



# Exploring Ideas

Whether you're working from a photo, out in the field, or from a still life setup, taking a few minutes to sketch more than one possibility for your painting can pay off at painting time, not only in terms of having shapes placed where you want them, but also the size relationships between shapes (both positive and negative). It also helps with balance, rhythm, dominance, movement, and in general helps you solve problems in a simple value sketch that you won't have to solve when you're painting.

At the left is a photo I took in the Chiricahua National Monument Park in southeast Arizona. A tree root had, over time, cracked a large rock and was continuing to grow down into the earth at the base of the large rock. I did several three-value sketches of this with the intention of painting it as an abstracted work, focusing on shapes, values and paint quality (lots of sedimentary pigments), with some linear accents. I sold the painting, but I still have the

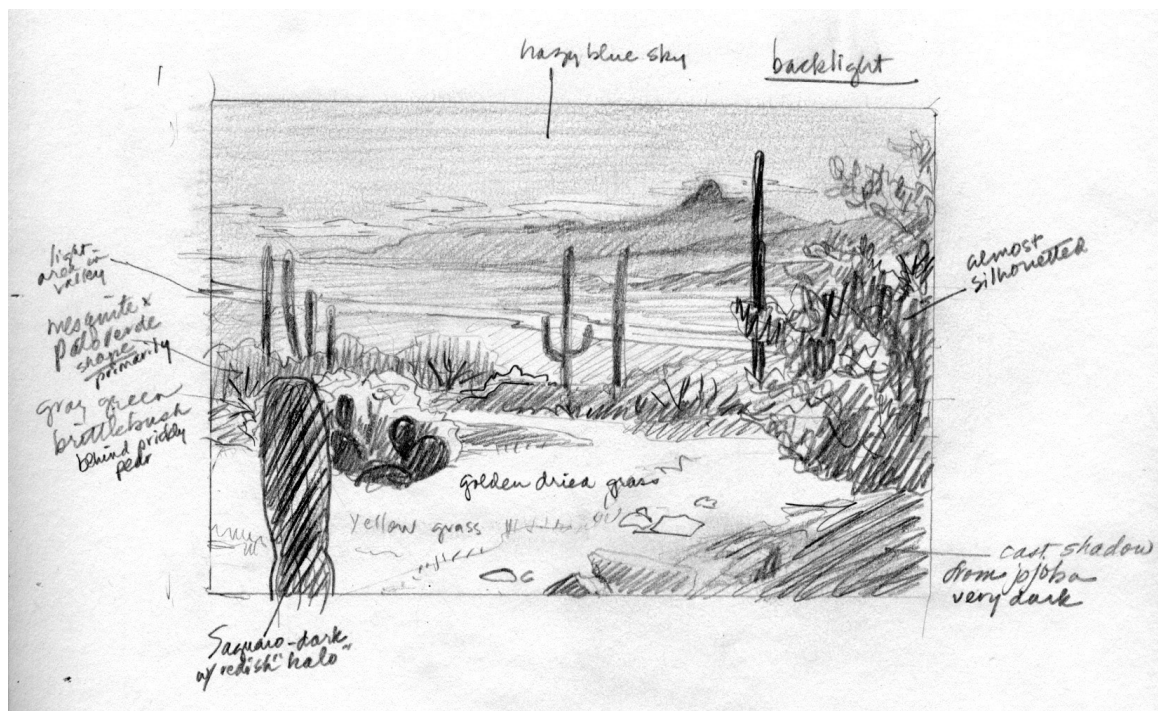
other sketches I did. I could create a series from these and the other two sketches I did (not shown here) and each one would be different but related.

Note how the focus shifts in each of these sketches. I like using one value predominantly, and then a lesser amount of another value and finally, for emphasis, just a small amount of the third value.

Don't get so invested in your first idea that you are reluctant to let it go in favor of another idea that might be even better. Spend no more than five minutes on these small three-value sketches. When you get one that "speaks to you", you can spend a little more time on a larger, more detailed drawing if you need to.







I often make notes on these value sketches, especially if I can't stay on site, or maintain a particular lighting situation. Those notes help reinforce my visual "notetaking" - the things I observed, both near and far that will help me finish the painting with the emphasis on what I felt/thought was most important about the subject. Note that in the painting, I decided to leave out the central saguaros, because I felt they took away from Baboquivari Peak.





# Use Value Contrasts to Shift Focus

Where you put your light and dark values, especially the strongest contrasting ones, will help the viewer focus on where you want the emphasis to be in your painting.

Look at these sketches of the same buildings and street, but with different lighting, and note how the focus changes to different parts of the scene. In the top image, the focus is on the street - the two foreground figures, and the carriage going through the archway. The greatest contrast between light and dark is in these areas, while the values in the rest of the painting are closer to each other. In the bottom image, the focus has shifted to the top arch and roof, again, because now that is where the strongest contrasts in value occur.

If you have a good value sketch, it does not matter what colors you use as long as those color's values match what you have in your value sketch.



# Fool Around with Color

Choosing a new palette of colors can give you a series even when the subject remains the same. Not only different hues, but changing the intensity of the colors, or making the subject monochromatic, can give it another life.

Below left: "Annie's Kitchen" by Judith Geiger. Opaque watercolor on paper. The other two versions imagine a lower intensity version and a monochromatic (sepia) version.

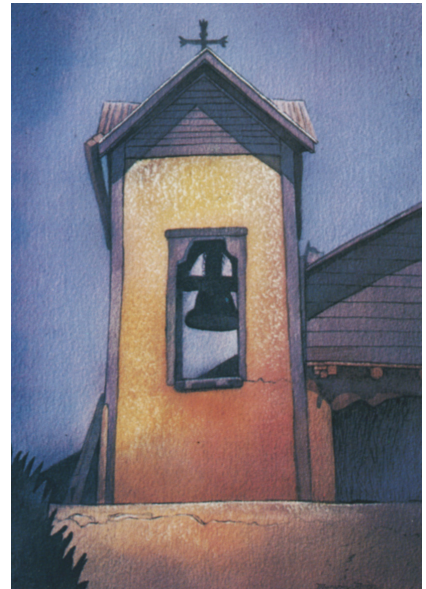
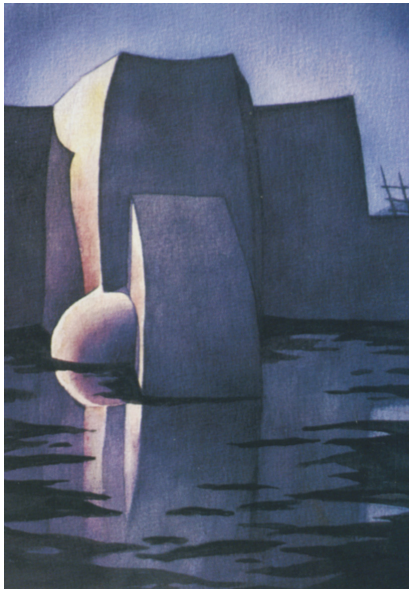
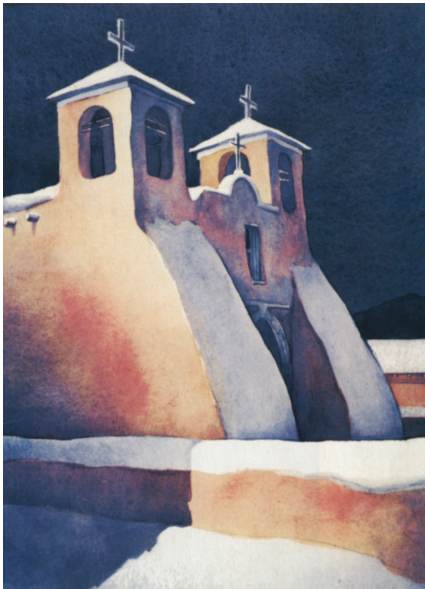




# Walk Around the Subject

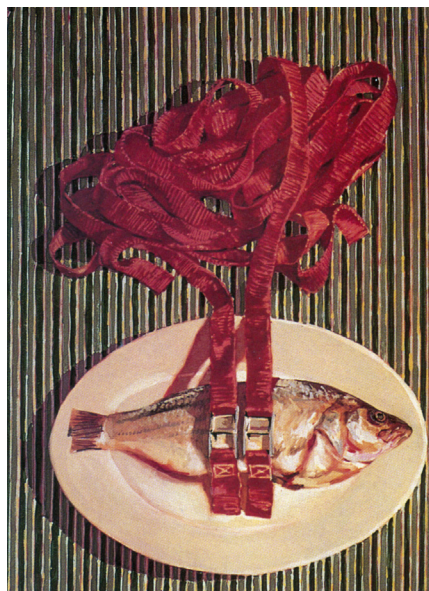
We talked about doing a 360 degree series of a landscape, but the same could be said for any subject. Get up, walk around it. Get down at it's level, or stand up and look straight down at it. The same subject, painted from a different point of view, can give you a series.

Below left: "First Snow", Center: "Respite" and Right: "Mountain Tower" all by New Mexico artist, Marvin Moon. He has painted famous New Mexico churches from almost every angle, using basically the same warm (burnt sienna, permanent rose) / cool (ultramarine blue) complimentary color scheme. It's a series, and makes his work very recognizable.



# Make Unusual Connections

We all have preconceived and often stereotyped ideas about what goes with what. For example, what gets served on a plate, or fills a coffee cup. But what if.....????



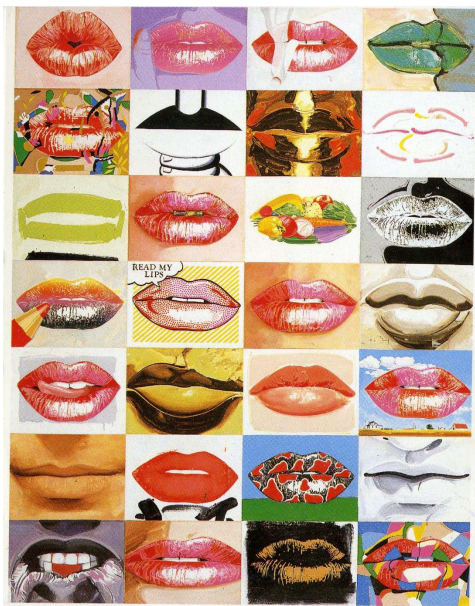
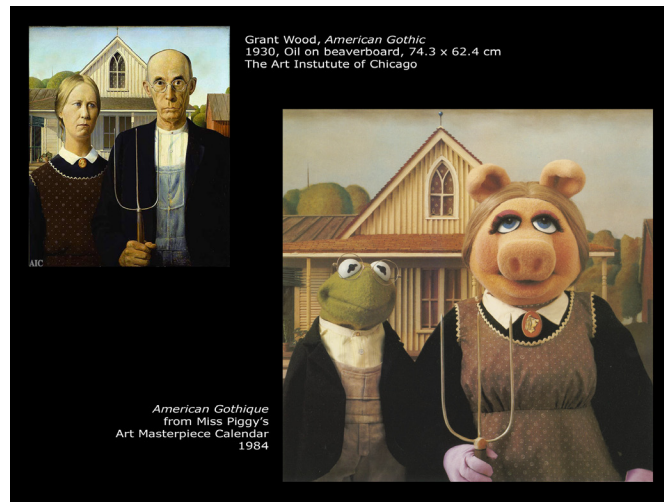
Above: "Three Caballeros", Left: "Strapped Bass" Far Left: "Cupid's Arrow", all by Jeff Bailey, watercolor and gouache on paper



# Look to Other Artists/Art Styles

Go ahead, appropriate! No artist works in a vacuum, and every artist stands on the shoulders of those who came before them. Artist and art periods of the past can provide just the inspiration you need to create your own series.

Right: Take offs on famous works of art from the Muppet team. These were in a calendar from 1984 that featured Miss Piggy and Kermit the frog.



Left: Artist Paul Giovanopoulos made a career (and a series) by appropriating "style" from a whole host of artists, living and dead.

He reworked the same object "in the style of" using a grid on a single canvas. It's fun to see if you can identify the art style or artist in each of the panels.

Right: Remember Picasso's bull series? Here is Roy Lichtenstein's version. Lichtenstein was part of the Pop Artist's movement, and his "thing" was parody through comic-book simplicity and large scale, often showing the halftone dots that were used to make colors in newsprint comics.

