

## Drawing Pets

Anyone who draws or paints, and owns a pet, will at some point want to paint them, after all, they are our constant companions and models, inspiring us with their characteristics and quirky little habits.

Our pets become one of the family, they are all individual with their own personalities, we, as their owners know all their little foibles so we are in the best position to sketch them accurately.

In this article I aim to inspire you to interpret the best characteristics of your pet, rather than attempting to create a pet portrait. Pet portraits are usually fairly detailed and require photos to work from. Our sketches will instead require our models.

**Tip** – You can use photos if you wish, if you do, place them at arms length propped up against something so when you refer to them it is as if you are looking at the animal from a distance. Avoid meticulously copying the photos; otherwise all spontaneity may be lost.

We will be creating dynamic sketches with ideas for you to build up a series of images which in time will perhaps build up to a journal about your pet.

We are going to begin with contour drawings. This in my experience is the quickest, easiest approach to drawing live animals.

Firstly, it is vital that you choose a time when your pet is resting, or calm. Perhaps curled up in a favourite chair, in front of the fire, on a windowsill or asleep in its basket. This will ensure that you have plenty of time to observe without it moving as well as you both being still and quiet. This is the perfect start.



Fig 1  
Resting 'Smudge' 6 x 12 cms

### Materials Used

A4 smooth drawing pad 120gms  
Pencil, biro or felt tip pen

### How to Contour Draw

Hold the pencil as if you were going to write your name, you may lean lightly on the paper but try to avoid firmly placing your fist onto it or this will restrict your movement.

Begin anywhere you wish, but once you begin try not to lift your pencil too much. Imagine it is fixed to the paper, look at your subject, then look down onto your then move the pencil slowly, look up again, then move the pencil slowly, look at the shapes, don't bother with the details, notice however the direction of the fur, each time you stop, look up. Draw exactly what you see not what you *think* you see.

**Tip** – You should spend more time looking and less time making the line. Spend more time thinking and less time drawing.

The result will be a strange little drawing that may also be an odd shape. This is because you have been concentrating on the subject alone.

I am often asked, where to end a drawing, what to include and how I decide what background I need.

I like to include the surroundings as it places the subject and makes it more relevant, it can also suggest a story.

Here (Fig 2) Instead of drawing my cat, I have drawn my cat sitting on a table in front of a window, which has horizontal blinds. The cat could be watching something outside or indeed have nodded off.

Unlike the first drawing, purely of the cat, this drawing is much more interesting by including surroundings. I didn't need to include the whole table, or indeed the whole window; I only need to include enough to set the scene. Remember your subject is the animal; the surroundings are like stage props.

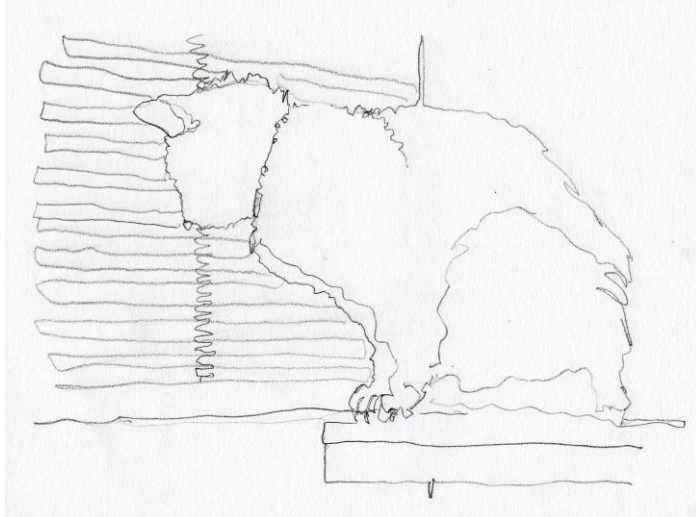


Fig 2

'Smudge' on the table 18 x 24 cms

Smudge often sits looking out of the window and nods off, so it's an ideal position to draw her. She is often there for quite some time, so I know I will have a chance to do one, perhaps two drawings.

**How to include backgrounds.**

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Think of your subject like a jigsaw puzzle that you are piecing together. Look at the background as well as the subject and remember to keep the pencil attached to the paper.

You may find the need to leave the subject and drawing a curtain, blind or carpet for example, and then return to the animal again. It is better to do this than draw the entire subject, and then consider the background. Always look at the subject and background as a whole rather than two separate entities.

This technique is not technically sketching. The line is constant and the result is a confident yet quirky drawing. Often this type of drawing can say much more than a sketch and take very little time to complete, ideal for drawing animals.



Fig 3  
Preliminary drawing 19 x 24 cms

Once you have drawn a few contours of your pet at a distance its time to try a close up. Use the same approach but this time, add some details. Avoid getting too bogged down in them, and certainly don't start shading; just continue to look at the shapes.

**Tip** – Build up a series of these type of drawings, you can use them as the base for future works.



Fig 4  
Step 1

### Using Colour



A4 smooth drawing pad 120gms  
Insert Fig 5 Coloursoft Drawing Pencils  
Blackberry 280  
Dark Terracotta 610

The next step is to introduce colour. Drawing with colour can be very exciting, especially if you usually use graphite and are used to black and white tonal drawings. Colours add another dimension to a drawing, which is surprisingly quick and effective.

The trick is to use a very limited choice of colours, otherwise you spend more time choosing and trying out colours than actually doing the drawing, which often leads to a disappearing subject!

For this drawing I used just two colours. I did the main contour drawing using Dark Terracotta, using exactly the same techniques as if I were using a pencil, and then I added more markings using Blackberry.

Once complete, I held the pencil flat against the paper so as to use the length of the colour, quickly blending the pigment against the paper, this gave a

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textured appearance similar to fur. I then added more dark and the whole drawing took about 3 minutes.

Of course it may take you a little longer, but try not to labour over it. Have both pencils at the ready and just go for it! Once this is achieved the next stage can be done even if the animal moves.



Fig 6  
Tabby in Laundry basket 11 x 14 cms Colouring Pencil Drawing

Any tonal contrasts and firming up of lines can be done once the main elements are achieved.

The difference made by just darkening the background is considerable, but unnecessary when the cat is in position, if it moves slightly or even walks off, I can still add the darks and strengthen my drawing.

The important thing is not to overwork it, keep to the original, but improve rather than alter it.

**Seeing blocks of colour and tone.**

Once you have had a few goes at contour drawing you are then ready to move onto looking for blocks or shapes of colour. Again it might be easier for you to think of these shapes like jigsaw pieces.



Fig 7  
Step 1

For this Demonstration I used pastel pencils.



Insert Fig 8

Use whatever pastel pencils, colouring pencils or indeed graphite pencils you have, choose three different tones. Light medium and dark. I chose one dark, one light and two mediums. This gave me a little more choice of colours.

This drawing was done at the same time as Fig 2.

I can either use my original contour drawing as a guide, or begin my second drawing and if the cat moves, complete it using my contour drawing as reference.

I used a combination of all three pastel pencils and, using the side of the pencil blocked in colour. I did this fairly quickly; I don't worry about details but just look at the darks and lights.

Tip – A good idea is to screw your eyes up so they are just little slits, then look at your subject, you will see blocks of tone much easier as all of the details disappear.



Fig 9  
Step 2

Using my forefinger, and small circular movements, I smudge the entire cat. This leaves a suggestion of texture but flattens the shape. This is good, it gets rid of all that white paper, so I am now ready to block in the dark background. This will automatically suggest light on the cat! How easy it that! Use whatever is there to create the background, avoid 'making it up' which rarely looks convincing and often looks like an after thought. Notice how quickly and loosely I add the dark. I don't have time to spend time colouring it in nicely, my subject may wake up!



Fig 10  
Pastel 'Smudge' 19 x 25 cms Pastel Drawing  
Step 3

I continue by suggesting a window shape, this need only be a tiny corner but it is enough to create a light source. I don't need to include the blinds. I now hold the dark pastel pencil as if I was writing and begin to add the darker tone on the body of the cat with bold scribbly marks. This suggests fur and texture and is really all I need to portray Smudge accurately. The drawing is exactly what I wanted, simple yet descriptive, the key to a quick atmospheric animal drawing.

**Using Blocks of colour rather than line.**

This is an alternative approach, which is more of a challenge, but fun. Instead of beginning with a contour line, or for that matter any outline, I block in colours as I see them.



Fig 11

A4 smooth drawing pad 120gms

Coloursoft Pencils

Blackberry 280

Blue 330

Ochre 590

I always use a limited palette for this technique, and choose it before I begin; I then hold the pencils in my hand and alternate between them as I go.



Fig 12

Step 1

Avoiding any white areas, I begin with the light tones, so in this case the Ochre, where I observe warmth in the fur. I immediately add the Blue everywhere I see a glossy shine on the coat. This represents the dark fur in bright light. Lastly I add the darks.

I use the pencils in the direction that the fur goes, but I block it in fairly quickly. I haven't much time, remember it's not a pet portrait, and the dog could move at any time. A slight movement won't worry me and once I reach this stage and have the important shapes so I can strengthen the colours even if the dog shifts.

**Tip** – I avoid overlapping any colour till I have established all the relevant shapes.



Fig 13  
Waiting to play. 14 x 20 cms Colouring Pencil Drawing

### Step 2

I strengthen my drawing by overlapping the colours to create a more three dimensional result. Any details such as the whiskers can be added later at the end.

The longer the animal stays in position the more detailed the drawing will become.

Watching the drawing slowly come into focus on the page is one of the most rewarding and exciting methods of working. The advantage is, you can stop at any stage and create anything from a mere suggestion of the animal, to a detailed drawing.

This technique is a great one to help speed up your observational skills.

### Using Oil Pastels

Oil pastels are fun to use to create vibrant drawings quickly.

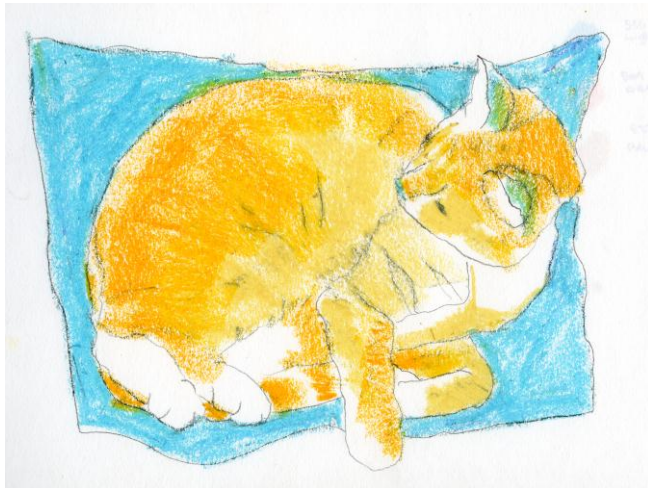


Fig 13  
Marmalade 20 x 25 cms  
I began this quick drawing with a contour in pencil, then chose just three oil colours.

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A4 smooth drawing pad 120gms

Inscribe pastels

522 Pale Ochre

509 Orange

535 Light Blue

I avoided the white paper where the cat is white, but applied Pale Ochre to all other light areas using the side of the stick. By applying an even pressure with the side of the pastel stick I can suggest bold blocks of textured colour with little effort.

**Tip** -Texture has a lot to do with the paper surface; the smoother the paper the finer the texture is achieved.

Next, using the same technique I added the Orange. I applied fluid broad strokes, occasionally overlapping the previous colour.

Using Light Blue I pressed the end of the pastel stick firmly onto the paper blocking in strong colour to suggest the cushion.

Finally I added a little of the blue to the darker sections of the ears.

I really like this little drawing; I enjoy using bright colours and emphasising the shapes and pattern within a subject.

I hope there you have had a go at some of these projects

Good luck with your drawing

Fiona