



B&W Portrait tutorial by Cynthia Blair

I'm using a B&W photo from a Lord of the Rings calendar as a reference for this drawing. This could be done in pencil, charcoal- basically any black and white medium. The ideas presented here are the same regardless of the medium, but some of the techniques would vary according to which medium you use, of course. For B&W drawings I prefer charcoal these days.

No one's face is completely symmetrical, even someone as handsome as Elijah Wood, so draw what you see not what you think you should see!

at left is the finished charcoal drawing of Frodo Baggins, played by Elijah Wood

Materials:

illustration board, Strathmore 500 plate finish, primed with med gray liquid acrylic.

Charcoal pencils, a variety of Derwent, Pitt and General (also General's white)

black and white gouache

kneaded eraser

Colorshapers in two sizes (like brushes but with rubber tips for blending in tight spots.)



Before Starting: I tint my illustration board with 2 coats of medium gray acrylic, so I can get a nice even neutral base, a mid tone so I can add lights as well as darks.

Step 1: Starting

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. I start blocking in some darks, like Frodo's hair, which is very dark and curly. I use a wash of black gouache here and there in his hair, to unify the base dark. The gouache is diluted with water, so it's dark but not opaque black. I'm careful to leave out the highlights. Charcoal over gouache has a distinctly different texture,

because the gouache sinks into the tooth of the paper, and the charcoal rests more or less on top.

I'll start with his eyes next, as this is the most important feature to get right, in my opinion. I'll make sure the shape and placement is as perfect as I can get it. The iris and the pupil are always perfectly round, especially when viewed straight on, as in this photo. The highlight or "catch lights" reflect the source of light on the subject. In this case, this is a studio shot, and the main light source is from Frodo's right at about 2 o'clock. A secondary light source is from behind him on his left side.

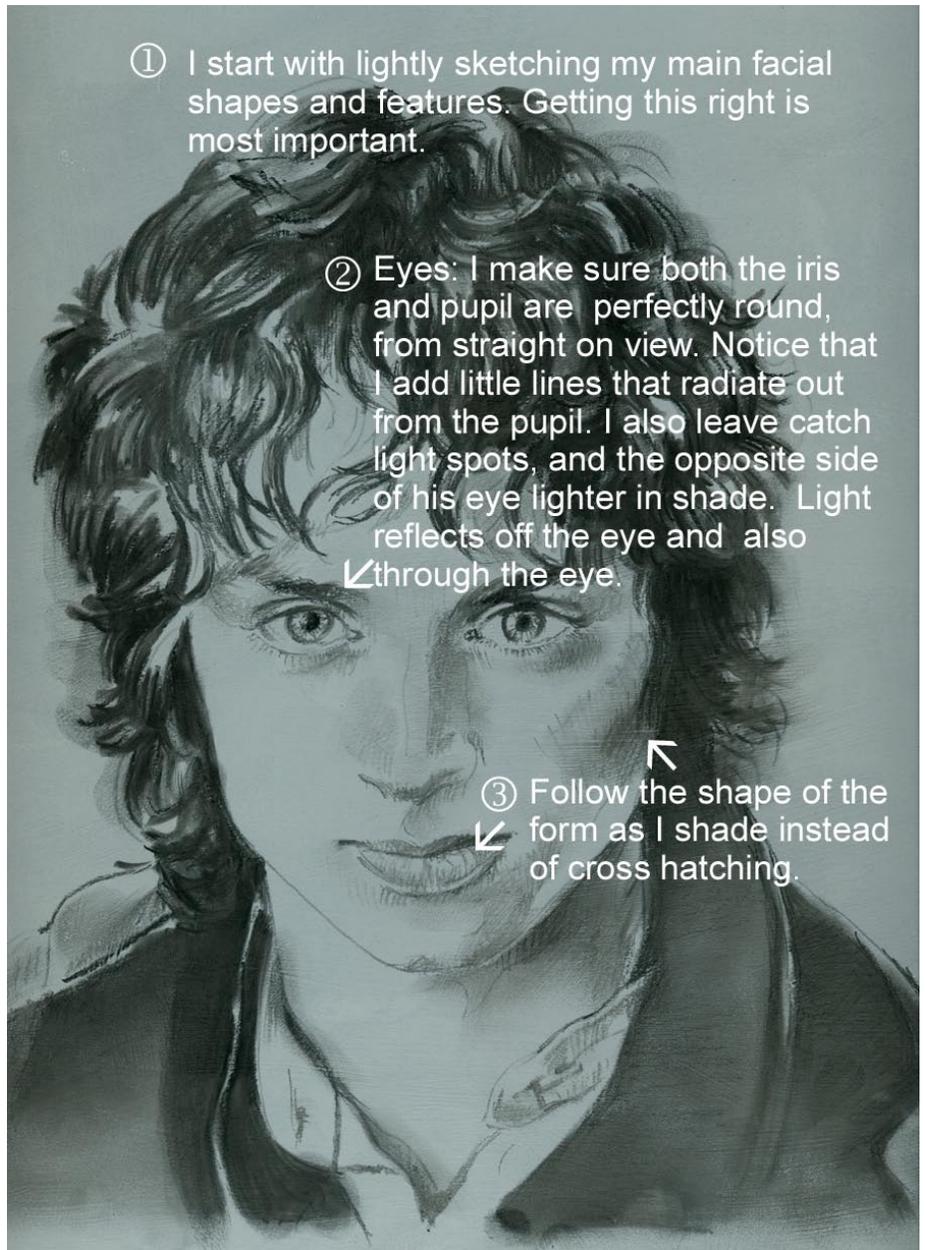
Frodo/Elijah has a rather square jaw which is emphasized in this view- as he is looking slightly up at the camera.

After I'm satisfied with the start on his eyes, I'll begin to add charcoal pencil lightly (my Derwent medium pencil) and start defining the shadow areas. As you can see, I'm stroking the pencil in the shape of each feature, following the form. (See the lips). I try to do this instead of too much cross-hatching. I'll use my fingers to blend the strokes, especially in all the big areas, following the contours of his face.

I'll work in all areas of the drawing at this point, and work them together. Once I'm happy with the overall, I will spray the drawing lightly with fixative a couple of times, doing a quick "smudge test" with my fingers to be sure it's fully fixed before adding the next layer of charcoal. Up to this point, I could erase any area I want (except the gouache) with the kneaded eraser.

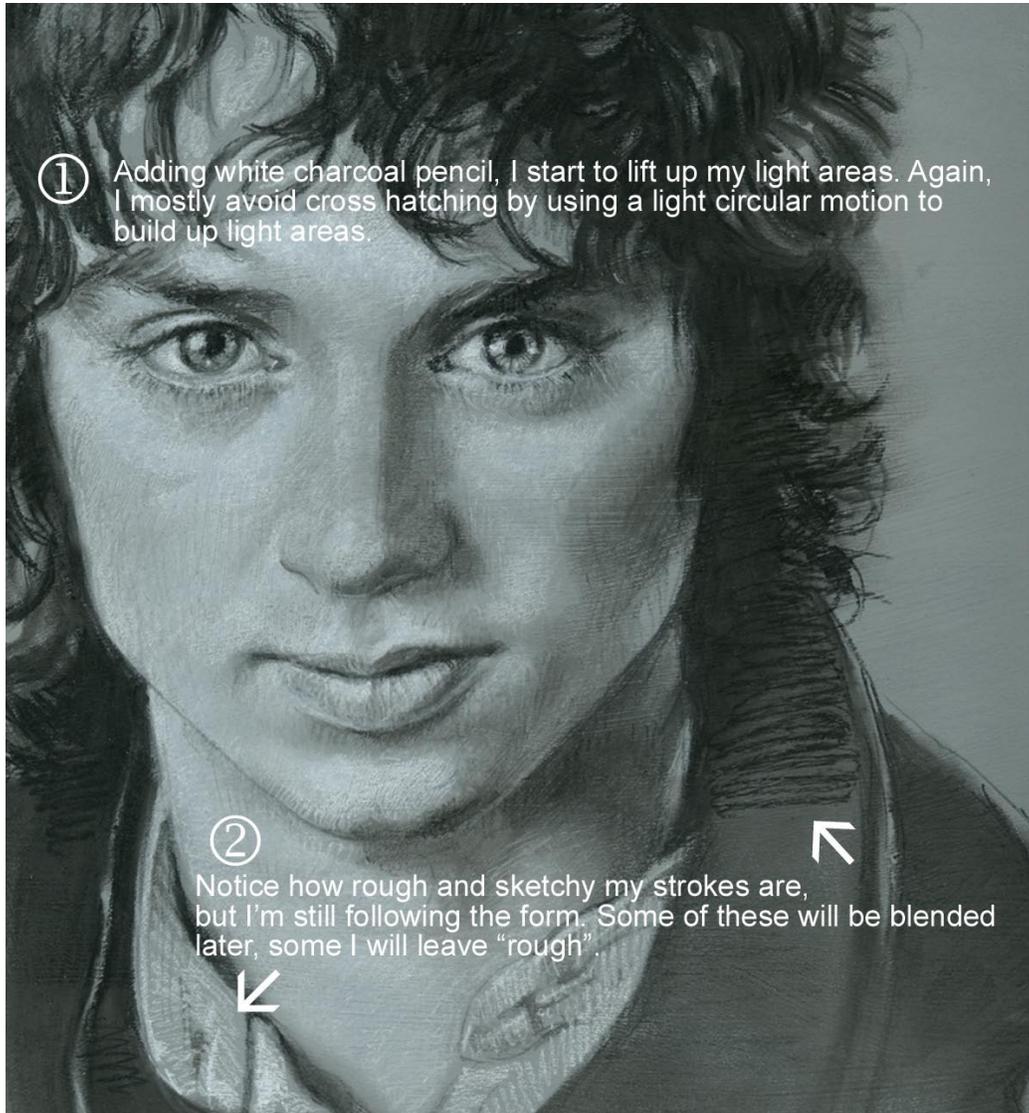
I do use the kneaded eraser a lot- it is are great for "lifting" charcoal from tight spots, as you can form the eraser into any shape you want.

Note: Being right-handed, I generally work left to right, trying not to lay my hand on the drawing. Charcoal smudges more easily than pencil, which is both a pro and a con! If you must lay your hand on the drawing as you work to steady it, a piece of wax paper or glassine (used in pastel work) under your wrist may help. You can also use a mahl



stick, which you tilt across your drawing and rest your hand on that, so your hand is not touching the drawing. I don't use a stick, I've just gotten used to not dragging my hand across a drawing as I work.

Step 2 : Adding white values



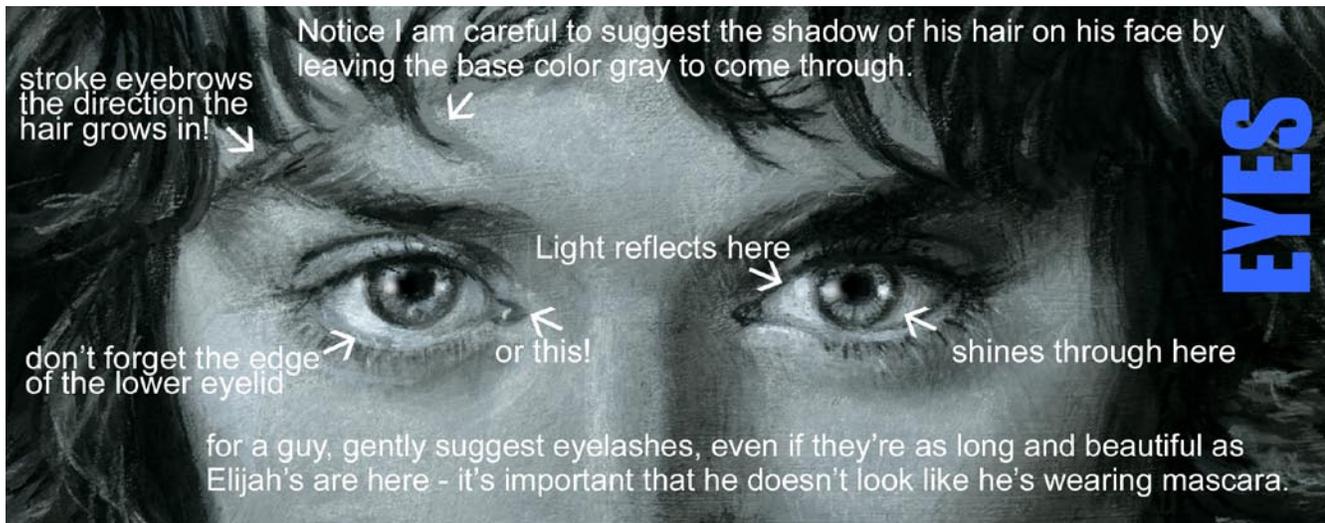
I add white lightly at first, applied in light circular motion, building it up slowly. Using my Derwent light charcoal pencil, I am also adding more gray values, observing very carefully the relationship between the two.

A note about edges: there are usually very few sharp edges in a portrait, as shadows follow the shape of the form. One problem I usually encounter is making too much contrast between values. If you keep the transitions soft, it will look more natural.

If you think the eyebrows are not so important, think again! Make your strokes follow the way the hair grows! Same goes for hair. Hair, even curly hair, follows the shape of the head. In this image we have light coming from 2 different directions, one main light (from his right side), one secondary (less bright) source of light from behind. So the curls catch

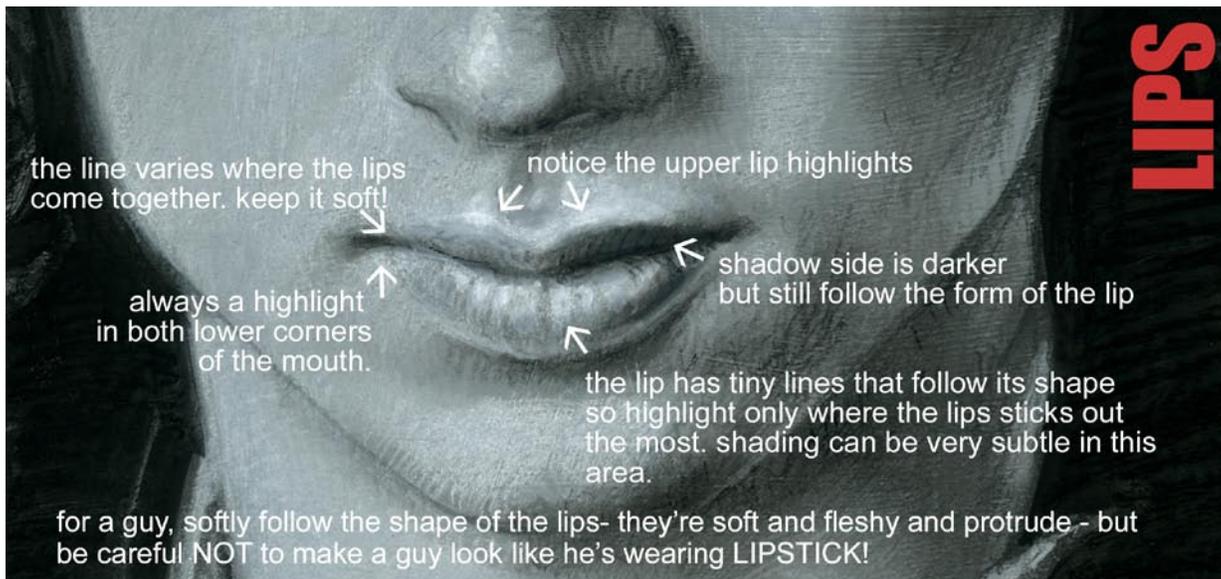
the light and also follow and define to shape of his head! Observe your photo carefully, draw what you see, not what you *think* you should see.

Step 3: Close-up on eyes!

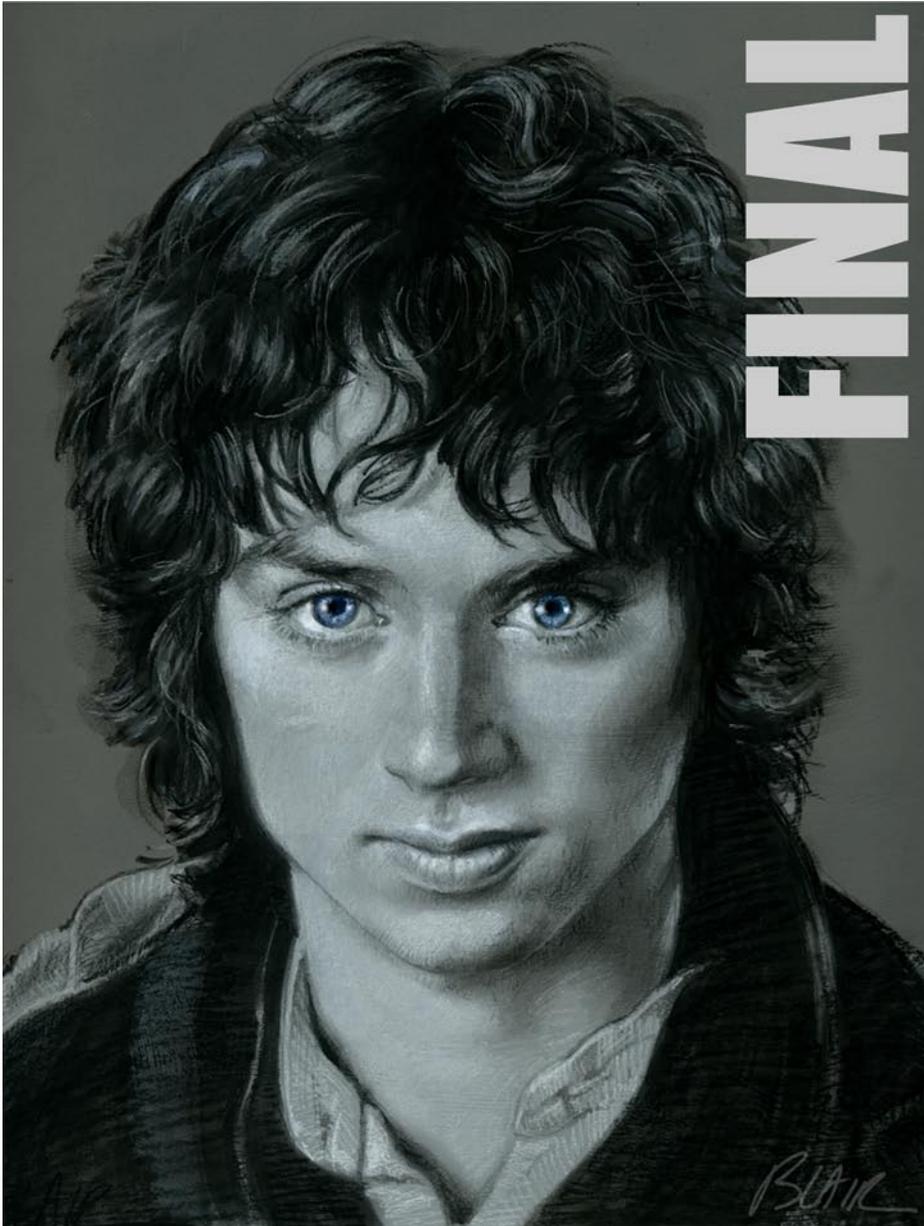


When drawing the eyes, follow the tips in the image! Frodo has gorgeous, expressive eyes, but he's a hobbit, NOT a drag queen, so don't go overboard with eyelashes. Follow your reference photo. *Suggest* the eyelashes only, especially the lower lashes. If he was wearing guyliner, it would be fine to add that, of course.

Close-up on guy lips!



Same goes for his lips. Guys don't wear lipstick! In this photo his lips are probably more suggestive because of the shadowing, but be careful to follow the form of the lips, keep the line variable and soft where the upper and lower lip come together .



Session 4: Correcting and refining

I've left his neck and its shadows nice and soft, still loosely defined, as it's not my focal point. Now it's time for finishing touches and final adjustments and corrections. I turn the photo reference and the drawing (both) upside down and compare shapes and values. This helps you to see problem areas without getting hung up on looking at facial features, which often throws off your judgment. You can do this in a mirror, also. I'm just lazy and prefer the upside down trick.

At this point I'll add my lightest lights and darkest darks. I left some areas very loosely suggested, his clothes show the pencil strokes. And his hair is soft and smudgy around the edges, just the way I like it. I could further render these details – to but I chose not to. I don't want to end up with a copy of a photo!

Oh, about his blue eyes- I gave him "contacts" first in Photoshop, to see if I liked the effect enough to do it to the drawing. I do. Finally finished! (at least I think so, at this point.)