

You may be familiar with the way in which coloured pencils can be used to produce some very fine artwork. However, many of you may be less well acquainted with how to use coloured pencils for sketching.

This article looks at some of the issues which sketching with coloured pencils can help you address and basics you need to think about when you're starting to sketch.

THE BENEFITS OF SKETCHING WITH COLOURED PENCILS

Sketching with coloured pencils helps you to:

- Expand your portfolio of subject matter
- Get a true record of the colours and tones you see
- Develop your freehand drawing and observational skills
- Learn how to draw more quickly
- Learn how to draw outside – and in public!
- Learn how to choose what to sketch

EXPAND YOUR PORTFOLIO OF SUBJECT MATTER

Problem: *In commercial terms, landscape paintings are probably the most popular form of art – and yet few coloured pencil artists do landscapes. Why?*

Many coloured pencil artists typically choose to do still life and floral subjects and portraits of people and animals. Very few do landscapes. It would be interesting to know why this is. Possibly it's connected with the tendency for coloured pencil artists to be studio based? However, coloured pencils are probably one of the most portable of all media.

Sketching presents new challenges and takes many people out of their home/studio environment and, for a lot of people, out of their comfort zone. However overcoming these challenges will enable you to extend your repertoire to include landscape work.

GET A TRUE RECORD OF COLOUR AND TONE

Problem: *How often have you been disappointed by your holiday photographs? Colours and lighting aren't quite as you remember. Those subtle colour changes are nowhere to be seen and all the shadows are big black patches. Is this why you don't develop more photographs into landscapes?*

Sketching is an invaluable activity for people who want to develop their landscape work. Photographs rarely record colours and lighting faithfully.

I starting to use coloured pencil for sketching in 1993 because I was so fed up with photos which didn't look like the scenes I remembered. I needed a better record of the things I saw on my travels.

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Coloured pencil sketches now provide me with invaluable information for developing work done at home in the studio. As a result I can paint landscapes which look like what I saw – and not what the photo looks like.

- Use your photos with incorrect colours and/or values as references for the architecture, shapes and relative proportions only.
- Use your coloured pencil sketch for the colours and values you actually saw.



This sketch (across a double page spread of my sketchbook) is of the view from Domme, a hilltop town on the River Dordogne in France. I sketched while I had lunch at a restaurant overlooking this scene. My sketch describes what I had to eat along the bottom! My aim was to record the colours for future use as a reference for a painting and to get samples of colour completed rather than a complete picture.



This is the work completed at home on Arches Hot Press watercolour paper – using information collected in the sketch and photographs. It's nearly 12" x 16" – more or less the same size as the sketch. The main benefit I get from observation and sketching is a very clear understanding of the place plus I can clearly remember being there. It's a much better memory than one ever gets from just taking photos!

DEVELOP YOUR FREEHAND DRAWING AND OBSERVATIONAL SKILLS

Problem: *You may be very accomplished at using various techniques to transfer a reference image to your drawing paper – but maybe you are more hesitant about your freehand drawing skills when drawing from life*

Sketching broadens and enhances your basic skill base. People who sketch gain value from the following activities:

- Practicing freehand drawing skills – tracing and using grids can mean that some artists lose their fluency in freehand drawing skills or fail to develop them. Sketching improves freehand drawing. With practice comes fluency and the ability to draw more quickly (see next section) and make more creative and interesting marks.
- Drawing with minimal aids – when the only drawings aids you have are your pencils and maybe a viewfinder, you soon learn to develop your observational skills. Looking more carefully means you get better at measuring judging by eye alone. You also understand much better 'how' a view works – you understand the perspective and grasp the recession which often gets flattened in a photograph.
- Once you start to look more, you start to see 'pictures' everywhere you go. You soon find yourself developing your skills in making choices about composition.

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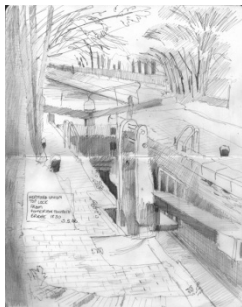
LEARN HOW TO DRAW MORE QUICKLY

Problem: *Your coloured pencil artwork takes many hours to complete and you don't know how to draw quickly with coloured pencils.*

Using coloured pencil need not take hours – once you learn to let go of the quest for perfection and learn how to scribble! You are producing a sketch, not a finished piece of art, so you don't need to work in the same way.

Often you will have a time limit when sketching outside. Before your first sketching trip, you might like to try seeing what you can do indoors within set time limits. Do you know what you can achieve in two hours, an hour, half an hour, 15 minutes or 5 minutes? People going to life drawing classes for the first time frequently say that the quick 2-5 minute poses at the beginning are the most difficult. However, as they continue, they rapidly begin to understand the huge value that learning to draw quickly can bring. You learn ways of conveying a lot with a little - how few lines or marks are required to represent an image. Lots of practice at learning to look carefully and drawing quickly helps most people to achieve much more than they ever thought possible

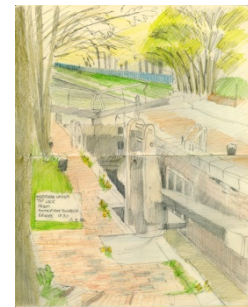
Other benefits of drawing more quickly is that you get to do more drawings in the time available and you're much less bothered by the few that don't quite work out the way you had hoped!



I completed this graphite pencil values sketch of a canal lock in my Moleskine in 15 minutes.

Coloured pencil was then applied on top when I got home – and while I could still remember the colours.

However using coloured pencil is always better when sat or stood in front of the subject.



LEARN HOW TO DRAW OUTSIDE – AND IN PUBLIC!!!

Problem: *You've only done work in your home or a workshop before now. You've never ever drawn outside or in public – and feel nervous about trying.*



second!

Getting outside if you've done all your painting in a studio/indoors is a big deal – people can see you! They might comment! I'd always suggest starting somewhere that feels really comfortable for you. Your own back garden/yard is probably a good place to start. Maybe have a go at sketching something which is totally familiar to you. Or maybe get an angle on something which you don't normally see. It matters less what you paint than that you have a go. Don't expect a masterpiece on your first outing – or the

You'll need a **BASIC KIT** for sketching. Try putting this together before the expedition into the garden – and then you'll work out what you forgot before you go on your first sketching trip!

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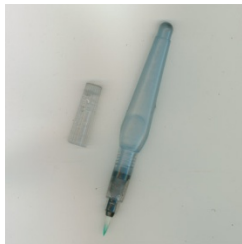
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Sketching is a wonderful use for all those small stubby pencils you accumulate. Mine all 'live' in my sketching pencils cases, one for cooler colours and another for warmer colours. I then place all the pencils I'm using in a lightweight plastic tray.

A hand-held sharpener with a container is a great way of not leaving any mess behind.



This Pentel brush pen has an internal water reservoir and consequently can be used with watercolour pencils. It's a great way of creating a simple wash without flooding the page with water or carrying water around with you (see example on right – done while travelling on the London Tube).



Sketchbooks are rather personal – everybody has their own favourite surface and size. It's worth trying different ones. Hardbacks provide good support.

I've used Daler Rowney's black hardback sketchbook for more than 15 years and late last year started using a Moleskine sketchbook. Daler Rowney sketchbooks come in a variety of sizes. I've used the A4, A5 and A6 sizes at different times and in different circumstances. They contain a smooth paper which takes coloured pencil exceptionally well. The pages are perforated; this means you can either remove a page very easily or it makes them very easy to fold along the perforation and then work right across the double page spread.



The Moleskine is the current 'fad' in sketchbook terms. I bought my first one late last year and find I now take it most places with me as it's small (8"x5") and easy to carry. Its advantages for me are:

- It opens up and lies down completely flat
- Good quality paper accepts coloured pencil easily
- Elastic band helps to keep pages in good condition

Little folder at the back to hold small flat items e.g. tickets, business cards, mementoes of the place you sketched

Bulldog clips are always useful as a way of stopping pages blowing around in breeze.

When you've conquered painting in the garden, it's time to venture beyond the garden gate. If you don't have the confidence to venture out on your own but have people who support your artistic efforts, ask them if they will come out with you. A cell phone is a comfort for those who go on their own. Other tips include:

- People will try and look over your shoulder and comment. It's difficult to avoid this and the comments are often inane or loud whispers which you can't quite hear! If you think you'll find their comments distracting use ear plugs!
- Speaking personally I usually pretend either to be deaf or not to speak the language of the person chatting to me – it makes it easier for me to say focused. But if you want a break, have a chat!

When you're comfortable sketching outside your home, you can start to think about travelling to sketch. My website includes a section devoted to "[Travels with a sketchbook](#)".

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I'm a closet 'everything but the kitchen sink' artist (!). This is my travel kit for artwork abroad – all this goes on the plane!

Essentials include:

- Sketchbooks and/or small blocks of hot press watercolour paper
- a portfolio of different coloured/types of drawing support
- Small foam core board
- Mechanical pencils (require no sharpening)
- Coloured pencils – sorted into colour groups – in pencils rolls
- Two pencils cases (warm and cool colours) containing shorties for 'lightweight' trips
- Small light electric sharpener
- Camera + battery charger + spare batteries
- A folding chair
- Folding mac and umbrella
- Protective creams for sun and bugs
- Good footwear for all that walking!
- Sack with lots of pockets enabling easy location of different bits of art gear
- Guidebooks / maps(so as not to get lost!)



LEARN HOW TO CHOOSE WHAT TO SKETCH

Problem: *What's your priority when sketching outside – to find that view which will stimulate great art or to be comfortable? Or both?*

When arriving at a new place take some time to have a good walk round to see what the options are. It's amazing when painting outside in groups to see how many people settle within 10-20 feet of the first place they get to within 2-3 minutes of arriving. Walking around helps you to get a better sense of place. Beware the 'herd' mentality but also remember that if you're new to sketching outside you may find it more comfortable to stick with a group.

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You will find a “viewfinder” very helpful. A camera viewfinder is not great if you have to keep picking it up to check anything. A small piece of card with a border of about 1-1.5 inches and a small hole in the middle is the best.



A scale finder is the same as a viewfinder. It’s generally made of acetate marked with a grid. It helps to sort out relative proportions if you have a very complex subject. However I wouldn’t recommend sitting with one of these in front of your face the whole time you sketch!

I’m a committed plein air artist but I’m also into my creature comforts. It’s no coincidence that a lot of my interior sketches are done in places where it’s possible to eat or drink. When away from home, I often start at the nearest decent looking café and try very hard to find something attractive to paint while sitting at one of the tables. It’s always easier to work if you have a table, drinks, munchies and ‘facilities’ available when required. Often, when painting in hot countries, they also frequently have a shade – which can make life tolerable if the alternative is no shade.

Other things to think about:

- Think about where the sun is – and where it’s moving to. What looks great right now might look completely different in half an hour.
- Aim for shelter from any wind – it’s difficult to draw when paper is flapping.
- Try and find a spot which means nobody can come up behind you. Having your back to a wall or sitting in a corner are both good options.
- If you’re female and on your own be very, very sensible about picking isolated spots.
- Don’t plonk yourself down in a place with foot traffic – you’ll just get bumped and jostled and find the whole experience thoroughly unpleasant.
- If you climb down to something with all your kit do make sure you are capable of climbing back up with all your kit! Or even without it?
- Work out where “the facilities” are before you need them!

My top recommendations would be to

- Always pick a view which speaks to you at a personal level and that you’ll enjoy doing – it’s the one that stays in your brain as you walk around
- Don’t be afraid of choosing something small – you don’t have to do everything
- Practice identifying views to sketch when you have no kit with you. You’ll end up with a list of views you want to do and you’ll never have a problem about what to do next!

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HOW TO GET STARTED: DIFFERENT WAYS OF SKETCHING

Problem: *But I don't know to sketch! What do I have to do?*

There is no one right way to sketch or to sketch using coloured pencils – just have a go and see what works for you. Some tips:

- Always remember that a sketch is a preliminary drawing or study.
 - You don't have to draw the same way you normally work
 - You don't have to work the whole sketch to the same level.....or even finish
- Go for big shapes rather than detail
- Identify the main contrasts between colours, tones, textures – this helps with identifying potential focal points
- Find something to use as a reference for a unit of measurement – and keep measuring as you sketch
- Try making marks and recording colours in different ways.

The images that follow are examples of sketches done using coloured pencil. You can read more about how I do my sketches on my weblog <http://makingamark.blogspot.com/>

This sketch, across a double page spread of my Moleskine sketchbook, was done in early April. It's of the rose walk and the kitchen garden at Chartwell in Kent – the former home of Winston Churchill.

I was sat on a bench just above this scene and had a limited amount of time and a partner who was reading his book! First of all I drew the scene using a mechanical pencil and then I used a limited palette of coloured pencils to record the colours and tones I saw.



This is one of my first ever sketches. It has minimal outline marks in graphite. I had to stop when it started to rain, so it's not complete but does provide all the key information needed.

- The big shapes and main zones are clearly identified
- The loose hatching of the reeds provides information about both colour, shape and movement
- Colours and light associated with atmospheric perspective have been established
- Partially completed trees have sufficient information for future use

This was later worked up as a small pastel painting.



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This sketch (in Venice) covers a double page spread in my A4 sketchbook and took a couple of hours.

- I first drew the scene carefully using a pen with sepia ink (to make sure I looked carefully!).
- I knew that shadow areas would look darker in the photos I took so I used coloured pencils to make a record of colour and tonal contrasts between shadow and light. This included optical mixing of different colours on the page e.g. on the paved area and stones.

Katherine Tyrrell version 2.1 March 2008

Version 1: 21.05.06. *The first version of this article was published in July 2006 in "From My Perspective" – Ann Kullberg's online magazine for coloured pencil artists. It's been updated and revised.*

Portfolio Website: <http://www.pastelsandpencils.com/>

Publications Website: <http://www.makingamark.co.uk>

Art Blog: <http://makingamark.blogspot.com/>

Travel sketchbook blog: <http://travelsketch.blogspot.com>

You can find more 'Making A Mark Guides' with advice on sketching on the portfolio or publications websites listed above.

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