

STEP-BY-STEP DEMONSTRATIONS

AMERICAN  
ARTIST

OIL, WATERCOLOR, PASTEL

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# PORTRAIT

~ HIGHLIGHTS ~

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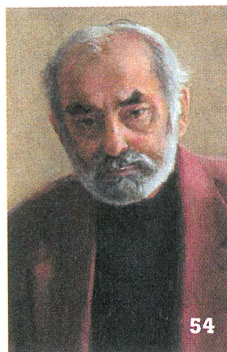
Portrait of  
Pam McMahon (detail)  
by John Howard Sanden



# PORTRAIT

~ HIGHLIGHTS ~

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# 4.

## A Disciplined Approach

by **Linda M. Gosman & M. Stephen Doherty**

While other Navy pilots were thinking about latitude and longitude as their planes nosed through billowy clouds toward distant horizons, U.S. Naval Academy graduate Henry Wingate found his thoughts wandering to the subtle value, color, and texture variations of the elusive forms around him. Although art was Wingate's first love, and he produced credible drawings as early as age 6, the traditional values instilled in him by his parents drew him to the military. There he learned the importance of self-discipline and perseverance, two qualities that now serve him well as a full-time artist.

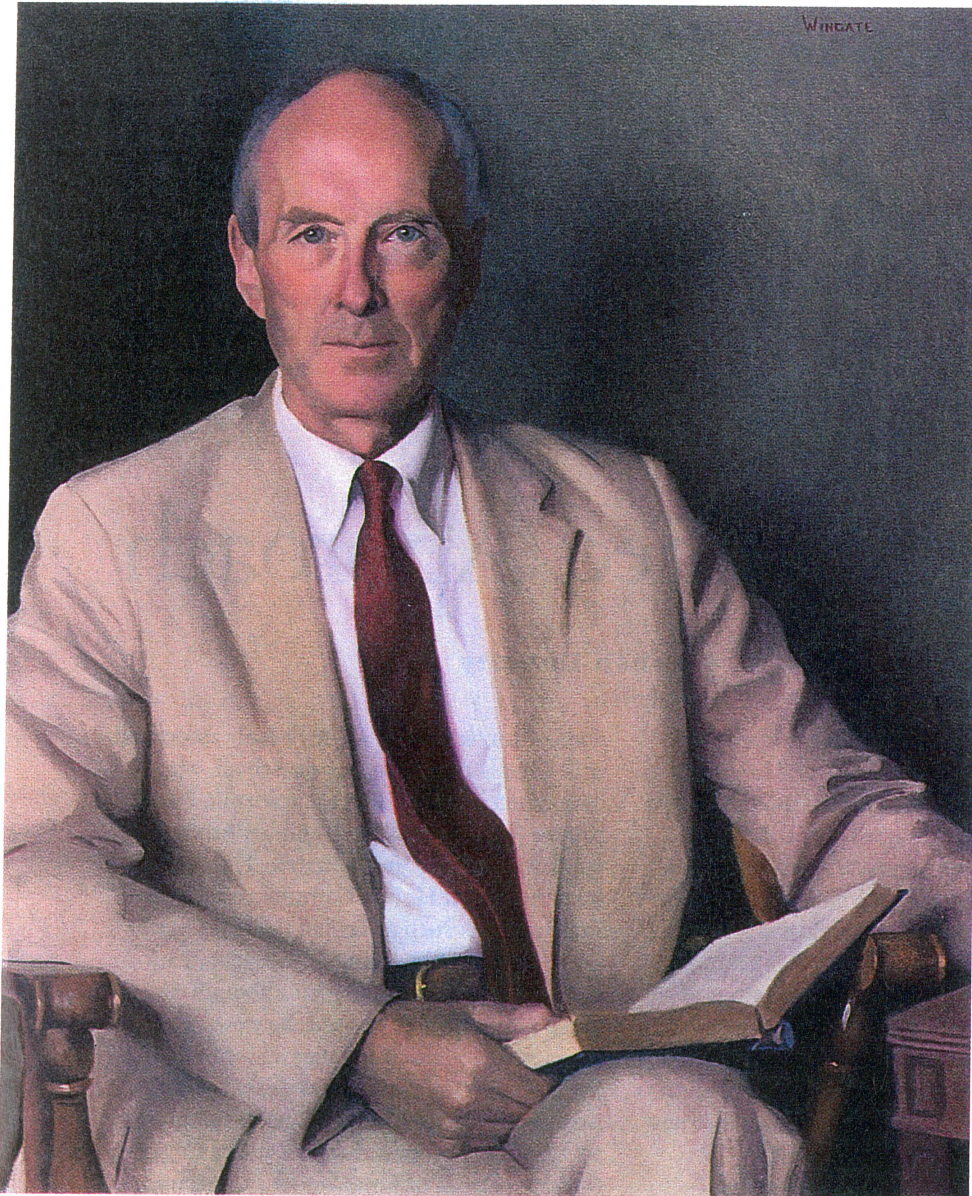
A winner in the American Society of Portrait Artists competition, the Virginia artist considers himself a traditional, realist painter, although a Photo Realist effect is not his goal. "I tend to be detail-oriented by nature and by my military background, but a painting is more interesting if you leave suggestive areas," the artist asserts. To clarify the painting's center of interest for himself and for the viewer, Wingate finds it helpful to establish a specific artistic goal first, creating a strong visual statement. From there, he concentrates on accurately establishing the color, value, and temperature relationships among shapes, rather than tightly rendering the subject matter.

To pursue his youthful passion for drawing, Wingate attended the Ingbretson Studio of Drawing and Painting, in Manchester, New Hampshire, for five years after fulfilling his military obligation. There are several genera-

tions of contemporary artists loosely associated with what is called the Boston School, who have direct links to the great academic French painter Jean-Léon Gérôme and his American pupil William McGregor Paxton. That link goes through R.H. Ives Gammel and Richard Lack to artists such as Daniel Graves, Charles Cecil, James Childs, Stephen Gjertson, Paul Ingbretson, and Allan Banks. Although these gifted artists have developed their own particular approach to teaching, they all insist that students develop a high level of skill through work from plaster casts of classical sculptures and from live models that hold the same pose for long periods of time. Under Ingbretson, Wingate focused on portraiture and figure work, spending his first year patiently making charcoal drawings, learning to distinguish value, and studying the proportions of the human form using plaster casts. The next year, Ingbretson introduced a model. Then, to learn the elements of composition, Wingate concentrated on still life. Finally, in his fourth year, he was allowed to render a live model in color.

The influences of John Singer Sargent, Joseph DeCamp, Dennis Miller Bunker, and Winslow Homer pervade Wingate's painting approach and philosophy. "They were complete as artists," he says, "painting portraits, people in interiors, genre scenes, landscapes, and still lifes." Following their lead, he focuses on portraits, figures, and still lifes during cold and inclement weather, turning to the landscape for inspiration when weather per-





**The Artist's Father**  
2001, oil, 34 x 28.

mits. "Although I believe my strong point is painting people, a change in subject matter refreshes and sharpens my perceptions," the artist remarks.

Wingate paints five days a week, six hours a day. For portraits and figures, he generally works in two- or three-hour sessions, morning and afternoon, usually from two different models. "It takes me two weeks to a month to paint a picture," says the artist, who completes about 20 pieces a year, ranging in size from 8" x 10" to 30" x 40". Whenever possible, he takes advantage of natural lighting, relying on north

light in the studio. Wingate rarely uses photographs because they fail to report the subtle shifts of color that he strives to capture. Often, the artist's high standards require much dedication from him, as well as from his subject; for one typical commission, his subject, a college dean, put in 25 to 30 hours sitting for the portrait. But Wingate also worked an additional 30 to 50 hours painting from a mannequin or a stand-in model wearing the same suit the subject wore for the sittings.

Whether challenged by the task of capturing the spirit of a human face or the mystical quality of a hazy summer morning, Wingate isolates a defining element that attracts him to his sub-

ject. To capture these often abstract impressions, Wingate completes a detailed drawing of his subject using charcoal on heavy paper. "This process is very important," stresses the artist, who will spend two to three weeks on preliminary steps. "It gives me time, especially when working with models, to get to know the subject and try different poses and lighting that are characteristic of that person." When finished, Wingate uses strips of paper to crop the drawing to a desired size, taking composition and balance into consideration. He then stretches his canvas—Claessens Belgian single-primed linen—to match these dimensions.

Next, Wingate completes color studies on wooden panels prepared with gesso or on heavy watercolor paper mounted to a Masonite panel with rabbitskin glue. Weighted down and allowed to dry for several days, the paper is then primed with another coat of glue and a small amount of dry pigment, such as earth red, to create a warm undertone. These preliminary exercises test the color scheme of the painting on a flat surface, allowing the artist to practice achieving the correct color relationships and ensuring accurate color on the final painting.

Ready to begin, Wingate relies on his drawing as a blueprint, and applies a few charcoal marks on the canvas to indicate the parameters of his shapes. Then, using a No. 8 or No. 10 brush, he applies broad strokes of paint, occasionally diluted with turpentine to better reflect the actual color he sees. The artist prefers Winsor & Newton or Rembrandt oils, arranged from warm to cool on his palette. They include lead white, yellow ochre, Naples yellow deep, cadmium yellow lemon, cadmium scarlet and red deep, alizarin crimson, and burnt sienna. On the cooler side, he uses permanent green light, viridian, cerulean or Sévres blue, ultramarine deep, and ivory black. For portraits, he sometimes adds Venetian or Indian red to his palette; and to achieve rich and vibrant flesh tones, he uses a combination of ivory black, lead white, yellow ochre, and cadmium scarlet. Winsor & Newton Rathbone



hog-bristle brushes are the artist's staple. For an underpainting he might use a No. 12 or No. 14, but in general, Wingate's working brushes are Nos. 6, 7, and 8 filberts. "I use a small sable for detail, but find I stay broader longer using bristles," the artist notes.

Rather than start by drawing individual objects, Wingate lays in masses of color to render shape and form. "Drawing will come later," he says, "after I have good color. I find that if I draw first—defining angles and shapes or a profile—and I haven't concentrated on color, I have a harder time with color because I become too attached to the drawing." During the first sitting with a model, the artist establishes the larger light shapes and colored masses and their relationships to one another. "I like working with paint directly from the tube," Wingate says, "but sometimes, to increase its flow or to increase the luminosity of my darks, I'll use a 1:1 ratio of sun-

thickened linseed oil and Venice turpentine as a medium, or equal portions of stand oil, damar varnish, and turpentine." The artist prefers to paint wet-in-wet, and he rewets areas if they dry while he is working.

In subsequent sittings, Wingate concentrates on subtle value and color variations within the form, which he continues to refine until he achieves a desired degree of detail and focus. "I'm not going for a photographic look," he emphasizes. "Instead, I like lost areas, where everything isn't given to you. Some areas are lost; some things are suggested. It's better if I don't show everything." Wingate describes his process of developing a figure by establishing color and form first as "coming out of the fog," which he learned from Ingbretson. "With this method, I can stop early on and have a very hazy, loose painting—one that still has everything needed for a good painting, such as the right color and value," the artist explains. "Or I can go further and further, until I have something very finished. This method is especially helpful with portraits

because, regardless of whether I need something very loose or very finished, I can follow the same procedure."

By showing clients the work as it progresses, Wingate gets a better idea of what kind of painting they have in mind. "I make a point of working only from life," he says. "Early in my career, when I needed commissions to survive and painted children who couldn't sit still, I had to work from photographs. Talking with a lot of portrait artists, I find that many use photos even when they don't have to. I try to do something different. Being with clients—during the initial drawing, color study, and all the stages of the painting—allows me to get to know them, and they can see my work and make changes along the way. With photos, you're stuck with a static image. It's not as organic or malleable as what develops working from life."

Constant changes can seem overwhelming, and many portraitists are deterred from painting from life for this reason. But Wingate cites a challenging perspective his teacher gave him to illustrate the outweighing benefits of the practice. "With Ingbretson, we would often complain about the position of a model's hair or clothes changing every day, and he would tell us, 'Chase it. Change it every day,'" recalls Wingate. "So I do, and I've found that it allows the possibility that one day the hair will fall beautifully, better than I could have imagined; or that one day the way the clothes fall inspires a nicer line, creates a better curve; or that one day a subject may put his hand on the table in just the right way." For Wingate, these unexpected shifts—when things come together—are one of the nicer aspects of working from life. "It's harder to work from life," he continues. "Having the client there puts pressure on the artist—but it makes all the difference." Believing that the way he sees a subject becomes more accurate over time, Wingate constantly re-evaluates his painting, scraping out or repainting areas he's dissatisfied with, and then starting over. To finish, he softens aggressive edges, restates his darks, and strengthens important highlights.

To help explain the classical

BELOW

**The Michaelis Family**

2003, oil, 38 x 52.  
Private collection.

OPPOSITE PAGE

**Erin**

2000, oil, 29 x 23.





## DEMONSTRATION: BETHANY



### Step 1

Wingate first executed a full-size charcoal drawing of his subject from life.



### Step 2

He then developed an 8"-x-10" oil sketch to hit the color notes, get the color relationships resolved, and to see the color scheme on canvas.



### Step 3

Without redrawing the figure, Wingate immediately began to paint with four basic colors that allowed him to block in the light flesh tone, the shadow of the face, the hair, and the background.



### Step 4

As the artist refined his portrait of Bethany, he sculpted her face with brushstrokes of oil color during three-hour modeling sessions.



### Step 5

He next filled in the background, suggested the woman's clothing, and refined the modeling of the face and hair.





### Step 6

Wingate continued to paint the details of the model's features and costume, always stepping away from the canvas so he could evaluate the subject and the painting from the same measured distance.



THE COMPLETED PAINTING:

#### **Bethany**

2006, oil, 27 x 26.  
Collection Mr. and Mrs.  
Christopher Wingate.

approach to figure painting, Wingate documented the progress of one of his recent portraits in stages of development. The following text describes, in Wingate's own words, how he develops his portraits.

### Setup

I began the process by spending the first day working on the composition, pose, and colors. Bethany, the subject of my portrait, tried on different outfits and the two of us looked at different backgrounds, poses, and amounts of light coming in through the north-facing window. I then tried to find out what color combination in the clothing and background would best suit the subject's complexion. There is usually a background color that is best for the skin tones of a sitter's face. Green usually brings out the pinks in a face, which is why we see so many portraits with dark-green backgrounds. I wanted a background color that would not only do good things for the face and hair but also work in harmony with the clothing.

The colorful shawl and black sweater were chosen because they went well with Bethany's fair complexion. The pinks in the shawl were similar to the pinks of her face and the black provided a good contrast, making her face and hand stand out well. The neutral, dark greenish-blue background was finally chosen because it also made the light of the face and hand stand out and the colors seem harmonious throughout. After trying several different poses and lighting situations, I settled on one with the hand up and the eyes looking off to the sitter's right.

### The Drawing

After the composition, pose, color, and lighting were firm, I began a full-size charcoal drawing of Bethany. The purpose of the drawing was to test the composition, to see it on paper, and to work toward achieving a good likeness. I only work from life because I find working from photographs can never produce as good a portrait. Over the weeks I will see the hair in many different ways—when it is the most



graceful, I will paint it that way. The same goes for the way the clothing falls, the way the hand is held, and other elements.

The charcoal drawing took two days of three-hour sittings to complete. I used the drawing to decide on the size of the canvas by adding strips of paper along the edges to determine the best cropping, proportions, size, and balance. I then stretched a canvas, which in this case was 27" x 26".

### The Color Study

I made a small color study on board, canvas panel, or a piece of canvas taped to a board to check the colors before beginning the large painting. It also gave me a chance to study the color—to hit the color notes and get the relationships down. I can usually complete the color study in one session of approximately 90 minutes. The 10"-x-8" study for this portrait took approximately that long.

All of this work done on the drawing and the color study helps in making decisions as I go. One should always be willing to make changes if he or she wants to improve a painting. In this case I decided not to paint the cast shadow on the background once I got involved in the larger painting. Readers may notice that the cast shadow is in the color study but not in the final painting because I felt it didn't help the composition of the picture.

### Starting the Painting Process

I used my drawing to determine where to locate the subject's head on the canvas—but not as an underdrawing. As I began to paint, I concentrated on three or four colors and tried to get those into correct relationship with one another. In this case, the colors were the light flesh tone, the color of the shadow in the face, the general hair color, and the background color. I didn't worry about drawing other than to place the mass of colors in the right location on the canvas. If I allow myself to get too involved in redrawing the subject, I end up trying to capture a likeness immediately, and I become so attached to that image that I find myself unwilling to paint some-



thing out to get good color. However, if I just try to get the colors correct, I'm more apt to be flexible. Once I get the good, lifelike color, I draw with it. It's best to have the drawing follow the establishment of the color relationships.

As I work on the first of the color notes, I also think about the form and the roundness of the head. I try to indicate the lightest areas of the cheeks and forehead and how the value darkens as it drifts to the left and into the shadow. I try to get all the chroma, or

the brilliance of a color, into a work because that's one of the things I love most about painting. Only when working with a live model under soft, natural light do I feel I can get the wonderful, subtle colors of a face.

I set up my easel beside the model so that when I'm looking back, I can see the model and my painting at about the same size and distance. John Singer Sargent painted this way. When I look back and forth between the model and the painting, I'm able to see the places



where I'm off. I also use a mirror to look at both the subject and the painting because the reverse image gives me a fresh view. This is especially helpful in getting angles correct. Leonardo wrote that artists should often use a mirror.

### Redrawing and Painting the Features

Once I am satisfied with the colors, I begin to refine the head, always thinking of the forms as they recede or project in space, and I continue painting in a sculptural way, trying to get good chroma and roundness in the head.

When I turn my attention to the features of the face, I treat them the same way, only on a smaller scale.

tions changed slightly in the studio and, consequently, changed the appearance of the color and value relationships. For example, on overcast days the warm colors in the model's face were more apparent, which I find more pleasing. On days when the sky was bright blue the relative color temperature became cooler. During some clear days I avoided work on the face because the light was too cool. I would work on the clothing or background.

### The Final Stages of Painting

I spent a full three-hour session just painting the hair. This was toward the end of the portrait, after I had seen the hair in various ways. One day it

subsequently studied with Charles Cecil, another student of Gammell, in Florence. Wingate currently lives in Madison, Virginia, with his wife and children, and he paints in a studio he built based on the plans of one built by Gari Melchers (1860–1932) in 1923. Wingate has an active career as a portrait and landscape painter. In 2003 he received the Gold Medal of Honor (Best of Show) award from the Hudson Valley Art Association, the John R. Grabach Memorial Award in Oil Painting from The American Artists Professional League, the award for the Best Painting from Life from the National Oil and Acrylic Painters' Society, and a Certificate of Recognition



FAR LEFT

#### Anne

2003, oil, 29 x 26.  
Collection the artist.

ABOVE LEFT

An exterior view of the studio Wingate built in Madison, Virginia, using the plans for Gari Melcher's 1923 studio.

BELOW LEFT

The interior of Wingate's studio with one of several paintings on the life of John the Baptist that he is developing for a church.

OPPOSITE PAGE

#### Pierre Paulo

2002, oil, 35 x 24.  
Collection the artist.

I think about form, color, placement, angles, and edges—are they soft or sharp? I always stand back far enough from the canvas and the sitter to get a good look at the whole painted image and the person I'm painting. For Bethany's portrait, this part of the painting process took place during three-hour sessions over a number of days.

It took me about four weeks of painting 15 hours a week to complete the portrait. As the weather changed from day to day, the lighting condi-

seemed at its best—very full and graceful—so I painted it that way. The whole time I was thinking how great it is to paint from life. I devoted the final two sessions to developing the shawl.

Wingate graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy, served as a Navy pilot, and in 1994 began five years of study at the Ingbertson Studio of Drawing and Painting, in Manchester, New Hampshire, with Paul Ingbertson, who was a student of R.H. Ives Gammell. He

from the Portrait Society of America. In 2000 he was awarded a First Prize by The American Society of Portrait Artists. He recently received the First Place and Members' Choice awards in an exhibition organized by The Portrait Society of Atlanta. For more on the artist, visit: [www.henrywingate.com](http://www.henrywingate.com).

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