

Tip #131

Using Thumbnail Sketches - Part One



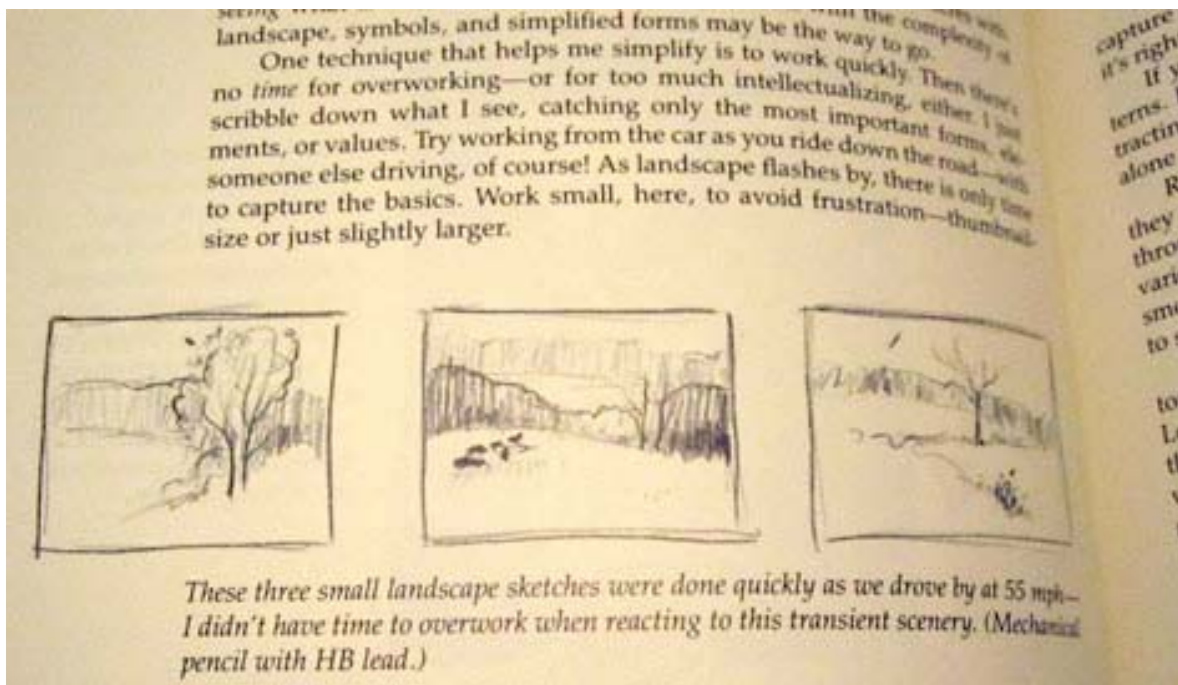
Most artists have heard of thumbnail sketches but weren't sure just what they were or if it was worth it to take the extra time to make them.

Of course a lot depends on what you're doing in the first place. If you're just quick-sketching, you probably won't bother. But if you're painting plein aire or doing a studio painting you may just find this is time well spent!

Natch, we're not actually drawing our thumbnails – that's just a term to suggest relative size. A thumbnail sketch may be as large as 3-4"–it's up to you. Generally, they're fairly quick and simple, as well, since there's not much room for detail. They're just a planning tool, for most.

Do I always do them? No. Do I find them useful when I do? OH yes! And here are some of the reasons why...

131-1 - fast!



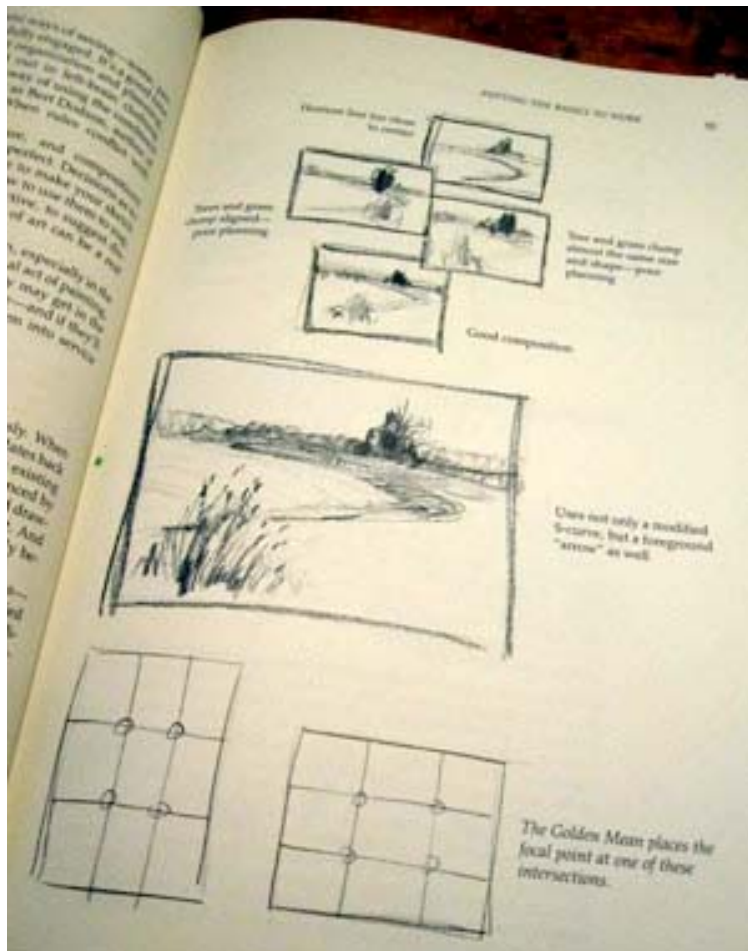
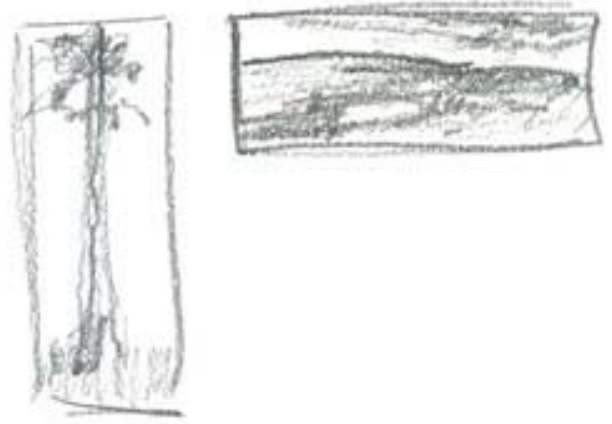
Remember, a tiny sketch can be a very fast sketch as well. These, from my *Sierra Club*

Guide to Sketching in Nature (sadly, out of print), were done from the car window as my husband drove by the landscape. Still, there's enough there to let me develop the idea further if I choose.



131-2 - format

Can't decide whether to do a vertical or horizontal? A few quick thumbnails can help you make that decision for maximum impact! What caught your eye? What expresses the mood? Spend 30 seconds or less trying these out! (This one's from the *Sierra Club Guide to Painting in Nature*.)



131-3 - composition

Composition can be a dilemma as well, and one fairly easily solved with a quick thumbnail sketch. The larger rectangles below show the Golden Mean or Golden Thirds; often, the center of interest is most pleasing NOT in the center but at one of these points.

131-4 - planning



Explore Composition and Details

Watercolorist Steve Penberthy uses his sketch journal to plan future paintings, exploring format and detail as well as color. He often makes a grid to make transferring easier but doesn't worry if the finished sketch explodes exuberantly beyond the boundaries. Here he tries out his composition and sketches details on a sketch crawl to the historic Elms Hotel in Excelsior Springs, Missouri.

My friend Steve Penberthy often uses thumbnails to plan his paintings—composition, detail, format and all! (From *Artist's Journal Workshop*.) Don't miss Steve's work at <http://www.stevepenberthy.com> for lots more inspiration!

Next time we'll cover more on planning, travel sketching with thumbnails and working with color!

I'll be offering some of the demos from my classes at <http://www.etsy.com/shop/CathyJohnsonArt>, my catalog where you can find instructional CDs and downloads for artists at <http://www.cathyjohnson.info/catalog.html>, or drop by for a visit on Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/cathy.johnson1>! Check out my YouTube videos, <http://www.youtube.com/user/KateJosTube>, for lots more art tutorials.

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