

Chapter 7

Different ways of drawing

Drawing in public

One of the reasons why beginners are reluctant to draw outside is the fear of exposure. For some reason artists are seen as public property and a curious passer-by will sooner or later peer over your shoulder and say 'mind if I have a look?' (and it's too late by then to say 'yes, I do mind, actually.')

You find yourself apologising, embarrassed ('oh it's rubbish really, I'm just a beginner, I can't draw at all, ha ha....') and you decide that from now on you're going to photograph the scene and work only at the privacy of your kitchen table.

Stick with it – there are ways to overcome the fear:

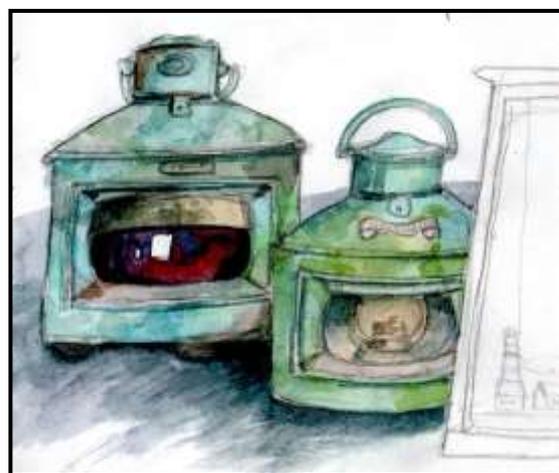


- Find a place to draw where you're tucked away with your back to the wall, or somewhere remote where no-one can easily peer over your shoulder

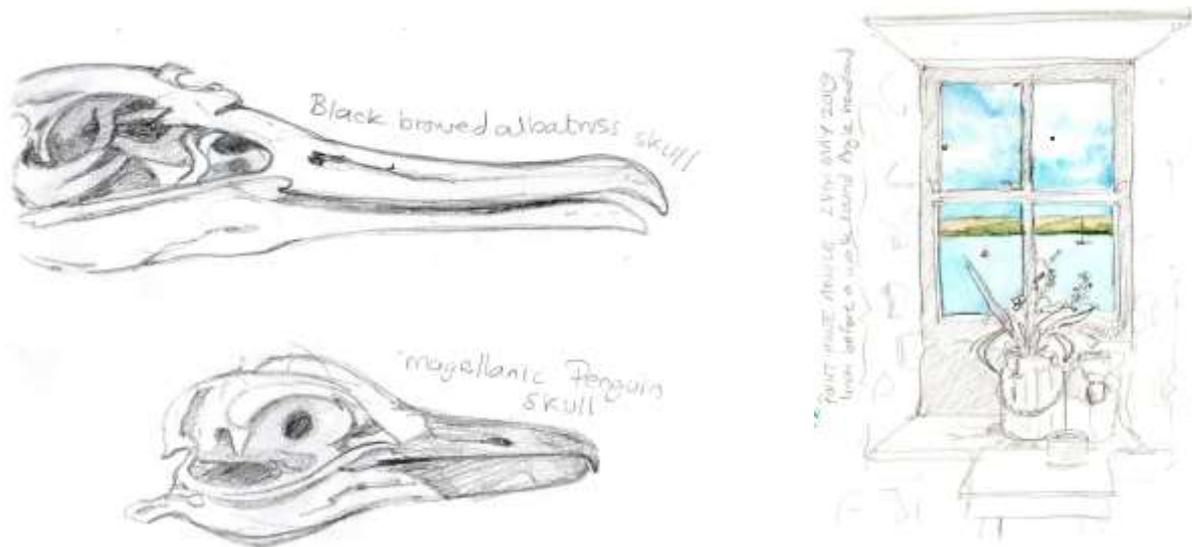
- Gain confidence in private spaces like a friend's garden or home.

- Get together with a group of like minded friends and go sketching together.

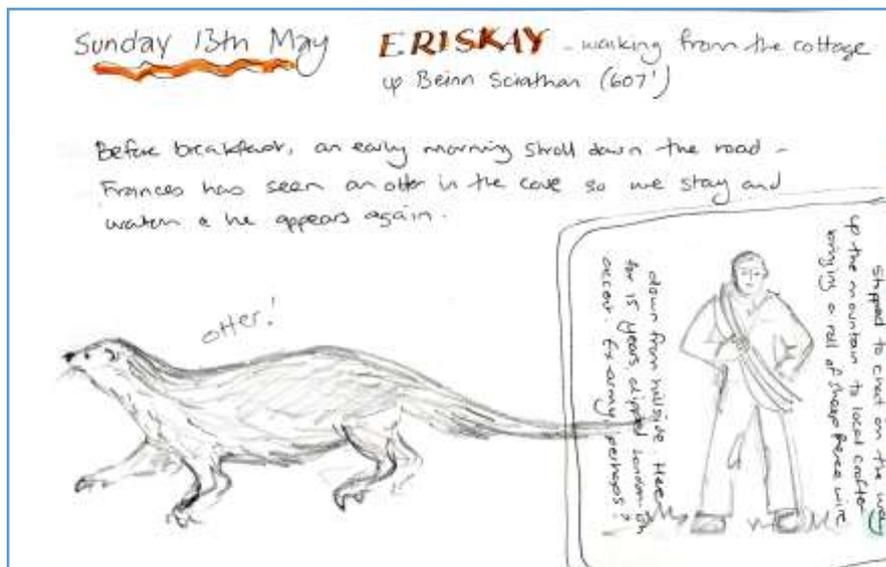
- Interiors have plenty of subject matter. Choose a quiet day for a visit to a museum or historic building, arrange a private visit to a local church or landmark.



Museums have subjects to sketch that you'd never find anywhere else.



- Treat your sketchbook as a diary and write as much as you draw. Sketching is seen as public, but the minute you start writing, people see that as private and will back off.



- Keep your sketching gear simple. A small sketchbook and pencil will be far less conspicuous than an easel, canvas and palette. If you want to complete a painting on location, obviously you'll need more gear but to begin with keep it simple, keep it small.

Try drawing somewhere outside your home, just for five minutes. Stop at the end of five minutes. Do it again the next day for ten minutes. Build up the time you sketch on each occasion so that you start to feel a little more confident. After all, five minutes is enough to get a few lines on paper, but not long enough to attract attention. If someone does approach, stop drawing and start writing.



Five minutes is enough time for a sketch!

Drawing from photos

Photos are a huge asset to artists. They are invaluable as a source of reference material; how great artists of the past would have loved them! (I recommend David Hockney's book 'Secret Knowledge' which looks at how the great masters used lenses to project their images onto canvas and trace over them). Cameras capture subjects in motion, remember detail that we didn't have time to draw, enable us to draw subjects we love whilst stuck indoors .

But don't expect too much from your photos. Treat your camera as an aid, an information provider. Yes, you will of course get a more accurate drawing by copying from a photo, especially of a moving subject, but if you get out there and try it from life as well, your drawings will be the better for it. We see life differently from the way a camera sees it, and a sketch reflects this. Taking a photo to paint from 'later' can make you lazy - after all, a photo is already in 2D. This saves you the trouble of having to analyse what you see, noticing shapes and relationships, discovering a new way of looking at the familiar – the part of being an artist that's hard work, exciting, frustrating and satisfying all at the same time. Even if a small part of your drawing practice is done on location, it will add life to your work.

Don't be a slave to the photo—feel free to crop, edit, change the composition:

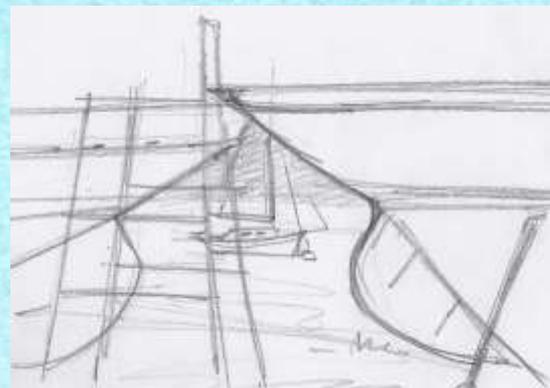


A lovely scene, dull photo, good sketch!

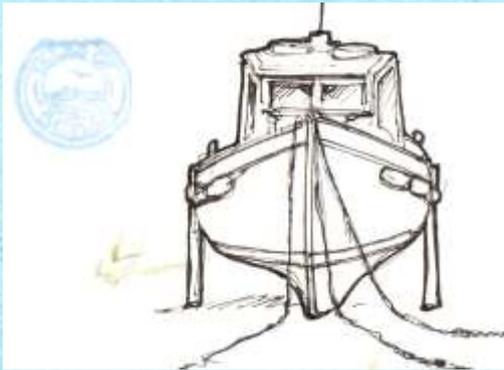


Find a photo that you took to use as drawing reference, but don't draw it exactly as it is. Take out things you don't want (the parked car, the boat on the shore) and add others (distant figures, birds, more trees). Imagination is as much a part of drawing as observation.

Here I just used the basic shape of the two boats that caught my eye, and simplified what I could 'see' in the space between them



Now let's try it the other way round—drawing first, photo second. Choose a subject and draw it from life. Then take a photo and print it out to about the same size as your drawing and compare the two, see how you did. As I've said before, you don't need to be as accurate as a camera, but if you are repeatedly coming unstuck with proportions or perspective, this can help you to work out where you keep going wrong.



Here's my attempt. I can see from the photo that I've not made the boat wide enough and the shape of the bow is too steep. I obviously wasn't concentrating! It was a pleasant if breezy afternoon on a lovely beach in the Isles of Scilly.

Next time you go somewhere new, have a photo-free day. If you see something interesting, have a go at sketching it, or simply look at it, slowly and deliberately. We think we take photos to remember things better, but sometimes you'll remember more by spending time with or without your sketch book.

Drawing a theme

Sketching anything, everywhere is marvellous for practice, but it can also be fun to keep a separate sketchbook for a particular subject or idea, or choose a theme to follow for a week or a month.

Here are a few suggestions:



- your garden (through the seasons, stages of growth, close up studies of plants or seeds)
- food (ingredients, what's on the chopping board, fruit, veg, meals, kitchen scenes)
- beachcombing (pebbles, shells, feathers, driftwood, rubbish)
- windows and doors (houses, cottages, churches, old buildings, archways)
- boots and shoes
- favourite walks—choose a different subject to focus on each time
- jugs, teaspoons, collections of objects
- patterns and fabrics, rugs and scarves
- Birds, animals, pets



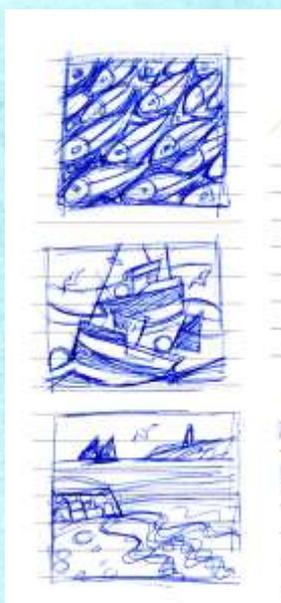
Every walk becomes a quest.... I love discovering archways!

You'll never take a familiar walk for granted if you go hunting for a different subject every time. Stay on the lookout for your chosen subject and collect reference material wherever you go.

Drawing from the imagination

This is something we found easy to do as a child but might find more challenging now. Drawing doesn't have to represent 'real' things; if you have a desire to draw imaginary characters, tell a story, create mermaids and dragons, fantasy worlds, or express thoughts and ideas, then do it! Doodling helps – take a line for a walk and see where it goes.





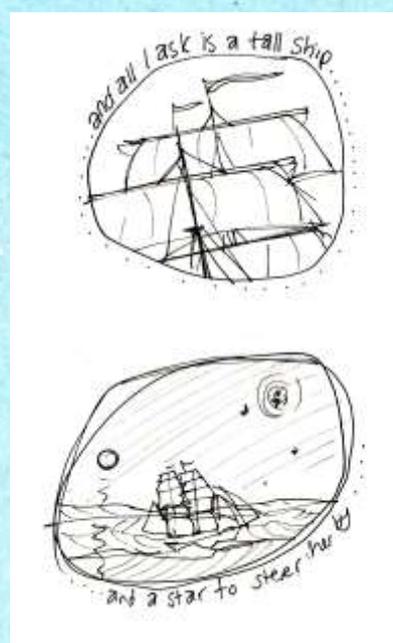
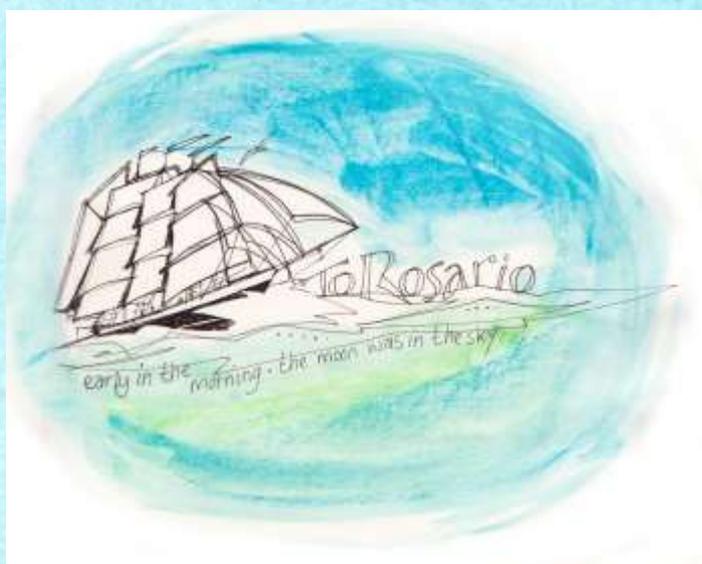
Next time you are watching tv, on the phone, or listening to music, give your hand a pen and paper and let it doodle without you worrying what comes out. Pens work well for this exercise as they give you nice clear lines, and coloured pencils are great too. If you struggle to get going with random doodles, find inspiration in household objects, patterns on fabrics, shapes, natural objects like leaves or flowers, photos or words. Doodling is a great stressbuster as well as helping you to become fluent in your style of drawing

I should have been paying attention to a meeting, not thinking about fish and boat shapes when I doodled in my notebook. I make no apology for being a bad influence, but doodling in a meeting may not be a good idea if you're in the chair!

Drawing words and poetry

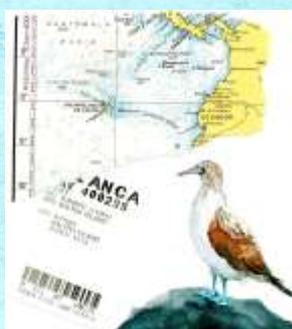
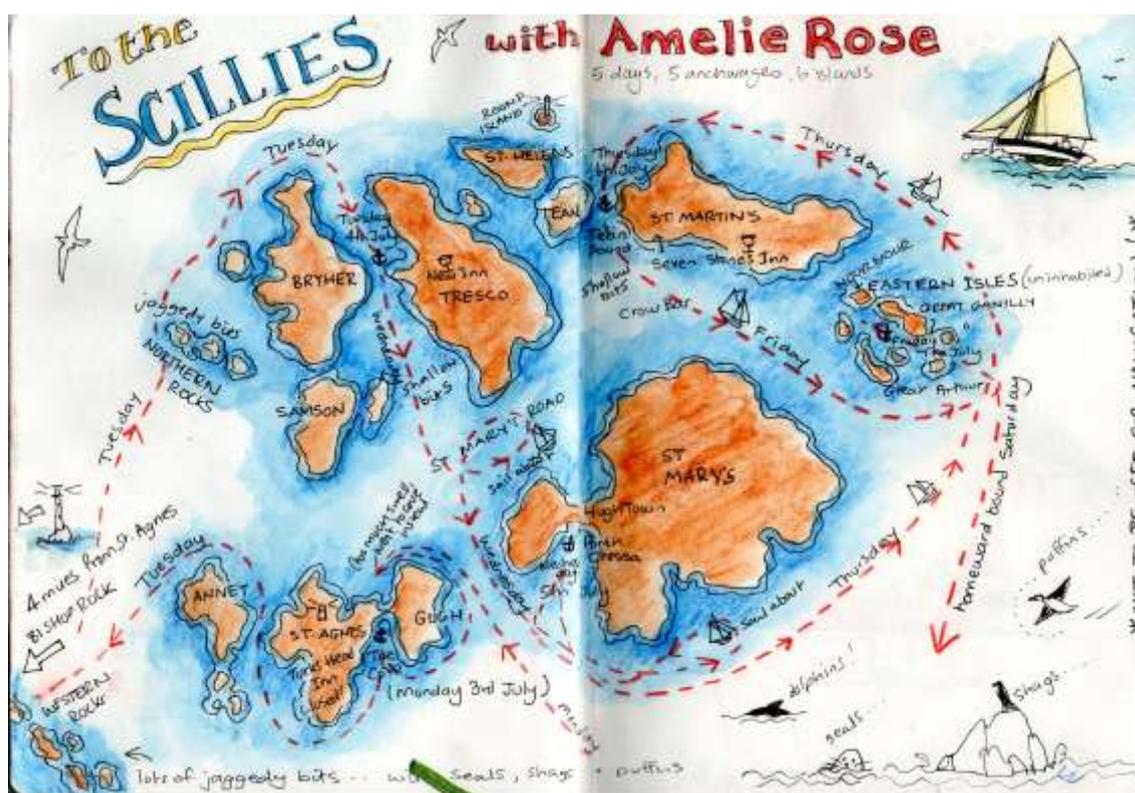
If you want to take imaginative drawing further, just add more words – poems work well but so do quotations or stories. When you read words, images form in the theatre of your mind and the challenge can be to express these on paper, as an illustrator would.

Take a poem, quotation or piece of prose you like, spend some time seeing what images the words summon in your mind. Then play around with putting those images on paper. Don't judge what comes out, treat it as creative play.



Journeys, maps and stories

I love making illustrated maps in my sketchbook of any journey I make. This is one of the reasons I always carry a sheet of tracing paper with my sketching gear so that I can trace the outlines that I need from an atlas, website or guide book – I don't worry about detail, just the basic shapes. I can then transfer the lines to my page and embellish them as much as I want to. Great for memories!



Create a map of your favourite place – even it's your garden, your favourite walk where you live, a place you go on holiday. Add words, colour, little drawings, doodles, cartoons, anything that belongs with the location. Don't worry too much about how it looks, enjoy the visual journey!

If you don't want to draw the map, tear up a real map and paste that in your sketchbook, draw on top of it or around it. There's no right or wrong way, only your way of making your world visible.