Essentials

Works with

Elements CS CC

What you'll learn

Trace a photo, create a watercolour brush and emulate watercolour paper

Time taken

2 hours

Expert



Peter Smolens

I've been using Photoshop since V6 and have been creating digital photo paintings for the last decade. I love to create digital photo paintings on my laptop, surrounded by cats and with sports on the TV. I'm a writer, photography and digital painter from Virginia, combining my love for taking photographs and writing articles. I use many of my photographs as the references for my digital paintings. Check out my web site: www.pbsstudios.com.

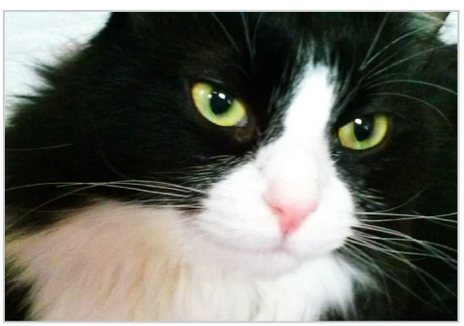
Paint a digital watercolour

Discover how to transform a photo into a watercolour painting using and outline and a bespoke brush

If you say you can't draw, we have a solution for you. Using a photo base, if you can trace the outline of an image, you can create a beautiful digital watercolour photo painting. In our case, we used Daisy the cat.

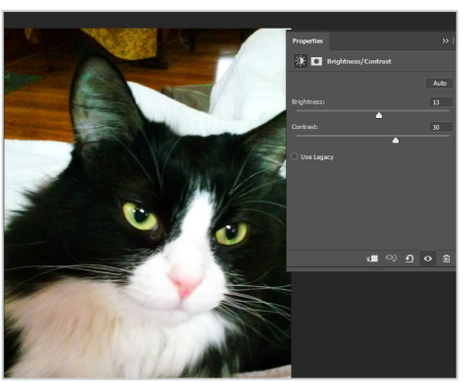
Of all the real media you can emulate digitally, watercolour is one of the more challenging to recreate using Adobe Photoshop. In traditional watercolours, because of the liquid element, the colours are generally uneven and fluid. For traditional watercolour painters, controlling the movement of colours in the paint is one of the biggest challenges.

Thankfully, digital brushes built in Photoshop make creating a digital watercolour easy. Using pen-pressure control on a digital stylus produces an uneven flow of colour that can emulate the watercolour effect. Add to that the outline, which you trace from the reference photo, before bringing back enough detail to define highlights of the painting, and you have a portrait worth framing. The beauty of this technique is it's easily adaptable. For this example, we used a photo of Daisy, but you can use almost any high-key photograph that has well-defined edges. Just remember, less is more in this case.



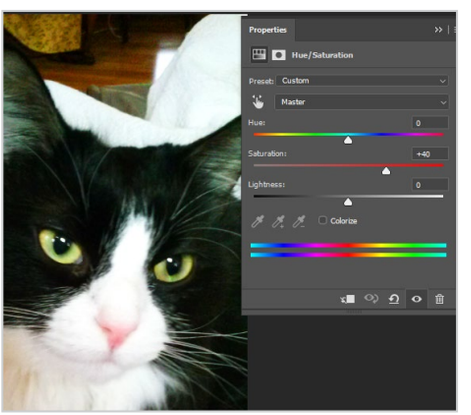
Make your work layer

01 After opening the original photo, duplicate it. Name the new layer Work. This is the layer you're going to perform your enhancements on before you start to paint. Click Layer> New> Layer. Name this Background Colour, fill this layer with white then turn off the visibility.



Prepare the reference photo

02 Perform some normal prep work. Start by clicking on Layer> Adjustment Layer> Brightness/Contrast and set Contrast to +30 and Brightness to +13. This will brighten and better define the image.



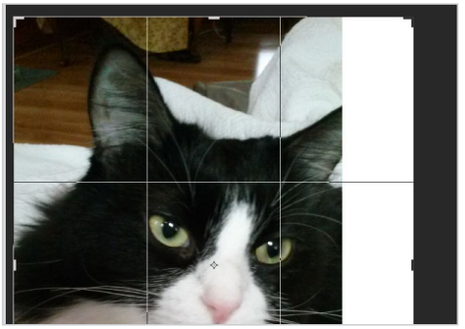
Pump up the colour

03 To increase the colour, click Layer> Adjustment Layer> Saturation. Move the slider to increase the Saturation by +40. This will punch up the colour a bit in the eyes.



On the FileSilo

Download your free resources at **www.filesilo.co.uk/photoshopcreative**



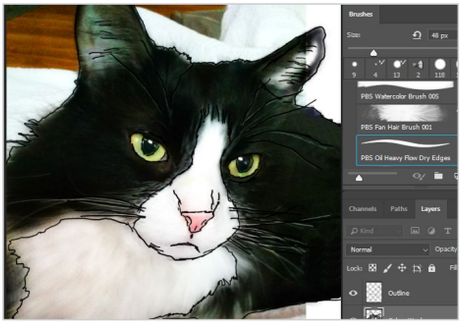
Expand to complete the ear

04 Because Daisy's right ear is cut off in the reference photo, use the Crop Tool to expand the reference photo. Clicking the Crop Tool will put an outline around the reference photo. Locate the right expansion control. Click and pull to the right so you have enough space to complete the ear.



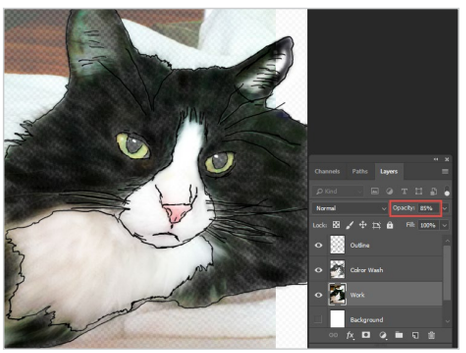
Create an outline

05 Click on the working reference photo. Lower the Opacity of the reference photo to 85%. Create a new layer. Name it Outline. Select the Brush Tool and then the PBS Hard Round brush (it's a customised version of the standard Hard Round brush). Set the diameter to 5px and trace Daisy's outline.



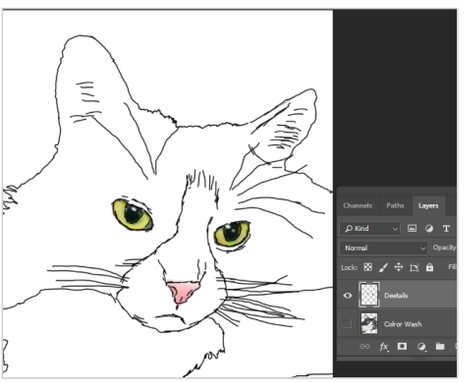
New document

06 Click on the Background Colour layer and then go to Layer> New> Layer. Name this layer Colour Wash. Select the Mixer Brush Tool. We used the PBS Oil Heavy Flow Dry Edges Brush. Set the Shape Dynamics Jitter to Pen Pressure and under Transfer, set the Flow Jitter to 21%.



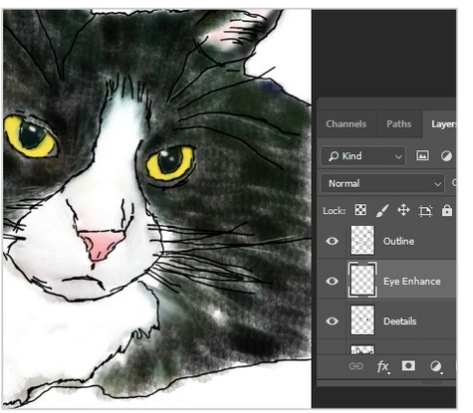
Paint with a light touch

07 Make sure to check the Sample All Layers checkbox. The Mixer Brush uses the digital information from the reference photo layer. Pick the Moist setting. Using the Outline Layer as a guide, lightly paint Daisy. Because of the lower opacity of the original photo (85%), you achieve a light, watercolour quality.



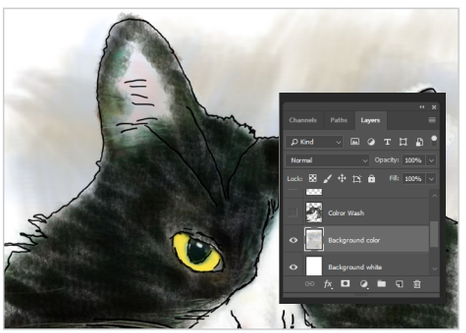
Bring back details

08 Increase the Opacity on the reference photo to 100%. Still using the Mixer Brush, switch to the PBS Hard Round brush, at a small size. Use the Navigator to zoom in on the face. Paint the eyes and nose. The Mixer Brush picks up the colour from the reference photo below.



Enhance the eyes

09 If you find the Mixer Brush picks up a little too much blue during the painting of the eyes, switch to the Brush Tool. Select a yellow from the Color Picker. Use a low Opacity and Flow setting, then paint to enhance the yellow in the eyes.



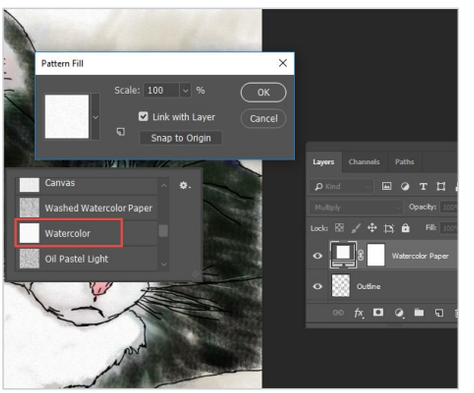
Splash some colour

10 Since Daisy is a black-and-white cat, it makes sense to add some muted colour as the background, in this case a blue-grey. Turn the visibility of the Background Colour layer back on but turn off all the layers above. Using the PBS Oil Heavy Flow Dry Edges brush, splash some colour.



Bring back the white

11 Turn the different layers back on to see how the background fits in with the rest of the digital painting. Add a new layer. Name it White and set the foreground colour to white. Paint the areas in the background that correspond to white areas in Daisy's fur.



Add watercolour paper pattern

12 Go to the top of the layer stack. Click Layer> Fill Layer> Pattern. Click the Arrow to see additional patterns and then click the Gear. Select Artist Surfaces> Watercolor. Change blend mode to Multiply.