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MAIN FEATURE

Night at the Museum

By Sarah Becketl



Wrestling Bullfrogs

"My current work is chock full of animal imagery and primarily focuses on the connection between humans and animals within the modern world."

Like many artists, I find an endless source of inspiration in the animal kingdom. Much of my childhood art focused on animals, and years before I ever thought of picking up a book about art, I had read and re-read every non-fiction animal book in my school library. As I reached my teen years, it was abundantly clear to me that art was my calling, but my interest in biology and the natural world has stuck with me. My current work is chock-full of animal imagery and primarily focuses on the connection between humans and animals within the modern world.

Given my background, it is no surprise that the American Museum of Natural History

is my favorite place in New York City. Sorry Metropolitan Museum of Art, you're great and everything, but it's just no contest. Besides the typical museum offerings, the AMNH also has a plethora of educational programs, classes, and events for the folks that desire an extra helping of nerdy science stuff. The crown jewel of these offerings is an after-hours drawing course, which I was lucky enough to recently participate in. Sure, people can draw during regular museum hours, but on any given day, the museum is swamped with class trips, tourists, and local folks. The constant flow of people makes it difficult to get situated and concentrate

continued





Black Rhinoceros

"But at the AMNH, there are halls filled with beautiful taxidermy specimens. I had hundreds of animal subjects (that stayed still!) right at my fingertips, and by observing the animals in three dimensional space, I got a much better understanding of my subjects' structure and anatomy."

on drawing. But for eight glorious Thursday evenings, I had the opportunity to draw in an empty, quiet museum. It was pretty special; I might even go as far as to say it was magical.*

Like many artists who use animal imagery in their work, I typically rely on photo references when I'm drawing and painting in my studio. I have spent countless days visiting animal sanctuaries, zoos, aquariums,

and just trekking through nature in hopes of getting quality photos of my animal subjects. While these references work relatively well, photographs have a tendency to flatten and distort the subject. They can never fully replace the act of drawing from life. However, drawing animals from life isn't an easy undertaking either. Most animals don't stay still on command, and frequently, my glimpses of wild animals only last a few seconds. But at the AMNH, there are halls

*Unfortunately, "magical" is just my personal perspective. As much as we'd all like "Night at the Museum" to be based on actual events, the only thing that comes alive at night is a healthy population of mice (which I actually find quite charming).

continued





filled with beautiful taxidermy specimens. I had hundreds of animal subjects (that stayed still!) right at my fingertips. By observing the animals in three-dimensional space, I got a much better understanding of my subjects' structure and anatomy.

When sketching or drawing, I prefer to work on toned paper. I like having the ability to use the bare paper as my mid-tone value, and use my drawing media to build up the lighter and darker values. I didn't have a set plan of the exact mediums I wanted to use each week, so I worked on Strathmore's

400 Series Toned Mixed Media paper. This paper has a slight surface texture that works well with graphite and colored pencil, but it's still smooth enough for pen and ink application. It can also handle wet media, which was helpful for when I wanted to add a wash of watercolor or acrylic. I knew that whatever I ended up using, this paper would suite my needs.

My materials varied slightly from week to week, but following is a breakdown of the typical process I used for my museum sketches.



Secretary Bird

"...photographs can distort proportions and perspective, so I always tried to have the drawing finished from life. Then, I would use the photograph for reference as I added values and color to the piece."

continued





Step 1

STEP 1: I usually spent the majority of my time at the museum working on the initial drawing. Because this was my chance to draw my animal subjects from life, I took my time to observe and create an accurate drawing. I would frequently move around to see my subject from different angles, which helped me to better understand form (such as the curve of the sheep's horns.) This is something that can't be done when working from photographs, so I really took advantage of looking at the animals in three dimensions. Before leaving the museum, I'd photograph my subject from the exact height and position I was drawing from. As I mentioned, photographs can distort proportions and perspective, so I always tried to have the drawing finished from life. Then, I would use the photograph for reference as I added values and color to the piece.



Step 2

STEP 2: After the pencil drawing was complete, I went back in with a gray pigment pen (Derwent's Graphik Line Maker in "graphite") to add detail and shading. I really enjoy using this gray ink for sketching. It doesn't create as strong of a contrast as traditional black ink, so it's a bit more forgiving. If I get a little wild with my lines or put something down that I don't like, it's not as noticeable in the gray ink and I can usually cover up these mistakes with colored pencil or acrylic in later steps.



Step 3

STEP 3: I used a transparent gray/brown acrylic wash (Golden® High Flow acrylic paint thinned with water) to darken and unify my shadow areas. You can achieve a similar effect with watercolor, but I prefer acrylic because once it's dry, the acrylic is permanent and can't be reactivated (unlike watercolor which can be lifted when it's re-wet). I kept the acrylic wash transparent so that it wouldn't cover up my line work.

continued



Step 4



Step 5

STEP 4: I used a slightly darker gray/brown wash to further darken my deepest values and create more contrast.

STEP 5: I introduced 4 colored pencils: white, cream, yellow ochre, and light brown. I used the cream pencil for areas of light value, and the white pencil for the lightest lights (around the nose and mouth). The yellow ochre and light brown pencil were added sparingly to suggest the warm tones of the sheep's fur and horns.

"Most museums will allow drawing during normal hours, and many have classes, sketch nights, or special drawing events where artists can work without the typical museum crowds."

For any artists out there using animals as their subject matter, I'd highly recommend drawing in a natural history museum if you have the opportunity. Most museums will allow drawing during normal hours, and many have classes, sketch nights, or special drawing events where artists can work without the typical museum crowds. And

if your local museum doesn't have any art-related programming, perhaps they'd be open to suggestions!

A note about drawing from taxidermy animals: taxidermy is really an art form in itself, and the finished specimen is a reflection of the taxidermist's talent. I point this out because there's a lot of bad taxidermy out there. If you don't know what I'm talking about, just google "bad taxidermy." It's a thing. And while poorly executed taxidermy is both creepy and hilarious, it's not at all helpful for understanding animal anatomy. So if you're going to draw taxidermy from life, it helps to make sure you're drawing from a specimen that is an accurate representation of that specific animal species. Most large natural history museums have good taxidermy, but I've definitely seen some specimens in major institutions that look a bit shabby. If you're unsure, you can always compare the taxidermy specimen's proportions, facial features, color, etc. against photos of a living version of that species.

continued





Dire Wolf Skull

SEE MORE OF SARAH'S WORK:

website: www.sarahbecktel.com

Instagram: www.instagram.com/sarahbecktel

Facebook: www.facebook.com/sarahbecktelartist



ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Sarah Becktel graduated from the Tyler School of Art in 2005 with a BFA in painting, and continued her studies of figurative drawing and painting at Studio Incamminati in Philadelphia and the Art Students League in New York. She has shown her work in solo and group exhibitions throughout the United States and has won numerous awards and recognitions. Sarah resides in Jersey City, NJ and works out of her studio in Newark, NJ.

Sarah's primary mediums are oil on panel and colored pencil/mixed media on paper. She works in a realistic style and categorizes her subject matter as "contemporary nature." Her art depicts the relationships between humans, animals, and nature within the context of modern society.

When Sarah is not working in her studio, she is helping artists and students understand art materials through her work as an Artist Educator for Strathmore Artist Papers™, Gamblin Artists Colors®, da Vinci brushes, and Caran d'Ache®. Sarah served as Product Research Director for the Colored Pencil Society of America from 2009 to 2015, and she is a member of ASTM International's subcommittee for artist materials.



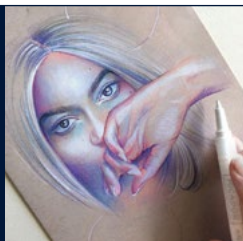
400 Series Toned Mixed Media A Perfect Hybrid

Our Toned Sketch and Mixed Media papers have become top favorites among artists. We're proud to introduce a perfect hybrid that combines these two papers for a unique toned surface suitable for both wet and dry media applications. Strathmore® Toned Mixed Media paper features a vellum drawing paper surface for dry media applications but is also sized to handle watercolor, gouache, acrylic, markers, and more!

- Heavyweight: 184 lb. (300 g/m²)
- Medium Surface
- Acid Free
- Warm Tan & Cool Gray
- For use with Wet & Dry Media
- Made in the USA

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Join Artist Georgina Kreutzer for free video lessons in a four week course where she'll demonstrate how to create ethereal mixed media artwork on toned paper. See details on **NEXT PAGE**.



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Strathmore® 2017 ONLINE WORKSHOP SERIES

Join us for Strathmore's FREE 2017 Online Workshops!

Strathmore's Online Workshops feature free video lessons and downloadable instructions created by experienced artists. Follow along in the online classroom as instructors guide you

through various topics and demonstrate useful tips, techniques, ideas, and inspirations to get you creating and learning even more about art.

Share all the fun on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter using **#StrathmoreWorkshops**

Workshops start March 6 and continue through December 31, 2017



Workshop 1: Brush Lettering and Watercolor

Instructor: Jess Park
Start Date: March 6, 2017

This workshop contains two components: the basics of brush lettering (a form of modern calligraphy) and loose watercolor painting. Learn what supplies are needed to start brush lettering, as well as the fundamental strokes that make up the letters of the alphabet. Next, learn how to use watercolor to complement your lettering with expressive background washes and beautiful flora. Jess will guide you through these two skills and teach you how incorporate them to create gorgeous pieces.



Workshop 2: Techniques in Pastel Art

Instructor: Amy Pearce Stone
Start Date: May 1, 2017

In this 4 lesson pastel course, we will create a series of art projects. Each lesson will incorporate a number of techniques, tips, and tricks for using both oil and soft pastels. We will cover things such as composition, drawing, value choices and voices, value blending, creative texturing, simplicity versus complexity, confidence, perseverance, and personal creativity. Whether you are a seasoned pastel artist, or are picking up pastels for the first time, you are sure to enjoy these lessons and find inspiration and encouragement in your own creative process. All are welcome to participate in both learning and joining the conversations!



Workshop 3: Ethereal Mixed Media on Toned Paper

Instructor: Georgina Kreutzer
Start Date: September 4, 2017

"I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail," said Abraham Maslow in 1966. This sentiment perfectly outlines why Georgina loves mixing various media as an extremely flexible and advantageous technique for creating art. Knowing how to use a wide array of art-making tools and products is powerful when approaching any kind of challenging subject. It's also vital for beginning artists to experiment and learn which kinds of media resonate with their own artistic direction. This four-week workshop will guide you through Georgina's techniques in mixed media art using pencils, soft pastels, inks and acrylics, with an aim to leave you confident in finding your own set of preferred skills.

Join us for our free workshops today at:
strathmoreartist.com/artist-studio





Art by Sarah Becketl

MONTHLY GIVEAWAY!



Show us your vision, win Strathmore products!

Post your Strathmore Vision custom cover on Instagram, use **#strathmorecovers**, and you could be randomly selected as one of our monthly giveaway prize winners!

During the first week of every month through December of 2017 we'll be selecting **1 random winner** from the pool of entrants.

PRIZE: a preselected assortment of \$100 worth of Strathmore products!

1

POST ARTWORK

Upload an image of the art you created on your Strathmore Vision cover to Instagram.

2

TAG & HASHTAG

Tag **@strathmoreart** and use the hashtag **#strathmorecovers** to be entered for a chance to win our monthly giveaway.

3

WIN A PRIZE!

A random winner will be chosen each month to win a pre-selected assortment of Strathmore products valued at **\$100!**

See contest rules [HERE](#)



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Questions from our Website

Question: How do I seal a charcoal drawing once it's finished?



Do Stars Sleep by Paul Knight on Strathmore 500 Series Charcoal

Answer: There are many opinions as to whether or not a charcoal drawing should be sealed with a fixative upon completion. Some say yes to preserve the drawing and prevent it from smudging. Others say no as it can cause charcoal particle loss or value changes if not applied properly.

There are many different types of fixatives available. Make sure you read all package labels and descriptions to ensure what you select is right for your artwork. If you do choose to use a fixative to seal your charcoal drawing, here are some precautions and recommended steps to take:

BEFORE SPRAYING:

- Make sure loose particles have been softly blown away or gently brushed away with a drafting brush. Do not use your hand as you could smear the piece or leave oil residue on the paper.
- Set up your spray area outside or in a room that is well-ventilated. Use a respirator mask for safety from fumes.
- Practice spraying a different sheet of charcoal paper first. Lay down some charcoal in different values and spray the practice sheet to see what happens and make sure you'd feel comfortable spraying your finished piece of artwork. Cover the entire paper with a mist and keep your arm moving while spraying to avoid soaking or over-saturating certain parts of the piece.
- Make sure your piece is securely adhered to a solid, flat, angled surface so it doesn't move when you start spraying. You can use clips to hold it down or artists tape. It should not be laid flat on the table as it can cause puddling. Tape or clip to a rigid surface that is upright or at a slight angle.

- Always shake the can for at least two minutes before using. This is especially important with matte finish fixatives as there is a matting agent in the spray that requires additional mixing.

- Clear the nozzle before starting. Spray a few short sprays onto scrap paper. Then turn the can upside down and spray until nothing is coming out except air. This prevents clumping of the fixative.

TIME TO SPRAY:

- It is always better to apply multiple lighter coats than one heavy coat. Hold

continued



the fixative about 2 feet from the paper as you're spraying. As mentioned above, use continuous arm movement while spraying to avoid over saturation of any one spot. Make sure to cover the entire piece from edge to edge by spraying beyond the borders.

- Wait a minimum of 30 minutes and do not touch the piece even if it looks dry.
- Spray the piece a second time from the opposite direction to make sure you've achieved full coverage. If clipped to a rigid surface turn paper 180 degrees and apply a second coat.

FIXATIVES:

Fixatives come in gloss and matte finishes, and also options that seal the drawing completely, or are workable so you can spray and still add more after. Some fixatives are not archival, which is especially true of workable fixatives.

Some artists may suggest using hairspray as a fixative; however this is not recommended for a couple reasons. First, the chemical makeup of hairspray does not ensure archival properties and could cause yellowing of the paper over time. Also, if too much is used, the paper can become sticky.

Click [**HERE**](#) to see Strathmore's Charcoal Papers