

# **MATERIALS FOR THE SKETCH ARTIST -**

**Sketching tools** – My current choices, Things can change!

Kenneth Williams 04/24/20

**Sketchbooks** – Your choice of size and shape.

Brands and papers that I like are:

**Strathmore 500 series**, 100% cotton, 5 x 8 inch or larger mixed media paper hardcover.

Strathmore 5 x 8 inch tan paper soft cover. Not great for most watercolorists but usable. It is very good for sketching, light washes of watercolor or ink and gouache.

**Strathmore 400 series watercolor sketchbooks**, I use them and like them for many things. It is easy to lift paint from them because they have a lot of sizing. The sizing does somewhat reduce color saturation but it can be adjusted for when you get used to the paper.

**Pentalic nature sketch.** (Currently out of production but rumored to be returning.) Sizes 6x9, 6x12, 8 ½ x 11 or 11 x 15 inch. Good all-around paper for water color washes, pencil and ink.

**Stillman and Birn alpha series**, any size. They take light washes very well; although, sometimes, ink will smear if you immediately brush your hand over the page. Also, pencil smudges easily. Fixative is necessary with some sketching tools like graphite.

I keep a 3 ½ x 5 ½ inch Stillman and Birn alpha series in my pocket. Their other paper series made more specifically for water color and or sketching are also good.

Sketchbooks come with either soft covers or hard covers. The hard cover books provide more protection for the pages and more importantly, provide a rigid support for sketching. However, the soft cover books are lighter and more easily fit bags or purses.

Binding is another consideration when selecting a sketchbook. Wire bound books like the Pentalic Nature Sketch have strong front and back covers.

**Wire binding** allows the front cover to be folded back flat providing additional support; and it also allows left hand pages to be folded to the back and out of the way. This is not possible with a sewn or glue bound sketchbook.

A **sewn binding** will open reasonably flat and is better for sketching across both pages of an opened book. However, it cannot be folded back on its self.

A **glue bound book** is not recommended because the pages tend to loosen and fall out with repeated opening and closing.



**Pencils – Pentel Quick click**, mechanical, 0.7 HB, plus spare leads. This pencil has a functional, convenient to use design and is inexpensive. It is good for all general work either in HB or 2B hardness values. I



have pencils 5x the price that are not as easy to use. The 0.7 lead is less likely to break than smaller diameter leads such as the 0.5 which are also available in this brand. The slightly heavier line is easier to see in bright sunlight and it tones or shades a drawing quicker.

Graphite artists will need a wider range of pencil hardness and generally prefer softer leads (2B - 8B).

Graphite sketches require a **fixative** or the drawings will smudge to a grey fog in a well-used sketchbook. Krylon spray, Matte Fixative works well and is easily available.

### Erasers –

**White vinyl, pen style** - Pentel is my favorite because the vinyl is softer than many brands. Pen style erasers in plastic barrels stay much cleaner than block erasers. The tip also can be cut at an angle to make a sharp ended wedge for fine line erasures.

**Large, Flat vinyl** – This eraser is used mostly for cleaning the page of smudged graphite during and after a sketch is completed. General's Factis brand is a very good soft vinyl. The Milan brand is great for carrying because of the plastic case it comes in.

**Tombow mono zero** is a useful pen style eraser that has a very small diameter that is perfect for small erasures and for drawing lines into graphite and other media.

**Pencil sharpener-** The 3 pack of red generals pencil sharpeners that are made for colored pencil and



pastel pencils are a good choice for all colored pencils. A regular pencil sharpener will make too much of a point for colored pencils and they will break easily. Use a craft knife for Conte' or pastel pencils. The gritty pastel and Conte' ruin regular tapered pencil sharpeners almost immediately. Do not forget a plastic zip lock bag for pencil shavings.

### Pens:

#### Roller ball pens –

The Pilot V5 Precise is fast, smooth and inexpensive. The ink is water soluble so it can be painted over with water for tonal effects. I use a waterbrush for this application.

Water coloring over pen lines made with the Pilot V5 is not recommended.



**Fountain pens** are a sketching favorite because ink choice can be almost unlimited. I mainly use Lamy Safaris, Twsbi Ecos and Sailor fude mannen fountain pens. The Twsbi Eco may be the best all-around pen for the sketch artist. The piston fill mechanism holds a lot of ink and the level is easily visible. Although the bent nib, fude pens have the advantage of a wide range of line width in a single pen. Fountain pens can be purchased with nibs ranging from extra fine to broad.

**Inks for fountain pens:** Waterproof inks can be washed over with water color without fear of dissolving or smearing the ink. I prefer black Platinum Carbon Ink. It is very black and dries quickly. Platinum Carbon ink does not damage or clog fountain pens. **Document inks** are also waterproof and come in a variety of colors. If an ink does not say **waterproof**, it probably is not.

**Water soluble inks** come in a very large range of colors and can be used to make multi-colored pen sketches much like water color. These sketches are particularly effective when toned with a waterbrush.

**Fiber tip pens** - Faber Castell, Pitt .05 or .1 (S and M) are the sizes I most often use. I use a .005 (XS) on water color paper that is dry but painted because it will match other line widths more easily. Black and Sepia are useful colors of ink for these pens and the inks are instantly waterproof. Micron and other brands are very similar. **Always test a new brand of pen to make sure it is waterproof before using it on a water color sketch!**

**Brush pens** - Pentel or others are great for bold, painterly lines and for quickly filling in black areas of tone.

**White Gel pen** – The Uni-ball Signo broad is the only white gel pen I have used that does not immediately clog up and fail after the first use. White gel pen is perfect for fine white lines in water color sketches.

**Color sketching media: Materials that are not too messy are often the best for on the go sketching.**

**Watercolor** – Is the preferred color media for many sketch artists because it is very convenient to use and to carry or travel with. It can be both the easiest and quickest to use color media but the hardest to master.

**Tube or pan colors?** The quality is the same. Tube color can be more economical. I buy empty pans and fill them with tube water color of my own choice. Many travel palettes come filled with a selection of usually 12-14 pans of paint. You may or may not like the choices. I prefer to buy an empty palette and fill 1/2 pans. The cost is hardly different and paint is not wasted. For about any sketchbook painting, half-pans are large enough for most colors and brush sizes that are used. I use full pans only for colors that are used most often.





**Palette** – A small tin or plastic folding palette that will hold 6-24 colors is all that is needed. A palette tin with a pan insert meant to hold 12 colors will easily hold 14. If the pan insert is removed the same palette will hold 18-24 half-pans of paint. With the insert removed, fasten the half-pans to the palette bottom with wall mounting putty. This was used in the left hand palette shown here.



- The palette should be sturdy, light and functional.



**Paints** – Colors I find useful are shown below. They are all not necessary to have. You may have other preferred colors. In general, it is good to have a warm and a cool version of the primaries (red, yellow and blue), some earth tones and a couple of convenience colors such as greens, violets, oranges or greys.

**White gauche** and **white colored pencil** are also essentials colors in my tool bag. White gouache is very opaque and can be used to create white areas over dark passages and correct painting errors.



**Water brushes**

**Brushes** – Waterbrushes are great for casual sketching and painting. I have used many brands and styles. The brushes shown here work best for me. From left to right in the photo: Pentel aquash, small, round brush. Pentel aquash, large round brush. Niji large flat brush with the brush fiber spreader removed (which converts it to a very large round mop brush). The same brush with the spreader attached to make a flat brush. Zig brand flat brush. I also occasionally use Pentel medium round brushes. These are almost the same size as the Pentel large round. Most of my painting is done with the large mop, the large round and the Zig flat brushes. I use waterbrushes when out sketching or when painting casually from my living room chair at home. There are waterbrushes made with piston plunger filling mechanisms and side buttons for water release. They cost a bit more but do not seem to work any better than the brushes I have described. They also have more parts to fail. Once familiarity is gained with waterbrush, they become very useful tools for the watercolor sketcher.

## Water color brushes-

I use regular watercolor brushes in the studio. Numbers

### Round brushes –

2,4,6,8, and 10 round synthetic brushes are most frequently used. Numbers 8 and 10 account for 80% of round brush use. Good quality synthetic brushes are a fraction of the cost of sable brushes and perform almost as well while lasting longer.

**A number 14 Royal and Langnickel “Zen” watercolor brush** is very useful. It is much like a squirrel mop brush and I use it for large, watery washes.

The  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch **hog bristle brush** is used mostly for texture.

**A No. 4 rigger or liner brush.** It is used for fine lines such as tree limbs and power lines.

**$\frac{3}{16}$ ,  $\frac{1}{4}$  and  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch flat brushes.** The  $\frac{3}{16}$ <sup>th</sup> inch wide brush is useful for depicting bricks and siding.

### Miscellaneous painting items –

**Travel brushes** –Travel brushes are great if you prefer traditional brushes while out sketching. Rounds in sizes 4,6,8,10,12. and one,  $\frac{1}{2}$  flat bristle brush are the brushes I most often carry. The number 12 is used as a mop brush for large washes.



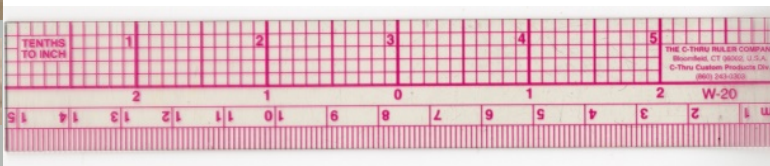
**Brush cleaning – A wrist, sweat band and or paper towels** for brush wiping. The end can be cut out of an old sock made of absorbent fabric and slipped on the wrist for a brush wiper. The brush wiping rag attached to the wrist is one less item to hold or lose while sketching.

**Mister bottle** – It is used for wetting the paint palette prior to painting, making textures, wetting paper and as an emergency water supply for waterbrushes or for traditional brush cleaning.

**Magic sponge** – for repairing mistakes and making lines in dried water color. Use caution. It can damage paper.

**White crayon** for watercolor resists

**6 inch clear ruler** or a small triangle. Use these to measure angles and quickly make straight lines and perspective guidelines. Transparent rulers make it easier to see already established lines.

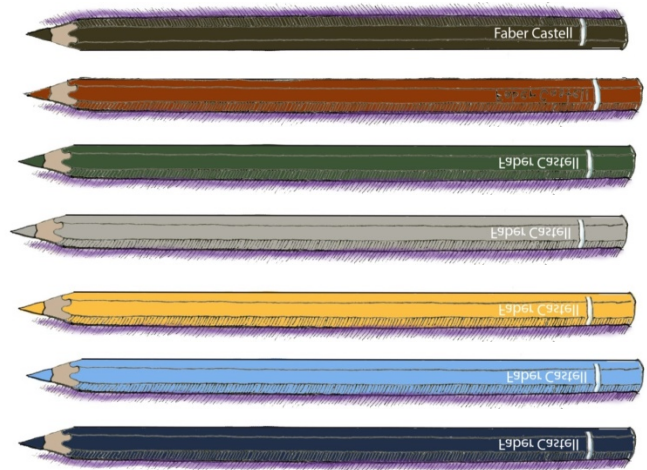




### Colored pencils -

A few watercolor pencils are useful for details, edges and tonal adjustments of the watercolor sketch. Watercolor pencils brands Faber Castell, Derwent, Caran D'Ache and Derwent Inktense all work well. Choose useful colors for the kind of sketching that you do. I find these colors most effective.

**Colors** – Dark indigo, Dark sepia, Burnt sienna, Yellow ochre, Chrome oxide green Warm grey III, and Sky blue. All are Faber-Castell brand. Black and white pencils are useful for some monochrome sketching.



**Bag to carry things** – A daily use or travel bag must be sturdy, water resistant and quiet – no Velcro if possible. Opening a Velcro closure in a quiet theater will attract a lot of unwanted attention. The bag should also be small and light with some divided spaces for organization. All of your essential supplies should fit into one bag that is always ready for use. Then you do not have to worry about forgetting tools or sketchbooks. A bag color that hides dirt and ink or paint stains is a good idea. A dark or neutral colored bag will probably match most of your clothing although a brightly colored bag is less likely to be lost or forgotten somewhere.

**Sketchbook page clips-** These are used to keep pages from flapping around. Bulldog clips or even rubber bands will work.



**Phone or small camera-** Use these for photos to record shadows, interesting compositions or set to black and white to view tonal variation in a scene or sketch.



**Folding stool** – An easily portable folding stool is very convenient for sketchers who prefer to sit while working. It keeps clothing off the ground and clean. A stool with a strap makes carrying your equipment easier. Some stools are small enough to fit in a sketch bag.

**Do not forget a Hat for eye shade, sun protection, bug protection and weather protection for you and your supplies.** A snack and drinking water are also recommended.

Your sketching supplies will vary with your preferences and the kind of sketching media that you use. This list should help you find your own way.