

# Contents

Acknowledgments	viii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: A Spark of Curiosity	3
Chapter 2: The Nature of Drawing Birds	9
Chapter 3: Ancient Partnerships	87
Chapter 4: Mammals: Miniscule to Massive	121
Chapter 5: Educational Animals	143
Chapter 6: From Spark to Finish	169
Chapter 7: Interpreting Nature's Connections	217
Recommended Reading for Creative Inspiration	264

## "The Full Monte": Work in Progress

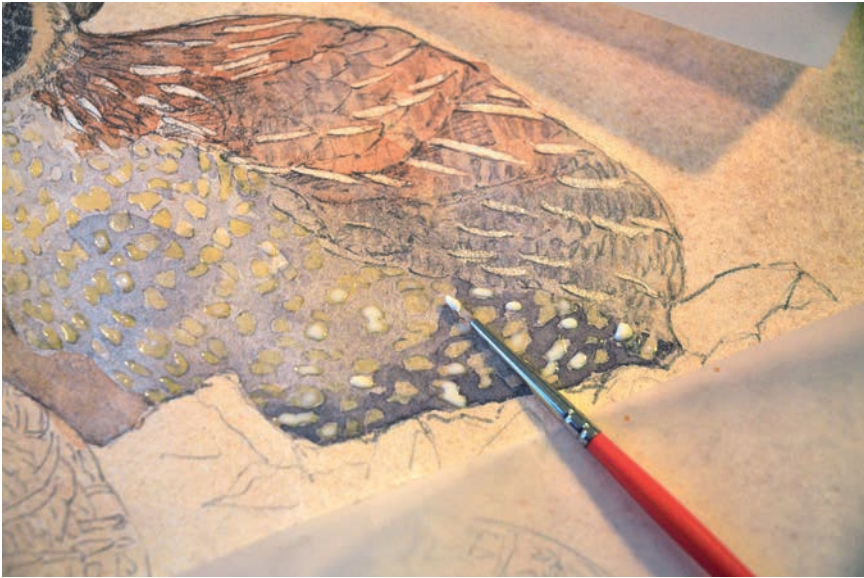
Ink or graphite with white highlights brings an earthy, organic feel to sketches on toned paper. To maintain that style, I considered staining watercolor paper with tea or coffee. Not knowing if this was archival, the use of a burnt umber wash with variations of salt and paint spatter appealed as an easy solution. I painted several sheets and selected one for this painting, saving the others for future use.



A half-sheet of Fabriano Artistico watercolor paper was thoroughly soaked with plain water. A 2-inch brush was used to float watery pigment onto wet paper and tilted so the paint would run. Small white bowls are handy for mixing large amounts of various colors that will softly mingle on moist paper. Smaller brushes, 1 inch flat and #8 round, were used to spatter.

15 x 22 in (38.1 x 55.88 cm), 140 lb (300 gsm) cold press Fabriano Artistico paper.





Masking fluid applied to the feather pattern preserves areas that should remain the lightest. A size 3x0 synthetic brush gives precise control for the individual shapes of spots and dashes. A small air-tight container is convenient for frequent dipping. It allows the larger container it came in to stay fresh. Once the latex meets air, it immediately dries. Keep a cup of soapy water handy to frequently clean the brush, as it easily clogs.



I applied the masking fluid to one bird at a time, covering the rest with protective tracing paper. After the fluid dried thoroughly, darker washes allowed enough contrast to remove the masked areas. The latex did not remain on the paper for more than twenty-four hours and was removed with a rubber cement pick-up eraser. To reclaim the white on the face, I gently lifted the background pigment off with a thirsty brush.



Dark chocolate seems to appear in several of my work-in-progress photos, so it must be an essential part of my process.

# "The Full Monte"

A striking denizen of open, grassy woodlands in the mountains of southeastern Arizona, the Montezuma Quail is extremely secretive and expertly camouflaged. Three pairs came to the studio water drip saucer. The male wears the harlequin pattern, and I could not distinguish the individuals. However, I could tell the females apart by subtle differences in their coloration: a paler face, broader and brighter eyebrow line, or darker cheek patch. The bird was once known as "Fool's Quail," for its habit of crouching when alarmed. The male shown here exhibits its ability to crouch and freeze while following the circling movement of a potential predator until viewed fully from the front.

Montezuma Quail (*Cyrtonyx montezumae*) and  
Ground Spider (Gnaphosidae)

*The Full Monte*, 13 × 18.5 in (33.02 × 46.99 cm),  
graphite and transparent watercolor, Sonoran  
Experience Collection, courtesy of the Arizona-Sonora  
Desert Museum Art Institute.





## "Ladies First"

The courting call of the Montezuma Quail is as elusive as the bird itself. Descending whistles emanate from within grassy woodlands, announcing that spring has come to the mountain foothills. It's not easy to catch a glimpse of them. The intricate markings of both sexes provide exquisite camouflage, creating the male's harlequin pattern and the female's delicate cloak of buff and umber. They do not readily flush when disturbed but quickly slip away into the cover or crouch immobile until the danger has passed. At dawn, the male stands sentry as his lady sips from a pool.

Montezuma Quail (*Cyrtonyx montezumae*) and  
Harvester Ant (*Pogonomyrmex maricopa*)

*Ladies First*, 14.5 × 21 in (36.83 × 53.34 cm), transparent watercolor,  
Sonoran Experience Collection, courtesy of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum  
Art Institute.





# "Manzanita Afternoon—Gambel's Quail": Work in Progress

The Gambel's Quail is the most common quail to visit our wooded yard. A compact ground-dwelling bird, it sports a forward-facing feathered topknot that nods when it parades upright on its short legs. Strong feet scratch the soil to uncover seeds and berries.

Famous for bolting into the air when predators approach too closely, the bird's startle factor gets my heart pumping! Their rounded wings provide a rocket-like take-off, but they do not fly far.





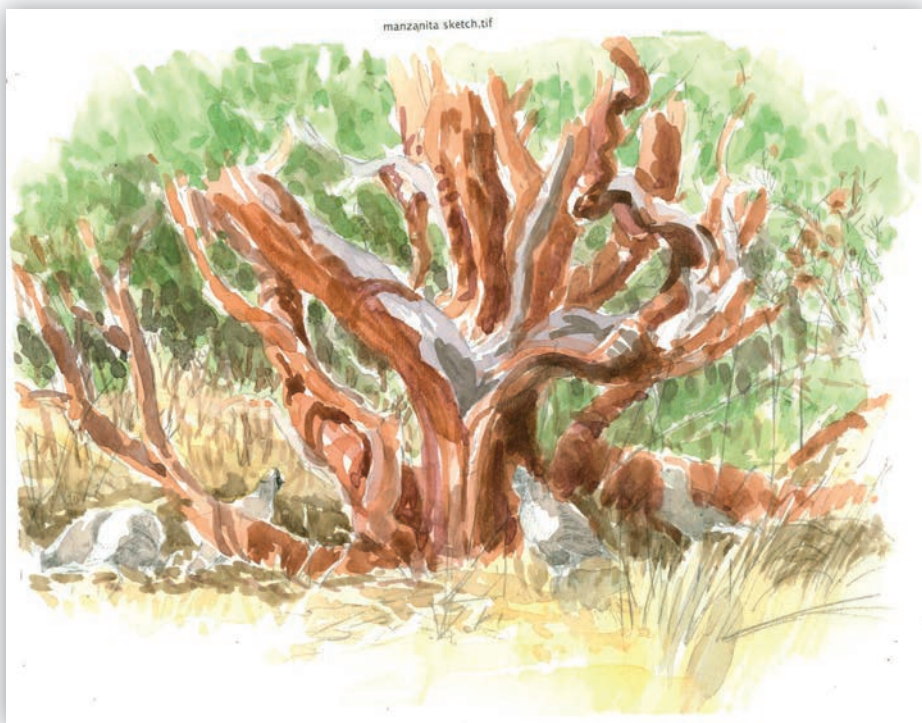
Gregarious coveys scurry through the grasses, pausing to feed and rest beneath the leafy manzanita bushes. Pointleaf Manzanitas are among my favorite shrubs with their maroon and gray bark. Lithe and supple, the smooth limbs are a richly colored accent to the green leaves and red berries.

This manzanita grows between the studio and house where the quail often gather. Four o'clock in the afternoon was perfect for the light and shadows to lead the eye through the painting.

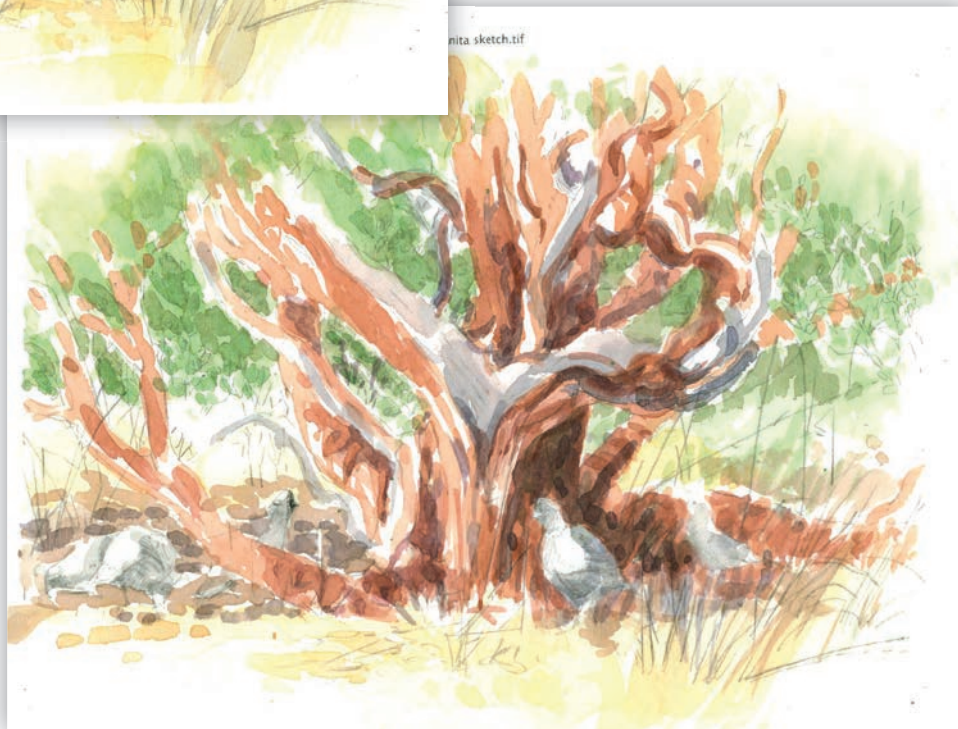


sketches with morning light and shadows

Pointleaf Manzanita  
(*Arctostaphylos pungens*)



The final composition is scanned and printed onto student-grade, lightweight watercolor paper. This is a quick way to create preparatory color studies without drawing them multiple times. It simply saves time, especially when outside with rapidly changing light. These color studies allow me to experiment with color mixing within the actual design. They also allow me to determine humidity and how juicy the washes should be for the desired watercolor technique.



8 x 10 in (20.32 x 25.40 cm), Strathmore #400 watercolor paper.

## "Manzanita Afternoon—Gambel's Quail"

A flock of Gambel's Quail rushes across the open grass to gather in the shade of this old Pointleaf Manzanita that grows between the house and studio. The smooth, curved limbs with their curious stripes of gray and maroon make this a striking subject to paint in watercolor. The sun-dappled and spontaneous nature of the quail moving beneath their shelter sparked the story. While they peck and scratch, a Tarantula Hawk wasp also searches among the plant duff. The quail soon leave this camouflage and scurry across the grass toward other safe covers.

Pointleaf Manzanita (*Arctostaphylos pungens*),  
Gambel's Quail (*Callipepla gambelii*), and  
Tarantula Hawk (*Hemipepsis* sp.)

*Manzanita Afternoon—Gambel's Quail*,  
22 × 30 in (55.88 × 76.20 cm), transparent  
watercolor.

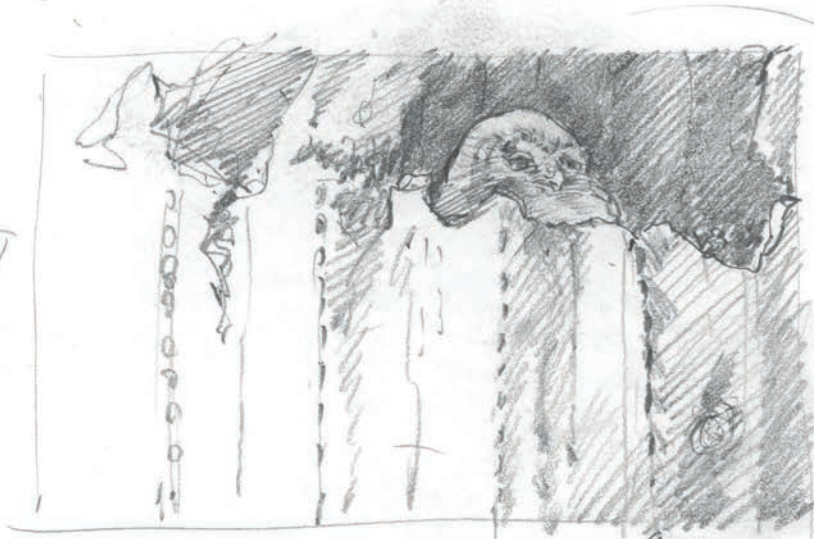




# "Saguaro Sentinel": At First Glance

On a late evening walk in the Sonoran Desert, I came upon a desiccated Saguaro cactus, a perfect subject for a painting. All it needed was a tiny roosting owl and a camouflaged insect. Imagine the owl's sleepy eyes awakening from a daytime rest and waiting for night to begin its hunt for moths.

low angle  
↓



AZDM  
late evening

SIZE ok

MOTH ? sp ?  
size

RIDGE TO RIDGE  
|-----|

The ridges on the surface, curving into the distance, reminded me of a mountain range seen from an airplane.



Elf owl 3.5.14

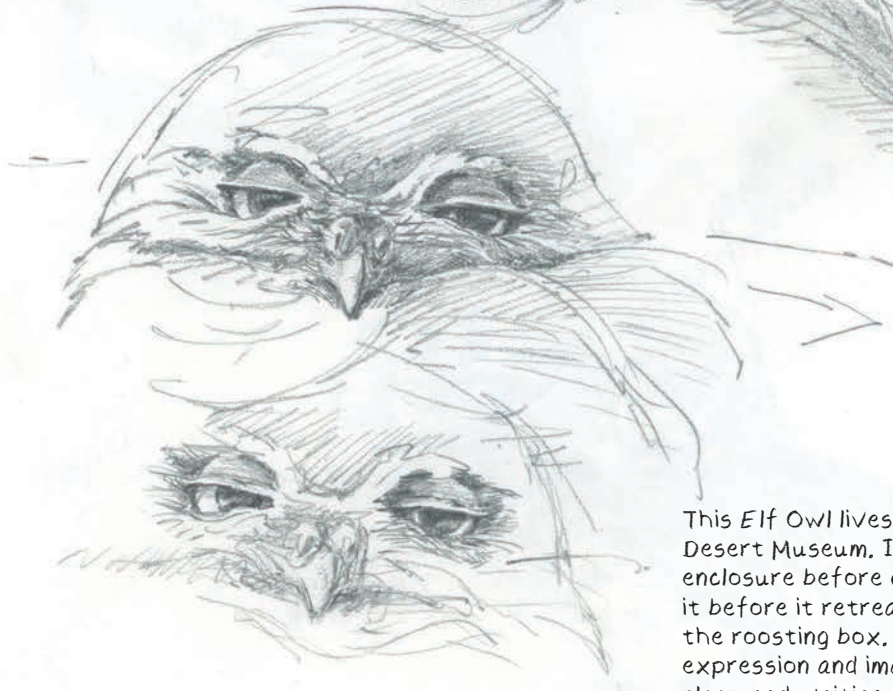


Elf Owl  
(*Microathene whitneyi*)



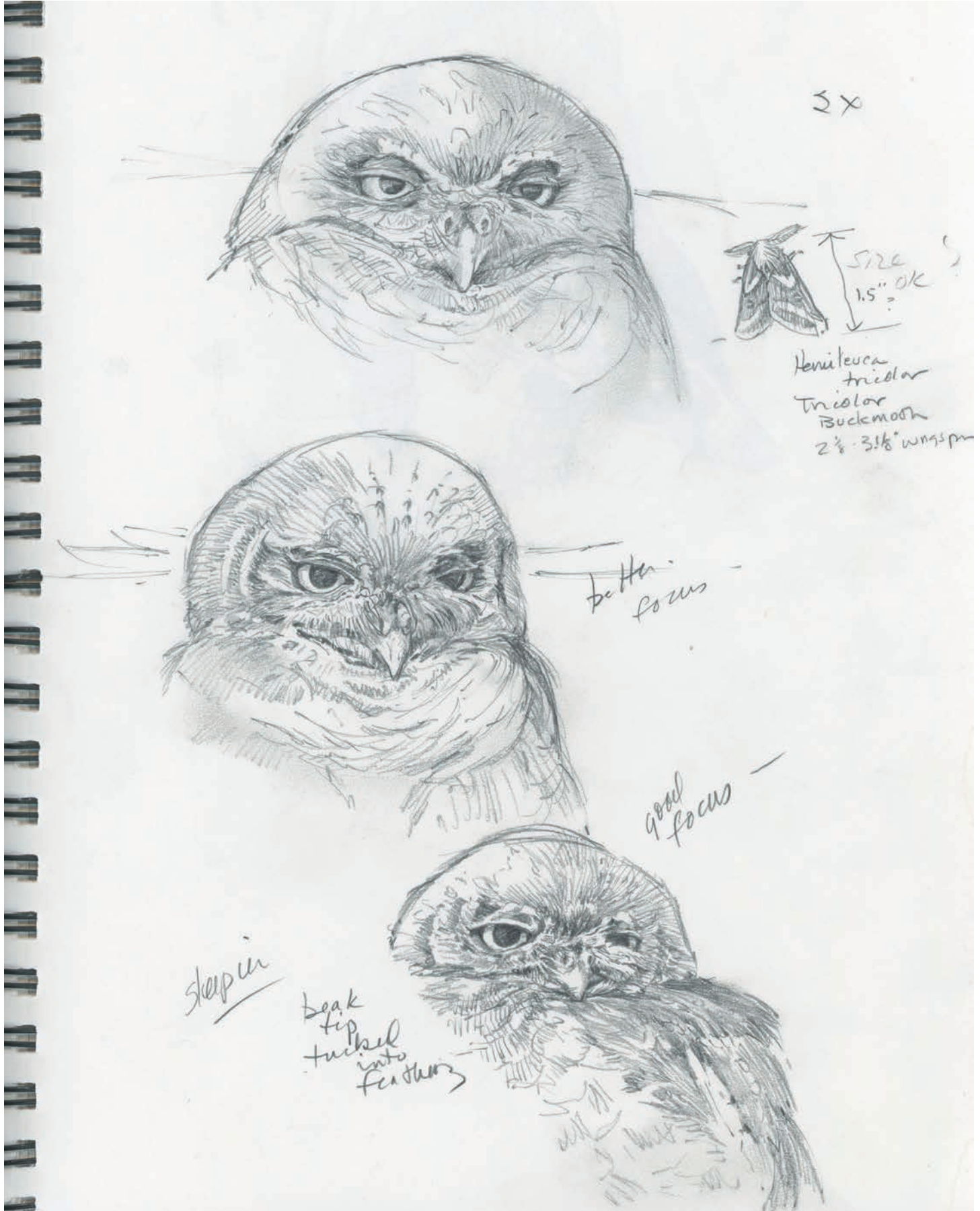
2x ?

White  
Scapular



This Elf Owl lives at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. I dashed to the habitat enclosure before class, trying to sketch it before it retreated from daylight into the roosting box. I loved the drowsy expression and imagined it awakening from sleep and waiting for the dark.

# "Saguaro Sentinel": Work in Progress



Preliminary color test, 9 x 12 in (22.86 x 30.48 cm), on 140 lb (300 gsm) cold press Fabriano Artistic paper.

Mixing colors in a traditional wet-in-wet technique with large-grain salt for organic effects.



The day after the color test, I began the full-sized painting. But the humidity was drier, the pigment and salt acted differently. Liquid masking fluid protected the bird and the highlighted edge from paint. The first and second washes were applied, letting the paper dry thoroughly between washes. I wasn't happy with the first sheet and painted a second to achieve the desired texture. The lighter version was preferred and used to paint the finished piece.



First washes, 19 x 13 in (48.26 x 33.02 cm), on 300 lb (640 gsm) cold press Fabriano Artistic paper.

# "Saguaro Sentinel"

In a protected roost well above the desert floor, a diminutive Elf Owl waits for the evening to begin its nighttime hunt. Soft feathers mute the sound of the owl's flight as it pursues moths, beetles, and scorpions. By day the desert may seem devoid of life, but after dark, the evening concert begins with chuckling owls, buzzing insects, and barking mammals. Crevices and cracks in old saguaros provide quiet places for desert dwellers to hide from their predators and the day's heat as they wait to emerge in the cool of the evening.





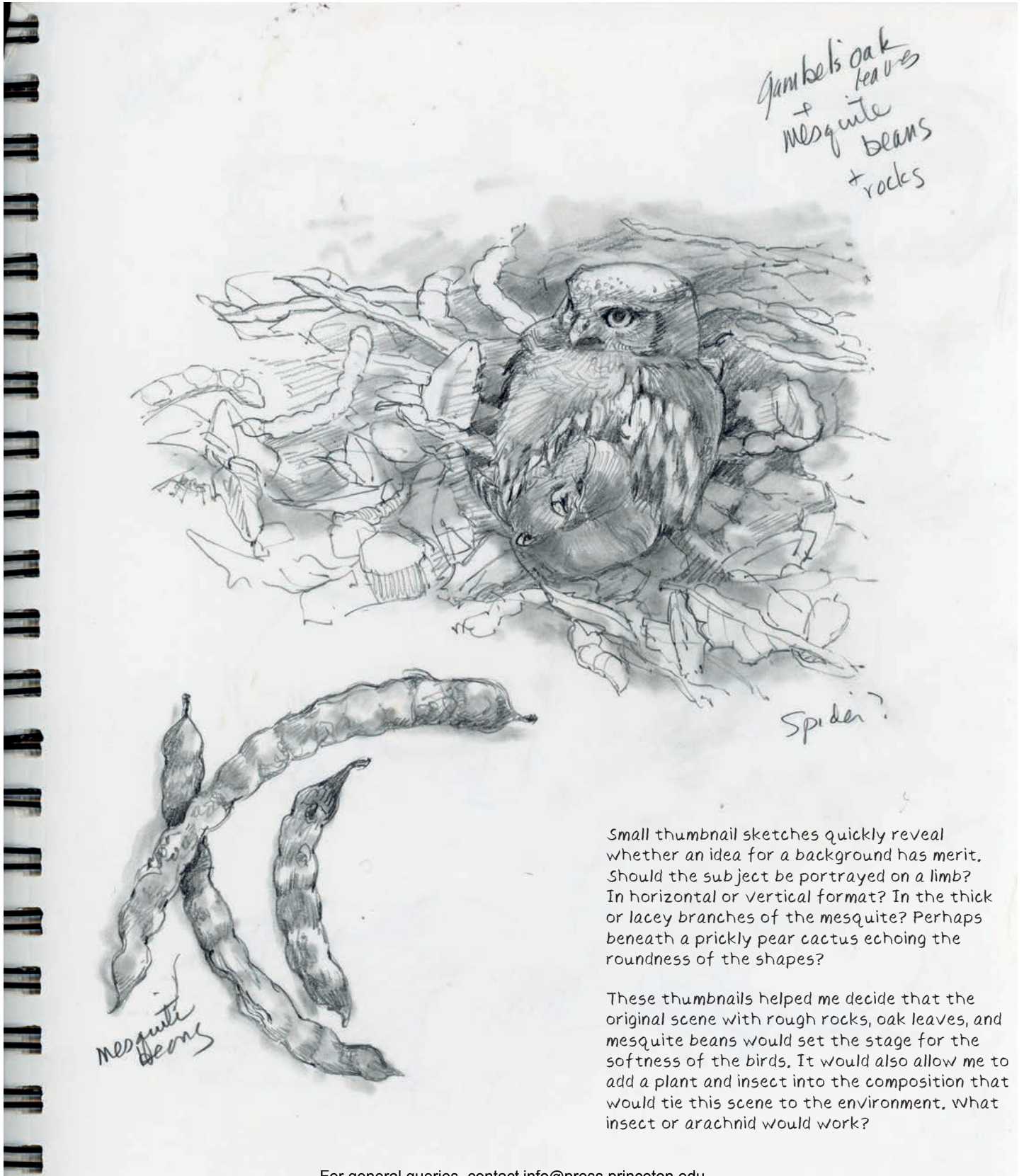


Elf Owl (*Micrathene whitneyi*) and Tricolor Buckmoth (*Hemileuca tricolor*), Saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*)

*Saguaro Sentinel*, 13 × 19 in (33.02 × 48.26 cm), transparent watercolor, Sonoran Experience Collection, courtesy of the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum Art Institute.

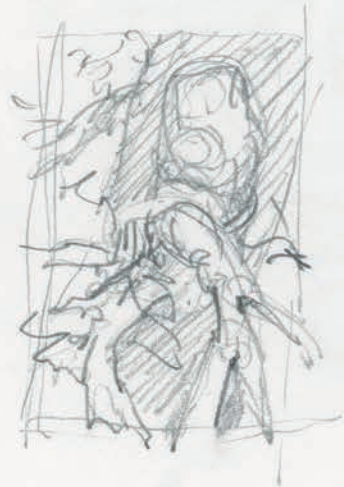
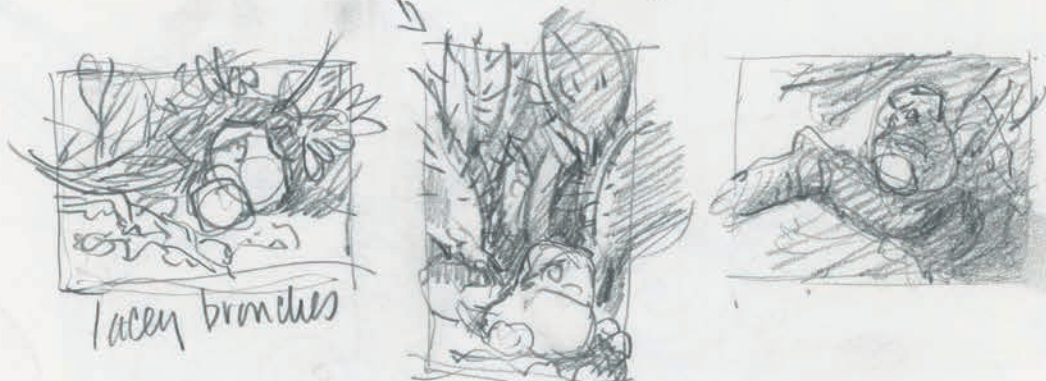
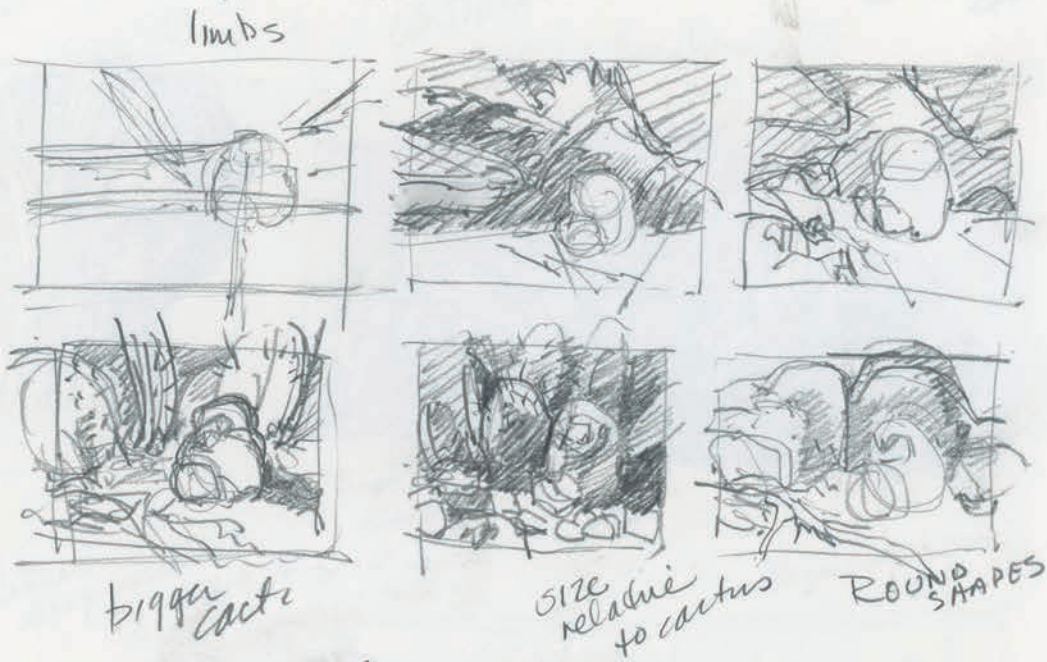
# "Pygmy Huntress": Work in Progress

A sideways glance out the window revealed an unusual lump in the gravel pathway. A soft, tan-colored Northern Pygmy-Owl had captured a House Sparrow and landed on the ground, an unusual occurrence for a secretive bird during the day—and a perfect study for a painting.



Small thumbnail sketches quickly reveal whether an idea for a background has merit. Should the subject be portrayed on a limb? In horizontal or vertical format? In the thick or lacy branches of the mesquite? Perhaps beneath a prickly pear cactus echoing the roundness of the shapes?

These thumbnails helped me decide that the original scene with rough rocks, oak leaves, and mesquite beans would set the stage for the softness of the birds. It would also allow me to add a plant and insect into the composition that would tie this scene to the environment. What insect or arachnid would work?



# "Pygmy Huntress"

The Northern Pygmy-Owl is not much larger than a House Sparrow. It is capable of capturing prey up to and including its own size. Populations in western North America frequently hunt during the day. Their repetitive tooting call heard in the mountains and canyons of the West may attract small birds like warblers, wrens, and chickadees who will mob around the owl and scold furiously while keeping an eye on the skilled huntress.

Northern Pygmy-Owl (*Glaucidium californicum*),  
House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), and Harvester Ant  
(*Pogonomyrmex* sp.)

*Pygmy Huntress*, 9 × 12.5 in (22.86 × 31.75 cm),  
transparent watercolor on handmade Twinrocker paper.



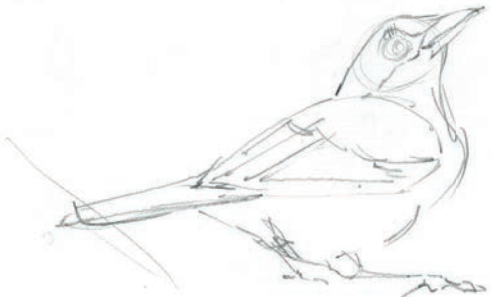


# A Passion for Corvids

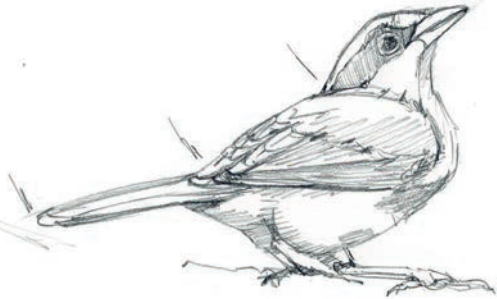


Corvids are members of a family of birds (Corvidae) that includes jays, ravens, crows, magpies, nutcrackers, and around 125 more species around the globe. They can be elegantly flashy with vivid blues and greens or cloaked in soft gray tones or shiny, iridescent blacks. Highly intelligent and social, they have inspired stories and myths throughout human history.

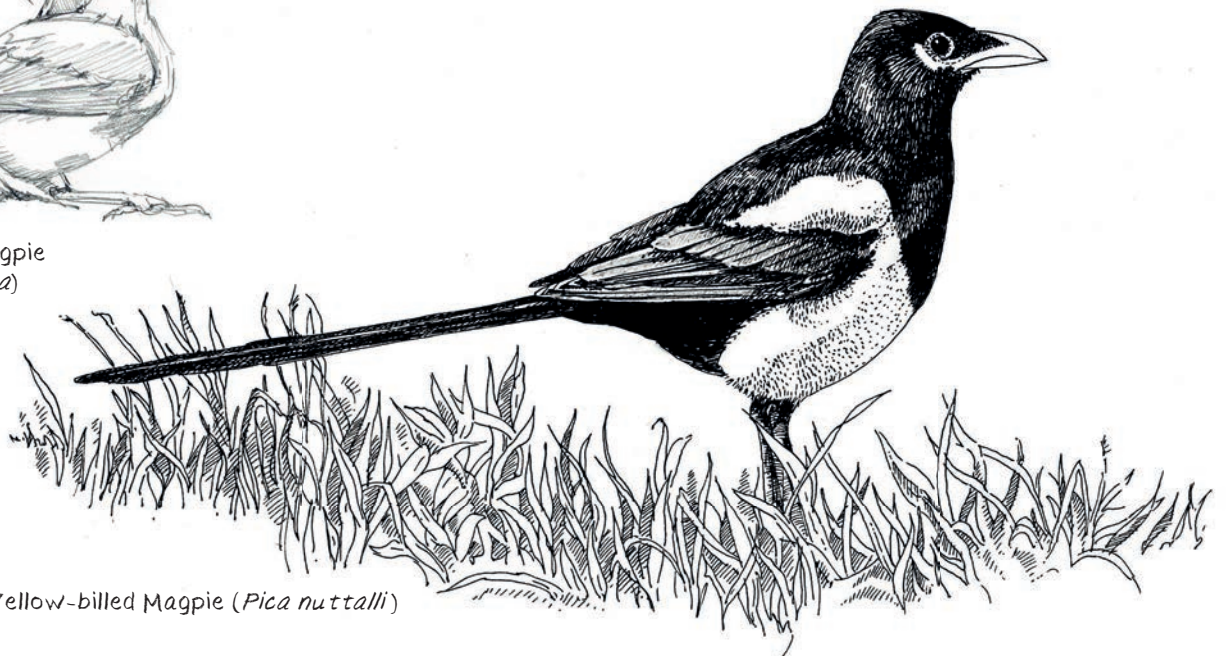
Their exceptional group behavior and reasoning have generated many studies demonstrating how remarkable they are.



young Mexican Jay  
(*Aphelocoma wollweberi*)



Javan Green Magpie  
(*Cissa thalassina*)



Yellow-billed Magpie (*Pica nuttalli*)



Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)



Chihuahuan Raven (*Corvus cryptoleucus*) study, 10 × 8 in (25.4 × 20.32 cm), black watercolor on Aquabond.



Black-billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonia*)



Black-billed Magpie (*Pica hudsonia*)

Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*)



Raven courtship tumble sketches

# "A Mischief of Jays": Inspiration and Development

The Mexican Jay is one of the few species that stay together in family groups. We watch the family dynamics from year to year in the yard. The one-year-old young stay around to help collect nesting material and food for the next generation of chicks. The fledged babies spend the following year watching their family group members. Critical life skills include learning when an acorn is ripe as well as which insect to eat and which ones squirt a foul defensive spray.



The final composition emphasizes the flow of a story. The eye moves through the group, ending up with a yearling bird contemplating an insect.

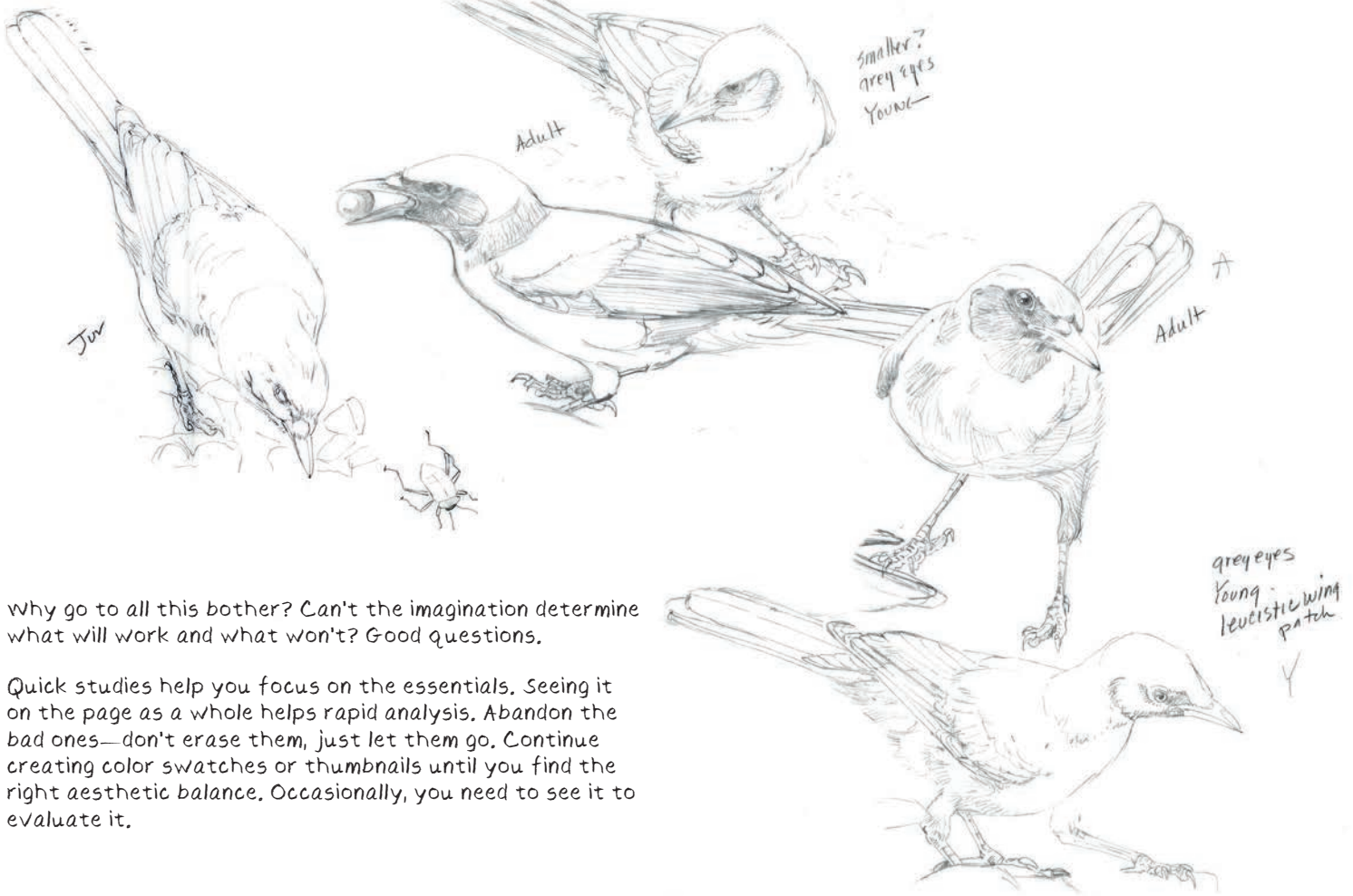


For the initial sketch while observing jays out the window (above), the intent was an abstract composition using several birds. I was not paying attention to individual size or fine-tuning anatomical details. The sketch was inspirational.

Once there were enough poses to work with, I scanned the page. Clipped and placed into a graphics program with layers, individual birds were repositioned, enlarged, or reduced to create an aesthetic flow. Particular attention was given to negative spaces where feet or heads did not rest awkwardly against the next shape.



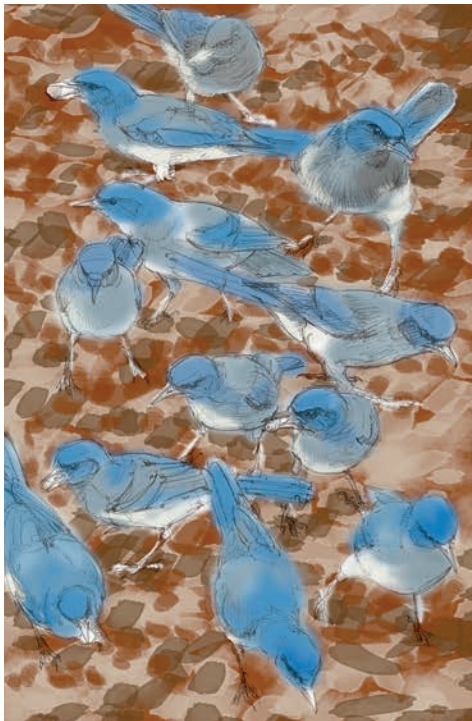




Why go to all this bother? Can't the imagination determine what will work and what won't? Good questions.

Quick studies help you focus on the essentials. Seeing it on the page as a whole helps rapid analysis. Abandon the bad ones—don't erase them, just let them go. Continue creating color swatches or thumbnails until you find the right aesthetic balance. Occasionally, you need to see it to evaluate it.

Painting on layers in a graphics program provides a quick way to experiment with background colors.



(a) Burnt sienna complements cerulean. At first try, it was obvious that the brown background entirely destroyed the abstract compositional flow.



(b) A lighter brown with darker areas in the center was also rejected.



(c) Hiding the brown layers revealed that the strongest background was the most subtle gray.

## "A Mischief of Jays"

Coursing through the oaks with rowdy cries and whooshing wings, Mexican Jays are a resident family group. They form a social group of family members whose nonbreeding juveniles from previous years act as helpers in raising a new brood. The youngest has a pale pink bill with a dark tip. Yearlings develop bills that are half black with a pink base, and as an adult, the bill becomes entirely black. These vocal, curious, and intelligent corvids are both lively and captivating. Gawky young intently watch the older birds and learn the ways of their intricate world. Can you follow their story?

Mexican Jay (*Aphelocoma wollweberi*), Arizona Darkling (*Eleodes obscura*), and Emory Oak (*Quercus emoryi*)

*A Mischief of Jays*, 14 × 21.5 in (35.56 × 54.61 cm), pastel. Society of Animal Artists' "Ethology Award for the Best Depiction of Natural Behavior in Any Medium" and Western Art Collector Magazine "Editor's Choice Award."

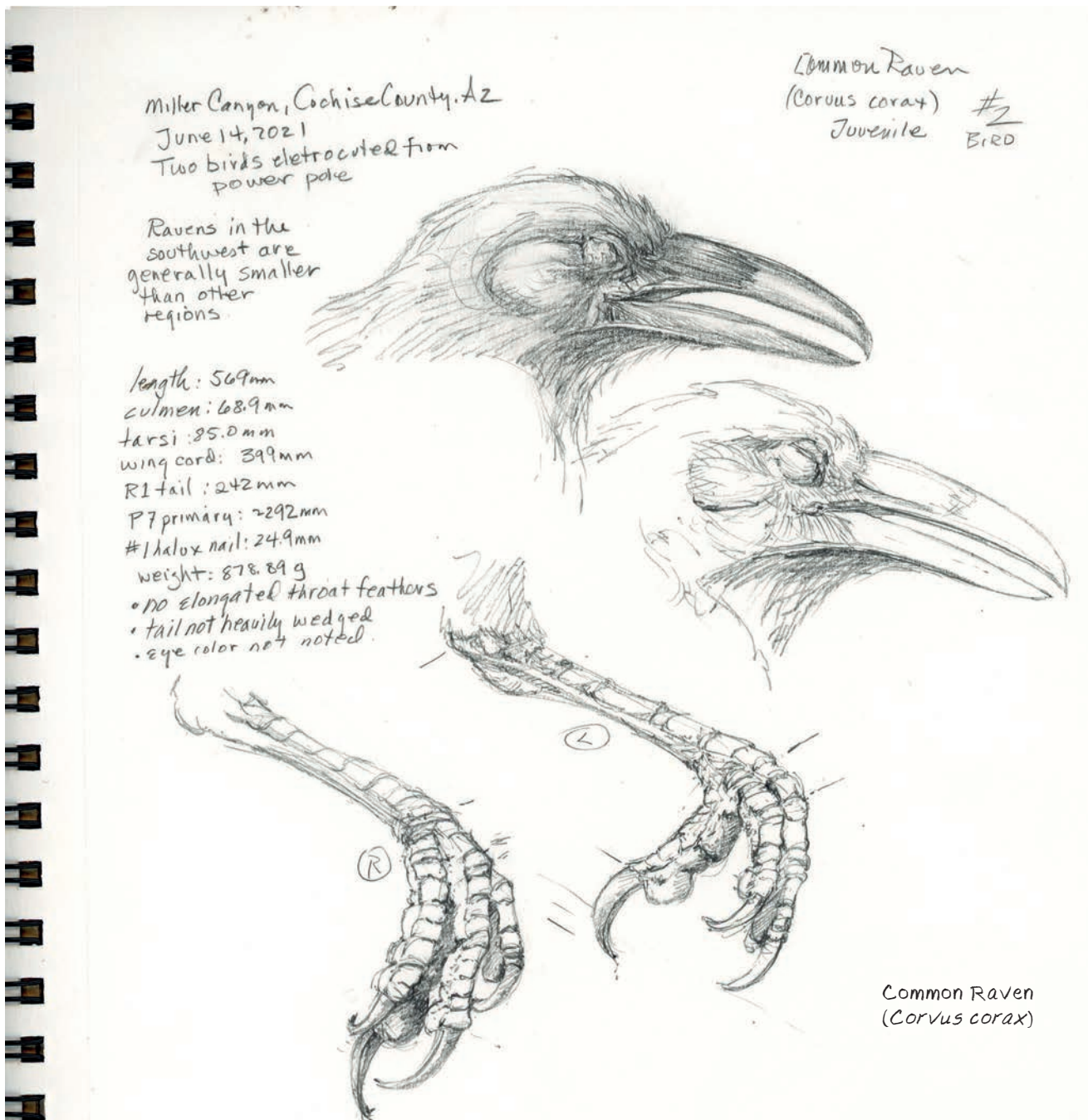




# Celebrating Ravens

Four young ravens fledged in the canyon, displaying their exuberant enjoyment of life with swooping, calling in baby voices, and cavorting as ravens do. Sadly, a power pole claimed two of their lives. Reverently bringing them into the studio, I gathered the courage to draw them with objectivity and honor.

I had not examined a raven this close, even in a museum. The first sketches were for measurements and observation, followed by color notes and reminders for the future. The birds are now part of a museum collection, where they can inspire and inform others.



Common Raven (*Corvus corax*)

BIRD #1

Bill coloration



overall gray  
patches of light ivory w/ pink tinge at base

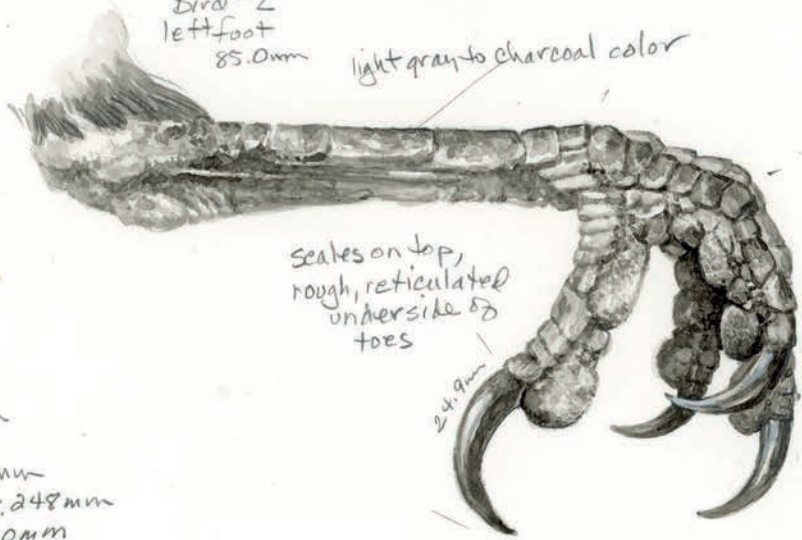
pinkish skin

Bird #2



overall gray to dark gray  
more like an adult  
pink skin

Bird #2  
left foot  
85.0mm



light gray to charcoal color

scales on top,  
rough, reticulated  
underside of  
toes

24.9mm

Bird #1 -  
length: 617mm  
culmen: 73.8mm  
tarsi: 87.6mm  
wingcord: 398mm  
R1 tailfeather: 248mm  
P7 Primary: 310mm  
#1 hallux nail: 22.6mm  
weight = 903.86g

LINDA M. FECTNER

# Celebrating Ravens, Continued

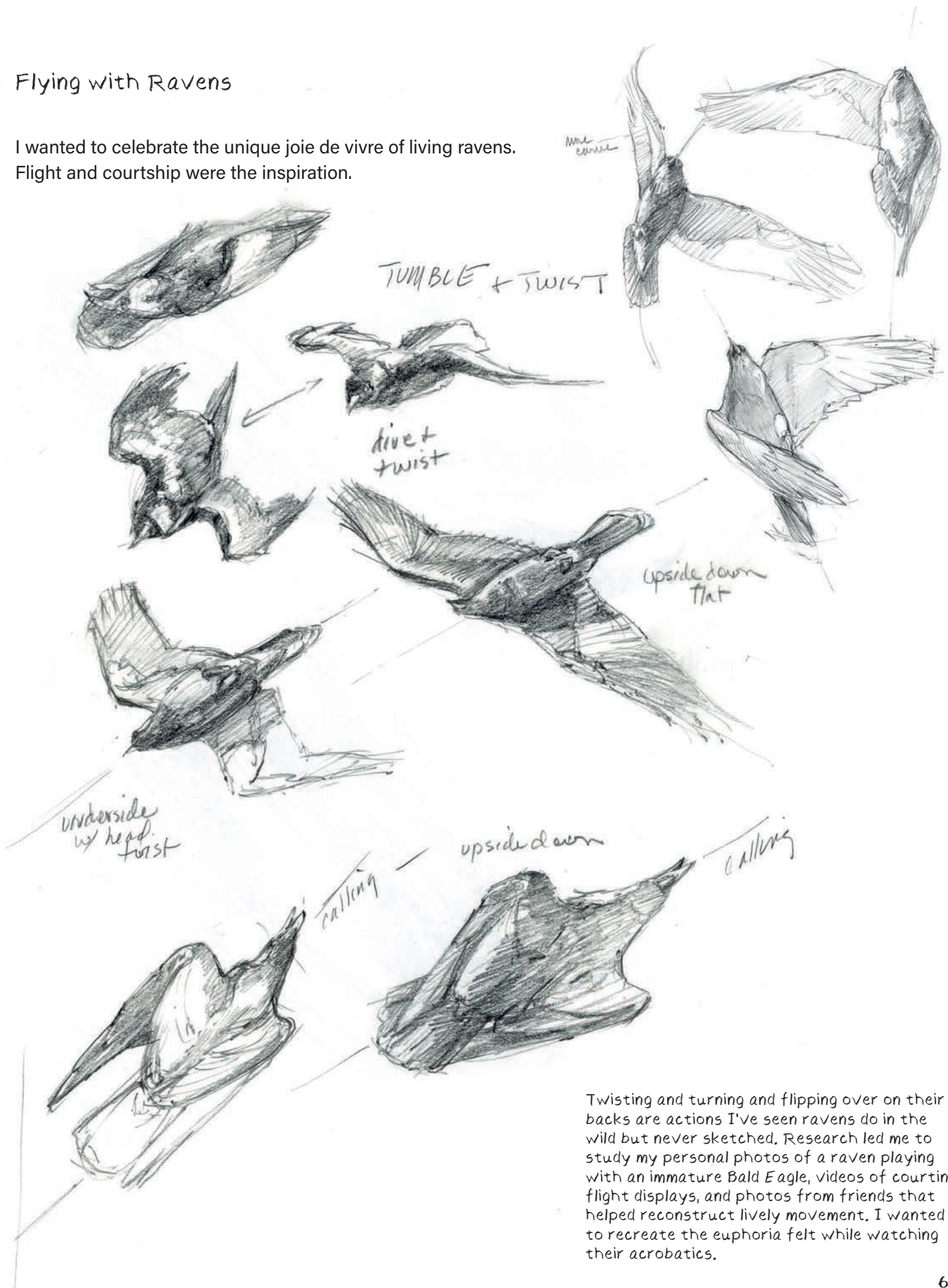
Although the color of the raven appears shiny black, a closer inspection reveals a color sheen on specific feather groups. In outdoor light, at a certain angle, the feathers reflect cerulean blue, a purplish ultramarine, or olive-green among the black. The opening study is not a painting of local color but is a color map noting parts of the bird that reflect a particular color.

the color map



## Flying with Ravens

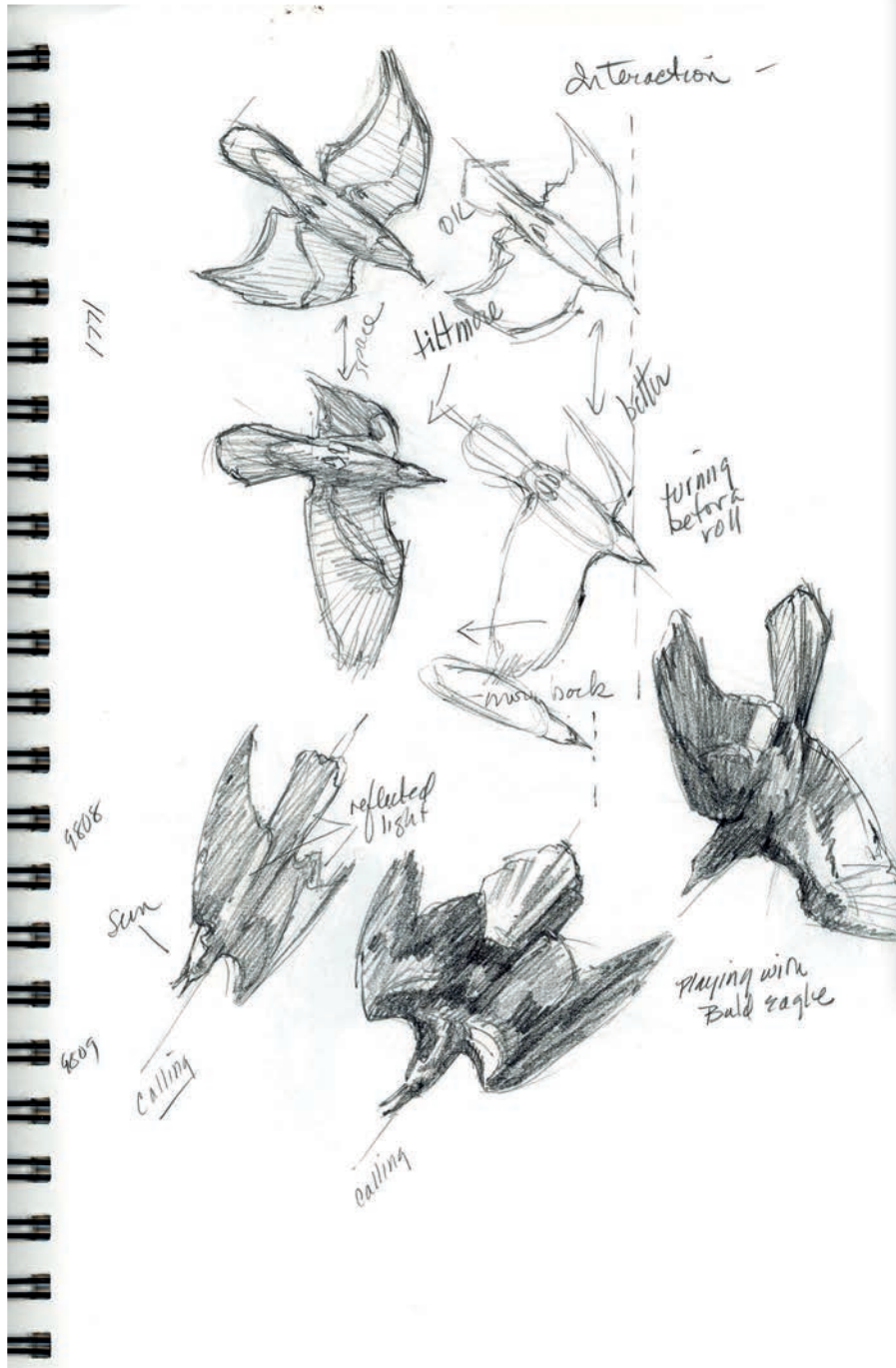
I wanted to celebrate the unique joie de vivre of living ravens. Flight and courtship were the inspiration.



Twisting and turning and flipping over on their backs are actions I've seen ravens do in the wild but never sketched. Research led me to study my personal photos of a raven playing with an immature Bald Eagle, videos of courting flight displays, and photos from friends that helped reconstruct lively movement. I wanted to recreate the euphoria felt while watching their acrobatics.

# Flight Composure

Courting ravens synchronize their movements in a display that coordinates gliding, spilling, rolling, and tumbling. The measured distances between the aerial dancers make their movements appear choreographed.



Raven Play—Study,  
5 × 9 in (12.7 × 22.86 cm),  
transparent watercolor.

One will often call while flipped over on its back.