

Notes on sketching with ink and watercolour...

Sketching is a great way to get creative without putting too much pressure on yourself. It improves your observational skills, allows you to experiment and can also give you a visual diary of the places you've been. It is said that you never really know something until you've drawn it. There really is no limit to the things you can sketch, from lovely landscape scenes to the leftover dishes on the table at breakfast, whatever catches your artistic eye is fair game for your sketchbook! There is interest in anything you choose to sketch.

Before you put your pen to paper have a think about what you want to put in your sketch, as you don't want to copy it exactly. With sketching time is of the essence, so you will have to make decisions on how you want to depict your subject as succinctly as possible. Think about the marks you'll make and where you will put them. Make decisions on your composition now and your placement of the subject on your paper, so you don't find yourself running out of room mid-drawing. Taking a couple of minutes will save your time and frustration and will allow you to then get on with your sketching with confidence.

As you're drawing, really look at the shapes of the subjects, forgetting that you're drawing an elephant, for example, and just breaking down each part of that elephant into individual parts, angles and forms. It's easy to lapse into drawing what we think an elephant looks like, instead of what's actually in front of you.

Vary your marks throughout the drawing to add interest, and don't be afraid to experiment. Your drawing style becomes as personal as your own handwriting. The more expressive you get the more lovely and satisfying your sketching will be. Don't get bogged down with unnecessary detail which takes the life out of the sketch.

If I'm definitely planning on adding watercolour I'll keep my initial drawing very light and sketchy, adding more ink work later after the paint has dried, but if I'm keeping the sketch as pure ink I will go ahead and add slightly more detail from the start with my pen.

If you're going to add watercolour to your drawing make sure your pen is waterproof! Add colour on with as large a brush as possible to help ensure you fiddle as little as possible, using just one stroke in each passage to avoid over handling the paint on the paper. I tend to let the colours mix organically on the paper, dropping wet into wet or wet against wet paint as necessary to get lovely natural colour blends.

I consciously try and leave sections of white paper visible in between the paint to add a bit of sparkle and life to the finished sketch. Whether you're working in ink or pen and wash ensure you have areas of light against dark to add contrast and depth to your sketch. Don't be afraid of using unusual colour combinations to add interest to your sketches, and always have fun with colour.

I often go back in and add a few more carefully placed marks with my pen, once the watercolour has dried thoroughly, mainly to add definition and structure to the composition.