

Drawing - Inspiration, Observation, Perspiration

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INTRODUCTION

- Drawing is the foundation stone of all the artist does.
- It trains our eye to see.
- We learn to explore the subject with our eyes and often begin to realise how little we noticed, before we picked up our brushes or pencil.
- A good sketch captures the very essence of your subject. Try to be bold and direct.
- I've heard people complain 'I can't draw'. To these people I would ask them to look, look again, and then simply record what they see.
- William Blake said 'All Art is Unceasing Practice', I say it is 90% observation, 10% inspiration, 50% practice and more PRACTICE!

1 Materials - Different types of **pencils** and their uses

- hard - usually used by architects and draughtsmen, etc. and unlikely to be of use to the artist, H = hard.
- soft - B = soft, obtainable HB to 6B.
- consider using the Black Beauty/Black Prince range. These are very soft.
- charcoal and charcoal pencils.
- you will need a drawing board. Work with it tilted or on an easel, but you must feel comfortable. I find a large plate under the board useful.

Types of Paper

- watercolour paper has a tooth, so will give a quite different effect from flat, cartridge paper.

1.1 Tips

- re-sharpen pencils frequently.
- many think pencil sharpeners are crude, but they make a very sharp point and are sometimes useful to collect charcoal/pencil dust.
- covered blades are good, or else keep a blade in a matchbox or safe equivalent.
- when sharpening with a blade, trim to a tapering point, exposing about a quarter of an inch of lead. Don't sharpen to a stumpy point.
- make sure the surface under the paper is smooth, to avoid indentations spoiling your drawing.
- work from left to right if you're right handed and vice versa. Or, consider placing a piece of clean paper over your work as you continue with other parts of the drawing. This will avoid your hand moving over finished surfaces and spoiling/smudging the completed parts of the drawing.
- try to carry pencils and a pad with you at all times.
- if you can't manage this, carry a camera; not to make a dull copy of a scene, but as a reminder of something which inspired you which you might turn into a painting.
- I find photographs incredibly useful, but always like to use them as a backup for drawings I have **already** made, or as reference, if I have to rush away with a partfinished painting due to bad weather.

1.2 Charcoal

- this medium can be difficult until you get used to it. It lends itself to direct handling with a minimum of over-working. Persevere if you don't take to it immediately, as the results can be very rewarding.
- sticks can be sharpened to a point with sandpaper.
- the thin sticks might be easier to handle for the beginner.
- you will need fixative or hairspray (cheaper) to fix your drawing as it's very messy and easily smudged.

1.3 Techniques

- shading - hatching - cross hatching - rubbing with fingers - single line expressing movement (Picasso's drawings are a good example).
- make heavier marks towards the front, softer in the distance.
- try to show texture.
- experiment with your method of holding the pencil to create different effects.
- Van Gogh's lines, even in paintings, follow the directions of the form - hair, etc.. This improves drawings and adds realism.

1.4 Throw away the eraser!

- draw over your mistakes. Surplus lines don't offend me - you can often learn from them. I think it can be interesting seeing an artist's thought patterns, particularly in life drawing.
- remember, you've not finished until there's a hole in the paper. It is **only** a piece of paper after all, so don't be too precious about it.
- when you do need to use an eraser, use a soft, springy kind, not a hard one. A kneaded eraser is useful.

1.5 Suggestion

- start a clippings folder. This can subsequently be filed into useful sections which is extremely good for reference.

1.6 Charcoal Dust Drawings and Drawing with the Eraser

- dust can be collected when sharpening pencils in a mechanical sharpener as previously described. This can be rubbed gently into paper with cloth/chamois leather and drawings can then be made with the eraser/pencils. Adding highlights with Chinese white can make a striking study.

1a Don't try to Run before you can Walk

- keep it simple. Choose objects, such as shells, etc., but try drawing things which interest and inspire you.
- see how lighting the subjects makes all the difference.
- practise - don't expect to have superb, finished work immediately. Stop trying to produce finished work of sufficient standard to warrant framing.
- say to yourself 'this isn't a painting or finished drawing, it's just practice/an experiment/something to use for reference for later on.' So often, this is when you begin to loosen up and produce something pleasing.
- keep adopting this method for a while and you will soon begin to forget feeling pressured to produce something decent; your natural ability improves and there's nothing like success to breed success.
- use the pencil to measure parts of the drawing against one another (explained in the video).
- also use the pencil to establish vertical/horizontal lines and to measure whether something is rising or falling.
- once you grow in skill and confidence, try to loosen up and let your lines flow.
- let this looseness come through in your working drawings for your painting (it's all too easy to tighten up in an attempt to get the working drawing right when you attempt to reproduce it for a painting, and this results in loss of spontaneity and movement, and creates pictures that have 'lost their soul'.)
- stand back at intervals to evaluate your work.

2.1 Composition - good examples:

- I like to have my work leading somewhere with the feel of 'where does this go?').
- 'S' shape makes a pleasant and interesting composition.
- a vertical feature at the edge 'holds' a composition.
- the most important feature should be off centre.
- a good composition has balance but this does not mean symmetry.
- one third/two thirds is considered a good split for the horizon line (used in other types of work, too).
- it's usual to break a long horizon line with a feature.
- forms/lines should not touch, but miss completely or overlap.
- straight composition lines give a calm feel to the picture.
- if you want to depict a more exciting, vigorous subject, you will need to construct a composition with rhythmic, not static lines. These will create a sense of movement.
- I always turn my pictures around in a mirror. This helps to evaluate the composition and confirm it is interesting.

bad examples

- features should not abut, but miss completely or overlap
- don't place like objects above each other or stop horizontal features against hilltops, etc.

2.2 Suggestions

- make a study of those things you find yourself avoiding, i.e. skies, trees, people, hands, etc..
- if you find them difficult, think of trees as just spaces between the branches.
- if they intimidate you, see hands as simply other things to draw, again with spaces between the fingers. Draw the spaces and the branches and fingers are drawn for you!
- drawing negative spaces is also a useful technique for still life - the objects should draw themselves.
- use of viewfinder - the proportions should be roughly equal to your painting's surface. Hold it about one foot from your eyes. It will help you select pleasing material for compositions.
- squaring up your drawing to use it for enlarging or redrawing for a painting - squares are drawn over your drawing (or on tracing paper, placed above your drawing) and in this way you can easily reproduce your existing drawing. I don't use this method, because I prefer to make a loose freehand copy and feel that although probably more accurate, the squared method can encourage you to tighten up.

3.1 Linear Perspective

- also described as foreshortening - eye level and the horizon line, relative to position are described on the video.

3.2 Aerial Perspective

- this will need to be evident in landscapes, etc., when you progress to painting. The graduation of strong, medium and soft lines also needs to be considered with pencil drawings.
- objects as they recede into the distance grow paler and colder in colour, i.e. greens become more blue or violet, so you must take into account foreground/middle distance and distance.

3.3 Tonal Values

- I can't stress too much the need for tonal contrast. A monotone picture (one which if you half close your eyes seems to disappear) is largely uninteresting. Some pictures can be very pretty, but in my opinion, pale into insignificance compared with those with a dark against light contrast (both horizontal and vertical). It really brings them to life.
- try lighting a simple still life and paint it in a bland way, then drastically exaggerate the tonal contrasts and see what a difference it makes.
- tonal contrast still has value in a drawing (i.e. it's not only important in paintings).
- it may help you to think of breaking your tones into three - light, half-tone and dark, the half-tone being the link between the extremes.
- if you find it difficult to assess a subject in terms of tonal values, try half-closing your eyes. This helps you to see broad masses of light and dark, and cuts out inessential details.

Summary - Take a Few Risks!

- it's so easy to become too cautious. That drawing you made is perhaps better than anything you've done previously and although you know, deep inside, that it could be improved, or that one vital limb is not quite as it should be, you hover on caution,
- **please don't!**
- agreed, you will have me to blame when you ruin a perfectly good drawing or painting. But I wouldn't mind betting that if you had doubts, it was fairly insipid, and millions of people are capable of producing insipid watercolours and drawings. Wouldn't you prefer to stand out from the crowd?
- so try something new; attack it; see what happens. Something good could come from your experiments. if you fail and spoil your work, it will be a learning process that will help you in the future. You'll discover how far you can push a medium and, more importantly, what you can do to express yourself. You don't need to be like somebody else; you are **you** and that's what makes you paint and draw the way you do.
- we all would like to emulate those we admire, but look and learn from others, don't try to slavishly copy, then feel disappointed with a poor imitation.

Transition to Painting

- if you are experiencing difficulty moving on to painting, as you become more proficient at drawing, try including some conte crayons, chalk or pastel, but avoid using them like 'colouring sticks'. Think of them as an extension of your pencils and charcoal, making both sharp and broad lines. You can create lovely soft and delicate effects by rubbing these crayons with your finger.
- alternatively, you might find as you grow in confidence that using a pen and ink could be useful.

CONCLUSION

I hope you've found this session instructional. I've attempted to appeal to those starting out, who maybe found drawing daunting.

With the arrangement of simple objects, lit to add excitement, it is possible to make drawing both accessible to all and at the same time, inspiring.