

OIL PAINTING DEMONSTRATION

THOMAS KEGLER

Follow the 19th-Century Tradition of Working From Studies

Like the great Hudson River School painters, Thomas Kegler creates his impressive studio landscapes from an extensive collection of plein air drawings and paintings. His aim is to convey the mood and emotional impact of the landscape by gaining a thorough understanding of nature.

“**F**ine art is that in which the hand, the head, and the heart of man go together.”

That is the quote from John Ruskin that opens a section of Thomas Kegler’s website describing the artist’s painting techniques. Kegler offers the words of the influential 19th-century critic as a way of explaining that his exhaustive studies of rocks, trees, waterfalls, clouds, plants, and atmospheric conditions are intended to increase both the accuracy of his studio paintings and the emotional content of those landscapes. In his view, as in Ruskin’s, art results from a skillfully trained hand, a well-informed mind, and a heart that swells with the beauty and glory of nature.

Kegler makes sure his hand, head, and heart are attuned to the landscape by making a lot of drawings — or *études*, to use the French term — of the outline contours, gridded topography, and tonal subtleties of both the small and expansive elements of a landscape. These might be done as black-and-white drawings in graphite or, more often, tonal drawings made by adding and subtracting charcoal or Conté crayon on a sheet of blue or gray paper. The goal in creating these drawings is to understand as much as possible about plant material, water patterns, angled rocks, species of trees, and seasonal leaf patterns under different lighting and atmospheric conditions.

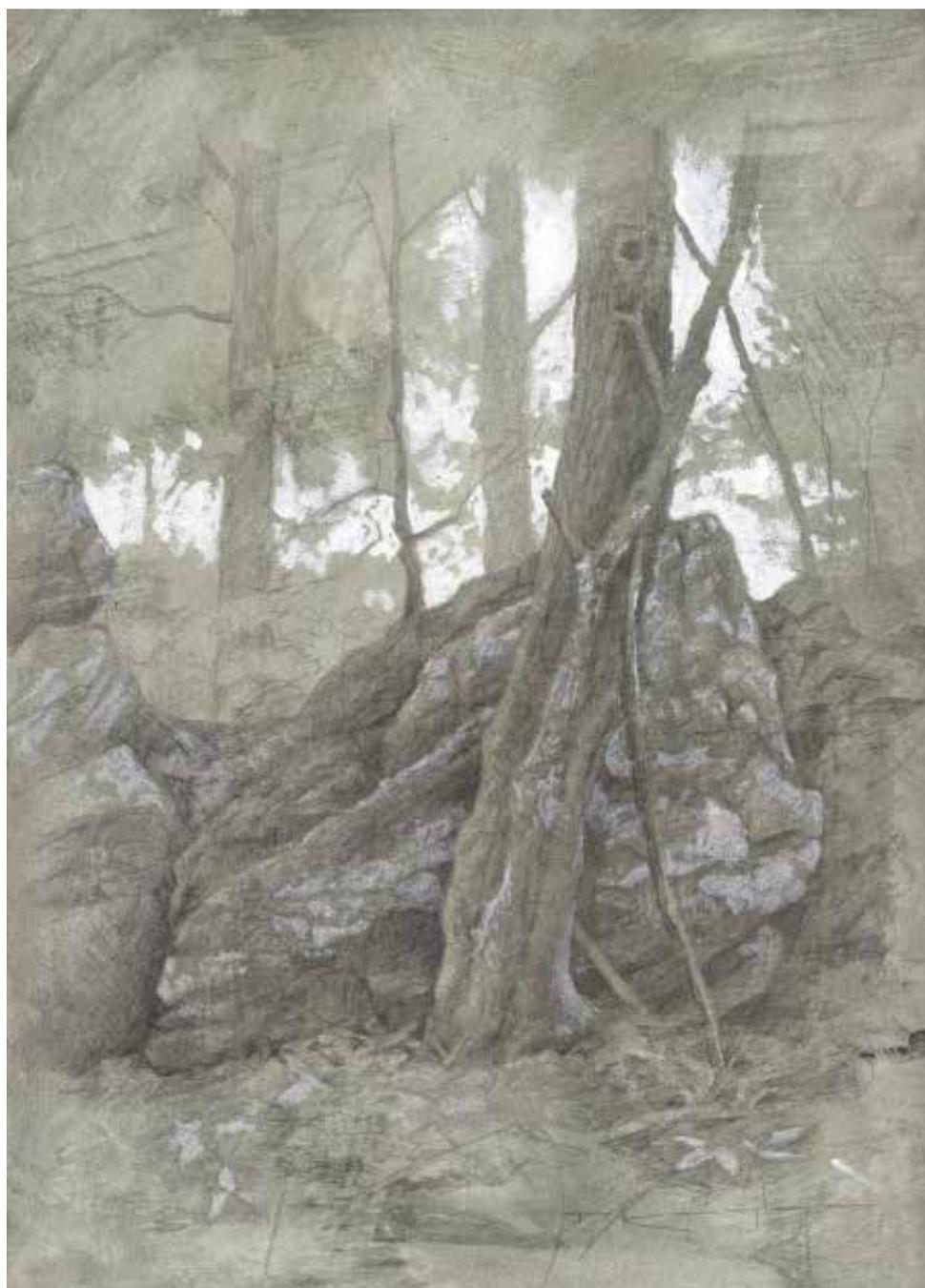
“These sketches might be compositional ideas quickly jotted down, memory aids to something that happened for only a moment,

Maple Grove & Rocks

2010, silverpoint and gouache heightening, 12 x 9 in.

Private collection

Plein air





Falls in Platte's Clove: Jeremiah 17:7

2010, oil, 14 x 11 in.

Private collection

Plein air

notations about the color at a particular time of day, or a grand scheme for a large landscape painting," Kegler explains. "I take those into the studio and refine them, or just refer to them as I explore other compositions. They become part of a library of ideas I can use immediately or go back to years later as I develop studio paintings. The great value in doing a grisaille [a study, usually in gray and white] is that it allows me to think about composition and value without tangling with the complicating issues related to color. And my favorite kind of value study is a monochromatic oil painting called an 'open' grisaille, made by

deductively wiping out the light values from raw-and burnt-umber masses. It is a nice transition into painting from the additive, linear marks in a drawing."

Kegler pursues his studies beyond the initial drawings and grisaille studies with plein air color sketches that are portraits of each of the actors that might appear in the "performance" of a landscape on canvas. Some are small oil studies of the forest lining, while others record the pattern of moving clouds against a sky. Here again, the artist informs his head about the physics of light, the botany of the forest, the

ARTIST DATA

NAME: Thomas Kegler

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Thunderhead Over White Mountains

2012, oil on linen, 12 x 9 in.

Private collection

Plein air

nautical movement of water, and the meteorology of weather patterns so that his heart can guide him in completing a painting.

"The plein air color studies are sometimes done on top of the umber-and-white grisaille studies," Kegler says. "I might start in the field by painting opaque passages of oil color, and then I'll begin to adjust the sketches with glazes of color. Quite often I'll make three or more passes with the oil colors — the first an underlying tone, the second involving more opaque colors, and the third created with glazes of thin color.

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Birch — Kaaterskill Clove
2010, ink and gouache heightening, 12 x 9 in.
Private collection
Plein air





Pasture Rock Study: Hunter Mountain
2008, oil on linen, 11 x 14 in.
Private collection
Plein air

(Below) **Fall Run: Zoar Valley**
2012, oil on linen, 12 x 24 in.
Private collection
Studio



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“I almost always modify the oil colors with fast-drying Liquin alkyd medium or Rublev Oleogel. In the studio, I prefer to work exclusively with two mediums made by Natural Pigments, Rublev Oleogel and Impasto. In the field, any of those mediums will cause the paint to dry quickly enough for me to continue working on the study the next day.”

Kegler observes, “My years of experience in painting outdoors have given me a deeper understanding of the landscape. Within the past few years of endless hours painting outdoors, I’ve expanded my grasp of how to express the sublime in ways that are truthful to the experience. For example, in a recent series of paintings I’ve been able to use my memory and understanding of weather patterns and lighting situations to depict mountains just after a thunderstorm has passed. I can recall what happened to colors when the light returned without having to rely on photographs or sketches done in a moment. My understanding gives

me the freedom to grasp and use those kinds of dramatic moments when developing a studio painting.”

Although Kegler doesn’t give any direct clues to how he draws on feelings in his heart when painting, he does suggest how that happens when he adds biblical references to his paintings’ titles. For example, one painting makes reference to John 10:10: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” Another landscape offers a reference to Genesis 2:1, with “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.” Finally, Kegler adds a reference to Proverbs 23.7 in the title of another painting: “For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.” 

M. STEPHEN DOHERTY is editor of *PleinAir*.

Moon Over Hunter Mountain: Matthew 20:28

2012, oil on linen, 18 x 24 in.

Private collection

Studio

(Opposite) **Birch Trunk**

2010, silverpoint and gouache heightening, 12 x 9 in.

Private collection

Plein air







The Notch — Catskills
2010, oil on linen, 9 x 12 in.
Private collection
Plein air

(Below) **Dusk at Zoar Valley — Psalm 9:9**
2012, oil on linen, 15 x 30 in.
Private collection
Studio



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White Pine at Sunset: Proverbs 16:21

2011, oil on linen, 16 x 20 in.

Private collection

Studio

