

Painting Hair

This tutorial is dedicated to the CGtalk community.

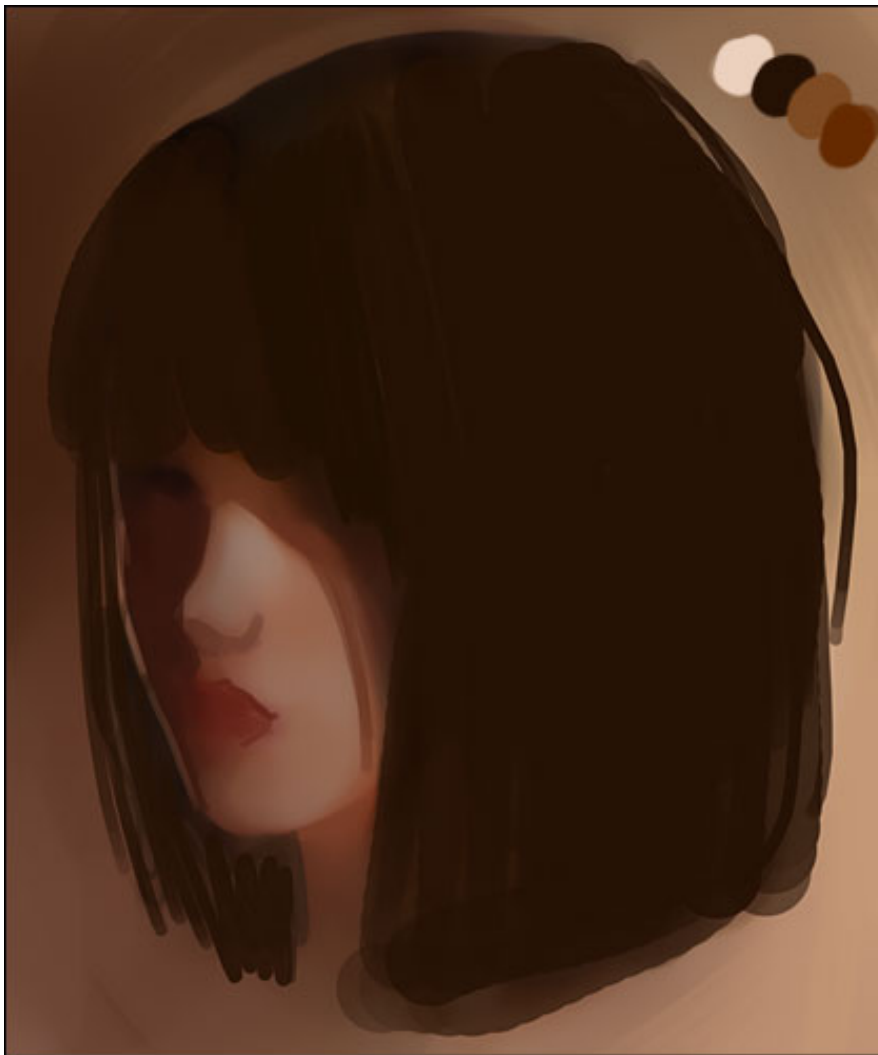


Painting hair isn't, obviously, like painting a face. Doing a tutorial on it is a wildly different

experience than a face tutorial. Why? A hair doesn't have any static features. There is no way of telling you where to place a strand of hair the way I can tell you where the nose goes. There's no anatomy of it, except that it has a certain weight and is likely to fall a certain way, and even that you can mess with because there is hair spray and gel and whatever else you might stick in it (blood or whatever, haha).

So. I've done the best I can. I've worked on this for a fair while (longer than I'd like to admit) and now I've finally added the finishing touches.

Throughout the tutorial you'll see some little tips and tricks added to the actual instruction pictures. Some of them are the brushes I'm using, some are tips directly related to the painting of hair, and some are just thoughts I thought I'd add as I went along.



sharp edged round brush set to opacity with spacing 25%.



Picking out colours for a palette is a very good idea even at the first stages of a painting. Even if you change them later, they'll help you along as you go. Once you've got a lot of colours laid down, mainly pick your palette from the actual painting.

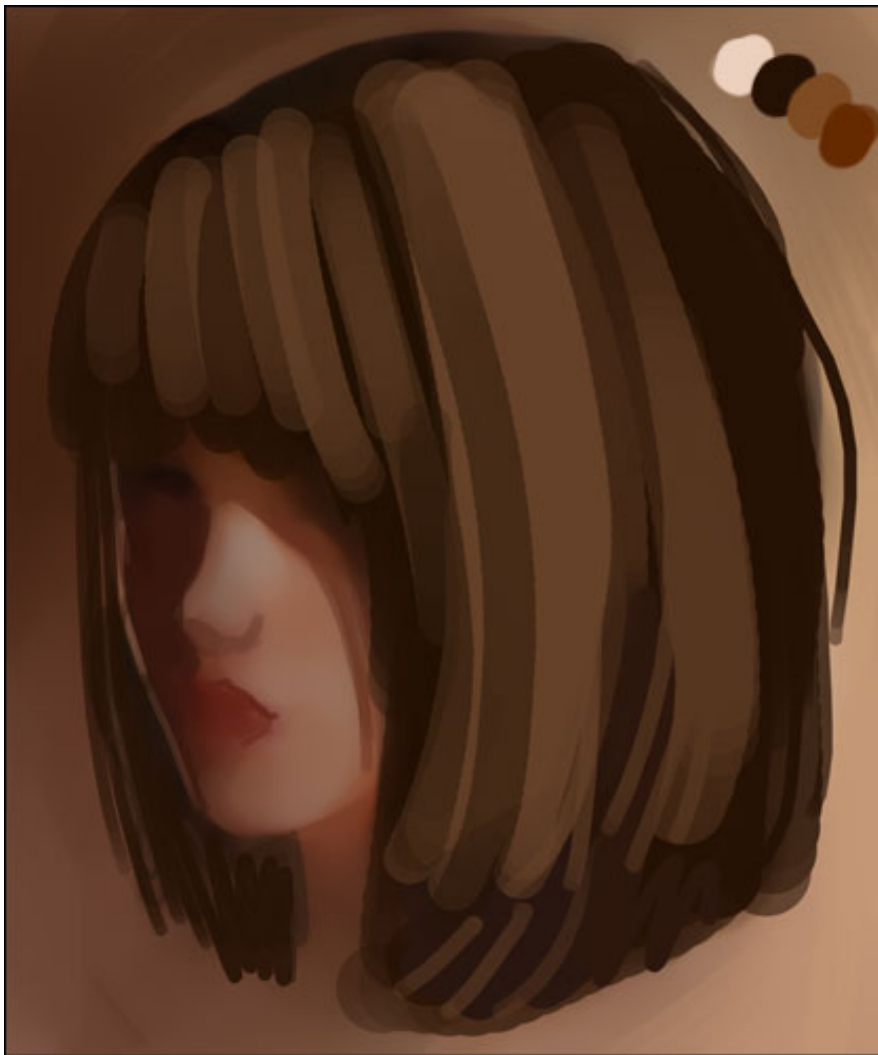
①

Instructions: The first thing you need to do is to decide on the colour of the hair. This hair will be brownish, but with a wee touch of gold in it. The darkest colour I'll pick for it is nearly black. This is usually true of ALL hair colours - even the lighter blondes where you'll end up painting over a lot of the dark tone, but it's still better to have it there underneath than to go too light. Once the colours are picked (make it one highlighter, two midtones and one shadow), just block

in the shape of the hair.

Important: WORK ON A LARGE CANVAS. I can't possibly stress this enough - if you're going to do really nice hair, work big. If you're putting it into a full-body image and you don't think you can work big enough... eep, wrong: work big and then shrink it down to fit into the rest of the picture.

Common mistakes: Starting out with a bright colour and then spending the rest of the time trying to darken it down with shadows. I can't stress enough how much it helps to do it the other way around. With skintones, it's best to start with a midtone, but with hair -- it's always helpful to begin dark. And the biggest mistake of all: not realising that hair really needs a level of detailing that 500x500 pixels won't give you. If you want this level of detail (not necessary, really, but if you do) work much bigger than that.

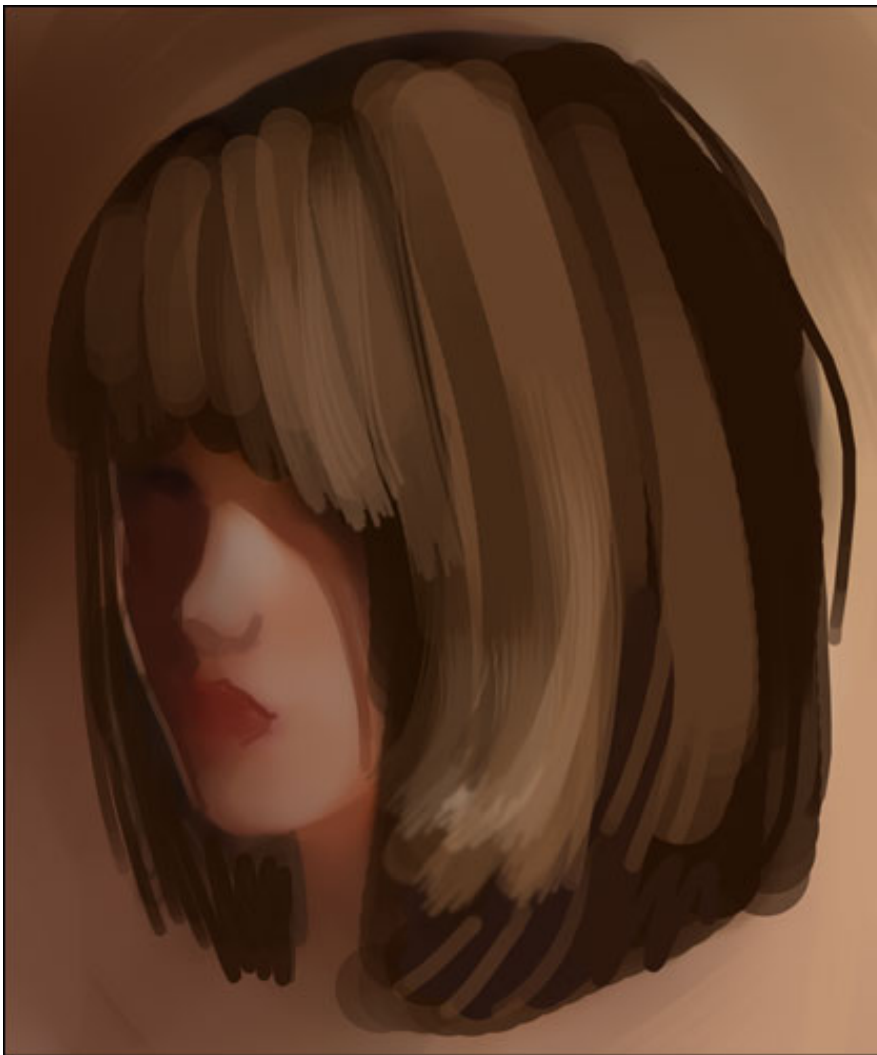


!! Nice trick here is to set your brush's opacity to colour on top of the regular opacity. Use a slightly more saturated background than the actual colour of the background hair. This way you can get some fun colour variations as well as nice freak accidents that give pretty sweet effects.

②

Instructions: What's done next is the blocking in on the large locks of hair. Just smoothly sketch in where you figure the strands will fall. The trick is to think of the hair not as a lot of individual strands at this point, but of it as thick sections that you will later work to detail down into individual strands in places. Pick colours at your leisure - starting out with the two midtones that you chose. No highlighting at this point.

Common mistakes: A lot of people start painting hair by painting the strands. Some won't even block it in, initially, but start frantically sketching in strand after strand on top of each other. The end result of this will often look like a clump of straw pulled together. Hair naturally separates into locks. It's really, really hard getting this result if you're not painting it in sections - you'll have to somehow, miraculously, paint every individual strand and somehow get them to flow in the right directions.



spackled brush set to opacity with spacing
5%



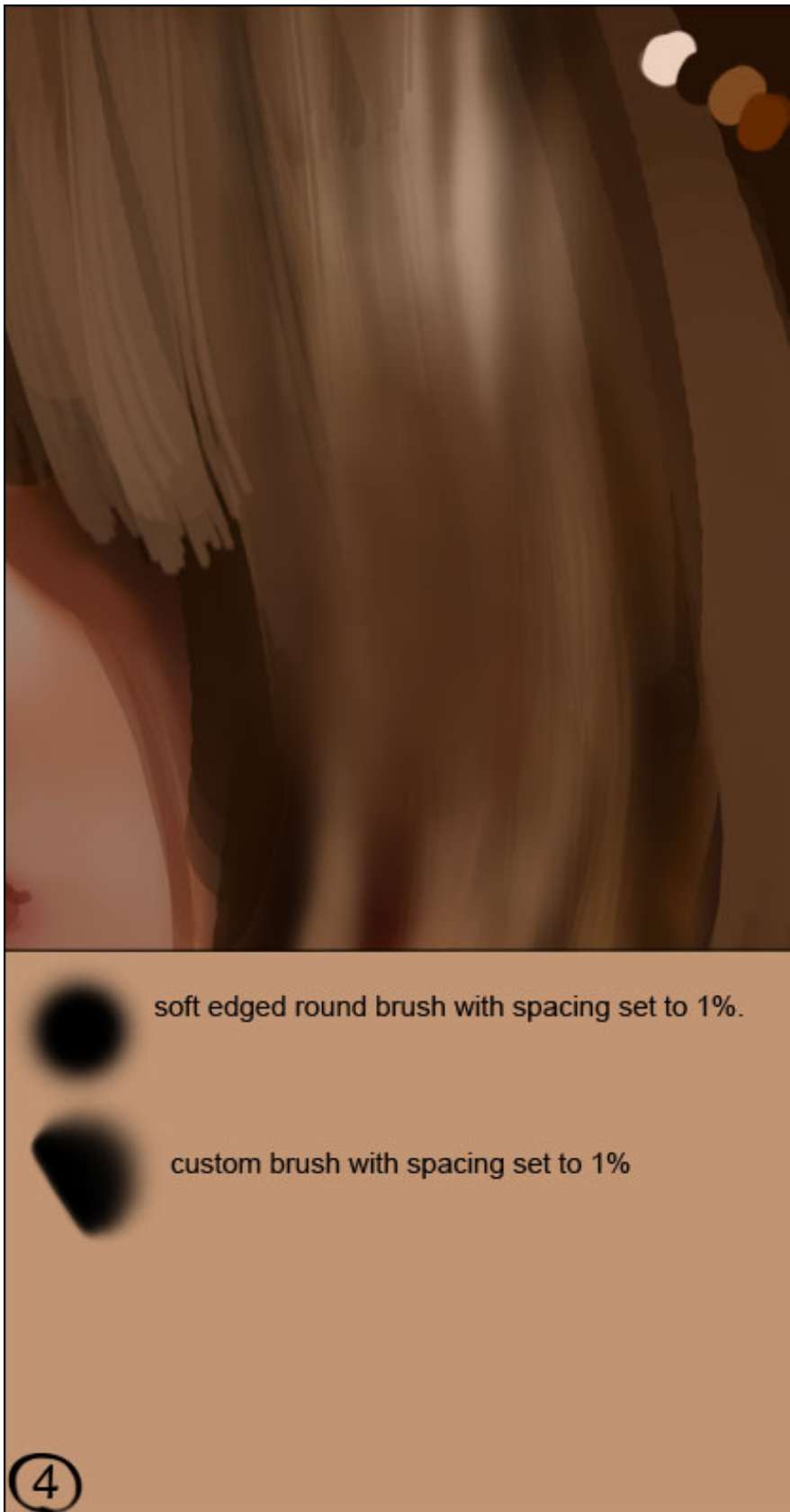
Always have at least four spackled brushes
in your brush list. They add great variance and
they're a nice alternative to the regular round
brushes.

③

Instructions: Pick a spackled brush now and try the clumps of hair out. What I mean by that is that you sketchily paint over the hard edges of the individual locks and just get a feel for how the locks will end, if they'll curl up a little and just the general 'feel' and 'flow' of the hair. Since there aren't, like I mentioned earlier, any static features of a hair it is so easily affected by the environment around. It's pretty good if you get the flow of it down right at this point.. From hereon, there will be detailing, and detailing, and detailing and if you realise later that you

messed it up here, you will be more than a bit peeved. So just get a feel for it. See if it falls all right considering the wind, the general look and check if you're actually happy with the hairstyle.

Common mistakes: Not considering the wind - a skirt blowing in one direction, for instance, and the hair in the other. Not considering the weight of the hair (short hair often being fluffier, long hair heavier) or the effect that items might have on it (tiara weighing it down, ribbon pulling it up).

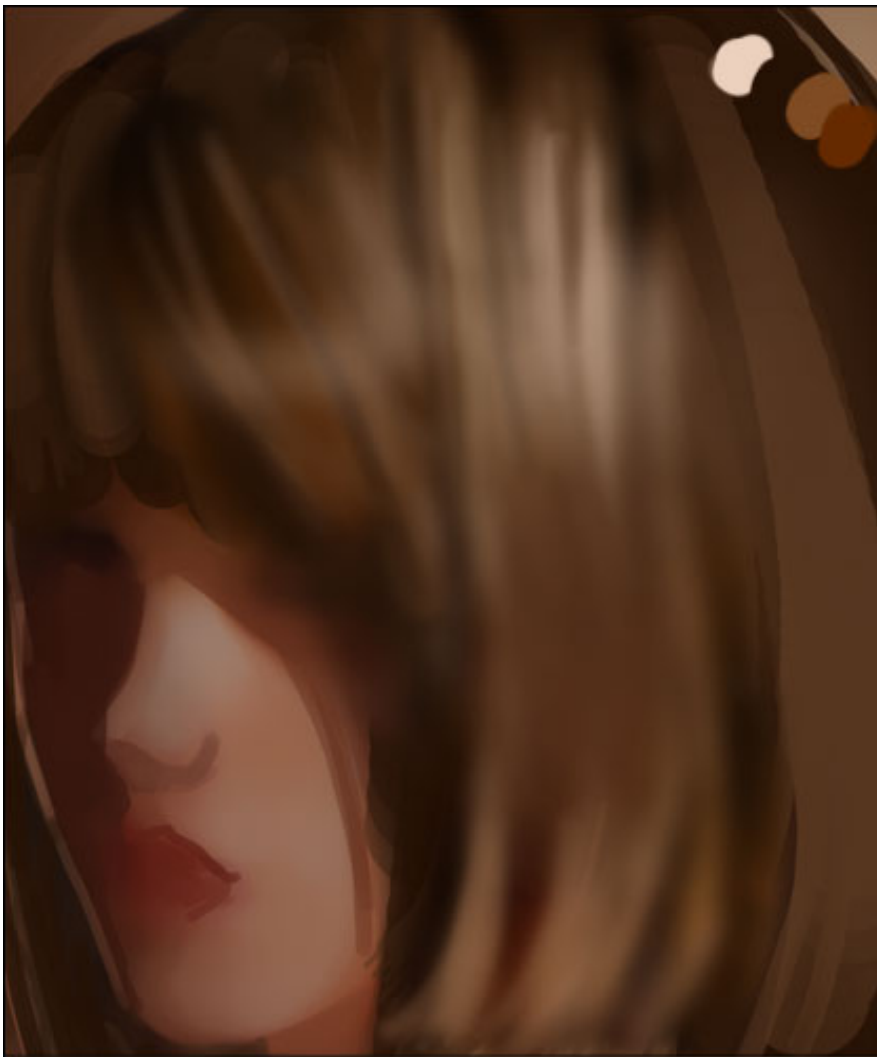


Instructions: This is where the fun starts. You can now begin thinking about the fall of the light, the effects of colours around the hair (I'm making this easy for myself, the background is pretty much the same tone as the hair, but if it hadn't been I would have had to consider it here) but most of all just smoothing out the hard blocks of hair and giving it some smooth nice flow. I've got a perfect brush for this. When I just want to quickly smooth the hair out, I'll use a regular round brush with soft edges, but if I want to give the locks of hair semi-sharp edges in places... I

can be clever and use a brush that has one side that's sharp and one that's soft (as seen in picture). Try making one, it's awesome.

Try starting to break up the blocks - into smaller sections while still keeping the bigger ones. Not as easy as it sounds.

Common Mistakes: Just painting over the blocks of hair. Big no-no. We still need the blocks, it's just that we're adding some more.

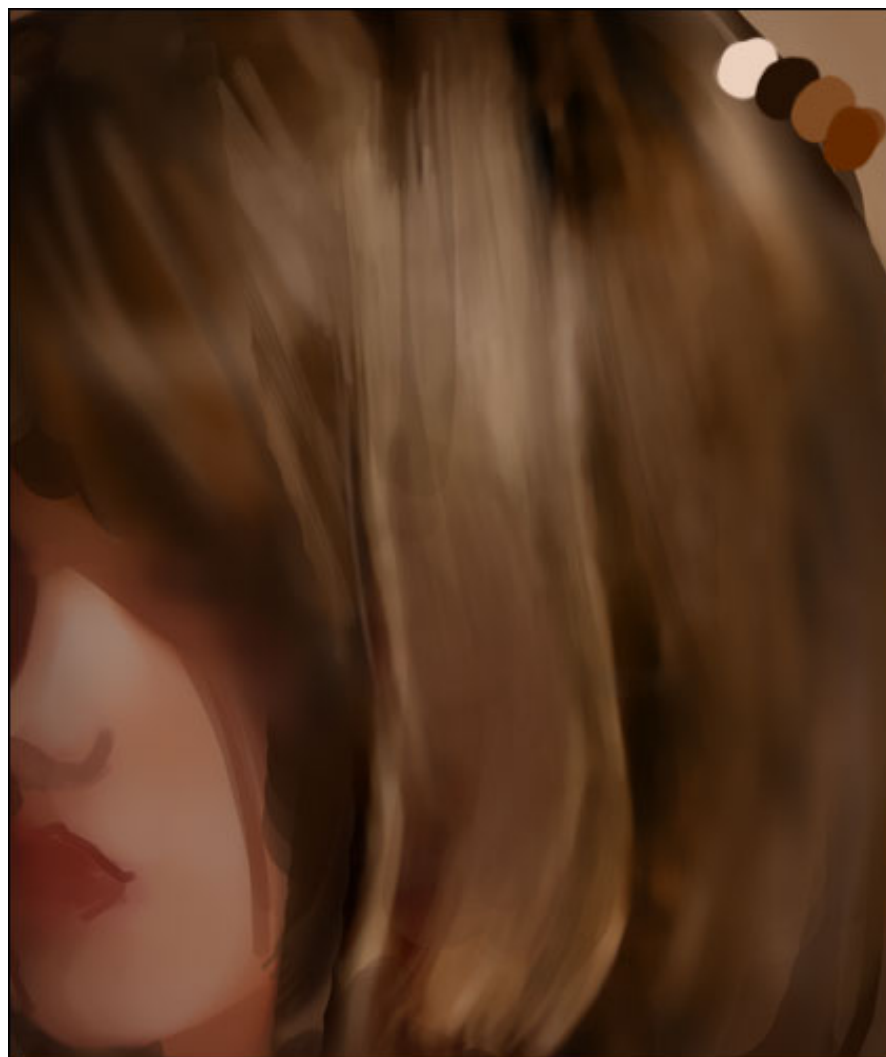


!! People (including me) will tell you to watch out for the soft edged brushes. They're boring and lifeless... but the truth of it is - they're excellent to use if you intend to add texture and life on top of them and you're just looking for a quick way to lay gradients down.

⑤

Instructions: Continue to both soften the hair AND break the blocks of hair up. Since we have those individual sections flowing in different directions, it will already start looking like 'hair' at this point. Continually use only soft-edged brushes and don't care if the result looks too-smooth or smudgey at this point. It won't later. Don't forget that the different locks of hair will have impact on each other. Where they meet, they might either shadow one another or merge together.

Common mistakes: Starting to draw in individual strands already. I know it's a bitch to wait for so long - the detailing is the fun part - but when it comes to hair, there's really no rushing ahead.



custom brush with spacing set to 15%.



custom brush with spacing set to 5%.

! using a custom brush with slightly rugged edges instead of the regular sharp or soft is a pretty easy way to add some discreet texture and life to your strokes.

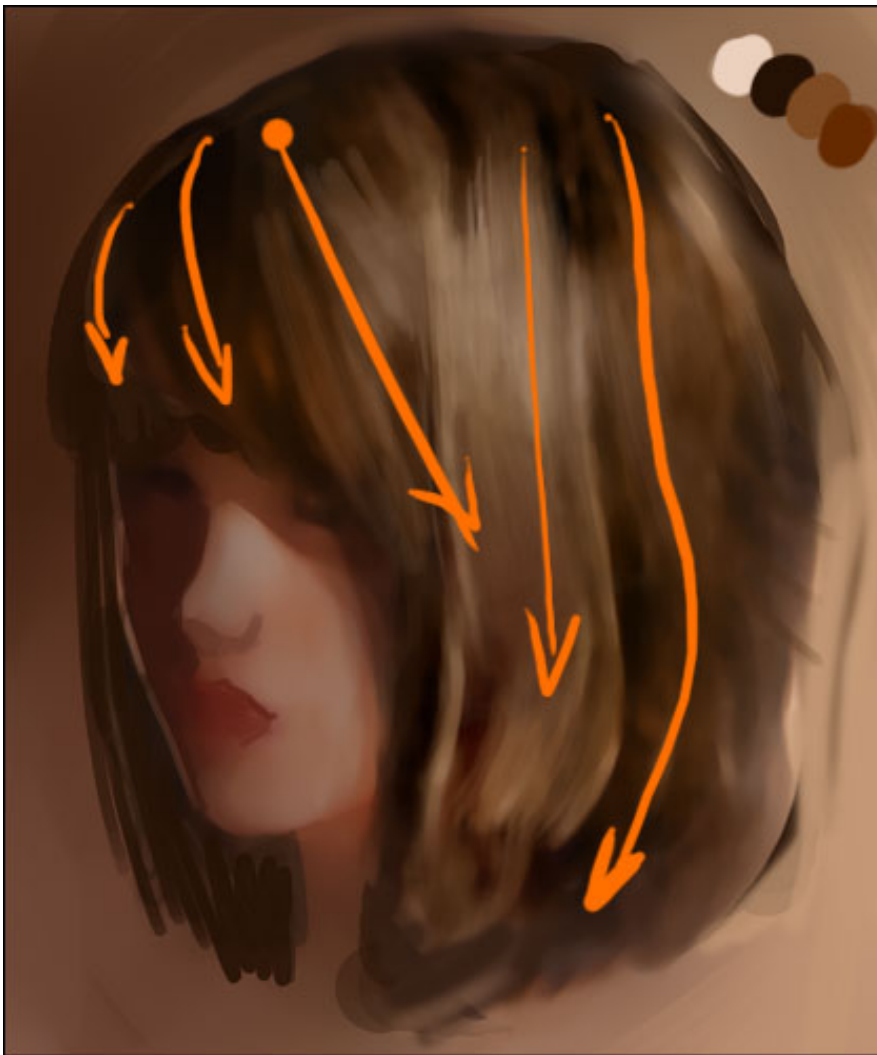
⑥

Instructions: Now. Here's the real trick. Even though we'll detail the entire hair, there's no need to super-detail all of it. Pick out one lock that will receive the most attention. Everything you do

to the entire hair, you'll do twice as much to this strand. The texture and detail level of this one lock will have major impact on the rest of the picture even without everything else being quite so detailed. Just trust me on this one.

I'll pick the lock falling down along the side of her head. Once you've got a lock singled out, use a spackled brush and veeeery light pressure to softly follow the flow of the lock down to where it ends. Repeat over and over again in short strokes -- and keep your finger on the colour picker (the alt key while you're using the brush) to use the right colour in the right place. This way, you will bring out the shape of the lock while keeping the separated, thinner sections. The spackled brush will help to, even at this early stage, add some nice texture.

Common mistakes: Unnatural fall. Take some time to study how hair actually falls. How the curls or locks wrap themselves and how they affect one another. Unless the hair is heavily styled with lots of hairspray and fussing, there are some things it generally won't do.



Stopping to consider the shapes, now and then, is an excellent way to keep from making small mistakes that end up being awfully big before you discover them. Make a habit of flipping your canvas horizontally every hour. It will give you a fresh view of the picture.

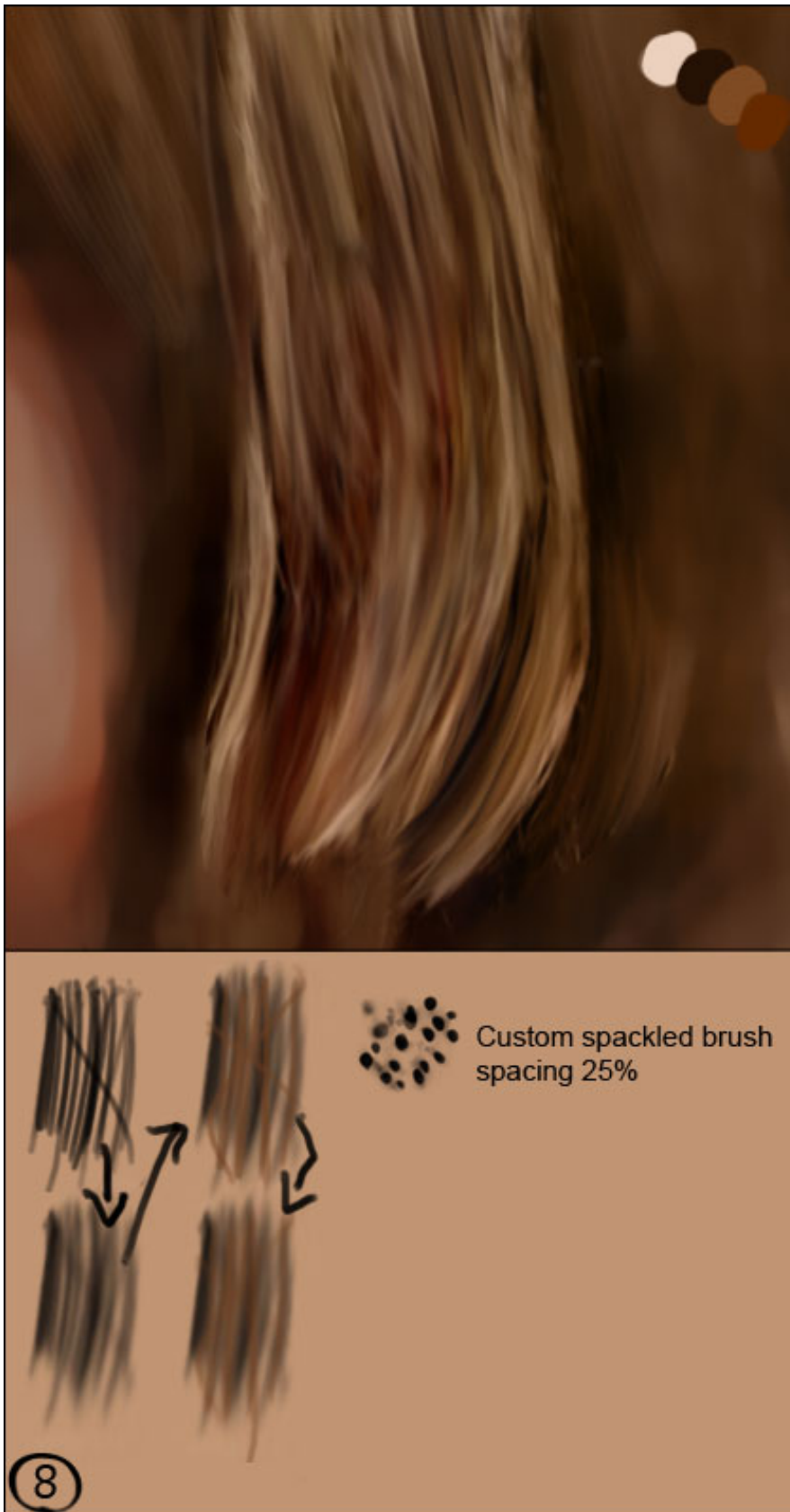
⑦

Instructions: Stop a moment and take a look at what you've done so far. This is as good a point as any to really consider the curves of the hair because we're about to go into detailing, and it's hell and some more trying to change it much after that. A successful looking hair will have nice, clean, natural lines to it. Even wildly curly hair looks better if the locks flow and work well together, than if it looks like they're just lumped together randomly. Do a separate layer and follow the locks of hair with some brightly painted arrows. Are they all pointing in different

directions? If they are, chances are you might want to adjust them unless you're painting hair in motion or some pretty unnatural looking hair.

If it's looking okay, repeat step 6 over the rest of the head.

Common mistakes: Getting carried away with how fun it is to paint flowing hair. Yes, big bouncy hair is nice, but the eighties are over and gone (hopefully buried) and it's better to keep this in perspective, unless something over-the-top is what you're aiming for. Subtle is often far prettier than overdone.

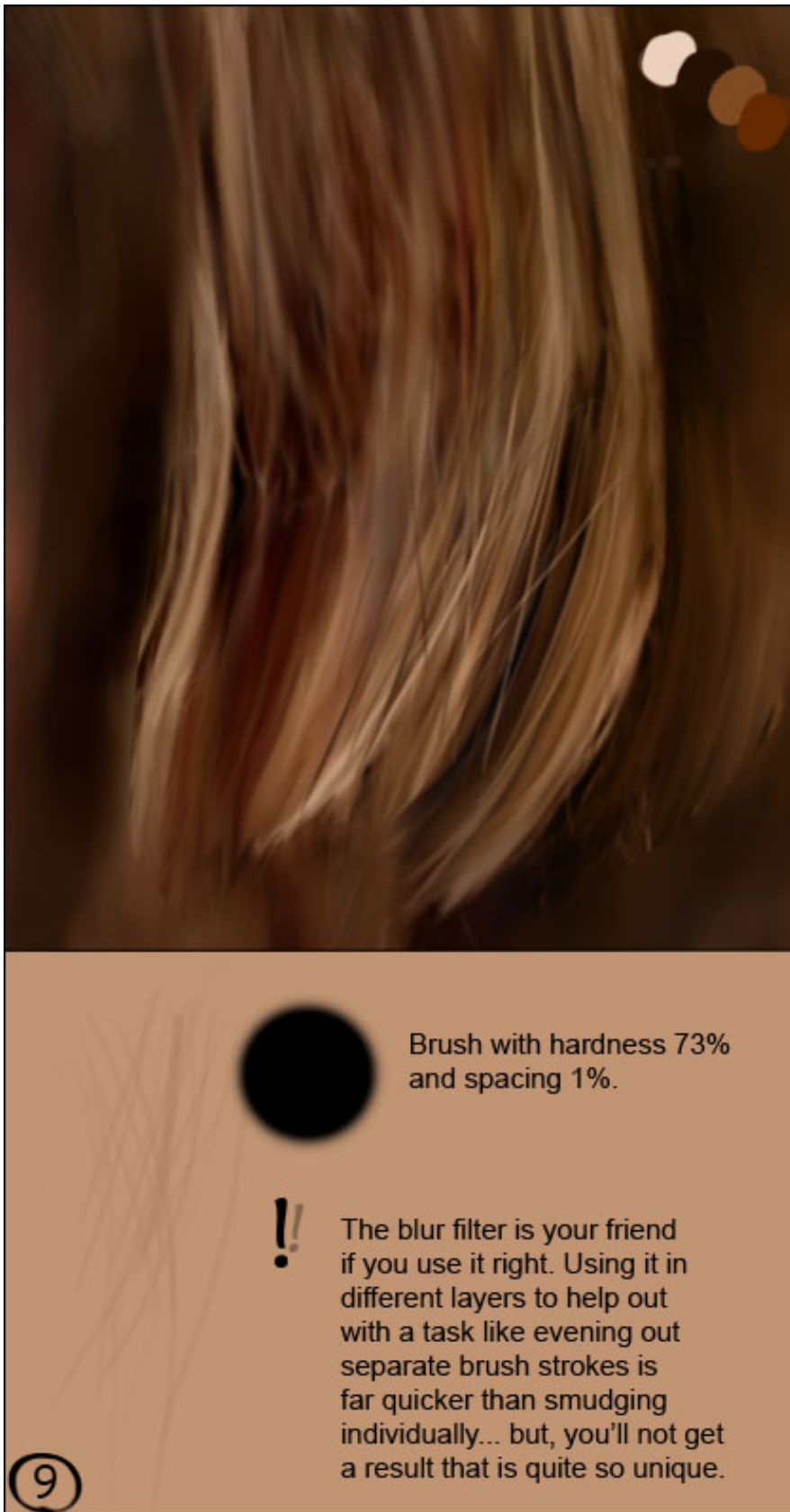


Instructions: We're finally getting to the details. There's not really any 'trick' right here. What you do is make a new layer. You pick a normal, sharp edged round brush and you paint strands following the general shape of the locks you have. You use a dark colour to begin with. You pause, you smudge it a little with a spackled brush - still in the hair's direction... and then you paint new strands on top of it in a slightly lighter colour... pause, smudge... repeat. Keep picking colours from the hair underneath and make sure not to remove the general shapes you've

already created - and since you're keeping all of this on a separate layer... feel free to erase away in places to bring forth the nice texturing you've already done underneath.

Because you've prepared and textured the hair so nicely already, there is no need to overdo this and you don't have to be so careful all over the place. The hair was already looking pretty nice before you got to this point.

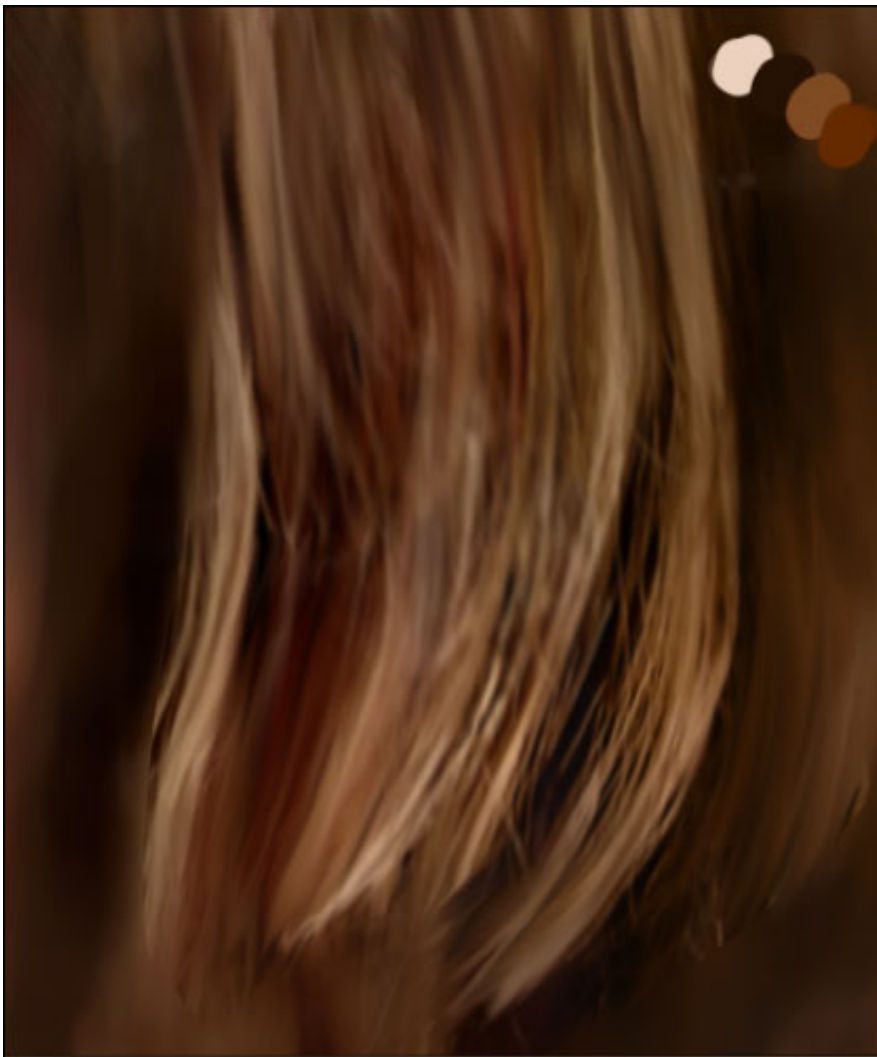
Common mistakes: Completely abandoning the shapes you've already set down. At this point, it's SO easy to fall back on the old 'every hair for itself' principle. These might be individual strands, but they SHOULD be moving in group. They should be together. Flowing in unison. One crossing over the other now and then and breaking each other up.



Instructions: Texture, texture, texture. Once the flow is done, it's all about the texture. A really, really nice way to accomplish that wild puzzle of strands that makes up a hair is to paint strand after strand after strand on top of each other, then on top of those on a new layer, strand after strand. Do up to five different layers with different colours, set them to different opacity, blur the strands individually either with smudge or with the blur tool and just keep at it.

Varying between a slightly bigger brush and a really small one, you'll trick the eye into seeing small strands even where there aren't any. Remember that one lock that will have super-details? Focus on that one.

Common mistakes: Thinking that every individual strand has to be painted all over the head. When I say a lot of details are nice, I don't really mean that level of detail.



!! One of the best tools for adding life to a texture that you ever will find would be layer effects. Copy a part of your painting to a new layer, scribble a little wildly over it, and set to 'soft light' or 'multiply'. Change the opacity and erase bits and pieces for a better result.

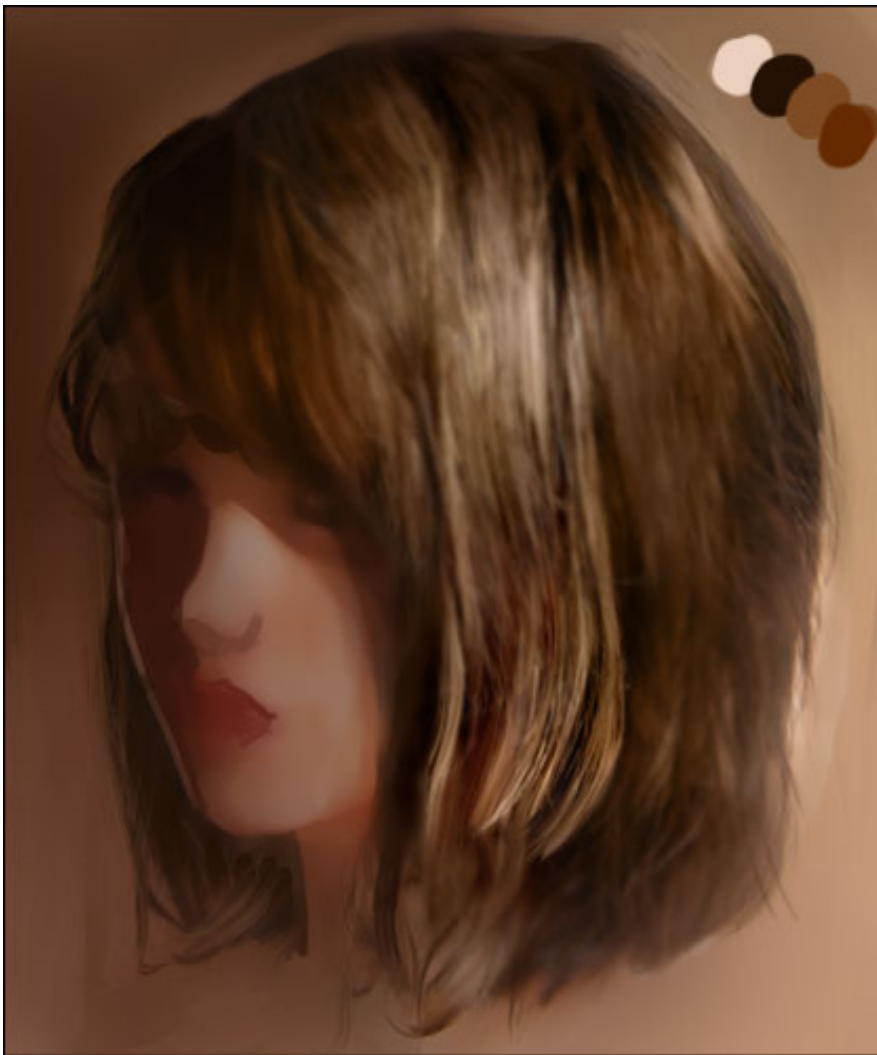
10

Instructions: All right. Flatten. Just flatten all the layers if you haven't already. Chances are you'll have way, way, way too many layers at this point. Then, on top of your neat, nice one-layered image, add a new layer and set it to soft light.

Now you're going to do something that likely looks weird, but it really adds to the effect when viewed from a slight distance. Pick a brush, almost any brush, and make it decently small.

Then, pick a colour from the canvas - set it as your background colour and then pick another colour as foreground. Go into brush settings and set the pen pressure to colour, and... scribble. Just scribble over the hair, shifting colours as you go, using a low opacity on the layer, and adding texture and depth to the hair. If you use dark colours, you'll also add a nice amount of contrast that will help the realism along a fair deal.

Common Mistakes: Just skipping the random texturing. It really helps to add life to hair even if it seems like pure madness, so don't leave it out.



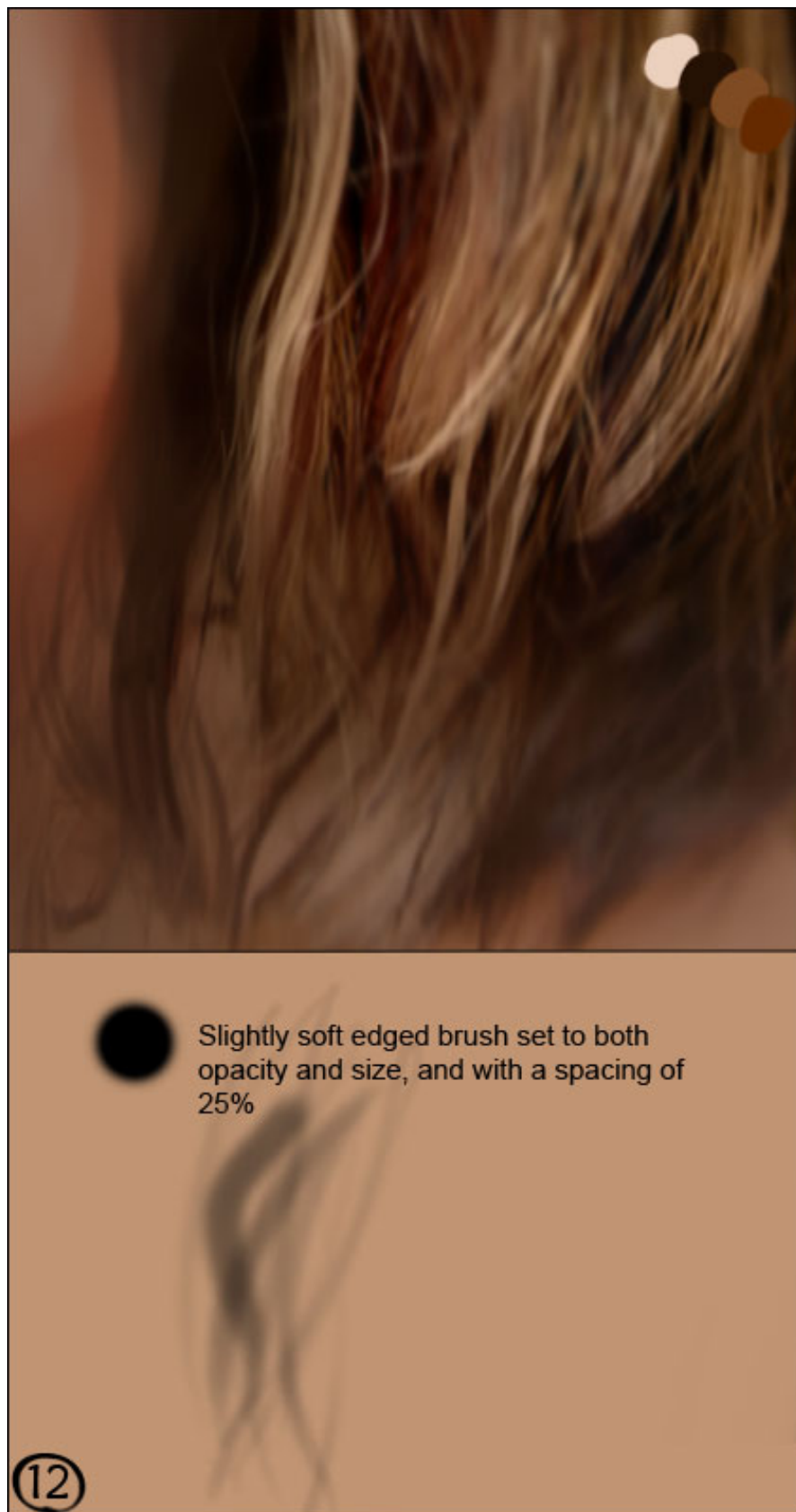
If something doesn't feel quite right, don't be afraid to adjust it even if you're reaching the final stages of a painting. That's the nice thing with doing this digitally. Even if it's a bother to change things at this stage, it's not impossible and it's better to do it now than never.

11

Instructions: Zooming out, you'll see that the hair looks really nice already. If you don't care to do that much more, you can stop here.

What I generally do at this point, though, is to fix the hairstyle. I've usually painted using the first clumsy blocked in shape and now that I can see the flow of the hair better, I'll go in and just fix the edges up. I'll push it in in one place and out in another, perhaps, so that the shape of it

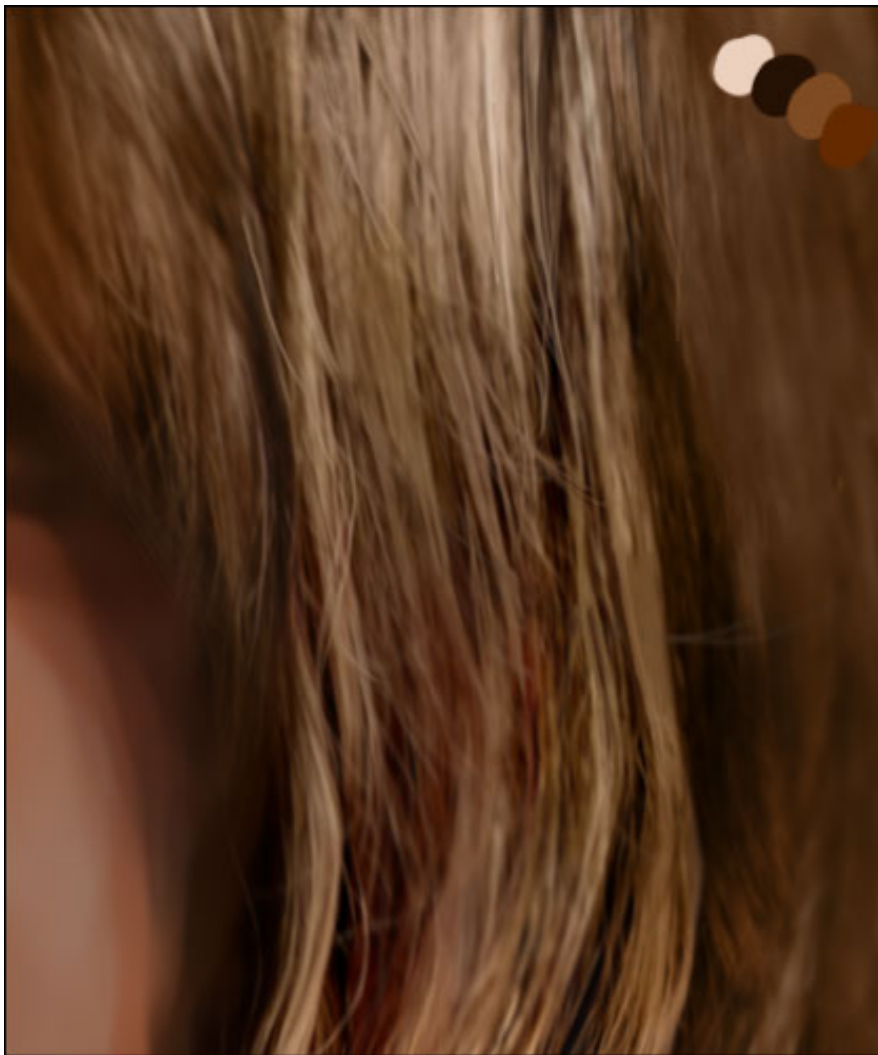
follows the locks I've painted. Using the trick of painting individual strands of hair on a separate layer and very lightly blurring or smudging them, follow the outline of the hair and add some 'frizz' to it. It still looks smooth and sleek but there's more life to it, now.



Instructions: For added effect, go to the edges of the hair and use a soft, nice brush to feather

the ends of the locks. There's really no overdoing this unless you totally go mad with it, and if you use a nice, dark colour - some of it will look like nice shadows, and some of it will look like shadowed strands. If the hair is shoulder-long, as it is here, it really breaks up monotony of skin... and if the hair has bangs, please do something similar with the bangs but not quite as feathery - or the hair ends up having a slightly frazzled look.

Common mistakes: Just leaving the hair blocky. Generally, the edges have already been softened up by now, but even so, give it a once-over just for safety's sak



Some sections are helped by very, very thin sketched lines of various opacity. Even though these won't be seen from afar, they will still help the overall impression.



Another trick for single strands of hair is to duplicate the layer and use the median filter on it, nudge it a little and then erase some of that, and some of the first layer before flattening.

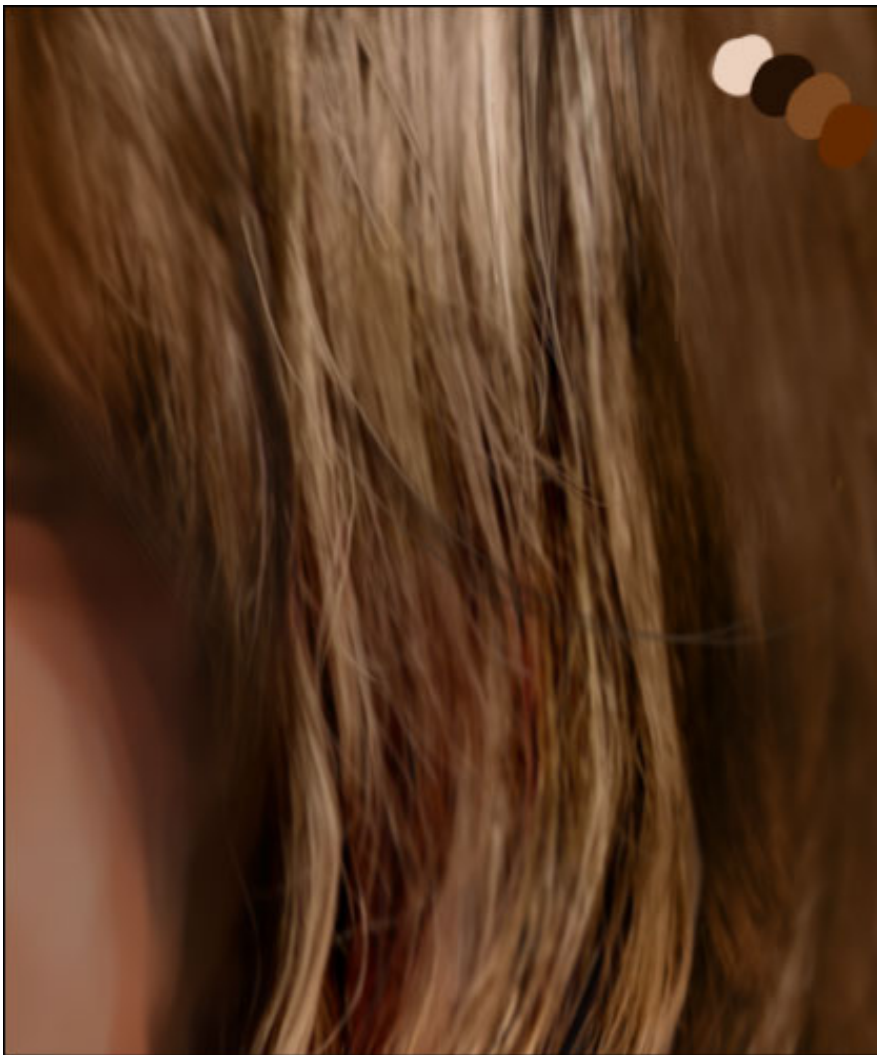
13

Instructions: I said something about super-detailing, didn't I? This effect is extremely difficult to get if you haven't followed the other steps, and if you haven't got a pretty good idea of how hair 'works'. If you're having a rough time of it, please find some photos to study - it will really help... or just set a mirror up next to the computer (hard if you've got short hair, like I do, but even short hair is helpful).

The trick is to use a really small brush and first follow the flow of the hair with light pressure, and then swerve out from it and across the other strands. This is what really makes a difference, and also what takes painstakingly much time. It's not necessary, I give you that, but the end result is really nice. These separate strands should always be made on layers of their own and carefully treated before they're flattened down. The big upside of doing the strands on individual layers is that you can lock the layer and they paint and shade the individual strands to fit into their surrounding environment. Treat them the way you did those large sections of hair, with shading according to how they fall and where the light is.

The other great bit about them being in separate layers is that you can erase, smudge, blur, and adjust your happy hearts out until they look just the way you want them to. This all sounds really serious, but it's not. It's just serious and difficult until you get the hang of how to do them, then they're pretty quick work.

Common mistakes: Making too many of these errant strands and ending up with static looking hair... making them too obvious or too starkly contrasting, which generally just looks dumb, or alternatively not adding a single wayward strand of hair into an entire hairstyle, and ending up with something akin to a brand new Barbie-doll style.



psst, when painting hair, copy the entire hair to a new layer when you're nearly done, flip it horizontally and set the layer to soft light. Lower the opacity considerably. For some reason, this little extra touch of texture can really do the trick. Don't forget to erase edges.

14

Instructions: Finally, and yes, we're at the last couple of steps now, add a few more 'obvious' strands that fall across entire sections of hair. If you skip the previous step because it's just too much into tiny details that you feel you don't need, at least don't skip this one. It really, really adds to the look of a hairstyle with a few of these playful locks.

The trick here is to make it seem as if they're actually escaping from a larger lock of hair and

just sort of floating out across the rest of the hair, perhaps tugged away by the wind. To add to the effect, a very faint shadow from the strand might fall across the rest of the hair, just making it more visible and also enhancing the appearance of it flying free.

Common mistakes: Unless it's windy or you're painting a wild-haired person, these 'errant strands' won't be that many, that obvious or that big. This is one of those discreet kind of touches that really makes a picture - but like all those kind of touches, it can also break something.



And now you're done, and I hope it was a little helpful :]

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