

# Lynx on the Prowl!

The Augusta Westland Lynx  
by Tiro Vorster, ASAA

Story by Pieter Cronjé, photographs by Irene McCullagh



**“Lynx on the Prowl”**—The Agusta Westland Lynx by Tiro Vorster A.S.A.A., Cape Town, South Africa

Having flown in helicopters for many years in war and peace, having painted four on large canvas as well as dozens of fixed wing aircraft, Tiro Vorster A.S.A.A. from Cape Town, South Africa, is convinced helicopters are the most difficult aircraft to paint.

Born of an idea after a successful art exhibition at Air Force Base Ysterplaat in Cape Town, Tiro’s latest oil painting of the Agusta Westland Super Lynx 300, entitled “Lynx on the Prowl”, dominates his living room.

The Lynx is shown in its typical maritime role, fully equipped and descending from a threatening grey sky onto its “prey” on the heaving ocean below, rotors whirling, winds buffeting.

Having painted four to five days every week over five months and three weeks, Tiro (age 70) says: “This is the most difficult painting I have ever done, with the most detail and needing the most paint!” All his years as flight engineer on the Alouette III helicopter (959 flying hours) and Shackleton maritime patrol aircraft, a lifetime studying manuals, books, pictures and records, a great number of

oil paintings, several hundred sketches and gouache works all came together in the Lynx work.

His painting has captured a stormy day around the Cape of Storms at the southern tip of Africa. The Lynx is at home here patrolling, undertaking search and rescue missions and ready to use its armoury should this ever be needed.

The fully marinised airframe, two LHTEC engines producing 1575 shaft horsepower each, a maximum cruise speed of 157 knots and 2 hours and 30 minutes endurance enable this multi-purpose helicopter to operate from small ships in extreme sea states and

winds. It is designed to support all aspects of land, inshore and maritime missions.

The painting captures the helicopter in meticulous detail. "Setting a grey helicopter in a grey sky was a difficult but ultimately very fulfilling challenge. It had to blend in and stand out at the same time. The setting had to be realistic, and the helicopter had to have a brooding presence." Tiro has

indeed captured that, say those who have seen the painting.

They include the Chief of the South African Air Force, Lieut. Gen. F.Z. Msimang, a helicopter pilot himself, who specially came to Tiro's home studio as well as experienced Lynx helicopter pilot, Major "Gees" (Spirit) Basson, from 22 Squadron at AFB Ysterplaat. He is the pilot behind the controls in Tiro's painting.



A reference picture for "Lynx on the Prowl: the original calendar picture of the Lynx and the actual model for Tiro Vorster's painting flown by Major Gees Basson.



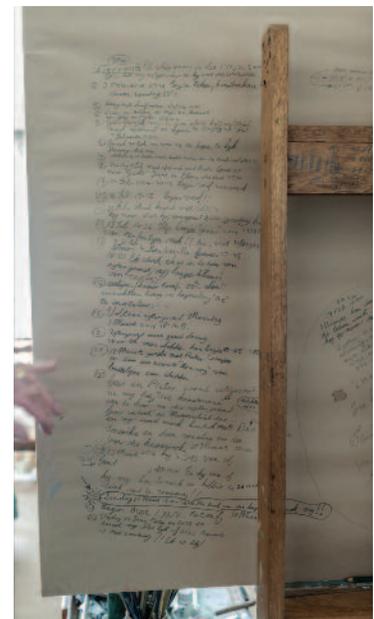
And that is how it all starts: a pencil sketch by Tiro Vorster, the foundation for his painting of the Agusta Westland Lynx.

Negotiations with a sponsor/buyer are now advanced, but as soon as the idea of the painting came up in 2013, Tiro could not wait. The Muse had descended, almost like the Lynx in his painting.

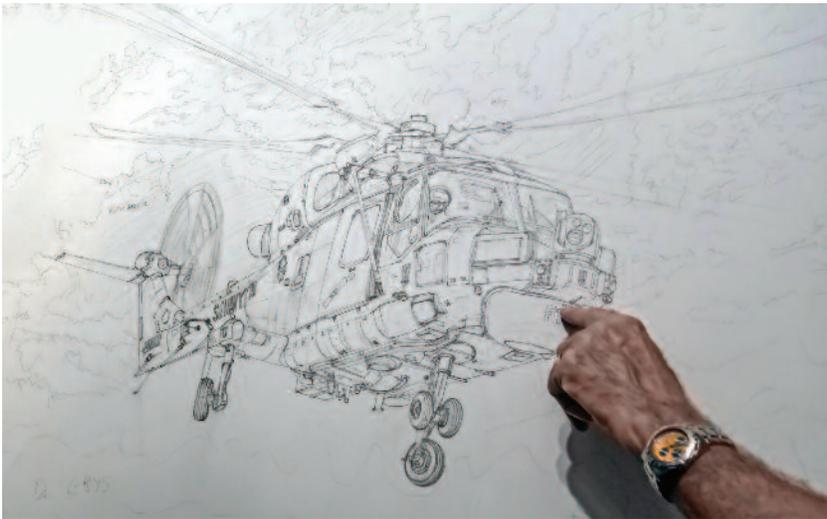
He completed the pencil sketch on 18 December 2013 after studying all the visuals and specifications he could find. On 21 January 2014 he watched the Lynx hovering with veteran aviation photographer Irene McCullagh recording every move. Tiro then boarded the Lynx and with Major Basson at the controls, experienced the character, capabilities, and sound of the helicopter first-hand during a training sortie.

He ordered the canvas board for the painting measuring 37 x 47 inches and started transferring the sketch and photographic images from Irene, all embedded in his head and hand. Through all the phases of the painting, friends and aviation enthusiasts came around to observe, admire, record the moment and celebrate. Tiro's dear and supportive wife, Hannatjie, was always there with delightful savoury and sweet treats.

The back of the canvas board was Tiro's diary. In pencil, he recorded the



Tiro uses the back of his Lynx painting as a permanent diary to record milestones in the creation of the work. Even with the frame, this writing stays as is.



Above: The pencil sketch has found its way onto the canvas board for the painting as a line sketch. Artist Tiro Vorster points out detail on the Lynx. Right: The business end of an aviation artist's studio. Tiro Vorster working on his Lynx painting.



progress of his work and names of those who shared the journey.

"Over the years I have done most of my paintings on my own. When it was finished, people could see it. This project was different. Several people had been instrumental in this project and I wanted to have them around at milestone moments, such as the naming."

"The title had to capture the mood of the picture and the character of the helicopter. *Lynx*, a well-known, large, African predator cat can stalk and pounce from cover just like its helicopter counterpart. When a *Lynx prowls* it is not good news for prey—on land and in the air. The title, *Lynx on the Prowl*, received unanimous support," says Tiro.

Now framed, the painting measures 43.5 X 55.5 inches.

It all started after Ysterplaat's very successful traditional Aviators' Evening on 21 October 2013, when more than 800 people turned out for the event and the first major exhibition of Tiro's work in South Africa.

International fame had preceded this. Inducted as a full Fellow of the American Society of Aviation Artists in 1994, Tiro had the honour of being invited to the United States Official Celebration of a Century of Flying. In 2003 in Dayton, Ohio, Tiro exhibited

eight of his paintings alongside big international aviation artists; but at this biggest aircraft museum in the world, it was a Vorster rendition of a Super Marine Spitfire bathed in muted sun-rays filtering through hangar windows that was chosen as the image for the official invitation to the Century event. The military band at Dayton played three South African songs in Tiro's honour.

Tiro is entirely self-taught. His career and calling as an artist started as a young boy in the small town of Mid-

delburg in the Cape Province of South Africa. He was fascinated by all kinds of machines, tractors, harvesters, locomotives, trucks, cars and, of course, aircraft. Sketching these on soap wrappers and flying model aircraft, the aviation bug bit when Tiro, then sixteen, first went to a big city and saw a real, large aircraft.

During a career in the South African Air Force as flight engineer his log books recorded thousands of hours of flying including one marathon flight of 15 hours and 30 minutes.



Meticulous detail on the Lynx fuselage needs a very steady hand and brush. Tiro Vorster at work on the Lynx in his studio.

Tiro's extensive library tells the story of his art career. Books and scrapbooks show Tiro with aviation icons, pilots, high-ranking officers, generals, aces from World War Two, Korea, Vietnam, brothers in arms and captains of the aviation industry. His early childhood books about aircraft are still there.

A warrant officer in the South African Air Force, his art opened doors without the usual military protocol, even behind the iron curtain of cold war days. Being a South Africa and aviation ambassador just happened along the way.

There were nine tours of operational duty in the insurgency conflicts of the then Rhodesia and Namibia. He had close calls and near misses. Decorations in his home tell battle and service stories. The Pro Merito medal was awarded for fixing a damaged helicopter under enemy fire and then insisting on flying it out himself.

The *Lynx* is Tiro's fourth helicopter painting. It started with the *Alouette III*, followed by the *Westland Wasp* and the South African attack helicopter, the *Rooivalk* (Red Hawk).

"Helicopters have busy fuselages. The detail, colours, reflected light, perspective, protruding equipment are difficult to render. In the end, it is worth it. This is a magnificent machine and the painting pays homage to the wonderful world of aviation, the pilots, cockpit and ground crews and all who appreciate the beauty and fascination of flying."

11 July 2014: It is done. Tiro signs his painting with wife Hannatjie, daughter Tihanna, Major Basson, Pieter Cronjé and Irene McCullagh ready to toast the event. "Tiro Vorster A.S.A.A."

12 July 2014: Tiro starts suffering "withdrawal symptoms". He finds the only known antidote for aviation artists – a sketchbook and pencil. The twin-engined US PV-1 Ventura starts taking shape. The aircraft featured prominently in an adventure book from his younger days: "Coast of Death". Tiro remembers it well.



The *Lynx* links two friends: Artist Tiro Vorster and *Lynx* pilot Major "Gees" (Spirit) Basson, from 22 Squadron, Ysterplaat Air Force base in Cape Town.

*"Helicopters have busy fuselages. The detail, colors, reflected light, perspective, protruding equipment are difficult to render. In the end, it is worth it."*



The signing ceremony. Tiro signs his name after a (hard) labour of love with left to right Pieter Cronjé (the writer who came up with the name for the painting), Major "Gees" (Spirit) Basson, *Lynx* pilot in the South African Air Force, Tiro's daughter, Tihanna, who lives in Pretoria, but who was visiting, and Tiro's wife, Hannatjie.