Abbozzo

A swirl of sap green and yellow ochre is smeared across her palette, the oils mixing to form the transient hues of a breeze across the meadow. She picks up her palette knife to mix that subtle hint of lavender that permeates the cerulean-colored sky, and with an old rag dabs the new color in a smear that completes the heavens of earth. This is her painting. But her sketchbook is open as well. Rough lines of charcoal and chalk pastels lay out this artist’s preliminary sketch of the painting she is working on. It is an abbozzo, the artist’s way of mapping out her painting. She uses it to find a composition and play with colors on paper before switching to paint on canvas.

‘Abbozzo’ is an Italian word meaning “sketch” or “outline.” The English noun takes on a more specific role as a “preliminary sketch or sculpture which serves as a basis for the final artwork.” Artists use sketches like these to formulate ideas, develop thoughts, and make changes before beginning a project or painting. The stages of preparation for a work of art can take on many forms—an old beat up notebook full of scribbles, a corkboard covered in clippings and sketches, single leaves of large colored paper, a simple sketchbook full of doodles and drawings, a laptop with bookmarked webpages, or open documents full of notes and images. The methods are endless, and each artist has her preference. An abbozzo, I suppose, refers to the more traditional, physical form of the preliminary stage. It is the final sketch before beginning a work. For a painting it is a sketch, for a sculpture it is a smaller version of that sculpture—a maquette—formed out of simple clay.

We don’t often think about the planning behind a work of art. Yet, it is always there. Behind every great painting full of life and color, behind every sculpture big, small, or abstract—there is an abbozzo. It sits in the artist’s studio with the rest, a glimmer of the masterpiece to come.

Source:

<http://dictionary.reverso.net/italian-english/abbozzo>

<http://dictionary.babylon.com/abbozzo/>