



B&W drawing tutorial by Cynthia Blair

I'm using this photo of David Schmitt from Breathe Carolina for this tutorial. His tattoos are just amazing and a real challenge that grabs me. So the photo (at left) is the initial photo reference.

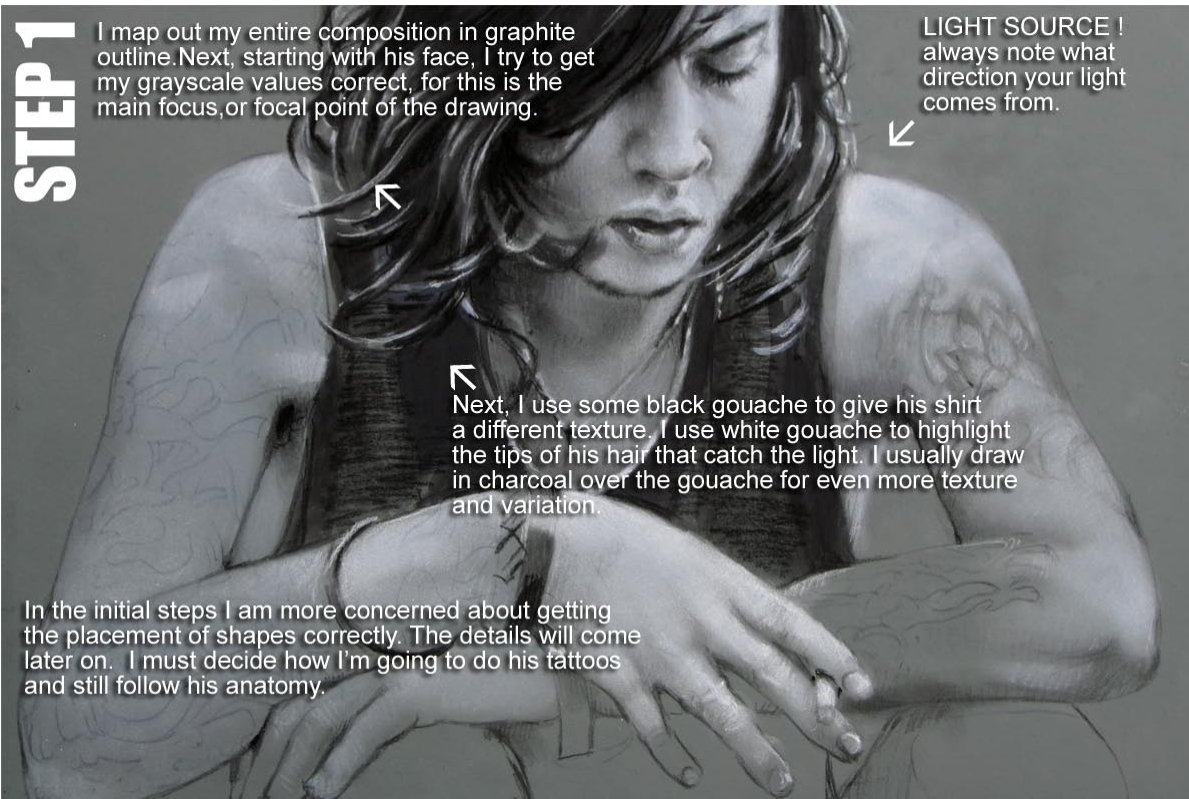
Materials I used:

10" x 15" Strathmore 500 illustration board, coated evenly with medium gray acrylic charcoal pencils, ranging from hard to extra soft, and General's white charcoal pencil
white nu-pastel stick
black and white gouache (opaque watercolor)
spray fixative, brand: Lascaux

Session 1: Getting the Basics

My personal preference is to start on a neutral gray background, adding both black and white. I like the way it makes the whites really pop. But if you're using white paper here, you'll only be working with black or the dark values. Your highlights will come from the paper itself. You can use graphite instead of charcoal, or combine them.

After selecting my reference photo (above), I do a quick line sketch in pencil to map out my shapes. I am very careful to place everything correctly, especially the outline of his tattoos. I get the basics roughed in, the darks and lights.



STEP 1

I map out my entire composition in graphite outline. Next, starting with his face, I try to get my grayscale values correct, for this is the main focus, or focal point of the drawing.

LIGHT SOURCE !
always note what direction your light comes from.

Next, I use some black gouache to give his shirt a different texture. I use white gouache to highlight the tips of his hair that catch the light. I usually draw in charcoal over the gouache for even more texture and variation.

In the initial steps I am more concerned about getting the placement of shapes correctly. The details will come later on. I must decide how I'm going to do his tattoos and still follow his anatomy.

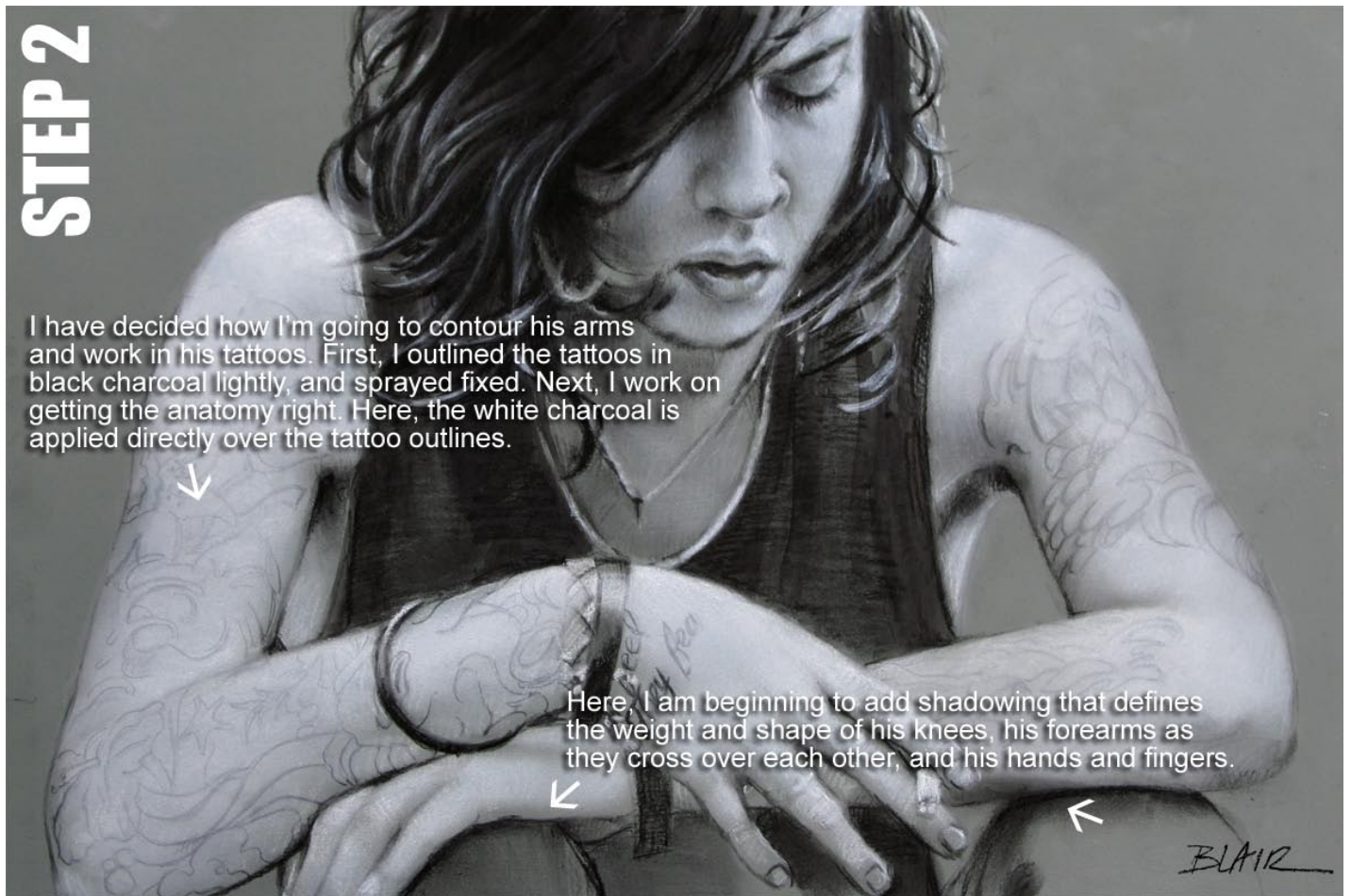
I first work some detail in his hair and face, to get a feel for the values. I will leave all the final detailing for last, when I work the whole drawing, with all the corrections.

After working on his arms and starting the tattoos, I decide that another approach is needed.

Session 2: Layering white values

Since I want the anatomy of his arms to be correct, I spray fix step #1, and continue to add white charcoal (in this case, white nupastel, because it spreads more smoothly). This will define his arms, and I will be able to “wrap” the tattoos more easily around them. Where the light falls on his body will be critical to making this drawing work. The white doesn’t completely cover up the tattoo lines, and spray fix makes the white a bit transparent, so several layers of white are needed here.

At this point I decide not to add the white details of his jersey, because it distracts rather than adds to the finished art. I’m only going to include a rough idea of the texture of his shirt. That’s what’s great: artists get to edit! What doesn’t ADD to an image DETRACTS from it. Another white pattern would only compete for your attention, and isn’t necessary.



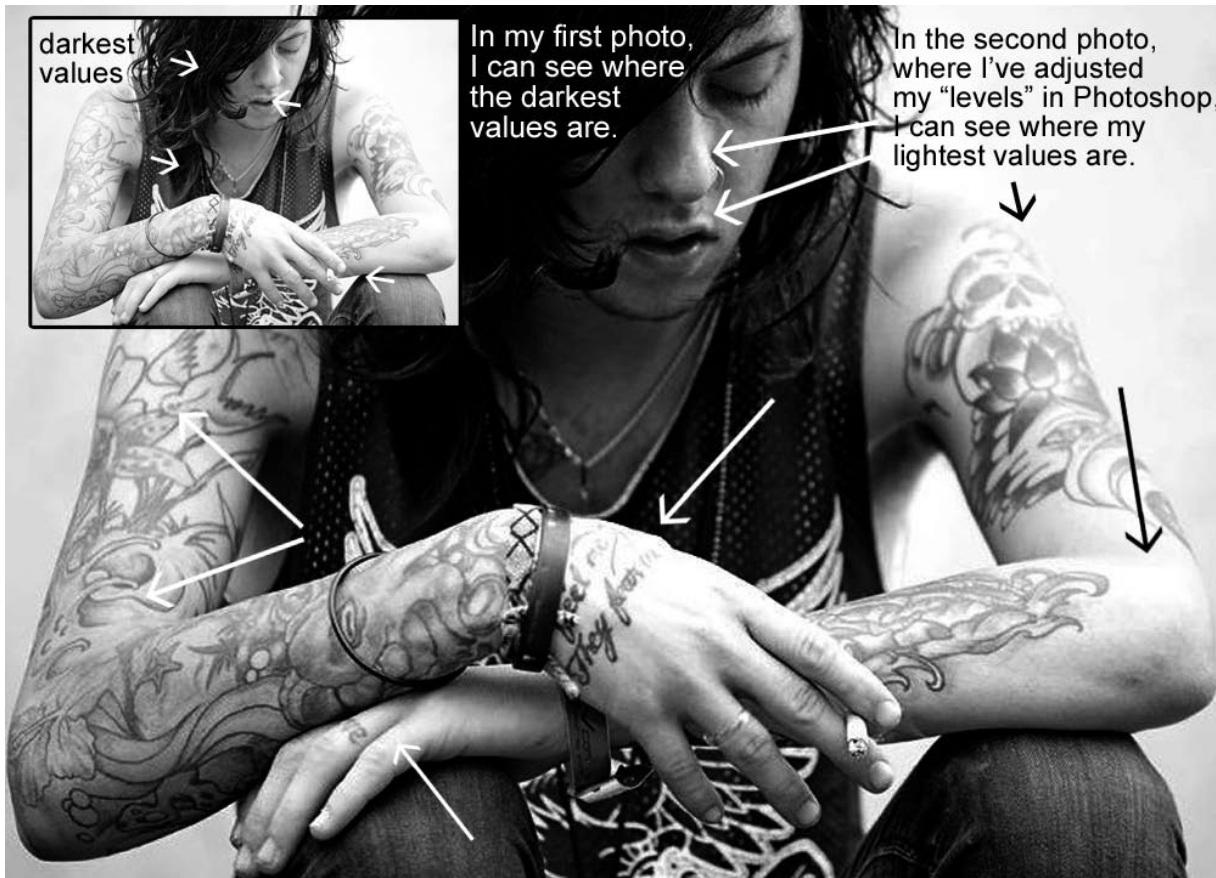
Session 3: Corrections using light and dark photo references

At this point I’m having trouble seeing where the lightest areas are. In the first ref photo, it looks almost uniformly light. When I have trouble interpreting the subtle areas of a photo, I do this: back in Photoshop, I darken the photo, using my levels adjustment, to where I can clearly see just the lightest areas standing out in contrast to subtle darker areas around them.

Now I can see detail I couldn’t before!

Using both the light and dark versions of the photo will help me to “see” the anatomy issues properly.

I use two references photos (like this) very often when I have a tricky subject. If I’m working in color, I will usually pull a B&W grayscale print, so I can see and keep the values in balance and relative to each other.



Tip: *It matters less whether your drawing is overall lighter or darker, what is important is that all the gray values are relative to EACH OTHER. They must always have a correct balance.*

So here are the main steps I take when correcting:

- I try viewing my drawing and my ref photo in a lower light like ambient room light, to study how close I've come to getting the overall correct values light to dark
- With my working light (bright), I turn the drawing and the ref photo upside down and compare them. This way I see shapes and values, not facial features. I sometimes draw and correct for an hour this way.

Session 4: Finishing touches

Now I do all the little details, and work the whole drawing together, not just sections of it. I adjust the contour and highlights of his hair...although his hair is mad stringy and goes in many directions, it still follows the shape of his head! Watch carefully where the light hits it. I work on his face and refine his lips (it's almost as if you can see an exhale of smoke, which I am tempted to emphasize, but I leave it for now. I can always do that later). Observe the tiny shadow from his hair on his neck. Notice light shading on his collarbones ...these must connect properly to his arms (pretend he has no clothes on, and you can visualize it better).

FINAL

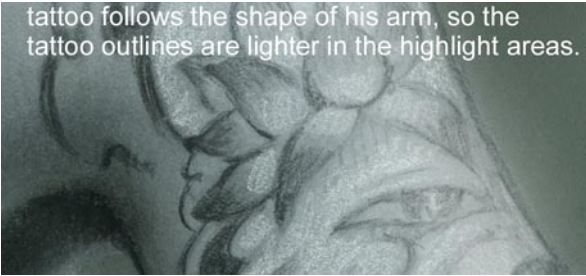
Details and corrections: soften his hair but keep it stringy, add shine to his lips, add the highlights and darken the darkest areas.

Once I feel I've gotten his arm anatomy corrected with my white, I work and shade his tattoos in black where needed, following my ref photo.

Create the blue jean texture by following the weave of the cloth in both dark and white charcoal pencil. Watch how it wraps around his leg.

BLAIR

tattoo follows the shape of his arm, so the tattoo outlines are lighter in the highlight areas.



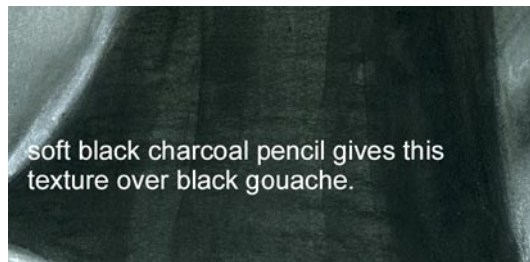
I've also shaded his tattoos carefully so they follow the anatomy of his arms. The same black line art in the shadow area of his arm may be very pale as it is seen in area where the light hits it, as you can see here. After putting in layers of white nupastel and fixing them down, I use just the black charcoal pencil for all the tattoo ink areas. I work some final white pencil over the highlight areas.

this is the hair texture, white charcoal pencil drawn over the black gouache.

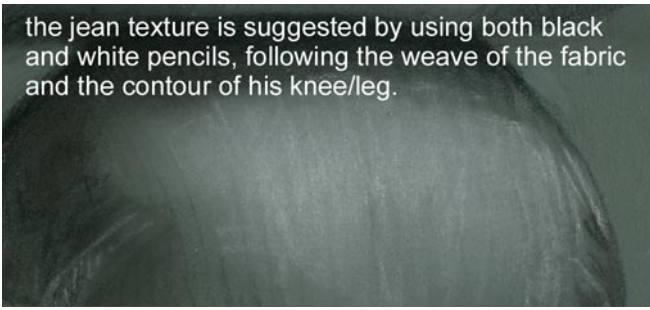


His hair and his jersey I touch up with black gouache to create a different texture, then draw over it again with extra soft black charcoal pencil. The result is a nice 'black on black' look.

soft black charcoal pencil gives this texture over black gouache.



the jean texture is suggested by using both black and white pencils, following the weave of the fabric and the contour of his knee/leg.



His knees are important, so I stroke them in the direction of the jean fabric, in both the black and white pencils, and smudge it a little until it looks right. It has to follow the shape of his leg, and the highlights are where his knee anatomy would show a bit, under his jeans.

Finally, observe how his arms, as they cross each other and rest on his knees, cast shadows. Mostly these edges are very soft. The harder/darker shadows happen where his arm and hand rest on his knees. The shape of his knee, as well as the shape of his arm or hand touching it, determine the shading of this shadow. It must look as though his arms have weight.

Finally finished! (at least I think so, at this point.) *Final photos are shot, outside in ambient bright light, using a tripod and a cable shutter release to avoid any camera "shake". I find that even outdoor lighting is best, on an overcast day (or at least out of any direct sunlight).*

This is the drawing, the way I will give it to David at the concert. Fearless Friends Tour, 10/17/10, Boston

But I decide to take it a step further once I photograph it and scan it into Photoshop:



I drop out the gray background behind him and add the Breathe Carolina logo from “Hello Fascination” on both sides (one is flipped, but I like the way it cascades from his head). It sets him off from the background.

Ok, still not quite done playing in Photoshop! I decide I’d like to try the color version of this, so I keep him in B&W and keep the logo in color. Here I’ve played with a number of Photoshop layer blends, and used the Flaming Pear “Glare” filter as well as a Polaroid transfer filter. Here’s the result, and I’m really really happy with it. It has just the ‘attitude’ I was going for.

I like the versatility of using a drawing as a “component” in an illustration, because it gives me options to play with ideas in Photoshop. I want to bring something more to the drawing, to reflect what I feel about Breathe Carolina and their music and lyrics. It melts and blends, textures morph, yet you can see the original strokes in the drawing itself, especially close-up. I feel like an alchemist.

I gave David prints of the final versions in Photoshop along with his original drawing.



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