

Basic Drawing Techniques

Drawing has often been described as 'the bones of art', which it most certainly is. It can also be a credible art form in its own right, with many absolute masterpieces being produced over the centuries using only drawing media and techniques.

Contributed by Brett A. Jones



Drawing has been overshadowed in the modern era – to some extent – by the emergence of forms such as abstract and cubism which really don't demand much from the artist in areas like realistic representation of the subject matter, or the effect of light and shade.

The waters are further muddied by methods like gridding and projecting having gained acceptance in the fine art world; this too must detract from the motivation needed for an artist to acquire the necessary and difficult skills required for freehand drawing.

I want to explore the really basic fundamentals of drawing ... to give anyone interested in learning to draw freehand a good foundation from which to begin.

There are really only two basic drawing techniques, and many subtle variations on these themes.

The first technique is where you keep your wrist and fingers still and move your elbow and shoulder (or your whole body with murals and large easel work). You make big decisions while being bold with your strokes and curves, usually building up the basic foundation of an ultimately more intricate work; or using the technique as a means in itself, to produce nice loose expressive art.

The second technique is where you rest your arm on a steady surface and only move your wrist and fingers. This is generally used for detail work and

careful adjustment of curves and lines.

The most basic mistake is to rely only on one technique for everything, all the time.

You need to think of the work you are doing (at any one time) as a whole, and plan how big it will be overall; how dark you are going tonally; the actual proportions and perspective of the subject (vital); how detailed the drawing will be (usually a time thing, but not always); the medium you're working with; and a dozen other things. Try to adjust your media and hand technique to suit your idea, rather than limiting the potential scope of your work by falling into familiar habits and trying to execute your idea without stopping and considering some basic and sometimes overlooked choices.

The way you choose to hold your pencil is an important consideration which is often overlooked. Bad habits can last a lifetime. Experiment with your grip and try to gain better control of your tools. You should be holding your pencil gently (the tighter you hold on, the harder it is to hold your hand steady). For the lightest lines, you should barely be holding onto the pencil at all. The darker the line, the firmer the grip (but don't hold on any tighter than you need to).

Another really important consideration is your working position.

It is worth experimenting with your working position, and not limiting



yourself with rigid ideas – particularly if you experience back pain. I made my big easel (two metres square) with pulleys and a counterweight so that I can shift my work up or down easily and sit or stand in front of it without having to interrupt my art. My drawing board is just a piece of thin board, 10 millimetres larger than the paper I work on. I cut my boards to suit the size of the work (not the other way around); and I keep a few different sized boards. Masonite is a good choice.

You should be able to infinitely adjust where your work is in relation to you, the whole time you're working on it. You yourself should not balk at standing or leaning over your work; propping it up; moving it around; moving around it; and basically doing

whatever you have to do, to achieve the effect you are after.

The time you choose to spend on a work has a big bearing on the finished product, and directly affects the way you will approach the work from start to finish.

Grab a subject (a coffee cup, an apple, anything) and give yourself 30 seconds to draw it. Now, starting again, do it in five minutes. Now take a few hours on the same subject. This may seem simplistic, but it's an important element. You have to have some idea of how long it will take before you start (ten seconds to forever ... and everything in between) because it affects every part of the work from the moment you touch pencil on paper. The longer you spend on a single subject, the

more detail you should see. And the more you see, the more you will see. Try it, and discover what I mean.

DRAWING EXERCISES

Draw something first (a wine bottle, a vase, a stool, fruit – whatever you like, but keep it simple). Then complete the following exercises (do each one moving your wrist and fingers on a small scale, flat on a table; and then moving your shoulder on a large scale, at your easel):

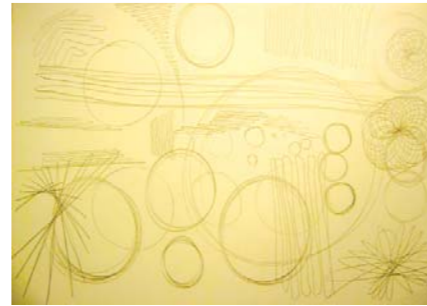
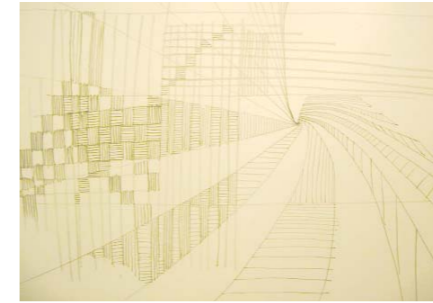
- Clockwise and anti-clockwise spirals;
- Off centre spirals;
- Square spirals;
- 3-D spirals;
- Straight lines;
- Parallel lines (horizontal and vertical);
- Circles; and
- Pretend that you're a Spirograph.



Now draw the same wine bottle, or whatever you started with. Your style should be more comfortable and looser, and it should take fewer lines to get the image right.

Freehand drawing is one of the harder skills to learn, but probably the one you'll get the most rewards from in all aspects of your art practice. It is important to recognise that sometimes you are just practising drawing skills. Do not try to make everything that you do into a masterpiece.

Use butcher's paper and fly around outside your comfort zone for a while. Concentrate on loosening up your technique ... and remember that's what you're doing while you are doing it. You might discover the place you need to be to produce a masterpiece you never would have otherwise. You will never know unless you have a go.



I have barely touched on the subject of drawing, and there is really a lot I could add; but you have to start at the start. Have fun in the zone.

If you would like to view some of my own drawing achievements, have a look at my website at www.seaofpain.com ■