
ILLUSTRATING FUNGI — 1

LORNA MINTON

PAINTING IN WATERCOLOUR

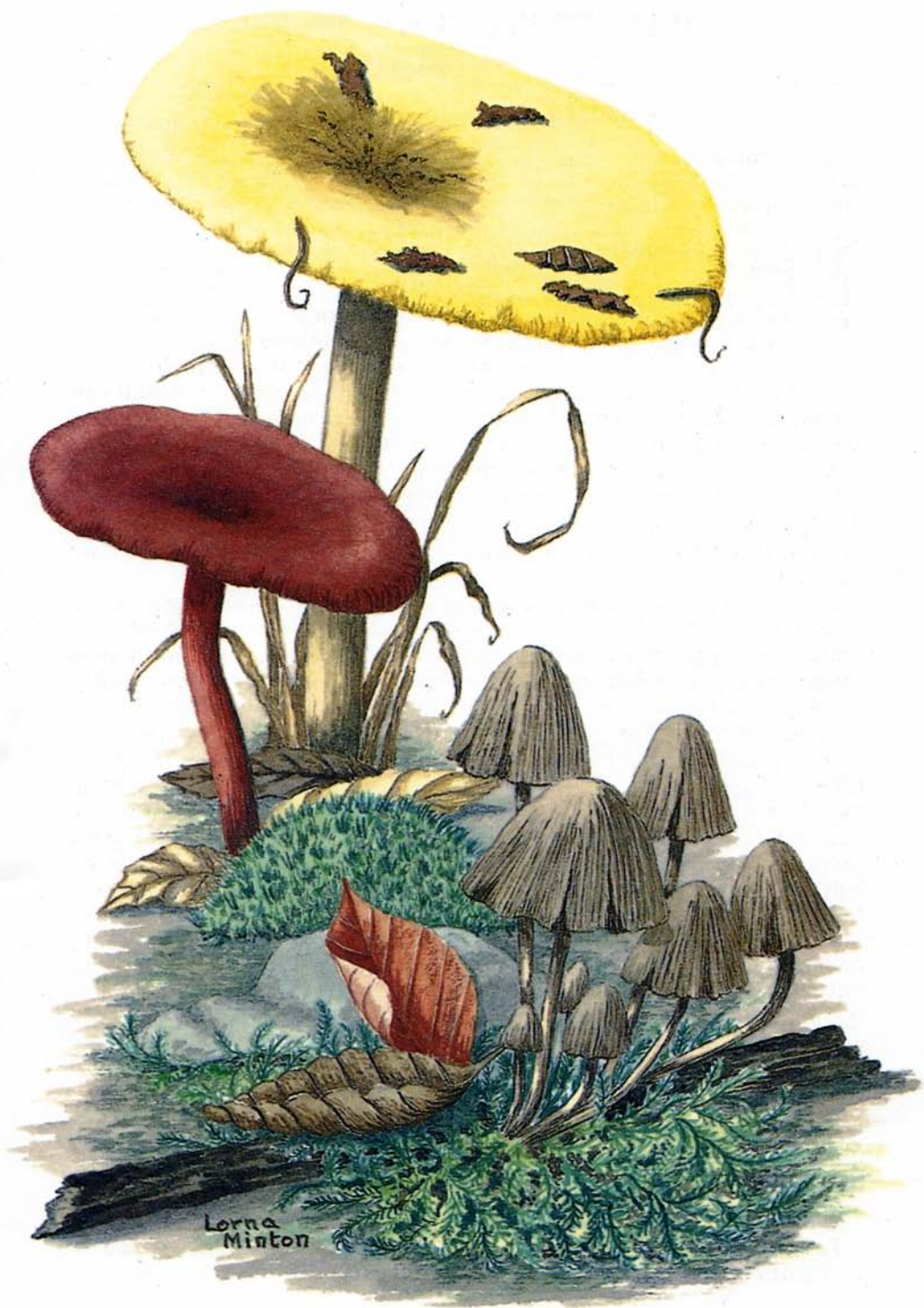
Most mycologists will have used a camera to record their specialized subject, and although some of the results may be pleasing, many will have fallen short of the desired effect, often quite simply because of the limitations of the camera. Most noticeable is the lack of the depth of field when working at close distances, so that just where you really want to study some detail like the formation of the gills on an agaric, they annoyingly go out of focus. So for some readers, the idea might appeal of recording choice specimens by drawing and painting them, and in these articles I will try to give some useful hints about how to set about it in watercolour.

On arrival home with the specimen you want to record, it is ideal if you can commence drawing right away because the freshness of the fungi doesn't last too long. To hold the fungus upright, I find it best to use a flower arranger's pin-holder and to encase this and the base of the stem in wet tissues to preserve freshness for as long as possible. Set it up so that the light from the window comes in strongly from one side. This will 'model' the subject well, and enable you to see the highlights and shadows very clearly.

Good quality **watercolour paper** is essential, and I personally prefer one which is at least 140 lb (39.7 kg) per ream, and has a smooth **NOT — surface**. The term **NOT** means that the paper has not been hot-pressed, thus watercolour paints flow more freely on it, and do not dry too quickly causing high water marks! This weight of paper, or heavier if you prefer, ensures that there is no necessity to stretch the paper before you start. Any type of **pencil**, providing it has a really sharp point, can be used according to preference although my own choice is for a **F - lead**. The drawing must be done with a very *light touch*, because watercolour paints are mostly transparent, so any heavy lines will always be visible. Another very good reason for drawing lightly is that the use of a rubber eraser can impair the surface of watercolour paper, if you have to rub energetically, and then the paint will not flow properly over that area.

If you have a single specimen to paint, you will need at this point to decide whether to record it just for future recognition, in which case you will need to draw it from several angles in order to show details such as the gill-structure, the cap and the volva, or whether you want to convert your specimen into an attractive picture to hang on the wall. For the purpose of this article I decided on the 'pretty picture' approach, while of course retaining botanical accuracy, so I collected three different specimens of fungi from a nearby beech wood, together with little cushions of moss, some twigs, and several autumn leaves. From top to bottom, the fungi are *Russula ochroleuca*, *Laccaria laccata* and *Coprinus micaceus*.

In the next issue, I will show with the aid of step-by-step drawings how this particular painting was produced.



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