

ANNA ROSE BAIN

Strength and Stormclouds

Recently, my passion for painting the figure has become an exploration of unconventional poses, color harmonies and compositions. Whenever I go somewhere that is part of everyday life, such as a park, a restaurant or the gym, I begin to muse about what those ordinary places would look like if they were the setting for an interesting and carefully designed painting.

Such was the case last summer when I started working out at a local CrossFit gym. There, I had the pleasure of getting to know some extraordinary people, including Jeremy, one of my coaches and the subject of this article's demonstration piece. In this painting I tried to unite a sense of classical timelessness with a contemporary subject. *Strength and Stormclouds* depicts a modern man but is reminiscent of the Norse god Thor, who wields a hammer and is associated with strength, storms and oak trees. While preparing to work with this particular model, I was greatly inspired by the drawings and sculptures of Michelangelo. The Renaissance master would have loved CrossFit athletes!

STAGE 1: I like to experiment with all kinds

of painting surfaces, and while I do have my favorites (lead-primed linen is at the top of the list), I decided to use an Ampersand Claybord panel for this project. To give the surface some texture and variation, I applied a thin coat of Holbein Foundation Green with a putty knife and soft brush, allowing it several weeks to dry before starting the painting (you can see some of that texture in stage 1).

For large studio pieces like this one, I prefer to block in the main shapes and proportions with vine charcoal first. I reinforce my initial drawing with some thinned down earth tones, as the vine charcoal rubs off very easily. Once I'm happy with the placement, I begin painting, and I almost always start with the face. For me, the face will make or break the painting. I give myself permission to move on to the rest of the painting only when I'm satisfied with the expression and overall quality of the portrait. Jeremy's face was almost entirely finished in one painting session. As you can see, I started there and began to work outward. I try to paint the subject and the background all at once. In this case, I painted the sky tones up to his face to help create interesting edges while the work

was still wet (see detail). With smaller paintings, I can simply put them in the freezer if I'm unable to finish them in one sitting; that way they will still be wet and ready to work back into at my convenience. However, with this 24-by-36-inch panel, I didn't have that luxury. I had to carefully plan my painting sessions, making sure that whenever I stopped it was at a good place to resume the next time so that the painting would continue to look fresh and painterly.

The colors I used in this painting included: transparent oxide brown, alizarin crimson permanent, permanent mauve, yellow ochre pale, cadmium scarlet, radiant yellow, titanium white, radiant violet, king's blue, viridian, ultramarine blue, ivory black and Sevres blue.

STAGE 2: I continued working down and out from the face, focusing the most attention on the areas of warm light hitting the torso and arm. I wanted to give these illuminated forms the greatest level of finish, while surrounding elements could lead the eye in by way of subtle diagonals in brushstrokes and shapes. The left hand was painted directly in one sitting. I also began to block in the background using





a palette knife. I wasn't looking for anything pretty at this point; my goal was to build up texture and paint volume in the background, while intentionally allowing some areas of the toned panel to peek through.

STAGE 3: At this point I was confident with the painting's direction and it was just a matter of choosing what to put in and what to leave out. I tried to ask myself with each brushstroke, "Will this add to the painting or take away from it?"

I painted the other hand as directly as I painted the first, in one session, again painting the background mountain tones up to it to ensure painterly edges. I began to refine the tattoo and build up the background. You'll also see that I signed the painting, even though it wasn't completely finished yet. I did this because I like to paint my signature wet into wet.

STAGE 4: The painting is finished once I am happy with the overall balance of values, color

harmonies and edges. For example, I initially painted the left arm a little too "tightly," and it was starting to miss the feeling of movement that it had in Stage 3. I knocked back many of the edges to resolve this and return it to a balance between looking fluid and alive, while matching the finish of the rest of the painting. I also lightened and darkened the tattoo in various places to make sure it didn't project forward in space. I added more reds to the clouds to highlight the warm colors in the skin. 