



# Pas de Deux

For artists who sketch during travels, drawing media and watercolor play intertwined roles.

TEXT AND ILLUSTRATIONS BY Stephen Harby

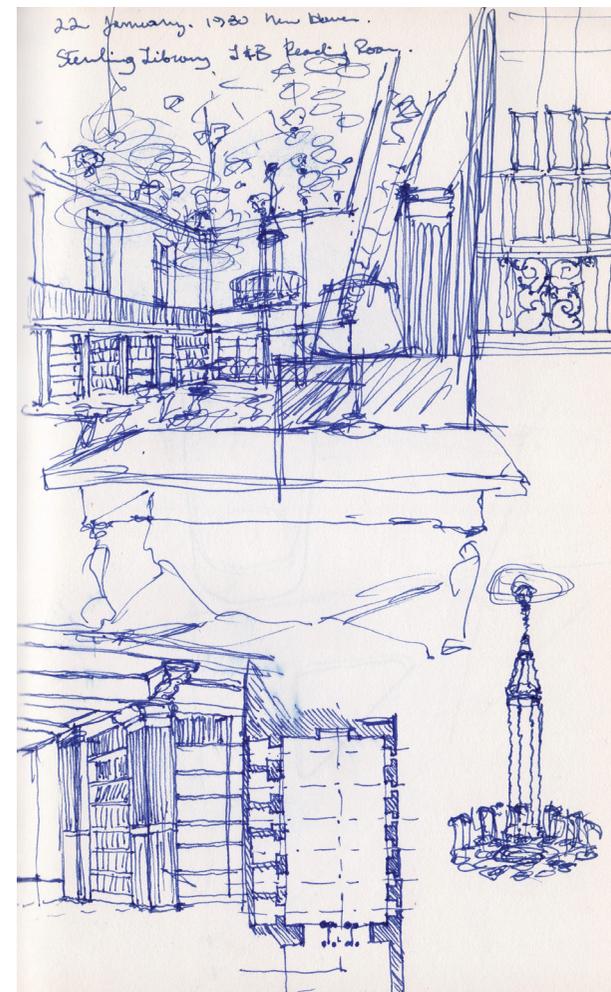


The relationship between the act of drawing and the creation of a painting in watercolor is one with many facets, and while we could say drawing is the skeleton supporting the organs and tissue of a finished watercolor, this metaphor is presented at the risk of oversimplification. It's true that sometimes an intricate painting is only possible thanks to the precise line-work armature painstakingly laid out before disappearing under watercolor washes. Other times, the drawing itself takes center stage to revel on its own as the star attraction. On rarer occasions, an artist manages to summon sufficient bravura to dispense with the preliminary drawing altogether.

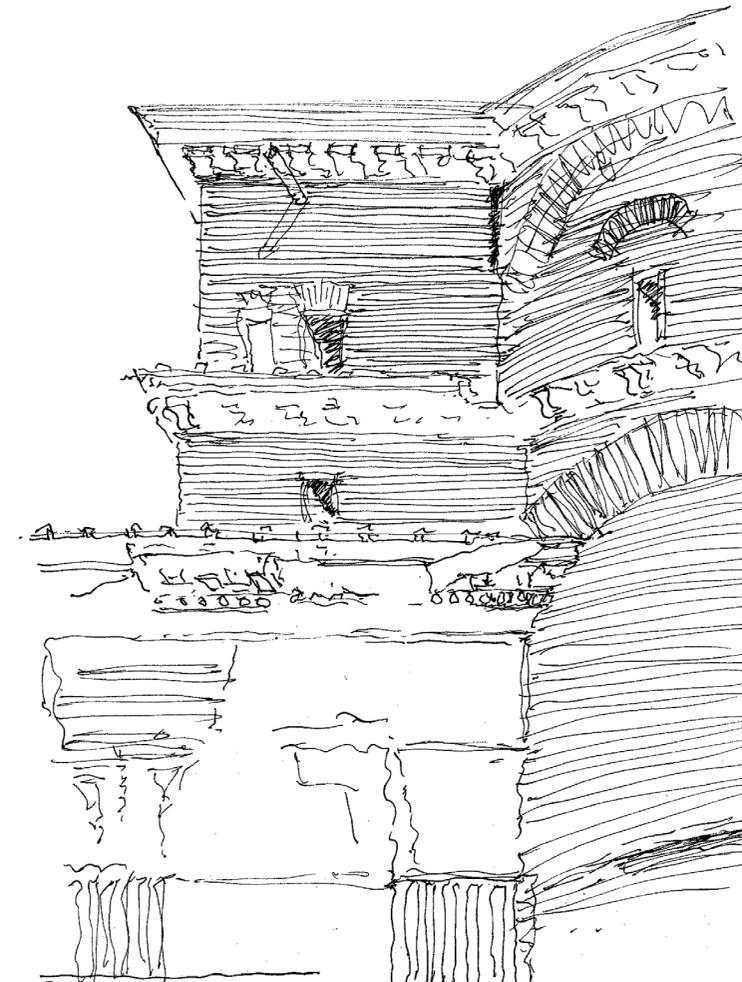
Perhaps the more applicable metaphor is that drawing and painting are like two performers collaborating in a duet or a dance, in which the lead role is passed back and forth. For this discussion, let's define drawing as the application of lines with a finely pointed tool, whether it delivers the mark in ink, graphite or another medium. Painting, on the other hand,

This presentation drawing **Michigan Avenue at Dusk, Chicago, Illinois** (graphite and watercolor on paper, 30x22) began with a detailed layout drafted in pencil.

COLLECTION OF THE CHICAGO ART INSTITUTE



These drawings, done in Pilot pen, depict the opulent reading rooms in the **Sterling Memorial Library**, on the Yale Campus. On a single 8x5½ sketchbook page, I documented multiple aspects—plan, overall view and details. For an architect, the very act of committing forms to paper serves as a memory device.



This detailed sketch of the side of the **Pantheon** (Rome; pen-and-ink in sketchbook, 6½x5) used line to indicate textures and materials.

is the application of broad swaths of color and tone with a brush. Sometimes a pen or pencil can mimic a brush's repertory of effects, such as when graphite is applied with the flat side of a soft lead. Alternatively, repetitive small marks of hatching or stippling can represent texture or surfaces in shade or shadow, although these roles may be more efficiently dispatched by a brush. By the same token, as a watercolor painting progresses from broad-brush blocking out to the final rendering of details, the use of more precise brushwork assumes the role previously played by the pencil. The functions of drawing

and painting overlap, and their collaboration should be seamless—like the artistic creation between two performers in its most perfect and idealistic sense.

As in all forms of creative expression, there's no one approach that's right. Just as there are soliloquies, arias and solo dances in performance, there can be drawings that stand on their own. On the other hand, drawings may be given a lift with the addition of color, or sketches may flow directly from a paintbrush. As I look over my own work in observational sketching from the past 40 years, I find satisfaction in a variety

of approaches—from analytical sketches of a reading room in Yale's Sterling Memorial Library that I created as an architectural student (above left) to a fine-line pen drawings of the Pantheon (above right) to a pen-and-watercolor drawing of the newly restored façade of St. Peter's Basilica (page ••), captured during the papal dedication in October 1999. The first time I completed a large-scale architectural watercolor in perspective was a quarter of a century ago. For that painting of a French classical château (page ••), I first drew everything in detail, using lightly applied pencil in a way that

## TWO-PHASED APPROACH

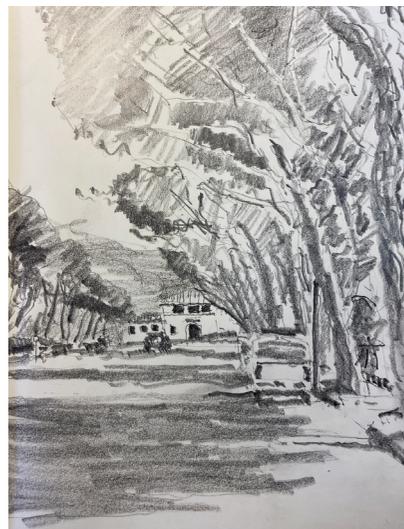
For my current work, whether in situ or in the studio, I've arrived at one preferred way of progressing from drawn line to final painting. This entails using a soft-lead, graphite pencil not only to draw lines, but also, primarily, to describe the unfolding drama of light and shadow, which for me, form the essence of a painting's structure. These drawings, usually done on the smooth paper of a Moleskin sketchbook, essentially become notans (black and white works meant to show light and dark values). My drawings guide the production of the final painting, which I can create with greater confidence because the design has already been "auditioned."



In preparation for a painting of a street in Lompoc, Calif., I created two separate graphite sketches on site. This first one was a quick study to capture the shapes and values.



For my second sketch, I began with a line drawing.



Shading with the side of a soft graphite pencil, I added light and dark values.

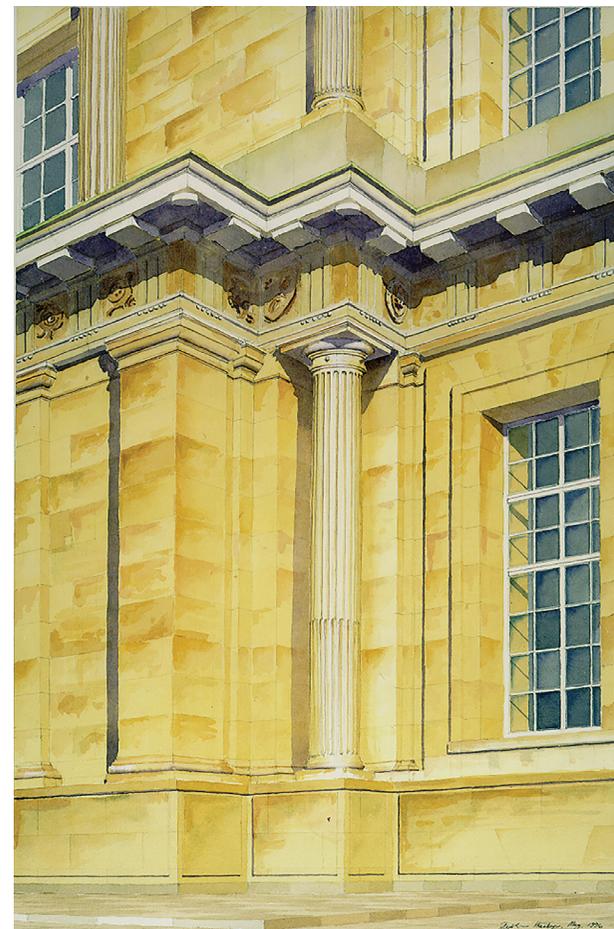


**FAR LEFT**  
Having worked out the design with my two graphite sketches, I was ready to begin my painting. I penciled in the merest compositional outline on my watercolor paper. In fact, that outline probably wasn't necessary, since my initial watercolor wash blocked in the forms just as effectively.

**LEFT**  
I completed **xTitle of Paintingx** (graphite and watercolor on paper, 14½x11) by adding warm and cool colors, being careful to preserve the white of the paper in areas denoting sunlight on the cars, distant building and sides of the tree trunks.



One of the glories of the restored façade of **St. Peter's Basilica**, in Rome, was the introduction of the slight colors of the travertine marble. I exaggerated the effect in this sketch (Sakura Pigma Micron pen and watercolor on paper, 6x6½)



In order to achieve the precision and realism I desired for this large watercolor painting of a **French classical chateau** (graphite and watercolor on paper, 33x22), designed by Francois Mansart, I started with a detailed pencil underdrawing.



I completed this sketch of **Santa Maria della Salute** (watercolor on paper, 9½x7) in less than an hour. Rather than draw a preliminary layout in pencil, I went straight to blocking in the forms, using extremely light values of watercolor.

probably comes closest to the idea of drawing-as-skeleton. In this piece, the pencil lines all but disappeared, and the washes and color took over—but this wasn't a quick, on-site travel sketch; it took many hours to complete in the studio. In another work created at about the same time, my depiction of the complex forms of Santa Maria della Salute (above), in Venice, materialized on the paper without any preliminary drawing.

Every artist's work process evolves over time, and I find mine now leans toward the one I've demonstrated in Two-Phased Approach (opposite). The relatively fast work in the field is assigned to pencil and paper. The more time-consuming work with watercolor comes next, which I find to be more rewarding in the comfort and convenience of the studio with my favorite music and libation close to hand. ♣

*Stephen Harby is an architect, watercolorist, former faculty member of the Yale School of architecture and founder of Stephen Harby Invitational, which organizes travel opportunities for small groups.*