

1. Make a terrible rough sketch on its own layer. Use liquify or just lassoing and transform to get the proportions mostly right at this stage

It's best to not use a pure white background to begin with



2. Lines. Don't go too thin. If you want the finished piece to not show much lineart, you can just overpaint them with a clipping layer in the end. The ghost hands in this one are on their own layer



The sketch layer is still showing on low opacity. It will help you with rendering later.

3. Fill in the Flat colors. You can do this manually, but the easiest way is just to magic wand select the outside of the lineart and then invert the selection

Put different colors on their own layers clipped to the base layer. That way you can easily change them with HSV sliders.



LASERPAINTS

4. Paint in the background in broad strokes. It will help you find base, shadow and highlight colors. This one is an overpaint of a royalty free stock photo. No rules, just tools!

The layers on Henry are still the same as before, just color shifted



5. Pick a shadow color and paint in Forms.
For painting in layers I find it comfortable to work "backwards" and paint in details first, then take a larger brush with lighter pressure and paint larger shadows over them.

Don't be afraid to be bold with shadow colors, that's something I need to work on



Here is where I did that low opacity - large brush stuff

LASERPAINTS

6. The same applies to highlights. Doing this in layers and with details first gives a lot of consistency and corporality, but limits your colors to a pretty narrow palette.



You can avoid pillow shading by giving all of your forms at least one hard edge

LASERPAINTS

7. Different Fur/skin tones have different shadow colors. Just putting lighting layers (multiply/soft light for example) over everything will yield inconsistent results.

This is where the separate layers for separate base colors come in handy. You can just put them on top (still below the lineart) and clip the lighting to them.



LASERPAINTS

8. I do an ambient occlusion pass, where creases and such allow less light in



Use it sparingly and only around major Forms

LASERPAINTS

9. You can still use different layer modes to adjust the rendering in subtle ways like I did on his chest.

A cheap trick to make the rendering more interesting is rimlight on a simple normal layer. I constantly abuse it.



A REALLY cheap trick to visually separate your characters from the background is to copy your base flat layer, turn it all black and blur it under everything else. You can clip a layer on top of it and paint a light color on some of it.

This approximates how our eyes enhance edge contrast IRL

Those hands layers are also still there on top of everything else

LASERPAINTS

10. Do sweeping color corrections lol.
I often map colors on a
red gradient like this with ~10%
intensity



A simple trick to soften the
picture is to add a bloom
effect by copying the whole image,
putting it on a layer on top at
low opacity and blurring that
with a Filter



The gradient effectively reduces
color depth so on soft, large gradients
you will see color banding. You can
reduce that with dithering or a
low opacity noise Filter



LASERPAINTS