

**ARTOOL INSTRUCTOR SERIES:**

**MASTERING "RETURN OF SKULLMASTER"**

"Everything you wanted to know about your new stencils ... but were afraid to ask."

**PART I**

By Craig Fraser



suckers. And while I don't profess to be an expert on stencils, since I did design these I think I can be of some assistance.

Let's first eliminate all the nonsense surrounding stencil use. I have come across many an airbrush artist who believes stencils are for babies or beginners. It may be true that someone who possesses no freehand skills is a remedial airbrush artist, but at least stencils can get a greenhorn going and help him produce a sellable product. The stencil's importance lies in the time it saves, time that can be used to practice freehand skills, or time that can be spent making money. When you have to paint 1,000 skulls in the background flames on a tractor-trailer, and you have no stencil or freehand shield, you are out of business.

After all these years of e-mails asking how to use my stencil systems, I want to assure you that only 80-percent of your cries fell on deaf ears.

*Just kidding.*

Even with the *Skullmaster* video, there have been a number of questions floating around on how to use these

tool, pure and simple. It's neither good nor evil, smart nor stupid. It reflects the abilities and creativity of its user. I'm a freehand fanatic, yet not a week goes by when I don't find a use for a stencil of one type or another. It might be that I like them so much because I like taping and cutting my own artwork even less. I still hand-cut my own custom stencils, as well as use the laser-cut stencils by Artool.

For the premiere of this column, I will introduce the latest installment of the *Skullmaster* series, *The Return of Skullmaster*. This video was created in direct response to comments made by consumers like you, people who liked the original *Skullmaster* set but had questions or suggestions concerning individual stencils. In this tutorial, I'll cover *Frontal II* and the new *Lucky 13*. The *Frontal II* is a remake of the original, and remains the most popular of all the stencils. The original forward-facing skull stencil is pretty basic, but people wanted more options, and a larger size. And you know what they say...the customer is always right.



**Step 1:** Starting with the *Frontal II* stencil, mask off the area around the main skull shape to prevent overspray. Using an Iwata Micron-CH, spray a reduced mixture of BC-25 House of Kolor black. You probably don't need an airbrush as fine as the Micron for this job, but it helps in the final detailing, and the new built-in air regulator allows you to drop the pressure pretty low at the gun to keep the stencil from lifting.

**Step 2:** Carefully pulling the stencil back, you can see the image you just transferred. Any small amounts of overspray can be removed with a rag and some pre-cleaner, but if you held the stencil steady, you should have a fairly clean image.



**Step 3:** For the bottom jaw, use the closed version on the stencil. Frontal II comes with two jaw images; one closed, one open. You'll need to mask off the areas around it too. A little masking tape will save you a lot of grief in the long run. Plus, the tape helps hold down the stencil when spraying.



**Step 4:** After removing the jaw stencil, you will need to do a little repair work with the airbrush. This is not because you made a mistake; all stencils will leave open areas in the design. You need to connect the dots.



**Step 5:** This is where you show off your freehand skills by shading and shadowing the design itself. You really want your stenciled design to not look stenciled. Remember, your final piece should showcase your art, not a shopping list of the techniques and tools used.



**Step 6:** You can make a number of different skulls from the same stencil. Here, use the same Frontal II as before, but mask off the eyes as well as the overspray areas.



**Step 7:** You can notice something is missing...not to worry. We will come in with another set of eyes instead. Freehand them if you want; you should explore what you can modify with stencils, rather than feel restricted by their design.



**Step 8:** The has another set of eyes, with a nose, just below the main skull and between the two jaw cutouts. This other set of eyes is angrier—an evil Mr. Potato Head.



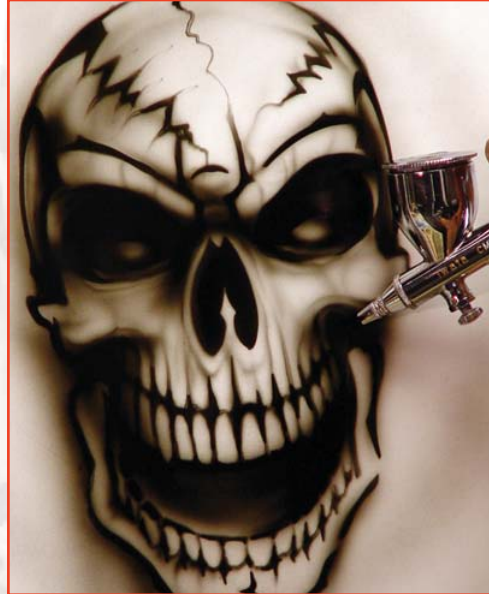
**Step 9:** Going to the jaw step, mask out the one not used yet—the open-jaw cutout. The bottom of the jaw is more rounded, and in a position that looks more correct when placed open.



**Step 10:** As with the first skull, time to come in with a few corrections. You might find more flaws the more you have to reposition or use the stencil. Don't worry; the airbrush was practically invented to hide human error.



**Step 11:** A few dagger strokes more and you have a respectable skull that no longer looks like a sprayed-on stencil. It's amazing what a little freehand work can do.



**Step 12:** For the last skull, use the same outline, and continue to leave the eyes masked. You can make drastic changes to the look of a skull by simply playing with the eyes. Experiment. Have fun. Your accidents may turn out to be your best effects.



**Step 13:** OK, they are not eyes, but Maltese crosses (or, for skater punks, Independent Truk logos) can sometimes look better than eyes. You don't have to use this part of the stencil for eyes; you can use them as reoccurring pearled patterns in graphics. You're limited only by your own imagination.



**Part 2 will be continued in the next issue.**