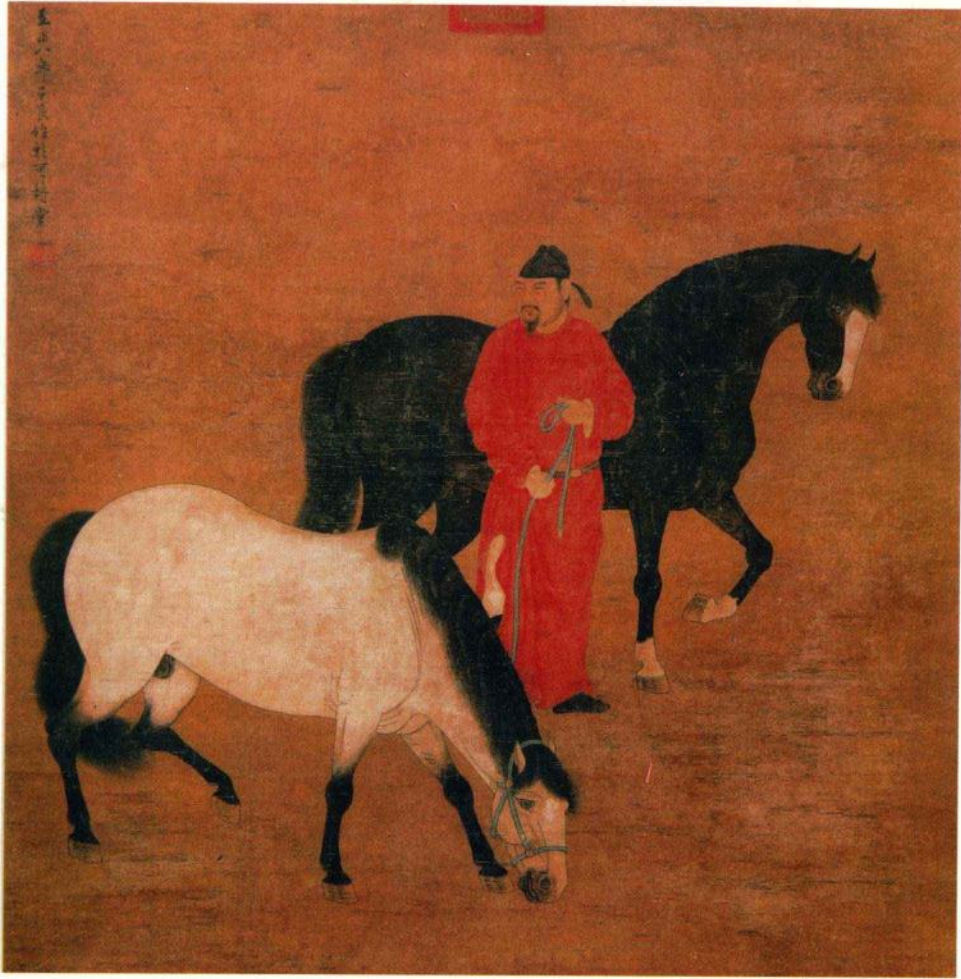


HOW TO



Chinese Animal Painting for Beginners

Wen Jingen
Art by Gong Chunhu and others



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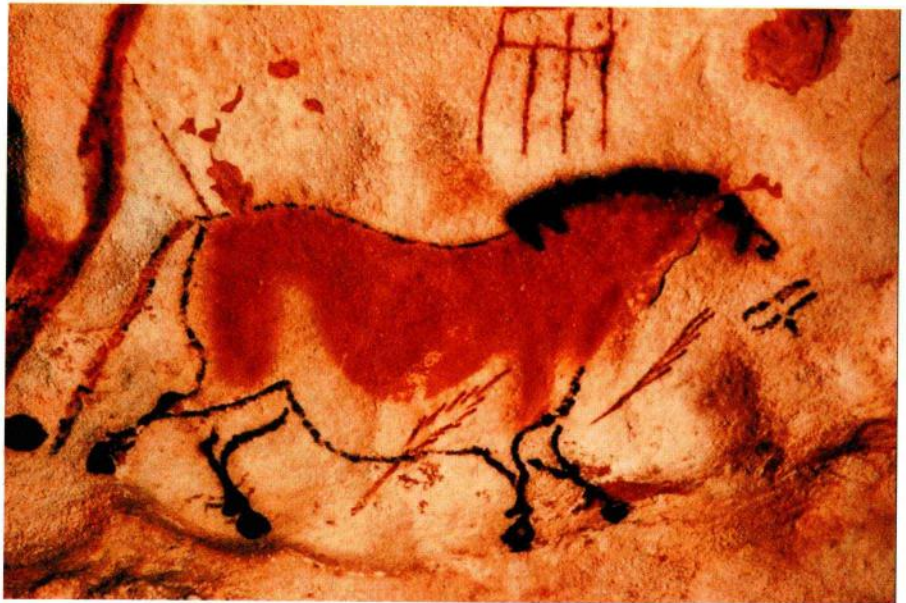
*To present the horse, you must take the horse as your teacher;
to paint the chicken, you must take the chicken as your teacher.
Observe their form, movement and emotion.*

– Xu Beihong, Chinese realist painter and art educator (1895 – 1953)

Introduction

Specially prepared for English-speaking readers who may take an interest in Chinese animal painting, this manual provides down-to-earth guidelines. The introduction tries to deal with a few issues that readers may be concerned about now, or in the future. *If you find the introduction helpful, read it. Otherwise, skip over it.*

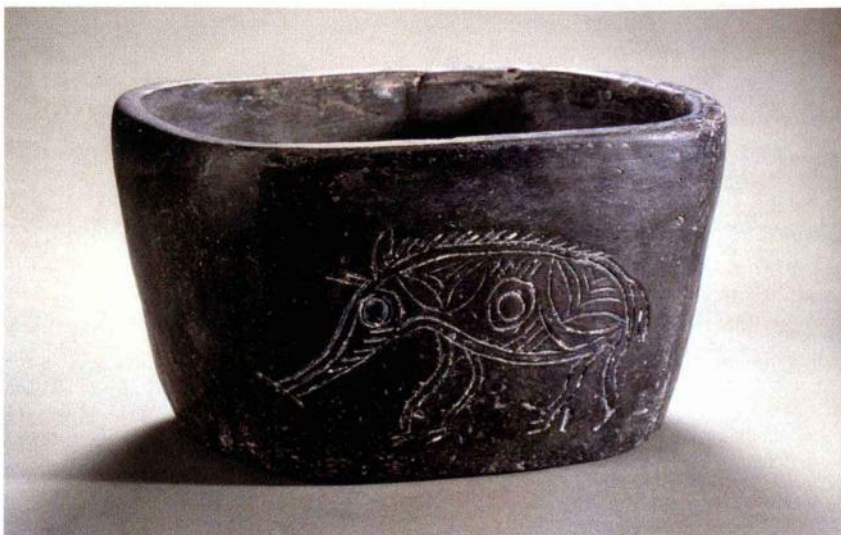
Animal painting as an old tradition



1-1 Horse, Altamira cave, 12,000 years ago, Spain

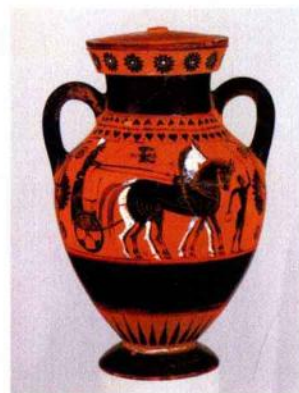


1-2 *Tiger and Goats*, Heishan Mountains, Gansu, China, 2,000 years ago or earlier



1-3 *Pig on pottery bowl*, China, 6,000 years ago

Visual images of animals occur in prehistoric arts throughout the world. Animal painting dates back to a past as remote as human memory or scholarship can reach. In the late 1880s, ancient caves with images of animals were discovered in Spain and southern France. The caves were the lodgings of late Palaeolithic human beings who lived there 10,000 to 30,000 years ago. These cave murals were all rendered with exquisite sophistication and symbolic force that even Pablo Picasso was amazed by them. “We,” he declared, “have learned nothing in twelve thousand years.” In China, rock paintings and petroglyphs have been discovered at many Neolithic sites, an era more than 10,000 years ago. An important feature of prehistoric paintings found in China is that the animal images in them often outnumber human figures. It is safe to say that animal painting is one of the oldest art traditions in China, as well as other countries of the world (1-1 to 1-4).

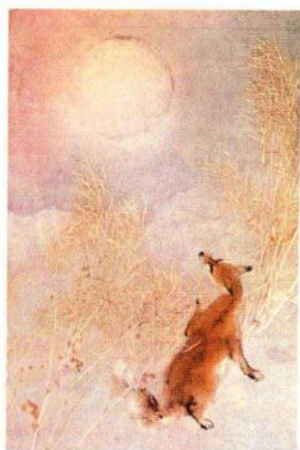


1-4 Greek amphora with patterns of horses, ca. 540 BC



1-5 Illustration for *Birds of America*, by James Audubon (1785 – 1851)

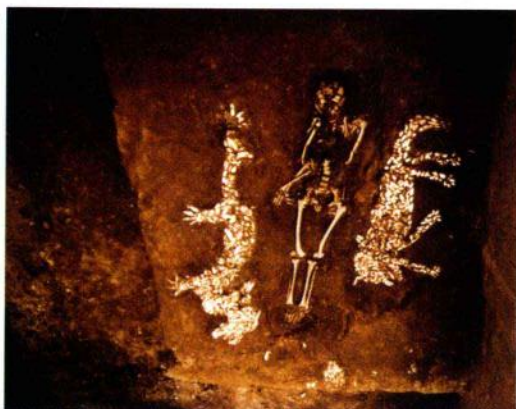
The earliest images of animals were used to decorate utensils for daily use and in some cases they related to religious beliefs (1-7, 1-8). Of course, they were also used as illustrations for applied sciences (1-5). As people came to have the art-for-art's-sake consciousness, images of animals provided them with inspirations for beauty (1-6). A verbal description or visual presentation of an animal often carried human emotions or aspirations. Read the poem by the great Chinese poet Du Fu (712 – 770) on a painting of a falcon:



1-6 *Moonlit Night* (1928) by Takeuchi Sehoo (Japan)

*On snowy silk a frosty windstorm stirs,
Where likeness of a falcon appears!
It makes to rise, ready to attack a hare;
It casts a sideways care-ridden simian stare.
I feel like removing from it the tether bright.
It perches under eaves, at your call for a flight.
When shall it swoop upon the vulgar fowls
And let their blood and feathers spill on soil?*

马上封侯



1-7 Patterns of a tiger and a dragon laid in shells in a prehistoric burial pit are related with ancient belief of afterlife

1-8 A monkey on horse-back puns on the Chinese saying “*ma shang feng hou*” meaning “conferring (upon me) a title of marquise immediately”, reflecting people's wish for quick promotion in rank



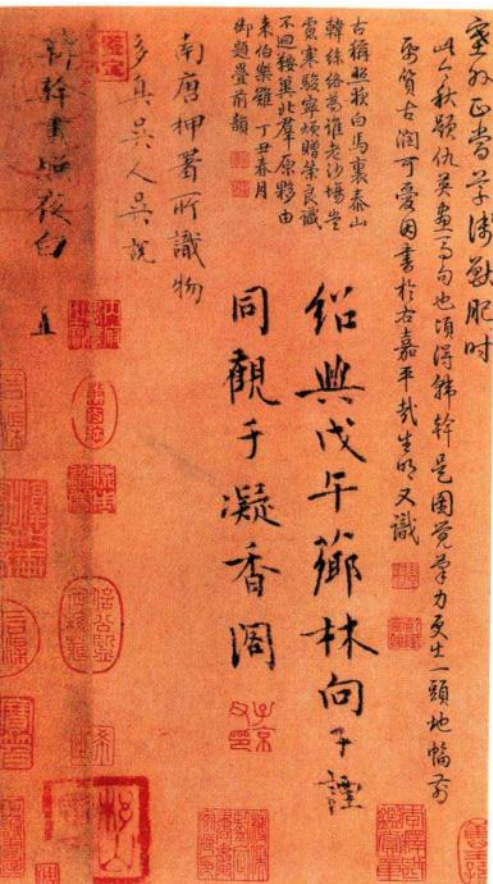


1-9 *Galloping Horse* by Xu Beihong, 1941

The painting was created during a time when China was in fierce struggle against Japanese aggressors.



Through this description of a falcon painting, we sense the poet's heroic ambition to rid the court of mediocre courtiers ("vulgar fowls"). The horse, on the other hand, exudes an indomitable valiance under the brush of Xu Beihong (1-9).



Today as our earth is ravaged in the economic rat-race, people have come to understand the importance of protecting wild animals as part of our environment. Losing a species of animal removes a link in the chain of ecology and this loss could eventually endanger human existence. A Chinese animal painter said, "In the world of animals there is only goodness and beauty with no falsehood or vice". In the joint effort to save our ecological system, many artists are making their contribution with representations of lovely, innocent creatures. This may also be an explanation for the popularity of animal paintings and the many recent books on this subject (1-11).

1-10 White Horse "Night Illuminator" by Han Gan (ca. 720 – 780). The picture is a portrait of the Emperor Xuanzong's (r. 712 – 755) beloved mount



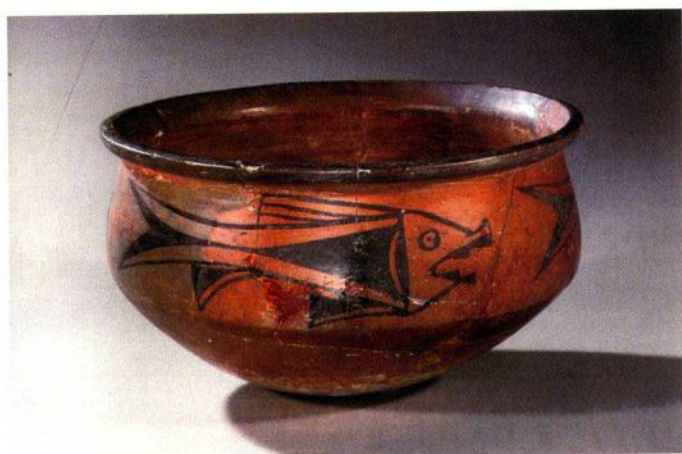
1-11 New books on animal painting are abundant in China's book market.

How is Chinese animal painting different?

The difference between Chinese and Western paintings can be explained on different levels and from different angles. Of the tools used, the brush is a key factor. Quite different from a watercolour brush or oil painting brush, the Chinese brush has a tip with a core of stiff hair surrounded with soft fibres. Such a brush is a handy tool for painting lines and various strokes in Chinese characters (1-12). The Chinese brush has undergone a long process of perfection. Patterns on pottery dating back to 5,000 years ago suggest that some kind of soft-tipped painting instrument was used to paint them. Early scripts clearly show signs of the use of a brush (1-13).



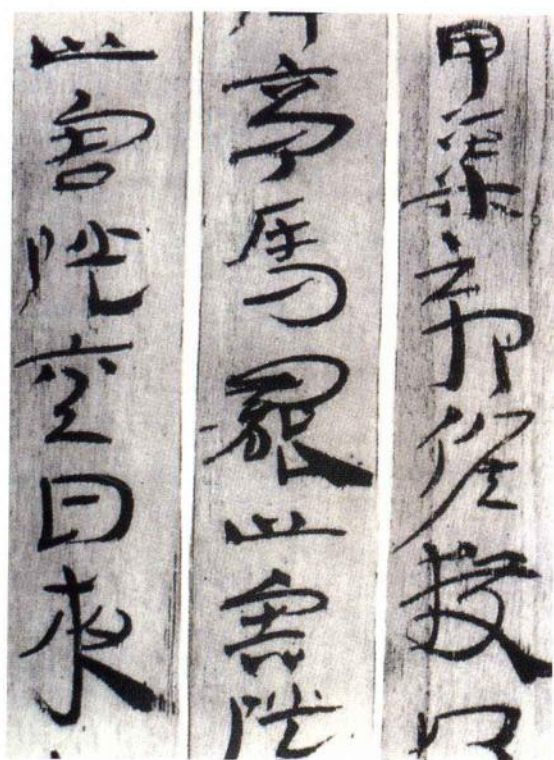
1-12 Oil painting brush and Chinese brush



1-13 Basin with patterns of fish, 3,000 – 5,000 years ago



1-14 Chinese brushwork



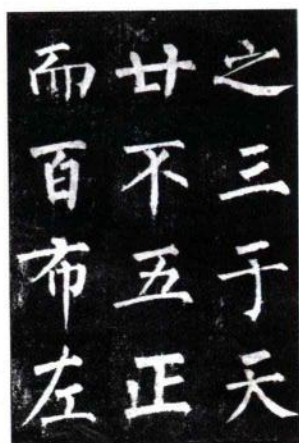
1-15 Script on split bamboo dating from 2nd century BC to AD 2nd century

今處九疑山其女子有郭白藥趙愛兒王魯
連等並受此法而得道者復數十人或遊玄
州或處東華方諸臺今見在也南岳魏夫人
言此云郭白藥者漢度遼將軍陽平郭憲女
也少好道精誠真人因授其六甲趙愛兒者

1-16 *Spirit Flight Canon* attributed to Zhong Shaojing (d. AD 746)



Chinese painters manipulate their brush in a different way to Western artists. Over centuries, Chinese calligraphers and painters have developed various techniques to control the brush, keeping and varying the position of the tip while performing strokes. By lifting, pressing and turning the brush tip, a well-trained Chinese calligrapher or painter produces lines in various shapes, gives them force and momentum endowing them with the artist's personal feelings (1-14). It is this "calligraphic" brushwork that produces the basic feature of Chinese painting and readers should take care to learn the technique (1-15 to 1-28). This feature is so predominating that not only Chinese literati (who are mostly calligraphers) but also artisan painters (who tend to be less well educated) employ this special brushwork (1-29).



1-17



1-18



1-19

1-17 Calligraphy by Liu Gongquan (AD 778 – 865)

1-18 Calligraphy by Yan Zhenqing (AD 709 – 785)

1-19 Calligraphy by Zhao Ji, the emperor Huizong (AD 1082 – 1135)

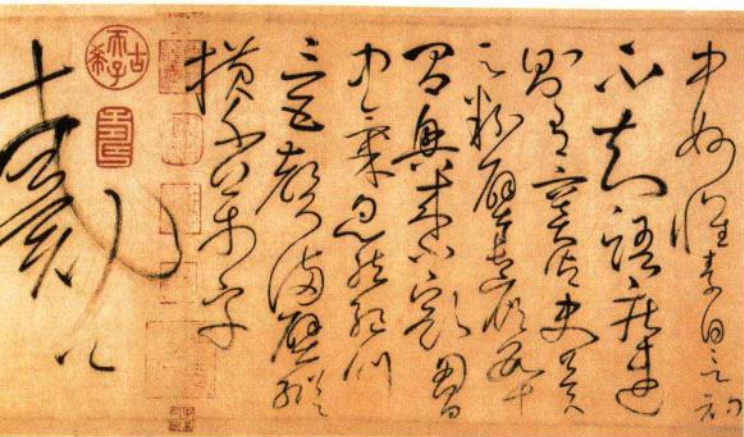
1-20 Calligraphy by Huai Su (AD 725 – 785)

1-22



1-23





1-20



1-21

1-21 Calligraphy by Su Shi (AD 1031 – 1101)

1-22 *Vimalakirti* attributed to Wu Daozi (AD c. 686 – c. 760)

1-23 *Two Patriarchs Sinking into Meditation* (detail) by Shi Ke, Five Dynasties (AD 907 – 960)

1-24 *Pilgrimage of Celestials* (detail) by Wu Zongyuan (d. c. 1007)

Compare the strokes of these calligraphers and painters – see how their brushwork can be infinitely diversified.

1-24





1-25 Drawing by Henry Matisse



1-26 *Bodhisattva* by unknown Chinese artist in 8th century

The brush strokes in Chinese paintings show the tender skin of the lady, the valiance of the warrior and the texture of the ladies' attire. In comparison, Matisse' line is flimsy and far less expressive.



1-27 *Guardian* by unknown Chinese artist in 10th century

The relationship between Chinese calligraphy and Chinese painting, however, should not be overemphasized. Many non-Chinese readers may be interested in Chinese painting but have not necessarily learned the Chinese language and calligraphy. In fact even in China not all painters are good calligraphers, nor vice versa. Ultimately, Chinese painting and calligraphy, although to some extent interrelated, are not the same thing. Through persistent practice you will learn Chinese brushwork (copying good works is an effective method to achieve this).

1-28 *In the Palace* (detail) by Zhou Wenju
(ca. 907 – 975)



1-29 *God of Food*, folk artisans' master copy, Qing Dynasty (1644 – 1911)

Note the brushwork is as maturely "calligraphic" as that found in literati painting.

