

Create **Controlled Chaos**

California painter Jeffrey R. Watts is deeply committed to training young artists. After years of conducting workshops on his own, he founded the Watts Atelier of the Arts, in Encinitas, California, where he continues to direct the educational program nearly 20 years later. His extensive art education gave him an appreciation for the work of a range of realist artists, including Nicholai Fechin (1881–1955), whose painting bridged the gap between realism and abstraction. “Some of the backgrounds in his paintings are totally abstract and are presented with the same aggressive, broad strokes of oil paint that one would expect to find in a work by Willem de Kooning or Jackson Pollock,” Watts said during a workshop he held in Fechin’s former studio in Taos, New Mexico. “But Fechin was able to focus on a model’s face and control the seemingly chaotic brushwork when capturing someone’s likeness. He could reel in his technique and let it go again so there would be a remarkable balance of spontaneity and exactness in the finished painting.”

Although Watts’ approach is based on a number of artists, his demonstration paintings show Fechin’s influence. “I like to refer to it as a ‘controlled chaos’ method,” Watts says, “in which I rely heavily on my drafting experience while I layer paint in a somewhat experimental manner.” Even in this experimental phase, the artist constantly assesses the overall progress of his painting, looking for balance and any potential problems. “It’s like playing a game of chess with oneself,” he says.

For *Philippe*, Watts used a limited range of colors to create a rich, multi-dimensional likeness. As an advocate for experimentation, Watts explains



THE COMPLETED PAINTING:

Philippe

2008, oil, 14 x 11. Collection the artist.

that three different palettes could be employed for this piece and should be tested. The first is a monochromatic palette of burnt umber and white, which an artist can use to help master value. The second is the Zorn palette, named after Anders Zorn (1860–1920), and includes yellow ochre, cadmium red light, ivory black, and

titanium white. This limited palette can strengthen one’s knowledge of pigments and how to manipulate them. The third palette is the one most commonly used by artists: a warm and cool of each of the primaries, along with earth colors and some “convenience” colors that are premixed combinations of other colors on the palette.

Demonstration #1 }



The Model



Step 1



Step 2



Step 3



Step 4

about the artist

Jeffrey R. Watts studied at the California Art Institute, in Westlake. He went on to work in the film industry and teach at his alma mater before founding the Watts Atelier of the Arts, in Encinitas, California. He is represented by Trailside Galleries, in Scottsdale, Arizona, and Jackson, Wyoming; Greenhouse Gallery, in San Antonio; and Parsons Gallery of the West, in Taos, New Mexico. For more information, visit the artist's website at www.jeffreyrwatts.com, or www.wattsatelier.com.

Step 1

Working on a rough-surfaced canvas, Watts marked the placement of the features by gauging them against the line running down the center of the face.

Step 2

Using warm-toned mixtures of closely related values, Watts blocked in the shadow side of the model's face.

Step 3

Watts next painted the lighter values on the far side of the model's head.

Step 4

The instructor softened some of the edges and developed more of the background.

See another demonstration on the next page

Demonstration #2



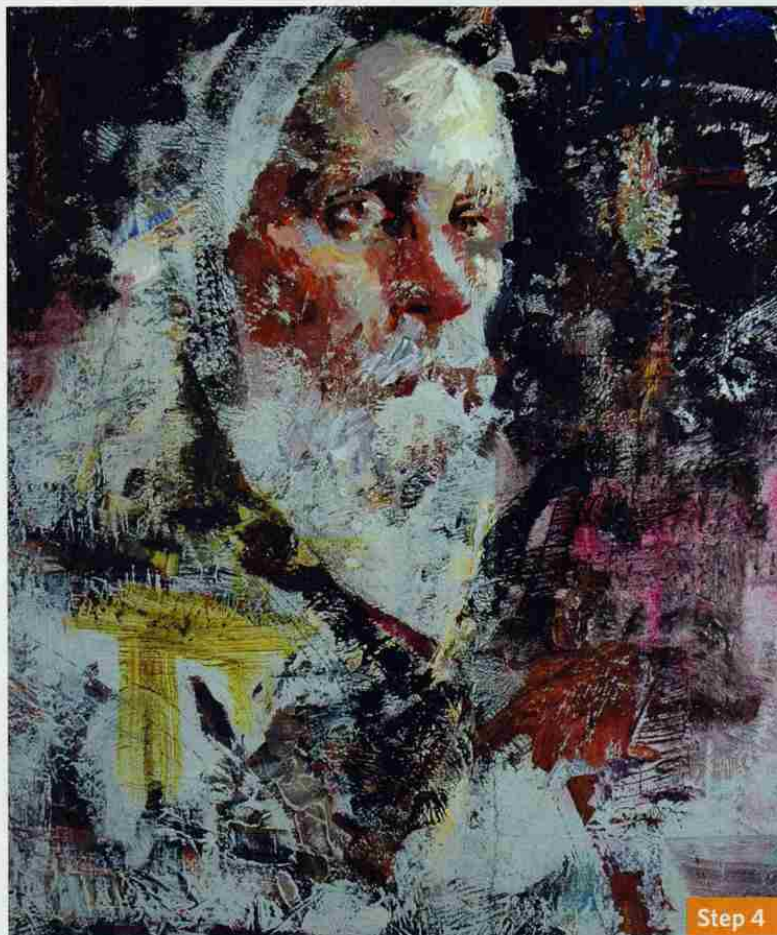
Step 1



Step 2



Step 3



Step 4

Step 1

Watts textured the surface of his canvas with a thick application of lead primer, drew the outlines of the major shapes within the portrait, and quickly applied a dark tone to the background.

Step 2

Starting with the model's eye, Watts established an appropriate range of values and allowed the textured surface to break up the strokes of oil color.

Step 3

Expanding outward from the center of interest, he then modeled the cheek and forehead.

Step 4

Still working with a large bristle brush, Watts filled in the remaining areas of the background so that the lit side of the man's face became more obvious.



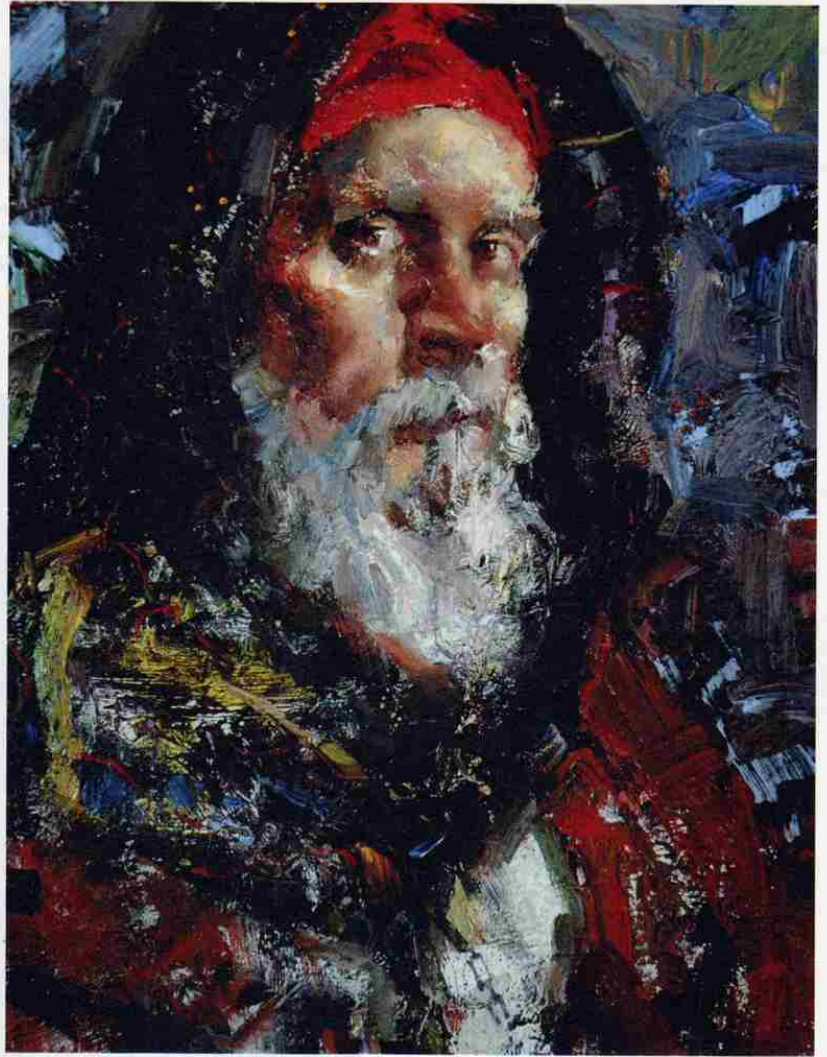
Step 5



Step 6



Step 7



THE COMPLETED PAINTING:

Bearded Gypsy

2005, oil, 14 x 11. Private collection.

Step 5

A close-up view of the portrait showing the "controlled chaos" brushwork that is a hallmark of the artist's painting style.

Step 6

Watts smoothed out some of the brushwork in the man's face without losing the painterly quality of the portrait.

Step 7

Adding more oil color to the background, Watts brought his painting close to completion.