STAGE 1
The drawing begins with a straight-line block-in using a hard (2H) graphite pencil.

STAGE 2
I refine the block-in by segmenting the lines until more and more detail is developed. I rely on very little measuring. With this method I can solve the proportions by adjusting the tilts of the lines, until the proportions begin to snap into place.
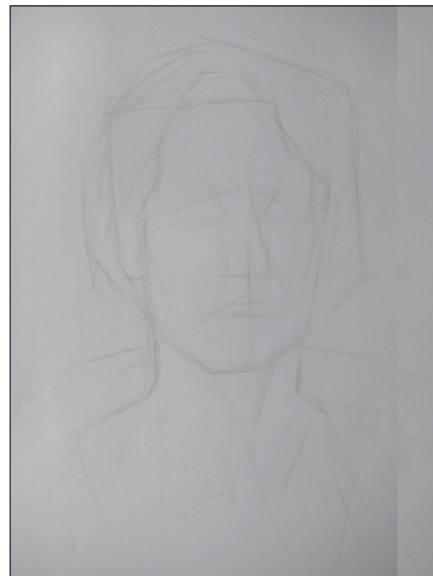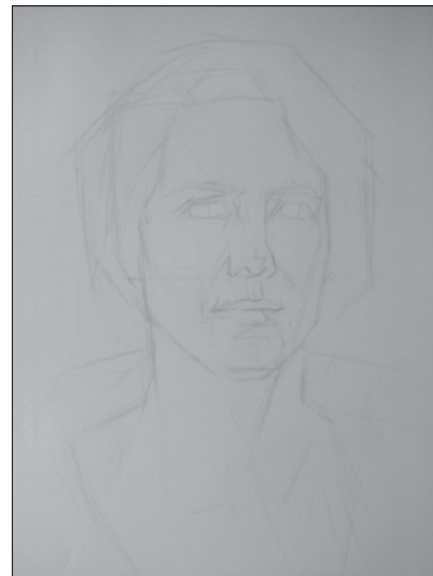
Self-Portrait in Progress
part one / Drawing by Sadie J. Valeri

I have been working on this self portrait for the last couple of months. It was an interesting challenge to take the same process I use for still-life and apply it to a self portrait. The painting is an homage to an 18th century German-born painter I recently discovered named Christian Seybold (1697-1768). I find his painting of a woman in a green veil particularly stunning. I was thrilled to see how he created extremely fine realist surface detail, supported by a structural understanding of the underlying form, and I tried to emulate this. I also took inspiration from the scale and cropping of the portrait, the fur collar, and the paintbrush tucked behind one ear.
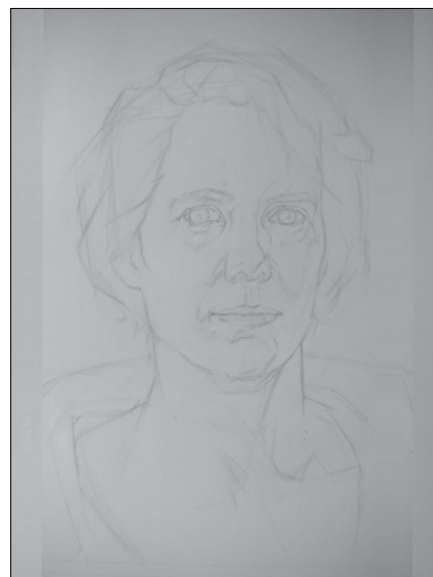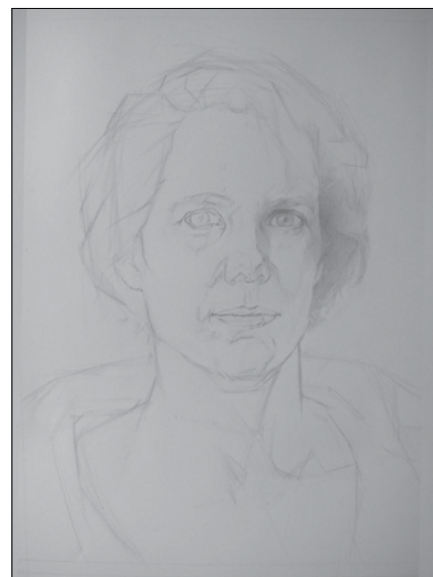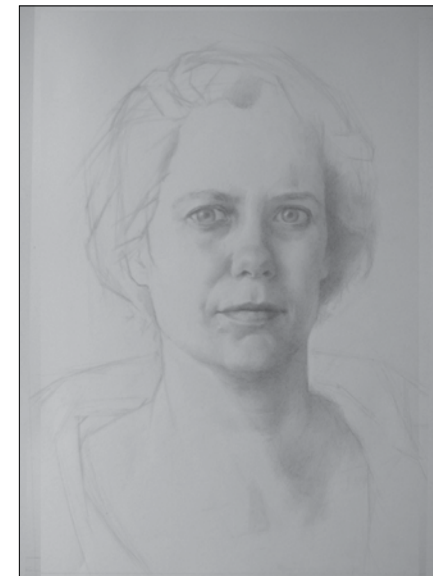

STAGE 3
When the major elements are in place and the proportions seem to be working, I begin to block in the shadow shapes. This is when the planes of the structure begin to take shape, and a likeness begins to emerge. Sometimes my students ask me at what point I begin to "round off" my straight lines. The answer is I never "round off," I just keep segmenting the lines until they begin to emulate curves. This method helps me identify accurate high points to make very precise contours.
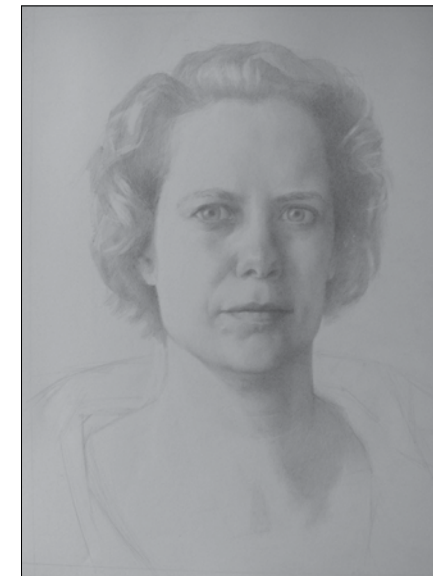

STAGE 4
When I have gone as far as I can with the contour drawing, I begin shading to model the forms. I start in the shadows and work up to the lights. When I do a preparatory drawing for a still life I only draw a contour, I usually don't do any modeling. But for this self portrait, I knew I would only be able to tell if I'd captured an accurate likeness if I developed a full-value drawing.
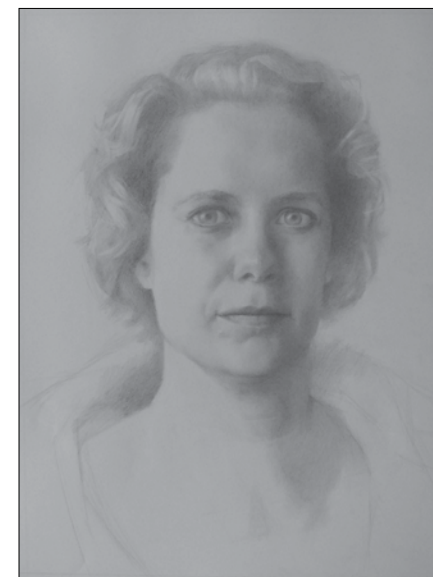

STAGE 5
Working piece by piece, I model each area of the face. I work only in continuous areas, without jumping around, so I can get a consistent value structure for the whole subject. The key to assessing accurate value is to judge a value by looking at the whole subject, not just compare two neighboring values.

STAGE 6
I developed the hair by using an eraser to sculpt out the light areas. The hair was the most complicated throughout the life of the painting and the drawing, because it changed so much session to session. I recorded the structure of the curls as much as possible in one day, and then tried to stick with the same pattern for the life of the project.

STAGE 7
At the previous stage I showed the drawing to several friends and to my husband, and asked for feedback as to likeness. Everyone told me I looked too "serious" and "mean." Apparently the expression I hold when I paint looks severe. So I made small changes to the mouth and eyebrows to relax the expression. As with all my paintings and drawings, I am working from life for every stage of the process, I never use photos.

STAGE 8
I had been apprehensive about rendering the fur, because I had never before tried to paint or draw such a complicated texture. It turned out to be very fun and easier than I'd expected, both in graphite and in paint. The hair was much, much more difficult.

Part two
In the next issue, Sadie will show the self-portrait steps in oil with the graphite drawing as a reference

about the artist

Sadie J. Valeri is a Classical Realist oil painter currently creating a series of still lifes of transparent and reflective objects in her San Francisco, California studio. Raised in Salem, Massachusetts, Sadie graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design with a BFA in Illustration in 1993. She has since studied with some of the most important realist artists working today, including Juliette Aristides, Michael Grimaldi, and Ted Seth Jacobs at Bay Area Classical Artist Atelier; Jacob Collins at the Hudson River Fellowship; and Écorché/Anatomy with Andrew Ameral. Sadie has taught graduate students at the Academy of Art University in San Francisco, and she now offers private workshops and classes at her San Francisco Mission District studio. To find out more visit: **www.sadievaleri.com**

Self-Portrait in Progress

part two / Painting by Sadie J. Valeri

GRAPHITE DRAWING USED AS A REFERENCE

In Part One in the last issue
Sadie showed us how she prepared
a graphite drawing reference for
this portrait

STEP 1

When my contour drawing is transferred to
my gessoed panel, I am finally ready to begin
painting. I start with an "open grisaille," which is
raw umber only, just using the white of the panel
for light areas. "Open" means some of the panel
is showing through. "Closed grisaille" is the next
stage, where the whole surface of the panel is
"closed" with a full value range of paint.

STEP 2

Using a mixture of white, raw umber, and ultramarine blue, I use my palette knife
to mix up 5 or six puddles of paint on my palette in a row, from darkest to lightest.
(I can get a near-black mixing raw umber with ultramarine blue. I never use black
paint.) Using my brush with the 6 puddles and also mixing intermediate values
between each step, I paint from the darkest shadows up into the lights, creating
small tiles or swatches of value, so I am making a clear decision about value for
every step from shadows up to the light. I never "blend" in any stage of the painting;
I mix every distinct step of value and color on my palette, and apply it like a mosaic.

STEP 3

I continue to refine the values and drawing of
the portrait. I paint a basic value base for the fur,
and I don't try to attempt fur texture at this stage.
At this point all the contours of my pencil drawing
have been painted over and are no longer visible,
so I keep my original drawing set up on an easel
within view, and I refer to that as much as to my
image in the mirror.

STEP 4

The final grisaille underpainting. At this point the
monochromatic underpainting is as developed
as the initial pencil drawing. Usually with my
still lifes I don't spend this long in this stage,
but I found that a portrait is much more subtle,
and difficult to find and keep accurate shapes
than with still life. I had to constantly adjust the
drawing as I worked out the values. I repeatedly
used a t-square to be sure my eyes, and the
corners of my mouth, stayed level.
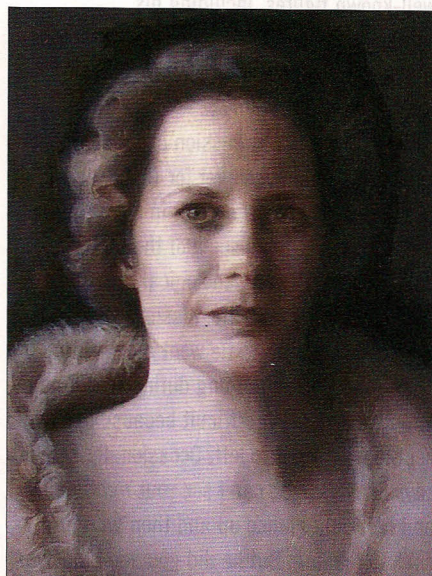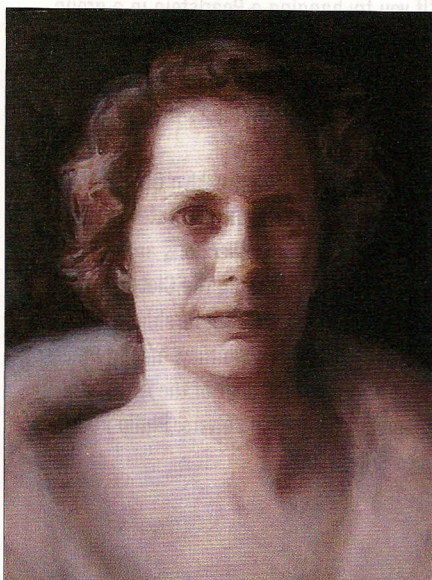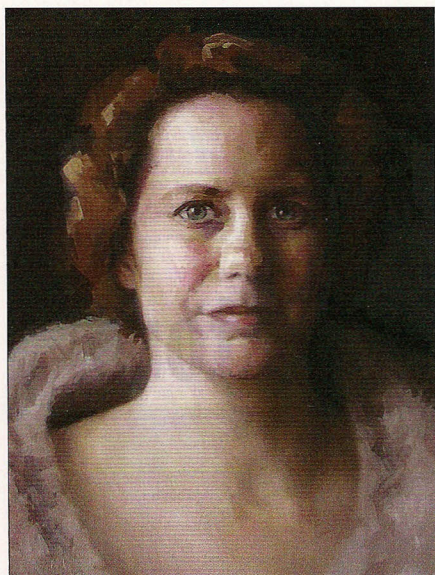
STEP 5

This stage may look like I have "gone backwards" in the sequence because the drawing has been so degraded. This is the first stage of color, painted directly over the monochrome underpainting. Here you can see clearly the large mosaic tiles I paint. This is essentially a "poster study" done directly on the painting, instead of a smaller study done off to the side.
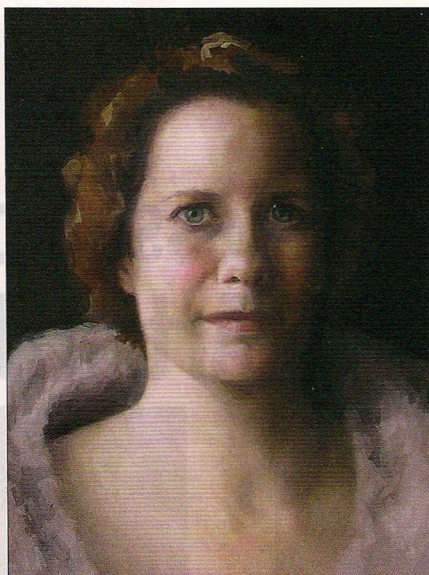
STEP 6

I continue to refine all my shapes. When I get to this level of detail, my students sometimes assume I start "blending." Just as I never "round off" a drawing, I never "blend" my mosaic tiles of color. I just make tiny tiles, and "knit" the edges together. Starting in the shadows and working up to the lights, I identify the hue (color name), value (lightness), and chroma (intensity or saturation) for each plane of form. I mix that H.V.C. on my palette, and apply it with one or two distinct strokes before going back to my palette to mix the next step. I never "mush" it into the neighboring color. In this way I can infuse the halftones with the most saturated, chromatic color. In the high-value lights, color is desaturated. In the low-value shadows, color is desaturated.

STEP 7

I continue to refine the shapes and colors of the form. For each session I work in one area for the day, and try to refine that area as much as possible in one pass. The next day I go to another area. When I have made a pass over every area, I start again. Some areas of my paintings have up to 7 or so layers of paint. I work opaquely, covering the previous layer to refine it. At the very end I use more glazing, essentially just more medium and less paint, as I refine the hue, values and chroma with very slight adjustments.

STEP 8

The final painting. The painting is inspired by the highly finished paintings of an 18th century German painter I recently discovered, named Christian Seybold. Seybold also wears a fur collar in his self portrait, and as a last-minute decision, I decided to also emulate the paintbrush he has tucked behind his ear.

I am offering a 10-day Drawing and Painting workshop in August at my San Francisco studio, see my website for details
www.sadievaleri.com