



## BPG en Plein Air

*We have decided to trial BPG Painting en Plein Air*

**2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> FRIDAY of the month**

**11am to 2pm**

**Beginning October 25<sup>th</sup>...**

**November 8<sup>th</sup> & 22<sup>nd</sup>**

**& Dec13<sup>th</sup>**

**Venue: Hazelwood Park**

**Parking off Devenport Tce, Hazelwood Pk.**

**Meet under Olive Grove (behind the toilets)**



**We will review in 2020 ...**



**look forward to seeing you there**

**Willie**

# 6 Tips For Sketching En Plein Air

By [Michelelling](#) on 13th August, 2019

There are few things more pleasurable than sitting quietly in nature, looking at a view with a paint box in your lap and your favourite brushes or pencils in hand. It really gets you soaking up the atmosphere and there's no better way to charge your senses!

It is also excellent practice and discipline. Being on location, with the sun, the clouds, the wind and rain force you to use all your powers of observation and to be in the moment.

Your sketchbooks, and the moments you capture can be a great source of inspiration for future paintings or simply a reminder of the places you've visited.

## Tip #1 - Equipment to Choose

When painting en plein air, make sure to take only the bare essentials with you. Carrying too much will put you off before you've even started.

My kit usually includes:

- A lightweight rucksack
- One 8"x10" sketchbook for wet media like watercolours (I like Stillman and Birn but any brand will do - go for a cold-pressed or vellum surface)
- Two 5.5"x8.5" sketchbooks (one portrait, one landscape) for dry media like pencil sketching, charcoal and pen
- A 12-pan watercolour travel box ([something like this](#))
- A selection of your favourite brushes
- A selection of drawing pencils
- A black charcoal pencil
- Three waterproof fine liner pens of different sized nibs (I like Uni Pin pens but any brand such as Sakura or Faber-Castell)
- A brush pen (for covering larger areas in ink - [such as this one](#))
- A few coloured pencils
- A water pot
- A small bottle of water
- Some kitchen paper
- A light-weight travel easel ([such as this one](#))
- A portable chair (or just a lightweight blanket or plastic sheet to sit on)



I used to take larger stretched paper and board with me but find I usually end up just using my sketchbooks, so now I leave the heavy board at home! Depending on the time of year you'll also need sunscreen and hat or waterproof clothing - always best to be prepared!

## Tip #2 - Use a Viewfinder

Your chosen view is perhaps your most important decision! And it's not always easy when you're faced with a big expansive landscape or a bustling townscape with lots of nice architecture and buildings.

A viewfinder can be very useful - it will help you select a good composition and frame your subject. You can easily make one yourself from a small piece of card with a rectangular hole cut in the middle (mine also has a sheet of acetate taped to it with a grid a third of the way along each edge of the aperture).

Once you've found a spot, don't be too picky with your subject. Very often, what appears to be quite a mundane scene can look really captivating as a sketch. After all, plein air and urban sketching are about capturing and beautifying the everyday - not about finding the eighth wonder of the world!

Decide which format is best: landscape, portrait or square. Doing a few thumbnail sketches is never a waste of time and will help you work out your priorities, what to leave in or take out, and the all-important centre of interest.

## Tip #3 - Choose A Focal Point



Your goal is to try and capture the mood and atmosphere of the place rather than every little detail.

Start by choosing your focal point. Which area do you want to draw a viewer's attention to most? It could be a building in a landscape, or a tree, or a group of trees, or an expanse of water for example. In a townscape, it could be a doorway, or an entire building, or a group of

people or a single person.

It helps to set your focal point off centre, or use the [rule of thirds](#) to place it. This is where your viewfinder comes in handy and a few very rough and ready thumbnail sketches if you're not sure.

Once you know your focal point, you can spend a bit more time on that area and not worry so much about the surrounding areas.

## Tip #4 - Focus on Tones Not Colours

If you're going to add colour to your sketches (such as a pen and ink wash) don't stress over exact colour mixes - you haven't got the time and it's unnecessary.

Instead, concentrate on the tones or values (the lights and darks) you see. Take more time over these because they will add depth and form to your sketches.

It can be tricky to see values outdoors so use the "[squinting technique](#)", which you defocus your eyes and remove a lot of the details in front of you.

A limited palette will help you avoid obsessing over colours. You could just maybe just three or four colours for any one scene. Or you could even just one colour and create a monochrome sketch. This will force you to focus on tones to differentiate the different areas of the scene.

And if you want to simplify things even further, stick to just three or four tones - so a very dark tone for the darkest shadows, a dark tone for less strong shadows, a mid-tone and a light tone (plus the white of the paper for highlights).

Remember to use stronger tonal changes (stronger darks against stronger lights) around your centre of interest or focal point, to help catch the viewer's eye.

With a bit of practice, you'll soon train your eye to see tones and values correctly!

## Tip #5 - Sketching People



It's great fun to sketch people. Try it when you're next sitting in a café or a bench.

The aim is to capture a little of their character rather than a full portrait - they won't sit still for long enough for you to do anything more than a quick sketch, so don't worry about making really considered drawings.

Study what you see for a moment, commit it to memory and then put it down on paper quickly.



Focus on big shapes (the head, the torso, the limbs) and the proportions of those big shapes. Don't worry about trying to capture a likeness - your aim is to sketch someone that looks in reasonable proportion, with a believable impression of facial features (if they're closer up). It's not easy so don't be hard on yourself!

## Tip #6 - Work Quickly & Take a Camera

You need to work quickly when sketching or painting outdoors because the environment won't stay the same for long.

On the one hand this can feel a bit stressful, but if you can learn to let go of the need to capture everything exactly as it is, that tension will soon disappear.

Remember, your sketches are a reference for a future painting where you DO have more time and less pressure. So aim to get down the bones of what's in front of you with the intent of working up the sketch later, at home or in your studio (if you want to).

Aside from people moving about a lot in an urban scene, one of the trickiest challenges is the ever-changing light...