



BLACK CAT WHITE CAT

BY ELI EFFENBERGER



INTRODUCTION

It was one of those rare, lucky occasions where I could see the image vividly before my eyes, so I could foresee the coming stages and plan the workflow accordingly. As I started working, I knew I was going to take my time. Still very new to digital media, working with a pen tablet and using Photoshop as my only tool, I was planning to use the coming painting to depict realistic characters. My emphasis was on facial expression and tension in both composition and texture. The first thing I decided on was the color scheme. I wanted it to be nearly monochromatic so it would not crowd the composition and leave room for viewers to focus their attention on smaller details – such as subtle expressions – which would create the tension. I wanted this piece to have a “close to life yet not living” feeling, which was what I chose primarily to focus on. This is what makes one person (such as myself) fall in love with dolls, and yet another to get goosebumps from them!

Entirely inspired by French ball joint dolls, and the Asian Gothic culture, I was striving to communicate a “cute yet somewhat disturbing” atmosphere through this piece.

THE “MAKING OF”

First I came up with a quick doodle for the positioning and composition (**Fig.01**). I scanned it and placed it on my



Fig.02



Fig.01

canvas on a layer set to Multiply. The doodle was mainly meant as a basic guideline, but not really to be used as the base line work. The positioning was still going to change, and also I wanted a more realistic feeling than my quick stylised sketch could portray.

The first thing I always do when starting on a new drawing is to quickly fill in just basic dabs of color to get the right balance in the foundation (**Fig.02**). I do this at a relatively low resolution: 150 dpi canvas. This is so I can quickly blend in many colors and not have to worry about traveling “long distances” on a huge canvas (my final resolution would be an intensive 600 dpi canvas for extra fine details, but it’ll be much later in the painting before I boost up the dpi).

Now, since I was using a very basic scheme here, it didn’t take very long and it wasn’t very complicated to get the balance right. My basic colors were to be pinkish whites and creams, contrasting with dark, desaturated purples and blacks. I wanted to oppose these with dark, desaturated greenish shadows, and also use some red to enhance the deep rich pinks in the eyes and mouths, to get a slightly demonic look (**Fig.03**).

Once I had the basics done, I decided to get the main focus of the painting resolved as quickly as possible. This way I could be reassured that my painting was heading in the right direction. In my case, it usually means getting started with the faces and hands, as these are the most expressive parts in the painting. Just before doing this, I remembered to boost up the resolution on my canvas (from 150 dpi to 600 dpi). Then I could get into much more detail later on, as the work progressed.

As I started working on the faces, I realized that it would be easier for me to leave the eyeballs to be painted in a later stage. This was due to the fact that I was painting almost expressionless doll faces. Dolls have the most fascinating way of giving the impression of an emotion through their glass eyes, without ever having a defined expression to their faces. Painting the faces without the eyes would let me cognitively separate the porcelain face from the expressive eyes, hopefully resulting in an unusual, and intriguing, dollish expression.

The left hand of my black-haired doll was the most complex to draw. I focused on getting it to show the joints but still looking relatively relaxed and natural. Joints can look a little strained if you are not careful! One other point to focus my attention on was the positioning of both the dolls' and cats' feet in perspective to the viewer. After playing around with angles a little, I managed to position them so they poked out, but still kept aligned one with the other (Fig.04).



Fig.05



Fig.03



Fig.04

I then turned to the use of a hard, semi-transparent brush with its Shape Dynamics set to Pressure. I lowered the size dramatically and used it to pinpoint smudges in the fabrics and highlight them – not only to further deepen creases, but also to emphasize smaller features, such as lace detail and frill volume.

At this stage I was considering adding blood stains to the cat paws and floor, just for fun, but finally decided to discard them, and left the unsettling feeling to be created solely by the tension between the characters and through their strange expressions – they were actually becoming “creepy” enough already at this stage!

Finally, I got to the eyes. Painting them in on a separate layer, I played around with the shading until I got a nice



Fig.06

positioning of the eyeball and iris, and left it at that for the time being. Everything was looking pretty good so far, so from this stage onwards it was all about further detailing (Fig.05).

Rethinking some elements in the drawing, I added interest to the cats' collars, shoe design and jewelry. When thinking about striking equilibrium between the doll's shoe and the cat's paw, I came up with a shoe having a cat paw imprinted on the bottom of the sole. If she walks around in the mud (or blood) with them, she'll leave cat footprints all over the floor. (I've got to make shoes like that one day!)

Now that I had all the key features drawn in to my satisfaction, I decided to give the piece some additional thought – for color and fine finishing touches. I did a little color correction using a separate layer set to Hue, added a little shimmer to the eyes and lips, drew in a few stray whiskers and... done (Fig.06)!

CONCLUSION

It was probably the first time I produced such a close match to the original image I had in mind when I first started working. Also, I found that the work process was quite consistent. There were no big mess-ups in the middle, so even though the painting took an awfully long time to complete, it was really fun and I learned a lot about digital painting – and that, after all, was my initial hope!

ARTIST PORTFOLIO



ALL IMAGES © 2007/08 ELI EFFENBERGER