



**COLORING DARK SKIN TONES**

# Introduction

To the best of my knowledge, this class is the most comprehensive guide to coloring dark skin tones available anywhere.

Oh sure, you can find dark skin tones tutorials in other places, but none give you a step by step process for creating realistic dark skin colors for your work.

The image for this class ends up being more or less "realistic" or photographic, but as always, by approach to realism is somewhat "painterly". That is, some visible brush work and a concerted effort not to over-blend.

The reason for this approach to realism is simple. It creates an image that is much more interesting to look at.

From a very short distance, say two or three feet, the image appears realistic, but close inspection reveals the hand of the artist. This is a double treat for your viewer since at first glance they believed they knew what they were looking at, but on closer inspection they get to enjoy the work that went into creating it.

So uncap those markers, sharpen up those pencils, and let's get started!

## Copic Colors Used For Coloring The Page

(Refer to the color conversion chart for non Copic alternatives)

T0	R02	E25
T2	R21	E31
T3	R27	E33
T4	R85	E34
T5		E35
T6	RV11	E37
T7	RV95	E49
T8	V15	Black 100

**NOTE:** Any range of gray will work for this class - you don't have to use toner grays if you don't have them, but the toner grays will work best.



# Chapter One:

## Coloring The Face



Note for colored pencil users - When coloring this image I'll be using multiple layers of the same colors, especially in the face. Be sure to keep your layers light in the beginning and gradually "build" your colors to their final forms.



For this class I'll be using a black line drawing. Normally when creating a more or less realistic work like this, a colored line drawing would be most appropriate, but since I'll be coloring in a dark background which minimizes the appearance of the black line, colored line work is unnecessary in this case.



I begin with E25 to model the far edges of the face, up and under the hairline, and then down and around the other side.

The shape of this color helps to indicate the bone structure underneath, so try to copy it fairly closely.



I indicate the shadows around the eyes, on the nose, and under the bottom lip, and also color the pupil. (E25)





Working my way from the outside contour towards the center of the face, I add a "color band" of E35 following the shape of the E25 color band.



I indicate the side plane of the nose and undersides of the eyebrows with E35.

When you watch the video you'll notice that I overlap the original E25 color band while coloring these color shapes of E35.



I add E34, still working towards the center of the face and overlapping the previous colors.



E34



Still using the E34, I indicate the sides of the nose and the roundness of the cheeks.

Again, you should try to mimic the shapes I'm making as closely as you can.



I add E33 to the forehead...





...nose and cheeks... (E33)



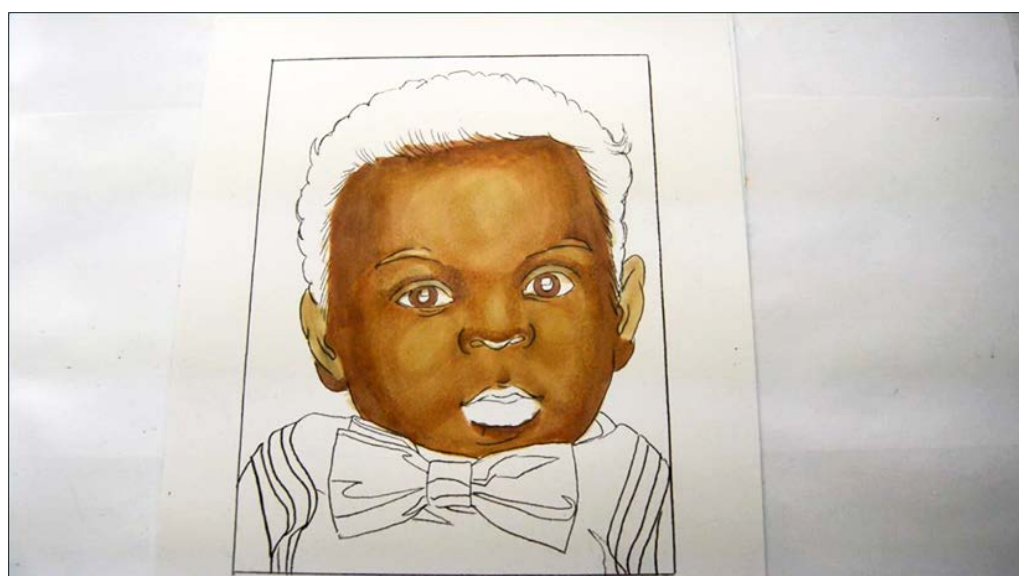
...and chin. (E33)



Your page should look something like this.



I add E31 for the lightest areas...



...and then "glaze" over all the previous colors with the E31. I also use this color to color in the tops of the ears.

Already we have a very nice sense of form :)



I add T2 to the "whites" of the eyes.





I color the pupil and indicate the outside rim of the iris with E49.



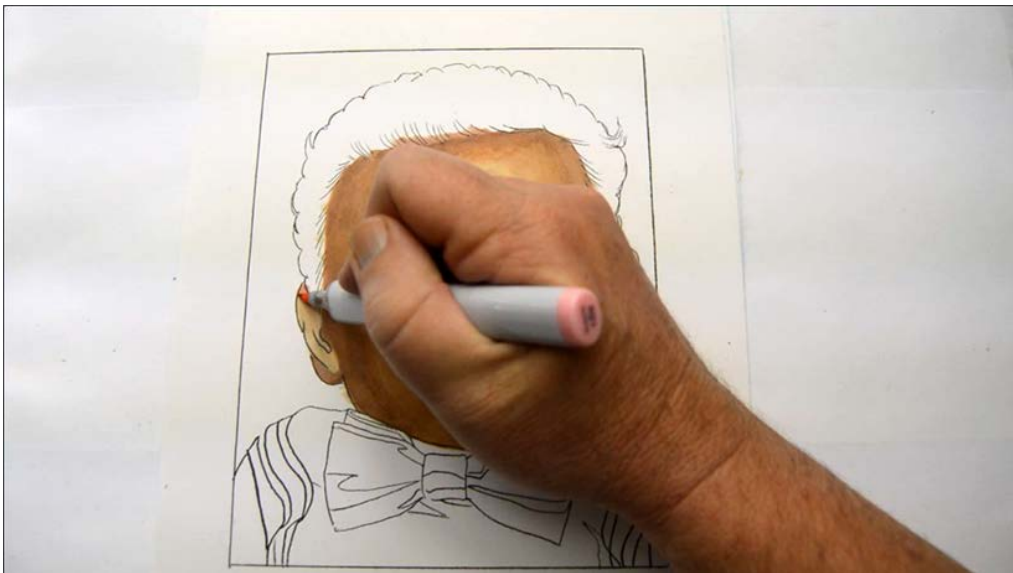
I also color in the nostrils and mouth. (E49)



I add R21 to the lips...



...tear ducts... (R21)



...tops of the ears... (R21)



...and along the bottom jaw  
(R21).

(Colored pencil users - skip  
this step.)





I then add "blush" to the nose.  
(R21)



Depending on how dark you want your skin tones, this could be nearly complete.

If I chose not to go darker I would simply soften up my color transitions and move on to coloring the hair. However, I want to go darker still.



I add T3 in a line under the eyelid to indicate the shadow the lid casts on the eye...



...then darken the eye sockets and eyebrows. (T3)



I indicate the side plane of the forehead with T3 (just on this side).



I accentuate the shadows around the wings of the nose and indicate the side plane of the nose, then touch in the shadows on the philtrum and under the bottom lip. (T3)





I add R02 to the nose...



...to the philtrum... (R02)



...and cheeks... (R02)



...under the eyebrows... (R02)



...and as a "blend color" along the edges where my darker and lighter colors meet. (R02)



R02





R02



After the R02.



I add V15 along the fold of the eyelids and to the inside corners of the eyes.



I also use this color to indicate the shadow on the tip of the nose... (V15)



...and on the philtrum and under the bottom lip. (V15)



I darken the underside of the jaw... (V15)





...and bottoms (lobes) of the ears. (V15)



I add R85 around the eyes...



...and to the bottom lip. (R85)

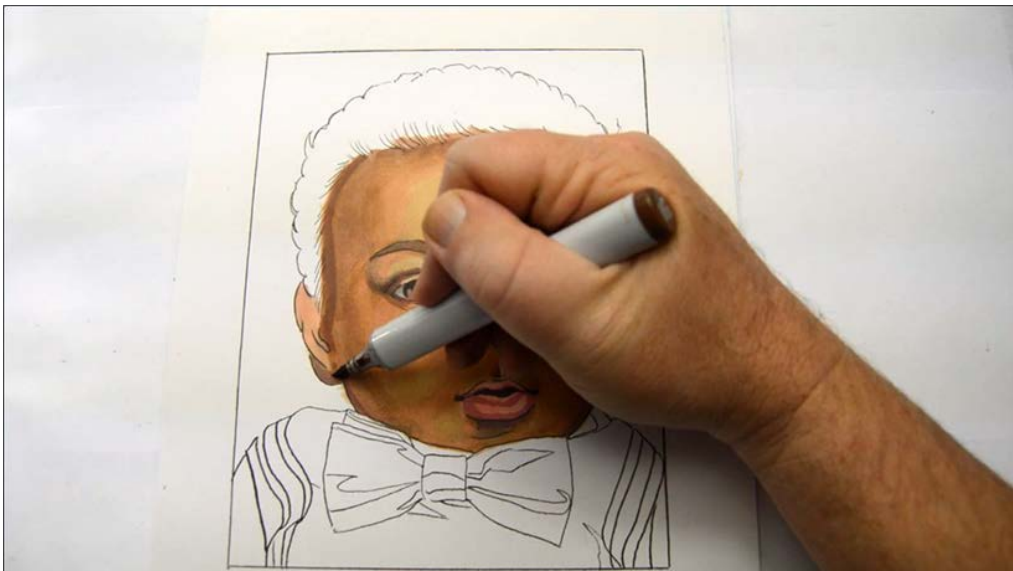


Again, the shapes are important!

At this stage I could, once again, soften my color transitions and call it more or less done... but I don't :)



I add E25 to the eye sockets and eyebrows...



...and again along the outside contour of the face... (E25)





...and finally, to the corners of the mouth and nose. (E25)



From this point I'll be using the same colors and the same "overlapping color band" technique to darken the over all skin color.



E35...



E35...



After the E35.



E34...





...and E33 as an over all blend layer to unify the forms and soften the color transitions.



E31...



...to blend the lighter areas into the darker colors.



Getting close :)



I add RV95 to the lips, both upper and lower...



...then soften the colors of the lips with R02.





I add R02 to the nose...



...cheeks... (R02)



...and between the eyes and eyebrows... (R02)



...to add a little "blush" to the face.



I add a layer of R21 to the lips...



...and underside of the nose.  
(R21)



I darken the lash line with E49.



### **SKIP THIS STEP!**

I add T5 under the bottom lip, which was a mistake that I later have to work to correct. It's just too dark for this spot! So everybody, skip this step!

(See, we all make mistakes)



I darken the eyebrows with T5...





...add accents to the corners of the mouth... (T5)



...and around the eyes...(T5)



...to finish off this stage of the work.

I'll be adding more colors and layers to the face in the "finishing" stages, but for now the face is complete.

## **Chapter Two:**

### **Coloring the Hair and Background**





With the face more or less complete, we now turn our attention to the hair and background.

I add a flat base color to the hair with T5.



I use E49 to make large overlapping "C" shaped hair strokes on the top of the head...



...and on the side of the head. (E49)





I use the same technique on the other side. (E49)



I add more "C" strokes with T6...



...and Black 100 to finish off the hair. Easy peasy :)



I soften the area where the hair meets the skin with E25, and then use the E25 to darken the opening of the ears.



Ready for background colors!

I add T5...



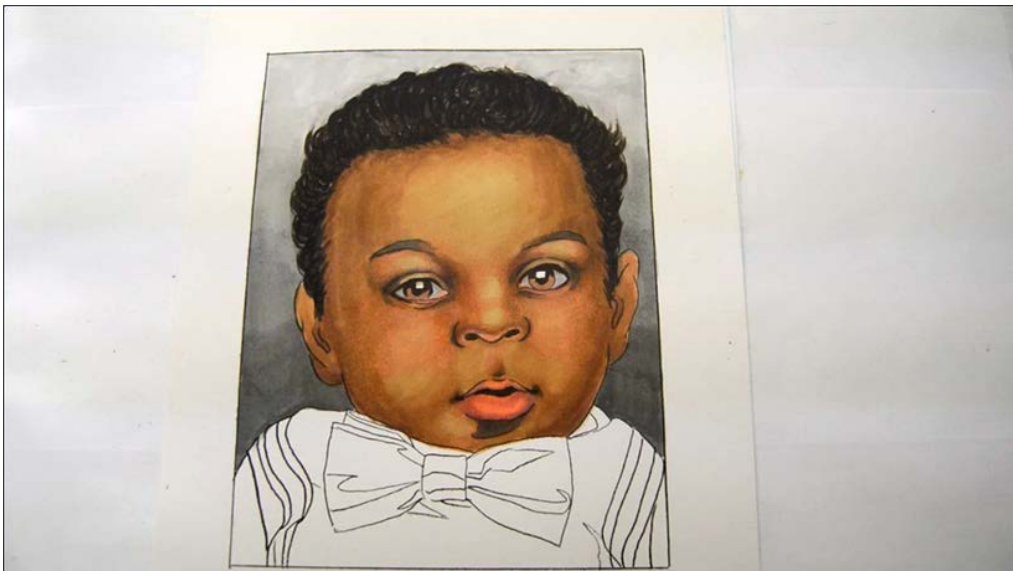
T4...



T3...



...and T2.



Feel free to blend these colors as smoothly as you like as they transition into one another, but be sure to leave some texture back there!



# Chapter Three:

## Coloring the Clothing





With the background complete, we can now turn our attention to the clothing.

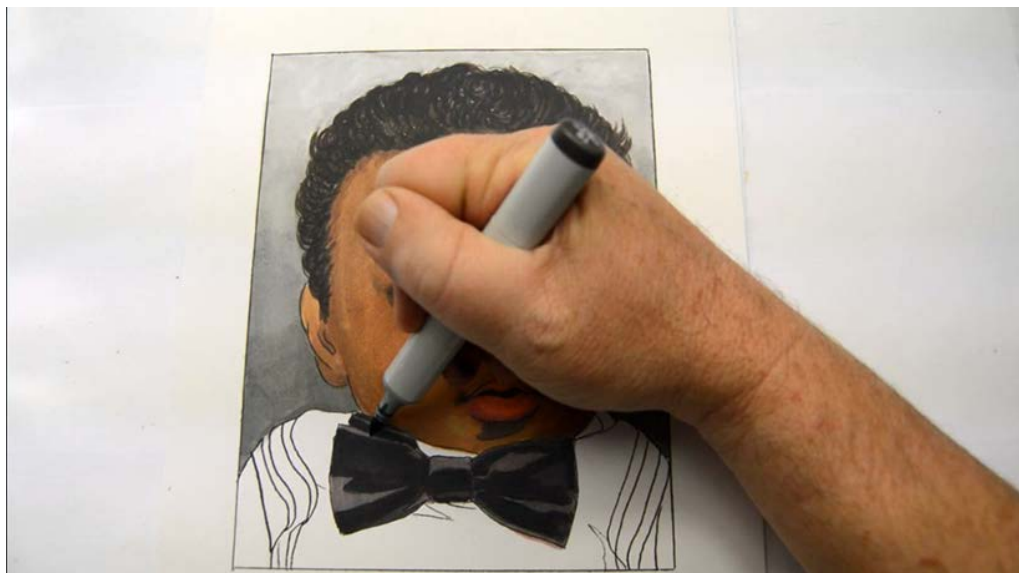
I color the tie with a base color of T5.



I add darker shapes with T7, leaving some of the T5 to show underneath.



I go darker still with Black 100, again leaving some of the T7 to show through.



I add T8 to soften the transitions between the T7 and Black 100...



...then restate my darkest darks with Black 100.



I darken the lightest shapes with T6 to finish off the tie.





I define the folds of the shirt with T3...

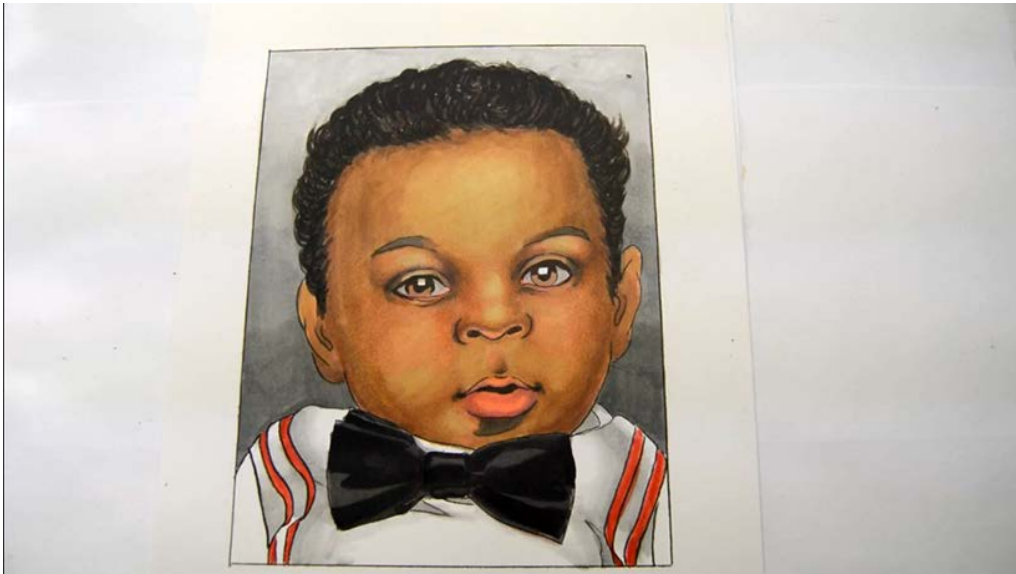


...then soften the edges of the T3 with T2...



...and then T0.

What a nice little round belly he has!



I add R27 to the stripes...



...then add darker accents to the stripes with T5.

The combination of gray shadows on the shirt and the modeling in the stripes really helps create the illusion of form.



I add a base color of E35 to the arms...



...then add E25...



...and E34.

That looks nice!



I blend the arms with R02 to finish them off.



# Chapter Four:

## Final Adjustments and Finishing Touches



With the white of the paper completely covered, the image could be considered complete. However, it's often best practice, once you've finished a page, to set it aside for a day or two then give it another look. With "fresh eyes" we are often better able to assess our work objectively and make changes if necessary to improve it.

What follows are the changes and attentions I decided would finish off this page. You may or may not decide to do any of these steps. Ultimately your opinion of your own work will be the deciding factor.



I darken the iris of the eyes just a bit with E37.



I also use this color (E37) to add small accents to the eyelids...



...and nose... (E37)



...and to darken the outside corners of the eyebrows. (E37)



I decided to do another round of color on the face as a whole.

I started as before with E25...



...then soften with E34...





E33...



...and E31.



The difference is subtle but I like it :)



I darken the eyebrows with T6...



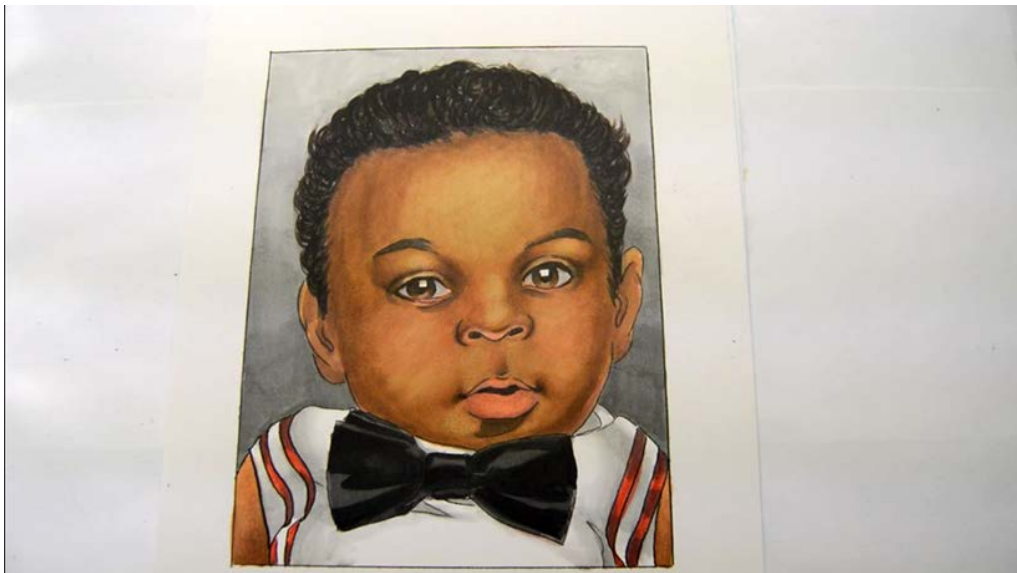
...and darken the upper part of the iris. (T6)



At this point the color on the lips feels a bit bright (saturated)...



...so I add E31 to desaturate them.



That's better :)



I add areas of R21 to the nose and cheeks to strengthen the "blush".





I restate my texture with E33.



Again, all of these make subtle differences but I like the way it's finishing off.



A little E25 in the hair...



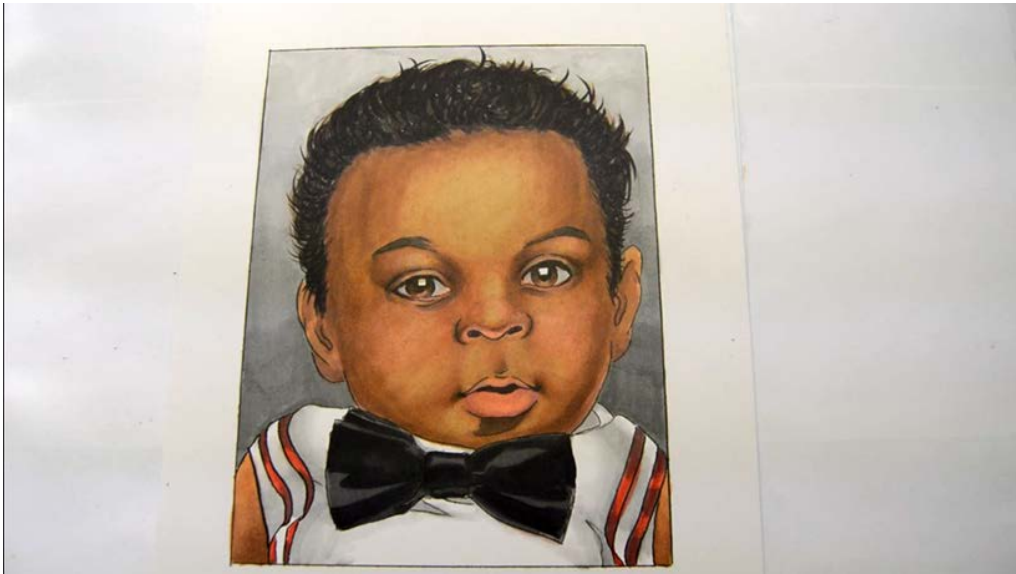
...and a bit more work with Black 100.



Such a cutie!



I add RV11 around the eyelids...



...and he's ready for highlights.



Using M. Graham's opaque white gouache, I add bold highlights to the eyes.



I add highlights to the nose...





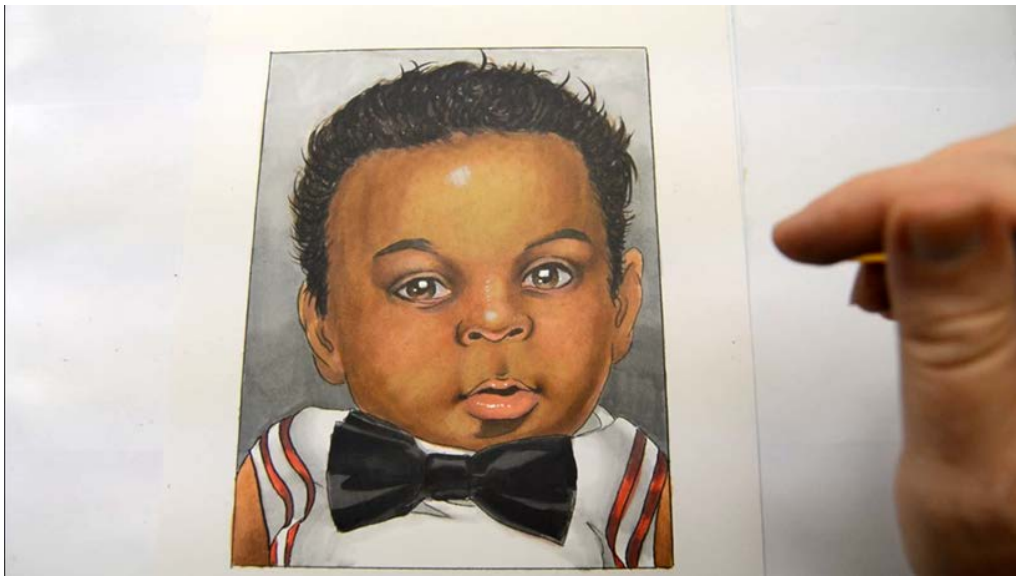
...and with the paint still wet, I "smudge" it with my finger to soften it.



I don't want big bold highlights on the forehead or cheeks, so I "dot" in my white...



...then soften it...



...to get a nice, soft highlight.



Dot and soften.



I add bold, crisp highlights to the tie.



I then add small, unsoftened highlights to the lips and "ball" of the nose.



Small highlights on the eyelids...



...and under the eyebrows.





Notice the two bright white dots on the right cheek and ear. These were "hand transfers" and accidental. I'll dip a clean brush in clean water and remove them a bit later.



I add highlights to the hair...



...and stripes on the shirt.



On the "white" parts of the shirt I lay my white in thick and bold...



...without softening.



A quick removal of any stray gouache and the image is complete.

## The Finished Image



## Conclusion

In this class we took an in depth look at coloring dark skin tones to create a "realistic" style image. Personally, I like my realism a bit "chunky" and not completely blended. I feel it adds more interest to the work. If in your own work you'd like a bit more blending, feel free. But be careful! Over-blending leads to "flat" work and can harm the three-dimensional effect.

Until next time...  
Christopher Kerry