

Ancestry and Artistry: Ella Marie's Exploration of Europe

August 2026

Ireland

My first stop was to the Emerald Island: the land of wool, stone, and fun accents. Me and my mother heard lovely music drifting from down the street when we stopped for food in Ennis. We biked around the smallest of the Aran islands and marveled at the quaint herds of sheep at every turn. I traveled with my Irish flute, taking every opportunity to play some of the Irish melodies collecting in my memory, and enjoy the scenery of the land that inspired these songs. The lore and stories that make up Ireland and its people is inspiring. My time in Ireland taught me the meaning and power behind music, language, and loyalty in holding a nation together.

Touring a castle in Bunratty
and learning about what the
lives of the Celts were like
under English rule.





Ice cream in Doolin after a wonderful day spent at the Aran islands.



Playing my Irish flute on the
coast of the smallest of the
Aran islands.



The old
Abbey in the
quaint little
town of
Quinn.

France

My second stop was France. Fascinated by the grandeur of Paris on every street, I sketched everything I saw, from the ceiling of the Panthéon to the fountain in the Luxembourg Gardens. In Rouen, I fell in love with the Saint-Ouen Abbey Church and sat on the grass, attempting to capture every facet with my pen and brush. In the blazing ninety-eight degree heat, I guzzled water as I sat in the sun despite the heat, determined to draw *The Thinker* by one of my favorite artists, Rodin. I fell in love with the art of Jacques Louis-David, especially *The Coronation of Napoleon*. France expanded my understanding of the history of art, familiarized me with the art of some of the most famous artists, and brought me to realize the origins of much of the art I see in my own country.



Sketching the ceiling of the
Panthéon until closing.



In the Louvre.



Enjoying ice
cream in a
Parisian
Plaza.



The old clock
in Rouen,
France.



Sketching the
Medici
Fountain in
Paris, France.



In the Rodin
museum
admiring the
process
plaster for
Eve.

Norway

My final destination was the land of my ancestors, Norway. Traveling there with my sister and father, we went to the Gårdhammer farm an hour from Oslo, where my last name came from. (the spelling changed over time). We were delighted to meet the wonderful couple that runs the farm now, and exchange information on the history of the farm and my family. We also were blessed to be offered a place to stay with the relatives of the family now living on another farm of my ancestry, the Kjos farm. From them we learned about what it meant to their family to be Norwegian. From Oslo, we went to the Lofoten Islands and explored the stunning scenery of the Arctic circle—the north has always fascinated me, so for me this was a dream come true. We explored old Norse Viking museums, sailed on a replica of a viking ship, and hiked on a glacier. Norway's scenery, history, and people have found a permanent place in my heart.



Hiking in
Lofoten. I
learned that
they tend
the trails
with a
helicopter.



The fish
drying racks
in Lofoten,
Norway.



Running on
the rocks in a
city called Å
in Lofoten.
(My sister
insisted we
stop there).
The jellyfish
were a fun
surprise.



Family bible
on the Kjos
farm, dating
back to the
1700s.



Sketching the
Kylemore abbey
from Ireland on
the Ferry to the
Lofoten Islands.
Yes, I got the
bag in Paris.
Yes, those are
Thinkers. Yes,
it's my new
favorite art bag :)



The Lovely Kjos family we stayed with for two nights. My parents knew them from a previous visit and they invited us to stay when we reached out to them a couple months prior about visiting the farm.



Our stop at the Gordhamer/
Gardhamar/ Gårdhammar
farm.



Hiking in Lofoten. We had a whole immersive experience in Norway—we even got to see the clinic! My Dad sustained an injury hiking and got sixteen stitches in a little town in Lofoten. It was a record for that clinic.



Glacier hiking in Norway. I slipped once! Lucky there was a rope and an experienced guide.

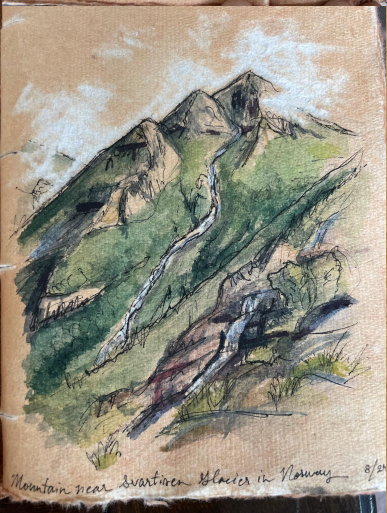
More glacier hiking.





Viking museum.

Europe in sketches



Thank you for this amazing
opportunity!