

## Tip #116

### ***Studio in a Backpack -- downsizing still further!***



Maybe you don't have any sort of space for your studio, not even in a closet or on a kitchen countertop.

Maybe you love painting plein air, or going to workshops. You may be a frequent traveler, or maybe, like many people, you're retired and live out of your RV these days. You could be like a good friend of mine, who is living the life of an over-the-road trucker and artist -- and space is at a premium! (Or, could be you're really a nomad at heart.)

In that case, you may want a studio in a backpack! (Or even a purse, which I normally have, really ... my backpack is for SERIOUS artwork.)

Of course, it takes organization and discipline, and narrowing it down to what you REALLY need. Resisting the art-supply-du-jour is hard – I speak from experience! But you can't take everything but the kitchen sink in your purse or backpack ... you may have to choose the 2-3 mediums you enjoy most, or that travel well.

You may need to look around to find the best backpack/satchel/bag/purse to suit your needs. It should hold everything you need, but only just enough, so you don't end up carrying far more than you need. It can get heavy!

Oil painters and artists who prefer acrylics may opt for a pochade box that holds brushes, tubes of paint, medium and other necessities. Some artists make do with a plastic tool box from the hardware store, but I find that a bit awkward to carry. Good to tuck under the bed in an RV, though.

My friend, writer/artist/teacher Maria Hodkins, <http://www.windword.net/>, uses a child's backpack for her art supplies; it doubles as her purse, and the backpack-style straps make it more balanced and easier to carry.

If weight is an issue – and it most definitely is, with me – you may want to use a postal scale to decide which palette to pack, or the water container or set of colored pencils to put in your studio pack. Lightweight plastic pencil boxes can hold pens, brushes, erasers and more, without adding much weight. Woodless graphite pencils, watercolor pencils or colored pencils are lovely, and they DO go farther – but they're also invariably heavier than the wood-clad versions. Consider the tradeoff before you choose.

Pick things that can do double duty, if you need to, to save space. I like Faber-Castell's Albrecht Dürer watercolor pencils, when I use that medium, because they're soft and pigmented enough to double as watercolors in a pinch – and if you're working relatively small.

You may need to use a limited palette of colors, too, and mix what you need instead of reaching for that huge set. I like to play with the primaries, plus 2-3 “convenience colors,” like burnt sienna, Payne's gray, and possibly a green.

### 116-1, primaries

Watercolors are my *own* first choice for simplifying my kit, though—there are dozens of techniques you can use, from drybrush to wet-in-wet, from straight painting to an array of wonderful tricks. (See dozens of them in my book, *Watercolor Tricks & Techniques!* <http://astore.amazon.com/httpcathyjohi-20/detail/160061308X>) You can even mix a rich wash and use it as “ink,” with a dip pen.

Colors mix readily, allowing you to carry fewer with you – always a big plus when space is at a premium. This limited set of colors is sometimes all I need!



### 116-2, water containers

The container you carry water in can also be a water dish, like my old Army canteen that's fitted with its own cup.



My little spray bottle in this ink sketch wouldn't do for large paintings, but one lives in my backpack AND in my purse, permanently. It can pre-wet my paper, quickly adjust a wash, make nice spattery effects, and, with its nesting cup, acts as my water container.

A lidded-type water container like the two here can carry some of your art supplies safely, when not in use. Great for all those small bits and bobs -- a set of watercolor crayons, pastels, erasers, pencil sharpeners, tubes of paint...

### 116-3, palette



Plastic palettes weigh less than metal ones, and won't rust (except their hinges, eventually!) — but metal palette boxes are tough and last forever. It's a personal choice! Everything but the 9 x 12 watercolor block fit in my purse — and the block WILL fit nicely into my backpack studio, with a few extras!

Watercolor blocks or pads (or your journal) will fit nicely in a zip-lock gallon plastic bag to protect them from moisture and travel stresses. The bag itself weighs almost nothing (and freezer bags of all sizes can hold all sorts of art supplies easily.)

## 116-4, brushes

A bamboo placemat will wrap around your brushes, allow them to dry, and protect the bristles ... you may find one in a thrift store, but art supply stores offer the same product with elastic to hold the brushes in place. Mine's traveled in my backpack for decades. The ones you see here are some of my favorites -- the bamboo placemat's the background.



**TIP #1:** *Reassess your “necessities” on a regular basis. What do you REALLY use? What do you need, what do you wish you’d packed but didn’t? I always ditch some things and add others.*

*I just gave away a set of unused watercolor crayons – passing things along is freeing! Every time I’d see those things I’d feel guilty I wasn’t using them, and they were WAY too heavy to pack.*

**TIP #2:** *You may want to make a “One Thing” rule for yourself ... if you add one thing to your portable studio kit, something else has to go. That keeps it manageable and as light as possible! (No fair getting rid of one of those nearly-weightless plastic bags as your One Thing!)*

Here’s one of my early videos showing what I was carrying in my purse at the time (I’ve simplified somewhat since) – but still, a studio in a bag! [http://youtu.be/2\\_Lj7s51c3c](http://youtu.be/2_Lj7s51c3c)

These are just a few tips — you’ll discover for yourself what works best for you! And when you do, please share, we always value feedback?

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