

CRITIQUE NOTES

WHAT WORKS

Line Quality

Story

Technique: Burnishing

HELPING HAND

Drawing

Edges

Shadows

Values

WHAT WORKS

STORY

I am always amazed and impressed when colored pencil artists manage to create such soft, loose, impressionistic images. I especially love her ethereal, dreamy background with its muted colors and soft, blended edges.

In fact, Marie's entire piece features muted colors and soft edges. This approach fits beautifully with the mood and story of the piece. To prove my point, I increased the color intensity and contrast of the piece. How do you feel when you look at the high-contrast version on page 77? What adjectives would you use to describe the mood of the piece? Compare that to how you feel when you view Marie's art. Now you can see why contrast and color intensity are choices an artist should make intentionally and not accidentally. Edges and color intensity make a difference in what the viewer feels toward a painting.

LINE

In my own work, when I complete a section I thought worked particularly well, I would say that the area sings, and for me, the adult horse's left ear positively sings, with such a graceful line. And not just the ear, but the tufts of hair, the not-overdone, not-underdone eyelashes; every line here is redolent with confidence and mastery. This is called surety of line, and Marie has it.

BURNISHING DONE EXPERTLY

I also like Marie's technique of using light colors over darker colors. This works best when working on a colored ground, like the beige paper that Marie used. It also works well with burnishing. If Marie had used these light colors on lightly applied layers, they would not be visible. Sometimes burnished subjects end up looking slick, waxy or glossy, but Marie has handled burnishing very well, and her horses look like living, breathing creatures. This is because Marie was careful to make her strokes follow the direction of the hair, lashes and mane.



REFERENCE PHOTO  
photo by Darby Lewis

About the Artist

Marie Toner-Cormier is a Canadian artist who loves drawing pet portraits. She's had many commission clients, but says, "This drawing was just for me." She is a self-taught artist, and drawing animals in colored pencil is definitely her passion. That passion for both her subjects and her medium really shines through in this elegant, beautiful painting.





**Confident line is elegant line.** Her strokes and outlines aren't shaky or trembling or tentative. They are sure and direct and so lovely to look at!

**FIRST IMPRESSIONS**  
This is a beautiful impressionistic piece with line work that sings!

**THE PROTECTOR**  
by Marie Toner-Cormier  
10" x 8" (25cm x 20cm)  
colored pencil on beige paper



**Expert burnishing.** You can see this technique especially well in the lighter hairs of the colt's mane and lashes.

**Story.** Bright colors and high contrast would change the story of the piece, imbuing excitement and drama instead of the steadiness and patient strength communicated with the softer hues.



## HELPING HAND

When a painting is this well executed, I tend to get a little picky, so here goes.

### EDGES TOO HARD

Here and there, Marie created edges that are sharper than they really could be. I think the main problem here is value. Marie used such dark colors in spots, and the values are so much darker than the surrounding area that it almost looks like a gash rather than a soft shadow. I'd suggest she cover this dark shadow with lighter, midtone colors and soften the edge on the right side a little so that this area isn't so awkward.

### COMPOSITION

Part of the edge problem is in the crop, since small dark objects near outside borders pull your eye toward them and then right out of the picture. She probably could have cropped the painting to eliminate some of the issue.

### DARK SHADOWS

It seems to me that Marie might have had the most trouble with the lower section of the larger horse. There are two reasons why this section doesn't look quite right.

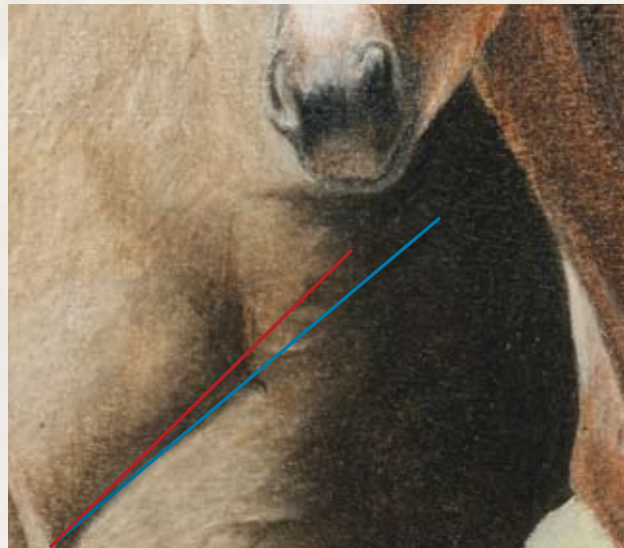
The first is that the chest area needs more detail and information to make that leg shadow look right. The reference photo is so dark that it's possible Marie couldn't see the information there and decided just to make that whole chest area a super dark value. I've lightened the chest area in my computer graphics program, and now you can see how that leg starts in the chest area. A trick I often use to see into deep shadow areas of photographs is to hold the photo directly over a light bulb. It is amazing how much you can see! It's like getting a very over-exposed photo.

### DRAWING

The second reason that the lower section of the larger horse looks a little off is because it is a little off! As I spent more time looking at this section, I noticed that the angle was off just a bit. It's not much, but when you're dealing with anatomy, even slight drawing errors can make a big difference!

## HINT: Make Conscious Choices

*When you begin your next piece, make conscious decisions about whether or not you want high or low contrast in your painting, and whether your colors will be bright or dull, depending on the mood you want to evoke in your viewer.*



### CHECK YOUR ANGLES

The red line is a replica of the angle of that shadow from the reference photo. The blue line is over the same shadow. Angles that are even slightly off can make a big difference.



### FIND DETAIL

Use your computer graphics program, or even a bright light bulb, to see detail in deep shadow areas.



### EDGES AND VALUES CREATE FORM AND DEPTH

You can see what soft edges Marie is capable of in the blue oval. But the two areas in red ovals have edges that are too hard. In the upper oval, the edge on the left side of that highlight is fairly sharp in the reference photo, but the right side is much softer. Also, the value gets slightly darker toward the bottom, but Marie left this highlight the same color throughout. Consequently, it looks like a cord that's protruding out of the neck in a rather unnatural way.

In the lower red oval, the dark shadow created by the front leg is awkward. I can imagine that this was a very difficult area to handle, since so little of the leg shows because of the crop.