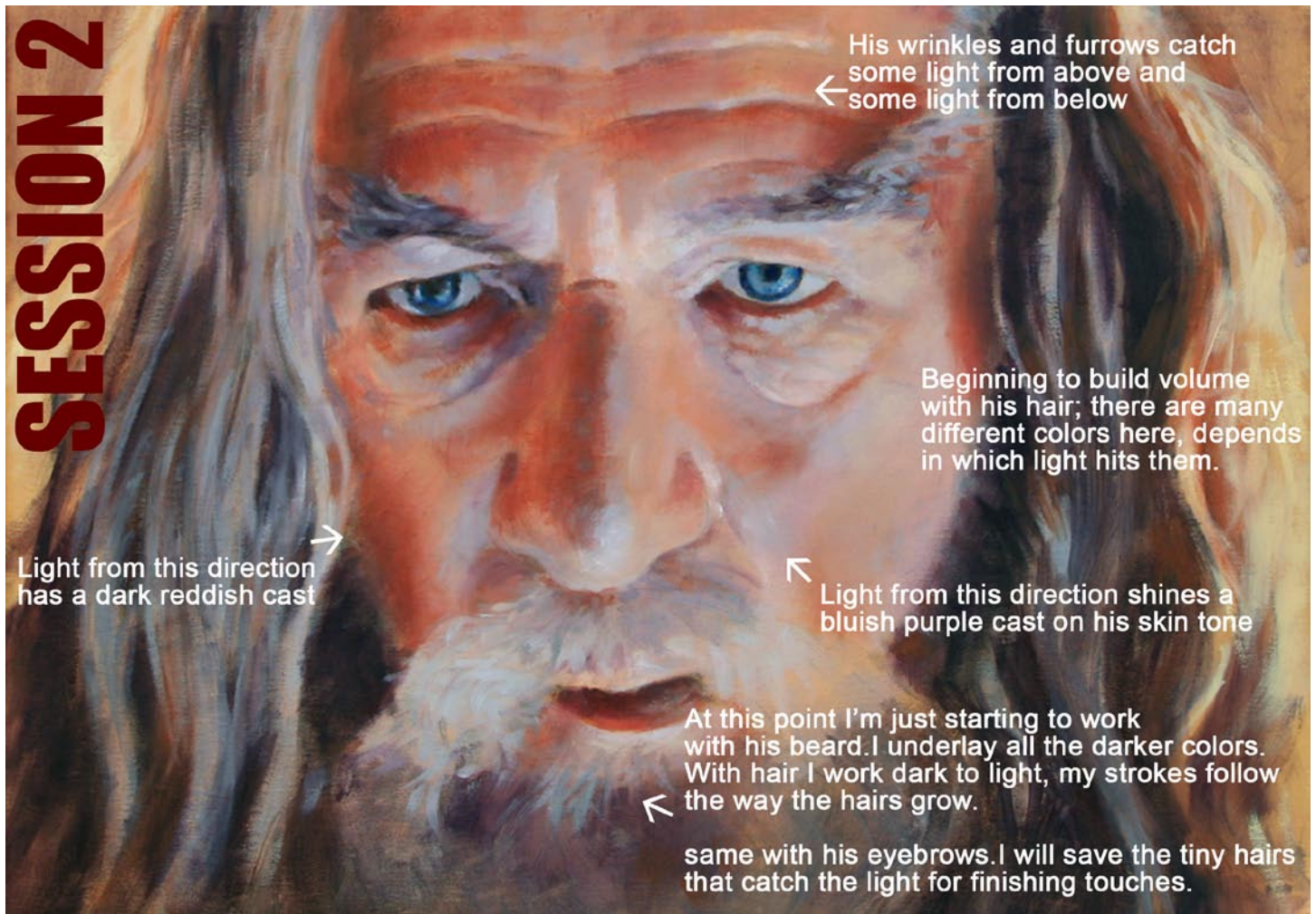


I start “drawing” now with my #2 or #4 brush, soft and loosely applying the paint *thinly*. I have mixed a big glob of base skin tone using white, alizarin crimson and yellow ochre. This glob I separate into 3 smaller piles. (pile 1) I add more red to, (pile 2) I add red and dk. brown, to make a deeper shadow red, (pile 3) I add ultramarine blue, cerulean and alizarin to, making a bluish purple shadow tone. I notice quite a bit of turquoise color, cerulean, in this shot, so I’ll add a small amount of this color in all my blue/purple/red mixes, as well as in his hair, to keep the color harmony. I will use it as an accent color for his eyes.

In this first session (about an hour or two) I’ll push the paint around with my brush, darken areas, and remove paint with a Q-tip dipped in turp where I decide it needs lightening. Use the least amount of turp as you can for this, and the paint should be applied in a thin layer (we’ll be building it up more as we go along). I’ll be very careful to get the shape of his

eyes and his other features correctly, however. Once I get a decent likeness going, I'll let it dry completely before the next session, where I start adding refining and deepening colors.

Session 2 : layering more color

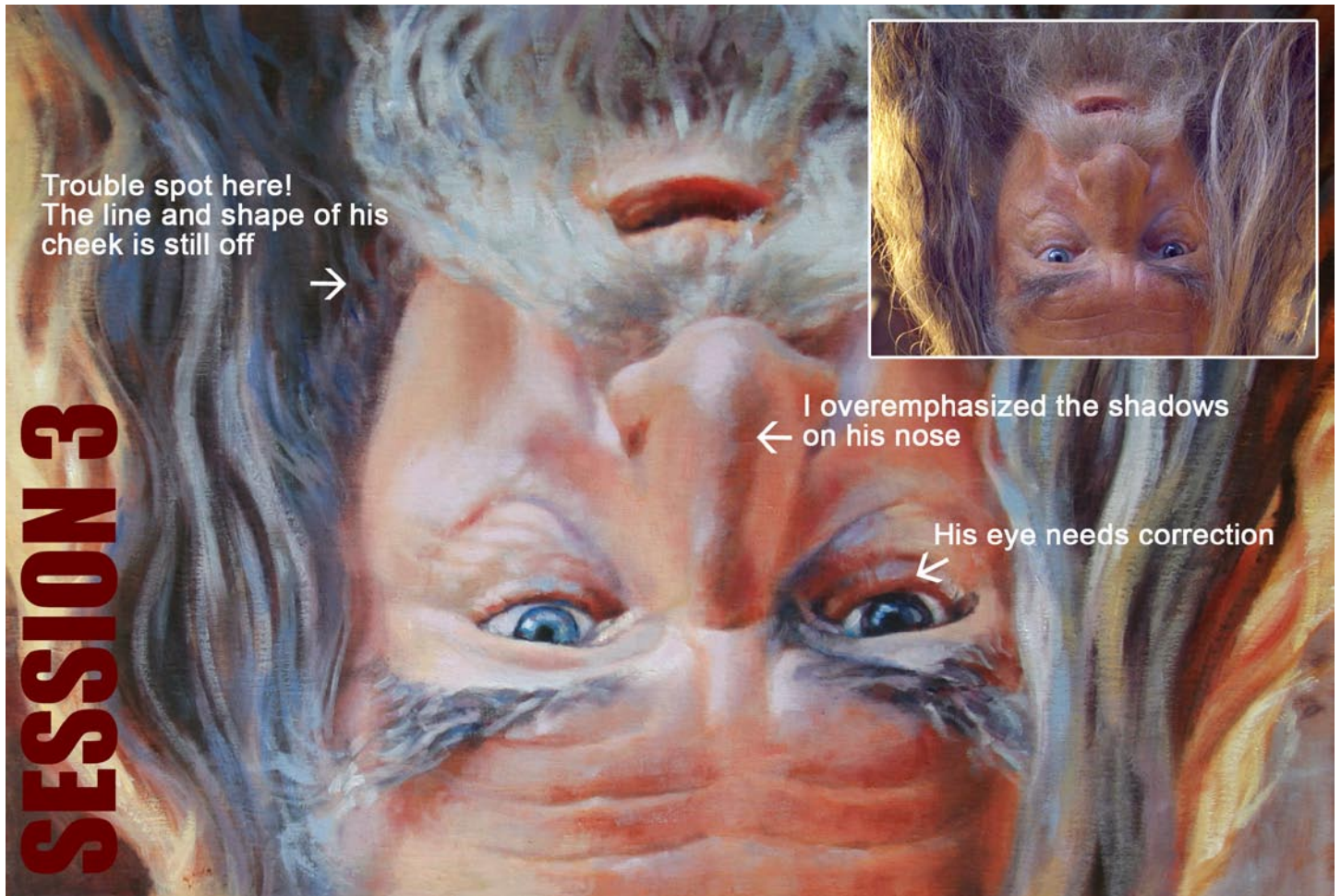


In this session I am slowly building the layers of Gandalf's hair, beard, and eyebrows, starting with the darkest colors first. There's many different colors in his hair, so I'm going to try to block in shapes as much as possible, and save the highlighted strands for last. I always stroke the brush in the direction the hair grows. Beard and eyebrow hair is wiry and a different texture from his head hair, and stands out from his face. So the facial features under his beard, lips, chin, etc. will be darker, but they are still there. And his beard, even wiry, follows the shape of his lower jaw.

Again, my paint application is thin and semi-opaque. Now I start sculpting the form of his face. He's got a lot of deep furrows and wrinkles that catch the light, his eyes are deeply hooded under folds of skin. I realize I have many corrections to do with this face!

Observe your photo carefully, paint what you see, not what you **think** you should see!

Session 3: Upside down corrections

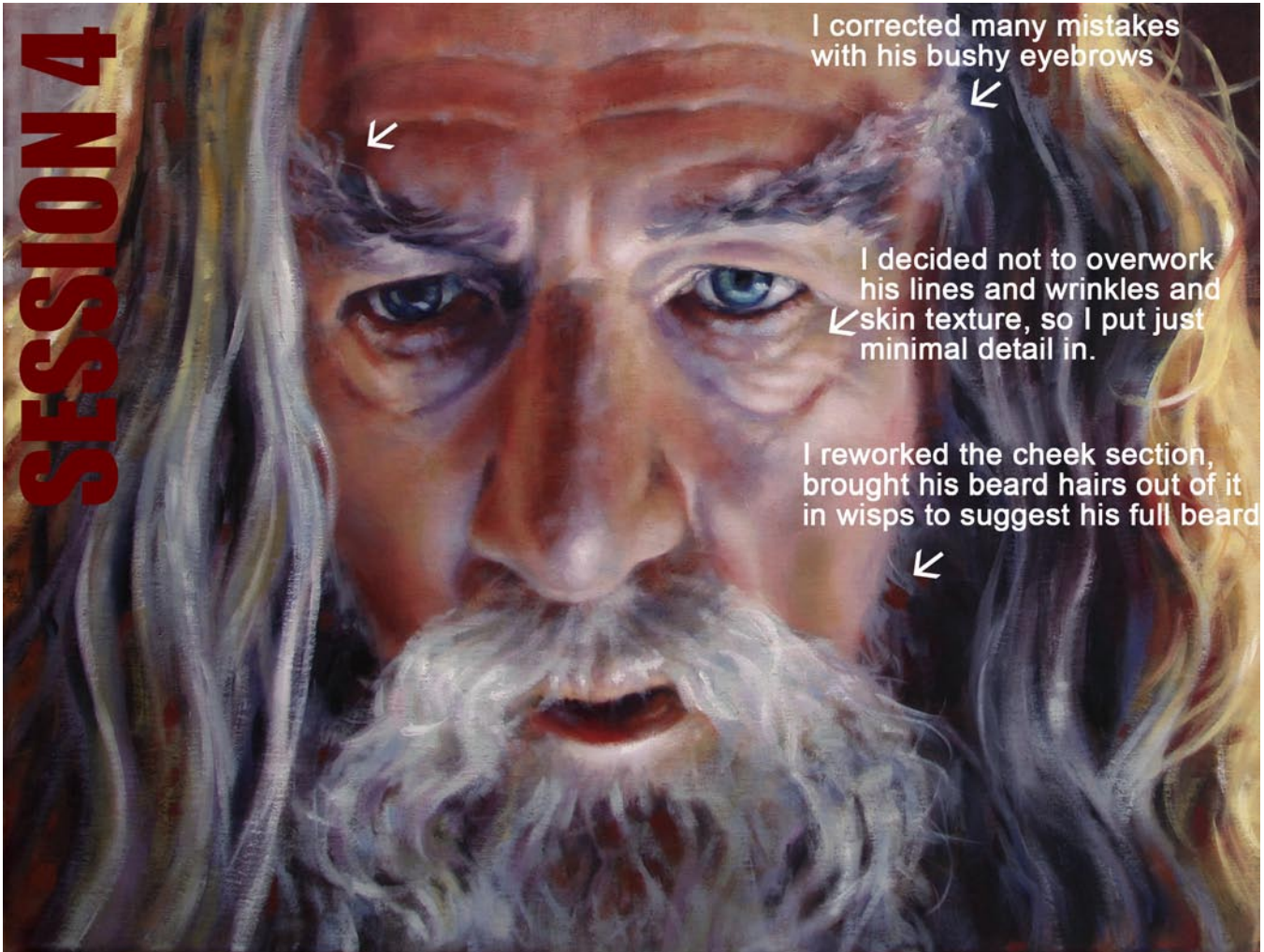


I notice this painting is getting derailed and I'm not happy, so it's time to do some serious correcting! In this session I flip the painting upside down, the painting and the ref. photo, so I can compare shapes and colors instead of facial features. It's also good idea to **squint** – at the reference photo – to get a clearer idea how the light cast on the face defines the form. It's **not** a good idea to squint at your painting while working.

What often happens is that I my edges and transitions of color aren't soft and subtle enough...I've certainly overdone the dark shadows on his nose, and under his left eye! Working upside down, I see these trouble areas immediately. I'll measure the distances between features, etc. to correct any problems I may have created inadvertently. In this same session I'm still building up and filling in his beard, eyebrow and hair. I'm going to correct all these issues before I do any final skin or hair textures.

It's fine to make mistakes, for that's how we learn...even better to be able to recognize them and correct them. This is the first time I've ever attempted someone as elderly as Gandalf (3000+ years old?) so I have a lot to learn!

Session 4: Finishing touches



In this final step I've focused mostly on corrections: checking how each light source hits the planes of his face (the blue light from below, the yellow light from the side and also from the back). I've layered more color into his hair and beard, added wisps here and there that catch the light. In comparison with the photo, I think I dramatized the color a bit, but I kind of like that – it seems somehow more fitting to his character. I could always adjust this with glazes (transparent color mixed with a painting medium like Liquin.) It's not unusual for me to continue correcting things I see over the next week or so.

Finally finished! (at least I think so, at this point.) *Final photos are shot, outside in ambient bright light, using a tripod and a cable shutter release to avoid any camera "shake". I find that even outdoor lighting is best, on an overcast day (or at least out of any direct sunlight).*

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