

# Sketch Your World: Choosing Subject Matter

[By Phil Dean](#)

'[Sketch Your World](#)' is a collaboration between artist Phil Dean and AccessArt, aimed at helping students 16 and above be inspired by their local landscape.

In this post Phil Dean suggests some tips for choosing subject matter to draw when urban sketching. Watch the video and try the challenges at the bottom of the post.

When you're heading out sketching, sometimes the pressure of what to actually draw can be a barrier to getting started. I've picked out a few of my go-to subjects to give you some ideas, but remember the key to successful sketching is in finding something that you personally find interesting.

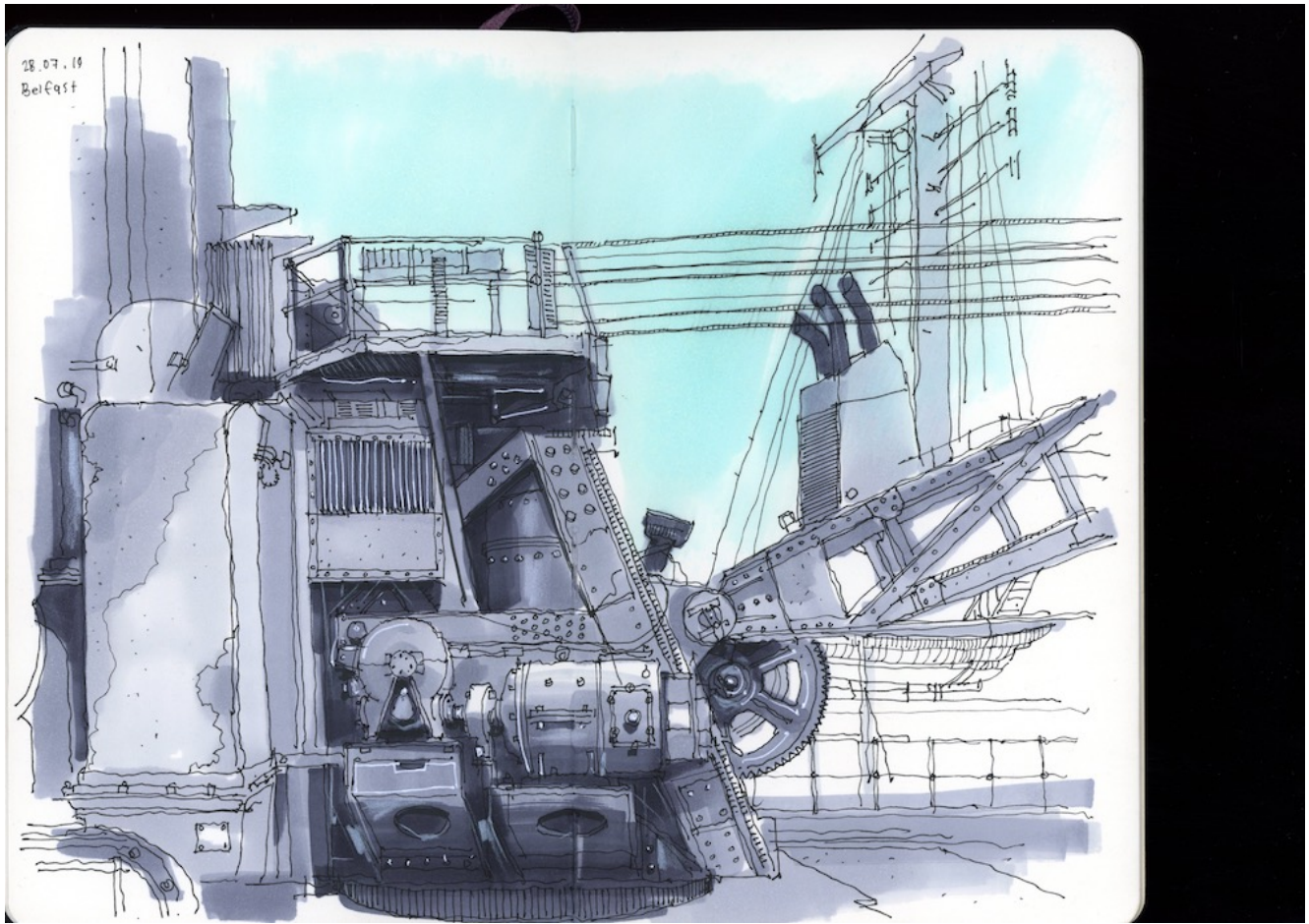
## Angles

I love a good rooftop and find there is no better place to start drawing than up high, with a view of a city. You can zoom in on details or, if desired, explore the entire vista. Urban sketchers relish the opportunity to draw above ground level and the elevated position offers the artist unparalleled freedom and a new perspective.



## **Observe the Ordinary**

Often a scene that you wouldn't ordinarily look at twice will be amazing in sketch form – locals sitting outside a small café in the sun drinking coffee, students doing their washing in a laundromat, a dog sitting under a table, for instance. All of these scenes might look quite uninteresting as a photograph, but drawing can bring a level of artistic gravitas to everyday views. Sketching opportunities are everywhere, especially where you don't expect them!



## Travelling

Travel and sketching go hand in hand. Buses, trains, planes, and cars are all great sketching locations. Everything you pass on the way from A to B offers new opportunities for the urban sketcher, and then when you arrive, there will be a plethora of new people, architecture, streets and nature to explore. Whether you are heading off to the other side of the world or on your daily commute, always remember to pack your drawing kit!





## Architecture

Old, new, classical, brutalist... the more varied the architectural styles are in a sketch, the better. A scene where the architecture tells the story of the city will always be interesting and challenging. In London, for example, you could look for a location where the beautiful old architecture of Sir Christopher Wren combines with the modernist towers of Norman Foster.





## Up Close

Urban sketching is not just about vast vistas and the large-scale drama of big cities – sketchers should always be on the lookout for the small details or moments, too. Train yourself to look for ordinary scenes that, when drawn, will become quiet artworks – a pocket sketchbook you can keep with you is perfect for catching the intimacy of details caught up close.

When working at smaller scales, use a fine pen or a hard pencil to make sure you can capture all the detail. Take care to observe the nuances of the subject – for instance, if you were sketching a chocolate bar, you would try to replicate the typography of the branding as closely as possible. Any



unrealistic interpretations will be magnified at this scale, so it's important to take care over the details.

## **One Sketch a Day**

Sketching the smaller things in life is an easy way to get a routine going. Try drawing one small thing every day for a month. Don't put yourself under too much pressure; just pick a small, simple item and sketch it in as much or little detail as you fancy. The fact that the subject matter is small will help overcome any feelings of being overwhelmed and get you into a nice drawing rhythm. Give it a try and you will find your sketching exciting!



## **Challenge:**

Create a viewfinder from some card. You may like to start inside initially to get comfortable with exploring a choice of subject matter. Once you have found the subject material you would like to draw (ideally a group of different objects), create multiple drawings, changing the position, angle and

height of the viewfinder to see how the focus of the subject matter changes the drawing. Experiment with some of the different materials mentioned in [Sketch Your World: Materials](#).

### **Extension Challenge:**

Go outside with your sketchbook and find a view that either you see everyday, or a view that you've never seen before. If you choose to draw a scene you see everyday, try and look at it differently, maybe with a different angle, or experiment with different materials. You might like to bring your viewfinder with you to create a focus.

[‘Sketch Your World’](#) is a collaboration between artist Phil Dean and AccessArt, aimed at helping students 16 and above be inspired by their local landscape.

[<< Go Back to Sketch Your World](#)

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**AccessArt welcomes artists, educators, teachers and parents both in the UK and overseas.**

**We believe everyone has the right to be**

creative and by working together and sharing ideas we can enable everyone to reach their creative potential.

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## **Sketch Your World: Materials**

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## **Sketch Your World: Sketchbooks & Composition**

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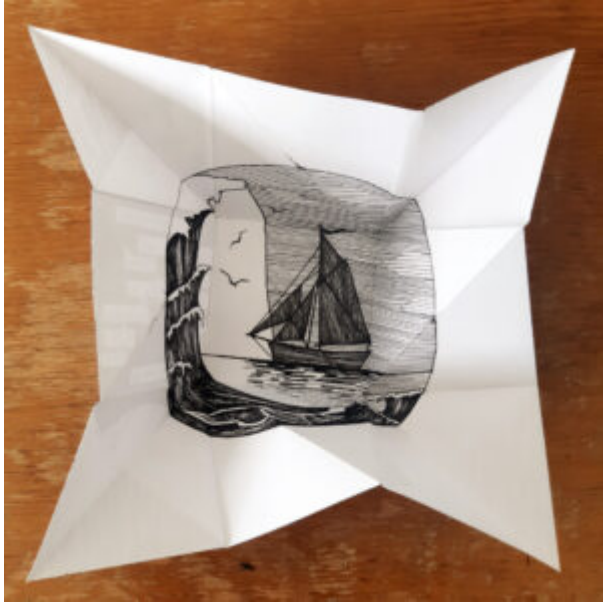
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**Recycled Baubles by Scarlett  
Rebecca**

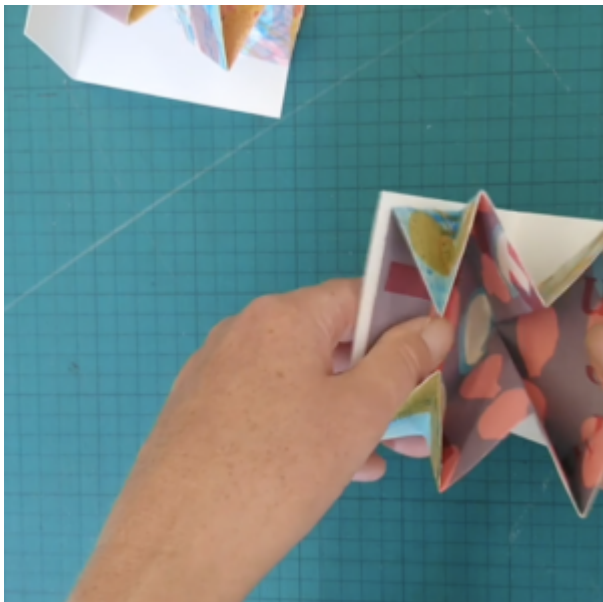


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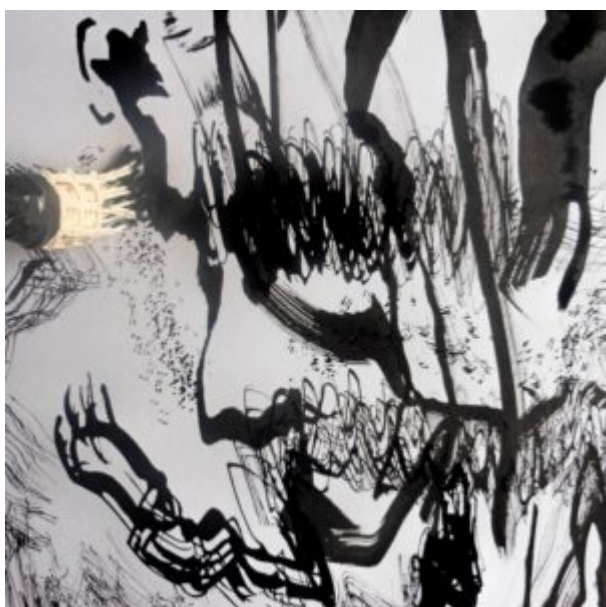




## See Three Shapes



[see all ink resources](#)



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## Recycled Baskets by Scarlett

# Rebecca

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paper bowls

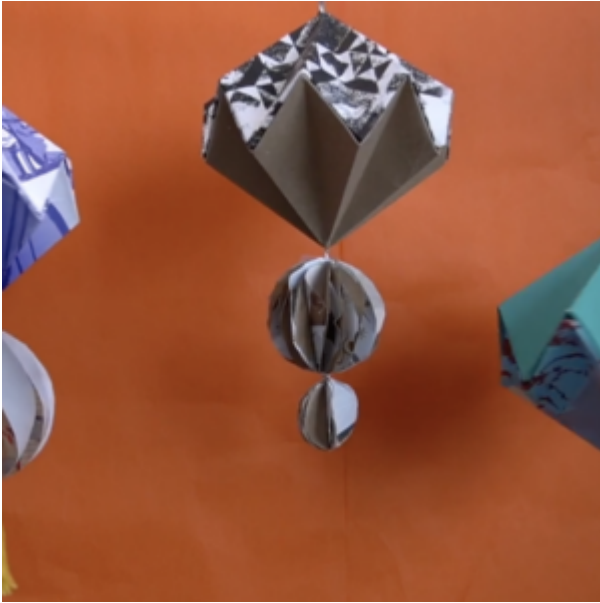


explore paper weaving





**recycled baubles**



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**Introduction to Colour  
Pencils**

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**Collecting Colour in my  
Moodboard Book**

**What We Like About This**

# Resource...

*"It's really nice to see that although Rachel Parker works quite digitally, her process from the beginning is very tactile. Rachels books act as a really great source of inspiration, helping to break down the creative blocks that we all get from time to time. Having a sketchbook dedicated to colour means that as well as working with colours that you already love, you can test new colour palettes and see colours from a new perspective. I especially love how Rachel picks up on the different tones in colours by looking at the way light hits it in order build her colour palette around those supporting tones as well as big statement colours."* – Tobi, AccessArt

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## Exciting Colour



## Make Repeat Patterns



## Which Artists: Rachel Parker





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## Collecting Colour

### What We Like About This Resource...

*“It’s great to see how a simple exercise such as colour collecting, which can be done in a classroom setting, is also used in a professional capacity. This gives the activity a clear context and purpose. It’s nice to see Rachel’s decisions being made in real time, it demonstrates how artists are constantly reflecting on and self evaluating their own decisions. Rachel also shows us that she sometimes gets colour palettes from photos that she’s taken herself, this is really*

*exciting because it demonstrates how the artists experience is central to their work. Students will be able to bring their own experience and personality to this activity by having complete control over what their colour moodboard becomes.”*  
– Tobi, AccessArt

## See This Resource Is Used in Schools...





**You Might Also Like...**

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**Exciting Colour**



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**Which Artists: Rachel Parker**



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**How Colour Collection  
Inspires My Work**

# What We Like About This Resource...

*“Rachel’s work is so vibrant and full of joy, it’s really exciting to see how she starts to form creative ideas around colour. Rachel highlights the importance of colour trends but also gives herself the opportunity to create her own trends which adds a level of playfulness and personality to her colour exploration. Seeing her colour books translate into fabric demonstrates a real clarity in her decision making process.” – Tobi, AccessArt.*

## You Might Also Like...

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**Exciting Colour**





**Make Repeat Patterns**



**Which Artists: Rachel Parker**



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# Escaping Wars and Waves – Encounters with Syrian Refugees

## What We Like About This Resource...

*'This resource really demonstrates how art can successfully bring awareness to important humanitarian issues, promote inclusivity and can give a platform to those who otherwise wouldn't be heard. The links between text, photos and drawings are really strong and demonstrate the creative process used by Olivier from start to finish. I*

*really like the inclusion of suggestions for students within the post, which encourage students to learn more about their community and to understand the experience of being displaced. This in turn will hopefully inspire the next generation to be part of an inclusive and empathetic society.'* – Tobi, AccessArt

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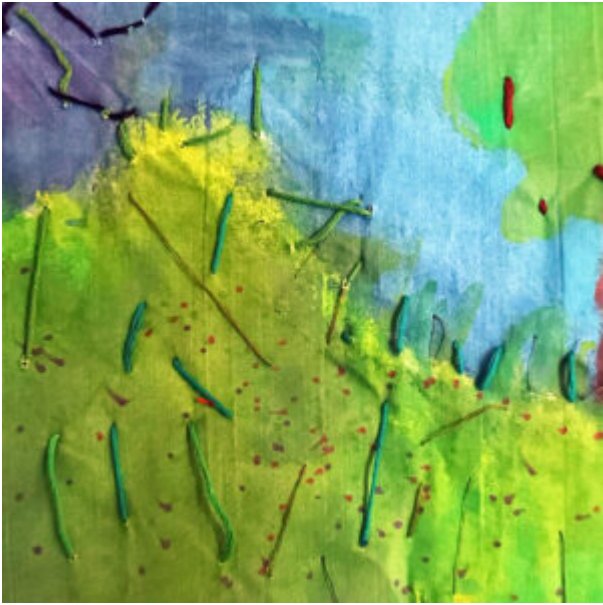
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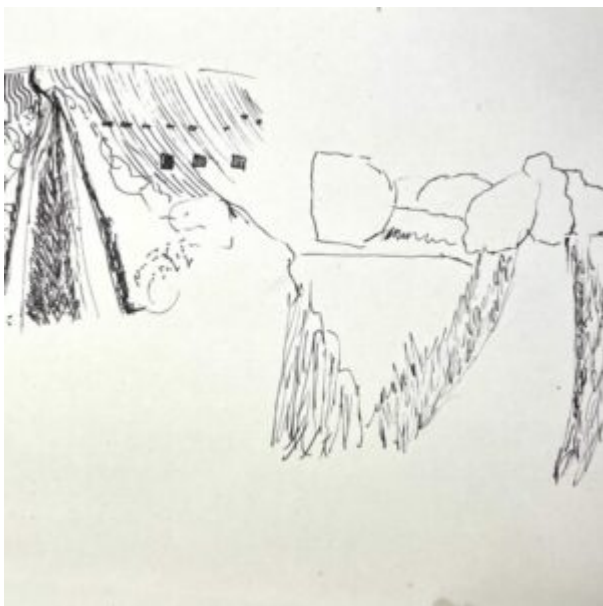




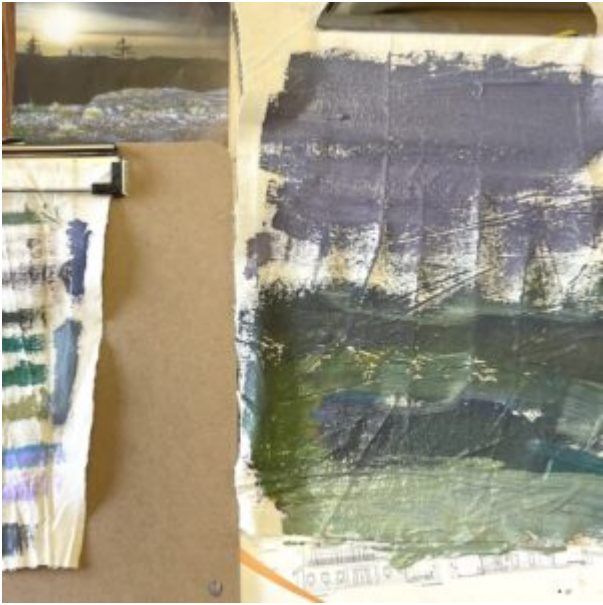


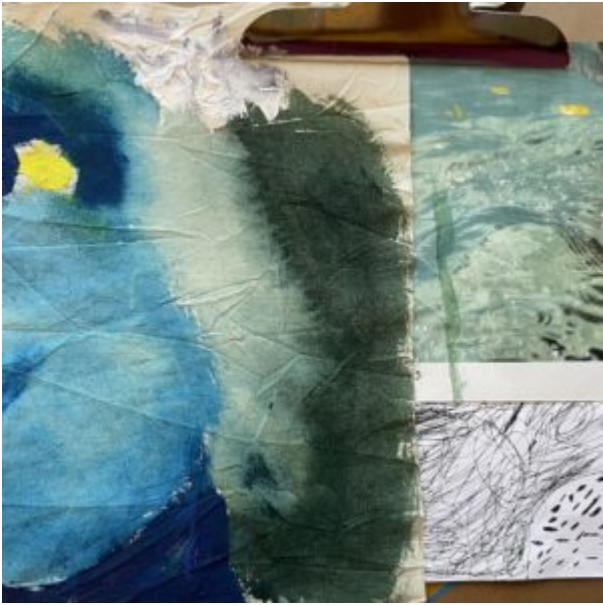
















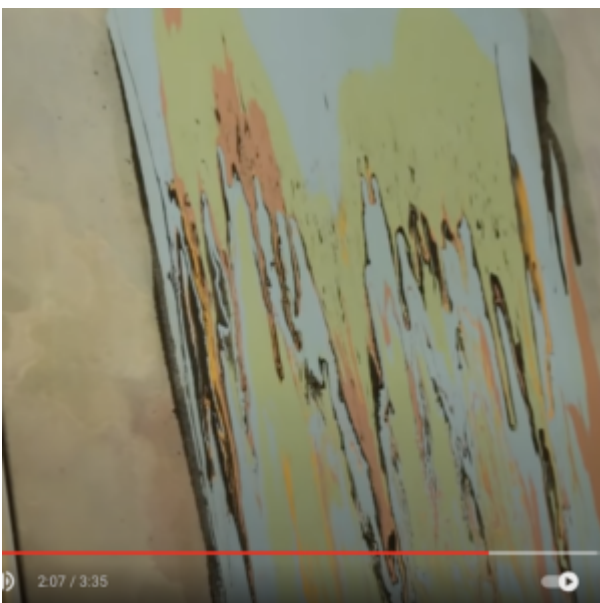
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[This is featured in the 'Cloth, Thread, Paint' pathway](#)

**Talking Points: Frank Bowling**

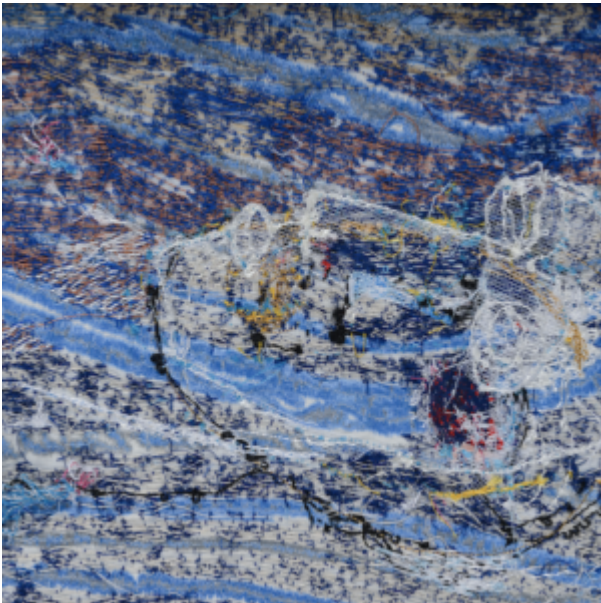




## Talking Points: Hannah Rae



## Talking Points: Alice Kettle



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# Experimental Making Tools

Mark

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## Pathway: Expressive Painting



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# Mixed Media Landscape Challenges

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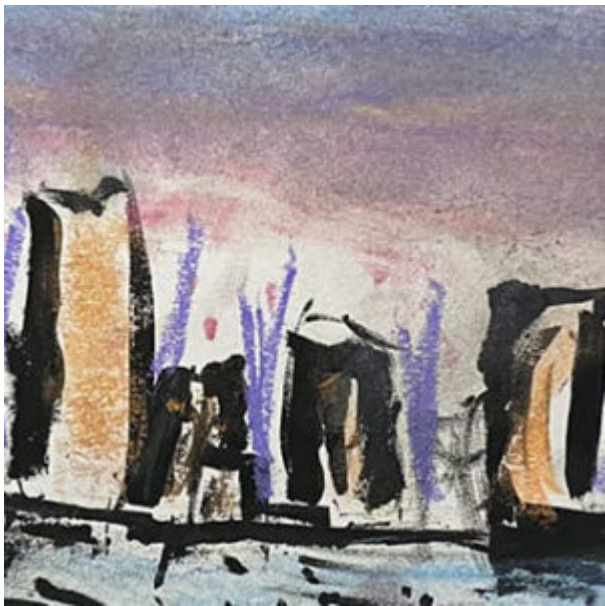
















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**Talking Points: Vanessa Gardiner**



# Talking Points: The Shoreditch Sketcher



# Talking Points: Kittie Jones

