

AS SEEN IN THE  
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**Albert Slark**

# Keeping Portraits Fresh

When beginning each portrait, Albert Slark considers the situation in front of him including colour, location and lighting

**H**aving a classical background in painting I use the indirect method, which is an underpainting or dead colouring, overpainting, glazing and scumbling. When I paint from life I use the direct method that is great for quick sketches improving one's skills and colour notes. Most of my clients don't have the time to sit for hours on end in order for me to paint a portrait from life. That would be ideal! I have to rely on photography and my colour sketches to finish the portrait.

I prefer the indirect method for my finished portraits as it allows me to build up my painting with layers of oil. This creates a level of luminosity evident in many of the works of the Old Masters. I start the painting with a highly rendered drawing, which is a road map so to speak. After spraying it with workable fixative I give it an imprimatura—usually burnt umber in this case because of its fast drying qualities.


I use the fat over lean principle, which is basically thick and opaque paint in the lights and thin and transparent paint in the shadows. The early stages are painted with very thin paint using only mineral spirits. In the overpainting stage I use linseed oil and finally I use a glazing medium for the finishing stage to enhance or mute passages or place an accent or highlight.

I don't have a set of premixed colours or use formulas or recipes of any kind. For every portrait the situation is different, the background and lighting will change. My subject's pigmentation will be different,



are they indoors or outdoors? Near any vegetation? Or are they wearing something really colourful like a red scarf or jacket? Is my subject illuminated by warm or cool light? These are the questions I ask myself before I begin every painting. To quote one of my teachers Max Ginsburg, "The

challenge is to respond to what we actually see and not rely on what we know." This keeps every painting fresh and exciting for me.

Being an artist is a lifestyle I chose. I thoroughly enjoy what I do; if I wasn't earning a living from it, I'd do it anyway! 



*Mr. Leonard Teeple*, oil on panel, 51 x 41 cm (20 x 16")



# My Art in the Making Ms. Elora MacRae Bates



## STAGE 1

### SOLVING DRAWING PROBLEMS

After painting several sketches from life, I schedule a photo shoot, select my reference and begin a detailed preliminary line drawing. After the drawing has been transferred to canvas, I start refining the big shapes and work on getting a general likeness, then I start the shading process establishing my values, like a grisaille except in pencil, I aim for a finished drawing. At this early stage I like to solve any drawing problems that could be an issue later on in the painting. My materials are a mechanical pencil; 2b, 4b, and 6b drawing pencils; and a kneaded eraser.

## WHAT THE ARTIST USED

### Colours

- » Alizarin crimson
- » Burnt sienna
- » Burnt umber
- » Cadmium green pale
- » Cadmium orange
- » Cadmium red light
- » Cadmium yellow pale
- » Dioxinene purple
- » Kings blue
- » Titanium white
- » Naples yellow hue
- » Naples yellow light
- » Persian red
- » Prussian blue
- » Transparent oxide red
- » Ultramarine blue
- » Windsor green
- » Viridian green
- » Yellow ochre
- » I also mixed up a purple using alizarin crimson and ultramarine blue

### Glazing colours

- » Brown pink
- » Purple brown
- » Rose dore
- » Transparent earth orange

- » Transparent gold ochre

### Brushes

- » Filberts
- » Flats
- » Rounds
- » Mostly sable and bristle haired

### Support

- » 16-by-20-inch smooth texture canvas or oil primed linen

### Mediums

- » Odorless mineral spirits
- » Refined linseed oil

- » My own concoction: stand oil, turpentine, varnish and gum spirits of turpentine an excellent medium for glazing, which I use sparingly!

### Other

- » Mechanical pencil
- » Hb lead
- » 2b, 4b, 6b drawing pencils
- » Kneaded eraser
- » Stumps
- » Tissue paper





## STAGE 2 IMPRIMATURA

Once I've finished my drawing, I spray it with workable fixative usually two or three coats, after it is dry I give it a burnt umber imprimatura or wash using odorless mineral spirits. I've always used the "fat over lean" principle. Since I'll be building my painting in layers, I don't use any oily mediums in the early stages. I like creating a certain amount of luminosity. Keeping my shadows thin and translucent and the lights thick and opaque, gives the portrait a lifelike three-dimensional feel.



## ▲ STAGE 3 UNDERPAINTING

By the next day the imprimatura is dry and I start my underpainting. I like to create colour harmonies in my paintings and keep them unified, the same colours used on the portrait are somewhat used in the background keeping this in mind I block in the background; I like the underpainting to show through. For the background I've used a combination of burnt umber, sap green, alizarin crimson, Windsor green and dioxinene purple. I've used ultramarine blue and burnt umber for the hair, I don't use any black for the dark shapes. Before I start working on the flesh tones I thinly wash in the shadow shapes with burnt sienna and a touch of alizarin crimson, the pencil is still showing through. I keep my edges soft right from the start; I might take a dry sable brush and go over the passages I just painted. For the flesh tones I don't premix my paints, I don't rely on formulas or recipes of any kind it doesn't work for me.

## ◀ STAGE 4 BLOCKING IN THE FACE

I like working wet into wet I start with a light wash of ultramarine blue and solvent over the face and then start in on the shadows I use a combination of burnt umber, alizarin crimson, cadmium yellow pale and a touch of titanium white. For the light area of the face, I'll take a dab of Naples yellow light, Persian red, and a touch of white. I start blocking in the eyebrows and eyes with Prussian blue, and burnt umber, again keeping the edges soft.



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### STAGE 5 ADDING MORE PAINT

Once the painting is dry I add more paint to the background still very thin and washy, I start finishing the hat using ultramarine blue, burnt umber, titanium white and ivory black. I work some more on the eyebrows and eyes, start blocking in the nose, and lightly scrub in some colour over the lips, which is alizarin crimson, white, and a bit of viridian green. I add more paint in the light areas I'm applying it more thickly. I start the lace with a wash of dioxinene purple and draw in the pattern with ivory, black and burnt umber.



### ▲ STAGE 6 BLOCKING IN THE BACKGROUND

After the surface is thoroughly dry, I block in the background with a big bristle brush mixed with ultramarine blue, burnt sienna, and white, finishing the hat, the left eye and start the hair on the right side.



### ◀ STAGE 7 GOING FOR THE FINISH

I'll break out the linseed oil, which I'll use at this stage of the painting. After the painting is dry I'll oil in the section I'm about to paint; I'll start finishing the shadows from the top of the face and work my way down I might use a bit of cadmium orange for the reflected light and gray down areas with its complementary colour. With a small round sable brush I start finishing the eyes, nose and mouth. I paint in the light section of the face with the same colours mentioned before. I use Naples yellow, cadmium red light, titanium white, and a touch of kings blue for the neck and shoulders. I then go on to finish the hair on the left my model actually has blue streaks in her hair. I've oiled in the hair on the upper part on the right, it can get really dull. I start washing in the purple on the dress and work some more on the lace.





#### STAGE 8 NECKLACE, EARRINGS AND HAIR

I've started work on the necklace, finished the earrings, hair and started to finish the lace.



#### STAGE 9 THE DRESS

The face is pretty much finished, I'm working on the folds of the dress and the lace. Painting in the details and the pattern of the lace.

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Left:

**Ms. Sabrina O'Dorico,**  
oil on linen, 61 x 51  
cm (24 x 20")



Right:

**Mayor Steve Parish,**  
*Township of Ajax,*  
oil on linen, 102 x  
76 cm (40 x 30")

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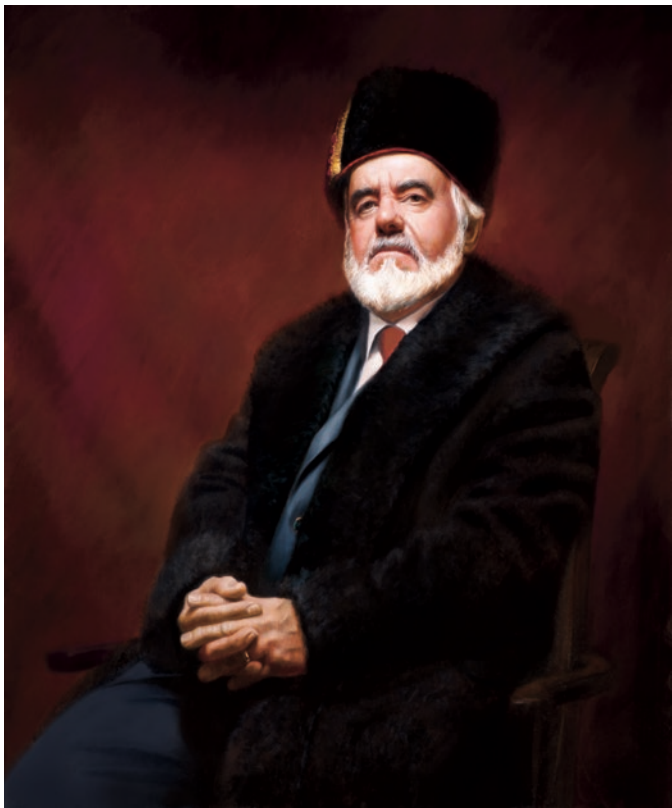


### STAGE 10 THE LAST SITTING

*Ms. Elora MacRae Bates*, oil on canvas, 51 x 41 cm (20 x 16")

The finishing touches are the most exciting part of the painting for me, the icing on the cake if you will. After the painting is dry I'll start with the face, I'll glaze parts of the shadows, working on the flesh, I'll paint subtle transitions from dark to light, put in accents and strengthen highlights, oil in dull passages, restate my half tones, finish the background and add paint wherever necessary to mute or enhance the portrait. After the painting is dry, two coats of retouch varnish are applied to the surface.





*Mr. Ernest Fischer*, oil on linen, 102 x 76 cm (40 x 30")



*Ms. Melissa Wilmot*, oil on panel, 51 x 41 cm (20 x 16")

## ABOUT THE ARTIST

**A**ward-winning artist Albert Slark grew up in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. He developed a passion for drawing and painting at an early age. In 1990 he graduated from the Alberta College of Art and Design, majoring in visual communications. After moving to Toronto he further sought instruction in classical drawing and painting. Post-graduate studies include classical drawing and painting with Michael John Angel in 1992. He also studied privately with realist painters in New York: Steven Assael, Max Ginsburg, Dominick Finelle, and Dorian Vallejo. He attended workshops at the Art Students League of New York and several in Toronto.

Since 1994 Slark has illustrated book covers from action adventure to romance for publishers across North America including Harlequin Romance, one of the biggest publishers of romance novels. He has illustrated well over 400 book covers to date.

One of three Canadians to be commissioned by the USPS, Slark has painted six commemorative stamps (portraits of celebrities)—the most famous being that of Marian Anderson, Spencer Tracy, Betty Davis, Countee Cullen, and the latest release of Barbara Jordan in 2011, currently in circulation.

Most recently Slark was on season two of the reality show *Star Portraits* where he painted celebrity Mike Holmes, which was exhibited at the Edward Day Gallery in Toronto. The painting is now in Holmes' private collection.

Slark won a certificate of merit from the Portrait Society of Canada in 2011 for his portrait of *Mr. Ernest Fisher*, exhibited at the John B. Aird gallery in Toronto. The portrait of Marian Anderson was exhibited at the Society of Illustrators 48<sup>th</sup> annual Exhibition in New York; the painting won an honorable mention awarded by the Art Directors Club of Washington.

Slark also teaches traditional drawing and painting techniques, loves to read a wide range of subjects, anything from art and art technique to philosophy and religion. When not painting, Slark is a part-time musician. He enjoys playing the drums (owns one of Neil Peart's old drum kits from the '80s) to the music of one of his favourite rock groups, Rush. He can be seen on YouTube.

### Contact at

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