



MARIE-CLAIRE

TUTORIAL

Paintings by Marie-Claire Colyer

'Intimate – Tuturiwhatu' (Northern New Zealand Dotterel in non-breeding plumage)

After spending many days at Auckland Zoo with my young son, I began a painting of a New Zealand Dotterel in non-breeding plumage. These amazing little shore birds change colour in the breeding season. One day I hope to paint another in their chestnut colouration.

This painting is based on a preliminary sketch.



Preliminary sketch on paper

Step 1 - Layout

Decide on the layout of the painting. I chose a close up of the bird's head and chest as this joined a series of close up paintings. I could have chosen to do the full bird and even include a background. The melancholy feeling to my sketch would have lent itself to a full landscape with a dimly lit beach, perhaps at dawn or on an overcast day. I may even decide to do a similar posture for a future painting – look out for that one.



Step 2 – Blocking in

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My normal method is to block in the subject entirely in black or another dark colour. This helps determine how light the background needs to be. If the finished painting is to be dark, e.g. a dark bird, painting the background without blocking out the white will make the background too dark. (Colours appear to change according to the colours about them. Placing black around a colour makes it appear darker and vice versa for white).

The other reason for blocking in a dark colour before painting the subject is because often the canvas will show through the brush strokes. This is far more evident when white canvas shines through.

I deviated from my norm this time. Because there is so much detail on the back feathers themselves I need to do many layers to create the colouration and soft texture of them. The Dotterel also has a white breast.

So although I have shown examples in the past of blocking in the subject, there can be subjects that require a different method. Do whatever feels right – go with your gut.

Remember there are no mistakes, just opportunities.

I could have blocked in the bird here, but decided it was a step I could forego. I first sketched in the major features with pencil and then brushed in the background. I decided to streak the paint to suggest flowing water as this is its natural habitat.

Step 3 – Background of the subject



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Next I dabbed on the back and head feathers in a range of shades to roughly define their position following the lines sketched onto the canvas. If I had blocked in the bird with an opaque black as I normally do I would have lost these details. The more detail and brushwork there is in the area the more I am likely to forgo blocking in a solid undercoat. Instead I rely more on a detailed sketch straight onto the canvas and many layers of paint to hide the canvas weave while layering in the fine details.

Step 4 - Definition

Time to start defining those feathers. This is a lengthy process, but well worth the effort to keep the plumage looking as natural as possible. The trick is to place them like roof tiles, alternating each overlapping feather. I also started to detail the area about the eye.

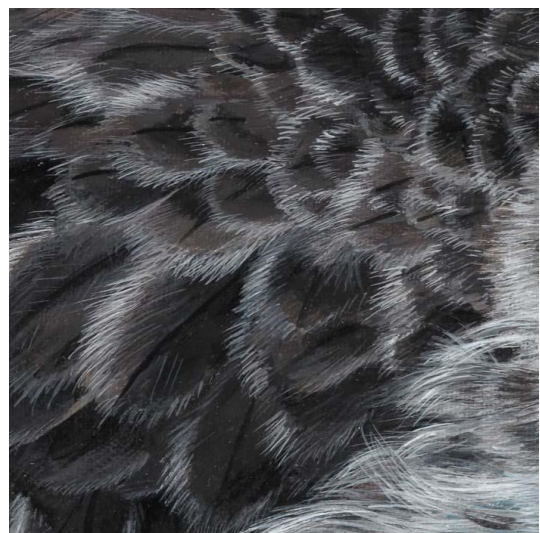
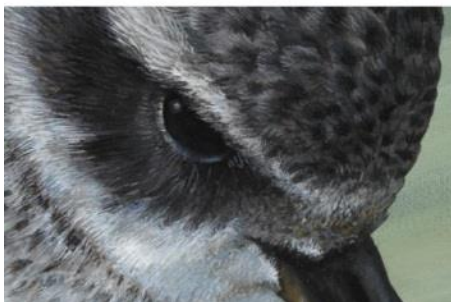
This is when I finally blocked in all the white by laying down a blue-grey over the breast area. **Always remember your light source.** I wanted the light to bounce off the edge of the upper back feathers, without coming from a focused source, rather a diffuse glow from cloudy skies. This would then dim the underside of the bird and create shade rather than stark shadows. The breast feathers therefore needed to have a blue bias.



Step 4 - Definition

The original photo I used for reference was taken in cloudy weather and the eye is black with no highlights. The eyes of this bird are often dark when shadowed. I liked the sorrowful aspect this lent to the bird, but felt the eye was too flat. To bring it to life I added a small flare, as if reflecting the sun. All it took was one small graduated dot. **Feel free to deviate from your reference photos, remembering always to be true to the subject, such as its behaviour, posture and environment.**

Detail of feathers



The eye in progress the way it looked in the reference photo above the eye completed with the addition of a sun reflection that wasn't actually there

Here is the completed painting, continuing my Intimate bird series.



'Intimate – Tūturiwhatu'

Close-up of a Northern New Zealand Dotterel in non-breeding plumage. These endangered shore birds change colour in the breeding season. Another name it was commonly known by is the Red-breasted Plover. Its Maori names include Tūturiwhatu, Pukunui, and Kūkuruatu.

Original artwork, fine art reproductions and home decor may be viewed & purchased by visiting Marie-Claire's website www.mccolyer.com. To see other paintings as they progress, follow her on Facebook www.facebook.com/marieclairecolyer.