

TEN MINUTE TIP - VALUE STUDY

- **What** is a value study?
 - A small, simplified drawing or sketch of what you want to paint. It focuses on the dark and light masses and how they relate to each other.
 - Value is the relative lightness or darkness of a color. Contrasting values make an image identifiable and give depth by expressing form.
 - Use 3 values: dark, medium, light (can be the white of the paper).
 - Pencil, marker, paint (one color)

 - This is your game plan
 - “The values are the skeleton of the painting on which color and form are added.” *Betty Lou Schlemm, Watercolor Secrets for Painting Light. 1996*

- **Why** do a value study?
 - To get acquainted with your subject and work out a pleasing composition.
 - You figure out in advance the shapes of dark, medium, light with their position, size, and relationship to each other.
 - The values help establish the background, middle ground and foreground. Light values help the scene recede; darker values bring it forward.
 - You link the shapes.
 - As the light can change quickly in plein air painting, the value study will continue to be your guide.
 - No matter how beautiful the colors... if the painting is weak in values, it won't work as well as you'd hoped.
 - A value study will improve your painting.

- **How** to do a value study?
 - *Keep it small. 3” square is fine. That’s why value studies are also called “thumbnail sketches.”
 - *Draw a rough frame; use the same shape as your paper (horizontal, vertical, or square).
 - *Start by outlining the major shapes. Don’t try to be careful or correct. Ignore details.
 - *Draw quickly, keeping your focus on what strikes you. This is your interpretation of what you see and like.
 - *Feel free to jot some notes about how the scene makes you feel or why you like it, and the direction of the sun.
 - *Pay attention to the negative shapes- they are also masses and they help you get the proportions right.
 - *Consider emphasizing an area by placing the darkest darks and lightest lights next to each other.

- **Some tips**
 - Get the general idea in quickly. Are you pleased with it? If not, do another. Repeat.
 - You can edit the scene. Take out extraneous objects or add something for interest.
 - You are the artist and you have creative license!
 - Dark and light masses should not be equal in size; one should be dominant.
 - Don’t forget the shadows. They can provide a way for the eye to travel through the painting and can link shapes of the same value.
 - Within a value area there can be a variety of colors, just keep them in the same value range.
 - Place a sheet of acetate under your work so it won’t bleed onto the next page.
 - Remember to go back and refer to your value study as you paint.
 - Use a value scale card or a piece of red acetate to check that your values work.

 - **Color gets the credit; value does the work.**