



Diane Davich-Craig

Using References to Paint the Details

Photographic references allow Diane Davich-Craig to hone in on the fine details of her paintings

After hearing several artists' stories of how they became artists, I realized that there are many roads leading to that career. At first, I thought most artists go to art school right out of high school, then after completing college they join a gallery—a validation that they are an artist. While this may be true for some, there are many other variations on this theme. I grew up loving to draw, and gravitated toward anything artistic. We had a set of encyclopedias, and I wore out the sections on art (and the section on dogs). Upon finding my report cards

a few years ago, I saw that my second grade teacher wrote, "Diane says she either wants to be a musician or an artist." So here is where the fork in the road was for me.

Once I was old enough to join the band, I fell in love with playing the flute. I majored in music in college and upon moving to Nashville, Tennessee, began my freelance career as a flutist. A number of years ago, upon learning of my father's terminal illness, I was more aware than ever of making time for things that "spark joy" in life. I saw an instructional

video of Jane Jones teaching oil painting and I thought, "I would love to do that." A group of friends started getting together to have "art days" where we painted, explored other art mediums and laughed a lot. We even stood on a high rock wall and threw paint at a canvas we twirled on a lazy Susan from the kitchen to try to replicate Damien Hirst's paintings. I started by taking private art lessons, but had to stop for a few years because of my music work. After a couple of years, I took an art class and got back into painting, however I was still working too many hours as a flutist to commit to any stable learning experience. Another couple of years go by and I take up painting again. At this point in my career, I was able to cut back on the musician lifestyle of working every minute of the day and was able to dedicate the time necessary to develop my skills and style. I painted many neon signs, and also enjoyed painting still life compositions with quirky humor.

This was my journey, and I am still stunned by all the opportunities



The 5 Carrot Misunderstanding,
oil on panel, 24 x 18" (61 x 46 cm)

Painting the peeling paint on the table was done keeping in mind the drop shadows. The Tiffany bag required four layers of paint to get the opacity I wanted and to blend the shadows. The stems of the carrots took a lot of patience making sure their form made sense.



The Art, oil on panel, 36 x 36" (91 x 91 cm)

When photographing this sign I cropped the image from a sign that said "The Mart." I used a thin tape to more accurately make all the straight lines. Shading was done keeping in mind the angle of the sun on the neon to add roundness.

that have fallen my way. I have been fortunate to have been placed in a few galleries, I have been invited to participate in local, national and international shows, and am honored to have been the recipient of various awards. In the last few years, I have done a few workshops that have led me

to a fascination with still life painting. It has shown me a completely different level of what is possible. Being able to learn from someone who paints in the style you want to achieve is a game changer. The added benefit of the workshops was meeting like-minded artists to share ideas with and

brainstorm possibilities.

Currently I am interested in the challenge of painting leather. Leather is a broad and challenging subject, ranging in many colors and more importantly many textures. I have painted leather that is smooth, tooled, bumpy and worn. Painting

Yippe-Ki-Yay, oil on panel, 40 x 30" (102 x 76 cm)
 Painting the blanket was in four layers. Layer one putting the base color. Layer two adding the threads. Layer three glazing. Layer four bringing out highlights and pushing back shadows. The leather tooling required me to paint the shapes with the correct values, then add highlight and shadow details.

these different textures has led me to experimenting with a variety of techniques and tools. Painting the gloves in *Knockout!* I used both a scribe and a folded piece of sandpaper to make the small dashes of the stitching. After scratching the paint off with these tools, I then painted over the dashes with the appropriate value and hue. The gloves have the thinnest leather that I have ever painted and contained gathers of the material that I had not encountered before. Keeping the angle of the sun always in my mind was crucial to making the gathers believable.

My palette changed a lot with this painting. I usually use a palette consisting of a warm and cool version of red, blue and yellow as well as white, black and five earth colors. With this painting, I incorporated several of the Mars colors. I discovered the use of Mars paints when I was in a hurry to make a deadline, as they are more opaque and required fewer layers to achieve a consistent surface. I like this characteristic of the Mars paints but I also like the hues of the paints. I used four grays that are premixed to use with the intention for mixing to bring down chroma as they are all neutral grays. In this case I used them to mix values for the bricks, which are quite challenging for me. Even though there is a lot of repetition you can never let up on your concentration due to the detail of the textures, and needing to be consistent with the shadows and highlights.


While painting, I work from a photograph alone, a live setup or a combination of a live setup and a reference photo. (The photo came in handy once when my live set up had



animal crackers in the composition. It seems my German Shepherd liked the animal crackers, as well as the kneaded eraser holding them in place, and ate that part of the composition.) I don't use any hard and fast compositional rules such as the golden ratio, using certain shaped canvases, symmetry or asymmetry. If it looks good to me, I am ready to go.

Before I started painting, I read some books on Chuck Close after seeing an exhibition of his work. He mentioned that he grew up loving magic and that painting gave him a feeling of performing a magic trick. That is the same feeling I get when I have been successful in making a flat surface look three-dimensional.

When I have completed a painting,

I usually scan it. The owner of one of the scanning companies commented that he felt I made quick progress in learning to paint. He thought it could be attributed to my training as a flutist. I had not thought about it until then, but I can say learning to play an instrument can translate too many life aspects. Besides the obvious discipline of a profession that requires a lot of solitary time developing technique, there are numerous other similarities such as repetition, breaking apart the subject into small details, experimentation, quantifying results and realizing that learning never exists in a straight line upward. These are just a few of the transferable skills I have been able to use to speed my progress in painting and to refine my skills. 

My Art in the Making **Knockout!**



STAGE 2 BEGINNING THE GLOVES

I usually choose to start with the background. This time I started with the subject. I taped a photo I printed with my computer next to the spot that I was painting to compare my progress. I also had a TV monitor attached to my computer to zoom in on any detail of the photo that I wanted to see. I put a ring of the background color next to the outline of the subject that I am painting. This allows me to make a blurred edge easier while the paint is wet on both colors. I feathered out the edges of the background color with a mop brush so the edge of where I stopped doesn't show. Also I erred on the side of being too light on the background color to avoid difficulty of a smooth transition.

STAGE 1 THE SKETCH

Finding boxing gloves and a leather jump rope on eBay and at an antique store was my first step. After reviewing over 100 photos I selected one that had all that I wanted. Many times I combine several photos in Adobe Photoshop. This time one photo was exactly what I wanted. I began with a graphite cartoon contour drawing. After I had completed the initial sketch, I knocked out the excess graphite by going over the entire surface with a kneaded eraser. I completely lost some of the marks but that's OK. I ended up making some things up as I went anyway.



WHAT THE ARTIST USED

Materials

- » Ampersand Museum Series Gessobord, 24-by-24-inch, 2-inch cradled panel
- » Saral transfer paper in graphite
- » Lead pencil No 2
- » Kneaded eraser
- » Blue painters tape

Tools

- » Palette knife
- » Winsor & Newton Series 7 brushes size 1 and 2

- » Sceptre Gold II Series 101 Sizes brushes in 000, 00 and 0
- » Blick Masterstroke Bristle Filbert 2
- » Lowe-Cornell ¼-inch Mini Mop
- » Lowe-Cornell ⅜-inch Detail Mop
- » Cotman 16mm mop brush
- » Pro Stroke Sable Filberts 6,8,12
- » Plaza 10/0 Liners
- » Princeton Select 10/0 Liners

Other Items

- » Royal Sovereign extra firm #2

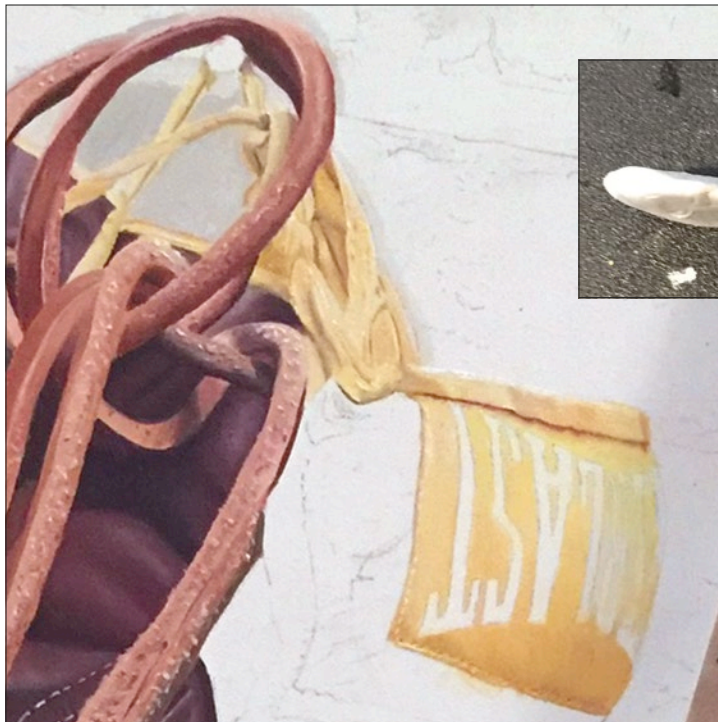
Clay Shaper Cup Round

- » Scribe
- » Paper Palette
- » Maroger Italian Medium
- » Sandpaper 600 grit
- » Protrack Maul Stick Old Masters Atelier

Oils

- » Burnt sienna
- » Burnt umber
- » Cadmium yellow light
- » Cadmium yellow medium

- » Lamp black
- » Mars orange
- » Mars red
- » Mars red light
- » Mars violet deep
- » Mars yellow
- » Naples yellow light
- » Neutral gray
- » Raw umber
- » Titanium white
- » Ultramarine blue
- » Yellow ochre



STAGE 3 THE TEXT

Doing text can always be a bit tricky. This is when my drawing really does matter. I go slowly and I accurately place the exact hue, value and chroma that I want on the text. On small text I don't count on being able to glaze over for shadows and reflections because it just rarely works as well. If I have to blend within that small area I use a small sable or a small eye shadow brush. If I get a smudge, I take it off with a kneaded eraser shaped up like a squished M&M. This removes paint accurately on tiny spots.

Heartbreak Hotel, oil on panel,
30 x 40" (76 x 102 cm)

Painting the shadows and neon required using very thin specialty tape to make the straight lines accurate. Shading the neon was done to make the neon have roundness. There are lots of hidden lettering on grommets and parts that is very small saying things like Graceland, Elvis, etc.





STAGE 4 STITCHING

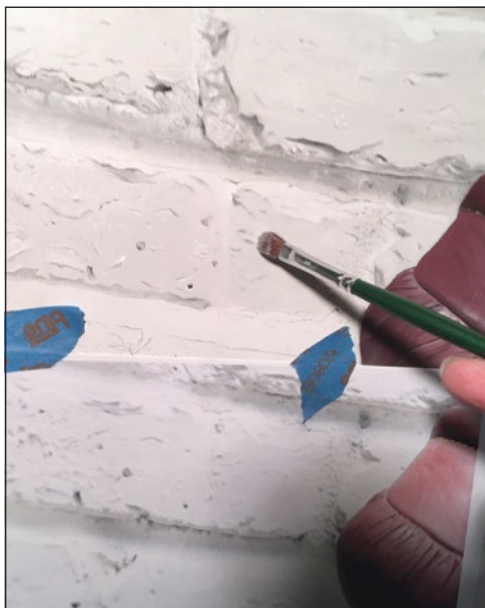
I used a scribe as well as a folded piece of sandpaper to pull out the stitching lines on the glove. I then painted each stitch with the appropriate hue, value and chroma after the surrounding paint was dry. When painting the jump rope I left some raised highlights on the leather portion and placed a shadow underneath. I usually have very little surface texture on my paintings but I liked it here so I left it. I added the background brick colors around this too while all the paint was wet so I could have the amount of edge blur that I wanted.



STAGE 5 THE BRICKS

I started painting the brick. With my cropped reference photo tapped close to my painting area, I painted basically left to right all the way down the panel one brick at a time while listening to Pink Floyd's *Just Another Brick In the Wall* (not really but I couldn't resist).

When painting the brick I had a system of putting in the basic values first then adding the dents, splats and cracks. I used a mop brush to even out the paint film. The photo only shows the first pass with a mop brush. I did this in other directions to smooth further. I notice that I need to do this more whenever I am painting with a color that has a high content of titanium white because of the viscosity. When I added this layer I lost most of the drawing below but could see some of the main marks. Next time I paint brick, I will not put forth as much effort to drawing in the details as they are more easily created in the painting process. (On this discovery, I wanted to hit my head against a brick wall.)



STAGE 6 MORE DETAILS

In doing the highlights and shadows I made it easier for myself to always be aware of the light angle from the sun on the gloves in the reference photo by adding an arrow to my easel. This is especially helpful as I started making things up.

On all of the texture marks, I blurred the edges and blended with a very small mop brush. Some bricks I glazed slightly to adjust the value. When I did this I went back over the highlights and shadows to enhance the contrast and blend again.

Ice, Ice Baby, oil on panel, 24 x 24" (61 x 61 cm)

The worn textures of the skates required scumbling with gray and scratching with a scribe. I also used a folded piece of sandpaper to pull off paint for the shoelaces. I also used a scribe to pull paint off for the stitching.





STAGE 7 FINISHED PAINTING
Knockout!, oil on panel, 24 x 24" (61 x 61 cm)


ABOUT THE ARTIST



Diane Davich-Craig is a longtime resident of Nashville, Tennessee. Coming to art as a career was preceded by a longtime career as a professional flutist. Davich-Craig's works cultivate and embrace timeworn character. She believes that a worn exterior displays a vulnerability found in us all. It also gives a testament to the importance of weathering of the storm. Many times worn or threadbare objects are that way because of the long loved life that they have shared with us personally and with our society. Davich-Craig has won awards from

International Artist magazine, Women Painters of the Southeast and the Portrait Society of America. She has participated in group shows at galleries around the United States. She studied in workshops with Anthony Waichulis in Bear Creek, Pennsylvania, and considers him to be her mentor and primary inspiration.

Contact at
www.dianedavichcraig.com

Find me on
 @davichcraig