



BEHIND EVERY GOOD WATERCOLOUR IS A CAPABLE DRAWING.  
CRAWL BEFORE YOU WALK BY DRAWING BEFORE YOU PAINT

## The Art of Travel Sketching

BY MALCOLM CARVER

**R**ecent winner of the Archibald Prize 2009, Guy Maestri, had a limited opportunity of 40 minutes at the airport to capture the essence of singer Geoffrey Gurrumul Yunupingu. His award winning painting was completed in his studio from sketches and studies of his subject. This is how it is with **the art of travel sketching** - limited time to capture the essence, **or a sense of presence** and a moment in time.

First you need to decide "why am I doing this subject?" because having a purpose provides a meaning, or an expression of something special you feel the need to capture. In the digital age of photography you can shoot infinite photos to maybe sort through later

and select a view. It is however, quite different to be discerning and sketch with a passion and a purpose. Time is limited, so be discerning – decide why is this subject so special. It may be the light, it may be the mystery of shapes, but there has to be a purpose. We were far more discerning when photographs were expensive!

This article outlines a range of recent travel sketches and a demonstration, which have come from my obsession in wandering around the world, starting sketchbooks in new places and never finishing any one book. Sketchbooks are rediscovered on return trips to favourite places or I start a new one for a new location. There are books on Italy, China, Japan, USA, North Africa etc which all await a revisit and a small addition, though the books are rarely

completed. You just start another with a new number.

My fascination with travel sketching came from spending a career in architecture, which provided wonderful opportunities to travel to some extraordinary places to see buildings, attend conferences or present proposals to any number of countries in the world. A sketchbook was included on every trip. Every day included another relentless sketch just as Apeles the Greek Painter said: "**Nulla dies sine linea**" *Not a day without a line.*

Some sketches remain incomplete as often you are interrupted for many reasons. Some works are completed later, providing an essence has been captured or presence revealed. □



**Early Light in Pokolbin, NSW,  
watercolour, 25 x 25cm**

Studio painting inspired from an early light-sketch of Hereford dairy cattle in the Hunter Valley, NSW. I now prefer the sketch, which seems to better capture the Australian colours, atmosphere and dustiness of the air.

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## art in the making Streetscape



My travelling paint box



My neat and compact sketchbook



Some of the travelling equipment that I use

### what the artist used

#### Paper

Cartridge paper in Winsor & Newton Sketch Book. I prefer to put studio and larger work on hot press Arches 185gsm

#### Brush

Arches Travel Brush 1

#### Other materials

Faber Castell Grip Plus Pencil 0.7 leads 2B grade

Mitsubishi Uniball Pencil in white for highlights

Schmincke Aquarelle Masking Fluid in travel pack size 730

Spray Bottle

Kneadable Rubber or Blu Tac

Tissues

#### The colours I have in my Winsor & Newton Artist Quality Watercolour Travel Set

Lemon Yellow

Rose Madder

Cadmium Yellow

Alizarin Crimson

Cadmium Orange

Cerulean Blue

Cadmium Red

Cobalt Blue

Vermillion

Ultramarine Blue

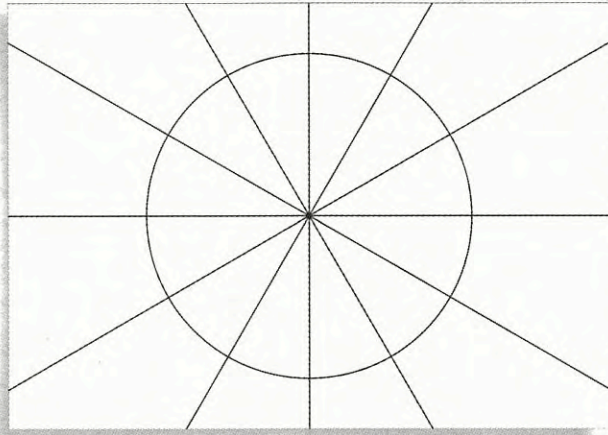
Quinacridone Gold

Ultramarine Violet

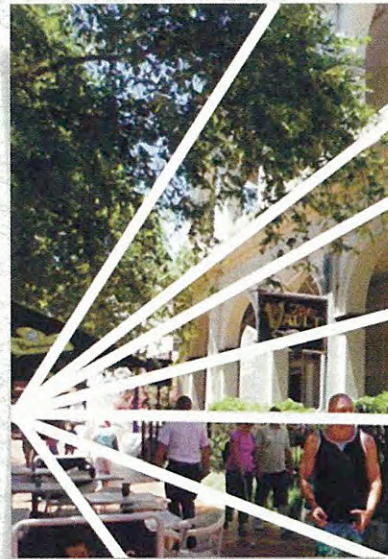
Raw Sienna

Ivory Black

Burnt Sienna



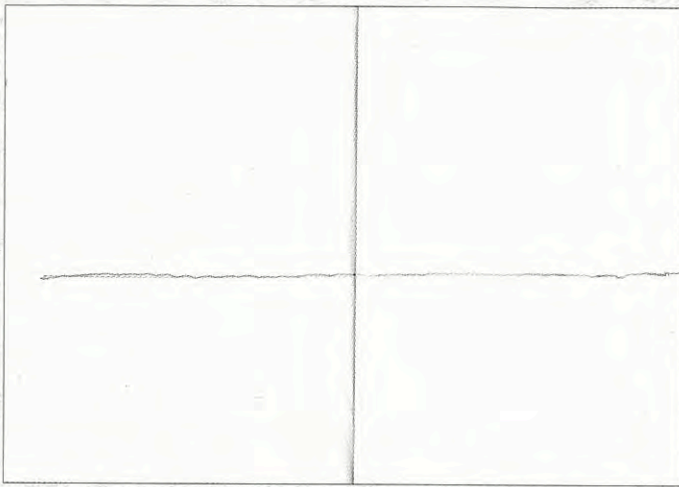
I use this "clock" diagram as a means of explaining "where" certain lines start and finish. It can help you plan your sketch and is a composition aid, particularly for working out vanishing points. You will see how it is used during this demonstration and in some of my design and composition tips.



A reference photo of Peel Street in Tamworth and radial lines from half a clock (refer to my clock diagram) to the vanishing point, superimposed onto the photo to help plot the sketch.

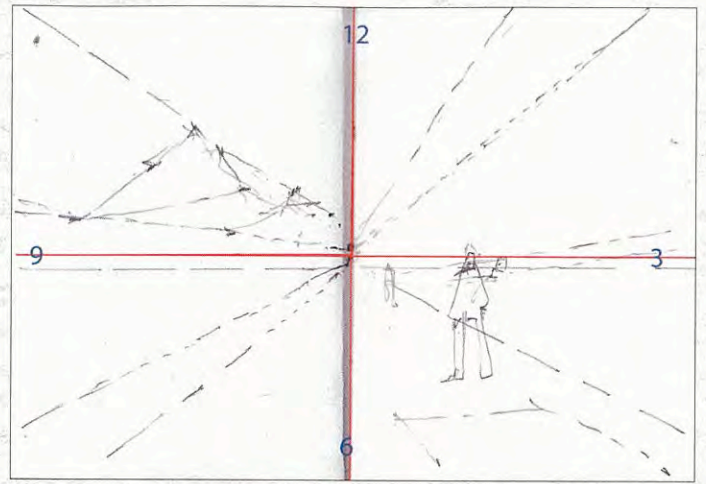
## my design & compositional tactics

- Strike diagonal lines from the corners of the paper to lead the eye into the painting
- Emphasise and reinforce the depth in your work. Understanding perspective principles will help, but just follow the clock (see my clock diagram) to judge the angle, to lead the eye to the correct vanishing point.
- Find the tell-tale signs pointing to the vanishing point and draw a clock lightly with the centre of the clock on the vanishing point. Most scenes and images can be limited to one primary vanishing point.
- Create depth with softer, cooler colours in the distance and more intense warm colours as you come forward to the foreground
- Capture small images reflecting local knowledge - people, objects in the landscape etc which will provide details of elements such as mail boxes in country towns. Animals or people and their clothing are usually unique to location. This entourage of information will provide credibility to your sketches and studio paintings



### The first line

The first line is the hardest, but it is always your horizon from your eye level. As you are sitting in a street cafe your artistic purpose is to capture the busy street scene in Tamworth on a sunny morning.

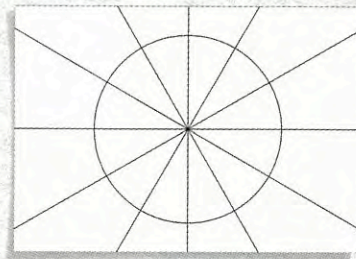


### Vanishing point and depth

Imagine the scene as a clock face and observe the tell tale signs of where the vanishing point is, which is on the horizon line. The building elements lead to the vanishing point to create the perception of depth.

### Tonal study

On a separate piece of paper, before painting, do a tonal study to see the light coming from the left. Look for shadows and keep it simple with three tones - dark, mid-tone and the white of the paper.



### Preserving light

From the guidelines you can begin to sketch lines to add detail based on sound principles. On your pencil sketch add a little masking fluid to preserve the special whites on the sides of faces and clothing facing the light.

### Blocking in the darks

Now the fun begins! Painting in watercolour is just like drawing, but with a brush! Block in the dark shapes first, preserving the light white or page colour. Leave the bright white areas such as the building, till last.



### Colour swatches for moody shades



Cerulean Blue and Rose Madder create a serene, cool grey.



Ultramarine Blue and Burnt Sienna create a warm grey.



Ultramarine Blue and Quinacridone Gold create a cheerful, golden grey.

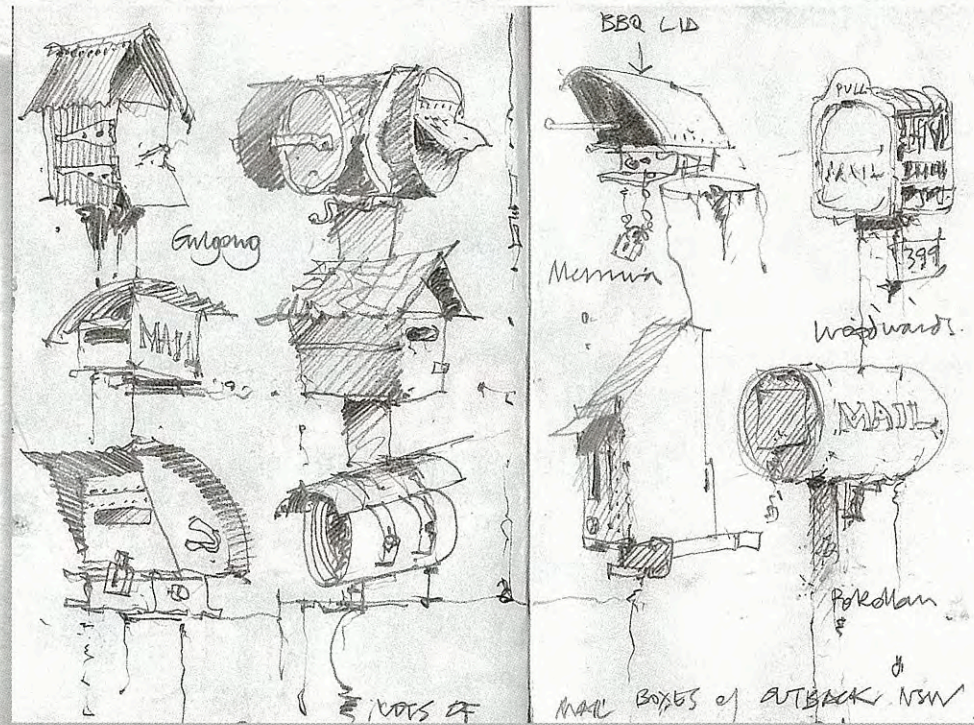
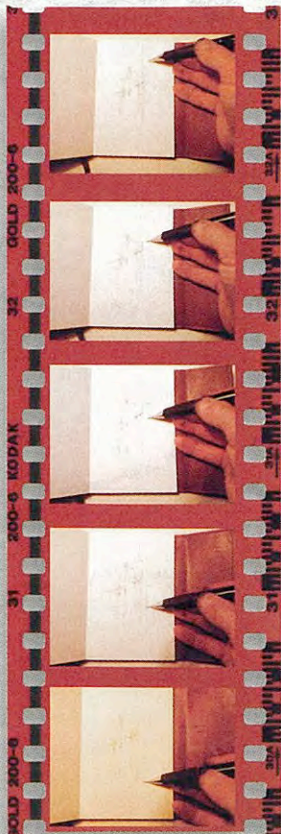


### Brighter colours and highlights

The final touch is to use brighter colours on smaller elements, but just give the hint of green. I have no premixed greens in my palette as they can so easily be created. Touch up the finished sketch with a fine white marker pen to create the highlights.



Pages from my travelling sketchbook.



This "film clip" shows a sequence of my sketching tip on drawing straight lines by running fingers along an edge. Try drawing straight lines holding the pencil rigid with three fingers using the other two as a guide, running down the edge of the pad.

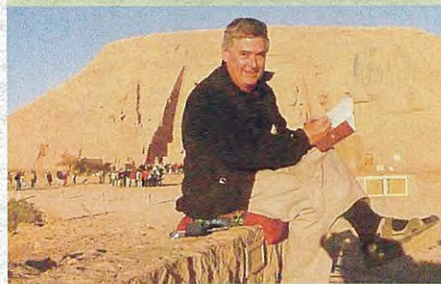
An assortment of mailboxes, each with their own character.

# TOP TIPS

- 1 I believe in drawing before painting in the same way we crawl before we walk. It helps us to really see the relationships between elements and simplify shapes. The least lines the best to decipher the image.
- 2 They invented the rubber on top of the pencil so we can make mistakes - nonetheless just keep the line work light with soft 2B lines. Don't use a nail and gouge through the paper.
- 3 The tonal sketch becomes the reference for painting. It's not about colour alone, its about tone and seeing the light. Paint the shadows by striking a clear water stroke and add colour to each end so the colour runs darker at the source and fades away.
- 4 Watch the light side of people or objects so that you always only paint the shadow side. Paint with a limited palette of colour and allow each wash to be a minimum of two colours plus water, to ensure that liveliness and vibrancy evolves on the paper. Don't pre-mix colours on the palette - let them evolve on the paper.
- 5 Green tends to dominate and spread just like the ubiquitous cane toad. Use green sparingly, always squinting to read the darks and see lights (mixed with white speckles to bring life to the sketch).
- 6 Keep time to a minimum so as not to overwork the painting. To maintain freshness don't overlap too many washes. Create a dark from the outset...don't build up darks from many layers
- 7 It's watercolour, not poster paint. Water + Pigment. Allow the transparent beauty to shine like no other medium.



*At Rest on the Clarence River, Grafton, watercolour (Arches hp 185gsm ) 25 x 25cm*  
Again in early light the tranquility and peacefulness of the house boat was captured.



## Future Workshops

Bathurst, Mitchell College July 2009

Grafton Artsfest, Spring NSW  
October 2009

Australian Artist magazine's tour  
to the Flinders Ranges & Kangaroo  
Island April 2010

USA Architecture Tour of the work  
of Frank Lloyd Wright October 2010

## about the artist

Malcolm Carver is an Architect and has over the past 30 years travelled extensively in Europe, Australia, Asia and the Americas. He has devoted these experiences to creating extensive travel sketchbooks, providing valuable inspiration for workshops and studio work in watercolour.

Malcolm has an enlightened and passionate approach to sketching drawing and watercolour painting. Over the past ten years, he has augmented his travel with a variety of both international and local workshops with all the leading watercolourists in the world today

He believes that we can all draw to a degree and we can learn to see, like other life skills. He seeks to reinforce the fundamental skill of seeing and sketching before painting, by simplifying detail in drawing techniques and learning to see shapes.

Member of the Australian Institute of Architects

Member of Royal Institute of British Architects

President of Ku-Ring-Gai Arts Society

Member Australian Watercolour Institute

Patron of Grafton Artsfest

[www.aquarellegallery.com.au/malcolmcarver](http://www.aquarellegallery.com.au/malcolmcarver)  
[mcarver@me.com](mailto:mcarver@me.com)