

Artsy Painted Birds

I love painting birds. I like to give them crazy colors and use loose, painterly brushstrokes. The fun-colored birdies make me happy! Don't fret if you can't draw a bird. You can trace! For this technique, you just need the basic outline of the bird, so tracing works well to give you a shape to use as a starting point. In this piece, I traced an image from the Graphics Fairy, which is an extensive online clipart resource.

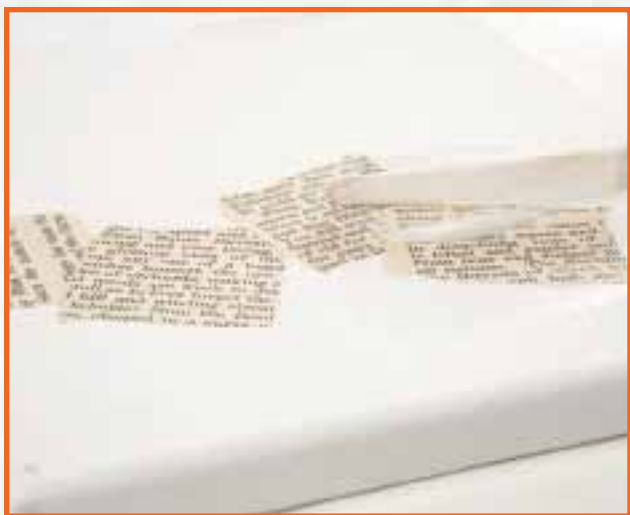
As you paint your bird canvas, think about the concepts in this chapter. Try using color to set a visual path, or to keep the eye moving around your composition. I put stenciling on each bird's body to keep the eye moving from bird to bird.



MATERIALS LIST

8" x 10" (20cm x 25cm) canvas
clip art or picture of birds
gesso
acrylic paint (Raw Umber, Burnt Sienna, Cobalt Teal, Manganese Blue Hue, Light Blue Permanent, Quinacridone Rose, Ultramarine Violet, Titanium White, Payne's Grey, Permanent Yellow Deep)
spray inks (Wild Plum, Sunset Orange, Sailboat Blue)
Stabilo Marks All pencil
sheets of book paper
stencils
paintbrush
gel medium
Workable Fixatif
paper towels
transfer paper
black pen
dull pencil
palette knife
water

acrylic paint (Golden, Liquitex, Amsterdam); clip art (Graphics Fairy); gel medium (Liquitex); gesso (Dick Blick); paper towels (Viva); pen (Sharpie); pencil (Stabilo); spray inks (Ranger); stencils (Crafter's Workshop); Workable Fixatif (Krylon)



- 1** Apply a thin coat of gesso to your canvas. I find even preprimed canvases need another coat of gesso to make the paint stick well.
Use gel medium and a palette knife to apply torn pieces of book paper along the bottom third of the canvas. Be sure to put a thin layer of gel both under and over the pieces of book paper.



- 2** Brush light blue paint onto the top left and bottom right corners of the canvas. I like to add some water to the paint so it flows well and has some transparency.
Wipe the paint with a paper towel, leaving the center lighter than the edges. Drag some paint to the corners that you didn't paint, too.



- 3** Add some teal paint to the edges. If the teal paint doesn't blend well into the blue paint, work it in with your finger or a cloth.



- 4** Use your finger to put some Manganese Blue and Raw Umber paint onto the corners of the canvas. Work the paint until you are happy with the shading.



5 Print out a picture of birds that you'd like to draw. I find lots of great copyright-free images on the Internet, or I use some of my own photos.

Place transfer paper on your canvas, and put your bird picture on top of the transfer paper. Use a dull pencil to trace the lines of the birds and branches. Make sure you use firm pressure so the image transfers to the canvas. You can fold the picture and transfer paper back to check your progress.



6 Go over your traced marks with a Stabilo Marks All pencil. Don't worry about putting in every detail. The general outline of the birds is just fine. Use several strokes while you draw to give the birds a free-form, artsy look.



7 Wet a paintbrush and trace over the lines. The water dissolves the pencil marks and turns them into paint. If you've drawn two or three lines, you can dissolve some lines and leave some as pencil lines.



8 Spray the birds with Workable Fixatif to prevent the black lines from smearing too much while you paint.

Take a good look at your bird photo. Identify the lightest areas on the birds' bodies. Use white paint to paint those areas on the birds' bodies. Don't worry about filling in every inch of the birds. We're making fun, artsy birds, not realistic birds. Make your strokes go in the same direction as the feathers. Your strokes will give the impression of feathers without having to fill in every minute detail.

Keep It Loose

I don't have a steady hand, so I find that if I sketch something with one line, it looks amateurish. If I sketch something with two or three loose lines, it looks artsy.



9 Look at your bird photo and identify medium tones or colors on the birds. Paint in those mid tones with violet paint. Be sure to overlap your brushstrokes and colors.



10 Look at your photo and identify the darkest colors on the birds. Use gray to add those dark areas.



11 Add some Quinacridone rose to brighten the birds and add more visual interest and color contrast. If you paint over your highlights or white areas, simply put them back with more white paint.

Achieving Graceful Brushstrokes

Keep your brushstrokes loose and expressive. I get the best results from using a small, flat paintbrush. Load it with paint and press the brush onto the paper. As you drag the paintbrush, lift it up so your brushstroke has a feathered edge.



12 Add yellow paint to the birds to add visual interest and emphasis. The yellow works well for beaks, too. If you paint over any of your black lines, simply draw them back in with the Stabilo Marks All pencil.



13 Use your pencil to define the eyes, and use a paintbrush to dissolve the pencil marks so they look like paint.



14 Add catch lights to the eyes with a few dots of white paint. Catch lights are the reflection of light in the eye. Catch lights are what make animals (and people!) look alive. You just need one or two small dots of white in the birds' pupils to create good catch lights.



15 Paint the branches loosely with Burnt Sienna.



16 Use orange spray ink and a stencil to add stenciled texture to the birds' bodies.



17 Blot the stenciling with one pass of a roll of paper towels.



18 Use blue and plum inks to add stenciled texture to the background. Blot the stenciling with one pass of a roll of paper towels.



19 Use a black pen to write journaling on the birds' bodies. You could write a poem, quote, song lyrics or anything that moves you.