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SIMPLE LANDSCAPE DRAWING TIPS

Draw Trees,
Cities, and More

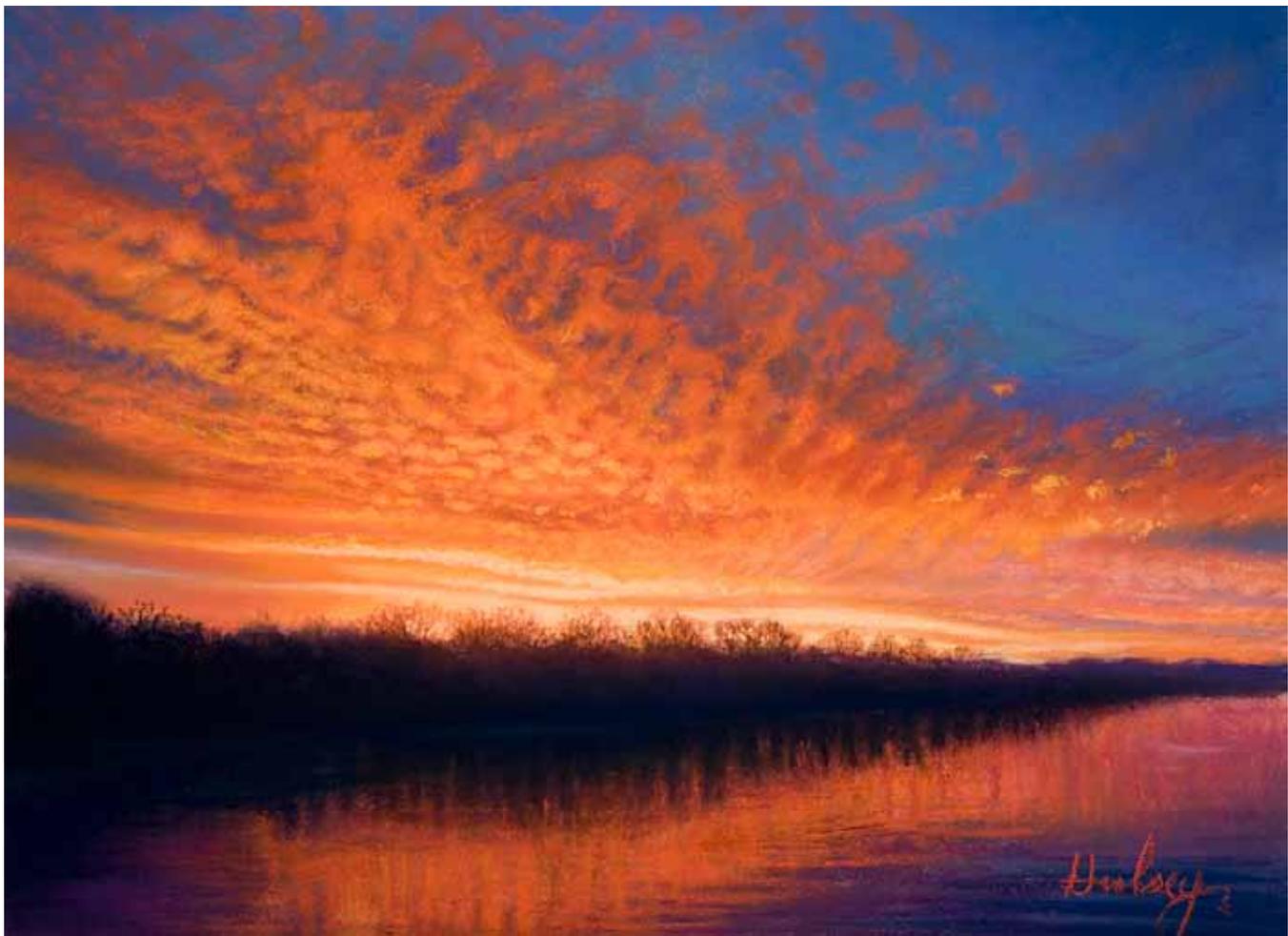
Drawing the Landscape

with John Hulsey



Morning at Double Cabin, Wyoming

by John Hulsey, 16 x 20, pastel painting.



With so much interest in plein air painting these days, it's easy to overlook how important drawing skills can be to the landscape artist. In our plein air workshops, we often encounter students who have reasonably good painting skills but lack skill in drawing. Many students want to get right into applying paint without first making a drawing of their subject. This makes as much sense as jumping in a car and entering a highway with no idea of where one is going and no idea of how to get there. While I sympathize with excitement and impatience, without considerable practice drawing the landscape, the student never learns how to see the landscape.

Fundamentally, drawing is both a way of seeing and a way of knowing

a subject. If you can draw it, then you own it. It is in your visual library. But the act and art of drawing goes much deeper than a mere recording process. For the artist, drawing is how we know the world. It is an expression of life and evidence of what we find relevant and recognize as beautiful.

There is something wonderful about the tactile sensation of a pencil or crayon dragging across a receptive paper surface. It is a feedback loop, and when one gets very accomplished at drawing, there is a seductive pleasure in making the subtle variations of pressure which result in the kind of rich tones which serve to create our image. Drawing also prepares the artist for the even more subtle tactile manipulations required to

The Memory of Water

by John Hulsey, 18 x 24, pastel painting.

develop good brushwork in a painting.

I began to draw as soon as I could hold a crayon. Drawing was always my refuge from the noisy activity of my large family. Fortunately, my father had enrolled my mother in the Famous Artist's Correspondence Course in the 1950s, so I had these valuable professional art lessons to study as a child. Having no other professional art teachers available to me at the time, these books were an encouragement to my interest in art, and gave me incredibly valuable knowledge of how to draw the world around me including the figure.

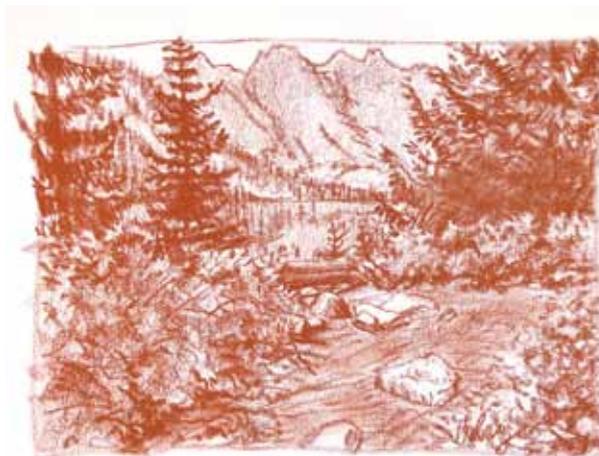
Perhaps the greatest skill that constant drawing teaches is the ability to concentrate one's attention intently for long periods of time on a subject, and make accurate comparisons between the subject and the drawing. This training of the eye, the mind and hand is absolutely necessary in the plastic arts, and there are no shortcuts for it. The 10,000-hour rule applies here. With intense practice over time, one can develop the ability to see the world as an artistic creation of line, tone, masses, shapes and edges. Once we can do that, then we truly have "got it". The "it" in this case, is the instant recognition of those elements in a landscape which will make a good subject for a painting, and the proper arrangement of them.

There can be a tremendous amount of confusing visual detail in the landscape. Often, there are several good paintings in front of us, and we must recognize that no single painting can capture it all. Therefore, it is very helpful to create a series of small, "thumbnail" drawings first, to sort those out and get to know our true subject for the day.

For those of us who love to draw and

also love color, the natural choice is pastel. I began painting outdoors in pastel in the 1980s, when we were living in Garrison, New York, on the Hudson River. Winters are often long, cold and snowy in the Hudson Valley, and I needed a medium insensitive to cold that could be portable as well. I made my first plein air pastel paintings with a small set of 48 colors and quickly realized that I needed more--many more, to express what I wanted. Now, I have more than I need for any one picture so the daily job is to pare down to just what is necessary.

One doesn't need 500 colors to paint a plein air pastel, but having the right ones for the job can make all the difference. I try to select colors which I will find in a given location based on my observations there and the season I'm working in. For example, a fall season painting in Vermont will require a selection of oranges, yellows, reds and



ABOVE
Teton View, Jenny Lake

by John Hulsey, 6.5 x 9, Conte crayon on paper, 2012.

This is a challenging value situation for a drawing--creating the aerial perspective needed required careful observation and a sensitive touch with my crumbling Conte crayon

BELOW, LEFT
Fall at Solstice Farm

by John Hulsey, 6.5 x 8.5, Conte crayon on paper, 2012.

This is a sketch in preparation for an oil study. The sketch allows me to get a firm grasp of the values and important details.



deep gray-violets. A temperate summer forest will need a variety of green and brown colors in cool and warms from light to dark. A city scene will require lots of grays and violets and perhaps blacks. The desert southwest, an entirely different palette tuned to those colors. That's why I change the selection of colors in my portable pastel boxes with the seasons and with the location. If you are making a painting trip and not exactly sure what colors you will need, do a little internet research and select colors based on those photos.

Most importantly, I always carry a good selection of warm to cool grays, especially in dark tones. What I mean by grays are not necessarily grays made from black and white, although those are also useful to have. The workhorses that I love are those grayed tones of brown, green, yellow and blue. Colors



that are mixes of two complements (like a “cool orange”, or a “reddy-green”) are best. These grays make up the largest percentage of the image, while the highlights or brightest local colors are added only at the finish. As the great Joaquin Sorolla said, “The money is in the grays,” meaning that the painting should be built on a foundation of colorful grays.

Surface is also very important when drawing with pastel, and there are now many great papers and boards from which to choose. Wallis and Richeson make some extremely good surfaces, along with Dakota and Artfix. I have tried all of them, and often use the lightweight Richeson Gatorfoam boards in gray or brick red. I also prepare my

own surfaces. Different textures yield different results, and the beginner should try many different ones to find his or her favorite. To make my own surfaces, I use Golden Acrylic Pastel Ground on top of a coat or two of gesso on a suitable substrate. This ground can be applied to any paper or board. If more tooth is wanted, additional marble dust or grit can be added to the ground to create a unique custom surface. After the Deluge was painted on my custom grounds, and it has a different look to it than the other very uniform commercial surfaces.

Pastel artists often choose to work on a colored ground, and here, too, there are many choices. Working on a color has advantages over working on

Harvest Walk

by John Hulsey, 8 x 10, pastel painting.

white. The color of the ground can serve as a major unifying tone throughout the painting, and therefore do some of the work. The other advantage is that painting on any value darker than white makes subsequent value comparisons easier.

I often mix colors on the paper, dragging the flat side of a stick to create a solid tone here, pushing an edge down hard to make a line there, and varying pressure on line work to create a sense of thick and thin. One can also use the traditional technique of cross-hatching to blend tones, or rubbing one color into another with fingers or a stomp to

create a new tone from separate strokes of color.

Because I learned to draw first and paint later, I became adept at creating tone or value separation with graphite. Even using a cheap No. 2 yellow pencil, one can create a beautiful range of tones that effectively suggest a three-dimensional object. Add a 4B and a 6B to the mix and suddenly an entire world of tone is available to the artist. The same effects can be created with Conte crayons or pastels if sensitively handled. But forethought must be exercised with pastel, because of the tendency for the paper to plug up with too much chalk

After the Deluge

by John Hulsey, 18 x 24, pastel painting.

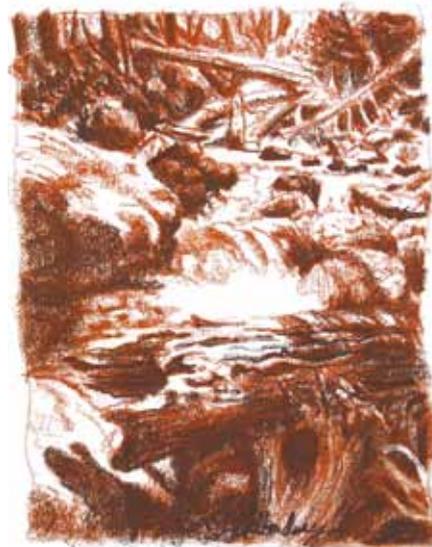
when developing the deepest values in a drawing. Unlike graphite, erasing or removing tone is a much more difficult problem with pastel, and can lead to a dull and messy surface. Avoid it through careful planning if possible.

Part of careful planning is deciding which kind of marks will be used to create the various elements in our landscape. Drawing any large masses, like a clump of trees, or a mountainous background, is often best accomplished by using large, flat strokes with the side of the pastel stick. These should not be dull and careless - they should have life in them! Varying the pressure while dragging and even rocking the stick a bit can suggest all kinds of contours in the mass. One can even lay one tone on

top of another to get some atmosphere without making any other detailed marks.

Drawing water is a fun and challenging exercise with pastel. The difficulty is all mental, and has nothing to do with the medium. Think not of painting water, but of shape and tone. Smooth water is the simplest to start with. This is the art of suggestion - less detail and more essence of the subject is what makes the water believable. Moving water requires the same mental engagement, only more so. The secret is to study the movements for awhile and you will see that there are always repeating patterns to moving water-even in a pounding waterfall. With repeating patterns, there are repeating shapes,





colors and values. I try to draw those in with big flat strokes first, and then hit the highlights and accents with line work.

Everything changed when I realized that I could wet down my initial pastel block-in with a brush and some alcohol or water to create a painted background from my initial work. It is similar to the Venetian oil painting method of a tonal underpainting, only in full color. This painted surface creates a colored background that is essentially glued down to the surface, preserving the tooth for additional layers of chalk. Now the painting can be a denser and richer surface because the initial tones are thin allowing for more build-up of additional layers without plugging up the grit of the paper. One can use the very softest pastels, like Senneliars, to add finishing touches of color right up to the last stroke.

When it comes to learning how to see the world as an artist, there is no substitute for drawing. All the professional artists I have ever met have sketchbooks full of drawings and ideas for paintings. When we draw something, we apply our personality and our preferences to that depiction. We leave things out, move things in, soften, define, combine, associate, and engage

our creative minds in thinking about our subject at a profoundly deep level. The camera is a great recorder of detail, but it cannot teach us to see the world the way drawing does. Do not rely too much on it. Instead, keep a sketchbook handy wherever you are and fill it up with your observations and dreams. You will be amazed at how much better and how much more about you, your art will become.

ABOVE LEFT

Water Taxi Approaching, Murano

by John Hulsey, 6 x 9.5, Conte on paper, 2007.

Flat light and moving water are another kind of drawing challenge. I had some time, so I laid in all the other details and shapes lightly while waiting for the water taxi to be in just the right spot.

ABOVE RIGHT

Mountain Waterfall

by John Hulsey, 5.5 x 7, Conte on paper, 2010.

I needed more darks in this high-contrast lighting situation, so I worked a brown Conte over my initial red drawing to give it some punch.



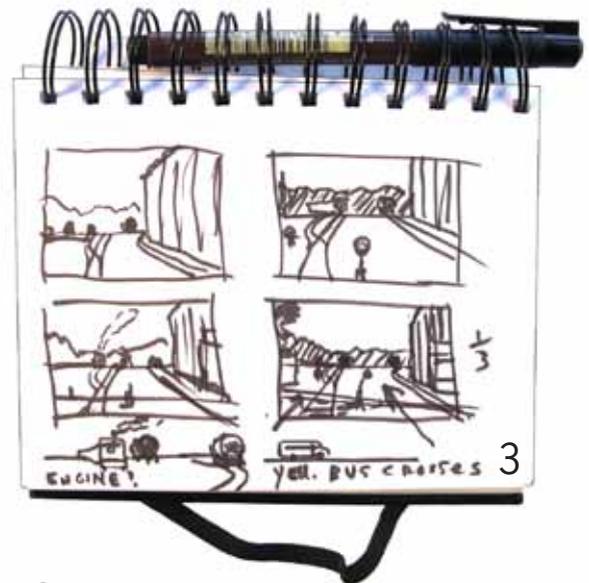
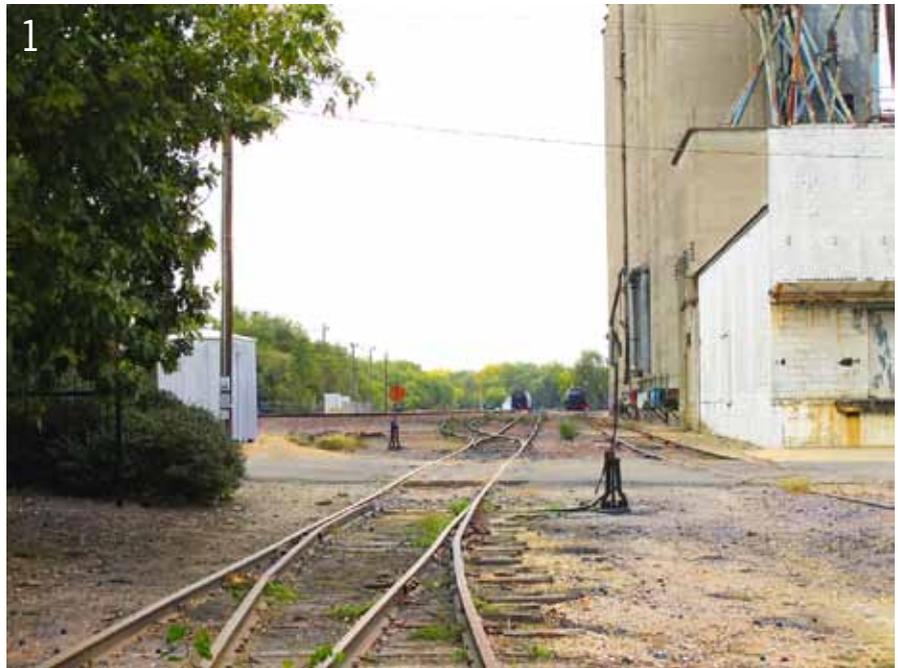
Tramonto

18 x 24, pastel painting.

Landscape Drawing Demo: SIDETRACKED

1 and 2

This was my view at the end of a side track near the train station with my portable Dakota pastel plein air setup. This is a classic one-point perspective. In my pack, I carry a selection of colors in soft, medium and hard sticks. I use Sennelier, Ludwig, Richeson, Unison and Winsor and Newton, among others, along with a full set of hard Nupastels.

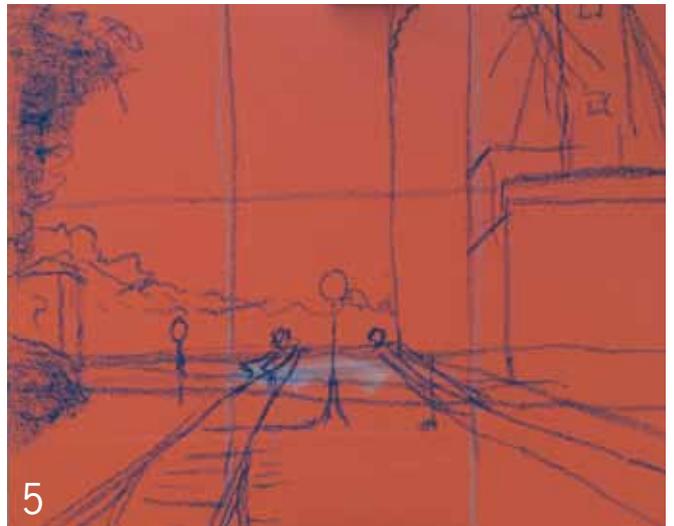
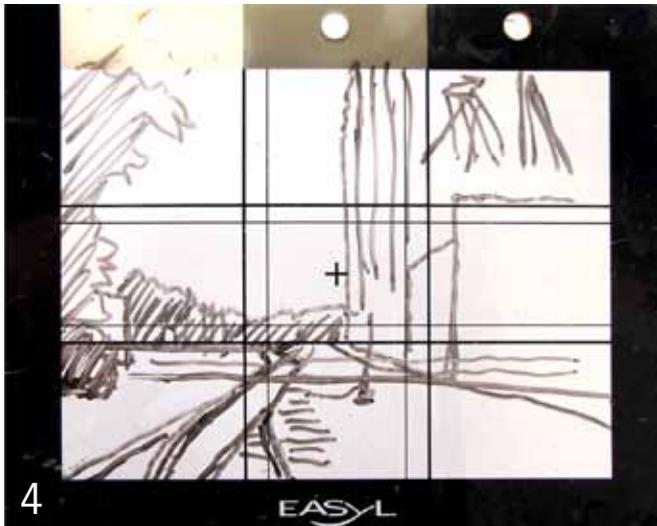


3

The first step is to draw thumbnails of the composition, exploring all the visual possibilities of the subject. This is a crucial process, helps to eliminate those solutions which are less exciting or do not work as well, and allows me to really get to know the subject before I begin to paint.

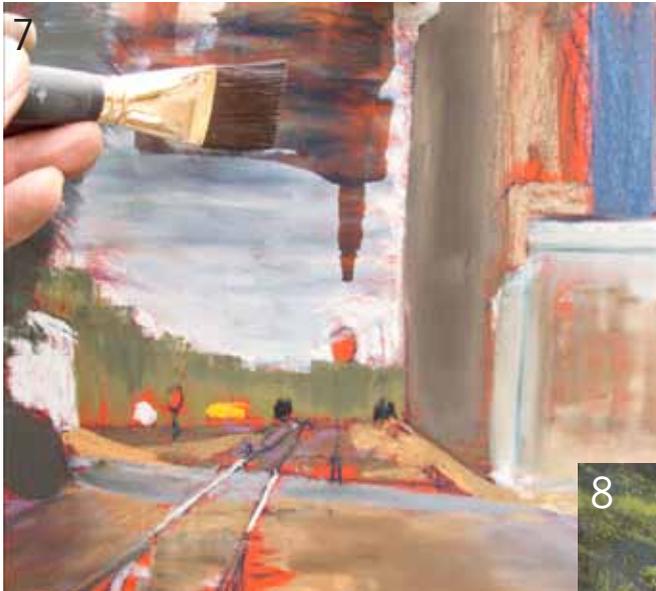
4 and 5

I have drawn my composition right on the plastic surface of my viewfinder. By segmenting my pastel board with an identical set of lines, I can easily transfer my drawing to it with great accuracy, using a dark gray hard pastel.



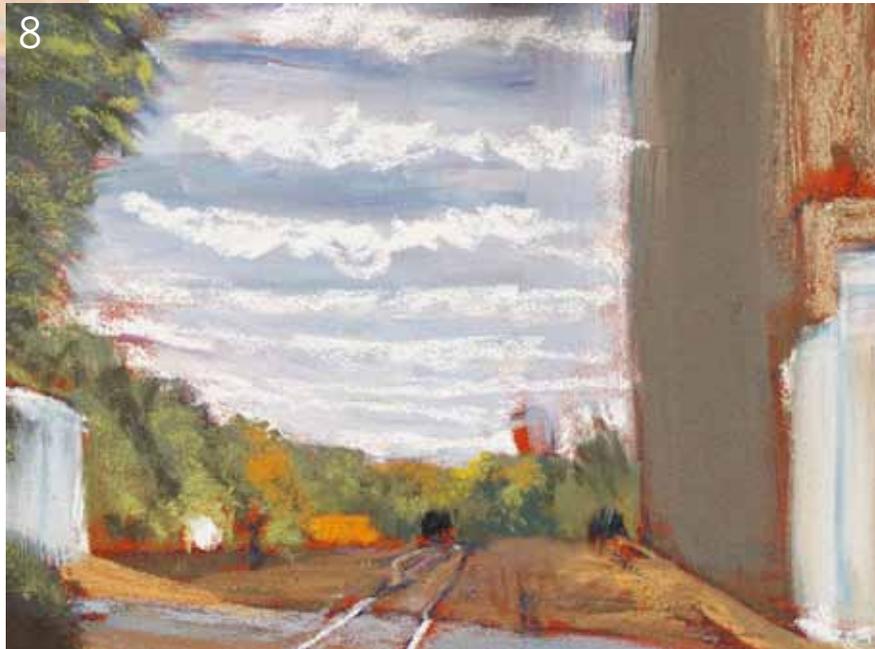
6

The first order of business is to indicate the main subject. That is where the sharpest detail marks will be. The rest of the picture must support the main subject, and so the marks used will have progressively less detail and possibly a lighter value as they move away from the subject. Here, the “squint-down” technique is very useful in identifying the main large masses. They are put in with large flat strokes from the sides of the pastel stick. Those masses in the far background can be drawn in as nearly finished tones. The next step is to progressively add darker colors (less white) or colors with more saturation as I move forward in space, still with large strokes. I do not try to obliterate the red tone of the panel, as I plan to use that color as a component in successive layers of chalk.



7

Once all the masses with correct values are established I apply a wash of alcohol with a soft flat watercolor brush, being careful not to scrub the surface.



8

When that wash has completely dried, I work colors back into the block-in with medium and soft pastels, building texture and tone. Unless I am intending to blend a series of marks or colors together, I use whatever marks work with the subject I'm trying to represent. Varying the pressure as the stick is dragged can suggest some detail in these large masses. If I'm blending, I'll often employ cross hatching with the point of the pastel stick, and then blend those together to make the new color or value combination.



9

At this point I smooth and blend wherever I feel it is needed to prepare the way for additional layers of chalk marks.



10

It is time to develop the main subject and get it to a near-finished state. This work will probably require moving from hard to soft and back again, using finer marks made with a sharpened point or edge, as shown. Switching to hard Nupastels, I indicate the rails and other sharp details which are key visual elements in the composition. You can see how the red undertone plays through the layers of chalk and helps to create interesting red-grays and violet-grays.



11

Stomps are very useful for blending, of course, but they are also great for defining edges by softly removing some chalk. When sharp, they also can be used as drawing tools, to push around or through a previous layer of chalk and make unique marks. I have also used my large stomps to “erase” a pastel layer down to the block-in when necessary. Here I’m softly defining some important edges.



12

The finished 11 x 14 plein air study, Sidetracked.

When I am ready to pack up, I will use a 19 x 25 in. portfolio that I made from cardboard and Velcro fasteners to carry fresh pastel sheets and, more importantly, protect the finished pastels during transport. I make these in different sizes as needed to suit the type of travel I will be doing. The Velcro tape is a great way to keep the portfolio fastened.

I will often protect a finished plein air pastel with a sheet of glassine. I cut a set of glassine sheets from a big roll to protect each painting. The glassine is slippery--pastel does not stick to it, so I can safely stack up many paintings in the portfolio. ■

John Hulsey and Ann Trusty have created an educational website for artists called The Artist's Road: <http://www.theartistsroad.net/>.



LEFT My custom built Open Box M wooden wet panel and pastel panel carrier which I keep in the car on long painting trips.

A finished pastel protected by a sheet of Glassine.



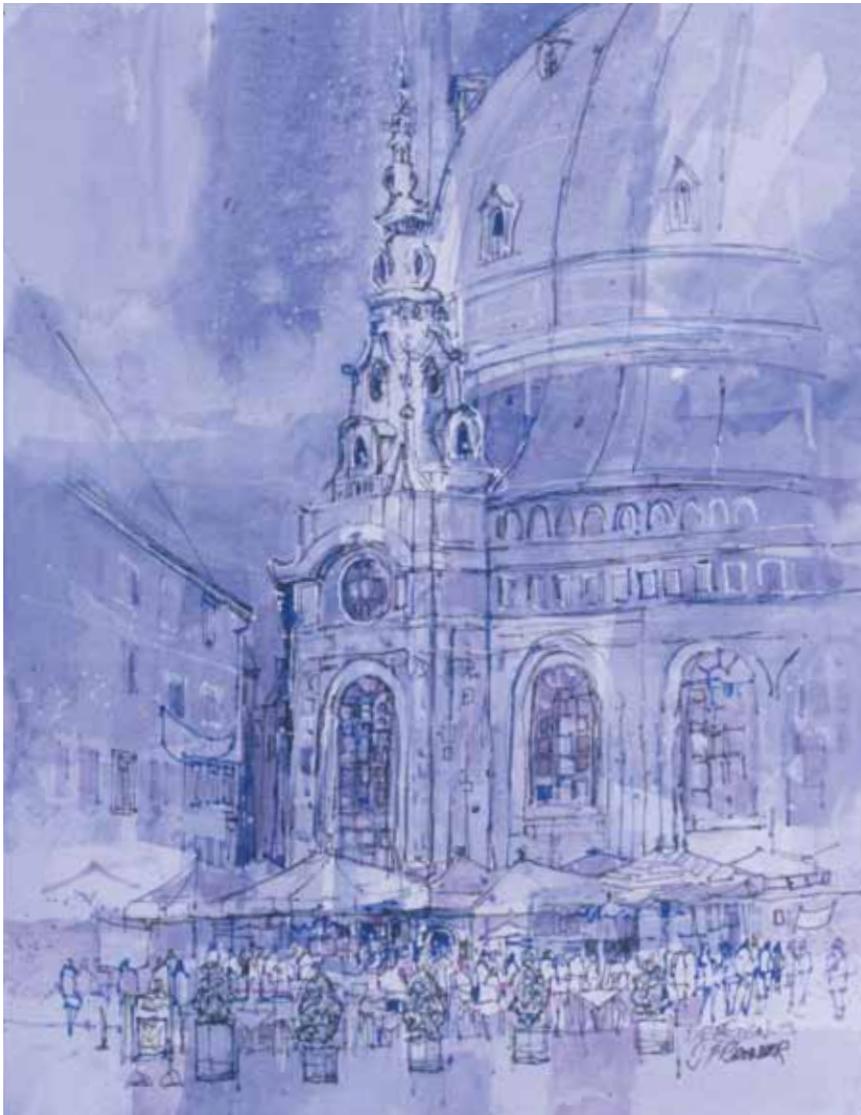
A cardboard case with Velcro fasteners is a lightweight option for safely transporting finished pastels.



Capture a Sense of Place *with On-Site Travel Sketches*

Without sufficient time to create full-scale paintings on location during a recent trip to Europe, I relied on graphite and ink sketches to capture the essence of the scenes we visited, adding watercolor washes once back in my studio.

by Gerald F. Brommer



A Street Market in Dresden

2008, ink and watercolor, 11½ x 9. All artwork this article collection the artist.

An active and busy market exists under wide umbrellas in a small square in Dresden. The energetic activity of the shoppers, seen against the confining and solid structures, presented a marvelous counterpoint. The characteristic chattering sounds of busy shoppers echoed off the walls surrounding the square.



There are certain trips throughout the artist's journey that simply do not allow for setting up an easel, getting out materials, and interpreting the surrounding scenic landscape. At these times, an alternate approach needs to be devised and explored. Such was the case when a dozen artist friends recent-

LEFT
Street in Prague: Near the Main Square
 2008, ink and watercolor, 11½ x 9.

Narrow streets squashed between old structures are constant reminders that Prague is an old city that cherishes such scenes as this. In another 100 feet or so this passageway opens into the main square at Prague's center. The voices of international visitors and native Czechs echo as they bounce off the solid stone walls.

ly went on a cruise on the magnificent Elbe River through parts of the Czech Republic and Germany, from Prague to Berlin. We were aware of and prepared for the constant movement of the river, the kind of steady downstream flow that would not allow for full-fledged painting experiences.

ABOVE
White Roses in Wenceslas Square
 2008, ink and watercolor, 9 x 11½.

The great Wenceslas Square is really a huge rectangular space in central Prague, 10 blocks or so long. The character of the building makes it a remarkable area, and the central space is similar to a huge park, here filled with dazzling white roses. What a dramatic contrast—solid architectural structures surrounded by soft, delicate flowers.

Dresden Baroque

2008, ink and watercolor, 11½ x 8.

Often it is possible to find a comfortable place from which to view a sketching subject. But that was not the case here in Dresden, Germany. Although I liked the way buildings stacked up behind one another, I had to stand on the curb of a busy street to sketch this scene. Dresden is filled with many difficult vantage points, such as this one.



We also knew ahead of time that our short stopovers in various towns along the Elbe would preclude lengthy painting explorations. This created the need to sketch and gather visual information on-site that could possibly be incorporated into future paintings. I made up my mind that this would be a sketching trip for me, during which

Prague: Across the Vltava River

2008, ink and watercolor, 9½ x 11½.

Buildings from several historical architectural periods are crammed together on the marvelous hill that is topped by the old palace and the Gothic St. Vitus Cathedral. Several colors of ink were drawn over the watercolor washes that were brushed over the original ink drawings.

I would draw as much as possible and interpret the urban and rural European landscapes with pen-and-ink. And since I had previously toyed with the idea of adding watercolor washes to some of my sketches, I thought this would be the perfect opportunity to experiment with that approach, sketching on location and adding some washes back in the studio. This would possibly result in a new method of working that I had not explored before.

The drawings were done on location in Prague, on board the river cruiser, and in the villages and towns where we docked and spent various amounts of time. I needed to use a convenient draw-

ing tool with permanent ink that would create lines that wouldn't smudge or run when watercolor washes were brushed over them. I found Sharpie markers with ultra-fine points were ideal for this, and a bonus is that they come in many colors. I also used Faber-Castell PITT artist pens in black, sepia, and sanguine, as well as Sanford calligraphic and Pigma Micron pens with archival ink.

Because I anticipated that I would probably apply watercolor washes at a later time, I decided to work in a sketchbook that contained 140-lb Kilimanjaro cold-pressed watercolor paper, produced by Cheap Joe's Art Stuff. I began by drawing contour lines





of the subject in ink—simple lines that indicated buildings, trees, and people in the appropriate areas. No graphite lines were used, just direct sketching with a pen. When time permitted, I added some details and shading and weighted some lines to provide a sense of immediacy, excitement, and variety.

Either in my cabin room on board the ship or after returning to my home studio, I later brushed on several applications of watercolor washes. These washes did not generally follow the initial contour lines that had been drawn in ink but were painted independent of them. This created a sense of looseness and immediacy and enhanced the feeling of direct observation.

When the watercolor surface was dry, I drew back into the work with different pens and included some with black, white, or various color inks. It was great fun to add people, colors, details, and textures and to create some weighted lines that provided visual impact to finish the work. I made more than 30 sketches such as these in nine days. For some, it took 30 minutes or so to

In Prague: Below the Palace

2008, ink and watercolor, 8 x 11½.

There are many sculptural monuments and statues in Prague that provide a constant art presence. This one is a personal favorite, situated in a small square below the palace and cathedral atop the background hill. The theme is very complex with life-size sculpted figures that seem to share space with the people who are walking in the vicinity.

capture the essence of the place, while others took an hour or more on location. Follow-up drawing on the pages took various amounts of time. Some subjects were unique, whereas others—such as the opposite bank of the Vltava River with St. Vitus Cathedral at the apex of a crowded hillside—I drew four or five times from different angles.

This process of sketching and drawing, applying color washes, and redrawing and detailing produced finished works that seemed spontaneous, direct, fun, exciting, and unique from anything else I had ever done. And yet I was able to capture the sense of place at each location—an important plein air activity that is instrumental in my interpretation of the landscapes and urban locations that I depict.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Gerald F. Brommer is a renowned artist, educator, juror, and scholar and is the author of more than 30 art books and the creator of multiple instructional videos. Trained at the Chouinard School of Art, the Otis College of Art and Design, the University of Southern California, and UCLA, all in Los Angeles, as well as at the University of Nebraska and Concordia Teachers College, in Seward, Nebraska, he holds Master of Arts and Honorary Doctor of Literature degrees. Brommer teaches workshops around the world and is in great demand as an instructor, consultant, and art juror throughout the United States and abroad. His paintings have been included in, and won several honors and awards through, more than 100 one-man shows, as well as hundreds of group shows and international exhibitions, including those organized by the American Watercolor Society, the National Academy, the Butler Institute of American Art, Laguna Art Museum, and the Royal Watercolor Society, in London, among others. His work is in hundreds of private collections in America and abroad, and he is represented by New Masters Gallery, in Carmel, California, and by the Esther Wells Collection, in Laguna Beach, California.

Demonstration: THE CASTLE AT MEISSEN ON THE ELBE RIVER



Step 1

I began this demonstration by sketching a scene of the city of Meissen, Germany, as a contour drawing, without detail or shading. I did not lay down any graphite lines but rather created a direct sketch. Some lines and shapes may not have been accurate, but at this beginning stage I was only concerned with creating an immediate response.

Step 2

Next, I thickened and accented (or weighted) some lines to create a more active feeling, a sense that the image was coming to life. This process took only a few minutes but drastically changed the feeling of the drawing. A black PITT artist pen (M) and brush (B) were used for this part of the process.



Step 3

Initial high-key watercolor washes were then applied on the surface of shapes, which began to suggest a cruciform design format. To make the surface more lively and interesting, spatters were applied with darker orange watercolor splats and also with some white gouache. Some of these were blotted off to create an initial textural quality.

Step 4

In this step, I added a few darker watercolor washes to help create a sense of three-dimensionality. More spatters were added to loosen the overall feeling of the work. White gouache was drawn over some lines to partially obscure and push them back into the surface or to lose some edges. The work was now beginning to show a sense of finish.

5



Step 5

Next I added more line work, this time with ultra-fine colored Sharpie markers and a quill pen with white ink. A few brush lines with watercolor were also added where necessary. I enjoy this kind of doodling at the end stage of the work to emphasize looseness and freedom of expression. ■

THE COMPLETED DEMONSTRATION:

The Castle at Meissen on the Elbe River

2008, ink and watercolor, 9 x 12. Collection the artist.

Some final washes that were a bit darker in value were pulled over parts of the surface to provide value contrast and to develop pattern. Finishing line work and a few accent marks brought this piece to completion.



An Exercise on Seeing the Forest *Not* The Trees

by John Hulsey and Ann Trusty

Aspen Light II

by John Hulsey, 18 x 24, pastel.



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“Trees are poems that the earth writes upon the sky.”

- KHALIL GIBRAN



Fiesta Walk

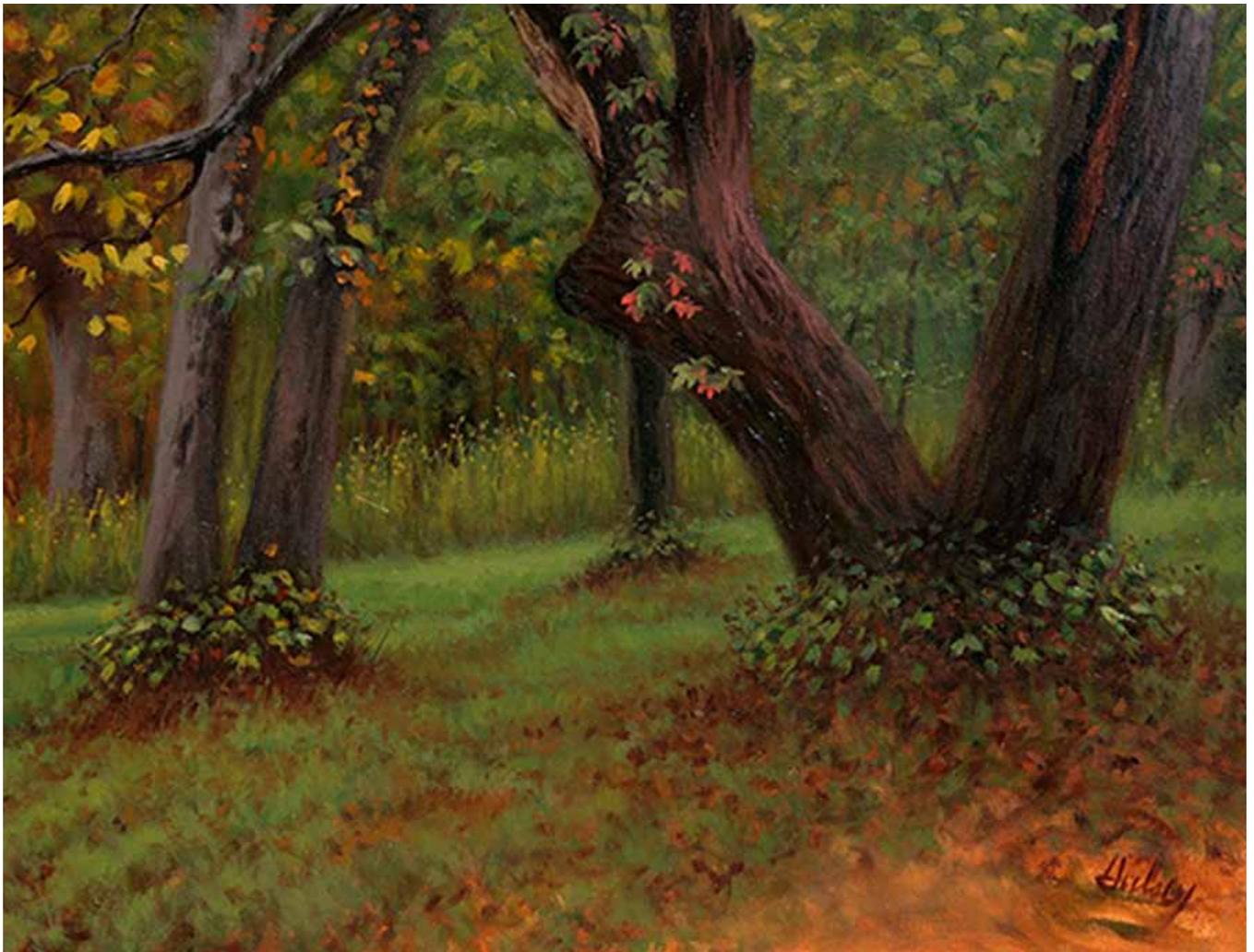
by John Hulsey, oil painting, 36 x 36.

Perhaps the biggest challenge for those of us who paint from life is to see and understand what is right before our eyes. This may sound simple, but it is anything but, and it takes unrelenting practice to get good at it. Why this is so

has partly to do with the way our brains are wired, partly to do with our visual biases, and partly to do with the sheer complexity of the world. Learning to see the world in terms of paint requires the unlearning of some visual habits and

the acquisition of some new skills of observation.

It is important and useful to learn to see masses and shape and to reduce the hundreds of smaller shapes into a few larger, simpler masses.



Trees are a perfect subject for this study, because they are complex forms and at first glance may appear chaotic in their organization. The truth is, trees are highly organized in the way they grow and their leaf and branching structures can be easily identified from a distance. It can be useful for the landscape art painter to learn more about the differences between species of trees they are painting. This familiarity helps the painter to understand the trees' growth habits and to see them as volumetric shapes in the landscape which reflect light in a predictable way.

"See, Simplify, State" is our mantra when painting outdoors, and so we have to ignore leaf detail and texture to a certain extent in order to render

the overall large shapes of the trees. Employ the "squint" technique when trying to see a tree's growth habit and form. Squinting-down consolidates detail and shapes into large masses making the big shapes more easily understood. Render only these large masses, making note of the shadows and where they occur. Look for the negative spaces—the "tree-holes" where the sky or the background show through. These are as important as the positives. Finally, let your artistic eye improve and idealize the subject, remodeling a bit here and there to make your picture more beautiful, perhaps heroic even. Once you get good at seeing and painting trees, the rest of the world will fall into place.

Lightning Struck II
by John Hulsey, 9 x 12,
oil painting.

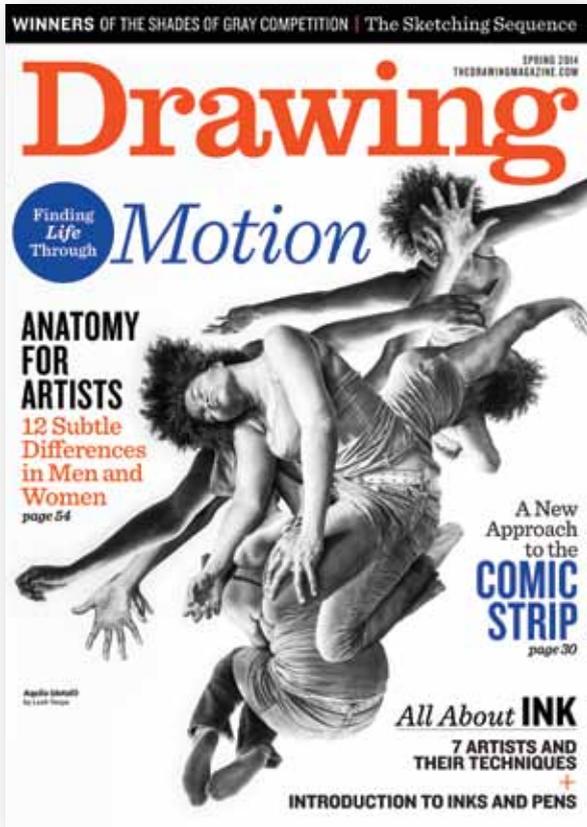
Make What You See More Paintable



This is an example of a mature Hickory tree. Can you see how it has a cascading growth habit, like a Spirea shrub? In this graphic diagram, we have reduced the many small changes in value to four only, and have also consolidated the many small shapes into larger masses. This has strengthened its unique shape and made it more paintable.



This is a favorite White Oak, with a second Oak sitting just behind it. We love the shape of these old trees. Notice how the leaves clump into distinctive shapes with dark shadows around the clumps. This is typical for a White Oak, and makes them easily identifiable. In this illustration we have merged some of the many small clumps into larger masses for simplicity. ■



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