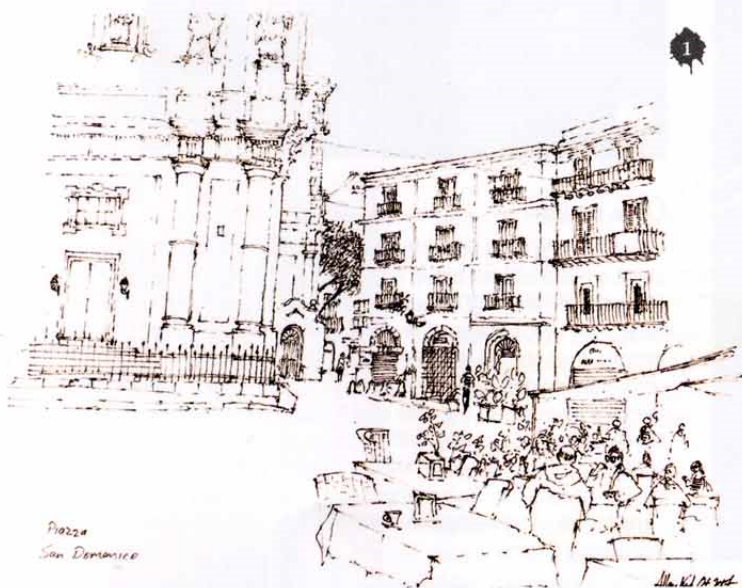


Allan Kirk

PLEIN AIR SKETCHING

# Six days in SICILY

With Spring on the horizon, we hope that Allan Kirk's travels in Sicily will encourage you to pack your art kit and head out in search of inspiration



Piazza San Domenico

1



Piazza San Domenico

2

Sketching in the open air is one of my favourite pastimes, especially when I am on holiday. A few small sketchbooks, pens, watercolours, and brushes are my essentials for stopping whenever a scene inspires me. An hour or two later, I pack up and move on to the next opportunity

When sketching, I'm not aiming for photographic accuracy but to capture the mood and atmosphere. My judgement of a sketch is not how perfectly it looks like the place, but rather how well it represents the story that first caught my eye. I normally draw with pen, add watercolour and then maybe a little more pen.

I start my sketches at the focal point and work outwards. This inside out approach, helps me balance the composition and develop a sense of including only what is important in my sketch. I try to keep details indistinct, and don't draw too much – just suggesting, rather than being explicit about such objects as houses, windows and people.

The best advice I can give to anyone sketching is to: work quickly, don't be careful, keep the pen moving, don't think, stay in the moment and do not worry about mistakes!

**Palermo** is a city of contrasts, modern and ancient, smart and run down, all mingled together. For the sketch above, I sat at a

café in the piazza, looking at the old San Domenico church. The waiters took great interest using their phones to photograph my progress. On a sketch like this at least 70% of the time is spent drawing with the pen. It took less than two hours to complete - what a wonderful way to spend the time (Figs 1 & 2).

We were keen to sample the street food that we had seen on Rick Stein's recent 'Long Weekend' BBC programme in Sicily, so visited Palermo's **Vucciria Market** at night. It was wonderful, but too busy to sketch so I worked from a photograph when we returned to our hotel. I work hard to get my people to look natural and animated and I have found that being too careful and precise makes them look stiff and still. In a night-time sketch, the dark can be your friend and let you create a wonderfully indistinct group of people. It also best captures the mood of the busy night-market (Figs 3 & 4).



Every for Food Palermo at night

Allan Kirk November 2014



Every for Food Palermo at night





The next day I sat in the sun on a concrete block in the **Piazza Ruggeri** for my sketch of the Politeama Garibaldi theatre and completed this sketch using a Pigma Micron black waterproof pen for the drawing. I then added shading using an Elegant Writer calligraphy pen which I washed down, bleeding out the ink with my Pentel Aquash Water Brush.

It took me around two hours. It was sunny, busier than it looks and a really enjoyable place to sketch. Like all my sketches I start the drawing on the inside, in this case with the large arched window. I find that if I start drawing at the focal point I can work outwards, focus on what I want in my sketch and avoid going to the extreme edges of the paper with details that add nothing. It also means that if my work is curtailed for any reason, perhaps rain, I can stop sketching and still have a sketch that doesn't look unfinished. I don't worry, or even think about perspective or vanishing points, instead, I just begin drawing and try to draw what I see as I move around the paper (Fig 5).

### My sketching essentials:

- Bockingford NOT spiral watercolour pad
- Pigma Micron black drawing pens (one really fine and one a little thicker)
- Elegant Writer medium tip black calligraphy pen
- Pentel Aquash Water Brush – medium tip
- White Nights Artists' watercolour plein air set
- SAA travel brush set
- Water bottle
- Rucksack
- Tissues

Allan 2017 Oct 2017

In Cefalu in October the sunbathers were out in number on the beach. There were more people than I have drawn in the sketch below. I sat on the steps leading to the beach and managed to find a little shade, starting my sketch with the house at the top of the steps and working outwards. It was getting hot and I applied the watercolour as fast as I could to beat the drying process (Fig 7).



We took the train to **Cefalu**, a typical and beautiful Sicilian seaside town, and spent four days exploring and sketching.

We discovered a seaside café looking back towards the town where I spent a couple of hours sketching in comfort with help from a cappuccino, which I managed not to dip my brush into. The light on the sea was beautiful with just a suggestion of clouds massing in the distance. I first applied a wash across the whole of the sea. To get the light on the water near the horizon, I dried my brush between my fingers and ran it across the wet blue paint of the sea, lifting out in places (Fig 6).



Allan and his wife, Lesley, established Tarnincolour Painting Holidays in 2007, where they organise week-long watercolour sketching and painting holidays in SW France. For more details of these, other workshops and holidays, and examples of Allan's paintings, visit [www.tarnincolour.com](http://www.tarnincolour.com)

### Artist Workshop Days

Join Allan for some expert advice on sketching in Pen & Wash, when he visits SAA HQ on 12th June. For further details and to book visit [www.saa.co.uk/workshop](http://www.saa.co.uk/workshop)

