

# Art Avenue

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## A PAINTING IN THE LIFE OF... LALITA HAMILL, AFCA

I am honoured to share my planning process and resources used to compose a 4' x 6' painting that is part of a series of philosophical paintings depicting scenes from Plato's book "The Republic".

It is my goal to summarize the key aspects of this process, which I use whether I am painting landscapes, still life, or imaginative scenes such as this. I have divided the planning phase into four 'stages', which do not follow a 'step by step' format; rather, I went back & forth between the stages as I honed in on the final design.

### CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

The visual story I am telling is of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave"; an analogy Plato created to describe his philosophical Theory of the Forms, which is essentially about achieving intellectual enlightenment. Plato uses words with great visual detail, and I spent considerable time deciding how to best tell his story through the placement of subjects, number of paintings in the series, lines created by figures (arms, legs, gazes, postures), use of multiple light sources, style of painting, mood of the piece, time period, and so on.



Here I am painting "Plato's Cave" at the 'dead colour' stage

### PREPARATORY SKETCHES

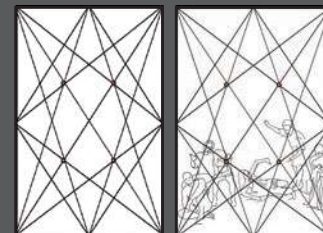
I began with individual poses, drawing from live models, and finding inspiration from a reference site called posespace.com to set up my own scenes. For example, I sketched and photographed small wooden mannequins with varied lighting and poses (see image). Note the compositional weaknesses, such as the height of the standing character being the same as the sitters. After selecting the positions I wanted, I hired models to do specific poses in particular dress.



I often sketch with powdered graphite and compressed charcoal on paper by dipping the chamois (in my right hand) into the powder and rubbing it on the paper to add tonal value. I remove powder using a kneadable eraser in my left hand. The result of this 'powder on, powder off, left brain, right brain' process is a loose, gradual build up of tonal value and shape that can be applied quickly and changed easily. I then add charcoal to the dark areas and use a graphite pencil for key details.

### ANALYSIS

Having used my intuition to create preliminary sketches, I then applied assessment methods to improve the compositional elements. One of these methods is to place an 'armature' over the work (see image). The lines create appealing angles, and wherever the lines cross each other a visual 'sweet spot' is created. Primary and secondary focal areas are well situated where three lines intersect. I soon realized I could save time by printing various armatures onto plastic sheets and hold the sheet up in front of the painting.



### PAINTING STUDIES

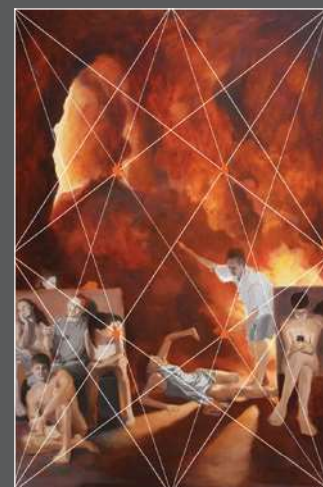
I created the under painting of a study by applying thinned burnt sienna or burnt umber with a brush in my right hand, and removing paint with a small cotton cloth in my left. This 'paint on, paint off' approach has the same benefits as the powdered graphite, though once the paint dries it is permanent. I then completed a colour study using traditional colours such as umbers, yellow ochre, ivory black, cad red light, and flake white.

If you compare the study with the final composition, you will notice a few last-minute changes. For example, I added vertical height in order to give viewers a sense of the enormity of the heavy, dark cave walls. What other key compositional changes can you spot? Why do you think I made those changes?

THE FINAL STAGE was to paint the 4' x 6' oil. I have placed further information on my website at [www.hamillstudios.ca](http://www.hamillstudios.ca) I look forward to unveiling the completed painting at the "Figure and Ground" show with Falk, Northcott and Robertson (see 'current exhibitions' for details).



12"x16" study under painting w/ armature



"Plato's Cave" oil 4' x 6' at dead colour stage w/armature

LALITA WILL BE TEACHING ABOUT COMPOSITION AND DESIGN ON MONDAY, NOV. 25<sup>TH</sup>.  
TO BOOK A WORKSHOP WITH LALITA, SEE OUR 2013 EDUCATION PROGRAM BROCHURE.