Strathmore®
ARTIST NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 15 | ISSUE 2 | SPRING 2017

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

NEW! Strathmore® Vision™
Our new line of pads featuring high sheet counts, rugged construction, and customizable covers.
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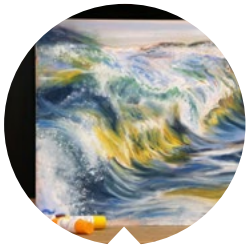

2017 Online Workshops
Workshop 2: *Techniques in Pastel Art* Begins May 1st.
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Questions from our Website
Why is 9" x 12" a standard pad size?
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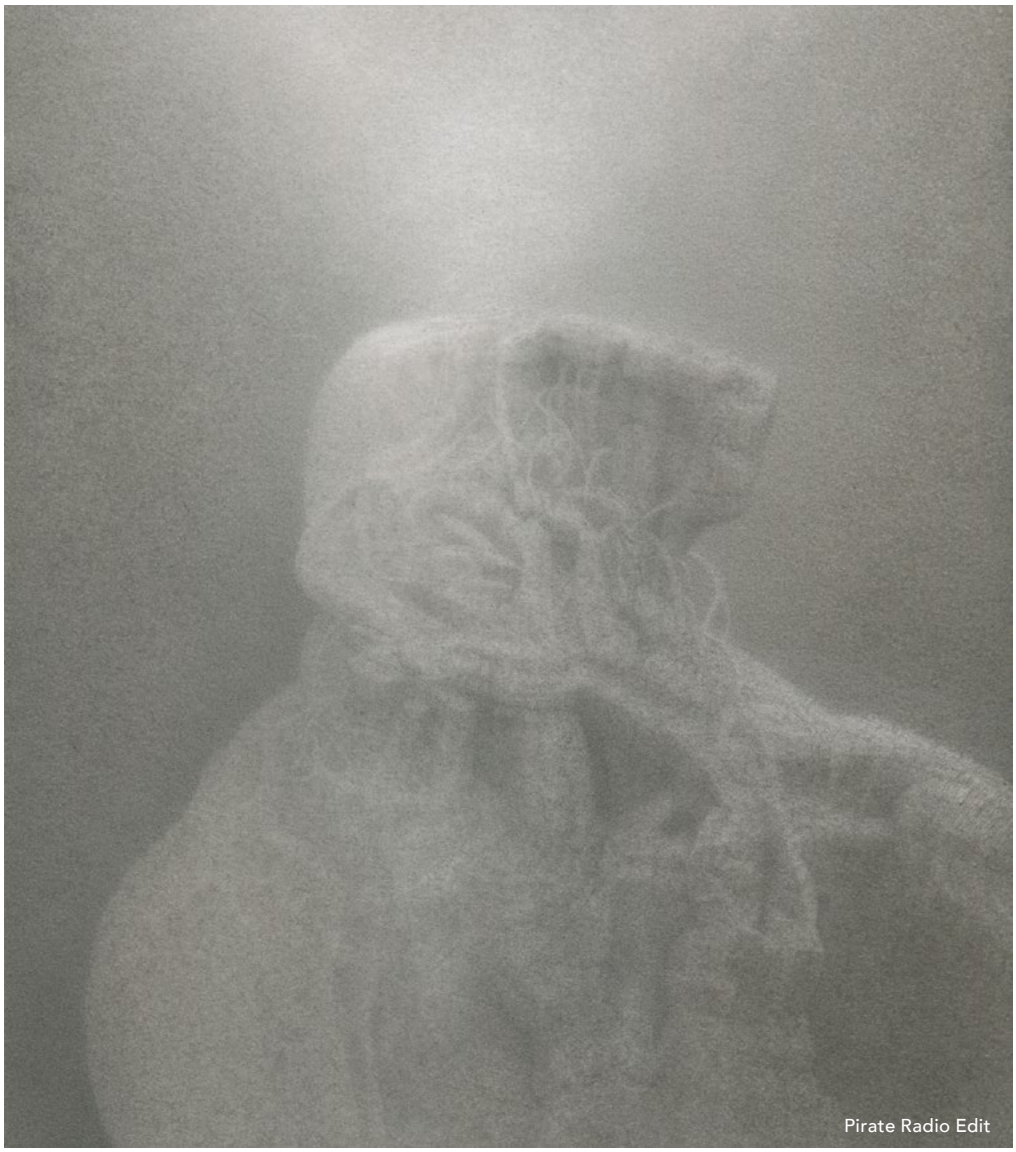
MAIN FEATURE

Making My Graphite and Charcoal Drawing *Pirate Radio Edit*

by Mark Reep



Pirate Radio Edit

Like many of us, I value insights into other artists' ways of working. Regardless of media, something always translates that is useful and inspires. In this article I'll talk a little about how my own process has evolved over more than twenty years of showing and selling drawings. I'll also share a step-by-step look into the creation of a recent drawing, *Pirate Radio Edit*. If you have questions, feel free to get in touch. We all learn from one another and I hope something of my approach may be helpful to you.

In 1995 I began showing and selling small stippled pen and ink landscapes. (For anyone who's unfamiliar, stippling is simply creating an image with many little dots... many, many little dots.) I enjoyed the precision, textures, rich darks, and dramatic contrasts possible with ink stippling. However, it's not well suited for rendering water, atmospherics like light through mist, and other ephemeral elements I wanted to incorporate.

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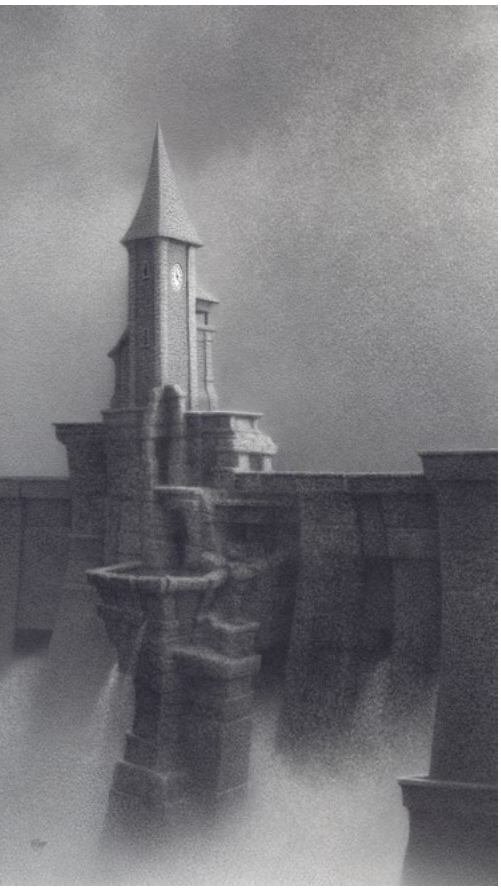
Dains Folly

Working with tools I had on hand, I experimented with watermedia creating backgrounds by loading water-soluble colored pencil rubbings onto a damp cotton ball, blotting, and lifting to create effects like stormy skies. I also tried eyedropper pourings, spatter, and other applications, often creating a series of panels in a session. When they were dry, I looked through the panels, chose one that seemed promising, and began stippling inked elements. I liked some results, but this approach had its own limitations and watermedia also roughened my smooth-surface papers.

I began exploring dry alternatives, like powdered charcoal and graphite, applying them in much the same way with cotton balls and brushes. This gave me much greater control and enabled revision as well.

"I began exploring dry alternatives like powdered charcoal and graphite...This gave me much greater control, and enabled revision as well."

I also liked the resulting contrasts, both tonal and textural. Charcoal and graphite broadened the range of effects I could achieve and gradually they assumed a larger role. Their forgiving nature encouraged exploration and discovery I enjoyed through more stages of a drawing's making. This became the heart of my process at the drawing table. For the past twelve years I've worked primarily in charcoal and graphite.

Morning Prayer

Here's a step-by-step look at my recent drawing *Pirate Radio Edit*.

Step 1:

STEP 1: I began this drawing with powdered charcoal. I press a cotton ball into soft stick or pencil rubbings on scrap paper, applying lightly with a combination of blotting, lifting, and blending. I like 'dry' charcoal with a little grit, so I try to avoid lines and other unwanted marks that rubbing too hard may produce. The resulting midtones and darks may be the beginnings of a stormy sky, misty moonrise, or whatever background seems appropriate as subject matter suggests itself.

This serves as a good place to start and allows more flexibility than toned paper, which can only be darkened or lightened by adding media. Lifting out initial shapes with erasers allows me to work with mass rather than line and areas of revealed paper provide highlights. Brightly lit areas that don't work are easily darkened again without the necessity of removing pencil marks.

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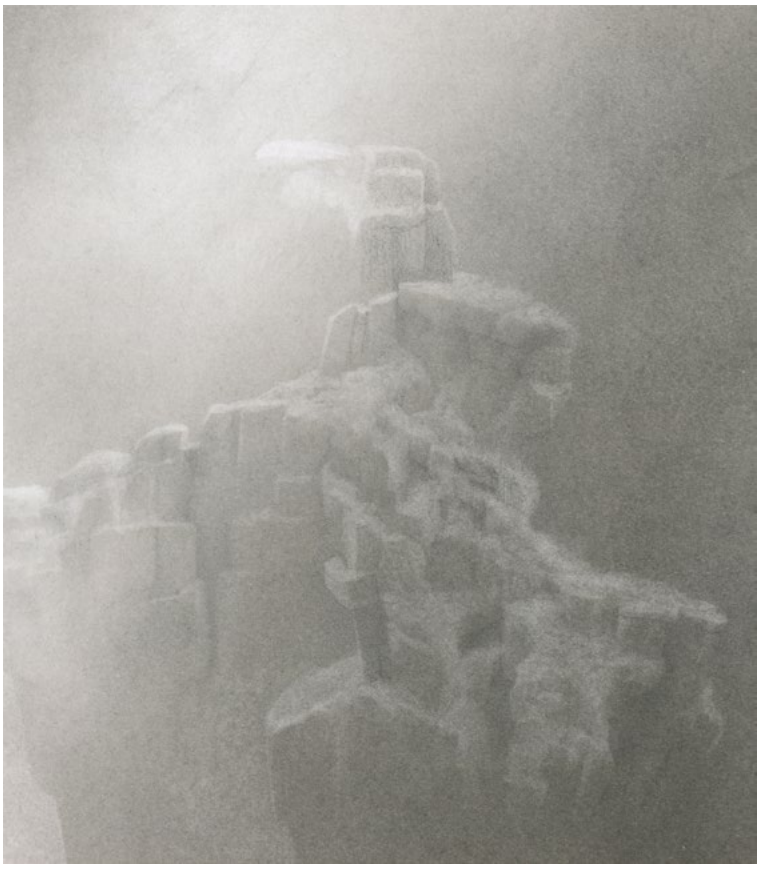
"I build tones in layers rather than pressing hard. This also makes revision much easier, should it become necessary."



Step 2:

Step 3:

STEP 2: Essentially I'm drawing in the negative with a kneaded eraser rolled to a fine point, or an eraser stick like the Sanford® Tuff Stuff™. When I'm ready to add darks like crevices or recesses with graphite pencil, I usually begin with a Dixon® Ticonderoga® #1. They're relatively soft and well suited to midtones and darks. To avoid the shiny, burnished look overworked graphite sometimes gets, I build tones in layers rather than pressing hard. This also makes revision much easier, should it become necessary.

STEP 3: I've added more darks and began teasing out some finer details on the left with the point of my kneaded eraser, dragging it lightly over the paper much as a calligrapher creates a flourish with a fine brush. At this point, the webbing or honeycomb-like area suggests the kinds of raised mortar joints sometimes seen in masonry. I don't know what is or may become. That's fine. I don't want to know yet. The shapes and flow seem promising and for now that's enough.

continued

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Step 4:

Step 5:

STEP 4: Shapes evolve, darks deepen. To make elements of the webbed area at left stand out, I darken alongside them, first with line, then fine hatching, and stippling with a harder pencil like a #3 or #4. I blend the graphite with a clean Q-Tip®, rubbing lightly away from the segment of webbing I want to highlight. If that highlight is too bright now or seems to protrude too far from its context, I can always push it back into deeper shadow by darkening it slightly with the dirty Q-Tip®. As with pencil, I avoid pressing hard. The Bristol board I often use is very smooth, which works well for me, but I don't want to burnish any of its minimal tooth away in the early going.

"As artists, we balance analysis and intuition. What we feel matters as much as what we think."

STEP 5: Many of this drawing's elements seem likely to remain in shadow. Establishing separation and detail while maintaining consistency of values is one of the challenges of working in monochrome, especially at this size. But it's a challenge I enjoy. At this point, the drawing is about 6" wide.

The brighter area in the lower left corner is a remnant of a road not taken. My process is improvisation on paper. Each drawing retains not only what worked, but often traces of much that didn't. That corner seems like a distraction now and I'm tempted to darken it. But for whatever reason, that doesn't feel right. Other shapes also seem likely to change, but I don't know how, so I'm in no hurry to remove or revise them either.

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"As a friend said, 'You need to leave room for everyone to find their own stories in the drawings.'"

The Gift Within

Dream Logic

As artists, we balance analysis and intuition. What we feel matters as much as what we think. Often I can't articulate why I like something. I don't overanalyze; I like it or I don't. Admittedly, flying by the seat of my pants is often an inefficient process. But it keeps the work fresh, intriguing, and fun.

Step 6:

STEP 6: I continue to develop detail, always with an eye to shape and flow. I like the twining and the delicacy of the webbing. Roots, vines, conduits? I don't know. At this point, this drawing is a small mystery. I like that. Mystery invites curiosity, offers opportunity to wonder and imagine. I hope and intend that the finished image will retain something of this and offer viewers that opportunity as well. As a friend said, "You need to leave room for everyone to find their own stories in the drawings."

I'll learn what I need to as the work progresses. In the meantime, I'm trying to see more of the possibilities this drawing offers and bring more of what seems faintly suggested into focus. My reach usually exceeds my grasp. When I try for more, for better, I sometimes undo good work. That's frustrating. I almost always think I can make this or that just a little better. Recognizing the point when I can't, when I need to leave well enough alone, remains an ongoing challenge. But no risk, no reward. Often the reward is new ground gained, something good learned. And that's gratifying.

I don't much like the top of the blocky shape, midway up the drawing's left side. Frank Lloyd Wright sometimes began architectural drawings with simple blocks or boxlike shapes, developing them by notching, excising. That subtractive approach often works for me, and it seems a possibility here. But there's a lot else to work on in the meantime. We'll see.

continued

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Step 7:

Step 8:

STEP 7: I like the shapes and flow at lower right better now. When I deepen a shadow or dark background adjacent to a brightly lit edge, I line that edge lightly, then hatch and stipple along the outside of the line. I blend away from the highlight with a clean Q-Tip® then layer more stippling with progressively harder pencils, blending periodically. A sharp pencil is essential. When the work is going well, I don't like pausing to sharpen, but continuing with a dull pencil quickly becomes less effective.

Areas of smoothest gradation take longest: Darken with pencil, blend, lighten where needed with a sharp-pointed eraser, blend. Examine and repeat.

Admittedly, stippling is slow work and not for everyone. But while stippling requires intense concentration, you can also listen to music, teaching, whatever you like while you're working. Or you can simply let the time spent developing a stippled passage become a time of quiet and meditation. Of listening, maybe, for that still small leading within.

STEP 8: I spent much of this session experimenting with the shapes at the top of the previous scans. I saw possibilities, but none panned out as I'd hoped. Eventually, I bit the bullet and reached for the Big Eraser. When I'd removed most of what I'd tried, I found I liked the overall shape much better. It's starting to feel like a vaguely reptilian

continued

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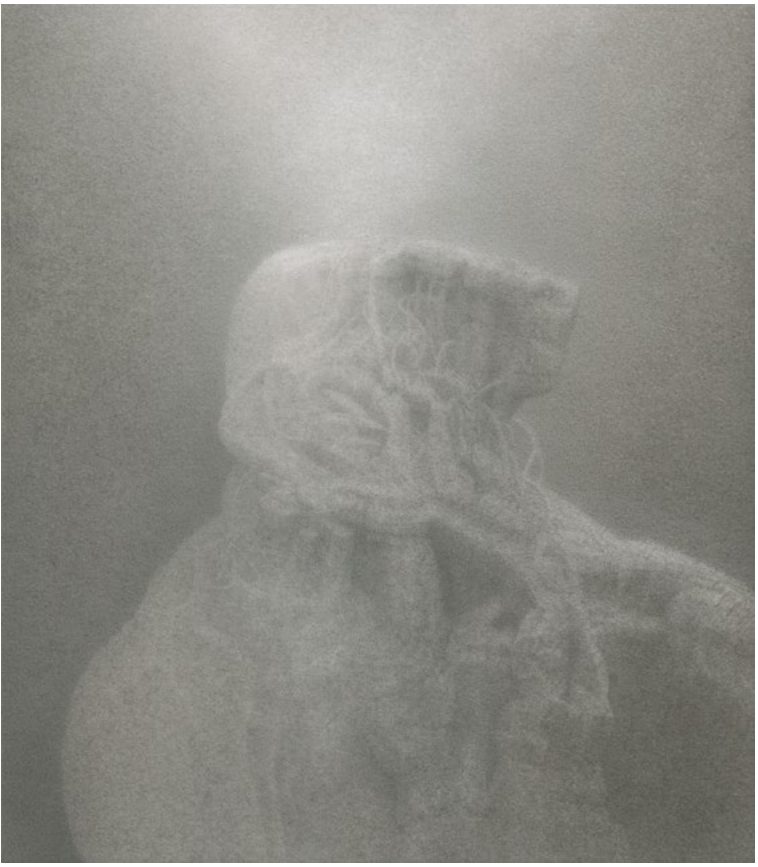
Sphinx: massive, ancient, abandoned. Or is it?

STEP 9: This drawing's final session was a long one. Again, the overall shape has evolved radically and feels much better now. Writers have a saying: you have to kill your darlings. If a passage is lovely but doesn't serve the story well or doesn't contribute to a cohesive whole, it's gotta go. I liked some of what I sacrificed, but maybe its value lay in learning more about creating those kinds of effects. As I mentioned earlier, their traces remain layered in there and lend a depth of texture the drawing wouldn't have if I hadn't tried them.



Step 9:

I don't keep sketchbooks but I do keep notebooks, and recently I jotted down the phrase "Pirate Radio Edit". Maybe the V-shaped or winged light at the top of this drawing is a signal or a broadcast. I like that. Maybe this drawing will become a gig poster or the cover of a live bootleg recording. I've not yet trimmed the paper, and there's room at the top for a band's logo and a venue. Maybe it'll inspire a review! Maybe *Pirate Radio Edit* will become a drawing and text piece, like *Loch Traignarry Light*, or *Point of Grace*. We'll see. Stay tuned.

Pirate Radio Edit is a graphite and charcoal drawing on *Strathmore 300 Series Bristol* smooth. The drawing measures 6" x 6 ¾". Tools included powdered charcoal, graphite pencils, kneaded and stick erasers, cotton balls, and Q-Tips®.

My thanks to Strathmore for this opportunity to share my work, and thank you for reading. I hope you've enjoyed it.

ABOUT THE ARTIST:

Mark Reep (American, b. 1960) is an artist and writer whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in American Art Collector, Bluecanvas, Endicott Journal, Metazen, Drawing Magazine, Word Riot, and many other publications.

Mark's dreamlike drawings blur natural and architectural elements, often in isolate, meditative context. Titles suggest narrative, small mysteries, abandonments and reclamations, new hopes built on ruins – but leave room for wonder. Mark says, "I draw found places. I'd call them imagined, but

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preconception doesn't work for me. I value exploration, discovery at the drawing table, and enjoy refining detail and depth at an intimate scale. So my drawings offer viewers opportunity for close examination, further discovery as well."

All The Silent Years

"I don't plan much; I try everything in drawing. What works best stays, but traces of abandoned directions and attempts (often, many) remain layered in there too and contribute to the drawings' depth."

Solstice

A self-educated artist, Mark has exhibited his drawings, photographs and stoneworks in galleries, museums, and juried exhibitions since 1989. Many of Mark's images are available as affordable postcards, greeting cards, and giclee prints on *Redbubble* and *Fine Art America.* Gallery representation: Jardine Gallery, Perth, Scotland.

You can see more of Mark's work on the following sites:

Cards, Prints, more: *Redbubble*
Giclee Prints: *Fine Art America*
MarkReep.net
Facebook
Twitter

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Introducing

Strathmore®

vision™

Let the world see your **vision**

Artists are as unique as their vision. That's why we listened to their requests for a series of pads with covers that artists can customize. For the first time ever, our new line of pads feature a tear away fly sheet that reveals a heavyweight, **CUSTOMIZABLE, blank cover** made from high quality, **184 lb. (300 g/m²) Steel Blue Mixed Media paper** for use with wet or dry media.

All Vision products feature:

extra high sheet counts • durable construction • customizable cover • affordable price

Sketch

Drawing

Mixed Media

Watercolor

Click to Learn More!

All Strathmore Vision products are acid free and proudly made in the U.S.A.

Artwork shown left to right by Laura Schrampfer, Sara Prentice, and Sarah Becktel
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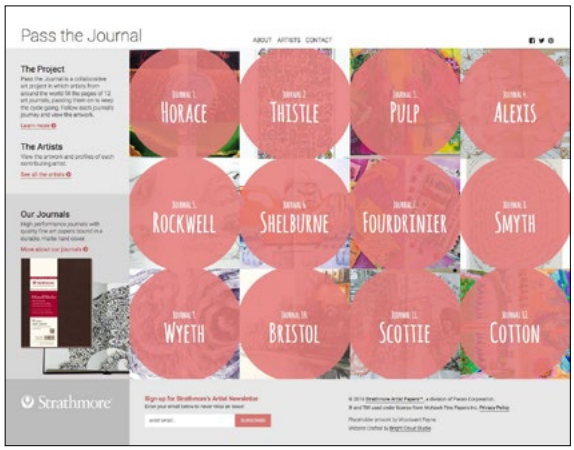
Pass the Journal 2 Year Anniversary!

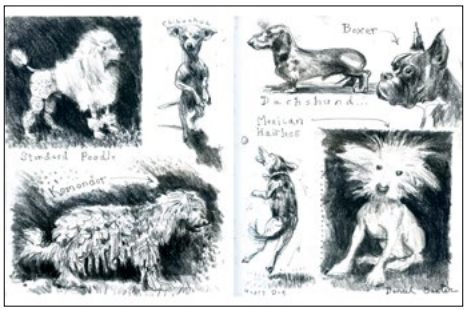
We're celebrating two years of *Pass the Journal!* In April 2015 we sent 12 Strathmore® Art Journals to artists throughout the U.S., the UK, and Spain to be filled by different artists around the globe. Since then, 134 artists from 27 states within the U.S. and 14 different countries have contributed to the pages.



Each book is named after something significant to the Strathmore brand and has its own unique story. Every book also has its own virtual tracking map on the Pass the Journal website. When an artist receives one of the books, they create original artwork across a page spread. They upload their work and artist profile to the Pass the Journal website where it gets added to a tracking map with a pin mark. When a pin mark is clicked, the artwork and artist profile for that location is displayed on the site. The artist then passes the book to another artist of their choosing to continue the cycle.

Once the books are completed, they are to be sent back to Strathmore Artist Papers where all the pages will be scanned. A few will be kept in the Strathmore archives and the rest will be donated to the Trout Museum of Art in Appleton, Wisconsin and the Paine Art Center in Oshkosh, Wisconsin so community members can enjoy and be inspired by them.

Christine Karron - Horace Journal



Daniel Baxter - Wyeth Journal

Inma Serrano - Shelburne Journal

In two years the 12 books have traveled to 27 states within the U.S. and 14 different countries!

This project has provided an opportunity for artists to share their work on a global scale and has inspired others to start similar projects in their own communities. We've loved the unpredictable aspect of not knowing where each book will end up next with another unique and one-of-a-kind piece inside.

See more: *#PassTheJournal*

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Strathmore® 2017 ONLINE WORKSHOP SERIES

Join us for Strathmore's FREE 2017 Online Workshops!

Strathmore's Online Workshops feature free video lessons and downloadable instructions created by experienced artists. Follow along in the online classroom as instructors guide you through various topics and demonstrate useful tips, techniques, ideas, and inspirations to get you creating and learning even more about art.

Share all the fun on Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter using #StrathmoreWorkshops

WORKSHOP 2: Techniques In Pastel Art Begins May 1st

Instructor: Amy Pearce Stone
Start Date: May 1, 2017

In this 4 lesson pastel course, we will create a series of art projects. Each lesson will incorporate a number of techniques, tips, and tricks for using both oil and soft pastels. We will cover composition, drawing, value choices, value blending, creative texturing, simplicity versus complexity, confidence, perseverance, and personal creativity. Whether you are a seasoned pastel artist, or are picking up pastels for the first time, you are sure to enjoy these lessons and find inspiration and encouragement in your own creative process. All are welcome to participate in this ***FREE*** workshop and join the conversation!

About the instructor:

Amy Pearce Stone hosts the popular art tutorial YouTube channel "Her Art from the Attic". Amy started selling her artwork to a worldwide clientele when she was 18 years old. On a whim, she posted an oil painting tutorial video on YouTube called "How to Paint Tree Branches". Since then, she's produced hundreds of videos and managed to gain 130,000 loyal YouTube subscribers. Amy loves art and creativity. She is more than thrilled to be hanging out with Strathmore this year!

Join us for our *FREE* workshops at:
strathmoreartist.com/artist-studio

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QUESTIONS FROM OUR WEBSITE

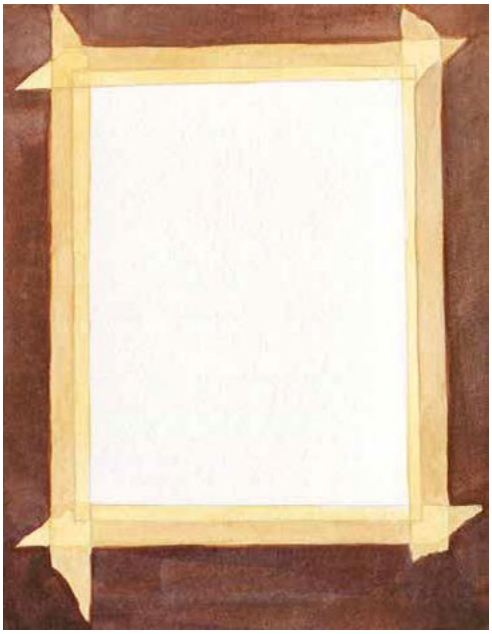
Question: 8" x 10" is a standard frame size. Why is 9" x 12" a standard paper/pad size instead of 8" x 10"?

Answer: An 8" x 10" pad size would make framing very convenient, and we do carry a number of Ready Cut Papers in frame-ready sizes, however there are a few reasons 9" x 12" is one of the most popular pad sizes:

1. Many artists like to tape their pieces down while they work. With 9" x 12" paper sizes, artists have an extra ½" to 1" border on each side to allow them to tape the edges and still leave a full 8" x 10" area for their artwork.

2. Having a little extra room around all the borders allows an artist to shift their artwork in the frame if their piece was created slightly off-centered.

1



2

Art by Kristina Carroll

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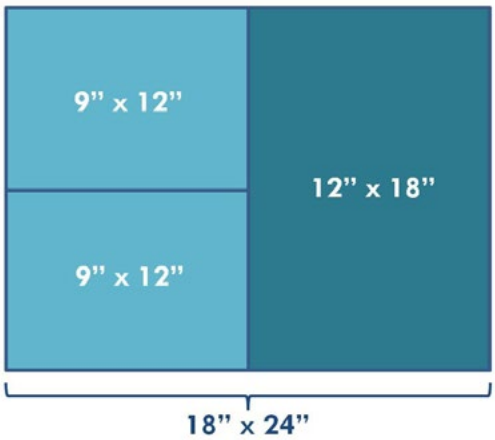
3. The 9" x 12" paper size also relates to efficiencies in the paper-making and paper-trimming process. The same master sheet size can be used for 18" x 24" pads, 12" x 18" pads, and 9" x 12" pads, creating less waste in the manufacturing process.

In the 1950's, the 9" x 12" pad size became our most popular, and for all the reasons above, we've kept it as a standard pad size in a wide range of fine art paper types.

3



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