



7 Essential Techniques for Painting Birds

These techniques are featured in the self-paced online course:
How to Paint Birds with Jane Kim

The Nuts and Bolts of Paint Strokes

Hi, I'm Jane Kim! I'm a bird artist, and I'll guide you along your journey as you explore some painting basics.

Materials:

My favorite paints for birds are **Golden Fluid Acrylics**. They're water-based, they dry quickly, and it's easy to layer them. I use **water brushes**, which have a water reservoir built into the handle.

Before I put a stroke of paint down on paper, I think about these 4 principles:

Amount of paint

Before dipping your brush into the paint, think about how much you will need. If you're filling a shape, use more; for details, just a touch. Be sure to pick up no more than half your brush's length of paint at most. I like to apply my colors in thinner layers, for a more luminescent and lively effect when the painting is finished.

Consistency of paint

The amount of water you add to the paint changes its opacity and flow. Practice giving the handle of your water brush a little squeeze to release water when your brush is loaded with paint and see how your paint strokes becomes more translucent.

Angle of my brush

You can control your lines by changing the angle that you hold your brush in relation to the paper. At an angle, more of the brush is in contact with the surface of the paper; best for painting thicker lines or filling a large area. When you hold the brush straighter, just the tip touches your paper; perfect for painting fine details.

How much pressure

The harder you press, the more your bristles will bend. This creates more contact between your brush and the paper, so you'll apply more paint. A lighter touch means less paint. Changing pressure as you paint a continuous line will vary the width.



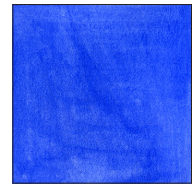
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These techniques are the ones I use over and over in my art. By practicing them, you'll build muscle memory so you can confidently paint any bird.

1. Solid-color fill

How to achieve: Keep your strokes even and smooth, thinning the paint only slightly with water.

Use for underpainting and solid areas.



2. Wash

How to achieve: Mix paint with water on your palette to thin it, mix enough color to fill the whole area in one step, and paint quickly to keep the edges of your paint strokes wet as you go.

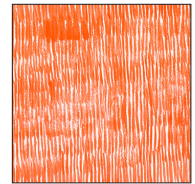
Use for translucent areas of color.



3. Hatch marks

How to achieve: Use paint that is a similar consistency to a solid fill. Hold your small round brush perpendicularly to the paper to use the tip only. Paint short, even, parallel lines.

Use for areas where you can't see individual feathers.



4. Scalloped edges

How to achieve: Use the point of a small round brush to make strokes that are shorter at the edges and longer at the center of each curved shape.

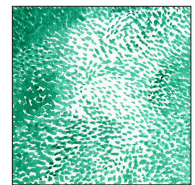
Use for defining edges of individual body feathers.



5. Stippling

How to achieve: Use just the point of your small round brush to make dots. When you place the dots close together, they appear as shading. When they are further apart, they allow the color of the paper, or the color underneath, to show through for a blended effect.

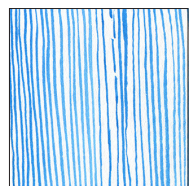
Use for fine details around the beak and feet, and sometimes around eye.



6. Parallel lines

How to achieve: Use the point of a small round brush to make lines. Try using your arm movement only, or use your hand and wrist to keep your lines parallel.

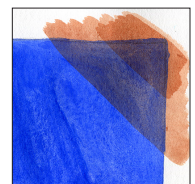
Use for edges of individual feathers.



7. Glazing

How to achieve: After a base color has dried, paint over it with a mixture of paint and water to create more depth or change the hue.

Use for creating depth making luminous colors.



When and Where to Use Them

These techniques come in handy for a wide variety of birds. Here are a few examples from birds I painted on the Wall of Birds at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Visitors Center.

