



AIRSICK LIGHTING EFFECTS

HOW TO RENDER SKULLS WITH DIFFERENT LIGHT SOURCES

BY SEAN CAHILL

PROJECT SUPPLIES

- Standard 18" x 24" aluminum Panel (Base Coated Black)
- Double Action Airbrush
- White/Black Airbrush Paint (Any Brand)
- AIRSICK "SKULL 25" STENCIL
- 1/2" Masking Tape
- Auto Mask



SKULL 25

Available at AIRSICKSTENCILS.COM



In this tutorial we will be focusing on lighting. Our main goal is to study the reference photo provided, and apply the lighting from the reference onto the panel. We will be using the Skull 25 stencil as a base for our design. This approach will allow us to focus all of our attention to the light source, and not worry about the proportions and layout of the skull. Although our reference skull does not match up to the stencil design exactly, we should still be able to render a believable light source by using appropriate landmarks such as the nose, eye sockets and teeth.

I start with a blank panel that has been segmented into thirds (STEP 1). I cover the two sides leaving the middle open for my first study (STEP 2). Always keep your reference close by as you paint. You will be working closely with it to make sure the lighting source stays as consistent to real life as possible.

STEP 1



STEP 2



STUDY #1 - LIGHTING FROM BELOW



STEP 3



Begin by placing your printed reference image close to your workspace. This close proximity will allow you to quickly glance between your painting and your reference.

STEP 5



STEP 4



After taping down and masking the Skull 25 stencil into place, I begin fogging in the brightest areas with white. Work slowly as you continue to build paint into layers while you constantly check your reference image.

As you can see by looking at the picture, the light is brightest or "Hottest" near the bottom of the skull. As you work your way up the lower jaw to the maxilla (upper jaw) past the nose and on to the eye sockets, you can see the light either reflecting or shadowing all areas of the face.

STEP 6



As light moves across, it hits the most protruding structures such as the frontal bone, zygomatic bone (cheek bone) and the mandible, turning them almost white. The light also makes sharp highlights on the nasal spine and temporal line. You will have to get in tight with your airbrush to get these clean lines.

STEP 7



I want this particular rendering to give off a stenciled look. I will be laying the stencil back down periodically and render it very close to the original form. Loading the brush with an over-reduced black I begin to build color in the darkest areas using my reference skull as a guide

Tip: When getting in close for sharp highlights, make sure you have the right paint viscosity, air-pressure, and that your needle is clean of any debris or tip dry. I like to paint at around 50psi. It may vary depending on what I'm doing, but for the most part I get away with 45-50psi. I also adjust my paint thickness accordingly. Stick to the manufacturers specs on this one. Paint mixing ratios may vary greatly depending on what "paint system" you're using and the climate you're using it in. When I'm looking for finer detail and a wider range of tone, I like to thin my paint a little more than lets say a 2:1 mix of 2 parts paint 1 part reducer. Thinning the paint will allow you to build translucent layers slowly giving you a very clean look, but It will also make the paint less stable at a higher pressure. When you're working up close you may get blow-outs or bursts of paint. So you will have to adjust accordingly by lowing the pressure. Think of it this way... Thicker paint requires a higher pressure and thinner paint requires a lower pressure. This will help you to adjust.

STEP 8



I want to match the dark and light spots of my reference as closely as I can. I do this by working slowly, using small amounts of paint at a time, and keeping the airbrush in control using both of my hands.

STEP 9



I noticed a dark area of the skull left behind by the stencil that I do not want in the final piece. I will remove it by slowly building it up to value with my white base coat, and then shading with my reduced black to match the surrounding areas.

I continue with black, always paying close attention to the areas of shadow in my reference (STEPS 10-12). Remember to work slowly and include the subtle bumps and ridges throughout the skull.

STEP 10



STEP 11



STEP 12



Here is another cover-up of the original stencil lines (STEPS 13,14). Although I choose to keep many of the reference points left by the stencil, I also make decisions throughout the painting regarding the stencil lines that I want to get rid of. Here I am removing a stencil line in the eye sockets.

STEP 13



STEP 14



STEP 15



Now that my shading is complete I change back to white base coat. I lay the stencil back over my work, tape it into place and begin to add reflective light and highlights to the painting. I work in small areas brightening up the parts of the skull where the light is hottest.

I see in the reference that the top of the skull doesn't fade all the way to black. It has some reflective light around the outer edge, I will be careful to retain this reflective light for the finished artwork.

STEP 16



Don't be afraid to get in tight for some of the smaller details. Small hard highlights like this really require getting up close and personal with the artwork.

STEP 17



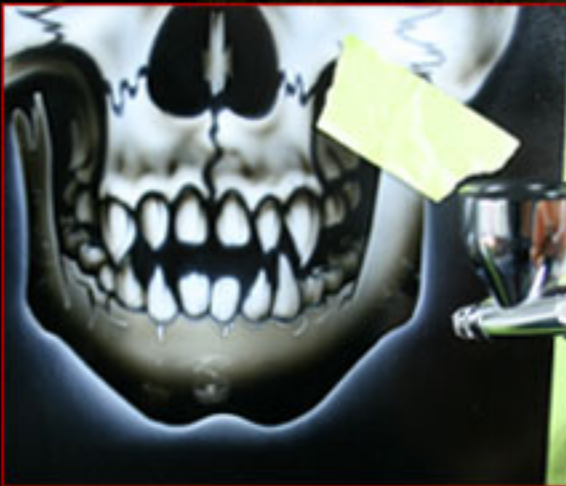
When I have the reflected light and highlights looking as close to the reference as possible, I am ready to move on to cleaning up some of my overspray left from the rendering process.

STEP 18



I remove the skull 25 stencil and use the secondary cut out frontal bone and jaw stencil included in the kit to clean up any overspray around the edges. I tape them in place, and hold them down while I spray black around the outside of the stencil.

STEP 19



STEP 20



STEP 21



I add a few finishing touches to the skull and compare it to my reference looking for consistency in light direction and tonal range. As I look at the final rendering, I can see that it's not a perfect copy of the original, which is okay. The whole purpose of this exercise is to study the light-source and the way light reacts to an objects surface. So don't be discouraged if your artwork isn't a spitting image of the photo. Just as long as you are convinced the light is coming from underneath.

STEP 22



STEP 23





In the next section we will be looking at rendering a skull with a top-down light source.

STUDY #2 - LIGHTING FROM THE TOP



STEP 1



After taping down my stencil, and studying the lighting reference photo, I begin to fog-in areas of the skull based on the light source in the photo. Because my light is coming from the top, most of the forehead gets fogged in.

STEP 3



STEP 2



The area above the nasal cavity is important with this type of a lighting scenario. Looking at the reference photo, you can see that one of the hottest spots is the area above the nose.

I am building up the white with multiple passes. Take your time during this preliminary stage of the rendering. By using multiple, thin layers, I am really able to build up the brightest areas of the image in a very convincing way.

STEP 4



STEP 5



Carefully look at the ways that the light falls over certain areas of the skull. In the reference (STEP 4), I can see the distinct shapes that the light is creating in the eye sockets and nasal bridge (notice the very distinct arc of light at the bottom of the eye socket). I am really trying to paint what I see, not what I think I see. Try to keep the subtle shifts between light and shadow, as well as the harder lines between the contrasting areas of light and dark.

STEP 6



I continue with black, working the shadows and darker areas of the skull. Just like working with my first white layer, I am building the darker areas slowly - this allows for a fuller range of tones throughout the painting.

STEP 7



Throughout the process I am losing the skull's "stenciled" look. By the end of this process, you won't be able to tell that a stencil was even used, and this particular skull will have a more organic feel than the bottom-lit skull.

STEP 8



Be sure to take a small break every so often. Take a step back and really compare your painting to the reference photo. Think about the lighting and ask yourself if the lighting looks natural? Are any of the shadows or highlights in the wrong place? Have I missed anything, or is there anything that I can improve before moving on?

Light is an extremely complex subject, and this tutorial does not even scratch the surface, but like anything, it can be learned given time and practice.

When I am happy with the progress, I move on to the lower jaw and teeth.

STEP 9



I begin to render the lower jaw. Because the light is coming from above the skull, there is not much light that makes it this lower portion of the skull, leaving much of it in deep shadows.

STEP 10



With the lower jaw finished, you really begin to notice the contrast between the upper and lower rows of teeth. As an rule, lighter areas appear to come forward, and darker areas recede - this is why the upper row of teeth really looks like it is out in front of the lower teeth.

STEP 11



STEP 12



I am ready to move on to the highlight stage. During this step I am going to build on the white areas that I have already established. I start by working the top of the nose (STEP 12). You can see that I removed the stencil line in order to round out the nasal bridge and make the skull more realistic looking.

STEP 13



This stage is more about enhancing the brightest areas of the painting, I am not adding new areas or dramatically changing the artwork.

STEP 14



I add highlights to the teeth using small, tight dagger strokes. This not only makes the teeth appear rounded and also really helps to lose the stenciled look.

STEP 15

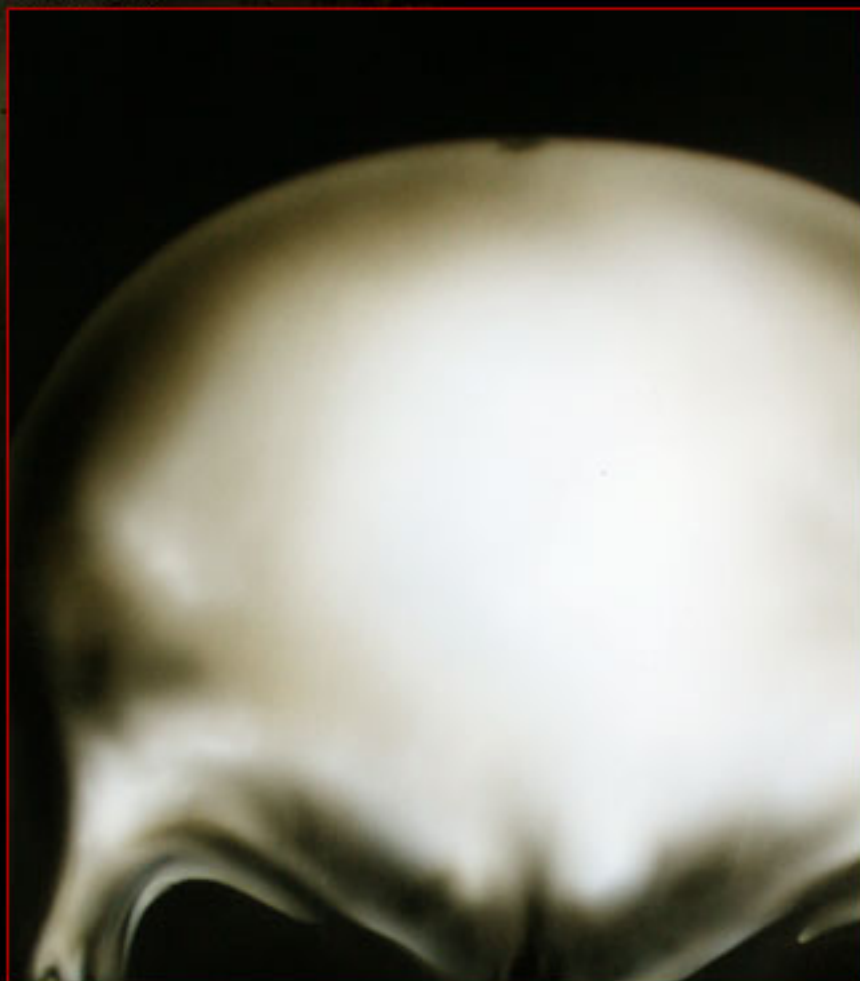


STEP 16



With the skull looking good, it's time to do a little cleaning up. I want to reduce the white overspray around the skull that was left during the rendering process.

STEP 18



STEP 17



The stencil include skull-cap and lower jaw cut-outs. I simply hold the cut-outs over my artwork and use them as a mask to black-out the overspray around the skull.

With just a few quick sprays of black, the skull's outline looks sharp, crisp and void of any evidence of overspray.



In the next section we will be looking at rendering a skull which is lit from the side.

STUDY #3 - LIGHTING FROM THE SIDE



STEP 1



This skull will be rendered to with side-lighting. With my reference and stencil taped down, I begin to fog in the right side of the skull with white, paying close attention to where the light falls in the photo.

STEP 3



STEP 2



I quickly remove some of the unneeded stencil lines by whitening them out. For the purpose of these lighting tutorials, I am keeping the skulls pretty minimal.

Here is a shot showing the skull with some of the stencil lines removed.

STEP 4



STEP 5



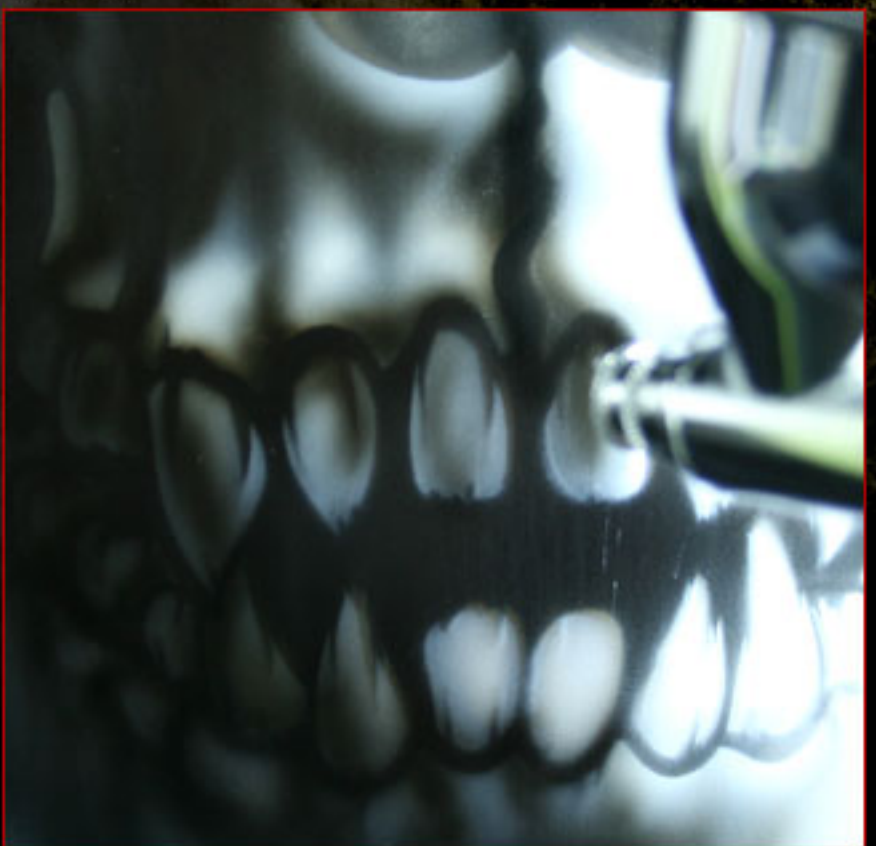
The large darker areas of this particular lighting set-up are mainly restricted to one side of the skull. With this type of lighting you must carefully study the reference to find the areas where the light spills over, where it stops, and where it is reflected. As with the previous lighting studies, study the reference and try to paint exactly what you see, and don't forget to glance between your painting and your reference often during the process.

STEP 6



Above the nasal cavity there is a hard line separating the two halves of the skull. I easily render this separation using the stencil line, which is already in the perfect location.

STEP 7



Here I am darkening the teeth and upper lip area according to the lighting in my reference photo.

STEP 8



The skull really gets split right down the middle. I really like this lighting set-up, the skull is fairly easy to render, and the lighting gives it a lot of personality.

After adding a few finishing touches and small details, I am ready to move on to the highlights and hot-spots.

STEP 9



STEP 10



STEP 11



To keep my artwork clean and crisp, I reapply my stencil. After taping down the "Skull 25" stencil, I focus my main highlights on the right side of the skull (STEPS 9-11). I boost up the contrast of the teeth on the right hand side, as well as the upper lip and chin (STEP 12). After taking a last look at my reference, and adding a few final touches, I am ready to call this one done.

STEP 12



STEP 13





We hope that you enjoyed this how-to, and that we were able to shed a little light on a very complex subject. Although this tutorial is meant to be a quick overview on the topic of light, we hope that it opens up some new possibilities in your own artwork. By really exploring and studying different lighting effects you can add incredible dynamics to your work, and even turn a single stencil into a massive group of skulls that all have their own individuality and unique features.

As always, please feel free to let us know if you have any questions about our tutorials. Questions, comments and feedback are greatly appreciated.







**PRINTER
FRIENDLY**





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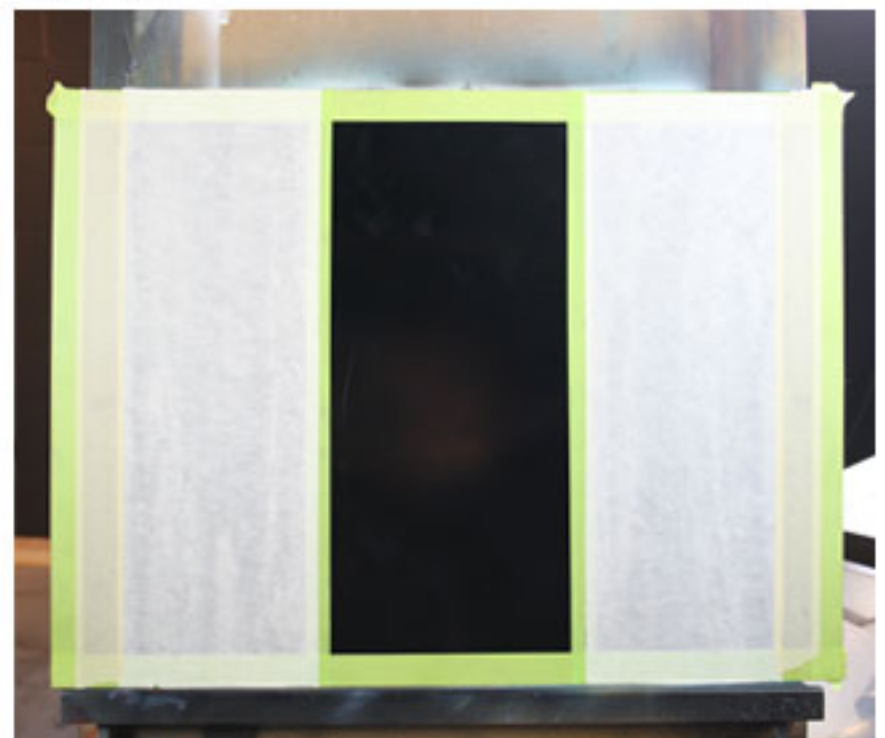
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I start with a blank panel that has been segmented into thirds (STEP 1). I cover the two sides leaving the middle open for my first study (STEP 2). Always keep your reference close by as you paint. You will be working closely with it to make sure the lighting source stays as consistent to real life as possible.

STEP 1



STEP 2



STUDY #1 - LIGHTING FROM BELOW



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STEP 10



STEP 11

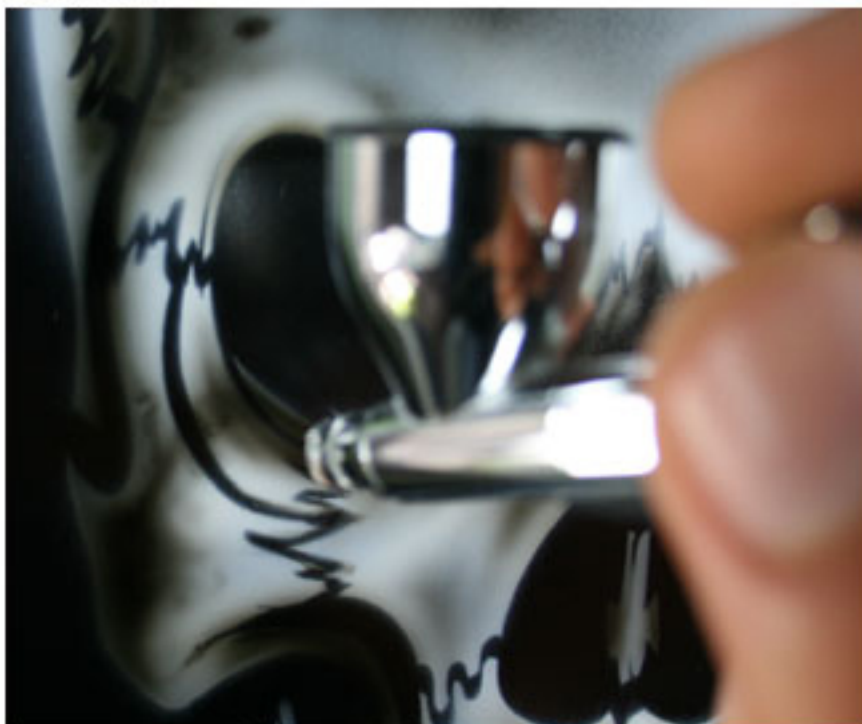


STEP 12



Here is another cover-up of the original stencil lines (STEPS 13,14). Although I choose to keep many of the reference points left by the stencil, I also make decisions throughout the painting regarding the stencil lines that I want to get rid of. Here I am removing a stencil line in the eye sockets.

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STEP 14



STEP 15



Now that my shading is complete I change back to white base coat. I lay the stencil back over my work, tape it into place and begin to add reflective light and highlights to the painting. I work in small areas brightening up the parts of the skull where the light is hottest.

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STEP 16



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STEP 17



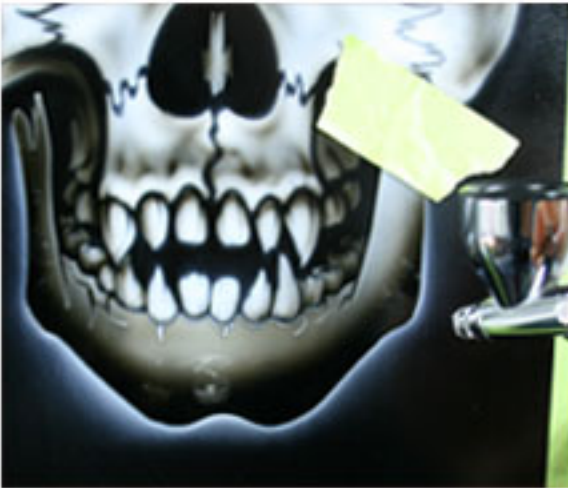
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STEP 18



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STEP 22



STEP 23





In the next section we will be looking at rendering a skull with a top-down light source.

STUDY #2 - LIGHTING FROM THE TOP



STEP 1



After taping down my stencil, and studying the lighting reference photo, I begin to fog-in areas of the skull based on the light source in the photo. Because my light is coming from the top, most of the forehead gets fogged in.

STEP 3



STEP 2



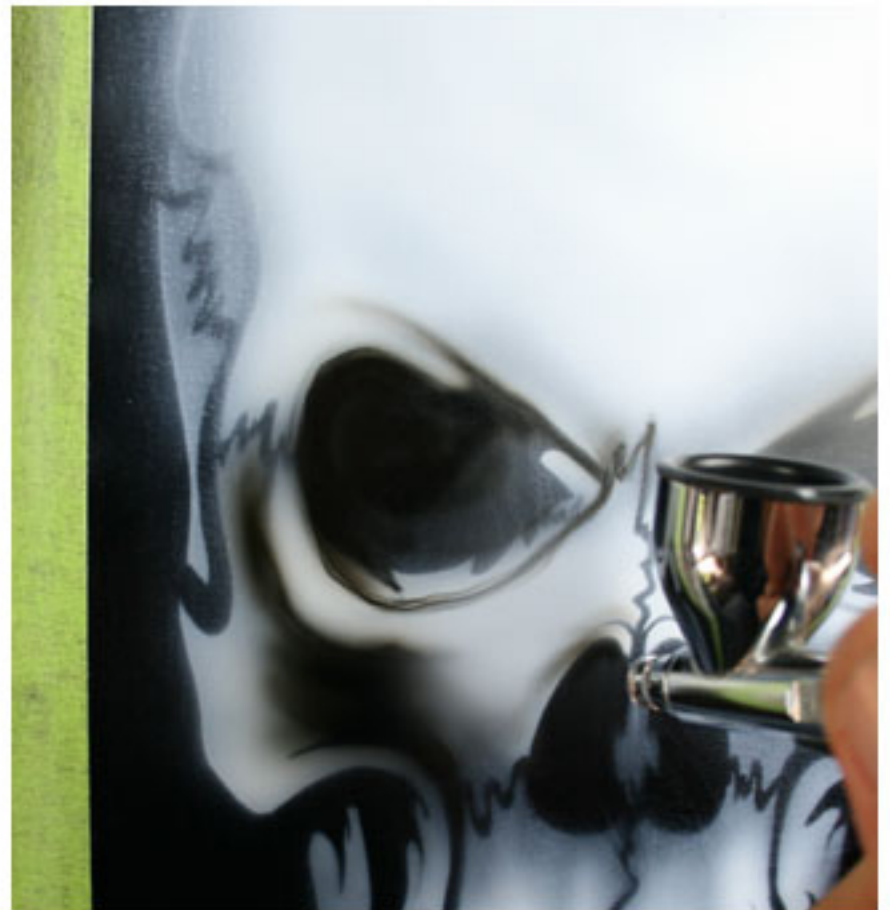
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I am building up the white with multiple passes. Take your time during this preliminary stage of the rendering. By using multiple, thin layers, I am really able to build up the brightest areas of the image in a very convincing way.

STEP 4



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Carefully look at the ways that the light falls over certain areas of the skull. In the reference (STEP 5), I can see the distinct shapes that the light is creating in the eye sockets and nasal bridge (notice the very distinct arc of light at the bottom of the eye socket). I am really trying to paint what I see, not what I think I see. Try to keep the subtle shifts between light and shadow, as well as the harder lines between the contrasting areas of light and dark.

STEP 6



I continue with black, working the shadows and darker areas of the skull. Just like working with my first white layer, I am building the darker areas slowly - this allows for a fuller range of tones throughout the painting.

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Throughout the process I am losing the skull's "stenciled" look. By the end of this process, you won't be able to tell that a stencil was even used, and this particular skull will have a more organic feel than the bottom-lit skull.

STEP 8



Be sure to take a small break every so often. Take a step back and really compare your painting to the reference photo. Think about the lighting and ask yourself if the lighting looks natural? Are any of the shadows or highlights in the wrong place? Have I missed anything, or is there anything that I can improve before moving on?

Light is an extremely complex subject, and this tutorial does not even scratch the surface, but like anything, it can be learned given time and practice.

When I am happy with the progress, I move on to the lower jaw and teeth.

STEP 9



I begin to render the lower jaw. Because the light is coming from above the skull, there is not much light that makes it this lower portion of the skull, leaving much of it in deep shadows.

STEP 10



With the lower jaw finished, you really begin to notice the contrast between the upper and lower rows of teeth. As an rule, lighter areas appear to come forward, and darker areas recede - this is why the upper row of teeth really looks like it is out in front of the lower teeth.

STEP 11



STEP 12



I am ready to move on to the highlight stage. During this step I am going to build on the white areas that I have already established. I start by working the top of the nose (STEP12). You can see that I removed the stencil line in order to round out the nasal bridge and make the skull more realistic looking.

STEP 13



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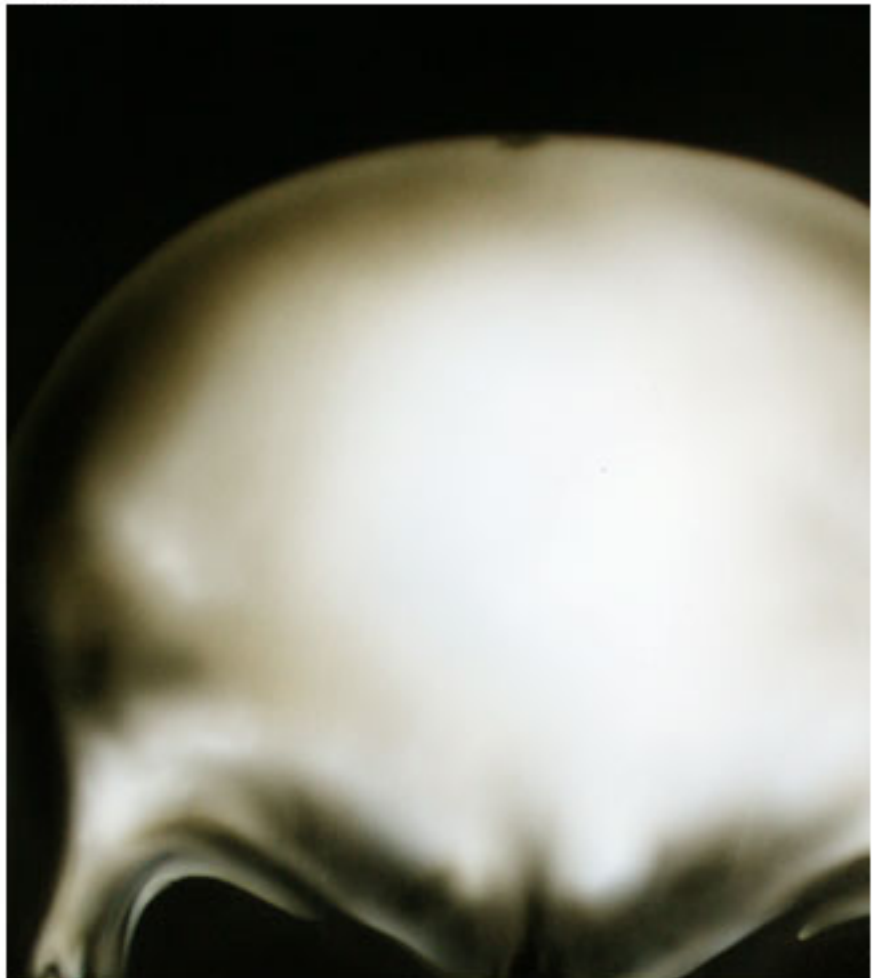


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STEP 1



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STEP 3



Here is a shot showing the skull with some of the stencil lines removed.

STEP 2



I quickly remove some of the unneeded stencil lines by whitening them out. For the purpose of these lighting tutorials, I am keeping the skulls pretty minimal.

STEP 4



STEP 5



The large darker areas of this particular lighting set-up are mainly restricted to one side of the skull. With this type of lighting you must carefully study the reference to find the areas where the light spills over, where it stops, and where it is reflected. As with the previous lighting studies, study the reference and try to paint exactly what you see, and don't forget to glance between your painting and your reference often during the process.

STEP 6



Above the nasal cavity there is a hard line separating the two halves of the skull. I easily render this separation using the stencil line, which is already in the perfect location.

STEP 7



Here I am darkening the teeth and upper lip area according to the lighting in my reference photo.

STEP 8



The skull really gets split right down the middle. I really like this lighting set-up, the skull is fairly easy to render, and the lighting gives it a lot of personality.

After adding a few finishing touches and small details, I am ready to move on to the high-lights and hot-spots.

STEP 9



STEP 10



STEP 11



To keep my artwork clean and crisp, I reapply my stencil. After taping down the "Skull 25" stencil, I focus my main highlights on the right side of the skull (STEPS 10, 11). I boost up the contrast of the teeth on the right hand side, as well as the upper lip and chin (STEP 12). After taking a last look at my reference, and adding a few final touches, I am ready to call this one done.

STEP 12



STEP 13





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