

Report on Dave White's Demonstration on 'Animal Portraits' 14 October 2024

This past Monday members were delighted to attend Dave White's very interesting, informative and inspiring demonstration on Animal Portraits when he generously shared with us what he has learnt over the past 20 years about painting animals, in particular dogs. Dave, who paints in acrylics, has regularly exhibited at Crufts and SAA.

His demonstration was divided into two parts. The first dealt with composition and how to tackle the difficult task of representing animal hair. The second on painting eyes, nose and the tongue.

For composition, Dave emphasised the need for a sufficiently large canvas (at least 20"x16"), adapting its size and shape to fit its future location, observing the direction of light falling on the canvas and using a background colour which fits with the colour of the floor. He strongly recommended placing the animal(s) off centre and ensuring the animal looked directly at the observer.

Dave's demonstration painting involved two dogs, one long-haired (Alsatian) and one short-haired (white Labrador). The dominant eye of each dog was placed on the 'thirds'. A key point about painting animal fur was to build up the hairs in layers, starting with the background shadow layer seen between the hairs, in the case of the Alsatian browns, in the case of the Labrador purple. Both dogs were initially given dark eyes, and dark/red noses respectively.

To paint the hairs, Dave recommended SAA Rake brushes, removing most of the paint and painting in short strokes, in the direction of hair growth, starting at the outline edge, and building up as many layers as possible to create a 3D effect. Alsatian colours focused on browns and golds, the Labrador whites and blues.

During the interval, members were able to view a wide variety of stunning animal portraits as well as some seascapes. Cards and books produced by Dave were available for purchase.

The second half started with the eyes, similar in shape to human eyes in comparison to cats' eyes which have a vertical split. Repeating the need to ensure the animal is looking directly at the observer, he noted that light hits the iris on the opposite side to the light source, and that due to the shape of the skull only 1/3 to 1/4 of the iris colour can be seen. The shape of light reflection part on the pupil should follow the outside edge of the eye. The noses (dark and red respectively) should include various shades to reflect the contours and again use white reflections to represent a wet nose! Tongues should not be too long, using a Cadmium Red deep and blue mix, with layers of darks, reds and lights. Whiskers should be painted on using the edge of a piece of card, painted with white and pressed against the painting, using different angles and different weights.

Finally he explained the use of glazes to warm up the colour of layered hairs, ensuring that the glaze paint is dilute and transparent, brushing lightly over the area. Dave's final words after a fascinating demonstration: Practice, practice, practice!!





