THE REALISM CHALLENGE
Drawing and Painting Secrets from a Modern Master of Hyperrealism
Mark Crilley
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Shattered Eggshell

This lesson requires a bit more preparation than the two previous examples, but it’s well worth the extra effort. Take an ordinary white-shelled egg and, after popping a good-sized hole in both ends with a knife, blow the contents out to make it completely hollow. Then simply crack it open to whatever degree you like. The more pieces you create, the more time consuming this realism challenge will be.

1. Draw the contours of the egg in pencil, taking care to replicate both the shapes of the various pieces as well as the shapes created by cracks in the surface of the shell. This stage is all about observation. You may be tempted to stop looking at the target object and just draw the cracks any which way you like, but if you take your time and reproduce them carefully, you will get a much better final result.

2. After switching to a gray colored pencil, begin adding shadows. I chose to start with an area of shade in the interior of the cracked-open egg. Note that this shadow is darkest on its left-hand side and gradually grows diffuse on its right-hand side. Capturing these subtle differences is crucial to conveying a sense of three-dimensionality.

3. Staying with gray colored pencil, continue adding shading across the entire surface of the egg, constantly comparing the darkness of your artwork with the corresponding areas on the target object. My approach is always one of caution—building the color up little by little.

4. Once you have the easily observed areas of darkness locked down, it’s time to move on to matters of greater subtlety. See how the whiteness of your paper reflects light upon the lower edge of the egg? Devote extra attention to areas like this: the shading on the surface of the egg has a light–dark–light pattern to it; if your drawing lacks this shading, it will be unconvincing.
Now it’s time to turn your attention to the tiny pieces of eggshell broken off from the egg itself. There are, of course, the drop shadows to contend with; they are dark and quite sharply defined, as the eggshell pieces lie nearly flat on the surface. But just as important are the light gray tones of the eggshell pieces themselves. Because they are all slightly curved you may find that they are more shaded on one side than the other.

Pull out a black colored pencil to begin working on the drop shadow of the egg itself. As always the darkest part of the shadow is nearest the object. If you left your egg largely intact as I did, you will find that the shadow has great variety in its coloring. This is because the white surface of the egg’s shell reflects light back into its own shadow. Capturing little details like this is what separates the “close but not quite” realism challenge from the one that makes people say, “You nailed it.”

If you want to take your illustration to a higher level, add highlights with white gouache. It may seem odd to put white paint on top of paper that’s already white, but the color of the gouache is actually more of a “pure” white than that of the paper. It’s very subtle, but you can see the difference when you compare the little pieces of shattered eggshell to the paper surrounding them.
Chocolate Bars

Most of the lessons in this book are focused on a single material of some kind: glass, metal, wood, and so on. As you advance in your skills, you may want to take on a realism challenge that includes more than one type of surface. I wanted to try illustrating shiny cellophane packaging, but then I thought, What if I tear it open? That way I could illustrate both the packaging and its contents. So it was that I settled on the image of the candy bars you see here.

1. Not wanting to overload the lesson with too many problems, I decided to tear the packaging in such a way that most of the lettering was removed. The pencil stage is always the time to check and double-check the item for accuracy. I actually took a moment to count the number of “zigzags” in the end pieces of the cellophane packaging. If you’re going to do something, why not do it right?

2. The packaging I needed to replicate was a warm, golden color. I decided to begin with a layer of pale yellow watercolor, with the goal of building up the necessary browns and blacks in subsequent stages. As for the chocolate bars, I laid down a fairly dark brown watercolor base, planning to go darker (with colored pencil) and lighter (with white gouache) later on.

3. Here you see me going in with further layers of watercolor. The cellophane packaging provided plenty of high-contrast areas that I knew were crucial for pulling off the shiny effect. Using my fine-tipped brush, I carefully added the different shades of brown watercolor needed in each location, constantly checking the target object for guidance. For the top of the red T, it was enough to get a solid shade of red in place. To achieve this level of opacity, I mixed in only as much water as needed, to make the color move across the page.

4. In this manner, I continued with the watercolors, refining each area of the illustration from top to bottom. The chocolate bars presented a challenge—insofar as the gradient shifts in color were quite subtle. I knew I’d have better luck approximating those subtleties using colored pencil. Still, I took it as far as I could in watercolor, knowing it would look that much better when I switched from one tool to the other.
Out came the colored pencils, and I was able to tighten things up throughout the entire illustration. Additions of black in the shaded areas were particularly helpful for making the picture look more three-dimensional. As planned, a dark brown pencil allowed me to give substantially more form and solidity to the chocolate bars. Sometimes your shading process lets you push something back a bit—the silver interior of the cellophane, for example—so that other elements can “pop” a little more.

The addition of white gouache made a particularly big difference with this challenge. Cellophane naturally produces loads of white highlights, and even the chocolate had a bit of a pale white shimmer to it. You’ve got to be careful not to overdo it, though. Add the white gouache highlights only where you see them in the target object. Your goal is always to capture the real world effects of light on surfaces: nothing more, nothing less.

Part of what makes this challenge interesting is the fact that it presents two contrasting surface textures. Your eye enjoys comparing the cellophane and the chocolate to see how they differ. Of course, you don’t have to stop at just two different items in one realism challenge. Up next is the final realism challenge, and it will bring together all the various skills you’ve learned so far.
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