

In this first of a three-part series on eye enhancement techniques, Jane Conner-ziser shows you how to achieve both painterly and photo-realistic results.

JANE CONNER-ZISER

Making eyes

CONTRAST, COLOR
AND DETAIL, PART 1

Having been a retouching artist, photographer and painter for over 30 years, I know how important the eyes are to any portrait.

When I took up digital imaging technology years ago, it was a challenge to replicate the delicate blends and transitions I'd done with brushes and pencils—digital tools felt clumsy in comparison. But I took comfort in knowing that the artistic principles didn't change, that knowing *what* to do is still more important than *how* it's done, providing the results are desirable and the process is efficient.

In this, the first of a three-part series, we'll begin with a few basics of artistic retouching. Look for parts one and two in upcoming issues.

Natural light creates volume and depth. For the eyes to look rounded, some areas need to be lighter than others (see **Figure 2**). To achieve depth, every facial feature that recedes gets shading on one side, and every feature that protrudes gets a highlight. Features that protrude enough cast shadows. If you can't tell the direction the light is coming from in the image, locating just one highlight will tell you where to put the others.

The viewer will focus on contrast, color and detail. Photographers think of contrast as the stretch between highlight and shadow, but here we'll also use contrast in the sense of color and of the juxtaposition of elements, such as seeing a huge tree in the midst of an urban landscape, or something yellow in a mostly blue picture. A contrasting color used as an accent can be a powerful attention grabber.

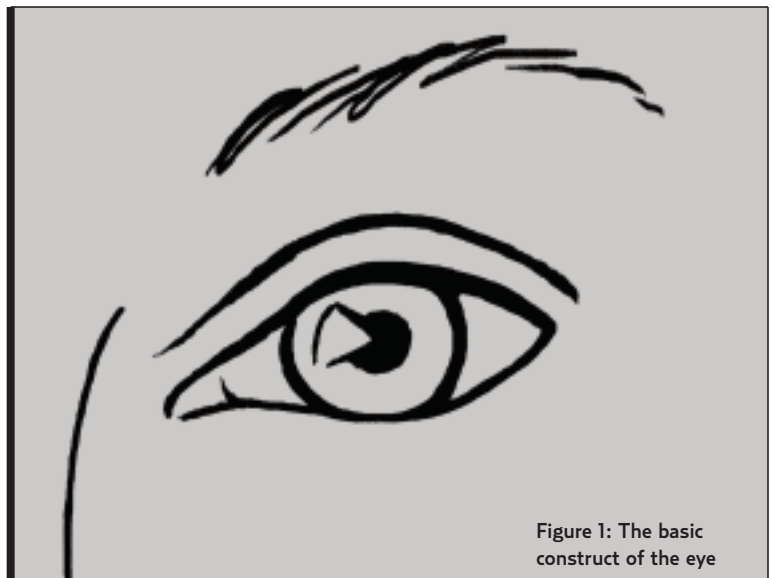


Figure 1: The basic construct of the eye

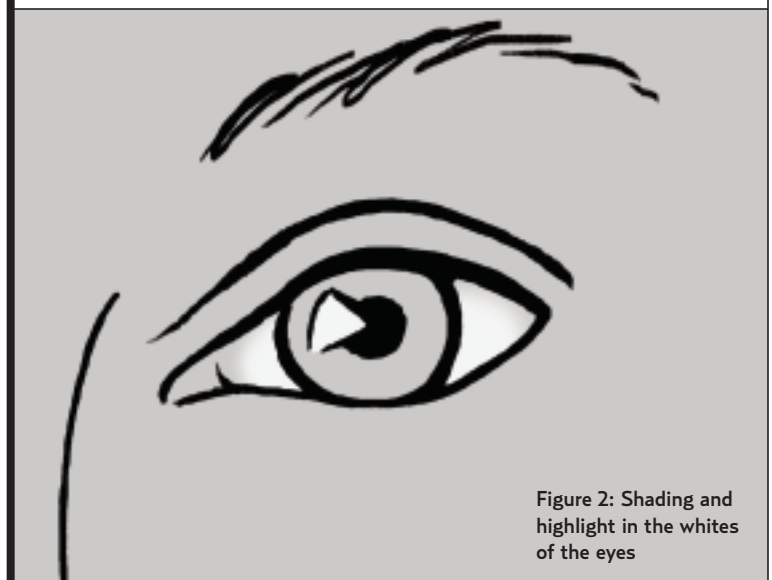


Figure 2: Shading and highlight in the whites of the eyes

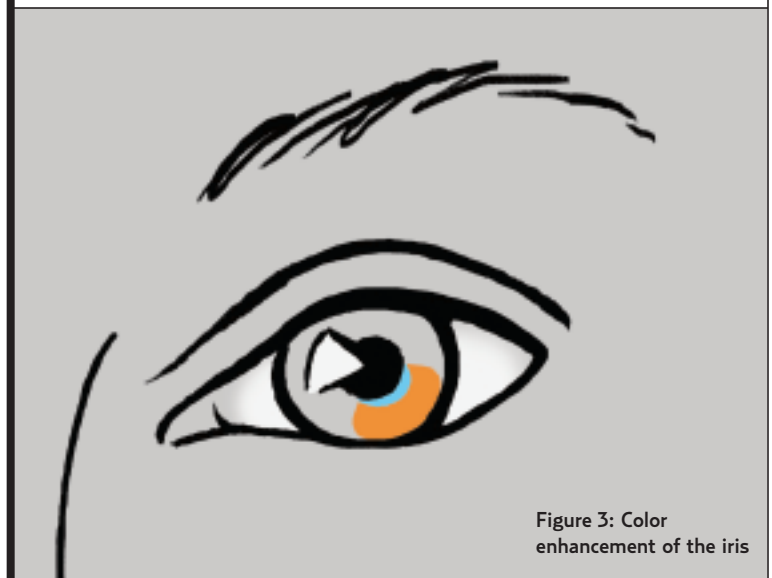


Figure 3: Color enhancement of the iris

We also want to draw the viewer's attention to the eyes by adding detail. For the enhancements to be invisible, the additions must be accurate in shape, texture, angle and in the transitions between the elements. Artwork needs this accuracy to maintain veracity.

HOW TO RETOUCH AN EYE

1. Start with contrast: Make some of the whites whiter and some of the blacks blacker.

The specular highlight in the eye should reflect the direction of the main light. If the eye already has a specular highlight, we'll just need to accentuate it. Always be mindful that the eyeball is round when retouching the whites. The brightest white is right next to the iris, and fades out toward the corners of the eyelids. As most main lighting comes in from above the center of the subject, the upper eyelashes cast a shadow across the top of the eyeball, so the brightness of the white doesn't extend much above the center of the eye. The catchlight is always brighter than the whites of the eyes.

If you choose to make the darks darker, you'll further enhance the contrast. Burning in the upper lash line and the top half of the iris intensifies the subject's gaze.

2. Enhance the color: We can brighten the subject's expression by introducing a contrasting color in the iris. To look realistic, the shape and position of the color must be appropriate and accurate. Light reflects through the clear membrane covering the iris and pupil and reflects just opposite the catchlight. The brightest part should be right next to the pupil and should extend no more than half-way up the shaded side, where the eyelashes are casting a shadow. The accent color should usually extend slightly more than halfway around the bottom of the iris (because photographers direct fill light from the bottom), but should not interfere with the dark rim around the iris. The shape should be curved like a kidney bean. If you further accent the brightness by applying an even lighter color next to the pupil, the shape should be more like a crescent moon. I like to add two colors to the iris if the eye is large enough, a lighter and brighter version of the actual color and a bright little crescent of the opposite color. Brown eyes get a cool gray crescent and blue eyes get coral. This little trick adds flash to the expression.

3. Enhance detail: Use brushes to sharpen edges that are already slightly sharper than the edges of the neighboring elements, but not so much as to cause the viewer to focus on the edge rather than the expression in the eye. Enhancing or adding eyelashes gives the viewer more details to look at. When you add eyelashes, positioning is key. Natural eyelashes lengthen toward the outside corners of the eye and become

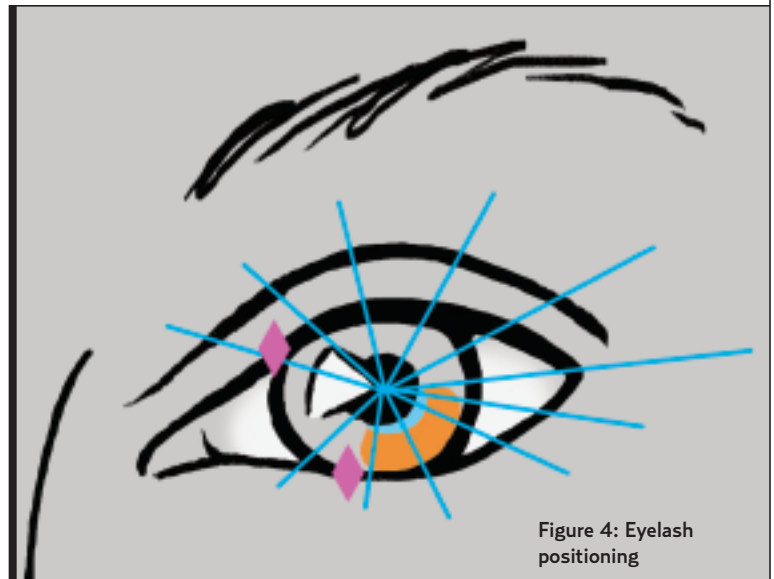


Figure 4: Eyelash positioning



Figure 5: Eyelash enhancement

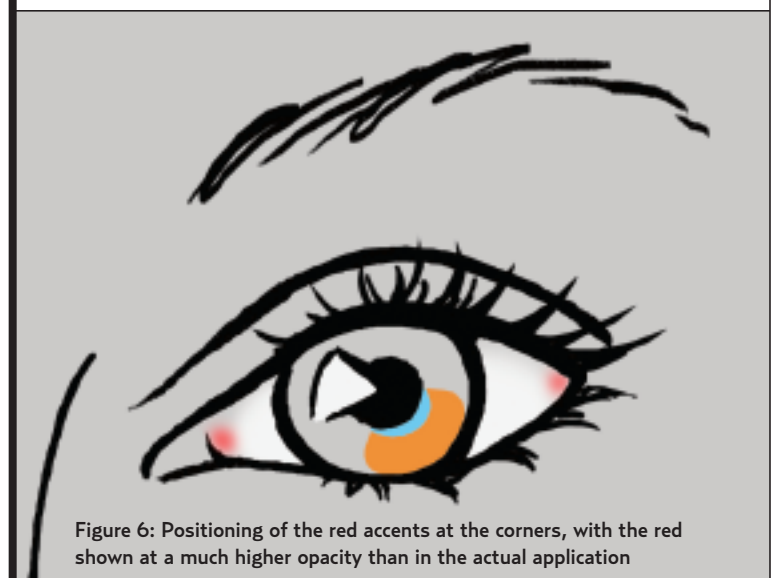


Figure 6: Positioning of the red accents at the corners, with the red shown at a much higher opacity than in the actual application

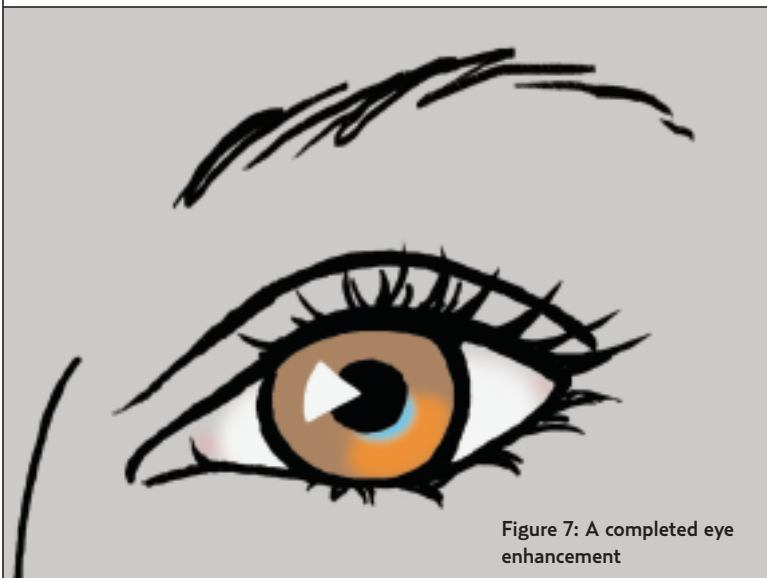


Figure 7: A completed eye enhancement

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shorter toward the nose. The thickness of each lash tapers off toward the tip. The outer eyelashes might reach slightly over the crease above the eye, but rarely by more than the tip of the lash. As you enhance the lashes, angle them like spokes on a wheel with the pupil as the axel, and curving slightly toward the center. The lashes over the pupil are nearly vertical. Save for the tiniest, lightest lashes, which are all but invisible in most portraits, the upper eyelashes usually don't extend toward the nose much beyond the edge of the iris, and the lower lashes usually stop near the pupil's edge. You can vary the lashes' size and angle a bit for interest. Know when to stop—add too many and it looks like the subject's wearing centipedes.

4. Add red: A light touch makes a big difference. At this point, the color and detail you've added will draw the viewer's attention to the eyes. To my taste, the eyes should look warm, friendly and inviting, so I usually add a little extra, a subtle shading of bright red at the inside and outside corners of the eyeball. This accent should be felt rather than seen. I discovered this effect when I was enhancing eyes with pencils and dyes, and it always seems to add that little something special to the expression.

5. Odds and ends: These are the little final touches that complete the retouch. If the subject's eyes are small, you can't do all of these steps without the additions looking out of place. Start with contrast enhancement, add color, then add as much detail as you can, stopping before the area looks unnatural or overworked.

Sometimes there's more than one catchlight per eye. That's fine, providing the catchlight from the main light is the brighter one. If you want to remove catchlights, do it first thing, before beginning the enhancement process. One catchlight per eye presents depth of expression; more than one creates a look of merriment. Choose what's right for the portrait.

If there is a highlight on the tissue just inside the inner corner of the eye opening, do not remove it or the eye will look dry and lifeless. If it's very large, you can make it smaller. If one eye is significantly larger than the other, make the big one slightly smaller and the small one slightly larger but do not try to make them match exactly.

The next article will show Photoshop techniques to produce realistic looking eye enhancement using the placements outlined in this article. ■

Jane Conner-ziser of Ormand Beach, Fla., is an internationally recognized portrait retouching artist, painter and instructor. With a background in fine arts, she's been creating professional portraiture for over 25 years. For more info, visit www.janesdigitalart.com.