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Feathers and fur

Develop your skills in drawing and painting animals by following the advice of three successful animal artists, by Anne Corless

Painting animals is both a joy and a challenge. Often a quick sketch can capture the character of an animal, as the artist has to consider the most important features to be recorded quickly. A favourite pet might be recognised in a drawing from the angle of the head, the position of its ears or its expression. Usually very little detail is required for the

artwork to 'work'.

For those wanting to include detail in their animal paintings, the real challenge begins. Do you concentrate on detail at the expense of form, and can a highly detailed piece of artwork still convey feeling? Remember, there is no wrong way to work. The various methods of mark making are similar in their

execution in that there are usually stages to work through: drawing, application of tone or colour, followed by detail and, finally, the emphasis of light and dark.

In this article the different working methods of three artists from the Association of Animal Artists (AAA) will be studied. I hope it inspires you to try for yourself.

THE FUR OF A CHEETAH

Demonstration by Anne Corless

Although I prefer when possible to work from life, my reference for this painting, *Cheetah on the Run* (below), was a number of old photographs that I took many years ago in Nairobi Game Park, Kenya. I have acquired a good knowledge of the anatomy of many animals and it is

important to me to be able to show the form of an animal in my paintings.

Of equal importance is the surface of the animal, its feathers or fur. Although the coat is highly detailed in my painting of the cheetah, it is as if it has been wrapped around the surface

landmarks of the body beneath it, so both form and detail have been achieved. Note the smooth coat on the body and the slightly ruffled neck fur that acts as protection against other predators (who often try to bite the neck area.) So, how was this done?

▼ Anne Corless
Cheetah on the Run, oil on canvas, 30×42in. (76×107cm)



Step 1 Line drawing ▶

As I no longer have the original line drawing of my cheetah, I have included this preliminary oil sketch of Ahmed, the elephant to show how this stage is drawn directly onto the canvas with raw umber and Artist's turpentine. I emphasise areas of light and dark, and roughly sketch the landmarks.

TIP

Keep looking at the artwork in a mirror, as mistakes really do stand out when you see the work reversed.

Step 2 Tonal work ▼

This stage usually looks a mess as I 'feel' my way around the animal, sketching bony landmarks and muscles, and emphasising form. I try not to lose the detail; the spots can be worked on later, but I need to know where they are and to identify the planes on which they lie to help show the form. The white of the canvas shows through where the highlighted areas will be.

**Step 3 Colour and detail** ▶

The artwork starts to look better again, which is always a relief! I enjoy exploring shapes made by the underpainting and detail slowly appears.

**Step 4 Detailed fur**

For the detailed fur I used long-handled Kolinsky black sable and Marder brushes, Nos. 2 to 6. I painted in between the spots with cremitz white, dragging individual hairs into them. I then worked into the spots again, overlapping the dark hairs with the lighter areas around them. I emphasised shadow, using glazes with raw sienna mixed with a touch of raw umber. Titanium white, with a touch of raw sienna or Naples yellow deep, were used for lighter hairs, leaving final highlighted areas to be painted over with titanium white.

DRAWING A HORSE'S TAIL

Demonstration by Sue Cotton

Step 1 First lines ►

With a sharpened 2B pencil, start to define the shadow areas of the tail hair. Your pencil strokes should follow the direction of the hair. Vary the tone of the strokes to add depth and give the impression of the different layers of hair. Add a little 'wobble' in your pencil strokes to denote the straggly bits of separate hairs and to give a rougher feel to the hair.



Step 2 Technique ►

Lift your pencil off towards the end of each stroke to taper the line. In this way you achieve a softer feel to the ends of the hair.

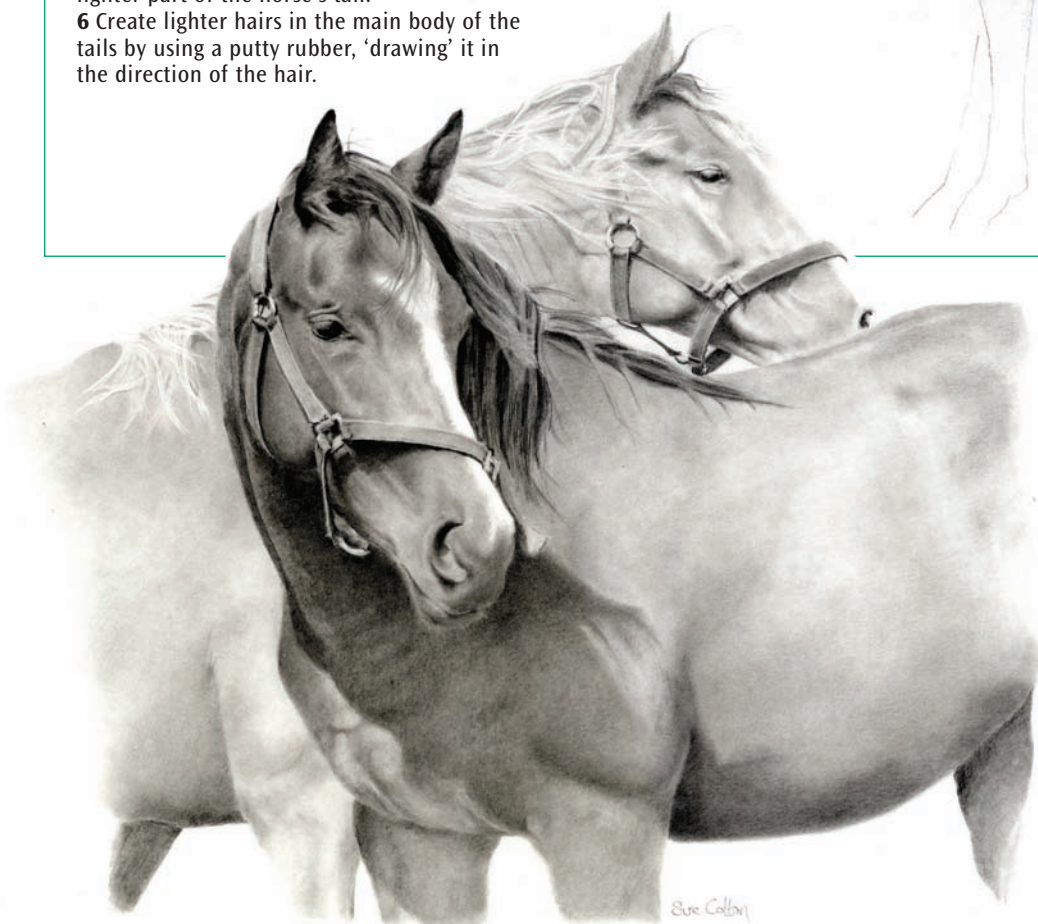


Step 3 Finishing touches ►

- 1 Create shadow around the top of the tail. These strokes should follow the rounded shape of the horse's hindquarters.
- 2 Continue to draw the lighter tones using a 2H pencil, drawing in the direction of the hair.
- 3 Overlap some of the hairs to give a feeling of movement. Bring some of the hair at the top of the tail across onto the horse's hindquarters.
- 4 Draw the shapes made by the hairs falling across the horse's hindquarters (negative drawing).
- 5 With a 2H pencil, gently draw the hairs in the lighter part of the horse's tail.
- 6 Create lighter hairs in the main body of the tails by using a putty rubber, 'drawing' it in the direction of the hair.



◀ Sue Cotton
Horse's Tail, pencil drawing on Gerstaecker No. 2 paper, 8x5½in. (20.5x14cm)



▲ Sue Cotton *Two's Company*, pencil drawing on Bristol board, 11½x16½in. (29x42cm). The inspiration came from a reference-gathering trip with the Association of Animal Artists. I love to incorporate interaction between horses in my work, and the shapes that they make on paper are as important to me as the drawing itself.

SUE'S TIPS FOR PENCIL DRAWING

- Try Gerstaecker No. 2 paper for sketches and experimenting with ideas – it's relatively cheap, but still has a nice white, smooth-ish finish.
- Bristol board is my favourite surface. It's a lovely bright white, which lends itself to a wider tonal range, and is beautifully smooth. It is also fairly forgiving in that you can erase mistakes without damaging the surface too much.
- I use only two grades of pencil: 2H and 2B. The softer pencils are too grainy for my style and you can achieve a good range of tones with just these two.

PAINTING WHITE FEATHERS

Michael Miller

My preferred medium is oil paint and I work exclusively on canvas. I prefer to work on a relatively large scale – 30x24in. for instance – which I scale up from photographs that I've taken in the wild. I begin with a fairly detailed drawing using a 4H pencil. This leaves very little carbon residue to 'muddy' future applications of paint. Do not be tempted to press too hard.

If the subject is a bird, for instance, I begin by painting the eyes and surrounding areas in great detail, almost to a finished state. This provides me with a colour and tonal reference for the rest of the painting. It also allows me to treat the 'up until then' drawing as a living representation. After creating this area, I move over the canvas creating similar areas of reference, eventually joining them all together. I must stress this is my personal approach; other artists have different methods.


Applying paint

Try to use very little, thin paint, as the ultimate source of light is the white canvas and any paint applied to it diminishes the light to varying degrees, depending on depth of colour and the number of coats. Shadow areas are more difficult. If you feel the need to use black, mix it with a strong colour. What colour you choose will depend upon the

tones that are already in your painting. For instance, if there are reddish tones then you might decide to add the darkest red you have.

Observation is the key so look hard. In a swan, for example, one white is transformed into a thousand whites by light and form. Don't be tempted into the 'one white does it all' approach. Be brave and use a touch of colour as soon as you move away from your highlight. Depending on the tones of your painting, perhaps add tints of blue if you're moving away from the overall light source, and tints of warmer colours if you are moving towards your main source of light.

I don't advocate using a 'technique' for various areas, such as feathers, fur, trees or grass. Speeding up areas you perceive as tedious is not an option for an artist. His or her brief is to convey all the intricacies, colours, shapes and rhythms in everything, regardless of the time it takes. Use your brush or pencil to 'feel' your subject. Go around it, under it, and through it. Let your colours and tones push it back or draw it forward.

Finally, don't try to be 'good'; there are thousands of good artists you have never heard of. Instead, be you. There is an artist in everyone. Create because you can. 



▲ Michael Miller
Moonlight, oil on canvas, 30x24in. (76x61cm)

▼ Michael Miller
A Soft Breeze, oil on canvas, 24x28in. (61x71cm)



FIND OUT MORE

Anne Corless is a qualified medical artist who also paints veterinary illustrations. She is a founder member, trustee and chairman of the AAA. Visit her website at www.annecorless.com

Sue Cotton is an animal and equine artist, specialising in pencil drawing. She is also a founder member, trustee and webmaster for the AAA. See more of her work at www.seahorsestudios.co.uk

Michael Miller paints solely for exhibition in the UK and occasionally abroad. He is a founder member and trustee of the AAA. Visit his website at www.michaelmillerfineart.com

The Association of Animal Artists offers members exhibition opportunities, workshops, field trips and a *plein air* painting group. All members are encouraged to create and exhibit artwork of any animal in any medium or style. They are also encouraged to explore and enjoy their creativity, which leads to varied and dynamic exhibitions. Some members are available for commissions. Visit www.associationanimalartists.co.uk for more details.