# HOW TO DRAW A REALISTIC EYE.

*Study in Colour Pencil on Drafting Film.*

*'The eyes are the window to the soul'.*

When I work on a portrait, my starting point, and the feature I pay most attention to is the eyes. It is generally the eyes of a portrait that will attract the viewer and draw them in, they are the centre of everything – literally the centre of the face but figuratively they are the centre of expression, often revealing the character and essence of your subject.

## The Reference Photograph

You will need a good quality, clear digital photograph. Ensure the photograph is well lit, preferably taken in natural daylight to catch the light reflections within the eye which are an essential part of your drawing.
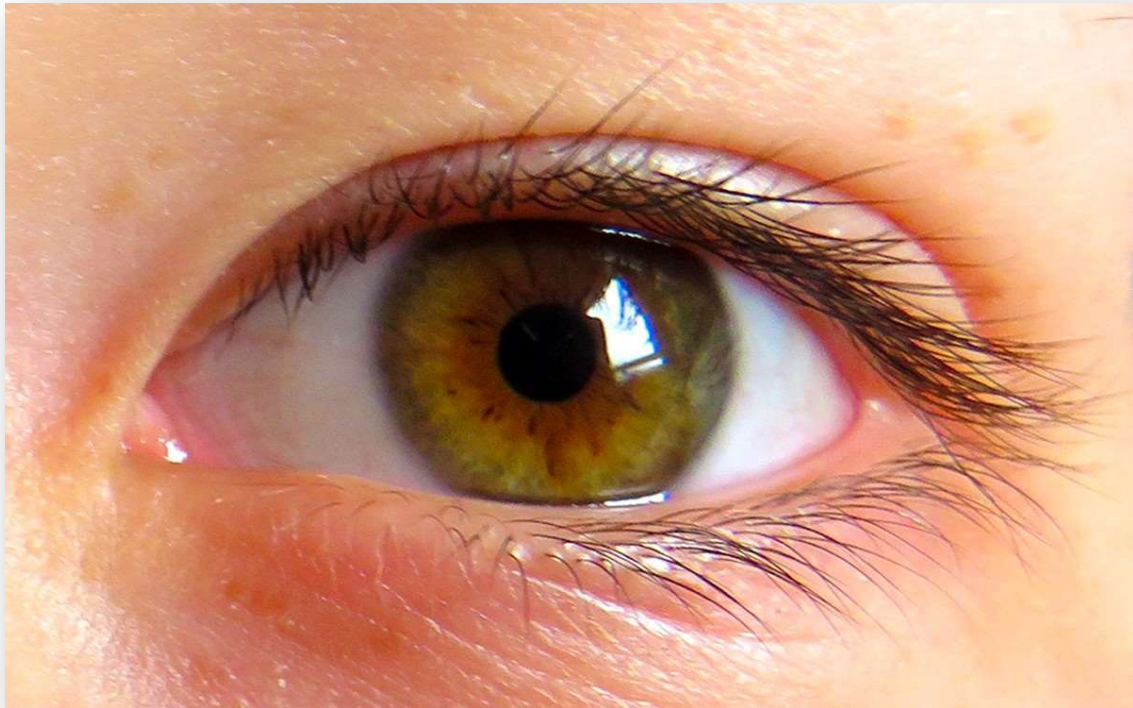


For this demonstration the subject has hazel eyes, they have great colour range within them. It's fascinating when you closely study an eye how many colours can be found within the iris.

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# Materials List

**SURFACE: Grafix Drafting film** 0.005mm Matte both sides.

**PENCILS: Faber Castell Polychromos Pencils (FC)** – White 101, Ivory 103, Cream 102, Black 199, Dark Indigo 157, Manganese Violet 160, Caput Mortum 169, Caput Mortum Violet 263, Burnt Ochre 187, Chrome Oxide Green 278, Burnt Sienna 283, Walnut Brown 177, Raw Umber 180, Nougat 178, Brown Ochre 182, Dark Cadium Orange 115, Light Yellow Ochre 183, Olive Green Yellowish 173, Earth Green Yellowish 168, Sky Blue 146, Helioblue Reddish 151, Light Magenta 119, Warm Grey II 271, Cold Grey III 232, Cold Grey V 234, Cold Grey IV 233, Pink Madder Lake 129, Beige Red 132, Salmon 130, Rose Carmine 124, Coral 131, Cinnamon 189, Sanguine 188, Dark Sepia 175. **Derwent Lightfast (DL)** Mars Violet, Dusky Pink.

(*I have listed the brands and colours used for this demo, but you can achieve similar results using the colours/brands you favour. You can apply the techniques that I use with your preferred colour pencil when you are doing artwork on drafting film*).

• Kneadable eraser • Brush (soft brush for brushing away pencil pigment dust)
• Backing board/ white card • White Gel Pen (optional)
• Sharp craft knife (Slice Ceramic Pen knife is recommended)

## *What is Drafting Film?*

Drafting film is a polyester film with a one or two side matte translucent drawing surface and is an excellent support for colour pencils. It is quite unlike any drawing surface in the way that it responds to colour pencils. It will only accept about 4-5 layers of pencil on one side before becoming saturated. The advantage of this is it allows you to achieve a vivid and vibrant colour saturation in a short period of time. Drafting film is a perfect surface for drawing eyes, as it is easy to create the smooth glossy look of the eyeball. The pencil brand I have chosen to predominantly use are Faber Castell Polychromos; a relatively hard lead, dry, translucent, and easy to blend, most importantly oil-based which means they adhere very well to the drafting film with minimal smudging.



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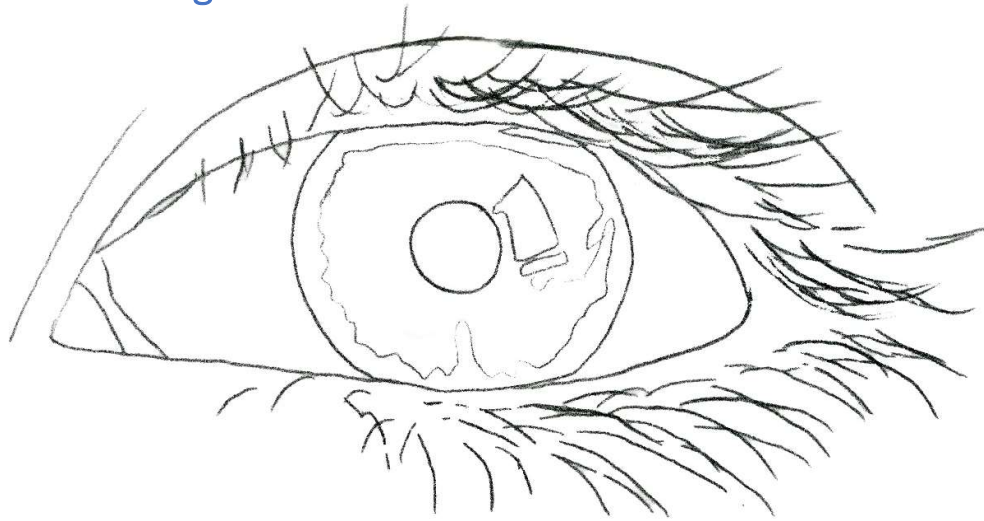
## The Line Drawing



The first step is to create a basic line drawing of the eye, so you have the correct proportions and basic shapes. In general, this can be achieved in various ways; freehand sketch, grid overlay method, projection, transfer paper, tracing, using a lightbox, using a photo formatting program etc. I say these are all valid artistic methods and tools to help achieve your end goal, use whatever way is comfortable for you. Try to make your outline light and barely visible so they can be easily removed or covered as you apply colour pencil.

## Transferring your image

When drawing on drafting film with colour pencil, try to avoid using graphite pencil for the initial outline, as the graphite can make the lighter colours look grubby. As an alternative, outline in colours like the ones that will be used in the final drawing. The outlines for this eye were done using (FC) White and Caput Mortum. The advantage of drafting film is that because of its translucent qualities you can get an outline directly from your reference image without the need for transfer paper or light box.



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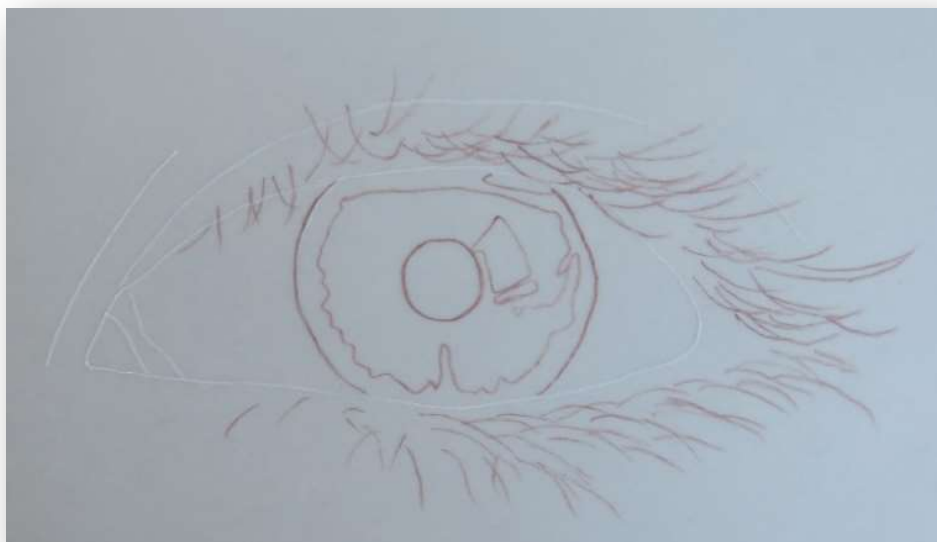
## Start with the Iris

Drafting film does not accept as many layers of coloured pencils as the regular papers, so it is important to remember **to apply your initial layers lightly with sharp pencils** as colour saturation will be achieved very quickly. To give a realistic appearance**, apply lines of colour radiating out from the pupil** and then different colours are applied in following layers.
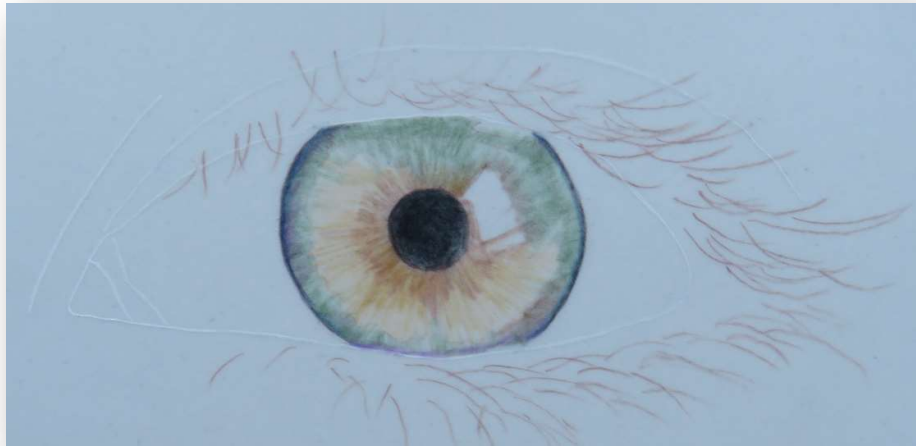


The pupil has been done with (FC) Black (or alternatively use Dark Sepia with Dark Indigo): the outside ring of the iris has been done with (FC) Dark Indigo and Manganese Violet; and the inside of the iris with (FC) Caput Mortum, Burnt Ochre, Chrome Oxide Green.

## Building the Layers on the Iris

Once I have applied the initial layer, I placed a white cartridge paper behind the drafting film, so the colours now appear truer. The next stage is to apply more layers of colour all around the eye, continuing with the same colours as before, plus some (FC) Burnt Sienna and Walnut Brown, **breaking the colour up and alternating colours**. Also apply a second layer of black to the pupil and you will see that a good saturation of colour has already been achieved in just two layers. At this stage concentrate on the tonal values of the iris, the details will follow later.
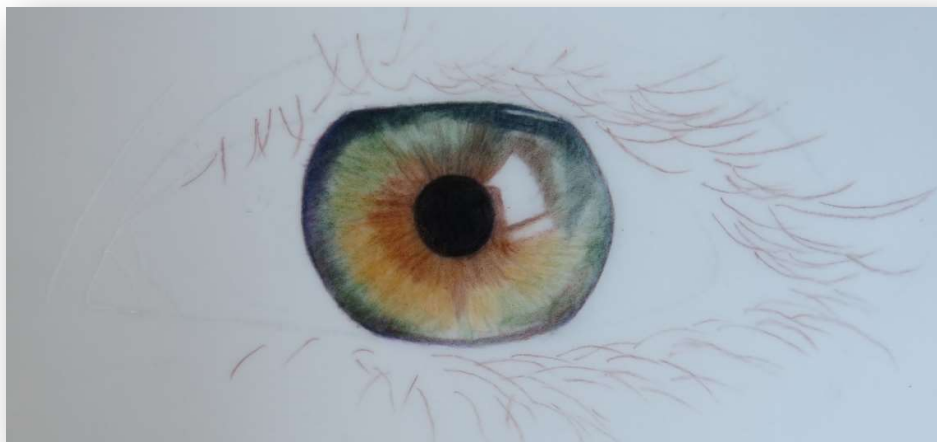
## Further layers and adding a highlight.

Continue to add colour and layers to the iris. The orange in the eye was deepened using (FC) Dark Cadium Orange. Other colours used within the iris were (FC) Olive Green Yellowish, Earth Green Yellowish (in the lighter green areas), Brown Ochre, Raw Umber, Light Yellow Ochre and Warm Grey II used to blend and soften the colours. The highlight was done with (FC) Sky Blue and White. The area at the top of the eye has been darkened using Dark Indigo and Dark Sepia, and reflections of the eyelashes added to the highlight using Helioblue Reddish**. It is important to look for these small details, as this is what give your eye a more realistic appearance.**



## The Sclera (Whites) and Caruncle

The next step is to work on the 'whites' of the eye, or sclera**. Of course, they are never pure white but it's not uncommon to find them drawn this way.** You will often find a pale blue, grey or pink hue and the associated colours and tones to show the shading that gives the eye shape.



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Start with a gentle application of (FC) Sky Blue, lightened with a layer of white applied either under or over the blue. Some Manganese Violet and Light Magenta are added to the areas of shadow, such as under the lashes and in the corners and edges of the eye.

The colours most frequently used for shadows are (FC) Warm Grey II and Cold Grey IV. Layers of (FC) Sky Blue, Light Magenta, (DL) Mars Violet were also added. Add details of the small veins with Light Magenta and Pink Madder Lake, this will add great realistic detail to the eye.



For the corner fleshy part of the eye, known as the caruncle, I have used (FC) Caput Mortum Violet and (DL) Mars Violet to darken areas, and flesh tones, Pink Madder Lake and Salmon, and White for the lightening areas and highlight. If you prefer you can use a white gel pen for the small highlights to add greater impact (I tend to avoid using this on commission work particularly as most gel pens are non-archival and can yellow over time).

## Completing the Eye

The eyeball is complete, so the next stage is to draw in the eyelashes and eyelids.



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The inside lower lid (between the lashes and eyeball) was filled with a combination of pink flesh tones (FC) Coral, Beige Red, White and Cream. The area under the lower lashes was drawn with Pink Madder Lake and Rose Carmine, the surrounding skin tones using Burnt Ochre, Cinnamon, and Cream. **Use the Slice craft knife to lift pigment to where you see the small creases and highlights**.

Same colours were used on the upper lids, with (FC) Caput Mortum Violet used for the darker area under the crease. Once again, using the Slice tool I lifted pigment to create highlights and used (FC) White and Cream to lighten and blend areas.

**When it comes to the eyelashes, we don't want spider legs**! So, some of the main points to pay close attention to are **lashes are sparse on the lower lid and fuller on top; the curve, the length, and the direction; the lashes are thick at the roots and thin at the ends; extra detail can be added where the lashes are cutting into the white of the eye**. Keeping my pencils sharp, the lashes were drawn using a combination of (FC) Dark Sepia, Caput Mortum Violet and Black. Some lighter lashes and highlights were then scratched in using the sharp craft knife.

## Final Drawing



**Every eye is unique and so the colours used will vary, but the principles of this demonstration can be applied to draw any eye to achieve similar results.** As the pencils adhere well to the drafting film you should not need to apply fixative. It is also an archival material and does not tear easily so should stand the test of time. For presentation, just use either a bit of acid free tape in each corner or photo corners and attach to a firm backing board such as a white archival mat board.

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## KEY POINTS

- **Study the colours within the eye**, that may not be immediately obvious, and this will give you a more natural eye colour. If you need help identifying colours, one option is to open your jpeg file with the Paint application and use the eyedropper tool to select an area and identify where it lies on the colour spectrum.
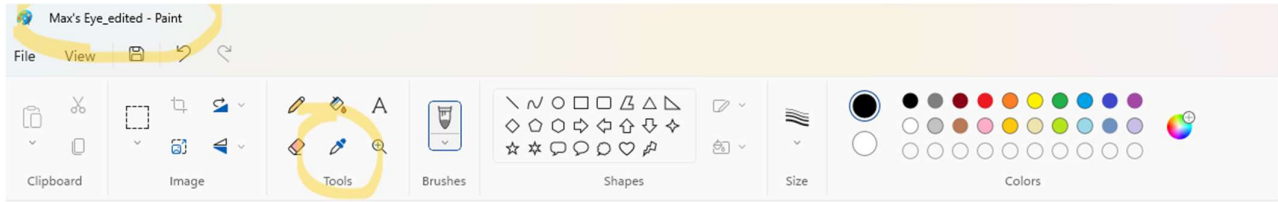


- **Be light of hand**. From having the lightest of line drawings so it is not visible through your colours, to applying the gentle pressure of each layer. It can be time consuming but don't be tempted to burnish (apply heavy pressure) too early, the result will be worth it.

- **Be aware of tonal values** (light and dark) within the eye before adding the little details. If you achieve the right tonal values, you will get a more realistic looking eye. Try using the artist trick of squinting at the reference so you are only seeing the dark and light colour and none of the details. The easiest way to determine the value of an image is to change it to black and white in a photo editing app so you no longer see any colour. Alternatively, there are tools you can use like a grey scale and value finder.
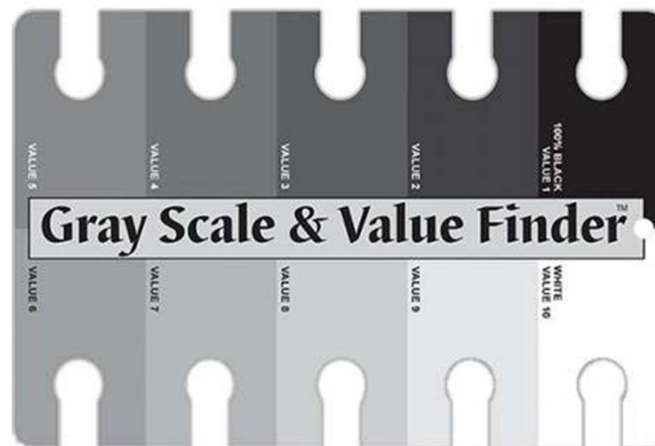


I hope this demonstration has provided some helpful hints on working with colour pencils on drafting film.

If you have any questions or would like to see more of my work, please follow me on Instagram, Facebook or visit my website www.portraitsbyclaireneedham.com

### HAPPY DRAWING!

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