

Workshops





Painter & Photoshop

FEATHERS AND ANGEL WINGS

Wings and feathers can be tricky to paint. **Melanie Delon** explains her technique for creating a realistic look

Painting wings is quite similar to painting hair: the first time you do it seems impossible, but in fact it's not, and there are little tips that can help a lot.

Before I start painting, I always do some photo research; in this case I looked at a lot of bird pictures to understand the feathers and decided what kind of design I wanted. Then I did a little concept sketch to test out a few colours.

When I paint wings, I think of them as a block; I never paint feather by feather, always as a whole element. I add in details later, once the lighting and the shape are okay. Working on them as a block helps to unify the wings and stops you getting too wrapped up in minor details.

Wings can also reflect the character's mood or attitude: you can do this with colour, or by making the wings lighter or heavier. Here, I want to avoid the image coming across very clean and pure: she's not an angel, so her wings will be more like a bird's – a bit dirty and old.

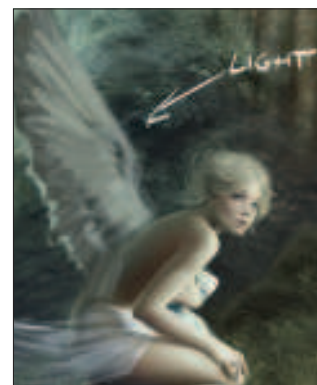
When painting wings and feathers, I usually use two brushes. For the base and the shape of the feathers, I use one that's very smooth and quickly gives me the

kind of lightness I want. Then I use a spackled one for adding the details.

Now let's look at how to paint the wings and feathers, step by step.



The concept sketch doesn't go into detail but establishes the general shape and colour.

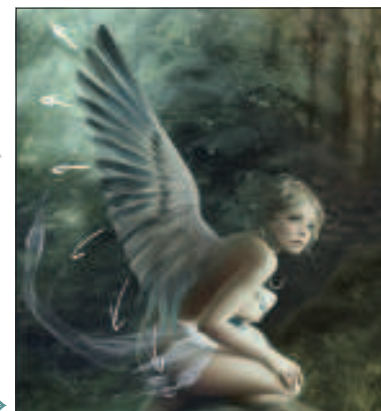


Once you're happy with the general shape of the wings you can start sketching in the feathers.

1 The base
I usually start by doing a basic sketch of the general shape of the wings. I also do a little research on another canvas. I use a large-sized custom brush to work the general look and to set the base of my future wings. I don't need to go into details, I just choose my colours – which are basically the same as the background – and paint in huge blocks of colour.

2 Sketching the feathers
I start to sketch the first feathers, still using the same brush as in the previous step. I flip the canvas horizontally quite often at this stage to correct any little issues. Once the base is okay I can start to look at light: for this I pick the same colour I use for the background.

3 Detailed part
Now comes the fun part. I lay down the colour of the feathers, which are very dark at the extremities and brighter at the base of the wing. I use brush number one again, and paint huge blocks of colour – no need to start on the details here, it's only the base for future feathers. The extremities also need to be more defined, so I erase some parts and add more green here, because the second light source (which is more diffuse than the main one) will affect the wings.



Artist PROFILE

Melanie Delon
COUNTRY: France
CLIENTS:
5eme Saison



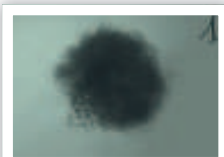
Melanie is a freelance illustrator based in Paris. She likes to

paint beautiful dreamy fantasy characters.

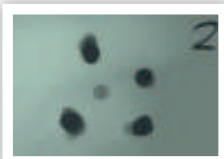
www.eskarina-circus.com

DVD Assets

The files you need are on your DVD in the Melanie Delon folder in the Workshop section. SOFTWARE: Painter X (demo). Download a demo of Photoshop CS3 from www.adobe.com/downloads



Custom brush, with Spacing set to 10 per cent and Opacity set to Pen Pressure.



Spackled brush with Spacing set to seven per cent and Opacity set to Pen Pressure.



4 Light and shadow

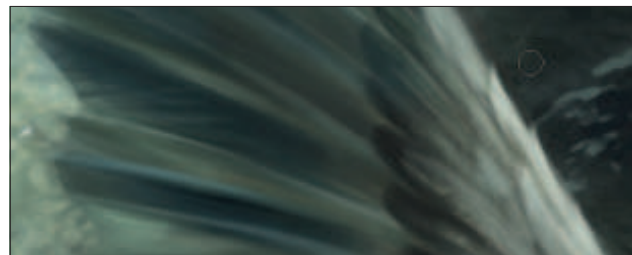
They're lacking volume so I have to add more contrast. I select a dark green tone for the shadows, and with brush number one I bring more darkness to the middle of the wing. I also add extra green from the second light source at the top of the wing.

5 Blurring

Now I switch to Painter, which is more appropriate for this stage. I create a new layer and with the oil palette knife I slightly blur the wing. I'm following the arrows below, to unify the feathers and to bring more movement and lightness to them. If you don't have Painter on your computer you could use Motion Blur on Photoshop with a very low distance (around 10 or 15 pixels) instead.

6 General refining

Here I decide to give the feathers more definition. I don't need to paint them one by one, just a few of them where the light source affects the wing. I also add more blue and more texture with the spackled brush. I do this several times, then I duplicate the layer and set it to soft light with a low Opacity; this will bring more volume to the wing.

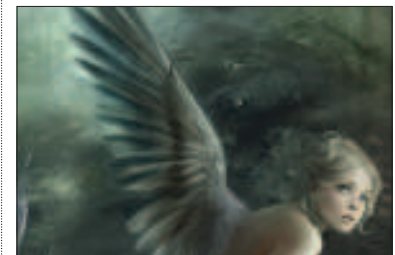


Shortcuts Screen mode

Use this shortcut to switch from standard screen mode to full screen mode quickly and easily while you work.

7 Special FX

I erase some parts of the extremities of the feathers to increase the realism. With the spackled brush I start to add more details to the feathers, picking a very saturated green (from the background) and painting some little rays of light on the extremities. I repeat this step a few times until I'm satisfied with the result.



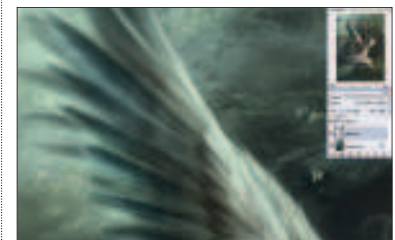
PRO SECRETS

Add extra movement

Once my wings are finished, I duplicate the layer and add a little blur filter with a very low Opacity. This is pretty useful when you want to add more movement or increase the feeling of lightness. You can also do this in Painter with the Oil Palette Knife, which is better than the filter in Photoshop. Also don't forget to blur each feather's extremities with the Blur tool, setting strength to 50 per cent.

8 Final touches

Now I only have to add extra light and some little colour variations on the biggest feathers. I usually switch to Painter one last time to fix some minor mistakes, and to unify everything.



9 Second wing

The first wing now finished, I duplicate the layer and place it under the main wing. I slightly modify the shape, add more light and blur the final result.

