

Crib Sheet No 2 by Ronnie Cruwys

NB These notes are supplementary to the guidance in Aidan Hart's book 'Techniques of Icon and Wall Painting'.

MEMBRANE TECHNIQUE – Faces

Part one: Application of the Membrane on Faces

March 2017

1. Transcribing the Drawing

First step is to paint the monochrome image or drawing on to the prepared gesso. If the surface has all been sanded for water gilding, remember to sand the surface for painting using 600 grade sandpaper. Egg tempera needs some tooth to adhere.

Using 80gsm photocopy paper, rub half a teaspoon of Armenian bole or a deep red pigment well into the surface of one side of the paper with cotton wool.

Photocopy your monochrome or drawing cutting two or three v-slots in the photocopy, to locate the drawing correctly on your icon board.



Then using the red bole paper underneath your photocopy, transfer your image, trace over your drawing with a fine pencil making only the minimum amount of lines on to the gesso. Keep lines sharp and clear.

Tip: always use a best quality colour reproduction icon print on photo paper to refer back to. Don't skimp on print cartridges, use the proper Canon ink.

As soon as the lines have been transferred, fix the drawing by painting over with a dilute mix of Avana or Terre Verte.

Drawing fixed on to gesso.

2. Underpainting

Example: the Mandilion

Using 80% terre verte and 20% yellow ochre (Maimeri light), paint the modelling of the image.

You can use other pigments for underpainting the face such as Avana or Yellow Ochre Maimeri and a little Ivory black.



Terre Verte and Yellow Ochre

If the figure is of Middle Eastern origin, add dash of red pigment (red ochre or Eng red Light) to the underpainting.

Build modelling up evenly and ensure that line weights vary in the appropriate places. For example, brows are thicker, eye socket line is light, the upper lid dense and lower lid light. The underpainting should be clear and well shaded enough to withstand several membrane layers.



Building up the modelling

Tip: If the figure is older, then model the facial wrinkles at this stage.

When you have finished modelling the underpainting, all areas of unpainted gesso should be lightly washed with dilute pigment mix to avoid patchy areas when you apply the membrane. It is best to wait until it is dry and apply a fine even layer over the whole lot.

Tip: Remember to paint with Distinction and Unity.

To see Aidan give a demonstration during class (Amateur) video: Underpainting:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N3a6puiMDuQ>

3. Applying the Membrane Layers

These layers give the skin's middle tone.

Using Yellow Ochre Light (Maimeri) and a little Vermillion or English Red light and a touch of Titanium White, mix up a warm golden orange. *Go easy with the white as it is a powerful pigment.* Mix it up separately then add with tip of your brush until you get the right colour.

With a large squirrel mop held at 45 degrees or less to the board, not upright, sweep a light, even wash of membrane colour over the face and beard but NOT the hair.

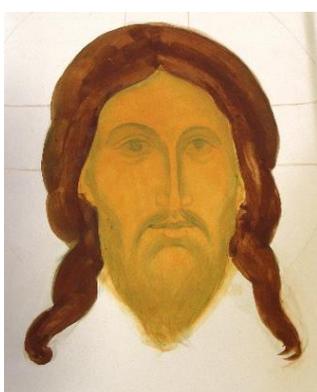
Apply 4 or 5 membranes until you get a rich even golden colour. This is where you see how important it is to have a strong underpainting. If there are areas on the membrane which are patchy, apply another layer and puddle in extra pigment where thin.

Tip: Reminder, when mixing colour, egg first, then add pigment.



Applying the membrane is tricky! This is not a good example as it's my first attempt

When the membranes are complete, you can apply a separating glaze of 10% egg, 90% water. Go easy with the egg as too much egg leaves a slippery surface which is hard to paint on. Ensure it is properly dry before you paint over it.



Aidan's Mandilion



My Mandilion

Applying the membranes can be difficult to master and very easy to go wrong.

TIP: If you smear or smudge, DON'T FIDDLE with it! It is repairable, but only if you are patient. Wait till the layer has dried (preferably overnight) and paint several more layers over it, dropping more pigment into any 'holes' in the membrane layer while you the whole layer is wet.

To sum up the main points:

1. Paint a good strong underpainting. Build up dark areas by layering rather than applying thick pigment.
2. Go carefully with membrane layer, if any patches or hairs occur, leave paint to dry, do not fiddle!
3. Wipe palette from time to time.
4. Avoid over-wet brushes.

To see Aidan give a demonstration during class (Amateur) video: Application of Membrane:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YcGFjclFIEo>