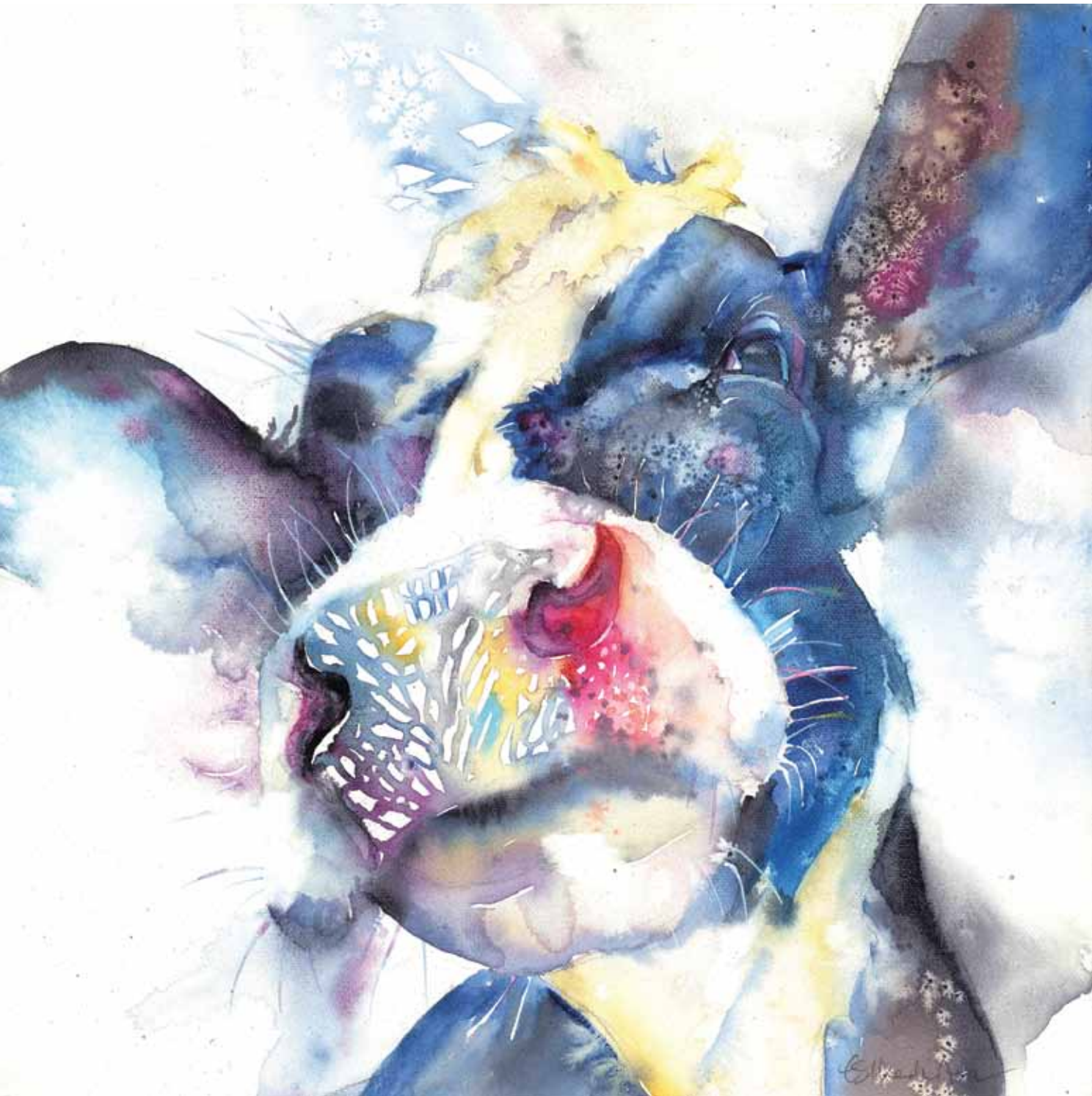


A Whole Different *ANIMAL*



With evident affection for her subjects, **Liz Chaderton** takes a big, bold spontaneous approach to painting animals that shows them in a new light.

By Tim Saunders

Traditionally, watercolorists have been constrained—in terms of painting scale—by the size of the papers available to them on the market. The development, however, of watercolor grounds revolutionized what could be achieved. These acrylic-based primers, designed to create a surface absorbency that accepts watermedia on any surface, have allowed artists to take water-based media to canvas and wooden panels, among other surfaces. For English artist, Liz Chaderton, the benefits were significant. “It’s not like painting on paper,” she says, “and that difference can be a shock to some, but the watercolors still have a lovely transparency—a way of flowing, mingling and merging that I love.” The artist is such a fan, she has developed her own recipe for a homemade ground (see page 00).

In addition to expanding the size and the type of substrate that watercolorists can use, this technique also allows artists to seal their paintings with wax or varnish and, as a result, frame without the use of glass. In terms of size, Chaderton says, “I’m only restricted by the length of my arms because, with watercolor, you have to work relatively flat since water flows downward. If I put a canvas up on an easel, it will be very drippy.”

ABOVE
Chaderton worked to capture a sense of purpose and movement in **Ready, Steady, Go** (watercolor on paper, 35x45).

OPPOSITE
Painted on a 19½x19½-inch canvas, this study of a cow takes a front-loaded vantage point that celebrates the animal’s wonderful nose.

The immediacy and spontaneity of watercolors is a big part of the medium's appeal for Chaderton. "Painting in watercolor is always a surprise," she says. "You might think you're in control of it, but you're not. Just when you think you've got it, it slaps you 'round the face and puts you back in your place. Then, just when you're getting completely fed up, suddenly something wonderful happens. In this way, you're always learning. It's all about the water and the way it flows. I haven't found such spontaneity in any other medium."

ANIMAL ATTRACTION

The subjects that Chaderton loves to paint most are animals and the natural world. "I find animals and birds endlessly fascinating," she says. "Nothing makes me happier than spotting a gorgeous herd of cows, coming up over a hedge. Their noses are just divine."

The artist is also a fan of urban sketching—a practice that encourages and hones her powers of observation. "You can be standing in front of a shop and, if you look up, you see a beautiful Victorian window," she says. "If you're staring at your feet and shuffling around, you don't see that."

Chaderton's creative process always begins with just this kind of surprise observation. "I might happen to notice the patterns of my cat's whiskers against the light coming in through the window, and that prompts a thought process that will usually take me somewhere," she says.

The artist often works from sketches or photos since her animal subjects are



unlikely to remain still for long. "I'll try to work on a composition that captures the moment I've just seen," she says. "I try to put a slight emphasis on what first caught my attention. Then I'll think about my colors because color convey so much emotion."

GO WITH THE FLOW

Rather than work in layers, Chaderton lets the water do much of the work for her. "I'll apply the first layer and the first wash, and that will be 85 per cent of the picture," she explains. "Then I'll stop and make sure my eyes are fresh, look again and develop it a little further." Near the finish, the artist adds a few details—the cat's whiskers or a flick of a furry ear perhaps. "I try to capture the essence of the subject, rather than the details," Chaderton says. "I want to pull viewers in so

Though Chaderton often opts for bold, interpretive color in her paintings, this isn't always the case, as demonstrated by her more naturalistic choices for **Timid Hare** (watercolor on paper, 17¼x17¼).

A Simple Recipe for Homemade Ground

Although it won't feel exactly the same, Chaderton warns, an application of a watercolor ground to a surface can make it behave a little more like a sized paper. To make her own, she uses a basic recipe of three parts gesso to one part modeling paste (by volume). After mixing it thoroughly, she applies three thin coats to the surface, typically to a canvas or wooden panel, letting each coat dry between applications [correct?]. Depending on atmospheric conditions, each layer should be dry to the touch in about an hour. To create a "hot-pressed" finish, she sands the surface gently between coats. She then allows the surface to cure for 24 hours or more. "I like to use a roller to apply the ground to avoid brush marks," Chaderton says, "but you could deliberately introduce a surface texture by using a palette knife or brush for the application."

Should you desire a transparent ground, a clear gesso and clear modeling paste can also be combined. "This is ideal for applications to wood surfaces when you want the grain to be visible in the final image," Chaderton says. If she doesn't plan to frame the artwork under glass, she seals the piece with either a varnish or a cold wax medium.



that they're imagining what's going on, filling in the gaps and becoming involved. This way, they get to experience the feeling I had when I noticed the cat's whiskers or the chicken's fluffy bloomers."

By taking this somewhat intuitive approach, the artist hopes to come to a successful conclusion and stop. "With watercolor it's very easy to go too far," Chaderton says, "and one extra brushstroke can ruin a painting." For that reason, she makes herself err toward the side of stopping too early. "You can always add to your heart's content," she says, "but stop too late and it has to go in the bin."

Chaderton has learned that, with watercolor, the key is in understanding how the materials react and what they'll do. "You also have the planning and cerebral work to do," she suggests. "Knowing the order and way in

which you work—that's equally important." As an example, she points to the importance of preserving the whites. "For watercolor painters, the white of your paper is the white in your palette. Therefore, you actually need to plan and think it through."

There are a lot of considerations for an artist during the painting process. Chaderton points to the need to understand the materials, chemically; the planning and cerebral activity; the conceptual considerations and the emotional expression. "There's all sorts of things going on at once," she says, "which is why I love it."

Chaderton was inspired to paint **Fearless Dodo** (ink resist and watercolor on surface?, 19½x19½) after sketching at a natural history museum. Now a symbol of extinction, dodos were once considered fierce protectors, known to attack sailors who threatened their nests and habitat.



PLAY WITH YOUR MATERIALS

Chaderton keeps an open mind when it comes to creative techniques and enjoys experimentation. Ink resist, which creates an effect reminiscent of a woodcut or linoleum print, is one of the techniques she has added to her creative arsenal. “The resist, which is gouache or gum arabic, protects the paper—a bit like masking fluid,” Chaderton says. “Waterproof ink is then applied over the complete surface and left to dry. The ink binds to any unprotected paper and becomes permanent.” The watersoluble gouache or gum can then be removed through a washing process. “If gouache is used, it will stain the paper and a tint of the original color will remain,” she adds. “This can either be enhanced with watercolor washes or left as is for a vintage look.” For best results, Chaderton recommends using a robust paper [such as?] that can withstand the washing process. *Fearless Dodo*, page 00, is an example of a watercolor in which the artist used ink resist. “Although it’s a very exact method, the end results can be unpredictable with delightful spontaneity and energy,” she says.

Another technique the artist uses to great effect is metal leafing. See, for example, [title of painting](#) and [title of painting](#), on this page. “Gold leaf has been used since Egyptian times to denote reverence and prestige,” Chaderton says. “By incorporating

TOP LEFT

[[title of painting, media, surface and dimensions?](#)] features the triskele symbol, which shows three hares joined at the ears. The symbol originated in China and, as goods moved along the old Silk Road, it made its way to parish churches in Devon and Cornwall, where they are known as “Tinner’s rabbits.”

BOTTOM LEFT

Living close to the River Thames, Chaderton is constantly inspired by the wildlife found in and around the river. In [[title of painting and dimensions?](#)], she captures a trio of otters on canvas with a mix of media that includes ink, watercolor and metal leaf.



gold into images, it signals a level of prestige—that there is value placed on the subject. I especially love to use it with commonplace subjects to show that even the most ordinary bird or animal is an everyday miracle.”

The artist uses artificial metal leaf as an affordable alternative to 24-kt gold leaf. “The challenge for the watercolorist is that, unlike acrylic or oil paint, watercolor won’t adhere to the metal surface,” says Chaderton. “Therefore, the gold needs to be applied separately from the watercolor. Still, the two media must work together as a whole.” The artist uses gold size, an acrylic-based adhesive which dries to a low-tack finish, to affix the gossamer-thin metal leaf. She also applies a sealer to the artificial gold or it will tarnish.

Line and wash, which Chaderton describes as the place “where painting and drawing meet,” is another method she regularly employs. See the artist’s portrait of a basset hound, above, as one example. “The goal is for the strengths of each medium to combine and produce an image that exceeds the individual parts,” she says. “The ink brings structure and definition of contours, while the watercolor wash adds volume and emotion through color.” It’s an approach that can be used to capture a lot of information quickly and is, therefore, ideally suited for urban sketching and

Line and wash, which was used for [[title of painting and dimensions?](#)] is one of Chaderton’s favorite ways of working. She suggests changing your order of working—that is, wash first or line first—according to the demands of the subject and your creative concept. [[Liz: What was the order here?](#)]

On Materials

Chaderton works on both watercolor paper and canvas primed with a watercolor ground. While there are grounds available from Daniel Smith, Golden’s QoR line and Schmincke, Chaderton says she prefers to save money by making her own. As for paper, she has found that a decent artist can use inexpensive paints on a nice piece of paper and still get good results, so she encourages people to get the best quality paper they can. [[LIZ: Do you have a favorite?](#)]

“When selecting the size of support, I think about what I’m trying to communicate in the painting,” Chaderton says. “If I’m painting a humble house sparrow, for example, I might decide that in order to make the point that this is a creature worthy of our attention, I need to paint it on a large, 3x3-foot canvas. Or, I may paint it small to call attention to its fragility. The same painting on a different scale will actually say something totally different, so I work in a range of sizes.”

That said, the artist does love to paint big. Lately, she has enjoyed a 31x31 and 35x35 format. “A hand-made canvas is a joy to work on when I’m doing a commission and a specific size is required,” Chaderton says, but more often she takes advantage of special offers for prepared canvases that are too good to miss. “We’ve got a loft room that is crammed with canvases,” she says.

As far as her palette of paints, Chaderton doesn’t have favorite brands, instead working with a little of everything. “But I do love gamboge from Rembrandt,” she says.

For brushes, the artist prefers synthetics due to her concerns for the environment and animal welfare. “Over the last 20 years, synthetics have improved enormously,” she says. “Also, working on watercolor ground and canvas is rough on brushes, so you want to use a really resilient synthetic one—rather than a soft natural hair brush. A good brush will come to a good point and hold a large volume of water, which it releases in a nice controlled way.”



illustration. “But the technique shouldn’t be overlooked for more finished studio work,” says the artist, “where it can be used for anything to create anything from detailed etching-style drawings to works with bold sweeps of graffiti-type line.”

ON THE BUSINESS AND BUSYNESS OF ART

Chaderton is a busy artist. In addition to painting, she teaches workshops, writes instructional art books and makes video lessons. “A lot of my time is spent on the business side of things,” she says, “and it’s very easy for the painting to get squished out.” On a good day, though, Chaderton will get to her studio—which she describes as “a posh shed”—as soon as her son is off to school, and she’ll paint all day. The routine, however, varies greatly, such that no two days are the same.

A lot of the artist’s time has gone into the writing of instructional books for watercolorists. Chaderton has already had four books published with The Crowood Press: *Painting Watercolours on Canvas*, *Painting Animals in Watercolour*, *Line and Wash Painting*, which delves into her methods for combining pen-and-ink with watercolor, and *Painting Birds in Watercolour*, which was just released in July.



TOP AND BOTTOM LEFT Chaderton painted the cat portrait, *The Look of Love* (watercolor, 13¼x13¼), on paper, but opted for canvas for *Title of Painting* [to come] (watercolor, 15¼x15¼).

ABOVE Painting on a deep edge canvas allows the image to continue around the side, letting the subject jump off the surface.



When the pandemic arrived on the scene, Chaderton decided to keep herself “ridiculously busy” as a way to avoid worrying about all the things not in her control. “I discovered the joys of social media,” she says, “and also started using the platform as a way to sell my art.”

The artist found other creative ways to find buyers. During an early lock-down period, for example, when art galleries and shops were closed, Chaderton took notice of a growing number of people who needed to “get out” and began taking walks in the countryside around her home. “I live on a busy country road,” she explains. “We were having gorgeous weather, and I’d never seen so many people walk past my house. So, I started putting paintings in the front garden—just propped on an easel—to give passersby something to look at. It made me feel better, because—as an artist—you want to show your work.” Chaderton put out a new painting each day and it wasn’t long before someone asked whether the painting was for sale. She made a few sales that way.

The artist clearly enjoys a challenge, and last year, set herself the goal of making a weekly video for YouTube demonstrating practical watercolor art tips. “I thought it could improve my teaching and video-editing skills,” she says. She has since made more than 50 videos, which have attracted 5,000 subscribers. This has been

an effective way to introduce her work to a growing fan base, but more than that, the artist is encouraged by the sense of community in this work. “It makes me very happy,” Chaderton says, “that we’re all united by a love of watercolor.” **WA**

Tim Saunders is a journalist living in Hampshire, England.

Meet the Artist



Liz Chaderton (lizchaderton.co.uk) works in watercolor on both paper and canvas. The artist’s aim is to create paintings that raise a smile and help viewers see the extraordinary in the creatures of this world. Her work is represented

by several galleries and can be found in collections, both public and private. She’s the author of four books of art instruction, and she also offers instructional courses.

Chaderton can be quite fearless with her color choices, as seen in *The Cow With the Zebra Ear* 35x35cm, watercolour on paper (watercolor on paper, 13¼x13¼).