



## The Creative Process for A Mixed Media painting : Snape's portrait 2011

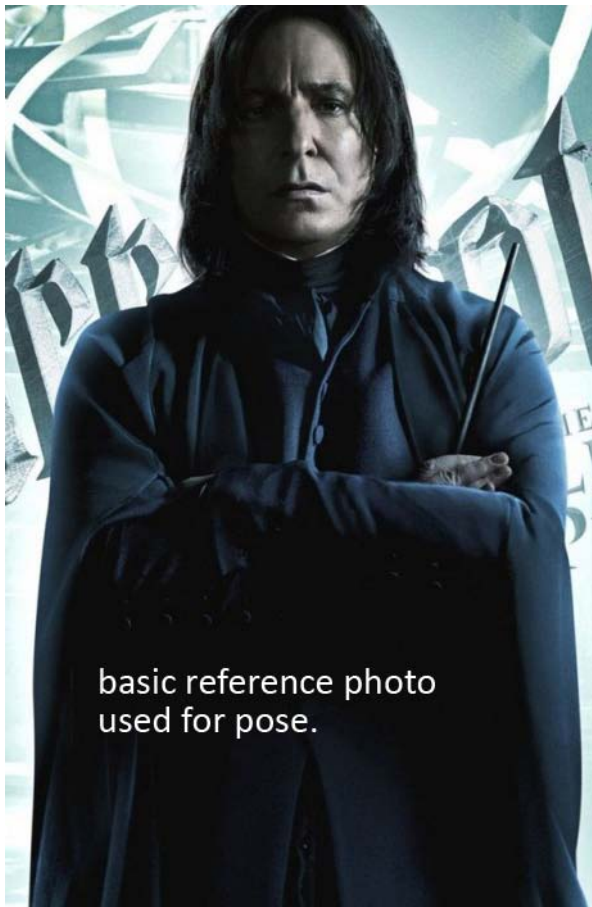
Lately, I have been using a mixed medium approach to get deeper into my portrait subjects, to create layers of meaning in an otherwise static image. This is mostly born out of the frustration that no one medium has all the qualities I am looking for...there are limitations to each. So here I find myself at the edge of experimentation, ready to cross the boundaries into unknown territory. This article is about the design process than a specific how-to about painting.

So, this is how my creative process works, from inspiration > conception > execution > finished artwork.

---

After deciding on my subject, I research quite a bit on the web and gather notes, symbols and images that I will possibly use. Conceptual development of the idea begins usually with a basic photo reference, which I "build" my design around. The figure is always the dominant force in the painting, so everything else that is added supports or connects to his/her persona.

The first and foremost decision is always how I feel about that person. In the case of Severus Snape, I could have portrayed him as villain, or victim, ugly or handsome, strong or weak. Throughout the books there is ample evidence of all those opinions. I am simply a witness to all, but it is in my nature to see both sides of any argument.



basic reference photo  
used for pose.

I think it is the duality – the light and shadow sides of his personality that I find fascinating. He's a very complex character.

**1. So here's the start:** I have a basic photo reference to work with, the one which has the spark of essence I am looking for:

This photo has been color graded to a cooler spectrum of blues, I will alter this as needed.

Although I usually have an end result in my mind's eye, it is intentional that I never work out every detail. I change my mind, add things in, take others out. It is not unusual for me to paint the figure before I make any final decision on the background. I prefer to allow my intuitive and spontaneous mind to take over, making connections on multiple levels.

**2. My Notes on Snape's character look like this:**

*Severus Snape 1/9/1960 Capricorn  
Duality light/shadow*

*An outcast, unloved by his parents, shunned and teased at school for being different. Defensive, trusting no one, very much a loner. Hides his true nature : Will sacrifice anything for the person he loves, in life and death. Great strength of will and personal control : Occlumens (can guard against intrusions into his own mind)and Legilimens (can read the thoughts of others). Powerful wizard, tempted by the unlimited power of dark magic.*

*(for those of you who haven't read the Harry Potter books): Snape has been blackmailed by Dumbledore to play a deadly game of counterspy between the Death Eaters(forces of evil) and the Order of the Phoenix(forces of good)*

**So, possible imagery:**

*Wand= his concentrated power [ LIGHT]*

*Snake = dark mark tattoo, alignment with Lord Voldemort, shadow side, evil Death Hallows symbol = The Tale of the 3 Bros from Beetle the Bard. The Elder Wand (unlimited power), The Resurrection Stone (the power to bring the dead back to life, to defeat death) and the Cloak of Invisibility (protection from death by being unseen)*

*Snake bite in neck w/blood = fatal wound*

*Stuff to work out creatively as I go: Background needs sense of depth...mirrors? Silver leaf? Dark glazes/aging/arcane knowledge/dark arts  
Mirror pieces (?) to reinforce the dualistic nature, multi-faceted, hall of mirrors effect  
Layered Typographic elements?*

---

**3.** The mediums I use allow me great flexibility to layer, change, re-paint, add textural elements. Creative solutions are often needed to bring out the essence of the subject. There is a progressive refinement that works out a delicate balance and interplay of the imagery.

**Color palette:** Mostly cool blues. Since warm colors come forward and attract the eye( particularly yellow , orange and red) that which I want you to see first will be accented/influenced in warm tones.

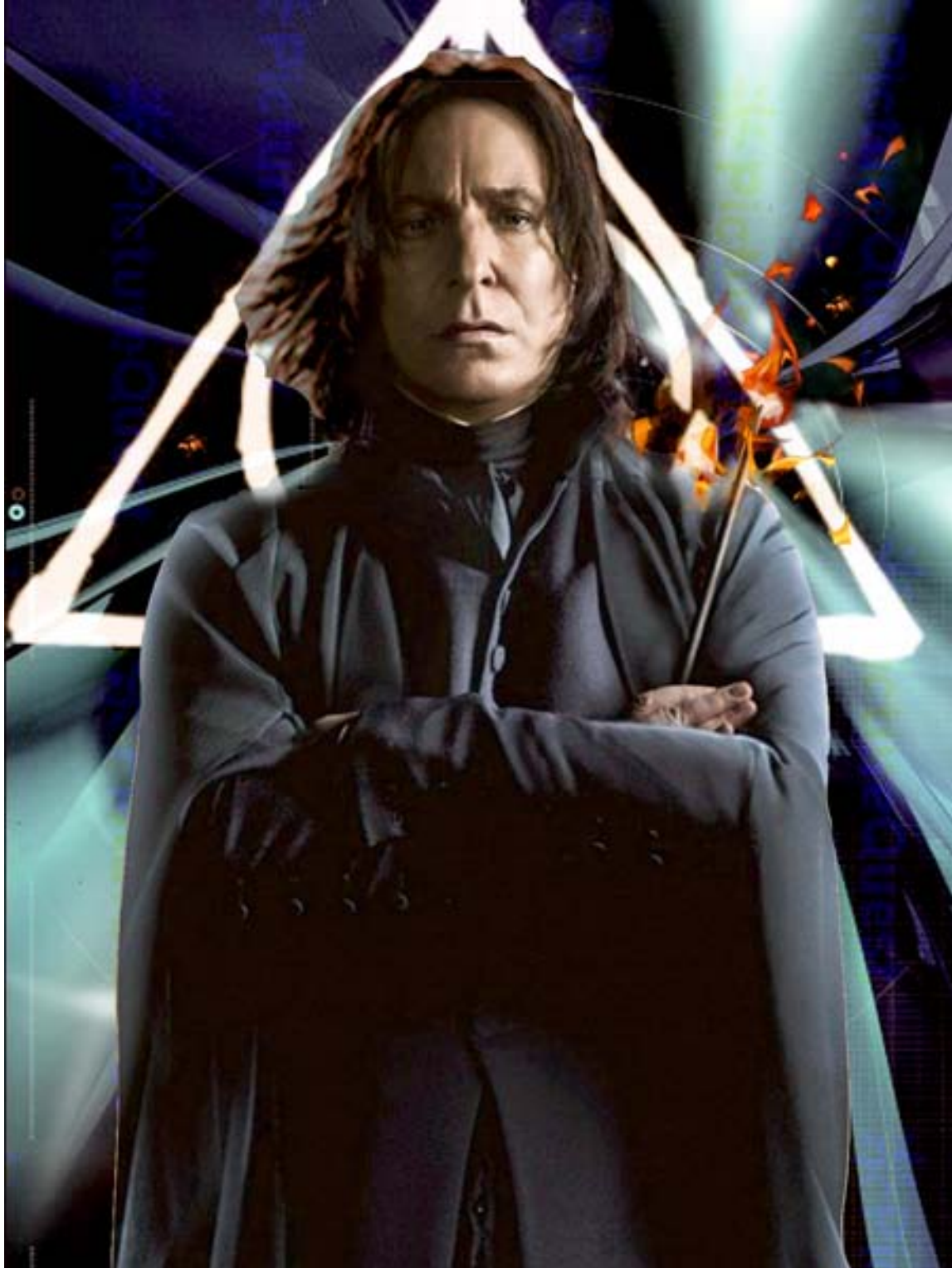
**Art board size:** Snape dominates the painting, he is in ¾ view, so I scale his head to be AT LEAST 5 or 6 inches from top to chin. This is EXTREMELY IMPORTANT if you want to see detail in his face! His expression and his stance carry the whole painting.

**Emotional Content** is what ultimately carries the artwork and how you, the viewer feel about it. I am not just throwing random elements together. I am telling a story, open to the viewer's interpretation, using composition, color, textures and shapes to set a mood .

**-It is quite obvious on viewing the end result that I like Severus Snape, that I believe he is more hero than villain! (cheers to Alan Rickman's portrayal of Snape in DH2, which inspired this piece!)**

**All these decisions I made BEFORE I put one brush stroke on the board.**

The placement of figure, symbols and background were worked out in Photoshop, and looked like this:



I don't bother to take the time to mask layers, clean up around hair, etc. This is the rough guide for painting only – not a finished product.

## Execution, taking the ideas to canvas

### Materials:

15x20 illustration board, Strathmore 500 series

1 coat liquid acrylic in warm tone, to seal the board surface and give some "tooth"

Acrylics

Oil Paints

Acrylic Soft Gel (gloss) used to glaze as well as an isolation coat to separate and seal layers.

Silver Leaf and bottle of sizing (special glue)

Pastel pencils: Carb Othello brand and Conte

Brsuhes: Robert Simmons white nylon flats, series 762B sizes 1 thru 10

### The Painting Process begins:

**First** layer down is the rough outline drawing of Snape.

**Second** layer is a full acrylic painting, first of Snape, as guided by the ref photo. I like this photo, as it shows him as a strong and powerful wizard, a man of great courage.

Next I need to add the snake to represent the evil influence of the dark mark/LV. First big snag! Must get creative solution! Since he has no bare skin, can't use it as a tattoo. Basilisk and Nagini, both are too big and will overpower him in stature. Final choice: Taking the snake from the dark mark, and coiling it around his neck like a slowly tightening noose. I drew this out on tracing paper in several different shapes before deciding which one I was going to add. I later left most of the lower half of the snake in shadow, so its head and neck would be more prominent.

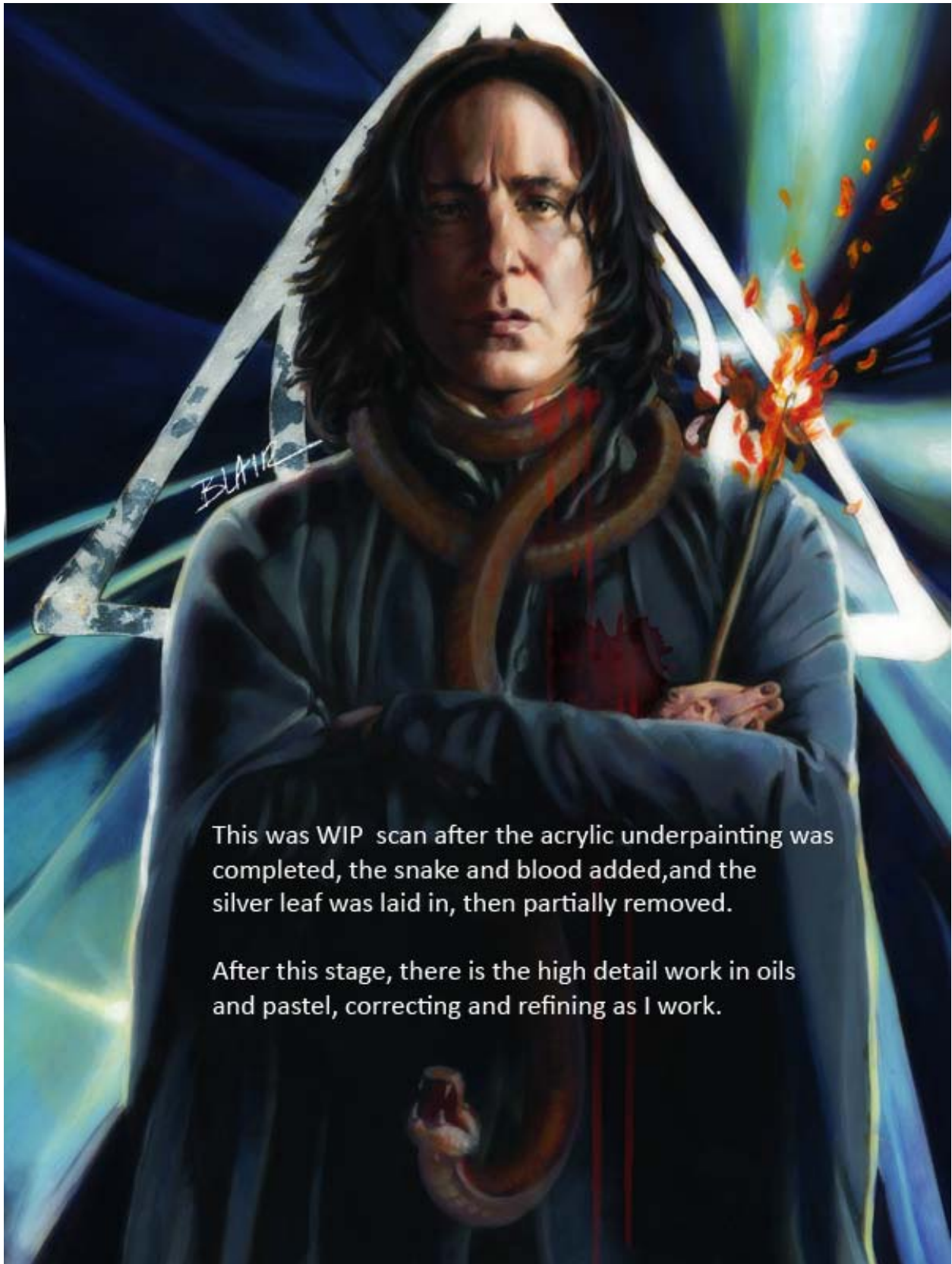
**The fatal wound** is a snake bite to his neck. So I allowed blood to start at the punctures and slowly leak down his body like a spreading stain, especially over his heart. This was achieved with thin washes of dark blood acrylic, so the faint color of his cloak would still be visible underneath. ***Goodness, I've killed off my hero, now it's time to add elements that give him spiritual power!***

**Third Layer**= The Deathly Hallows symbol, which is a large element, behind and backlighting his figure. The resurrection stone symbol serves as a broken halo behind his head...no accident...more like a martyr/redemption connection for his true spirit. The DH symbol is painted pure white, to which I added silver metal leaf, a tricky process. I wanted the silver leaf to add a textural element, also to remind one of Lovegood's silver DH necklace. The silver leaf was supposed to stick only to where I painted a special type glue called leaf sizing, but it rather stuck to the acrylic gel coat as well, so getting the sharp edge I was looking for was impossible! (oops!)

OK, I take masking tape and place it over the silver leaf, and rip it off the board randomly, so only broken sections remain. After this a thin coat of soft gel medium mixed with 50% water is added on top of the whole artwork, to lock down that silver leaf and act as an isolation coat.

**Background** of the blue abstract came from an old texture I had in my files, it suited well because the center of it emanated from his tip of his wand and flowed out from there.

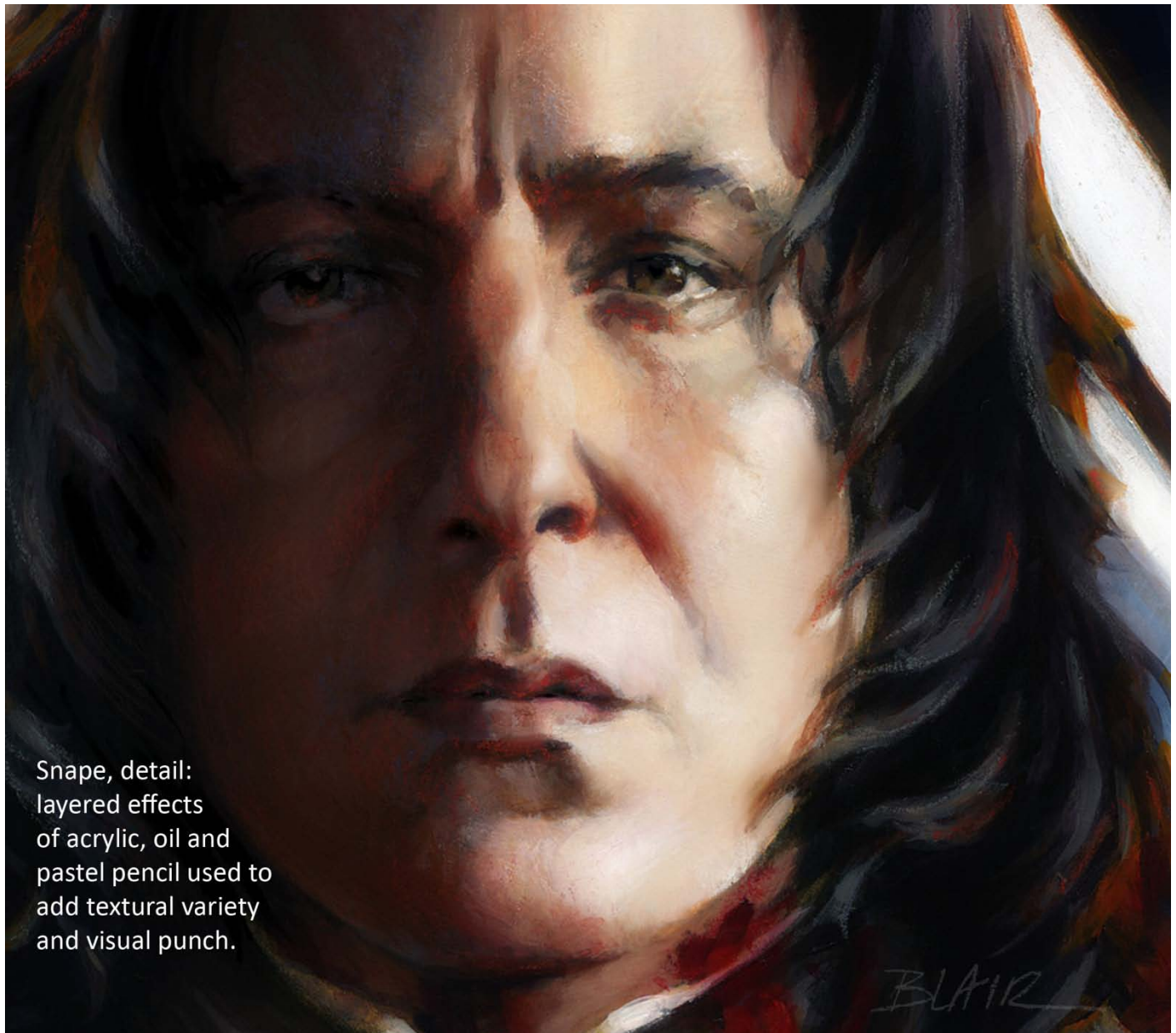
**His wand**, another symbol of his power: I paint sparks and fire, then backtrack a bit...I want it to have a more magical glow as well, so I add some white light. At the bottom left, I add another counterpoint light, almost hidden behind his cloak. Maybe this represents another force for good?



This was WIP scan after the acrylic underpainting was completed, the snake and blood added, and the silver leaf was laid in, then partially removed.

After this stage, there is the high detail work in oils and pastel, correcting and refining as I work.

*OK HP fans, I bypassed the whole doe patronus thing, it just didn't work with the design. We all know he sacrificed his life for love. You can see it clearly in his face – two contrasting strong emotions – on the light side, there is a great angst and pain. On the shadowed side, controlled rage.*



Snape, detail:  
layered effects  
of acrylic, oil and  
pastel pencil used to  
add textural variety  
and visual punch.

**Fourth layer:** Not satisfied with my acrylic blends, using the same color palette in oil paints, I re-paint his face in thin layers, because the likeness needs to be perfect.

Pastel pencil, added in strategic areas of his face and also to add texture on his cloak. I use a bright red to pop certain areas with a punch of exaggerated color: lips, chin, arch of eyebrows, under his nose, etc. I like the textural qualities, the way brush strokes and pencil strokes play off each other. It helps enhance the drama.

**And final tweak?** After scanning the art on my flatbed scanner, I stitch the 4 sections together in Photoshop and add an additional soft glow to the wand light and the DH symbol. Some things are just easier done digitally! Glow is one of those.



Final Scan of Snape painting, 15x20, mixed media on board (above)

**\*Many of my original notes were never incorporated into the final artwork. I may re-think and add some at a later date. For now I will let it stay as is...**

**Done, I think! (but you never know...)**

**In closing ~ Just about anything can be used in mixed media: found objects , collage, prints, embossing powders, typographic elements, polymer clay, etc. I've only used a few traditional mediums in this one, my intention was to use whatever I thought was needed to enhance this particular piece. Keep in mind, that whatever doesn't add to a piece, takes away from it. Sometimes less is more.**

**Two great resources for experimenting with mixed media are:  
"Art Revolution" and "Experimental Painting" books by Lisa Cyr**

Since I am primarily a portrait artist, I tend to use these techniques to enhance a painted portrait. For those of you who are not comfortable with painting, you could easily use a photo collage to build around. There are many artists out there doing incredible work in this area, and I've only begun to play around with it...what you can do is limited only by your mind, so if this looks like fun, I hope this helps you get started.

**Experiment, have fun, and don't be afraid to take risks.  
Feel free to ask me questions or comment at: [cblair7@gmail.com](mailto:cblair7@gmail.com)**