

"The longer I've worked, the less I've had to have friends pose for me. For the cover of this book in particular, I had just completed the creation of a life-size figure of Captain America that I wanted to use just for this purpose. The sculpture is on a head cast of the model Frank Casey from twenty years ago. I sculpted the mask on top of that and opened up his eyes (life casts can only be made with the eyes closed), and altered other parts of the features. The bust is based on work by sculptor Mike Hill. He made the material look like leather. I needed to copy his work as closely as I could."



THE PROCESS



"The raw sketch (opposite, upper right) is the starting point, but the photos lead from what the sketch is doing to where I finally want to go."

The first step is to make an enlarged copy and then lay it over a lightbox. "It's you tracing over you, but now you are correcting the things you now recognize to be wrong at this new larger scale. Through all of this I am never tracing the photographs, I am using them to inform various details and to see what fits with what I intended to draw in the first place."



After all this time (a career spanning over 25 years), why does Ross still need photo reference? "Because there is always something more that I'm learning from looking at life. The universe has so much more in it than what we have in our heads. I'm still looking at the superficial details that lead me to the finished piece of art."





Ross learns from all of the things in the photo that the sketch doesn't have. "It's all about training your perception to pick up more details. I'm not doing things any differently now than I would have been doing them in art school."
And no computers? "Absolutely not. For me, it has to be an act of engagement with your hands. I believe the stuff that works well is the stuff that has more life in it. As much of the human hand visible within it."





Alex doesn't normally do color roughs, but in this case he did. "I was adding a hot color highlight here to the right side of his face (Cap's right) and I needed to see what that might look like."

To sum up, the steps are: rough pencil sketch, which gets blown up and put on a lightbox, full-size pencils, earth-tone/sepia gouache over that, then full-color paint. Then airbrush. And through-out this, lots and lots of talent and hard effort. "There's so much transformation that goes on from the reference to the finish, the pictures are an imperfect match from what I want them to be. They need to be *interpreted* by the mind, not copied."

