

Highland Cows

For this project we will be looking at how to achieve fur using charcoal or graphite. Have a go at the project below and if you enjoy it, why not try it again, in colour using soft pastel or coloured pencils.



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Drawing fur can seem daunting – where do you start with all of those bristles of hair and how do you render it without ending up with something that resembles grass or straw instead? My top tip is to switch off from what you are drawing and learn to trust your eyes, thinking about patterns of light and dark that you see and looking carefully at the direction and movement of marks.

If we think about fur, it's made up of hairs that lie one upon the other. When the surface that they sit upon bends, the individual hairs become grouped, creating clumps or waves. The finer the hairs, the more they become clumped. Drawing is all about the contrast between light and shadow. Think about approaching drawing fur by beginning to draw the shadows between the clumps or waves of hair rather than the fur itself. When the clumps or waves of fur are larger, the larger the shadow between these will be.

Warm Up



Whether you decide to use graphite or charcoal, the technique will be the same. I start by using a viewfinder to lay over a complicated piece of fur. This automatically makes what I'm looking at, abstract which helps me to switch off from what I'm drawing. I set a timer to 10 minutes – this way I'm not becoming too precious.

Cover your swatch of paper either with willow charcoal rubbed into the paper with a tissue or use sandpaper to grate some graphite dust onto your paper and rub this in with a cotton pad. Think about bigger shapes first and the way in which these move. Use your preferred medium to begin to shade in the shapes of the shadows that you see. Don't go too dark too soon- you're building up the texture. When you've covered your area with some shapes, apply more pressure to make the darkest areas and an angled eraser or putty eraser to pull out some highlights – think about using your eraser as a drawing implement!

Main Task

Equipment Needed: cartridge paper, 2H/HB pencil, sketching pencils or willow charcoal/charcoal pencils, angled and putty erasers, paper stump or cotton bud



Use your 2H or HB pencil to sketch out your chosen image. Look at how the pencil marks can be used to achieve movement in the cow's fringe. Some simple, directional marks can say a lot! I've decided to use charcoal pencils and I begin to add the mid tones that I see, varying pressure to create these. You want to use a variety of marks and I've enlarged some sections below to show this. For example, I use a feathered stroke for the body of the cow and a stippled mark for its nose. Don't lose that lovely movement in the fringe – the initial marks that you made should guide your shading direction. I use my paper stump to blend some edges.





Once I've worked mid tones over the whole of the image, I give my pencils a good sharpen and begin to apply more pressure to add those darker areas – look at the shapes of the shadow. As before, work around the whole image with these darker marks to help to see your image as a whole.



I give my pencils another good sharpen. Tip: if you're using willow charcoal, keep a piece of sandpaper to hand and use this to grind down the willow charcoal to a point. Using my sharpened tools, I add finer detail. I also warm a small piece of putty eraser in my hand and then mould it to the required shape. This is then used to draw in some of the highlights.

Why not try:

- a toned paper with charcoal. This way you can introduce white charcoal or chalk for those highlights;
- using a toned paper with a range of brown pastels or charcoal can create a softer image;
- try using soft pastels on a black paper – see the mood board for inspiration;
- coloured pencils work well. Using blue in tandem with orangey browns can give an interesting twist.

Photographic References

