

MEDIUM: WATERCOLOUR | DIFFICULTY: 

# *Dolly Day Dream*

**Nicola Ann Gaffey** captures her cat completely focused on bird-watching



As I was looking for some inspiration through my own gallery of cat pictures on my laptop, I happened to notice my cheeky little farm cat, Miya, on her cat stand gazing through the window at the birds, a perfect opportunity for me to capture a beautiful close-up moment. I prefer to use my own photographs. If that's not possible then I like to take different elements and inspiration from life and photography to make up my own interesting imaginative paintings.





## Materials used

- **Surface:** Arches NOT surface 640gsm (100 per cent cotton)
- **Paint:** Winsor & Newton Professional watercolours: Burnt Umber, Burnt Sienna, Yellow Ochre, Indigo, Opera Rose, Ultramarine, Alizarin Crimson, Indian Yellow
- **Brushes:** Daler-Rowney  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch Oval wash; Daler-Rowney Sapphire Rigger 0; Billy Showell round Fine Liner; Winsor & Newton 6mm Filbert
- **Plus:** SAA Maskaway; spray bottle; putty eraser; HB pencil; SAA Ruling pen/cocktail stick; SAA Blue Masking Fluid; glass water jars; plastic palette; kitchen paper; tape and board



**1** The first step is to begin the drawing using an HB pencil. It's very important to pick a good reference photo for your painting, ideally with high resolution, so you can zoom into the eye and ear areas. Try to avoid blurry or badly lit images. This is a really important stage and will make a difference in the end results. Draw lightly and observe as much as possible, taking your time to get the proportions correct and paying attention to the lightest and darkest values. The direction of the fur and the eye shape are very important. Drawing does take practice but a good drawing is key to a successful watercolour painting!

When you're happy with your drawing, it's time to apply masking fluid in a few key areas, such as the eye; add a little dot in the pupil and longer strokes around the whiskers and the inner ear hair. You will get lovely fine lines with a ruling pen or a cocktail stick. Let the masking fluid dry completely before you begin painting.

Have all of your materials ready to use. Depending on the size of your work put the desired amount of paint in separate wells on your palette slightly larger than pea-sized. Use your water spritzer to keep the paints damp or wet while you work. Create watery mixes of Burnt Sienna and Burnt Umber separately. You can mix a little Burnt Umber into the Burnt Sienna for a darker midtone. Always work light to dark.

Using the  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch oval wash brush, dampen the paper and then pick up some lighter values of Burnt Sienna (top half of the cat) and Burnt Umber (bottom half) and drop in, blending as you go. This will give a nice soft base layer of fur to build on; always be careful to leave out and preserve the whitest areas, such as the chin.

Let this layer dry.



**2** Re-wet your paint and add the second wash, again with the  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch oval wash brush. Gently wet (not scrub) the areas where you want to add more mid and darker tones. Adjust your colour accordingly, add more pigment if you want a more vibrant, deeper colour, or add water to lighten. Start to build colour and depth. You can now continue the eye; you should have a tiny amount of masking fluid in this area from step one – this will preserve light to give life and energy. Use the 6mm Filbert to add a base colour of pale Yellow Ochre. While still damp, add a little green mixed from Ultramarine and Indian Yellow. Mix Indigo with a little Burnt Umber or Burnt Sienna to give a deep grey/black tone.

Start to define the eye using the round fine liner. Resist the urge to go in with a big circle of black as it will deaden the eye and become flat; it should be a mix of grey/darkest grey tones to give an illusion of black but will still have a hint of colour for life.



**3** When dry, check your colours and make any adjustments before carrying on. Keeping your palette misted helps the paint flow more easily. Pre-wet the eye again using the 6mm filbert and build in some green and also a little more Indian Yellow. If you feel it has got too dark, use a clean, dampened-off brush and a slight sweeping movement lift a little colour back out, this will liven the eye right back up!

When dry, add the pupil. This is important as it needs to be sharp and you don't want it to bleed into the iris. Use the fine liner for this delicate area.

Now the fun part! Using the fine liner in delicate strokes, begin to add fur and direction to build muscle tone and face shape and also start to define the brow.



**4** This is where you can begin to add detail to the ear. As in step one, you have masked the soft white fur off, and you can use the  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch oval brush to wet the whole ear area. Then, using the 6mm filbert, start to drop in some Yellow Ochre mixed with a tiny amount of Opera Rose from the top-down to create shadow. Soften and blend with clean water, and also add a little of your very darkest mix of Indigo and Burnt Umber at the very tip of the ear while it's still damp. When dry, take the rigger and use fine, delicate strokes to add the fine fur inside the ear, paying attention to the direction and length. When dry, you can remove the masking fluid. Then, you can add darker strokes to blend the whiter fur.



You can also think about the first light wash of background colour, using the  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch oval brush to wet the area around the face and apply a pale wash of Ultramarine.

When applying this wash, be sure to keep lighter and darker areas to add interest, which means dropping some darker mix into some areas and leaving the rest lighter.

**5** Keep adjusting the mid-tones using different shades, and build the fur using short, long and sometimes more curved fine strokes with the round fine liner. This will give the fur a more natural look.





## TIP

When painting in watercolour, try not to block and colour every inch of your paper. The little unintentional white marks will bring your work to life! It does not need to be exact or perfect – just have fun!

**6** Use the fine liner and rigger to add strokes of fur in different directions above and below the eye area. Keep building value and tone. Notice the darker streaks of fur from the corner of the cat's eye moving down towards the neck area. Before you build the darkest values in these areas, add some fine lines of masking fluid and let them dry. This will preserve lighter values and allow you to build darker areas over them. Then when the masking fluid is removed, it will give the fur more depth. Now you can add some detail to the nose area, using the small 6mm filbert to wet the whole nose. Use a watery mix of Yellow Ochre toned down with a tiny amount of Burnt Umber. While damp, drop in some detail using a watery mix of the dark grey with the round fine liner to the very tip of the nose and drop in tiny spots at the sides and a pale mix of Opera Rose and Yellow Ochre at the very end of the nose.

**8** The last stage is to mix a watery wash of Ultramarine. Use the  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch oval brush to wet the area around the cat's face, then load the brush with the Ultramarine mix and drop it under the chin. Use the smaller filbert to define the white fur under the chin with a slightly darker mix. You can add a little Alizarin Crimson to the Ultramarine, which will make a pale purple to add a little interest in some areas around the cat's face while still wet.

When everything is dry, remove all the masking fluid with the Maskaway block and finish the whiskers. Use the rigger to define the white whiskers and add darker ones above the eye and from the cheek down.

Well, I am done!



**7** Now the painting should be taking shape. Don't worry if it's not perfect, especially if you haven't had a lot of practice with fur; it does take time. When dry, if you need to put any more washes over the fur or add more intense mid or dark tones, it is fine to re-wet areas, even over delicate lines, as the underpainting will not be affected as long as you do not rub too hard. Apply more fine fur detail to bring the painting together.

Continue adding short and longer strokes, use a little Alizarin Crimson with Indigo to give a nice rich colour to contrast darker fur against lighter fur, and keep building shape and tone through the direction of the fur.



## ABOUT THE ARTIST

To see more of Nicola Ann's work, visit: [nicolartistt.com](http://nicolartistt.com)  
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