

Tip #32

Animals in Landscape

When you add animals to your landscape paintings, you are adding focus, interest—a sense of life that intrigues the viewer. This isn't the same as wildlife painting, where the animal itself is your subject, but simply including a suggestion of life. Remember Tip #25, "Putting People in Your Paintings"? It's the same kind of idea...a few shore-birds give a seascape a feeling of reality, as does a heron fishing in the shallow water of a lake (by animals of course I mean the animal kingdom, which includes birds...) Consider a herd of bison in the distance, or a single deer in the forest—keep it simple but lively.



Art 32-1, Adding what you DON'T see!

I added the white-tail deer in this thumbnail sketch because the forest scene needed something more. I have enough sketches and photo-references for this big animal that I could almost paint them in my sleep, so I added them for focus where they didn't exist.



Art 32-1

Art 32-2, Painting the Herd

You can choose to paint individual animals, or a whole herd—those can be simplified into an overall shape, with just enough detail to let you know what it is, like these sheep. One or two closer animals can suggest more detail, if you like.



Art 32-2

Art 32-3, Having fun with it!

Practice drawing or painting animal shapes to get familiar with how they're constructed, how they move, how light and shadow work with their forms. (I broke the little cow at upper left down into various colors to make it clear how the parts were shaped. Honest, I DIDN'T see one colored like that, I'm not that punchy!)

(This illustration is from my new book, Drawing and Painting Animals, used courtesy of



Art 32-4, Painting what you see ...

Your addition of an animal to your landscapes can be in response to what you actually see-like the little rabbit feeding here, as I painting a plein aire watercolor in the rain-I was in a shelterhouse nearby. He barely shows, but he adds that sense of life I really like. I painted his shape, snugged down into the grass, very carefully, and lifted the light color of his tail by dampening that spot repeatedly and lifting with a paper towel to removed the loosened color.



I love to paint animals! You can see much more in my new North Light book, Drawing and Painting Animals, from your local bookstore, or from North Light Books, <http://www.artistsnetwork.com/nlbooks/index.asp>, or from Amazon, <http://www.amazon.com> - or buy it direct from me and have it signed, <http://www.cathyjohnson.info>. I'll be addressing this subject further in my online art classes - check my website for more information, including starting dates! You'll find my artwork on new products in my Cafepress store at http://www.cafepress.com/cathy_johnson and original fine art auctions on eBay at <http://members.ebay.com/aboutme/cathyjohnsonart>.