

WINTER 2013
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Drawing

SPECIAL SECTION

COLORED PENCIL
3 Artists Discuss
THEIR MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES

Surfaces
THAT MAKE YOUR DRAWINGS POP

Etude: Fawn's Leap—
Catskills (detail)
by Thomas Kegler

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Made Easy

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Advice for
**COMPOSING
A LANDSCAPE**

*** THE 3 KEY PRINCIPLES**

AMERICAN ARTIST
PRESENTS



Understanding the *Anatomy* of the Landscape

Thanks to years of careful observation and diligent study, **Thomas Kegler** is able to create landscapes that are true to the laws of nature and honor his own vision.

BY AUSTIN R. WILLIAMS

OPPOSITE PAGE

**Étude:
Kaaterskill
Falls**

2010, ink and
gouache on
toned paper,
12 x 9.

Collection
Nathaniel
Stewart.

All artwork
this article
collection the
artist unless
otherwise
indicated.

Thomas Kegler is never at a loss

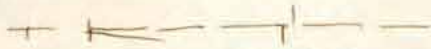
for something to paint or draw, and for this, he feels fortunate. “So many artists get ‘blank-canvas syndrome,’” he says. “I consider myself really lucky—I have no shortage of concepts and subjects I’m attracted to. I’ll take a walk through the woods and by the time I’m home, I’ve seen ten good potential paintings.”

Even though Kegler’s oil landscapes are often inspired by the sweeping panoramas of the Hudson River School, the subjects that attract him aren’t all soaring vistas and romantic forest scenes. “There’s as much beauty in a dead tree as in a live one,” he says. “The thing that inspires me can just be the shape of a tree or a log on the ground. It’s the same with whole landscapes—there’s beauty in the overlooked. And the great thing about working on a landscape is that you have so much stage to work with—you get to work both on an intimate level and on a vast level that you often don’t have when painting a still life or figure.”

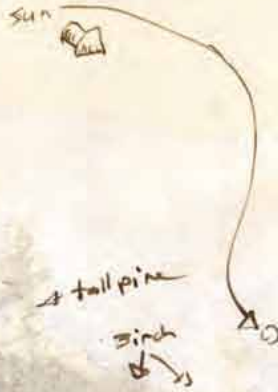
Kegler has always gravitated toward the landscape, and this is no surprise considering his upbringing. “My father ran a small mom-and-pop hunting-and-fishing store,” he says. “I think that hunting, fishing, and camping can all nurture an appreciation for nature. The landscape itself was just a natural muse for me.” On top of this, his father eventually added a wildlife-art gallery to the store, and Kegler’s older brothers went into a range of creative professions, from graphic design to fine art. “There was always a very creative atmosphere in the house,” he says.

Many of Kegler’s drawing efforts are devoted to understanding what he refers to as the “anatomy of the landscape,” which allows him to comprehend what he sees and translate elements of the natural world into invented compositions that appear entirely real. “The word ‘anatomy’ refers to the physical makeup of something based on laws,” the artist explains. “In human anatomy, this includes the laws

Kaaterstille Falls
from below



July 6th 2010
10:30 AM
Clear / hot day
little water
over falls
today



heavy foliage
Maple tree

Pine

heavy atmosphere
perspective
from water falls

light
blue/cast
from flat
top

Bright green
highlights
on rocks

light
violet/blue/cast
from mist

heavy
foliage

pink
highlights

Small
Birch tree

violet
shadows

Water pool

Moss
+ leafy
plants

pink highlights
on brown rocks

CREATING a STRONG COMPOSITION

Kegler offers the following advice for designing the composition of your landscape.

CONCEPT: "The composition should be simple, and it should be about one thing, or concept. A deft artist can make even the most mundane subject interesting. As in poetry, how you say something is as important as what you are saying. Distill the elements to speak to this objective."

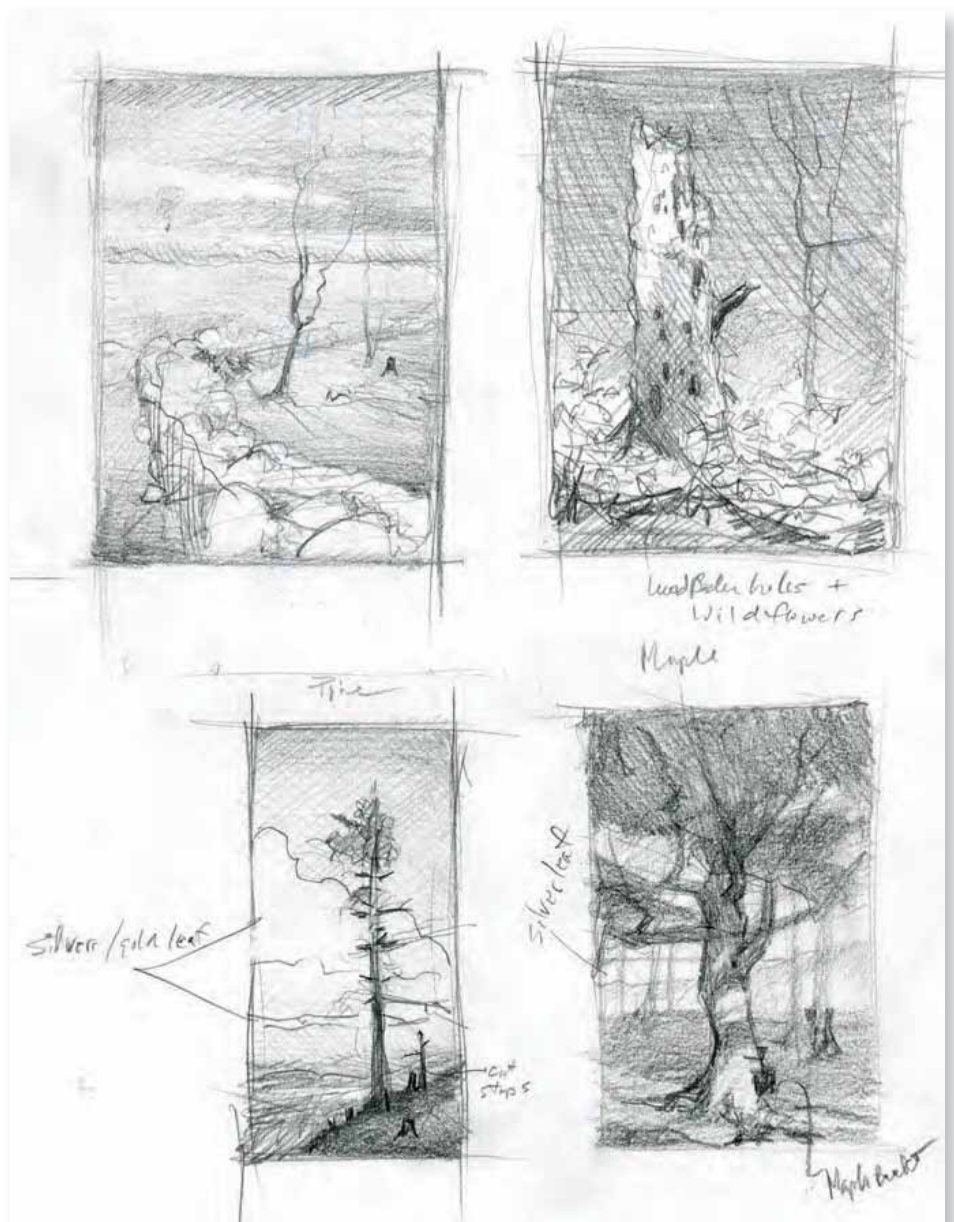
SIMPLICITY: "When in doubt, keep it simple. Less is more."

PLANNING: "Take the time to plan out your composition."

ASYMMETRY: "Interesting paintings have a harmonious balance (not equal amounts) of opposites, such as cool and warm, dark and light, thick and thin texture, detail and ambiguity, and hard and soft edges. The unequal treatment of these elements is pleasing to our senses."

FLOW: "Seek an interesting flow of eye movement—avoid a static composition."

ARMATURE: "When I am choosing an area to place a subject of interest, I strive to adhere to a harmonic compositional armature, such as the golden mean. This and other armatures are derived from harmonic musical scales, translating what is pleasing to our ears to proportions that are pleasing to our eyes."



of proportions, physiology, and physics. The landscape works on a similar set of physical principles. At first it can be very overwhelming, because it's so complex—there are temporal aspects to it such as atmosphere and light that are constantly changing. But once you spend time with it, you begin to see the recurrence within the chaos. It never becomes predictable, exactly, but many patterns and consistencies emerge.

"For example, during my first year in the Hudson River Fellowship, we would go to the same spot every night to paint the sunset," Kegler continues. "After a few weeks, we saw that some things about the sunset never changed. The dome of the sky, for one, was always the same. That's a rule—part of the landscape's anatomy. Once we knew

that, we would pre-paint the dome of the sky, and then when we went to paint the sunset, it was just a matter of painting the cloud variances. The same can be done with understanding a tree—through study, you learn how branches form on a certain type of tree and how it responds to the environment. Once you acquire this knowledge of the landscape's anatomy, you gain freedom to make contrived but convincing landscapes based on real experiences."

Most of Kegler's paintings combine aspects of real locations with a degree of invention. "I try to mirror the Hudson River School's approach," the artist says. "You want to be as true to the spirit of the land as you can. But if a tree would look much better moved two feet to the right of where you see it, you

should be free to make that change, as long as you're true to the character of that tree and true to what the landscape would really look like if that tree were in that location."

Gaining this thorough understanding of the landscape is a long undertaking, and for Kegler, the pursuit is rooted in drawing. He draws constantly and in numerous media, both en plein air and in the studio. Many of the artist's drawings fall into three groups: croquis, esquisses, and études. A *croquis* is a thumbnail sketch that establishes the image's main concept and sets the composition by indicating the most important shapes and values. An *esquisse* is a refined version of the croquis: a more resolved thumbnail with a refined value structure and something closer to the final composition. An *étude* is a drawing of an individual natural element, such as a tree, a patch of undergrowth, or a rock outcropping. Most of Kegler's études are not created for a specific painting; rather, he keeps a library of these studies and refers to them when he needs guidance during the process of planning a larger work.

Kegler's 3 Key Principles of Landscape Drawing

1 Strive for the gesture and character of your main concept from the start.

"You want to take in the whole picture from the start," Kegler says. "This is where the importance of a thumbnail comes in. The thumbnail is a way to say that your image is a statement about *this* subject, *this* lighting, *this* atmosphere, *this* time of day. It reveals what it is that you're really trying to create a painting about. With a pencil, you can get this down very quick in a thumbnail."

2 Work from big to small.

"Once you have your concept, the quickest way to capture it is to get your big values set," the artist says. "Start with your big sky value, your big land masses, flat planes, and any uprights. Once you have those large masses in, everything else will fall into place."

3 Work from general to specific.

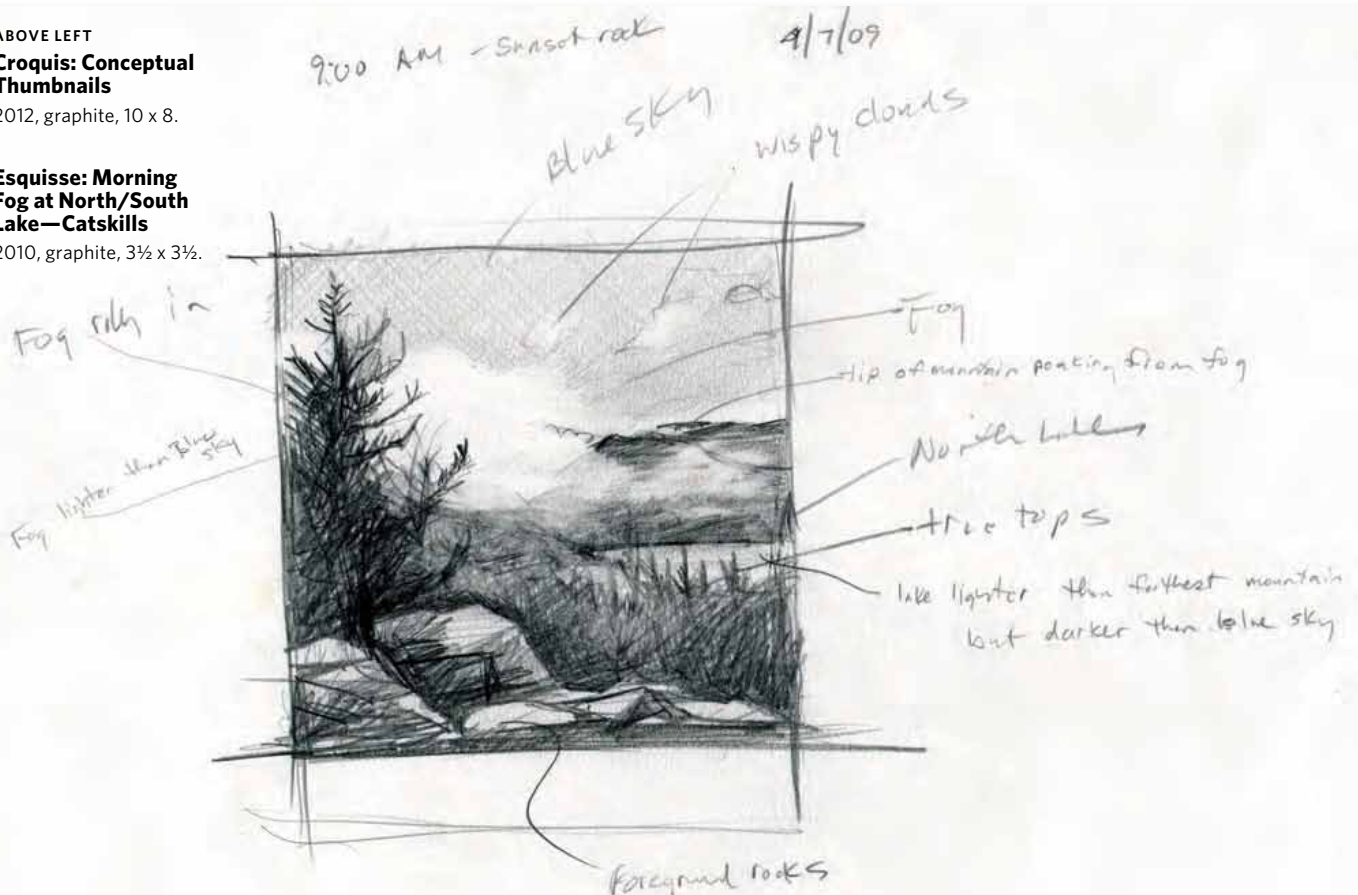
"This follows the same concept as the previous principle. Start general, then add the big details, and finally the little ones."

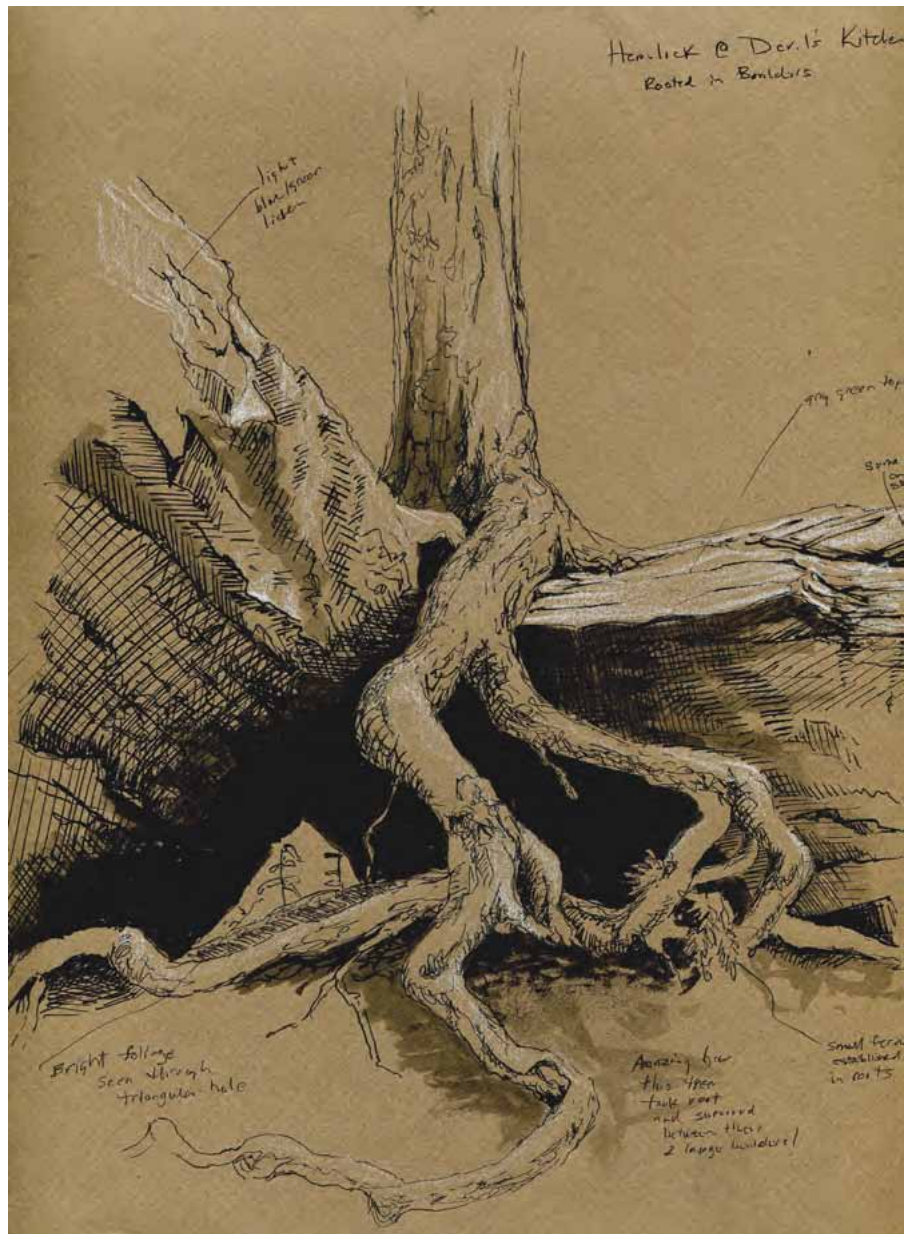
ABOVE LEFT
**Croquis: Conceptual
Thumbnails**

2012, graphite, 10 x 8.

**Esquisse: Morning
Fog at North/South
Lake—Catskills**

2010, graphite, 3½ x 3½.





TOP LEFT
**Étude: Schoharie Creek Rocks—
 Grid Study**
 2008, graphite, 7 x 10.

TOP RIGHT
Passing Front: Proverbs 16:20
 2012, oil on linen, 32 x 24.

ABOVE
Étude: Birch Trunk—Catskills
 2010, silverpoint on hand-toned paper,
 11 x 8½.

RIGHT
Étude: Hemlock at Devil's Kitchen
 2008, ink and chalk on toned paper,
 12 x 9.



Kegler selects his instrument depending on what he hopes to accomplish in a given drawing. “Graphite pencils are the workhorse,” he says. “They’re my staple for basic information gathering. I use them for most of my thumbnail sketches, and for some études, as well. They come in many grades, which makes them very versatile. And although there are some limitations to the values they can achieve, graphite still allows more variance in value structure than silverpoint, for example.”

Ink is another medium Kegler uses frequently, and many of his ink drawings—often incorporating a little wash or gouache—stand alone as fully realized works. “Ink drawings, done with pen or brush, can act as good indicators of structure—of a tree for example,” Kegler says. “You can do cross-

Étude: Fawn's Leap—Catskills

2008, ink and gouache on toned paper, 9 x 12.

hatching with them to show form, and you can use washes to indicate atmospheric space and a sense of environment. And ink also has a natural crossover into painting.”

Finally, Kegler is somewhat unique among landscape artists in that he often works with metalpoint. He finds that drawings done with various metal tips—such as silver, gold, and copper—are perfect for capturing nuances of value and detail, and he uses them for studies that, like his ink drawings, also stand as independent works of art. “Ink may be the most useful medium for sketching, but I think metal tip is the most beautiful,” he says. “The drawings take on a warm tone and a jewel-like sheen.” Metalpoint poses significant challenges—it doesn’t offer a full value range, for one, and it can’t be erased. But these difficulties can be overcome,

and the results are worth it. “You *cannot* get detail that fine with any other instrument,” the artist says emphatically.

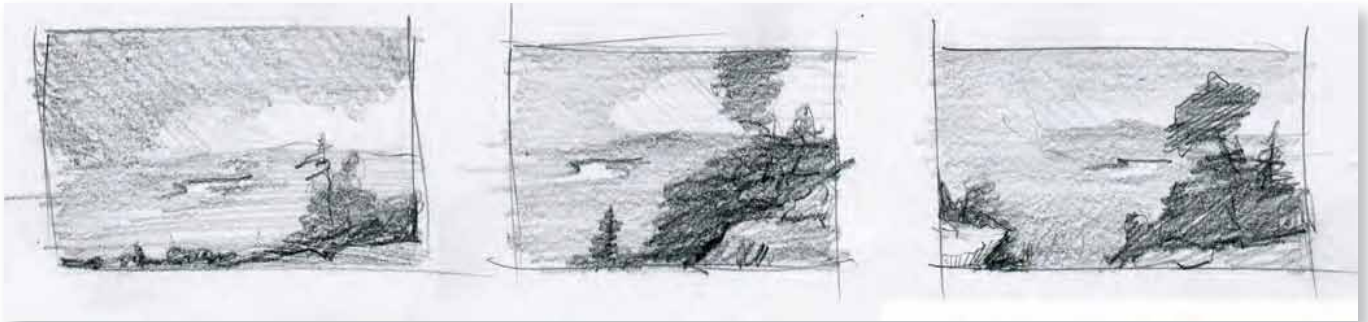
Kegler believes a drawing should serve two purposes. “It should be an informative study and also an aesthetic piece of art,” he says. “I’m always trying to create a beautiful piece at the same time that I’m trying to get information.” A quick look at Kegler’s wide portfolio of drawings reveals that the artist is equally successful in both of these pursuits. Even the parts of the drawings that are explicitly intended to convey information—the notations, the grids illustrating surface form—work to enhance the images’ beauty by revealing both the science and art that underscores the natural world.

TURN THE PAGE FOR A DEMO OF KEGLER'S PROCESS



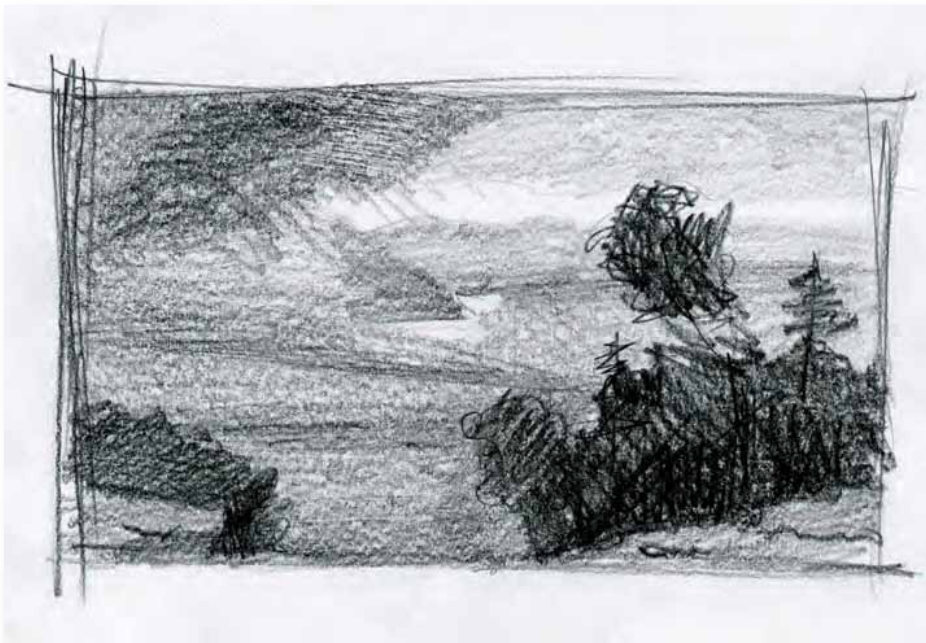
From Thumbnail to Canvas

Kegler first started thinking about the concept for the painting *Thunderstorm—Catskill Park: Psalm 9:9-10* during his first summer in the Hudson River Fellowship. When he returned to the fellowship for a second summer, he went with a list of things he needed to finish the piece—for example, he wanted to find a suitable rock structure to place in the painting's foreground. His preparation for the painting included drawings made specifically for this project, as well as drawings already in his reference library.



Croquis

In these initial rough sketches, Kegler focused on his overall concept and laid in the largest masses.



Esquisse

In this refined version of the croquis, the artist resolved the composition and further established the image's armature and value structure.



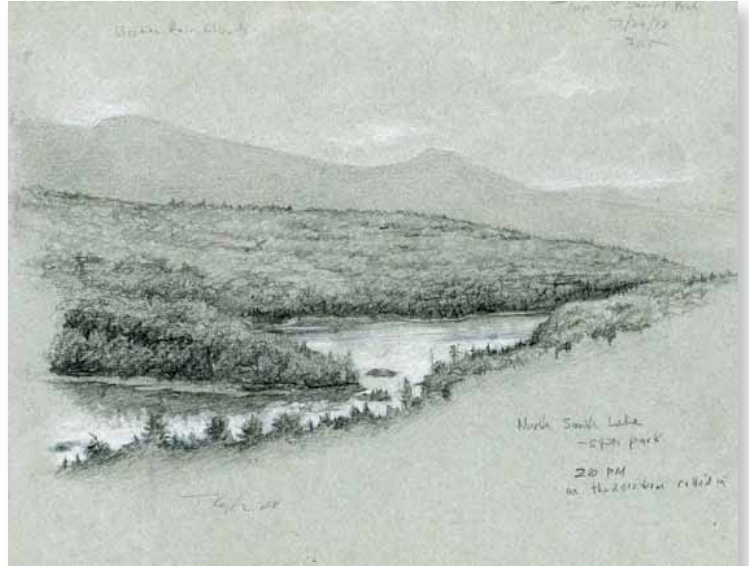
Études—Trees

Kegler referred to previously completed studies of oaks, white pines, and red pines for information about the structure of the trees he planned to incorporate into his painting.



Études—Landscape Elements

Studies of rock formations and larger views of the landscape.



Tonal Grisaille Study

Once the plan for the painting was complete, Kegler painted this grisaille, which includes all the major elements of the composition and sets the image's value structure.

The Finished Painting

**Thunderstorm—Catskill Park:
Psalm 9:9-10**

2009, oil on linen, 24 x 36.
Courtesy Cavalier Galleries,
Greenwich, Connecticut.



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Thomas Kegler hails from western New York, and many of his paintings depict the landscape of his home state. He has participated in the Hudson River Fellowship as both a student and an instructor, and he teaches workshops throughout New York state. Recently, he produced an instructional documentary titled "Painting en Plein Air: Resolving the Landscape," which is available through his website. He is represented by John Pence Gallery, in San Francisco; Beals & Abbate, in Santa Fe; Meibohm Fine Arts, in East Aurora, New York; Oxford Gallery, in Rochester, New York; Beacon Fine Art, in Red Bank, New Jersey; and Cavalier Galleries, in Greenwich, Connecticut. For more information, visit www.thomaskegler.com.