



Keep a Sketchbook

Many artists keep sketchbooks in which they experiment with ideas and record drawings of their environment. Sketchbooks are like visual diaries for artists. Artists often use them for planning and developing their work.

Perhaps the most famous artist sketchbooks are those of Leonardo da Vinci. He filled his sketchbooks with drawings, diagrams and written notes of things he saw and ideas he came up with. Picasso produced 178 sketchbooks in his lifetime. He often used his sketchbooks to explore themes and to make compositional studies until he found the right idea and subject for a larger painting on canvas. Henry Moore, a British sculptor, filled one of his sketchbooks with drawings of sheep that often wandered by the window outside his studio.

If you want to be an artist, it's a good idea to start keeping a sketchbook around with you all the time. You can draw in your sketchbook, write in it, and stick photographs and other things you find in it. Later on, you can return to your sketchbook when you're looking for ideas for making works of art.

Getting Started

To begin, purchase a simple spiral-bound sketchbook and drawing pencil from an art supply store. Or, make your own sketchbook. Personalize your sketchbook by drawing something on the cover and then writing your name and the date on it.

Carry your sketchbook around with you wherever you go. Look for things to record in your sketchbook.

Remember that as an artist you have to look closely at things. You may find it difficult at first to stand still and draw something outside, especially if there are people around. Don't mind them or any comments they might make. And don't worry if some of your drawings don't turn out like you want them to. You can make mistakes in your sketchbook and you'll get better with practice. Drawing requires courage!

Try to fill one page of your sketchbook everyday. Getting started is always difficult, especially when you have a new, empty book. If you don't know where to start, try one of the following ideas. Once you've done your first sketchbook, the next ones will be easier and even more rewarding.

Many artists choose a theme to follow in their sketchbooks. For example, you might decide to focus on portraits of people (like your family and friends) in your first sketchbook. You might draw scenes around your neighborhood. Or, you might draw views you see when looking out windows (something that Henri Matisse, a French artist, liked to do).

Most people have collections of things. A collection can make a good theme for a sketchbook. If you have a collection of toys or dolls, draw pictures of them in your sketchbook. (Did you know Andy Warhol liked to draw pictures of toys?) You can also draw pictures of shoes, old hats, tools, kitchen utensils, or other items found around your house.

If you like comic books, your sketchbook can be a place to invent new comic-book characters and to develop story-lines for your own comics.

If you have a dog or cat as a pet, try drawing pictures of it in your sketchbook. Don't worry if your pet moves before you finish your drawing. As you get to know your pet better by drawing it, you'll probably be able to go back and finish any uncompleted drawings of it later on.

Drawing things from unusual points of view is good practice for an artist. For example, try drawing trees while sitting directly underneath them.