Tutorial - How to Paint a Chow-Chow

The Chow, originating in Northern China, is called Songshi-Quan which means 'Puffy-lion dog.'

This painting is what is known as a 'line and wash' because it is drawn in pen first and then painted with watercolor.

Reference Photo

I found this reference photo on Pixabay.

Before You Start

Sometimes, I start a painting without considering what I want. But when I have a photo reference, I find it better to decide what I like about that photo. This helps me choose my tools.
I loved the dog's expression - I wanted to capture that and I wanted the impression of that deep, plush fur. While, I used the photo's color as a guide, I didn't care as much whether I got the exact colors. Close would be good enough

Pencil

*This scan is darkened so you can see the pencil lines. You should pencil lines in lightly.*

I look for shapes, first. They were pretty simple in this case, but perspective and distance between shapes can make a big difference in a face. For this reason, I used the grid method to pencil in my drawing.

*Not sure if you're up to drawing this? Art Tutor has a great grid program that will help by applying a grid to your uploaded photo. You can also crop and adjust color and value.*
I like the look of line and wash paintings, so I usually draw my lines and values with at least a .03 nib pen. This time, however, I decided I wanted my lines to pretty much disappear so I went with a .01 nib.

Why even use a pen, if the lines won't be seen? Well, they are seen, but they blend in well enough that most people don't even notice they are there.

One of the things that can be difficult with watercolor is getting distinct edges and/or texture, especially if you are going for a soft, blended look, and even more so if you are painting something small, like a postcard. Using thin pen lines can help you get both. The pen provides the distinct lines and some texture while the paint gives you a soft, dreamy look.

Something happened while I was drawing. I already knew I want fluffy clouds of fur. I got to this point in the drawing and it hit me. The drawing was done.

I wanted the distinct edges for the face - the expression. But I wanted soft, soft, soft for the rest of the fur.
The Brush Counting Method

For the nose and the tongue I used a light wash of Cadmium Red Light. Don’t let the 'light' in that name fool you. This is a powerful color! I wanted light pinks which meant I had to add lots of water to get the light color I wanted.

I had colors from a previous painting that were perfect for this one, already dried on my palette. I decided to control my paint/water ratio through my brush.

• First, I add a few drops of water to the paint to let it soften.
  ○ I wait until the paint is like pudding on the surface

I choose a ‘thirsty’ brush - one that holds a lot of water.

• Then I hold my brush in the water for a slow count of five
  ○ This gives the brush time to soak up lots of water

• For the tongue, I touch the brush to the Cadmium Red Light for a count of one
  ○ This gives me a thin consistency of paint resulting in light color
• For the nose, I run the tip of the brush across the red for a count of two.
  ○ I get more color on the brush, which means more color on the paper.

Some brushes hold more water/paint than others. Counting helps you know what your brush can do, and that helps you control your paint. After a while, you stop counting because you’ll know what it is needed without thinking about it.

You can also just premix your paint with water to the consistency you want. Then you only put your brush in the water to clean it.

**TIP:** Do NOT set your brush tip down in the water and leave it. Keep the tip from hitting bottom at all times. You will damage your brush irreparably if you leave it sitting or bounce it on the bottom of your water glass!

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**Brush Counting VS Premixing**

- **Brush Counting**
  - You can use a smaller palette
  - You don’t end up mixing more water/paint because you didn’t mix enough
  - You don’t end up mixing too much and having lots left over
  - You don’t need paint that is as soft
  - It’s quicker when working on small paintings
  - Works best for thinner washes of paint
  - Works best with small painting, such as postcard size

  This technique works best with a 'thirsty' brush - one that soaks up a lot of water and paint. I use it most when I’m using pan paints or paint that has dried on the palette and when I want colors to run and blend together

- **Premixing**
  - More exact consistency throughout the painting
  - Your brush doesn't need to be as thirsty.
  - It's easier to get a creamy to thick mix of paint
  - Works better when painting larger works

  This is a more common technique. I think it is easier to learn. It does give you more control when working with larger works.

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**Painting the Face and Fur**

For the rest of the dog I mixed a brown, using QoR Cadmium Red Light, Manganese Blue and Quinacridone Gold. I also used QoR Quinacridone Violet and QoR Ultramarine Blue Violet.

Once, the cadmium red light was dry, I used Ultramarine Blue Violet for the blue on the tongue, the fur between the mouth & nose and the shadows on the nose.
I used Quinacridone Gold for the eyes, and then once that dried, I added shadows with the brown mix. I painted the darker areas first, and then used a damp brush to spread the color out in some areas.

For the darkest shadow values along the top of the mouth and around the gums, I took some of the brown mix and added more ultramarine blue-violet until the mix was closer to a black.

Then I do a 2 or 3 count with my brush in the water, and do a 2 count running the tip along the black mix. I use this to paint light shadows around the face and up into the fur at the top.

The next value was painted with the original brown mix - about a 5-count dip in the water, and then 5-count gently swirling it through the pre-moistened brown mix.

While the black and brown was still damp, I cleaned and blotted my brush until it was almost dry, then dipped it for a 2-count. I don’t pick up anymore paint. Instead, I run the brush along around the edge of darker brown that I’ve already painted - where the fur fluffs out from the face. Picking up some of the color on the brush, I pull it out toward the edge of the paper. To make the fur look wavy, I wiggle the brush as I spread the color.

In some areas I start pulling from further in, to get more dark color. In some areas I barely touch the brown and get just the faintest of color.

**Tools**

And where you can buy them

[Hahnemühle Cold Press Watercolor Postcards](https://example.com) (review).

[Zebra Zensations Technical pens](https://example.com) (review)

[Princeton Aqua Elite Travel Brush Set, Series 4850 Synthetic Kolinsky](https://example.com) (review)

QoR Watercolor 11ml tube:

- **Quinacridone Gold**
- **Ultramarine Blue Violet**
- **Quinacridone Violet**
- **Cadmium Red Light**
- **Manganese Blue**