

Adobe® Illustrator® CS5 How-To Guide

Blue Mirror

by Greg Geisler

Based in Austin, Texas, Greg Geisler has been freelancing for 10 years and is currently working on a variety of web site projects and online educational products. That is, when he's not creating compelling and curious portraits with Illustrator.

Greg has worked in design, illustration, and animation on the computer now, for 20 years. That experience landed him a spot on the team that created *A Scanner Darkly*, where he primarily contributed background artwork for the film. He subsequently collaborated with the creators of the software used to produce *Scanner*, working on an animated short and on a weekly animated series.

For our How-To Guide, Greg tells us how he used the new Bristle Brush features in Illustrator CS5 to create the personality and mystery in the character in *Blue Mirror*.

“**■** a huge fan of the German Expressionists and their figurative work. I try, with my renderings of the human face, to express a similar depth of emotion.”

How I work

■ a graphic artist—more of a draftsman than a painter. I don't have any formal training in painting, so my methods may seem unorthodox or impure to “true” painters.

I almost always start with line drawing, but from there my normal process defies linear logic. I become more of an expressionist, preferring a loose, sketchy, and unrefined approach. I think this is partly a reaction to the very controlled nature of the design work that I do. With my fine art, I like to “let things happen” and generally not adhere to a methodology for how line and color are applied. I also don't erase lines or mistakes—I avoid command-Z—preferring instead to cover them or let them show through. I do a lot of layering and use a wide variety of opacity settings.

But for this piece I took a slightly more linear approach so I could best demonstrate how you might use the Bristle Brush to create something similar. The theme “Depth of Expression” was a good one for me to demonstrate how to use varying depths of Bristle Brush strokes to build up an image.

Subject matter

I wanted to use an inspiration that had a bold, high contrast light source. My fine art subject matter is always figurative, mostly portraits. I dug through a box of old photos and found a piece of an old black-and-white Polaroid from the early 80's.

I scanned the photo and used it in Adobe® Photoshop® as a reference to draw a more stylized version. I distorted and exaggerated features, and elongated the head. I sketched and hatched in tones and shadows.

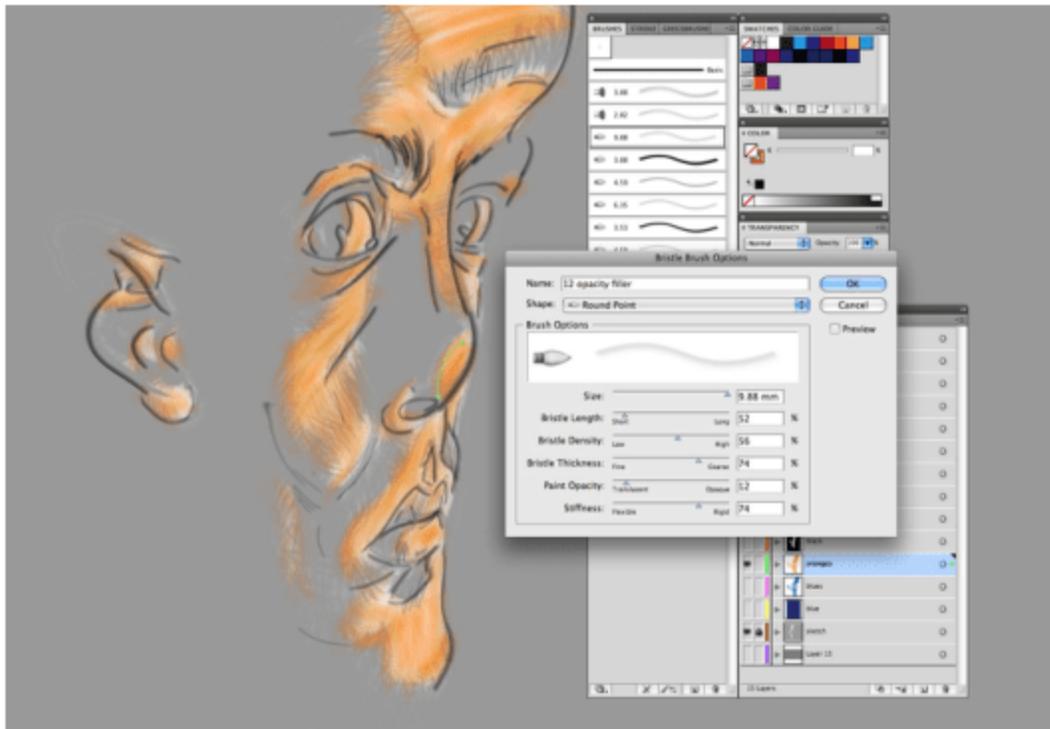
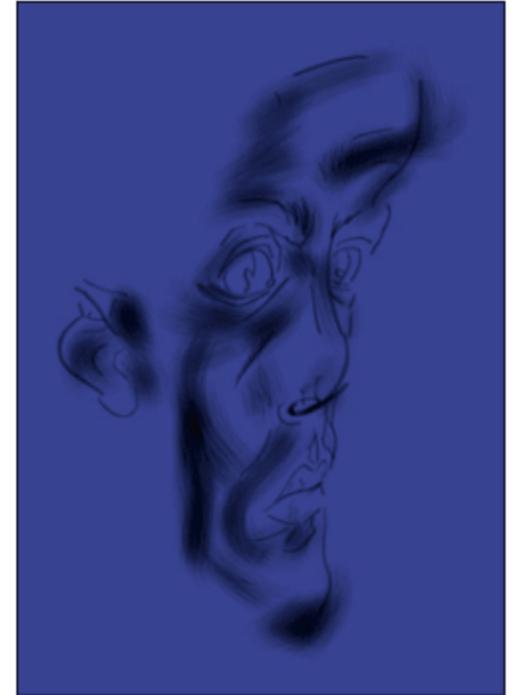


In Illustrator

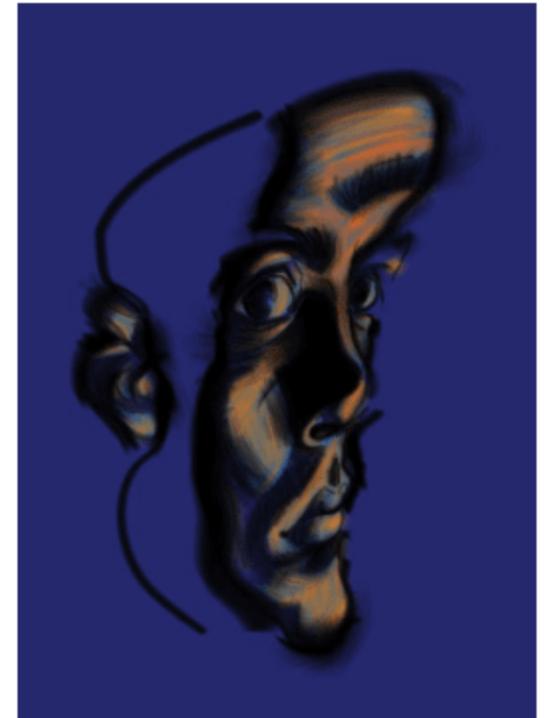
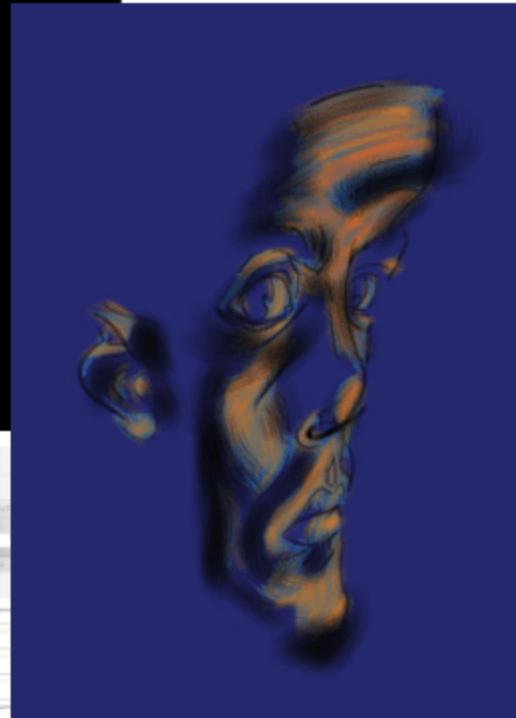
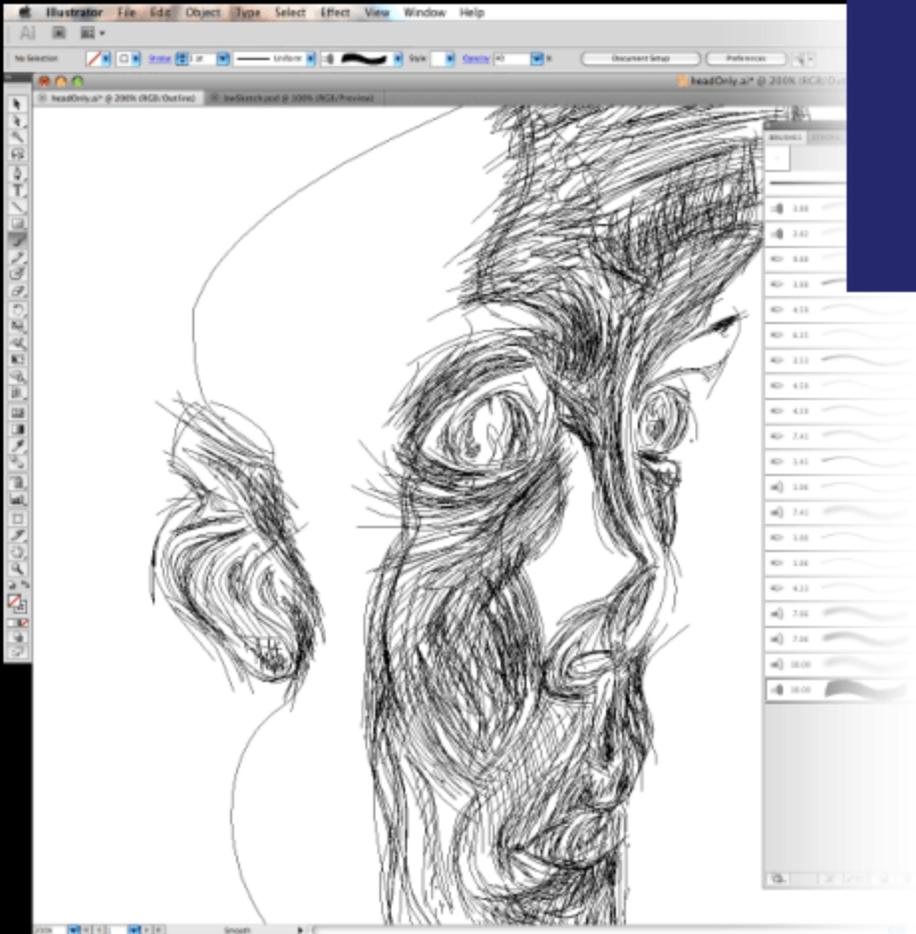
I placed the resulting sketch into Illustrator to use as a template. I started vector drawing by sketching the outlines with a fine Bristle Brush. I was able to define a brush that had the feel and feedback of a pencil. This has tremendous potential for artists out there who want a responsive pencil tool that is vector!

Next, I used a wider brush to rough in the midtones and shadows. I then placed a blue background behind the art in preparation for laying down highlights.

I used a wide translucent brush to rough in the highlight areas. See the highlights here in orange and the Bristle Brush Options that I used. There's a stroke being applied there to the nose.



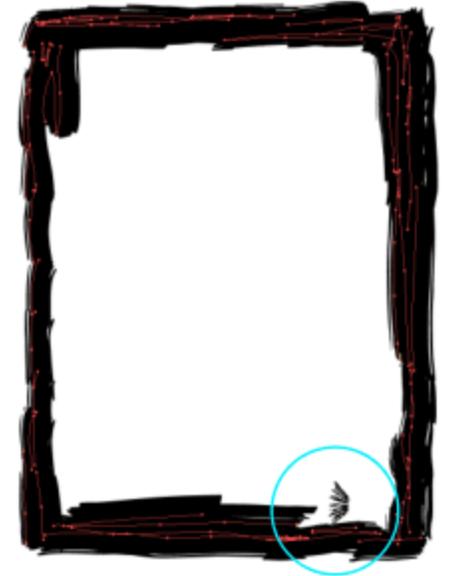
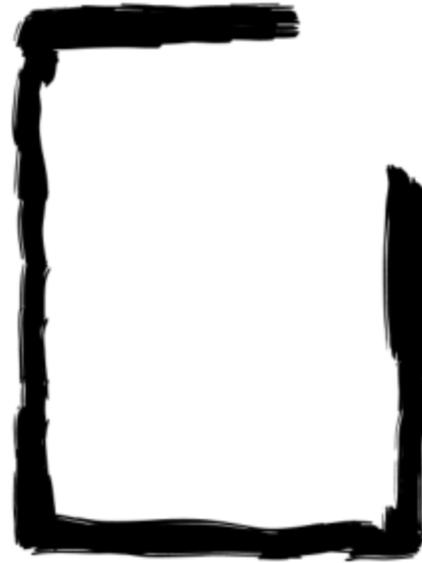
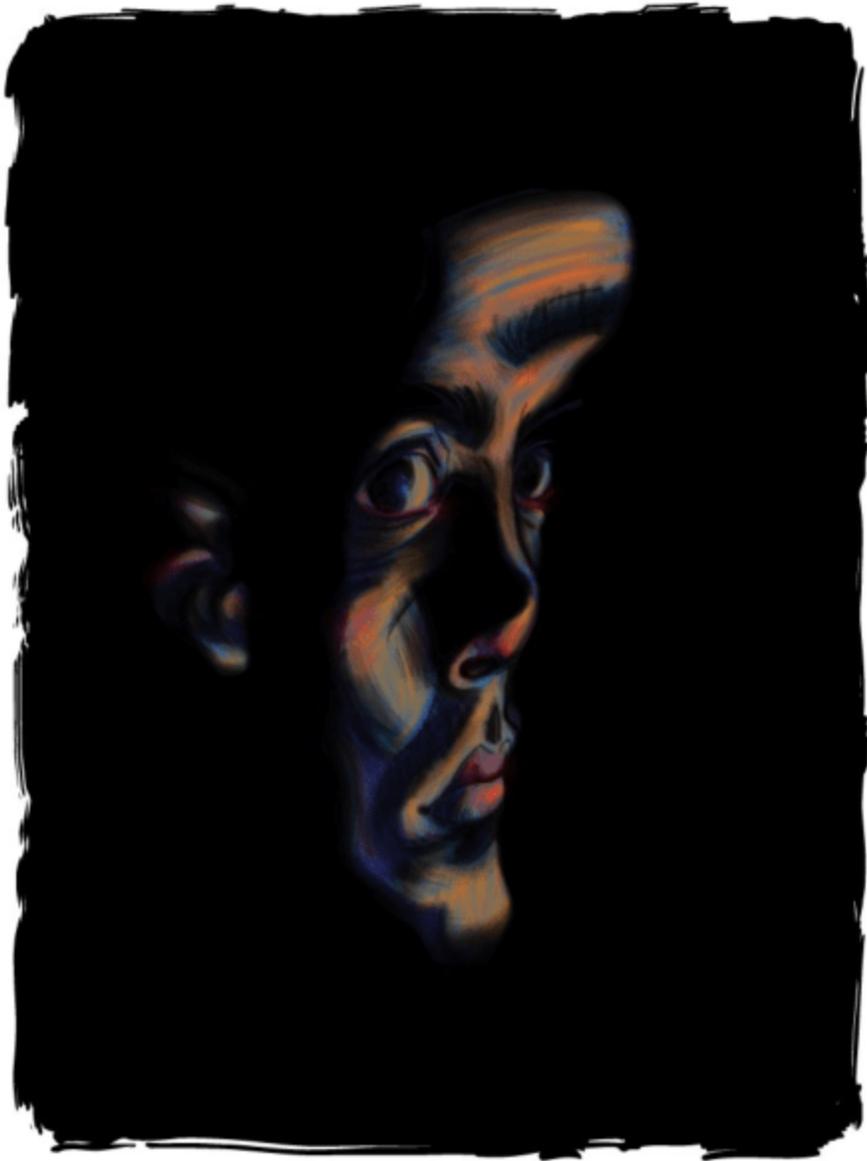
“In general, I don’t think that much about what I’m doing while I do it; the mood simply comes out. The emotion transfers to the canvas with my brush strokes.”



Midtones and shadows

I roughed in some midtones underneath the orange highlights using a lighter blue. Next up was blocking in some of the shadow areas with black.

Here it is in outline mode to show you how the build-up of strokes is progressing.



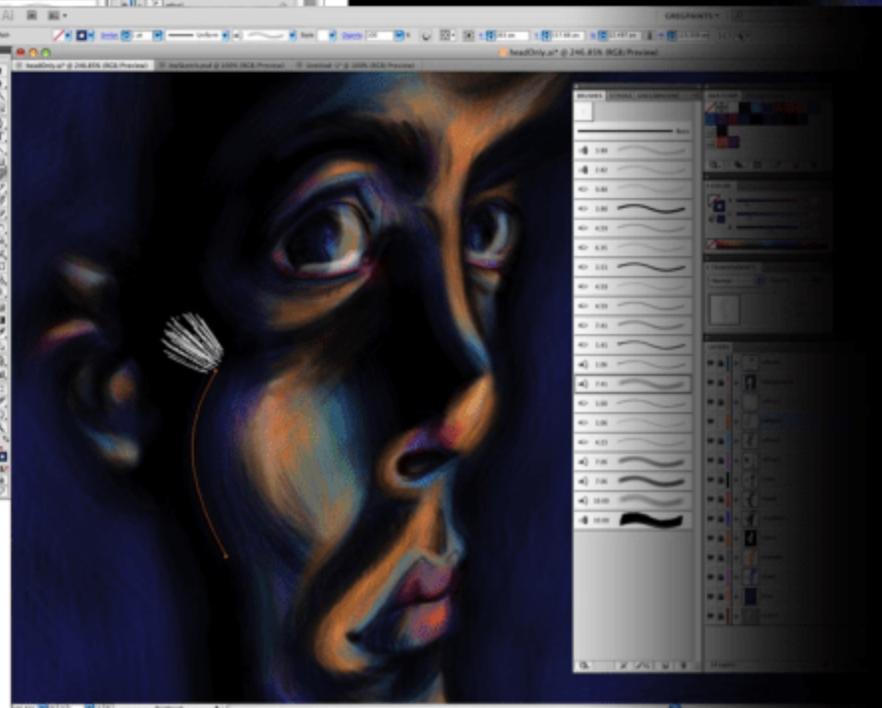
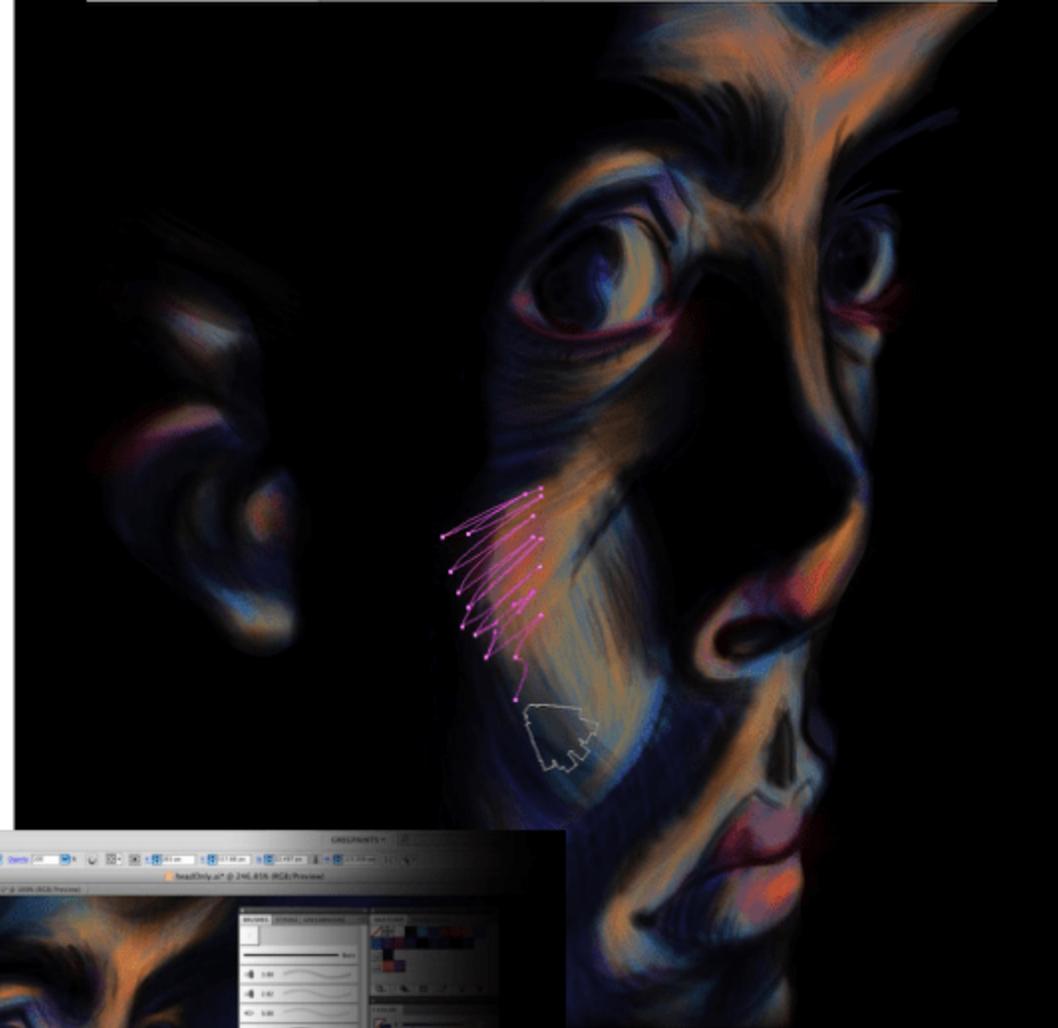
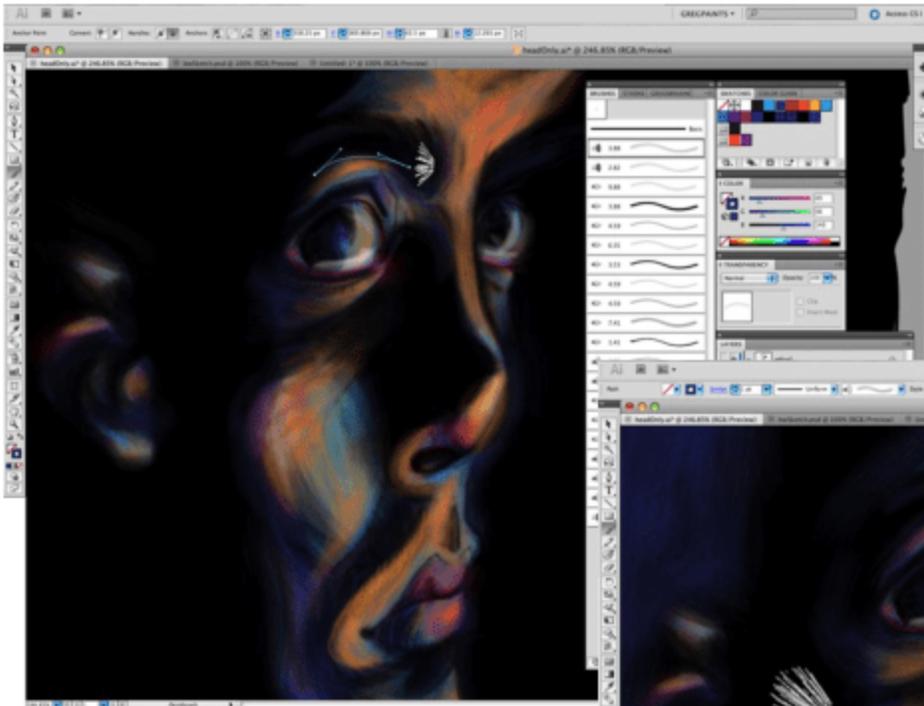
Creating the frame

A wide, opaque Bristle Brush makes it very easy to create those cool rough-edged frames, in just seconds. I roughed out a rectangular shape, expanded the strokes and merged them with the Pathfinder tools. I wanted to create a mask to let the blue background show through, so I sketched in the remaining area around the head with filled pencil strokes, sketching roughly to reveal the blue background in places.

I finished by merging the strokes around the head with the frame to create the full mask.

Midtones and shadows

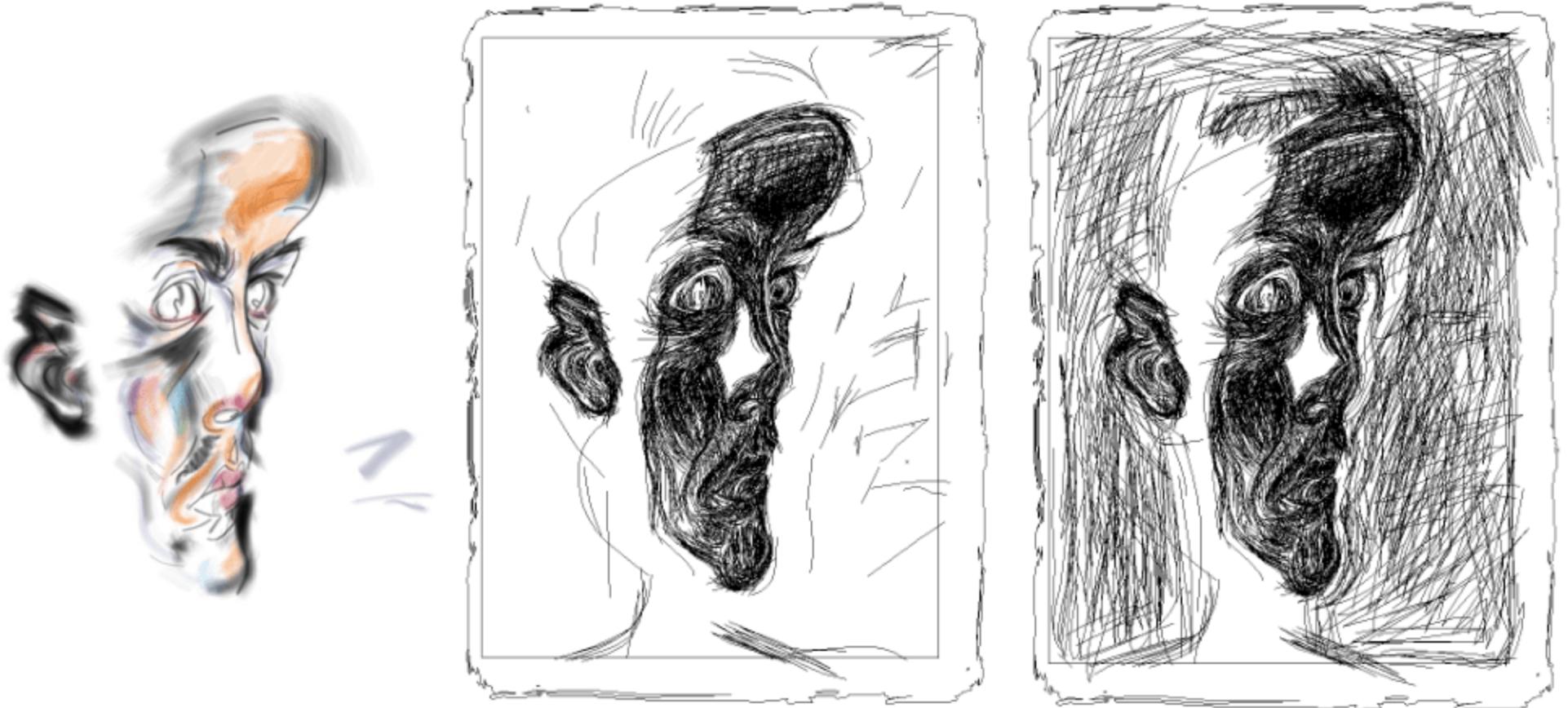
Then I started the process of refining the image and features by creating new layers and using various translucent brushes. I added detail to some areas like the eyes and smoothed out other areas, adding in more color.



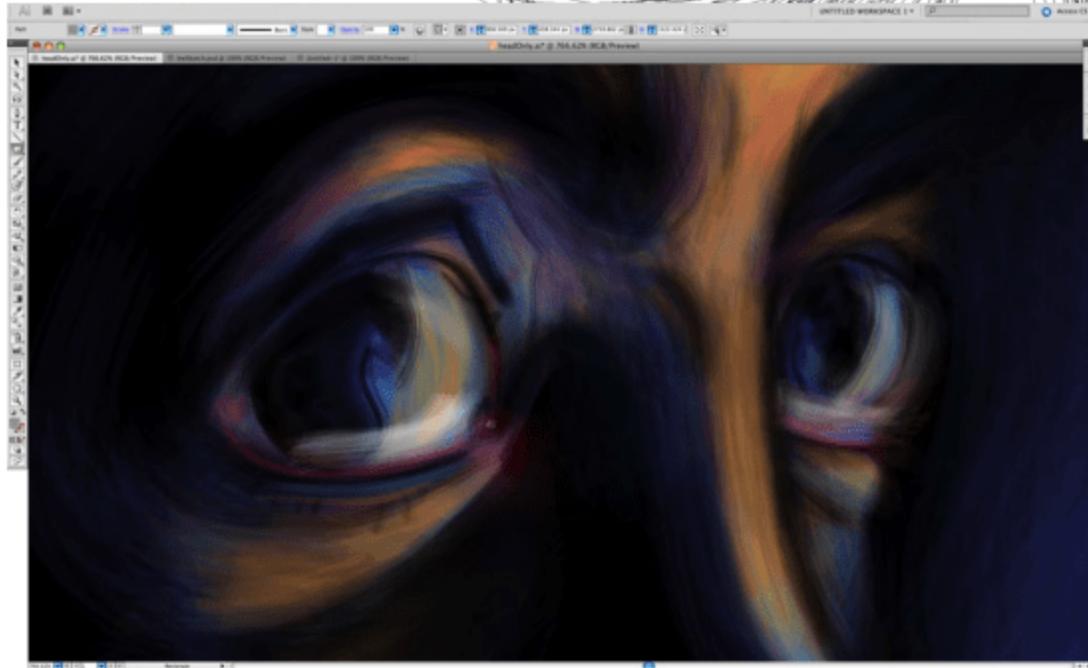
The final steps

My final step was to give the background some texture. This is another example of how the Bristle Brush can make fast work of something that would otherwise be rather tedious. With only a small number of brush strokes you can create a rich texture that looks like it took hundreds of strokes to create.

That's it!



“Along with German Expressionism, my influences include Outsider Art, printmaking, and caricature. I also used to do a lot of pastel work, which you can see in my style. This is something that the Bristle Brush really helps me achieve.”



Blue Mirror was commissioned by Adobe and created using Adobe Illustrator CSS.

For more information
Product details:



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