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## Ⓢ Artist of the Month

### Henry Wingate

By Beth Derringer-Keith

#### **How and when did you get started creating art?**

I remember liking to draw as a very young child, filling up notepads with pencil drawings copied from pictures in magazines and books. Through some of my elementary school years I was homeschooled and my parents noticed my interest in drawing. They arranged some private lessons with local artists. One particular artist was studying to become a medical illustrator and she probably reinforced my inclinations toward representational work. I attended a public high school in Charlottesville, Virginia, and was fortunate to find a good art teacher there.

By the time I finished high school, I was completely committed to representational art, and had I been able to find a good art school, I probably would have become a painter much earlier than I did. But in the early 1980s most art schools were still firmly in the hands of abstract/non-representational teachers, so I decided to put my painting on hold and accepted an appointment to the Naval Academy. Four years at the academy, followed by flight school and several years flying F-14s added up to nearly 10 years spent completely away from art. However, toward the end of my time in the Navy, I knew that I wanted to get back to painting and began to look for a school. I learned that there was a group of ateliers in this country and abroad (mainly in Florence) following the teaching methods that had flourished in the studios of 19th-century Paris. I decided to enroll in the Ingbretson School in Framingham, Massachusetts. (Now, the school is located in Manchester, New Hampshire.) Here, with a dozen or so other students, I studied under Paul Ingbretson and spent my days drawing or painting live models who had interesting faces and also were willing to sit for extended periods of time each day, for several weeks. I also spent two terms painting at the Charles Cecil Atelier in Florence.

**What media and genres do you work in?**

Nearly all my work is done with oil on canvas. I like to draw, and I do some pencil and charcoal work. While I like to paint still lifes and landscapes, most of my painting is centered on the portrayal of people, either portraits or figurative/genre work. For the past few years, most of my income has come from commissioned portraits. Wanting to be as complete of a painter as I can, however, I try not limit myself. For this reason, I paint still lifes, landscapes and perhaps a figurative painting between commissions.

**What was the inspiration for *Pierre Paulo* (oil, 36x26)?**

*Pierre Paulo* was painted in Florence. The model was a native of Florence and an art student in one of the many studio schools there. He modeled part time to help with his expenses. I thought he had an interesting face to draw and paint, and for me he epitomized the young Florentine. He was an excellent model, which makes so much difference to a painter, like myself, who doesn't use photographs.

**Describe your process: Do you begin with drawing? Do you work from life? Photographs? Do you have a typical color palette that you always use?**

My process in painting *Pierre Paulo* was typical of the process I always follow. All of my drawings and paintings are done from life. I know what an easy trap using photographs can be, and for that reason I simply don't use them at any stage in the process. I began *Pierre Paulo* with a life-size charcoal drawing that took about three days to complete. This means a total of nine hours, since Paulo sat for three hours a day. The drawing helps me learn the model's face. It also gives me time to get to know the model's characteristics, looks and mannerisms.



*Pierre Paulo* (oil, 36x26) was a finalist in the *Artist's Magazine's* 2002 Art Competition.

After drawing, I paint a small color study—I usually do this on a canvas board about 12 inches square. The color study is very unfinished and is used merely to check the color scheme. Actually I didn't do a color study for *Pierre Paulo*. The color scheme was fairly simple, and I didn't think the color study was necessary. I generally can complete a color study in one three-hour sitting.

Then I begin the painting. Nearly all my portraits are life-size, as is *Pierre Paulo*. I start by trying to get good color and concentrate on color relationships. So with *Pierre Paulo*, I started with the general fleshtone in relation to his hair color and to the background color. Once I have good color relationships, I'll start drawing with those colors—that is, trying to get a good likeness and make the face on my canvas look like the person sitting in front of me.

The process I use, and have used since my earliest days as a student at the Ingbretson Studio, is one of working from the big to the small, from the outside to the inside. This is an old, established process. You can see a good description of it in the Charteris biography of John Singer Sargent.

There are a lot of other factors that come into play in painting a portrait. Form is of the utmost importance. I try to make the head as rounded and solid as I can. Edges are vital. Some edges are sharp and others are very soft, and I try to show these differences. "Losses"—those areas that are lost in shadow and not easily discernable—are important as they make a picture interesting. I think that if everything is given to the viewer, a picture loses some of its interest.

With each successive sitting, I try to make the painting more and more like the model. It's a process in which you can stop early on and have a loose painting, or push it further and further to have a tight, highly finished painting.

I always use the same palette for portraits. It is as follows: Winsor & Newton flake white No. 2, Winsor & Newton alizarin crimson, Rembrandt cadmium red deep, Winsor & Newton cadmium scarlet, Rembrandt yellow ochre, Rembrandt cadmium yellow lemon, Rembrandt naples yellow deep, Rembrandt permanent green light, Rembrandt viridian, Rembrandt sevres blue, Rembrandt ultramarine deep and Rembrandt ivory black.

I use a medium of equal parts: distilled turpentine, sun-thickened linseed oil and Strasbourg turpentine.

#### **How long do you spend on a typical painting?**

My portraits usually take from a month to six weeks to complete. Because I don't use photographs at all, a lot depends on the subject's schedule and ability to sit for hours at a time. *Pierre Paulo* was a practiced model and sat very regularly for three hours a day, five days a week. The painting was completed in five weeks, meaning that he sat a total of 75 hours. For me, that is fairly typical for a full-figure, life-size portrait.

My other paintings, still lifes and landscapes, are much faster. I usually spend 10 to 15 hours on one of those.

**Were there any surprises or difficulties along the way as you painted this work? What was your favorite part?**

I don't know how common it is among other painters of portraits, but with nearly all of my portraits I hit a difficult spot with which I have to struggle. I had a difficult time with the likeness of *Pierre Paulo* for a while. I've found that if I can work through a difficult period in a painting, it usually turns out to be good.

My favorite part in painting *Pierre Paulo* was his face, and especially his eyes. It's always fun to paint such expressive faces.

**What are you working on right now?**

I just finished a six-week stint in New York painting a family of four. I lived in the family's guest house during that time and worked nearly all day, six days a week. Right now, I'm working on building a new studio in Madison, Virginia, where I live. I am also doing a few head and shoulders charcoal portraits.

**Why do you create art?**

To me, creating a painting has to do with the beauty of nature. I'm always trying to capture permanent, tiny parts of that beauty. It can be in many things—a graceful line, a rich color, a soft form or an interesting composition. It's a real delight to be a painter and to attempt to put things into a painting that will last and bring beauty into lives of people for years to come.

**Beth Derringer-Keith** is an assistant editor for *The Artist's Magazine*.