COLOURWHEEL Art Classes
**Three Ways with Watercolour Pencils: Peacock Feathers**

In this session we're going to use watercolour pencils to explore three different ways to use them looking at these beautiful peacock feathers. If you don't have watercolour pencils at home, then normal colouring pencils will do as we will be using watercolour pencils dry for one of the methods.

If you don't fancy tackling a peacock feather, substitute it for another type of feather as these methods will work equally as well.

In the image to the left, I've used all three methods in one piece, simply to demonstrate the process; perhaps you may just stick with one.

Left to Right: dry watercolour pencil only; black biro with dry and wet watercolour pencil; wet watercolour pencil

Watercolour Pencils

Watercolour pencils are a wonderful bridge between drawing and painting. When used with water, they can create effects similar to watercolour paints. The binder in watercolour pencil pigments is water soluble. When you add water, the binder releases more pigment resulting in more intense colour.

Watercolour pencils allow for a more controlled piece and the artist can feel more in control. They also allow for the creation of more expressive lines. They are generally less messy – they create a watercolour effect without the hassle of cleaning up. I like to use them in a sketch book when I'm working outside along with a jam jar of water. I often use them in conjunction with watercolour paint to add finer detail and/or marks at the end of my work. The sharp point of a watercolour pencil allows you to lay down more visual information than the flexible point of a brush. If you want a particularly crisp line, you don't even have to add water. Watercolour pencils do present versatility and can be useful to those who enjoy sketching, drawing and line work and using these in conjunction with different techniques.

Do consider how you apply the pencil to the paper- pressing on too hard with the point can make indents in the surface of the paper and when adding water, these marks may still be visible. Consider hatching and cross hatching to build colour gradually. Using a scumbling motion can also be effective.

Main Task: **Equipment:** watercolour paper or multimedia is best if you want to wet your pencil work. If you don't have these papers, strong cartridge paper would be suitable, 2H or 2B pencil, black biro or black fine liners (using a blue pen will give a different effect so you may wish to experiment with this, watercolour pencils or colouring pencils.
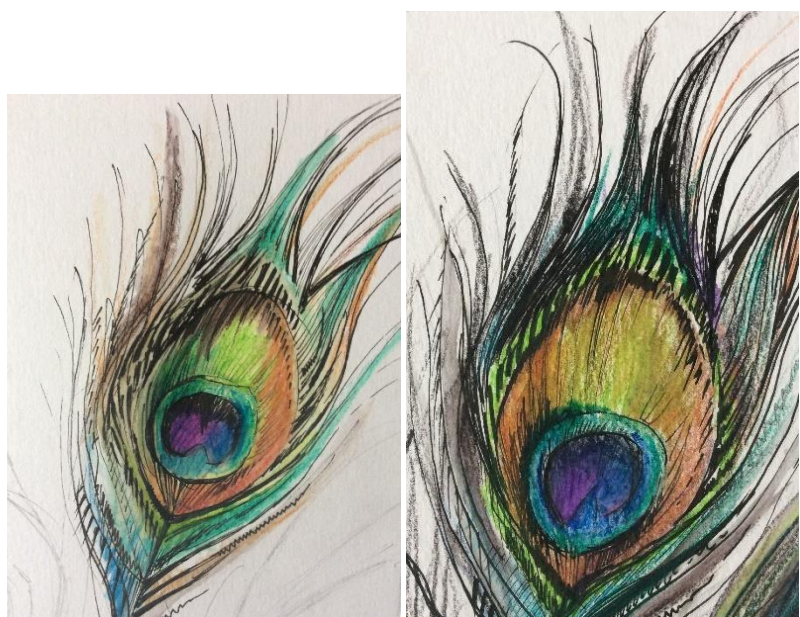
Biro and Watercolour Pencil:
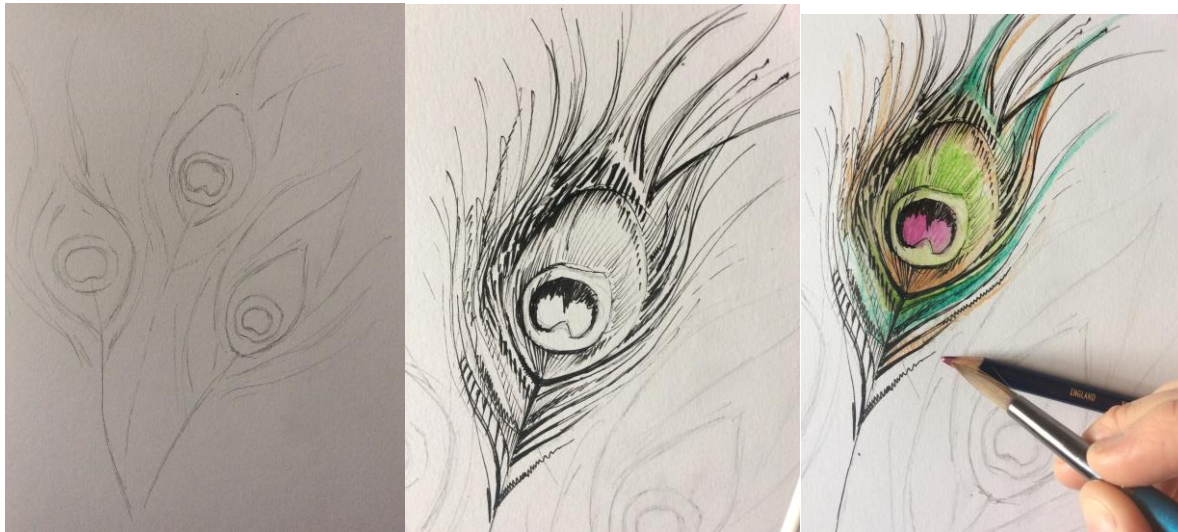
Step One: Begin by lightly drawing out your composition – I'm going for three feathers to demonstrate the different ways to approach this, but feel free to draw only one if you prefer. Notice how I'm adding very little detail at this stage – I'm going to let the other mediums do the work. I've also altered the photographic reference slightly and have the stalks overlapping.

Step Two: I'm beginning with the black biro feather and in my image, it's the one in the centre. Do check that your chosen pen is waterproof first as when we add water, it may smudge. I look around the feather, varying my marks and thickness of line this begins to add detail and tone.

Step Three: as tempting as it is, never, dunk your watercolour pencils into water – instead take a wet paintbrush and take the paint off the tip. We will be working light to dark so work in some of the main colours that you can see. I use a mixture of taking the pigment off the pencil with a wet brush and lightly drawing on the image and then gently wetting it.

Step Four: once the initial layer of colour is added, I can start to make colours more vibrant. For this I press on a little harder with my colours and use a brush to then liquefy the pencil – sometimes I layer a couple of colours and allow these to blend using water.

Step Five: you don't want to lose the original pen marks, so once you've worked in some darker colour and your paper is dry, think about adding a little extra detail with your pen if you think it is needed. Note the contrast in the last image between definite pen lines and then colour taken from the pencil with a wet brush on the left side of the image.

This method would work equally as well with felt tips – think back to the city scape in the felt tip tutorial. Some felt tips are water soluble also.

Watercolour Pencil used dry (coloured pencils would work equally as well)
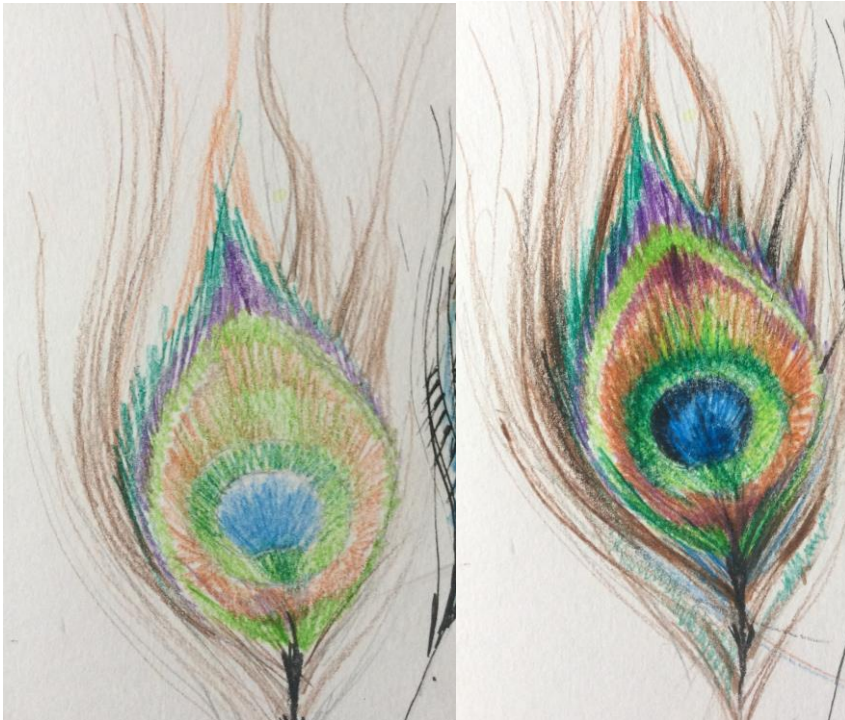
Step One: again we're working light to dark so begin by laying down the lightest colours you see in the different areas of the feather, making sure you're working around the whole image. Take note of the texture of the feather and move your pencil in this way to help to describe the feather. Coloured pencils can often been seen as a child's medium and this stage will look childish- subsequent layers will bring it to life so stick with it.

Step Two: using a harder pressure, begin to darken up areas using the same colour but also darker hues e.g. dark green over light. If you haven't got the exact colour, try laying colours over the top of one another on a sheet of scrap: dark blue under brown will give a darker brown; a light brown layered with purple can give a pleasing colour for this subject. Experiment! Keep pencils sharp and again consider those marks.

Step Three: for the fronds at the top of the feather and down the stem, look at some of the textures you see. Hold your pencil in different ways e.g. on its side to begin to pull some of these marks out. It's a good idea to think about keeping your tone and marks heavier and darker on these fronds where they touch the centre of the feather and looser and more wispy towards the ends.

Wet Watercolour Pencil: if you don't have watercolour paper, try not to wet your paper too much.
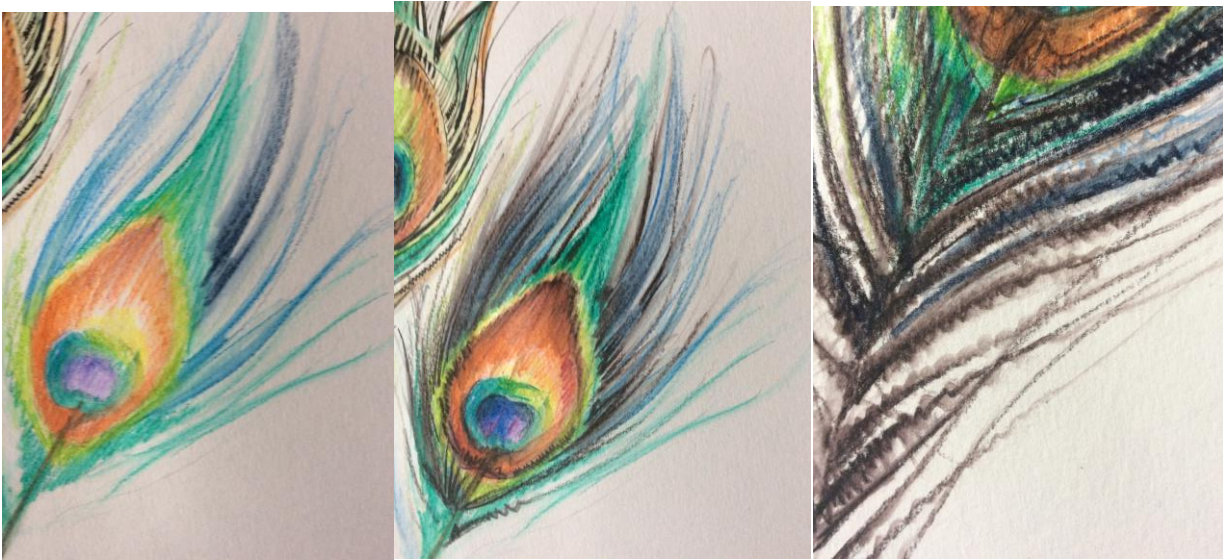

This version takes elements from the previous two techniques.

Step One: begin adding your colour in the same way as you did on your biro drawing – taking pigment from the pencil with a wet brush and also laying down colour lightly and washing over this with a damp brush. Begin to think about some of the darker areas and especially on the fronds, run the brush from the darkest area of the colour to the ends to get a contrast. Don't be put off by the gaudy appearance – it's amazing what subsequent layers will do.

Step Two: once the initial layer is dry, use a harder pressure to build up tone. Experiment on a piece of scrap paper to see what happens when you layer two or three colours and then wet it with a brush. Tip- do push the water from the lightest colour to the darkest to prevent colours becoming muddy. Start to put in some of those darker browns that you see.

Step Three: being to add finer details – keep that pencil sharp and at this stage, just use the tip of the brush to wet pencil on the page. Take a look at the image of the fronds – to achieve this feathery look, wiggle your paintbrush, almost in a scribbly mark up and down over the fronds. You want to keep the main stem darker with the feathery parts coming off looser and lighter.
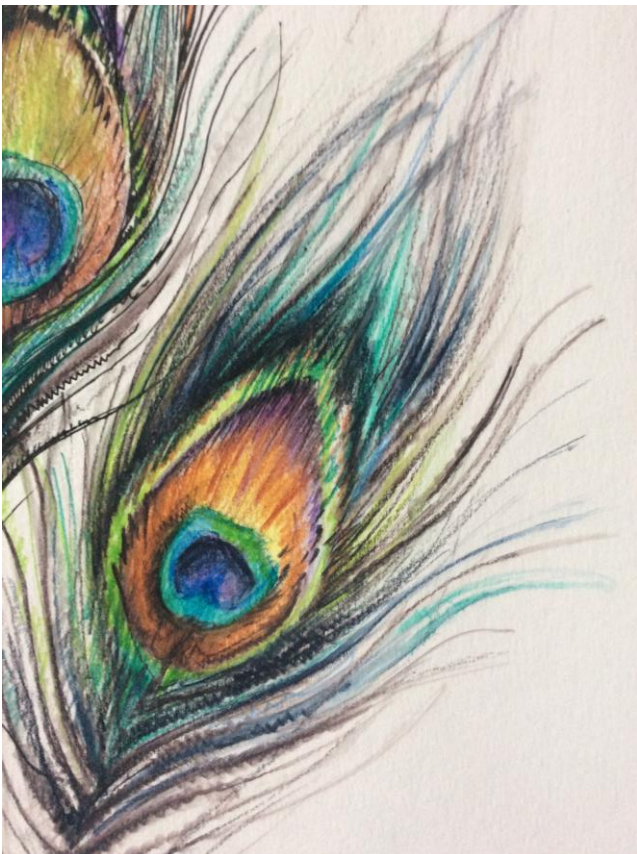
Reference Images
If you're not in the mood to tackle a whole feather, looking at a section up close can create some beautiful drawings.