

## A Wildlife Masterclass with Eric Wilson

At the end of November 2017 I participated in a workshop with wildlife artist Eric Wilson in Heerlen/Netherlands. I am fascinated by his paintings and urgently wanted to learn more about his pastel technique. PGE member Yolanda Coevers-Schoenmarkers had organized this master class at the big art supply shop 'Victor4Art' in Heerlen

Eric Wilson is one of Great Britain's leading wildlife artists, a multi-award winner whose paintings are now widely collected throughout the world. He has had sell out exhibitions in London, Germany and the United States. His paintings have appeared in numerous magazines and books and original works have been auctioned at Christies in London.

Eric has recently been the subject of a Sky Television documentary 'Zeitgeist' about his life and work. He is also a respected teacher of art, with students coming from as far away as Australia for his lessons and he has taught classes in Italy, Holland, Germany, Austria and Thailand. His instructional DVD 'Pastel Masterclass' has been a huge success selling all over the world.

The world wide appeal of Eric's work is not only the craftsmanship of his paintings, but the fact that he has spent a lifetime studying these animals in the wild, from Polar Bears in the frozen north, Gorillas in Zaire, to Tigers in Nepal. Eric paints wildlife from his own direct experience'. For more information, go visit Eric's website at [www.ericwilsonart.com](http://www.ericwilsonart.com).

Initially I had expected Eric to show his composition technique at the easel. But first, everybody got a reference photo and a b/w copy in DinA3. Most participants chose a photo of one of Eric's paintings. I decided to use a photo of a lion a photographer friend from Switzerland had given to me. We used graphite paper to transfer all outer lines and other important boundary lines like eyes or ears and drew the rest by hand. Then, Eric spent at least 30 minutes with each participant and discussed technique and the colours to use at each stage of the painting process.

I was already used to building up colours with soft pastels in several layers on UART Sanded paper and to put in the details with pastel pencils. I started with the eyes and already met with the first difficulty. The lion's left eye was partly in shadow and the eyelid, like everything else had an olive tinge. Eric suggested to use soft pastels only sparingly and to use Carbothello pastel pencils in several layers to build up the correct colours. You had to hold the pencil nearly horizontally and use the whole length of the pastel mine. We were using Pastelmat which has a much smoother surface than the UART paper I was accustomed to; I had quite a lot of adapting to do!

We first developed the colour scheme on a piece of paper and compared it to the original photo. Only when we were happy with the result did we use it in our painting. The iris was painted in a more vibrant yellow, for the eyelid I actually used a muted Terry Ludwig olive green. The lion's mane only stood out after Eric had covered the background with a very dark brown and black and blended it in a thin layer towards the lion's head. Now I could draw more accurately the strands of hair and the curls because the Pastelmat surface wasn't completely filled with pigments.

Time passed quickly; lunch had been kindly prepared by Yolanda's parents. With renewed energy we went back to work. After Eric Wilson had encouraged me to be more bold, I underpainted the shadow of the lion's cheek in Olive green.

In the evening, we all had dinner in a Greek restaurant in Kerkrade and had a lot of fun.

On the third day of our workshop I realized that I had painted the lion's chin too small. After having corrected my error, I used a General's Charcoal pencil in white (558) to add the finest hairs. Those whiskers were the last detail in my painting. I would have drawn those white lines in one continuous move but Eric suggested to draw over them in different colours. Of course! The light didn't hit the whole length of the whisker!

I now really like my lion and we all have learnt a lot! We all enjoyed our daily dinners and the many nice talks we had; we had all found new friends. Great that Mr Wijnands, the owner of Viktor4Art opened his shop even on the Sunday for our emergency buys. We could also buy prints of some of Eric's paintings. We all received a beautiful certificate and proudly drove home with our new paintings.

I am sure it wasn't always easy for Eric to constantly adapt to all the different paintings in their different stages and to the varying artistic levels of his pupils. I think it is easy to understand that the air sometimes seemed to crackle with all the concentration and effort we put in; but our teacher always managed to release the tension with a joke. He once asked the woman who was sitting next to me for the Carbothello pencil 625. We wondered aloud if he knew every number by heart because we all had at least 60 different pastel pencils. He made us all laugh when he replied 'No, that is the only number I have managed to memorize!'

This masterclass was a wonderful experience and we learned a lot. Eric is a great teacher who helped us all to achieve really beautiful paintings. Highly recommended!

Many thanks go to Yolanda, her parents and Mr Wijnands for the organization of the master class!