

Planning Your Painting

Creating a painting can be a daunting task if you don't plan it out carefully first, even for experienced of artists. Unless you're working from a reference photo, going straight to painting can often lead to bad compositions. You can avoid putting in a lot of time and effort for something you aren't happy with by taking the time to plan your painting before you pain

Planning your painting using the method provided will save you lots of time by allowing you to decide on the below aspects of your painting before starting on the final version.

- Idea
- Composition
- Values

Recommended Supplies:

- Paper
 - Sketch
 - Watercolor
- Pencil
- Col Erase Pencil
- Eraser
- Scanner or Camera
- Photo Editing Software
- Printer
- Transfer paper or graphite pencil
- Artist tape
- Watercolors
- Watercolor brushes
- Water Container
- Computer

Developing an Idea

Every great painting starts with an idea, this is completely up to you to decide what you'd like your painting to be of. Your idea can be anything you want from a still life, to crazy science fiction adventure!

Start by deciding on a general idea of what you might like to paint to start, remembering to keep the idea simple. For now, you just want a basic idea of the main points within the painting, you can add in detail later in the process.

Once you have an idea, begin gathering reference photos before you start drawing either by taking them or finding them online. Keep in mind, if you find a photo online ensure you aren't copying it directly unless it's a free stock photo. Using reference photos for your painting can really help when it comes to:

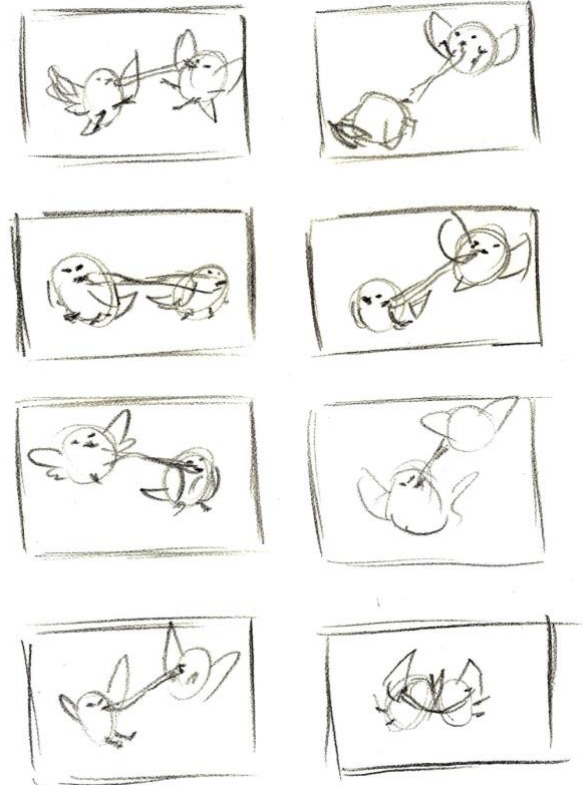
- Poses
- Colors
- Values
- Layout
- Composition
- Sizes
- Accuracy of objects

Creating Initial Thumbnails

After deciding what idea you'd like to use for your painting, you'll want to start creating thumbnails to help create the base of your composition.

Thumbnails are quick drawings meant to give you an idea of the layout of your composition. They help determine the positioning and sizing of the objects within your painting in relation to one another before you begin drawing the detailed line art.

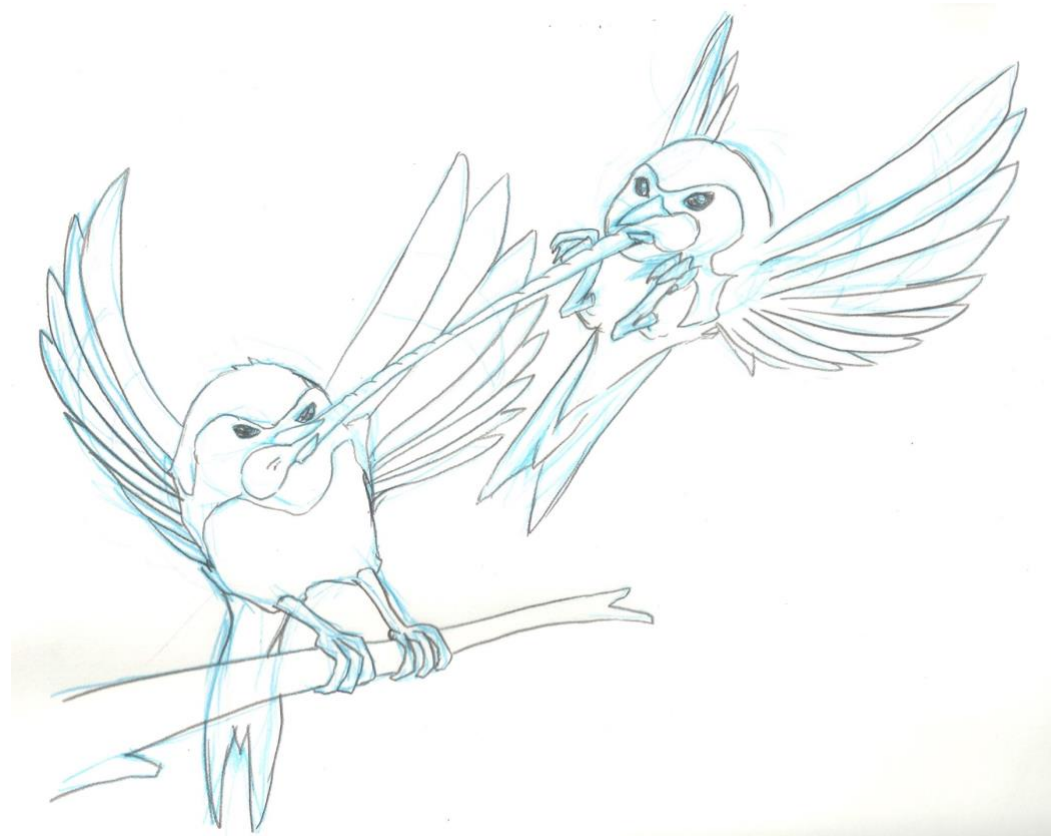
Thumbnails are the best time really explore how your painting could look. Try taking risks with the composition to see if there's another way you can make it uniquely your own.



Drawing Line Art

Once you've selected your favorite thumbnail you can start to draw the line art for it. Don't worry about the drawing getting messy as long as you can still see the main lines of it. This is the final drawing of what you want your painting to be of though, so include any small details you think will enhance your painting.

If you gathered any reference photos previously this is the time to use them, otherwise I recommend finding some before you start drawing. As a tip, try using a blue col erase pencil when you create your initial sketch. Blue col erase pencils show up very lightly when scanned in, to the point of almost disappearing when you change the drawing to greyscale. So, if you need to scan, print, and retrace your line art to clean it up the col erase pencil will help a ton.



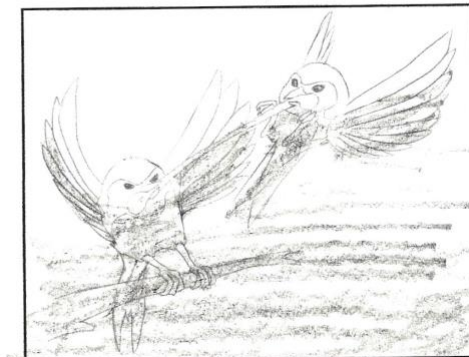
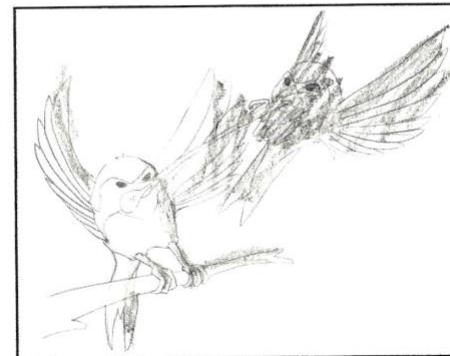
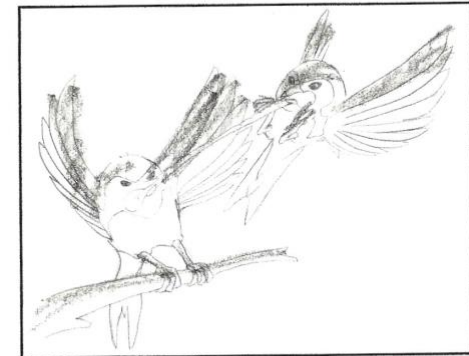
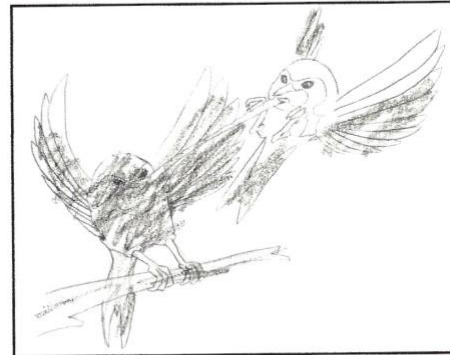
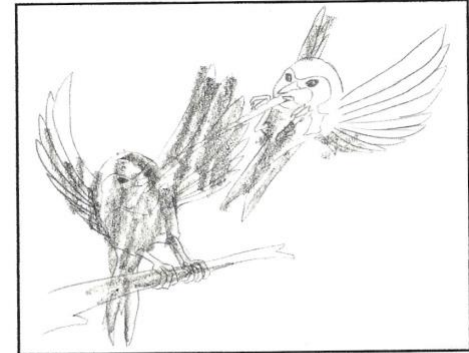
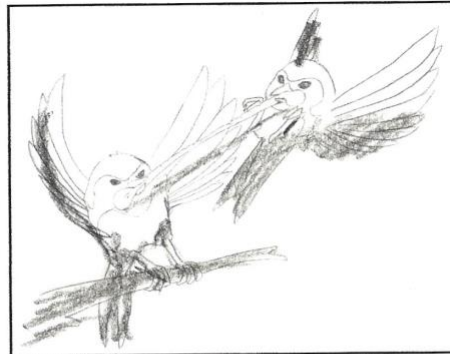
Creating Value Studies

After completing the line art for your painting, the next step is to value studies. The value of a painting is the light and dark areas within it, generally shown through shadows. Value studies help determine where the light source is and can also help set the mood of a painting. Using lighter values can help create a cheerier mood, while darker values can create a creepy atmosphere.

Scan or photograph the line art and resize it to a smaller size, then copy it over several times on a page in image editing software so when you print it out you have several copies of it to work with.

You can use a graphite pencil or greyscale markers to color in the areas you want your shadows to be for each thumbnail. Much like when you created your initial thumbnails, this is a great opportunity to play around with the values of your painting!

Try as many different value schemes as you like, playing around with the levels of darkness to create different moods or bring attention to something within the painting.

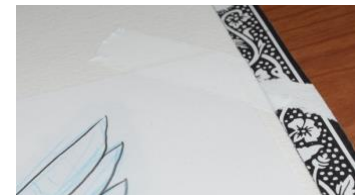


Transferring Line Art

Transferring line art is a very easy process! You can either transfer using transfer paper or use my favorite method below!

Transferring a Drawing Using a Graphite Pencil

1. Hold the drawing up to a light and outline the areas to fill in with a graphite pencil on the back of the drawing paper.
2. Use a graphite pencil to fill in the outlined areas.
3. Position the drawing on the water color paper.
4. Tape the drawing to the water color paper.
5. Trace over the drawing.
Tip: Using a different colored pen or pencil to do this can help you to not miss any of the lines.



Painting the Values

Once your drawing has been transferred over, it's time to start the painting process!

The trick to painting in watercolor is to build the colors up slowly by painting them in light layers instead of starting with deeply saturated colors at the start. This is because watercolors can be extremely difficult to remove, especially if the color is dark.

I start by painting the shadows first using the value study I chose from the value thumbnails I did previously. This can create structure for your painting at the beginning, but also allow you to not have to work as hard to get darker colors later on. Generally, you will only use one color when completing this step. I recommend giving the painting time to dry between each layer as the darkness of a value can change once it's dried completely, you can speed this process up by using a hairdryer.



Painting the Colors

Painting the actual colors of your painting is by far the most daunting task of the entire process! Use any reference photos you gathered during this step of the process as well. Some people also find creating color thumbnails, like the value ones, to be helpful in the beginning.

Like painting the values, it's a good idea to paint each layer of color in lightly and build them up over time allowing for sufficient drying time between each layer to determine the actual color.

Take breaks from the painting as well. Step back to examine your painting and see if there's anything you're unhappy with that you can still change before you finish.

Have fun with this step though, it can be a great point to experiment with different techniques and figure out where you want more detail and where you want less.





Painting the Highlights and Shadows

After completing the main colors it's time to add in the finishing touches to your painting. You do this by adding in highlights and deep shadows as necessary.

One of the downfalls of watercolors is that it takes a lot of work to get a color really dark. Using gouache paints in conjunction with the watercolors at the end can allow you to get incredibly deep blacks, allowing you to add in detail to the dark areas of the painting much like the feathering done in the bird's collars in my painting to the left.

Highlights give a whole new level to paintings. They can often make paintings of animals far more lifelike, especially in the eyes. It's astonishing how such a small detail can make all the difference in a painting as well.

Use gouache again for the highlights as the paint will go over dried watercolor paint without getting muddied in the process.