

Animal Artists

Paint for Fun, Food



Do you sometimes get a reward when you do a good job at school or at home? If so, how would you feel if your teacher tossed you a dead fish for getting 100 on your next spelling test?

For one “artist,” a fish is the perfect reward. Maggie, an 11-year-old sea lion at a Pittsburgh zoo, has become famous for her paintings. Her trainer, Kesha Phares, taught her how to paint. Every time Maggie paints a stroke, she gets a fish.

Phares said she wanted to teach Maggie to paint because Maggie is very smart. Phares wanted to challenge the smart seal. It took about three months for Maggie to go from holding the paintbrush in her mouth to putting paint on canvas. Now Maggie paints with smooth strokes. A special easel holds her canvas in place.

NEWS WORD BOX

reward challenge
canvas easel
orangutan orphaned

Maggie still needs help, though, to create her works of art. All sea lions are colorblind, so Phares chooses the paint colors for her. When Maggie gets tired of painting on canvas, sometimes she paints Phares’ face instead.

Sea lions aren’t the only animals that can paint. Janey, an orangutan at the San Diego Zoo, has been painting for years. Janey also likes to draw and weave -- and even puts on her own makeup! Now some of Janey’s paintings are for sale. The money earned from selling her paintings will help apes that have been orphaned or whose habitats have been destroyed.

MORE FACTS ABOUT ARTISTIC ANIMALS

- Scientists started teaching animals to paint and draw about 50 years ago.
- Some animal artists even “sign” their artwork with a foot or handprint.

THINK ABOUT THE NEWS

Have you ever tried to teach an animal or a person to do something new? What did you teach? How was that teaching experience similar to the teaching Kesha Phares did with Maggie?