How to define ethnic facial features

If you plan to do a drawing, painting, artwork of any medium and you wish to distinguish your artwork to be of a particular race of people, you need to define what are the characteristics of the race .

The best and most effective way to do that is to find a minimum of 3 images of people from that race of people. Breaking down the images to facial features is the easiest way to determine what is unique to a certain race.

DRAW FEATURES AND COMPARE

For example by drawing the individual features from each image you will start to appreciate a pattern.

The drawings to the left are from 3 different men of the same race, if you investigate them you will find that the common trait in all 3 is the triangular nose shape.

So l know to progress further with my artwork that my person requires a triangular shaped nose.

Let now study the eyes.

Eye study drawings

Left eye

Left eye

Right eye

Right eye

Eye study

From studying the faces of pictures of 4 different people from my chosen race of people, my conclusion is that their eyes have more of an Asian appearance then a Caucasian appearance, although the inner lid is not as pronounced and covering the actual eye on the inner corner of the eye like that of Asian males.

From what I gather from looking at collected pictures, the race shows all of the eye from left to right, however only the middle of the eye ball is shown when looking at it from an up and down perspective giving a squinted looking eye. The eye from outside looks quite triangular in shape, thinning as it goes to the outside of the face.

So again I have a solid indicator of what my eye shape should look like.

Let move onto the mouth

Lip study drawings

Lip study

The lip study concluded that my race of people have mouth features that all seem to have one common trait, the corner of the mouth turns down on both sides, looking like a sad face would.

All the pictures I collected and looked at this seemed to be a very strong feature in most facial pictures.

So what have I determined from my study

Well that my nose needs to be triangular, my mouth turned down and my eyes slightly squinted.

So let's put what we know into action

Understanding how ethnic features differ from race to race

I started by quickly and roughly sketching a Caucasian man then I placed a sheet of paper over half of the original image of the "white" looking man and started drawing my ethnic featured man. I decided to do it this way, so I could keep the features in the same place, just turning him into a more ethnic looking man that has the traditional features as researched in the eye, nose and mouth study.

Study your differences

Once you have finished your rough drawing take a good look - Do your features resemble what your study earlier suggested?

Compare – How does your ethnic man differ from your Caucasian man, it is important to understand the difference to further your artistic talents. Make notes in a note book to refer back to later.

Can you guess the race of my man yet?

Facial study – Understanding racial features

Now proceed to draw the other side of the face to draw the other half of the face on a new sheet. It's important to do this so you completely understand the look of your new individual as a whole.

Your drawing will not be perfect

This is not an exercise in brilliant drawing technique this should be a rough quickly done sketch, you don't want to spend all day doing fantastic study drawings unless your interest is conceptual art (more about the process than the finished project).

The purpose is to plant a seed in your mind for future reference, a bank of knowledge if you like.

The more you do this exercise with different cultures, races, ethnicity the more you'll be able to draw them realistically with acquired knowledge rather then guessing based on memory or assumption.

ARTIST'S DO RESEARCH JUST LIKE TEACHERS, DOCTORS, AND ANY OTHER PROFESSIONS

WELCOME TO PART 2 OF MY SERIES ON 'HOW TO DIFFERENTIATE RACES WHEN DOING ART'

So we finished up part 1 by looking at how to get a new perspective of cultures and different racial features.

Now we are going delve into using that knowledge in actual artworks, now just because you've discovered certain features belong to certain race types doesn't mean your limited to doing drawings or paintings that are totally realistic to the human face.

That is what we are doing to delve into next – different ways of working using your new knowledge purely for inspiration.

Adding colour to B/W drawing – In the making

Play around quickly with your initial drawing from part 1 by adding in some colour, try to bring him/her to life with real life colour tones according to your race's skin tone.

This is an investigation all of it's own really and we might delve into that in another lesson, but for now look some images and try to gage the over all tone.

Bringing your person to life means you can play around with your design concepts and ways of working.

This is my finished man, laughable but again I state that beauty is not the issue here, these are fast, rough and now coloured sketches designed to inform your learning and take you into new more exciting directions.

DON"T SPEND ALL DAY ON YOUR PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATIVE WORK
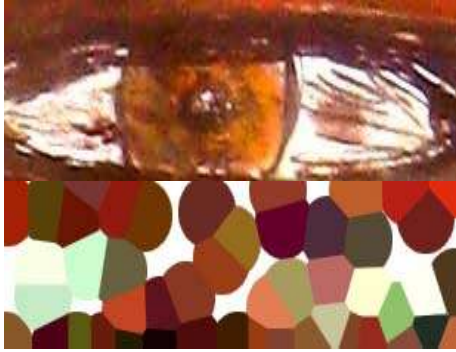
Extracting the colours digitally

I want to extract the colours from the painted Indian and portray them in dot form. The idea and purpose behind these works is to extract a select few main colours, then utilizing only those colours do a host of portraits and depictions in different styles. So although this work is based on colour, its purpose is to define a refined pallet in order to use in coming portraits.

The colours were extracted digitally using photo shop in order to get an indication of colours and tones that blended to make this face work. Obviously l know what colours l used, but the tones that were blended together to produce new tones are of interest. If you don't have photoshop outdated programs are available online for free just place free photoshop download into your search engine and it should give you plenty of options to download it from. When you open photoshop click file > open> find your picture> click filter >pixelate>crystallize>file>saveas> choose your file and save your image.

Colour study

The colours were extracted digitally using photo shop.

I then broke down the colours into a select few using various parts of the picture, photoshop >file>open> select image>image>duplicate image> rename or leave as is> select rectangular marquee tool (square broken line box in the tool section > drag over the area of the picture you want to crop > image> crop > then do the same as before >filter> pixelate> crystallize to get your colour pallet breakdown. This will give your the perfect colour pallet to work with when using paint.

For my first work investigation I am going to work on my colour pallet

For this work you'll need a piece of MDF board, canvas or something your paper/masking tape will not stick to. This is a quick artwork, can be quite effective, and I suggest to do a few variations because it is really fun to do.

Applied masking tape to your white painted prepared MDF board in any direction, overlapping is fine.

Applied the selection of paint colours

Gradually filled up all the gaps

Ready to take the tape off

OPEN YOUR MIND TO DESIGN

Whilst your paint is still wet be careful to take off the tape, you want to do it when it's dry because if you let it dry it can peel away your paint with the tape (sometimes) and you will be really ticked off.

The 3 I have done here are quite different even though two look the same, when you examine them carefully are in fact quite different. But it can make for a very nice artwork especially if framed either separately or as a set. Very cheap very easy artworks.

The beauty here is that even though they are far removed from my man, they hold the same warmth in colour and tone as him.

Inspiration comes from many different ways of working.
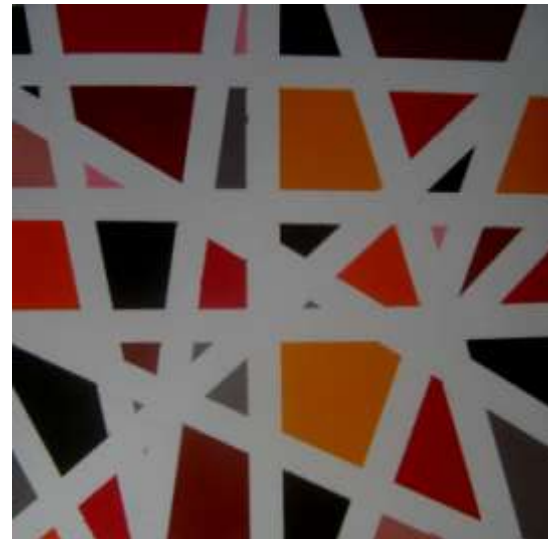
Drawings of potential abstract man

For the next artwork let's go to the cartoonish land and go a little abstract

Try to do as many drawings as you can in a few minutes, trying not to think to much about it as you go, go mad, go wild.

Abstract cartoon man – Work 1 In the making

I started by free drawing my image

I outlined my drawing in Permanent black marker

I used chalk and pastels on areas

Added paint to the mix, diluted with water and added yellow chalk lines to background

Layering paint, chalk, ink dye to achieve depth

Added highlights to areas

Mix mediums, and experiment, mix pastel , and chalk with paint to achieve very different results to just using paint.

Abstract Work 2 – In the making

Drawn picture

Permanent marker outline

Added chalk and pastel

Added pastel to the background

Painted the background with ink and water

Added paint and water to varying degrees

Honed the details and layered paint and pastel.

Again if you notice my facial features investigated in part 1 are present even in a more abstract form, I have my triangular nose, my saddened top lip and squinted eyes.

Let's try another

There are a million variations you could come up with

The important point to recognise is that by slightly altering your drawing each time your work will inevitably take on a life of it's own and will organically change, if I was to keep making these artworks there would ultimately be a huge progression from my original first work through to my last work. Why? Because it's evolution, we learn from prior mistakes how to work better, more efficiently and faster, we learn what works and what doesn't, and obviously we don't repeat the mistakes, so our work gets better, we make progress and our work inevitably changes.

CHANGE FOR AN ARTIST IS A GOOD THING!

So let now move onto another different style or way of working, lets go even further into the world of
"ABSTRACTION"

Shape exploration – Let's use shapes to build our man

Drawn Image

Painted image using the same colours as the original man's image, but with block colours. Note you still want to keep those key features in play, so l have the triangular nose, squinted eyes and saddened mouth, as long as you keep your basic traits in play your work will see resemble your race or ethnicity of your man. I can still see that my man does not look like a white Caucasian man.

3 DIFFERENT ARTWORKS INSPIRED BY MY MAN

Think about different compositions, angles, points of view (above, below, side on, looking up at) playing around with these will give you a great bank of ideas to draw from.

Again these artworks would look very appealing as a set of 3 framed on a wall, all inspired by following this process derived in part 1.

Let's go one more style

Collage – WHY NOT

Why not try and little collaging with your original coloured man, go to photoshop and enlarge certain features, or crop and print out different sizes of features and have some fun reconnecting them.

"Crowd" – painting a giant canvas-In the making

Drawn outline then added gap filler for texture and height

Colour was added to the faces starting with the largest faces at the for front and working backwards.

Hair was added

Before final application of oil pastels

This is my final work is this lesson, it is a large painted work utilising pastel, chalk, and gap filler to add outline height.

From where we started all those artworks ago, we are at the end. By resolving our work and continually trying new things outside of our comfort zone we can reach new heights of artistic awareness. This artwork was picked up by the British Psychological Society monthly magazine for their front cover feature. It featured in the April 2012 edition both on the cover and feature story inside. So you never know where your work will take you.

Work size Large -136.5cm x 81cm on canvas

Thank you for viewing part 2, I hope you enjoyed and learnt a bit more about how to find the differences in cultures and races and how to more accurately depict them, and to venture into uncharted territory with different ways of working.

Karen Elzinga

Karen Elzinga (Bachelor of Art – Double major: Fine Art & Visual Culture)