

Drawing Fish

The Scientific Art of Fish Illustration

Curator of Vertebrate Zoology Dr. Gavin Hanke

Scientific illustration is a branch of art that does not get its due credit. While some may claim there is no art in scientific illustration, you cannot produce accurate illustrations without artistic skill. Some illustrations are stunning, like the fish art of [Joseph Tomelleri](#). Others are far more simplified to highlight specific features rather than the entire plant or animal.

I got into scientific illustration partly out of necessity when I started describing and naming fossil fishes, but even as a kid, my dad (John Hanke) always encouraged me to draw. I also have to thank Les Ewacha, one of my teachers at Sansome Junior High in Winnipeg. He was particularly supportive and allowed me to draw what I wanted rather than follow the standard curriculum. In his class I finished a Green Iguana using oil pastels. That drawing won me a 3rd place in a Winnipeg-wide art competition for kids of my age.

Now I draw with pencil crayons to illustrate whole fishes. I use line drawings with fine stipple shading for more dry scientific illustrations of fish anatomy and fine detail work on fossil fish anatomy.



Pencil crayon drawing by Dr. Gavin Hanke. This Eulachon (*Thaleichthys pacificus*) illustration took about four hours to complete using standard pencil crayons. Credit: RBCM, G. Hanke