

# KATIE MILLER

## Painting Process - Enduring - 2014

### 1. Collecting images and ideas

My imagery is influenced by art history, contemporary advertising and other found photographs, personal observation, and interacting with the models. Some paintings stay in this stage for years, and others develop almost immediately.

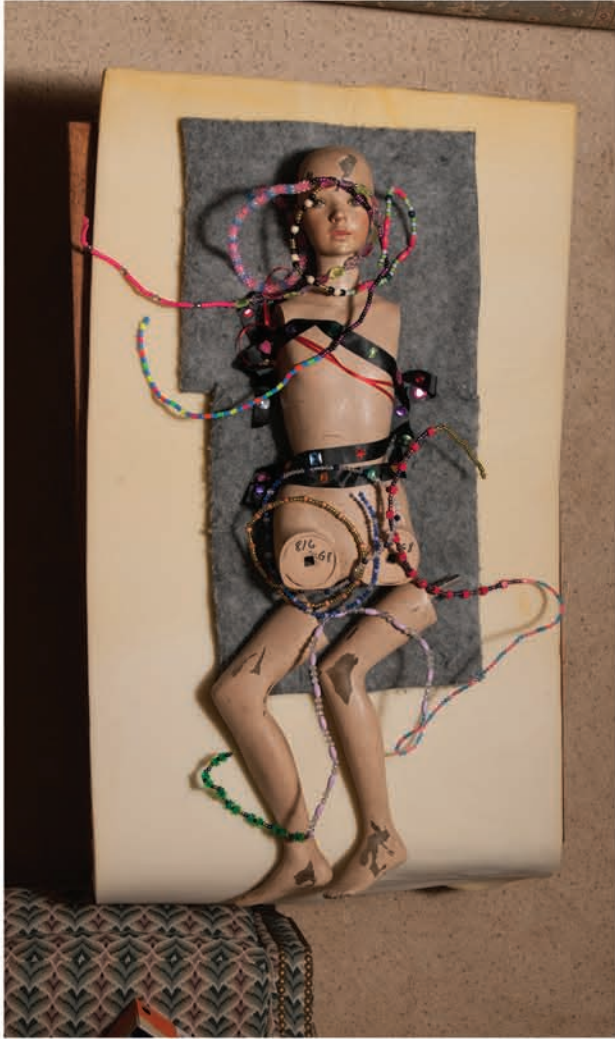


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\* starred photos only (c) Katie Miller

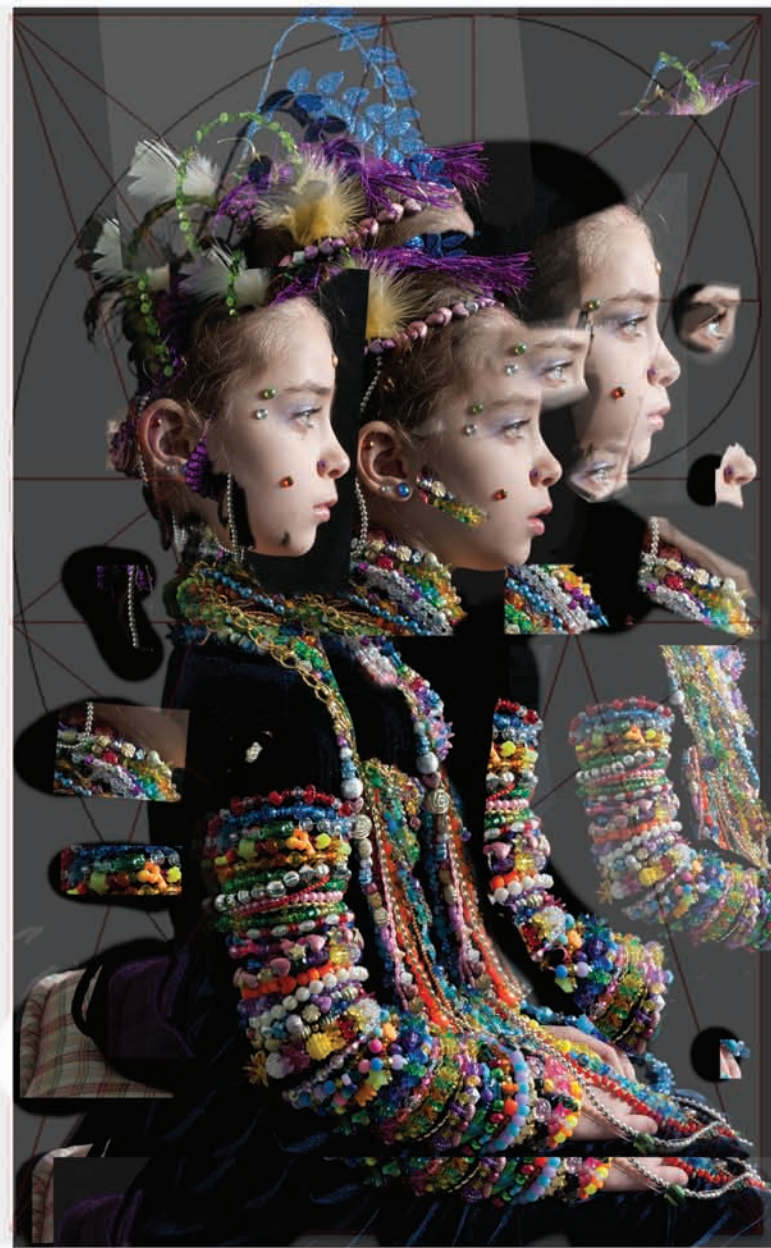
## 2. Photo Session

Photo Sessions start with my mannequin, and sometimes myself or others, to experiment with lighting days before the real shoot. Sessions with the model last anywhere from 15 min - 2 hours. We experiment with a variety of poses. I've developed strategies to elicit the expressions I want, even in very young children. For more complicated shoots, I try to have someone act as a photographer's assistant or child wrangler. Photo sessions take place in my studio, my home, or the model's home. My models are the children of friends and acquaintances. I always have a model release form signed by the child's parent, and, if old enough, the verbal consent of the child. The child's identity is not important to the content of the work - the job is like that of an actor - with some children more natural than others. Temperament and interest in the project are more important than their looks. Sometimes new ideas emerge from the shoot, and usually we have fun.



### 3. Constructing the Composition

I play with dozens of photos to create the composition that I will base the painting on. I choose body parts, facial features, and other small bits, mixing and matching them until the image feels just right. Photoshop allows me to play with many variations of the same picture so that I can experiment widely in a smaller amount of time than with traditional sketching. Even so, making the composition takes weeks. The images below illustrate the process by showing many of the layers at once. Some of what is shown ended up in the final compositions and some did not. Still unseen are the many combinations that came before these final stages.



#### 4. Preparing the panel

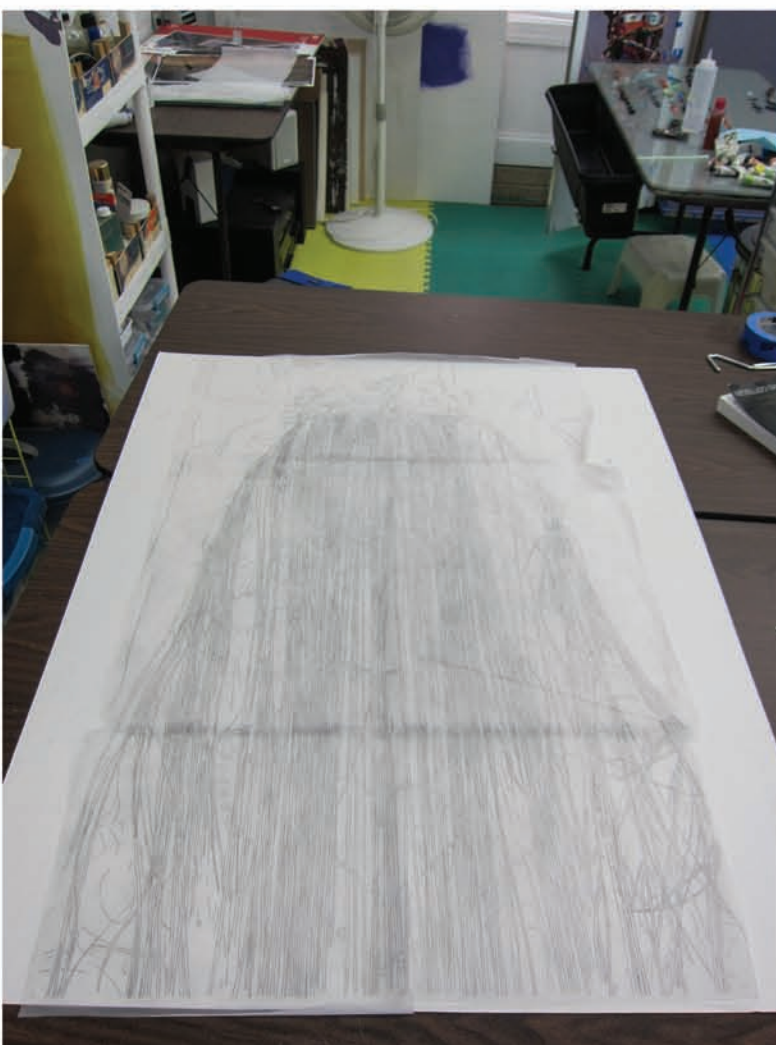
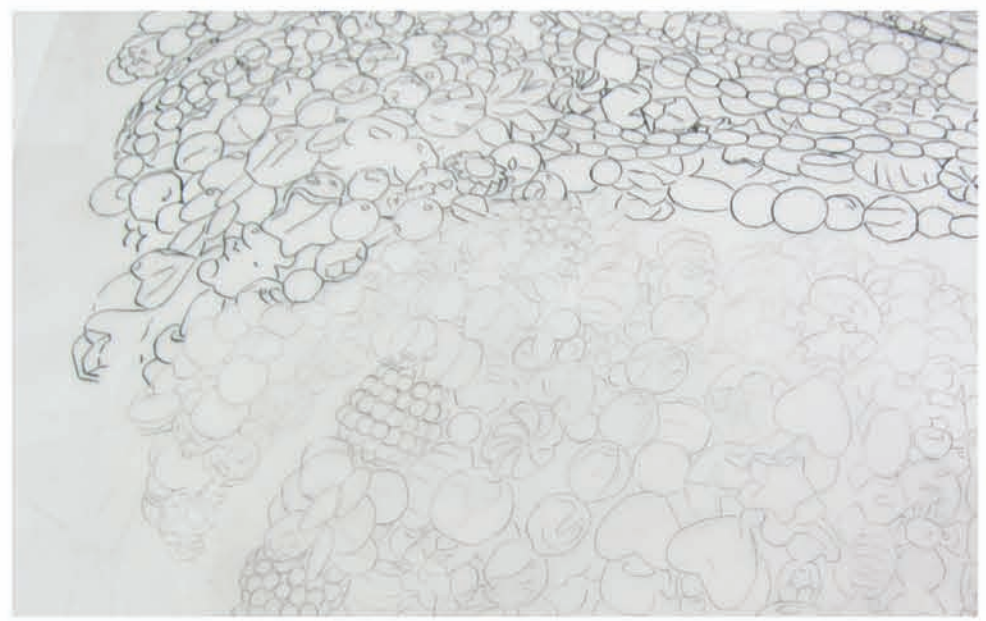
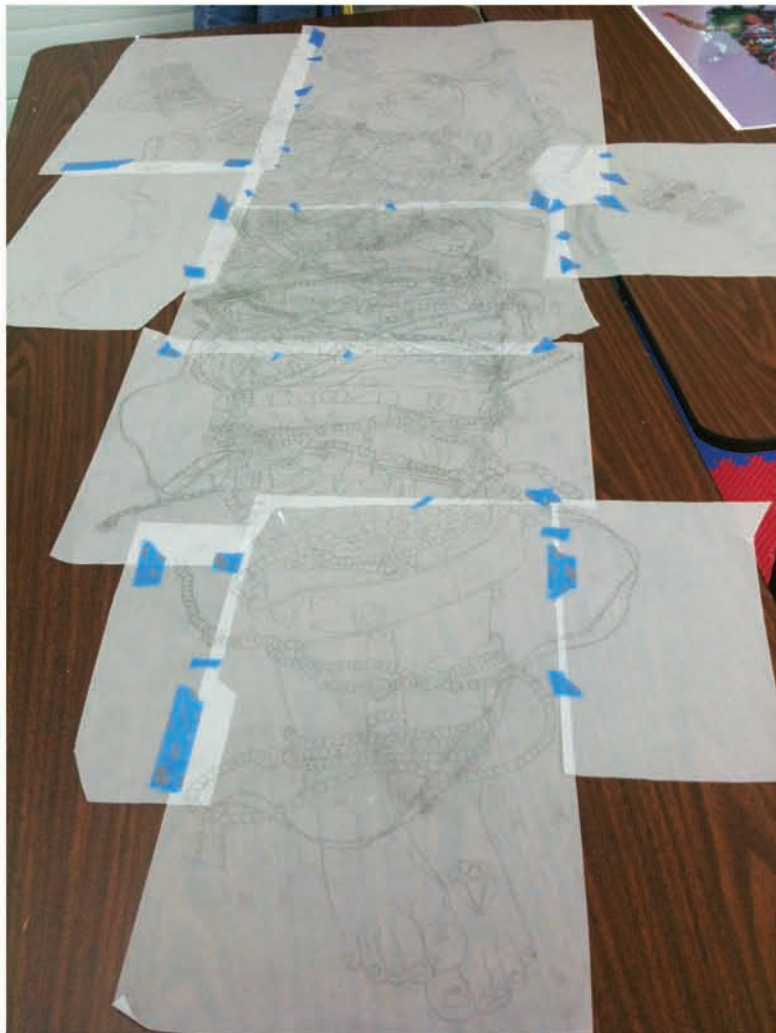
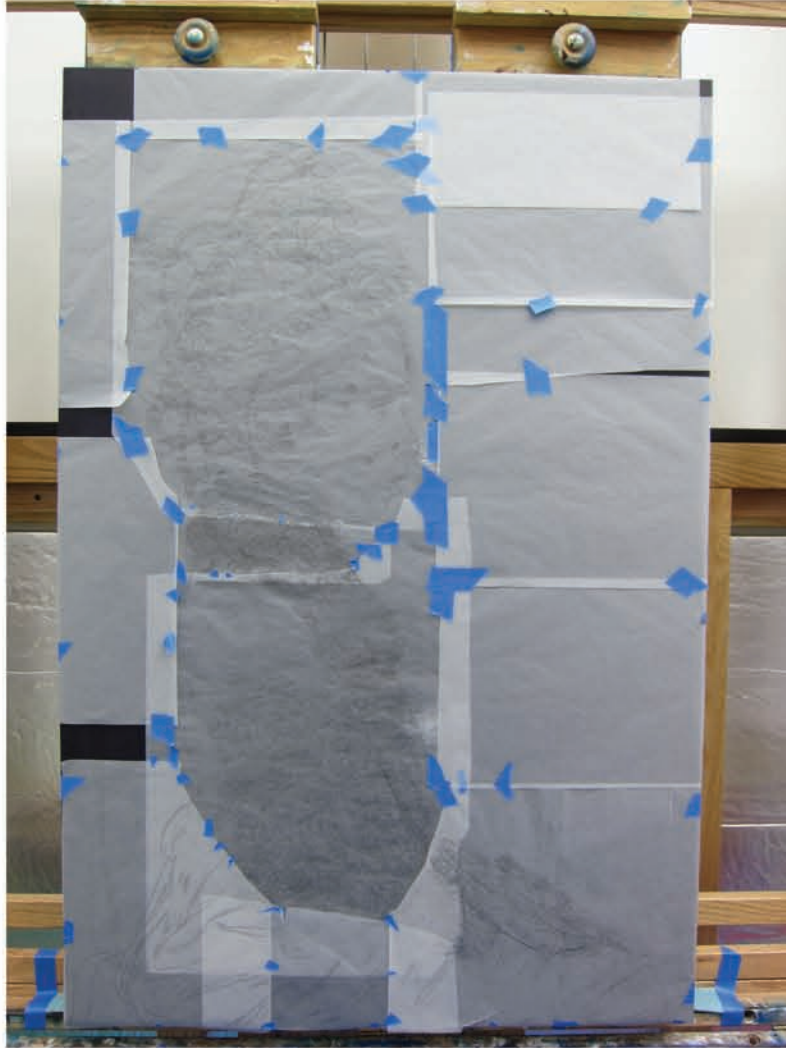
My panels are custom-made to my specifications. The surface is furniture-grade A1 1/4" birch plywood and the cradle is made of poplar. I coat all surfaces of the panel with Golden's GAC 100, an acrylic product designed to prevent support-induced discoloration. I then brush acrylic gesso to the back, which provides a white surface for my signature and further protects the wood. Next I apply 10 or more thin coats of acrylic gesso on the front, sanding between each layer. When finished, the surface is similar to an eggshell.

For paintings with a solid color background, I mix a large amount of liquid matte acrylic paint. I have successfully applied the solid color with brush and roller, but high-volume low-pressure sprayer provides the most dependable results. I look forward to applying my gesso this way in the future to cut down on prep-time. From construction to the final sand, preparing the panel takes about two weeks. Typically, I have multiple paintings in various stages going at the same time. I am fortunate to have a separate studio for panel preparation so that dust and spray do not contaminate my other paintings.



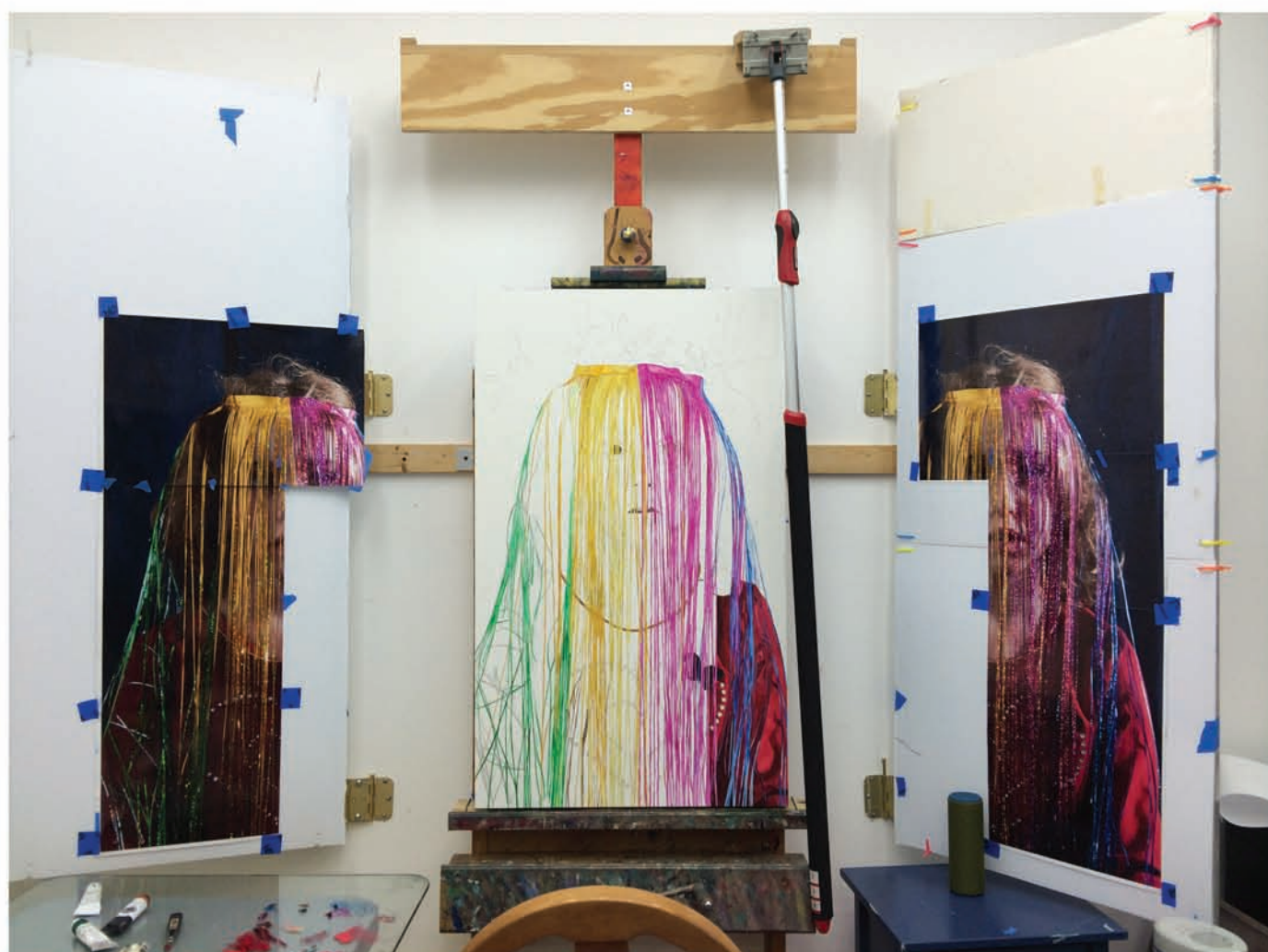
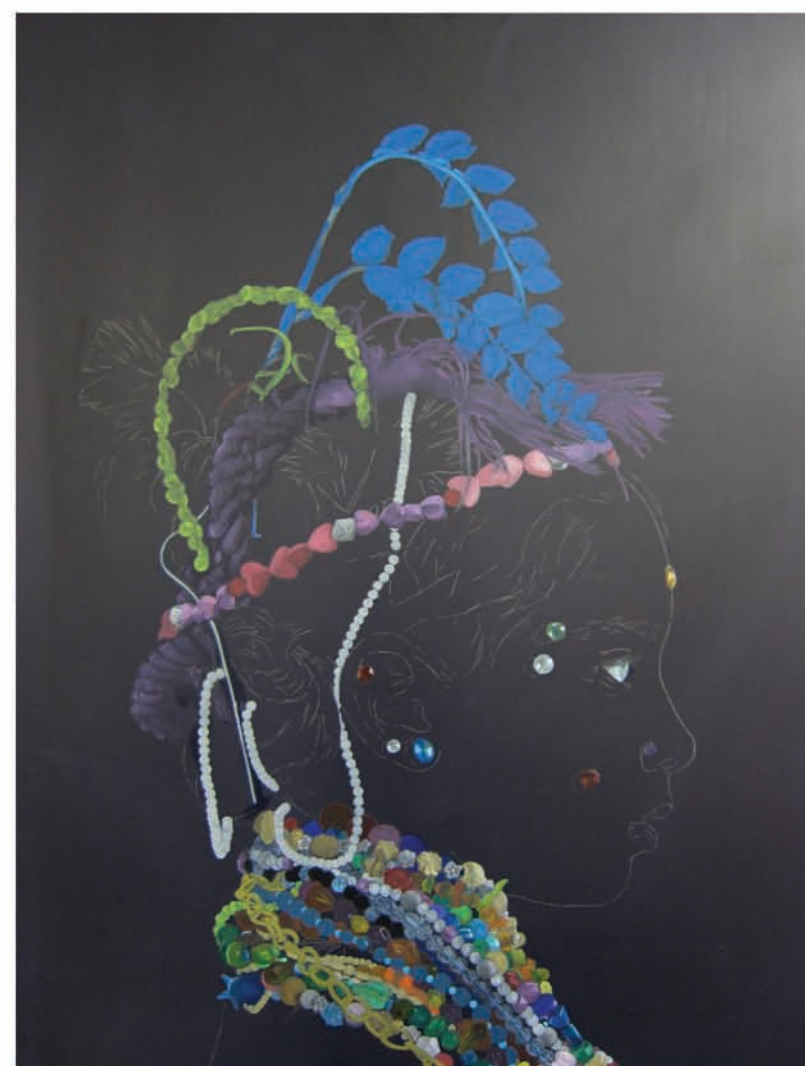
## 5. Transferring image to panel

I print the completed photo composition the same size as the painting. With a mechanical pencil, I outline the details of the photo onto tracing paper, aided by a light pad underneath. When the entire photo is traced, I cut it up and tape the pieces onto the wings of my easel, along with other photos to reference while painting. Then, I flip the tracing paper over and trace the back of the tracing with a slightly softer pencil. When this is complete, I tape the tracing onto the panel and rub a tool along all the lines to transfer the graphite drawing onto the panel. Sometimes the drawing is transferred onto the white gesso and sometimes onto a simple or solid-color background I have already painted. Per painting, this stage takes 1-10 days of work depending on the size and level of detail.



## 6. First layer of paint

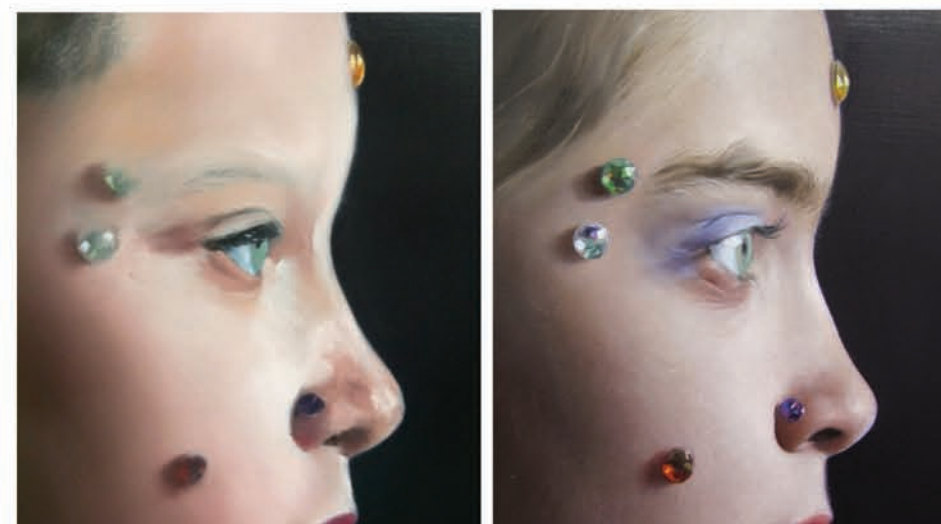
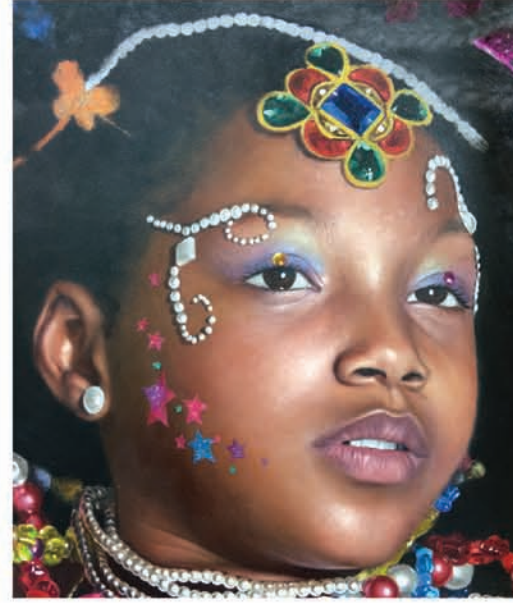
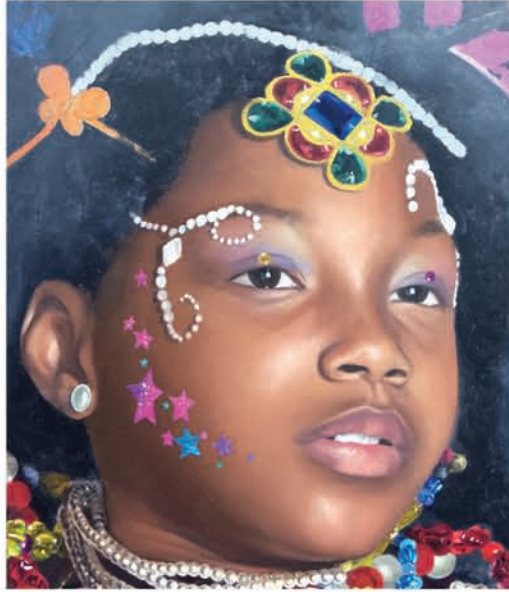
The first layer of paint is thin and semi-transparent. Typically the values (light and dark) are not yet accurate, and the paint doesn't blend or spread easily. The goal of the first layer is to establish approximate colors within the framework of the transferred drawing, and provide a base on which to build more opaque layers. The appearance of the first layer varies based on the presence or absence of a colored ground. The first layer takes anywhere from one day to several weeks depending on complexity and size.



## 7. More layers of paint

The second through fourth layers are thicker than the first. By the fourth layer, everything is opaque and smoothly blended. The skin is dull in color, light in value, cool in temperature, and far too smooth in texture, but this is an excellent base upon which to glaze. Glazing is a technique using thin, transparent paint so the layers below shine through like stained glass. In the glazing layers, darks get darker and lights get lighter, skin texture and details emerge, and the colors become luminous.

I've never counted my layers past the first few, but my guess is that some areas have upwards of 20 layers. From the second layer to the last, it takes between two weeks and six months. Each layer needs to dry for 1 - 10 days before it can be painted over. Because of drying time, it is crucial to work on many paintings at once. As you can see in the pictures, parts of the painting are in various stages of finish. Some areas get painted over, then brought back out again in another layer. Hair, eyelashes, and eyebrows are usually last. I use many types of brushes and support my wrist with a mahl stick. On an average day, I paint for about 10 hours.



## 8. Finishing Steps

I sign my name, date, and title the painting on the back. When the painting is completely dry, I varnish to unify the surface, saturate the colors, and protect the painting for future conservation. The varnish I like is glossy and reflective.

When the varnish is dry, I put the painting back on the easel to photograph it.

After proofing my photos, I take the protective blue tape off the sides of the panel, and paint the edges a neutral color in acrylic. The paintings with solid color fields have the color wrap around the edge. When everything is dry, the painting is wrapped in silicone release paper designed for this purpose, and delivered to the gallery.

From the beginning of an idea to final delivery, making a painting can take anywhere from a few weeks to several years, though most are completed in a matter of months.

