



Tip #13

Working Fur with Watercolor Pencils

Watercolor pencils are great sketching and painting tools for capturing the effect of fur or hair, whether smooth and sleek like a deer or many domestic dogs, mottled like a rabbit, or thick, curly fleece like a sheep.

What technique you use depends on how far you are from your subject, as well. Up close you can do an almost hair-by-hair approach. For distance, you will probably prefer basic shape or color.

Somewhere in between, a mostly simple approach with just a suggestion of the roughness of the hairs works—imagine a long-tailed cat in the middle ground. For the most part it would look all of a piece, but with a broken line to suggest the long hairs of the tail or jowls. Watercolor pencils should be used, normally, with a layered technique, allowing the layers to dry in between. Otherwise you'll lose detail and get mud!

Art 13-1, art-deer, rabbit, and squirrel

The deer has a smooth, glossy coat. Unless you are very close you don't see the much detail.

This one has a bit more than normal because it's still a fawn, but other than the light areas around eyes and muzzle or the dark hairs near its nose and on the tips of its ears, its coat is fairly uniform, so I applied the pencil smoothly, as you can see in the sample to the right of the young deer, blending it with clear water.

The young rabbit has a variegated coloration that helps it avoid predators. Its fluffier coat is a light brownish-tan, mottled with black hairs that are a bit more of a challenge to suggest accurately. I used a smooth underlayer of ochre, blending with clear water and allowing it to dry thoroughly. Then I went back in with black and gray pencils using zig-zag squiggles and quick, repeated marks and blended that layer only very lightly so the hairs were still suggested. Finally I added dry watercolor pencil on the head and ears and the bunny's whiskers to capture the effect of soft fur.



(There's no reason to feel that you must wet these pencils just because you can. If you prefer the effect you get by using them dry, by all means leave them untouched.)

I used two different techniques for the squirrels. Although I could have used the same approach as on the small rabbit on the closeup, I decided to try it with a smoother effect because the squirrel's coloration was less stripey. I used the warm undercolor again for both the head shot and the squirrel digging in the snow, but on the head I used a combination of squiggles in a dark blue gray and smooth areas of black to model the animal, then wet these areas again. I used a bare minimum of dry pencil along the edge of the jaw and on the tufts of the ears to suggest the soft hairs. For the more distant squirrel I left the layer of black watercolor pencil untouched by water to let the texture of the paper show through, suggesting the variations in fur color.

You can see other types of fur, hair, and wool in my North Light book, *Watercolor Pencil Magic*, available for North Light, your art supply store, or on <http://www.amazon.com>!

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Website: <http://www.cathyjohnson.info>
Email: graphicart@epsi.net