

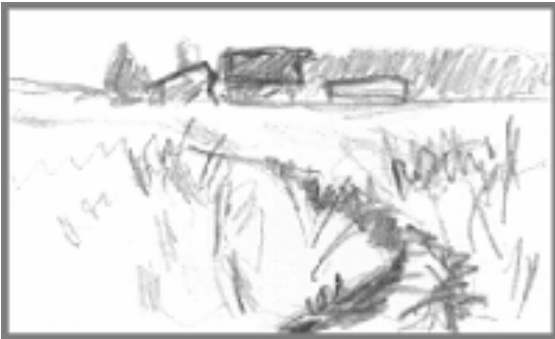
## Thumbnail Sketching

Sharon Himes



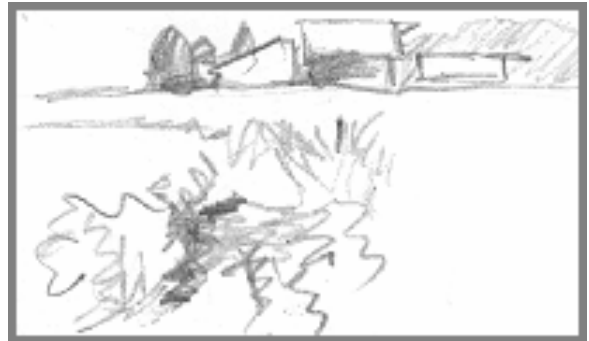
The first steps are often the most important, especially in painting. Before I get out the paints or brushes, I want to be sure the idea for the painting is a good one and that it is well planned.

I carry plain index cards with me, especially while cycling through the countryside. When I stop at a scene that I think would make an interesting painting I get out index cards and soft pencil. The card is divided into four or six segments depending on the general proportions I want to use in the work.



The details are not important in a thumbnail sketch, nor is the draughtsmanship. The small size forces hard decisions as to what is necessary and what is unimportant to the overall composition. (The illustration images are slightly larger than the originals) done.

The scene can be analyzed from various angles. Peering through an empty slide mount helps to frame it in my mind. I look for the darkest and lightest areas, trying to ignore color for the moment and thinking totally in greys and white. I sketch the general pattern of the scene in one of the spaces on the index card. Then looking at the scene from another angle, I sketch it again.



Sketching from a sitting position gives the scene a higher horizon and the ground more importance in the picture. Standing or looking down produces the opposite effect. The overall pattern of light and dark is the important thing, not the texture or color. The pattern is what would be noticed about a painting when viewed from a long distance.

When I have finished two or three index cards full of thumbnail sketches, I lay them out and look them over. I look for the design that I find most appealing, the one with the most potential as a painting. Using that thumbnail as a guide, I sketch the scene again, sometimes a little larger, and work out the middle values. When I am done the thumbnail will tell me where the light, middle, and dark areas will be in the finished painting.

If I am not going to paint immediately on location I might make a color thumbnail of

the scene, mapping out where the major color areas are for reference. A pad of watercolor postcards is good for this purpose, or scraps of watercolor paper cut to index card size. Again the small size forces attention to the overall pattern of the scene and limits details.



The thumbnail sketches, whether grey, value studies or full color patterns, will be used as guides when the painting itself is begun. Taking time in these preliminary steps saves mistakes later. A well planned painting is more likely to be a successful one.

© 2006 Sharon Himes - [ArtE-Lessons.com](http://ArtE-Lessons.com)

You may print a copy for your own use but please do not distribute in any way without written permission

[ArtE-Lessons.com](http://ArtE-Lessons.com) is a division of ArtCafe Network of Artists & Friends

[ArtCafe.Net](http://ArtCafe.Net)