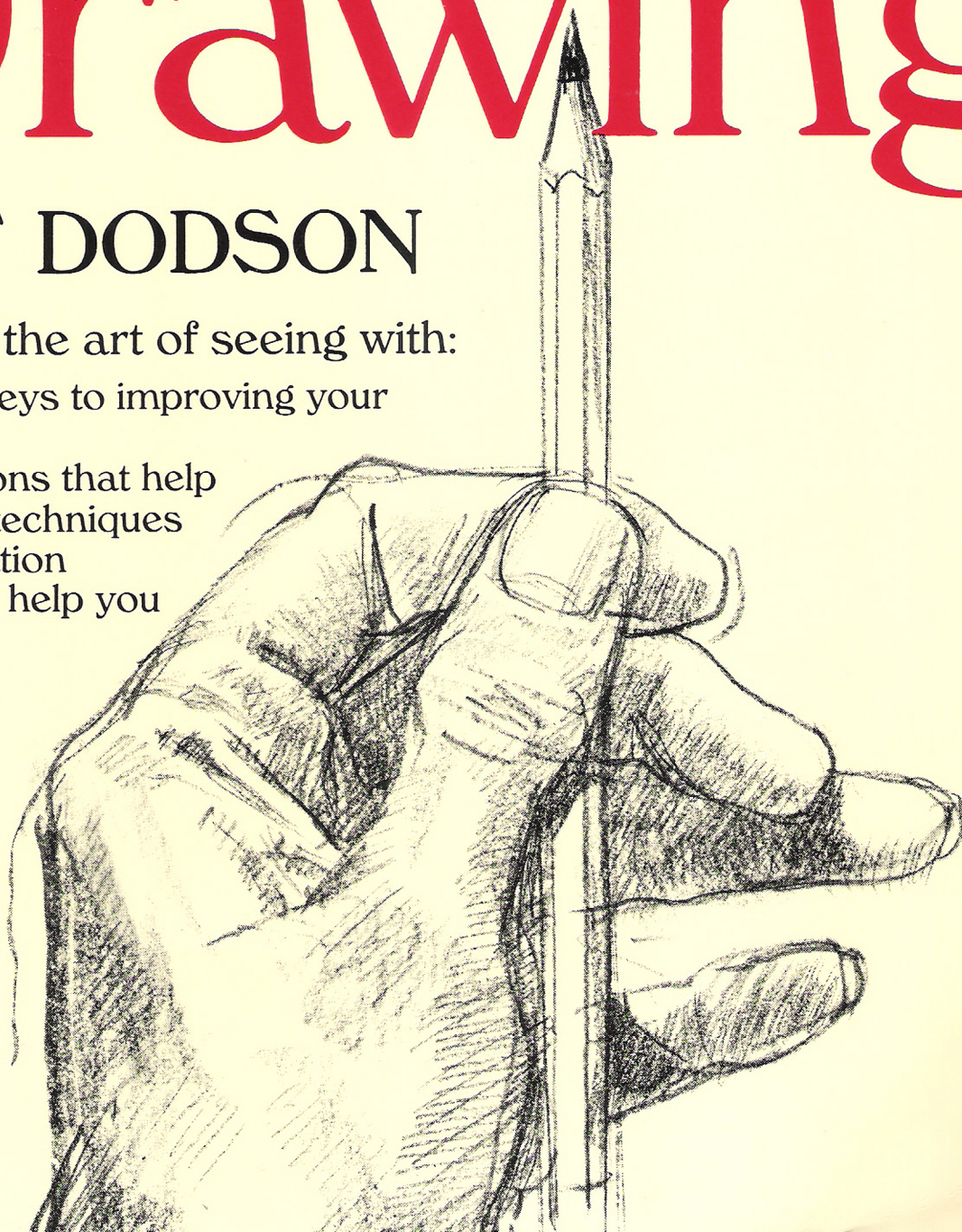


Keys to Drawing

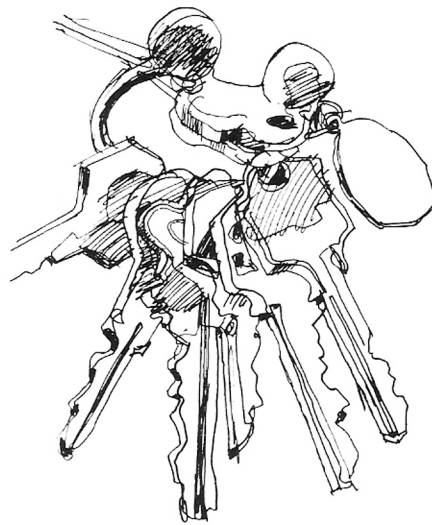
BERT DODSON

Rediscover the art of seeing with:

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KEYS TO DRAWING





KEYS TO DRAWING

BERT DODSON



NORTH LIGHT BOOKS

Cincinnati, Ohio

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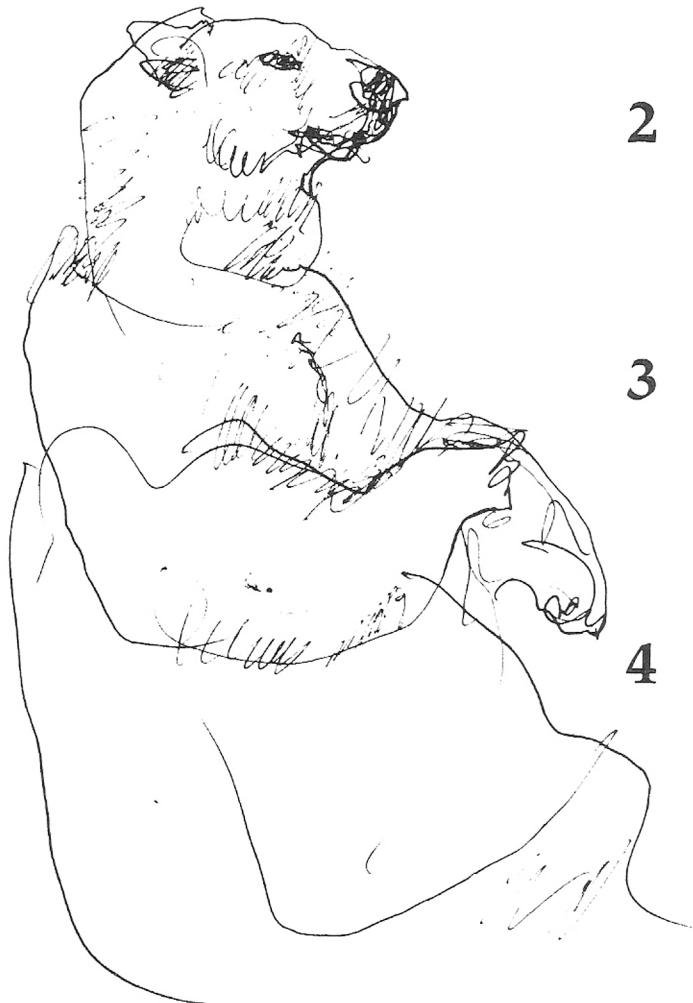
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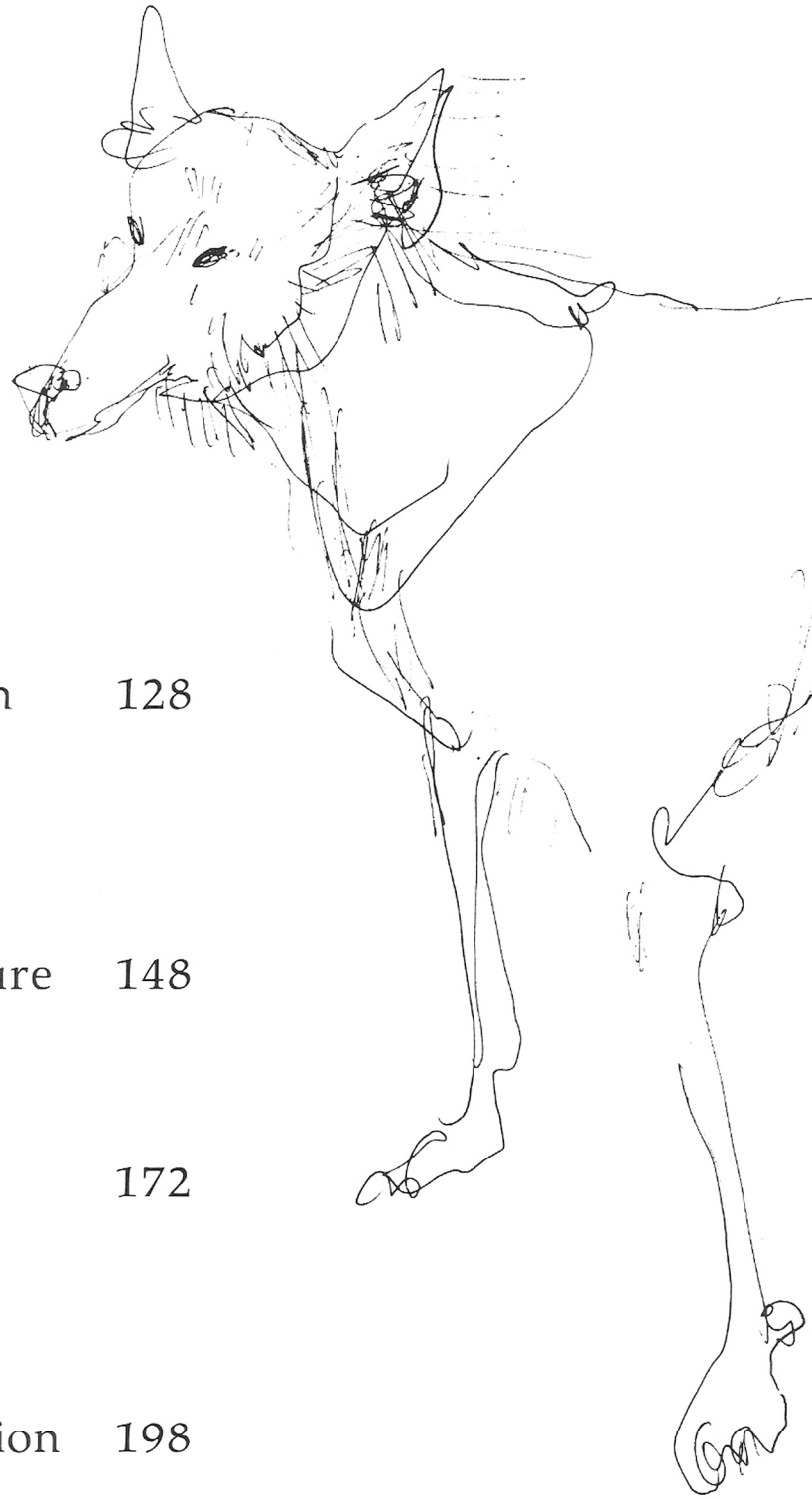
For Bonnie, with love and gratitude



CONTENTS

	Introduction	8
1	The Drawing Process	10
	Internalizing practical dialogue	
	Using triggering words	
	Drawing "blind"	
	Restating	
	Seeing vs. knowing	
	Individualizing	
	Shape consciousness	
	Focusing	
2	The Artist's Handwriting	40
	Separating your two handwritings	
	Freeing your hand	
	Controlling your hand	
	Copying	
	Emulating	
	Exploring mediums	
	Erasing	
3	Proportions: Taking the Measure of Things	70
	Sighting	
	Finding the midpoint	
	Using plumb and level	
	Looking for comparative measurements	
	Foreshortening	
	Intensifying proportions	
4	The Illusion of Light	102
	Mapping	
	Modeling	
	Managing edges	
	Analyzing the light	
	Intensifying mood	
	Merging shapes	
	Designing with light	





5 The Illusion of Depth 128

- Overlapping forms
- Diminishing sizes
- Converging lines
- Softening edges and contrasts
- Drawing through
- Sighting angles
- Using eye level and vanishing points
- Drawing ellipses

6 The Illusion of Texture 148

- Articulating and suggesting
- Sensing the stroke
- Repeating and varying
- Contrasting textures
- Shifting strokes for distance

7 Pattern and Design 172

- Designing with shape
- Sensing pattern
- Framing
- Cropping
- Straddling opposites
- Identifying tangents

8 Drawing and Imagination 198

- Joining two bags
- Creative playing
- Making the familiar strange
- Working in sequence
- Drawing on diverse sources
- Exploring themes

Bibliography 222

Index 223

INTRODUCTION

There is a scene in an old Western film in which Danny Kaye, as the hero, is challenged by a dangerous gunslinger to a shootout in the street. As he walks toward the saloon door and out into that street, well-meaning friends give him advice on his best chances of surviving. "The sun's in the west so keep him to the east," says one old timer. "He stands up tall, so squat down low," says another. Someone else advises, "He shoots from his right, so lean to the left." Kaye desperately tries to remember these tips, but by the time he reaches the swinging doors, he is hopelessly confused, and we hear him muttering, "The sun's up tall, so lean to the west . . . he squats to his left so shoot down low . . . he's east of his right so shoot at what's left . . ."

Drawing, if approached as a set of instructions that must be remembered, can make us react very much like Danny Kaye in the scene above. No one I know draws that way because it is difficult to keep such a jumble of instructions in mind while drawing. Simply remember there are many keys to drawing which you will find in this book. With use they will be absorbed into your own system of drawing. We cannot bring to bear all our knowledge at once. What we can do is concentrate on our subject and trust our eyes. *Keys to Drawing* essentially is learning to trust our eyes and learning different ways in which we can reinforce that trust. Drawing is primarily a process of *seeing* rather than strictly an application of principles. Other keys — such as *restating*, *visualizing*, *merging* and *mapping* — are really by-products of seeing put into the language of the artist. They can be learned gradually, at a comfortable pace.

In addition to trusting our eyes, the quality that most defines any of us as artists is *curiosity*. An artist I know recently found a dead duck. He took it back to his studio and made drawings of it. He studied the arrangement of wing feathers to better understand how the bird flew. He observed them under a blow dryer. He made studies of the legs and feet, noting their location well back on the body — awkward for walking but perfectly suited and powerful for swimming. His drawings helped him *understand* ducks. For this artist, drawing is a means of satisfying *scientific curiosity*. I know other artists who will simply draw whatever strikes their eye, confident that even ordinary objects can make extraordinary subjects. Such artists are intrigued by the interplay of shapes, tones, and textures. For these artists, drawing satisfies *visual curiosity*. Whether your curiosity is scientific, or visual, or both, the mere fact that you approach the world with wonder will impart to your drawings an authority and a beauty not otherwise obtainable.

Each chapter of *Keys to Drawing* contains *projects* designed to give the reader experience with the important keys under discussion. A *review* and project *self-evaluation* section is included at the end of each chapter. The projects are narrowly focused, limiting the number of problems to be solved at any given time. Some specifically call for awkward or unusual views of objects, cluttered compositions, or

exaggerated reality. The object is not to produce handsome drawings but to introduce you to new ways of seeing and responding.

The examples included in this book embrace a variety of "types" of drawings — quick "gestures," "thumbnail" sketches, sketchbook studies, and full compositional drawings. Where photographs have been used as aids, that fact is indicated to avoid conveying any misleading impressions. Unless otherwise indicated, the drawings are by the author.

The chapters and projects are designed to be taken in sequence. However, believing as I do in serendipity, chance, and luck, I invite readers to follow any sequence which best suits them.



1

THE DRAWING PROCESS

INTERNALIZING PRACTICAL DIALOGUE
• TRIGGERING WORDS • DRAWING BLIND
• RESTATING • SEEING vs. KNOWING •
INDIVIDUALIZING • SQUINTING •
SHAPE CONSCIOUSNESS • FOCUSING

An internal dialogue

The art of drawing is an act of uncanny coordination between the hand, the eye, and the mind. Each of these is subject to training and habit. For many students, improvement in drawing simply lies in breaking bad habits and replacing them with new and useful ones. For example, what do you think of as you draw? Can you remember? Perhaps your mind wanders. Perhaps you think of nothing at all. If you are like most of us though, you do, from time to time, carry on an internal dialogue as you work. This dialogue will either help or hinder your ability to draw, depending on which of two basic types it is.

Critical Dialogue

"That arm doesn't look right."

"The foot couldn't possibly turn that way."

"I never draw the legs right."

"Why do I have so much trouble drawing faces?"

Practical Dialogue

"What does that shape look like?"

"Is that shoulder line horizontal or slightly tilted?"

"Is the distance from knee to foot greater or less than the distance from knee to waist?"

"How bumpy is that contour?"

You can probably see the difference between these two types of dialogue and you may agree that the practical is preferable to the critical. Even if you already have the critical dialogue habit, it's not hard to break.

Where do you look when you draw? Do you look at your drawing or at your subject? If you're not sure, try this experiment. As you draw, have someone watch your eyes. Do they rest mostly on the drawing or on the subject? This is an important question and a key to improvement. If they focus primarily on your *subject*, you will draw better than if the focus is on your *drawing*. Why is this so? Let's go back to the two

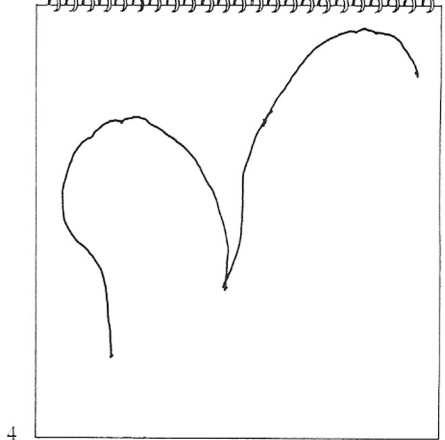


A common practice that weakens drawing effectiveness is concentrating too much on your paper and not enough on your subject.

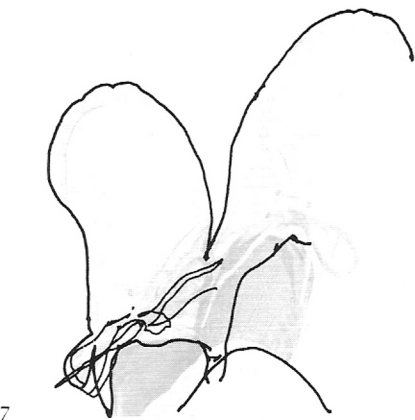


Your drawing skills will improve dramatically if you concentrate on your subject, only glancing at your paper to keep your lines on track.

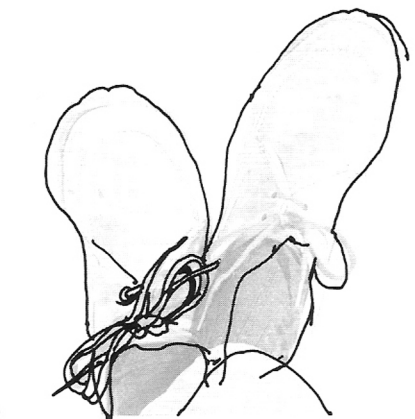
1 *Look, make a note of the contour . . .*



4 *continue the contour . . .*



7 *subject (draw blind) . . .*



10 *continue this process . . .*

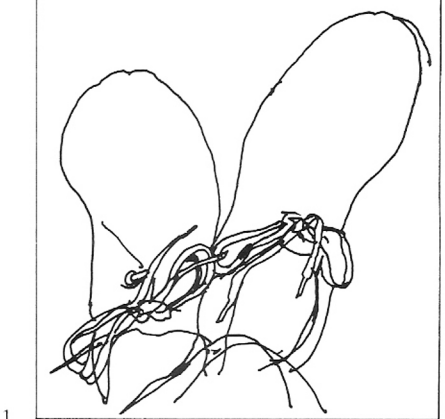
2 *make a line . . .*



5 *back to subject . . .*

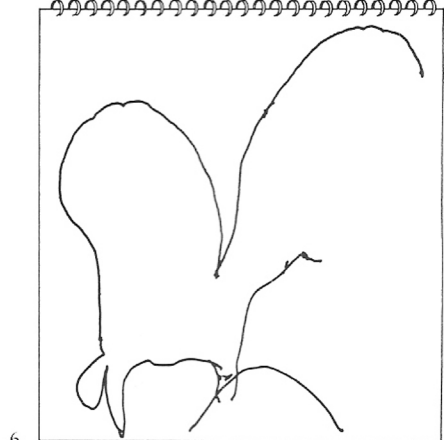


8 *check your lines, restate*



11 *until drawing is complete.*

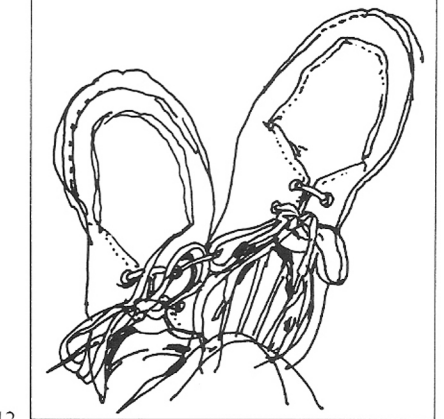
3 *back to your subject . . .*



6 *continue to draw while looking at*



9 *back to subject . . .*



12 *until drawing is complete.*

types of dialogue. When you focus on the drawing, especially in its early stages, you are *judging* your efforts. This leads to a self-involved, self-analytical, critical mode; things in the drawing are “wrong” or “just don’t look right.” You may be tempted to rely on formulas and techniques you already know rather than to draw what you actually see. You may become impatient. Beginning students often become lost or confused when relying on critical dialogue. It beats down on the head like Chinese water torture and, eventually, can take all the pleasure out of drawing.

Practical dialogue results when you are focused primarily on the subject. This is really a dialogue between you and the subject, giving you information about shapes, angles, and measurements that you can translate into lines on paper.

Sometimes practical internal dialogue is no more than the repetition of a single word that describes the feeling in your subject that you are trying to capture and then convey. Called *triggering* words, they help you stay in the moment. Saying a word like “angular,” “sharp,” “long,” “rounded,” “intricate,” or “bristly” softly to yourself (often repeatedly) as your hand moves on the paper, keeps you in contact with your feelings about what you are seeing and makes it easier to actually create that effect.

Looking, holding, drawing a line

Drawing can be described quite simply: *look* at the subject and take note of a contour or shape; *hold* that contour or shape in your mind for a moment, and *draw* it while it’s still fresh in memory. *Look, hold, draw. Look, hold, draw.* Notice we do not include “Think about it” in this sequence. In fact, drawing can be viewed as a process which usually bypasses conscious thought and knowledge. Artist and author Frederick Frank, in his book, *My Eye is in Love*, expressed it this way: “All the hand has to be is the unquestioning seismograph that notes down something, the meaning of which it knows not. The less the conscious personality of the artist interferes, the more truthful and personal the tracing becomes.”

The illustrations at left depict the drawing process in sequence. We look at the subject, two feet (fig. 1), note a contour at the toe of the higher foot, and begin to trace that line (fig. 2) on the paper. Now back to the subject (fig. 3); we estimate where this line intersects the other foot and draw this (fig. 4). *Look, hold, draw. Look, hold, draw.* A natural rhythm becomes established. The speed of your hand will vary as the contours vary.

Drawing blind

It is possible to compress the look-hold-draw process into a single action which we call *drawing blind*. In doing so, your hand continues to draw as your eyes remain on the subject. This often occurs instinctively as you become engrossed. But until it becomes a habit, you should train yourself to do this.

In Figure 3, we observe the contour of the second foot. In Figure 4, we begin to draw it. In Figure 7, we look back to the subject but *leave the pencil in contact with the paper and continue drawing*. Drawing blind is a valuable way to strengthen eye/hand coordination, and the result is a more sensitive recording of contours. There is some sacrifice in accurate proportions, however, so drawing blind is best done in short bursts interspersed with look-hold-draw. It is most effective in the early stages of drawing.



Project 1 - A — Feet

Make a drawing of your own crossed feet, stressing accurate contour and detail. Use line only — a sharp pencil, pen and ink, ballpoint pen, or felt-tip marker (fine point).

Sit comfortably with your crossed feet propped up in front of you and place your pad or paper on a support in your lap so that you have a clear view of your feet. Using the look-hold-draw process discussed here, represent the feet as closely as your observation permits. Be aware of looking at the subject more than at the drawing. Try “drawing blind” at least three or four times while working. Do not erase, but have two or more “restatements” in the drawing. Allow yourself at least one-half hour for the project.

Restating

Most of us have a negative attitude about our own mistakes. To a draughtsman, such an attitude is not helpful and will need to be reshaped. Trial and error are *essential* in drawing. You make lines and compare those to the contours of your subject. Distortions will no doubt occur, and some of these you will want to correct or adjust as you go. You could erase these lines, but it is usually better to leave them for now and simply draw the more accurate lines alongside. This we call "restating," and its advantages are two-fold: (1) You don't waste a lot of time erasing which you can better spend observing your subject, and (2) the drawing actually looks more alive and energetic with all of those restatements. The Degas drawing on page 51 has numerous restatements in the arms and torso. The drawing below is a mass of restatements.

In restatements, we can see the drawing process at work, the "feeling out" of forms, the searching out of more accurate contours, and the adjusting and correcting.

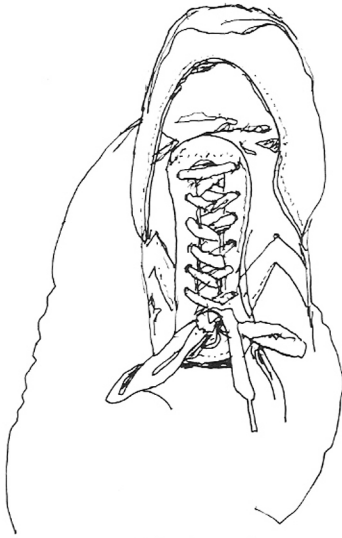
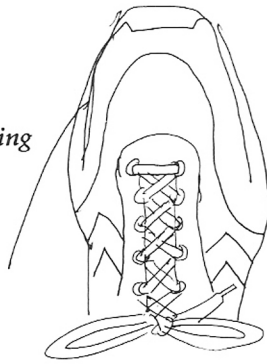
*Don't worry if restating lines
makes your drawing look
busy . . .*





*... restatements demonstrate
that drawing is a vital, changing
process.*

Shoelaces drawn from "knowledge." Note mechanical criss-crossing of laces.



Shoelaces here are drawn from observation. Each lace-shape is individually drawn. This takes more patience, but the results are invariably more interesting and authoritative.



Because we know the head is placed above the shoulders, we tend to want to draw it that way.

Seeing vs. knowing — a conflict

As you draw, you will often encounter conflicts between what you see and what you know. For example, in the quick sketch at right the boy's head was tipped down below his shoulders — "foreshortened" in our view. Foreshortening violates our expected view of things. The head is below the shoulders, touching the top of his trunk. Our natural temptation in this case is to "make things right" by drawing what we know instead of what we see. It's important to resist that temptation. Our goal in drawing from observation is to capture the richness and variety of *visual* experience. We should draw, for the time being at least, as if we know nothing, and were obedient only to what our eye tells us to draw. This is the key to natural, life-like drawing. To understand this is to understand that there is no such thing as knowing how to draw something. One hears, "Can you draw hands — or horses — or trees?" The answer is: we do not draw "things" at all, only lines. To reproduce objects we see on paper, we need to translate what we see into a useful language which we will call the *language of lines*. This language involves angles, shapes, tones and measurements. Any other language (the language of "things") is not of immediate use to us. Whenever we try to speak in two different languages simultaneously, the result is confusion.

The reader may argue, "OK, I see how knowledge of certain facts about something might prejudice us against seeing it clearly, but what about knowledge of drawing principles — perspective, anatomy, foreshortening, light and shadow? Doesn't this kind of knowledge help rather than



True seeing means ignoring logic and responding to what our eyes tell us.



*It takes courage to ignore knowledge
and to respond to what we see
instead.*

hinder us in making a good drawing?" Indeed, these principles were developed to help us understand what we see. But they do not come first. Seeing comes first. When rules conflict with seeing, forget them and draw what you see. This is what is meant by retaining an "innocent vision." That is, to look at something as if you have never seen it before, and to be unclouded by assumptions about how a thing is supposed to look. The one simple rule to follow is: at each point of frustration or confusion, ask yourself, "What do I see?"

Squinting

If you've drawn at all, you've probably experienced times when you've been overwhelmed by the detail in your chosen subject. Squinting is an excellent way to simplify your subject and make it instantly manageable. Little wonder it's a device often used among artists. A useful habit, squinting is a key we will refer to frequently in this book.

What is it?

One of the hardest things to do in drawing is to force yourself to follow your vision when it just doesn't look right. Drawing your own hand from an end view creates such a conflict. We "know" a hand must have fingers, and that those fingers must have a certain length. Otherwise, as in this view, it "just doesn't look right." It doesn't match our preconceived hand symbol! It takes courage to stick to your vision in spite of how it looks. If you are to grow and develop as an artist, it is necessary to develop that courage.

Upon completing your drawing for Project 1B, study it a moment. If it looks a lot like a hand, you didn't keep your hand dead level with your eyes or you didn't follow your vision. (Or you are a truly excellent draughtsman.) If you gave much length to the fingers, you either held your hand too tilted while drawing it or you were drawing it from knowledge rather than from seeing. In either case, you have missed the conflict — the seeing vs. knowing — and should try it again.

Project 1 - B — Hand

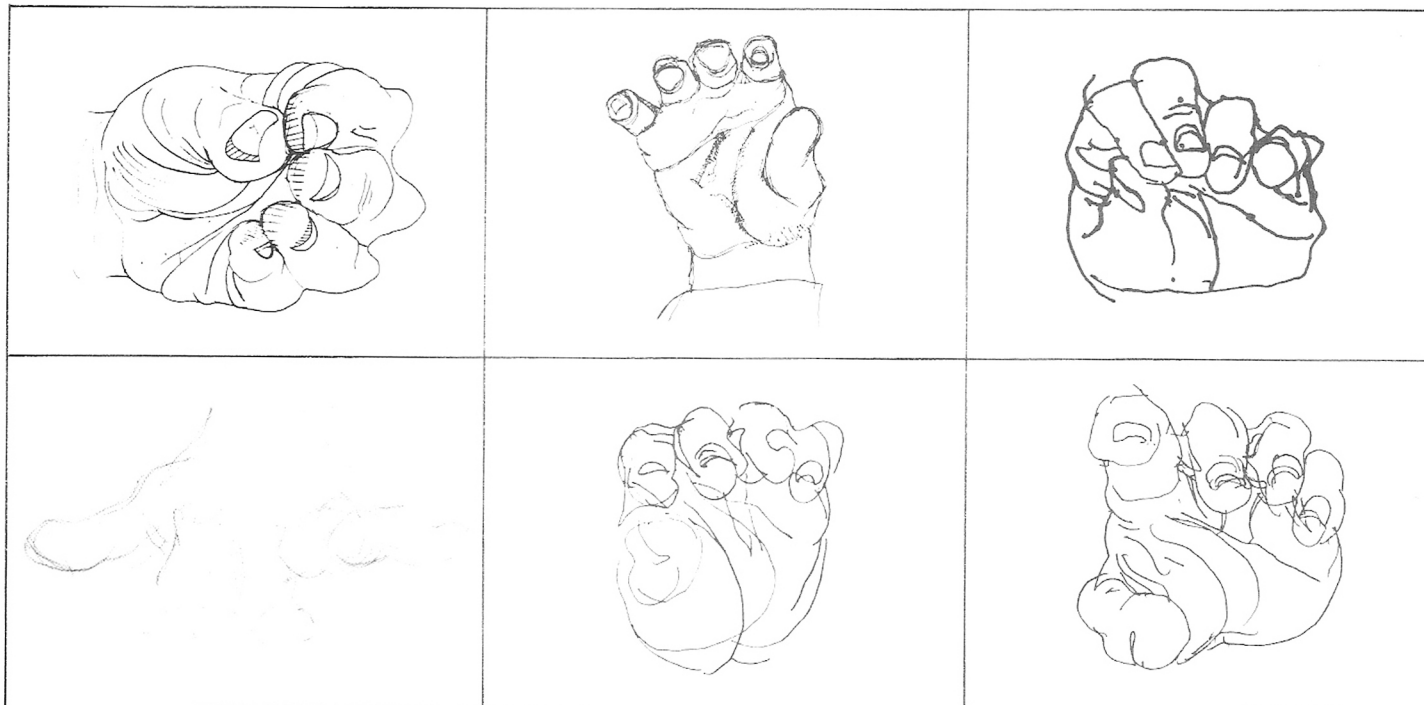
Make a drawing of your own hand from the unusual end-view of the fingertips. That is, with the hand and fingers pointed directly towards your eyes. Stress accurate contour and detail. Use line only — sharp pencil, pen or fine point felt-tip marker. Tape your paper on a flat surface in front of you and hold your hand next to it about twelve inches or so from your eyes. Close one eye as you draw. Be aware of looking at the subject more than at your drawing. Try "drawing blind" at least three or four times as you work. Do not erase, but have two or more "restatements" in the drawing. Allow at least fifteen minutes for the project.

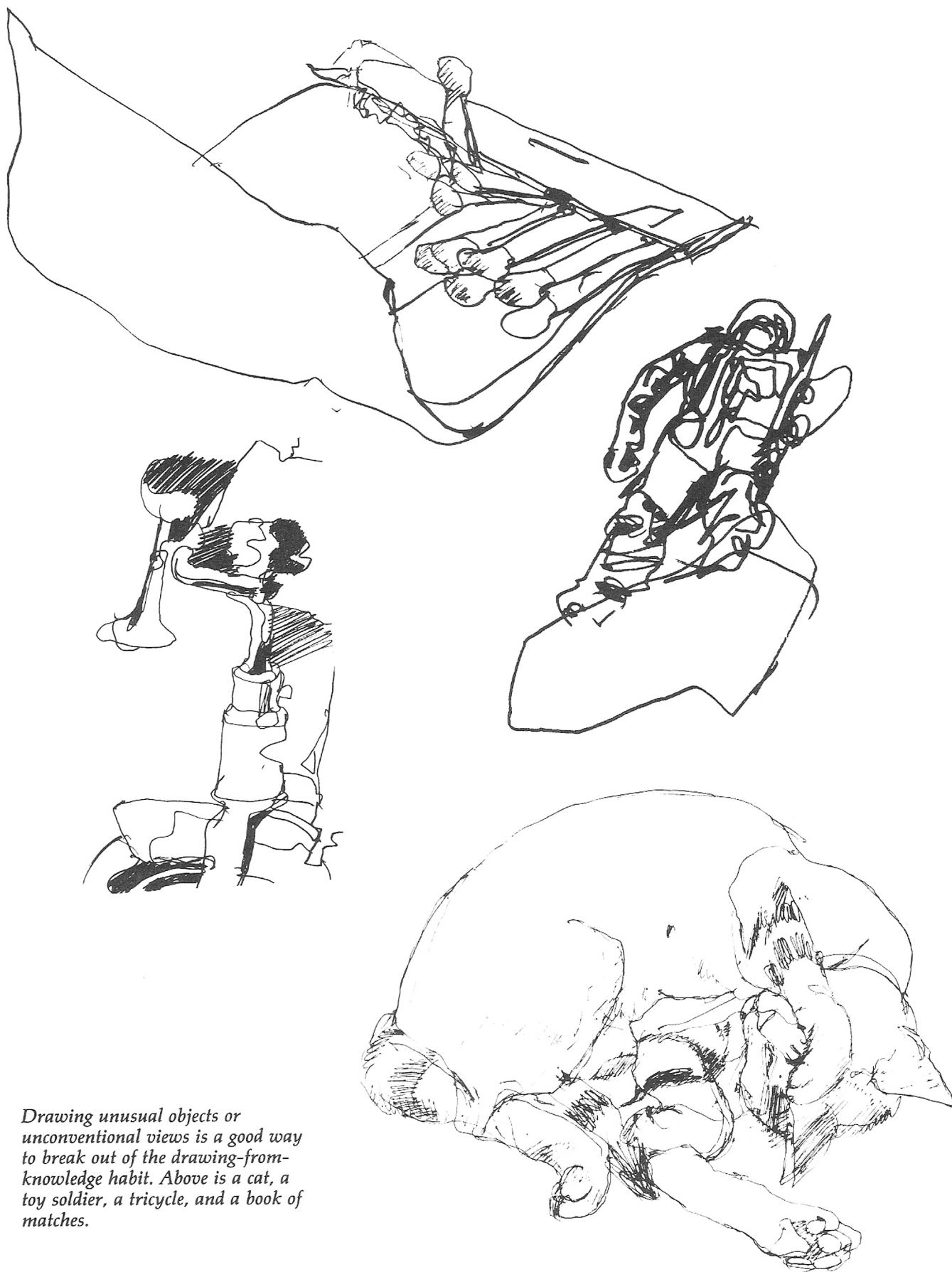
Try to keep an "innocent vision." That is, draw exactly what you see, but since this is an unconventional view of a hand be forewarned that the result will probably not look much like you expect a hand to look.



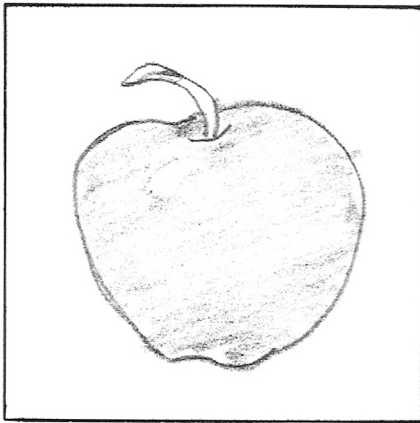


The examples on this page were done by students of varying ability and experience, but all concentrated on drawing purely what they saw. Note also the number of restatements in each.





Drawing unusual objects or unconventional views is a good way to break out of the drawing-from-knowledge habit. Above is a cat, a toy soldier, a tricycle, and a book of matches.



A "symbolic apple" drawn from memory.

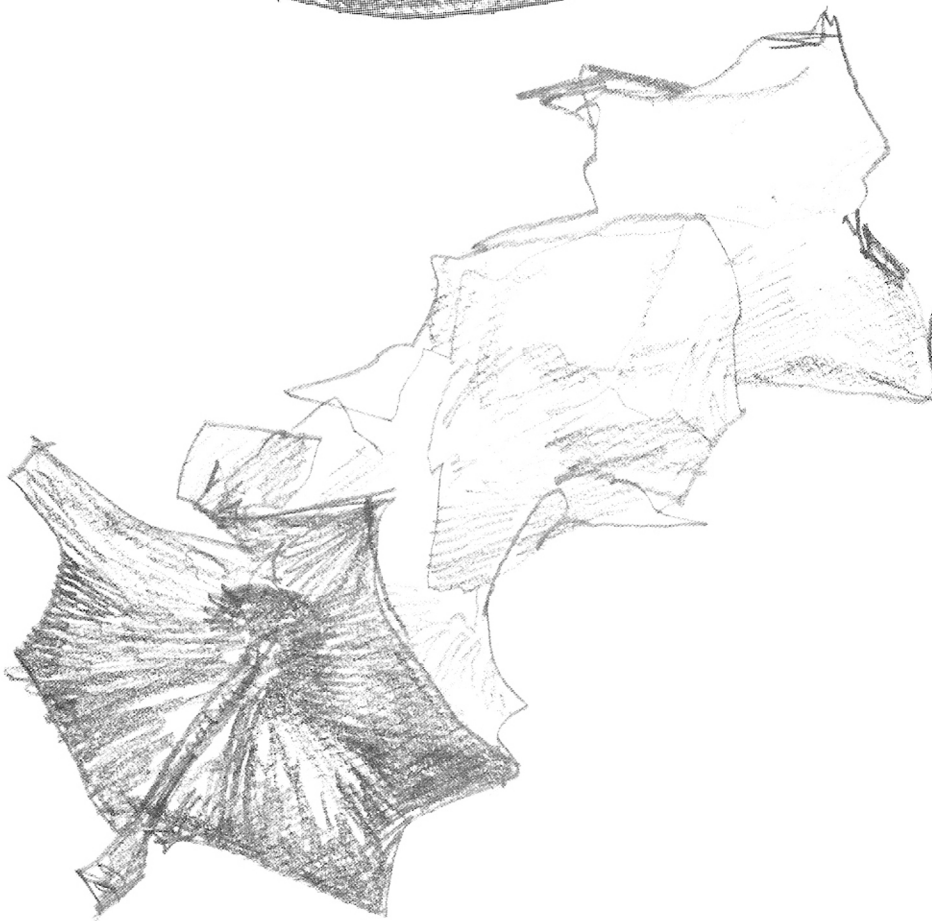
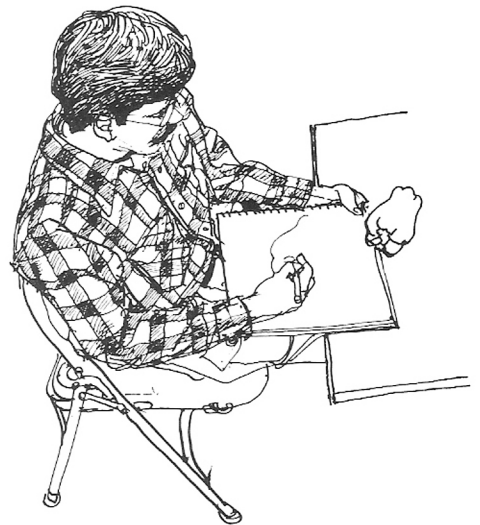
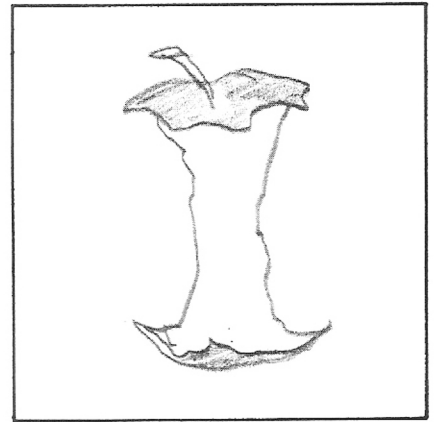
Seeing vs. knowing — mental images

We carry around with us mental images of the way things are supposed to look. These images are reconstructions from memory. We can easily imagine a potato or horse or the face of a good friend. Sometimes we feel that our mental image is an exact duplication of the real thing. If, however, we try to draw these mental images, we quickly realize that we don't have nearly enough information about shape, proportion, contour, or texture to do the job with much precision or character.

We can see this in these examples. The apples in the boxes are drawn from memory, the others are drawn from observation. The dramatic difference between each drawing is readily apparent and proves that mental images are really only symbols of reality. The mind couldn't possibly store all the information necessary to draw really convincing apples. Nor should it. That is a job for the eyes: following carefully each rounded contour, the maculated surface of its shiny skin, the random imperfections, the play of light and shadow. This information, which the eye alone provides, the hand can then readily follow.



An "individual apple" drawn from observation.



Project 1 - C — Pepper

Make a pair of drawings of a green pepper. In the first drawing, create a mental image of the pepper and draw it as accurately as possible from that. Do the first drawing from memory without the pepper being present. Supply whatever details you can recall without having looked at it for some time. In the second drawing, place an actual pepper in front of you and draw it as accurately as you can while observing it. Use line and some tone (shading) for added realism. In the second drawing, try "drawing blind" at least three or four times. Include at least two restatements.

Use any drawing medium and allow yourself at least forty minutes for the two drawings. Make the drawing life size or larger.

Individualization

How inadequate is the memory when compared to the richness and variety of direct visual experience! The shapes, tones, and textures needed to draw convincing objects are conveyed through the eyes. We individualize by drawing from life.

Try to break old seeing habits by assuming nothing about your subject. Look at it with less logic and more curiosity. Override mental images and study the subject itself. Use practical dialogue to ask questions about the subject. Shift from the language of things to the language of line and shape. To individualize in your drawing the unique qualities of your subject gives your work verve and authority.



An exercise in individualizing

Try to get a mental image of your own eyes. You know that an eye is a ball set in a socket, surrounded by an upper and lower lid. The opening is almond or tear-drop shaped. Knowledge of these generalizations and a few details about iris, pupil, and lash would allow most people to draw a reasonably convincing pair of eyes, particularly from direct front view (see above).

However, unless you have practiced, it is doubtful that you could make a very accurate portrait of your *own* eyes or any other pair of eyes from memory. Moreover, when the head is tilted up or down or turned to a three-quarter view, the shapes of the eyes, lids, and brows change. Our mental images are inadequate to store all of this information.

Now stop and take a moment to view your own eyes in a mirror. As you study their shapes and contours, try to answer these questions:

- Are the two eyes *exactly* alike or are there subtle differences? If different, what are those differences?
- Are your eyes more or less than one eye-width apart?
- How much of the exposed eye does the iris cover? One third? One half?
- What is the shape of the upper lid? Is it symmetrical or asymmetrical?
- Where is the eyebrow's point of highest arch over the eye? The lowest?
- Which are the two or three most prominent character lines or folds?
- Where are the darkest shadows? The brightest light areas?
- Turn your head to a three-quarter view. Can you see how the eye shapes change to a more exaggerated tear-drop shape?

- Do you see how the difference between the two eye shapes become more pronounced?
- How much of the one eye is obscured by the bridge of the nose?
- If you wear glasses, can you see how the size and shape of the lenses are different in the three-quarter view, the near lens being a larger and more open shape?

These and countless other questions are often automatically noted and resolved in drawing from observation. What you capture on paper in this process is not merely “a pair of eyes” but a sensitive and accurate drawing of a *uniquely individual* pair of eyes.



Project 1 - D — Eyes

Make a drawing of your own eyes as they are reflected in a mirror. In doing so, keep your head turned to a three-quarter view (halfway between a front view and profile). Draw as accurately as possible only the areas of the eyes, eyebrows, and the bridge of your nose. Be sure you are always drawing what you see rather than what you *know*. Use a 2B or an HB pencil and keep the point sharp.

Work primarily in line with some added tone (shading) to indicate the lights and darks you see. Allow yourself at least twenty minutes. Try drawing blind at least three or four times and include at least two restatements.

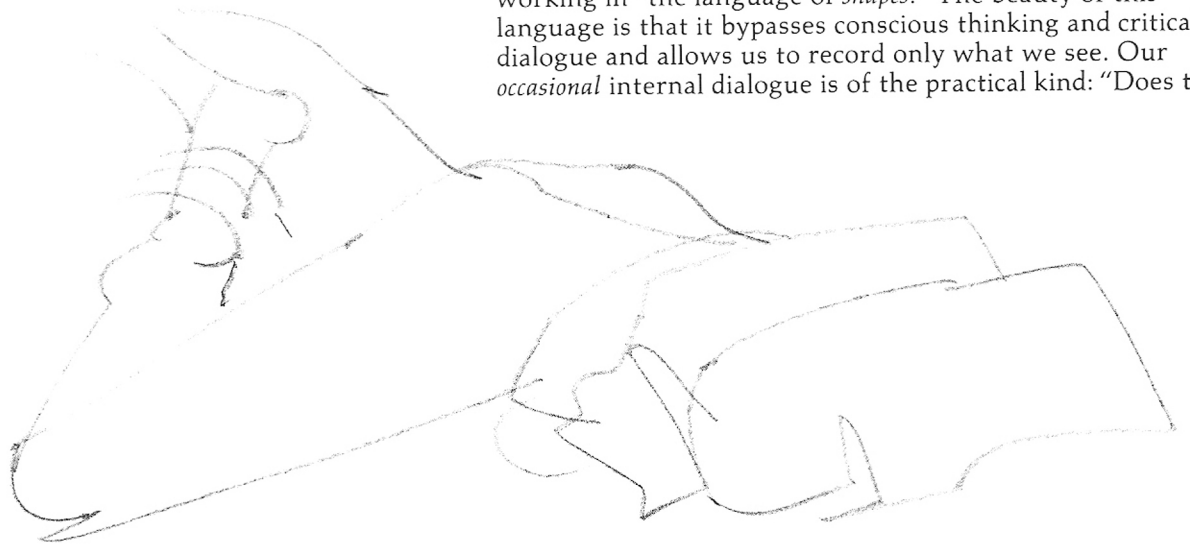


Developing shape consciousness

The painter, Edouard Manet, once observed: "There are no lines in nature, only areas of color, one against another." For any artist, the importance of this simple remark can hardly be overstated. It suggests a major key to drawing improvement. Each "area of color" has a shape — in fact, *is* a shape — for our purposes.

Drawing shapes is easier — much easier — than drawing things. Try this: Select an object in your immediate surroundings. Now, holding a pencil in your hand and closing one eye, trace the outline of the object in the air as if you were actually drawing along its outer edge. Begin at any point and continue all around the object until you meet your starting place. Did you notice that there is virtually nothing to think about? Your eye and your hand do all the work for you. It's only a slight step further to the actual drawing of the shape.

You keep your eye on the object you're drawing and only briefly glance at your paper as you work. This is working in "the language of *lines*" or, as we can now advance it, working in "the language of *shapes*." The beauty of this language is that it bypasses conscious thinking and critical dialogue and allows us to record only what we see. Our *occasional* internal dialogue is of the practical kind: "Does that



shape taper to a point?" "Is that side straight or does it have a slight curve?" "How does that shape compare with the one next to it? Is it smaller or larger?" Do you see how these questions take us out of the language of *things* ("oceans," "trees," "hands," "hair") and into the language of *shapes* ("elongated triangle," "square corner," "half moon," "oval")?

It happens that when we work in this language, our images ultimately become oceans, trees, hands, hair, etc. It's like a conjurer's trick. The more we stay in the language of shapes, temporarily shunning the language of things, the more our resultant drawings resemble the reality of the things we have observed.

That is why it really doesn't matter *what* we draw. When we learn to see things in terms of their shapes, we can draw anything well: people, buildings, parrots, landscapes, and fire hydrants all are treated equally. We are not specialists.

Four rules of shape

I've formulated four rules to help you break away from the language of things and into the language of shapes. While they are actually helpful hints rather than rules, let's call them rules so that you'll feel a greater imperative to learn them:

1. Draw large shapes first, then smaller shapes.
2. Look for enrichment shapes, including highlights, shadows, reflections, patterns, and textures.
3. Tie shapes together.
4. When you see a "trapped" shape, draw it.

These rules, once understood, will not only make drawing easier but will help you see things in a fresh and original way. Let's find out how.



Michael Mitchell



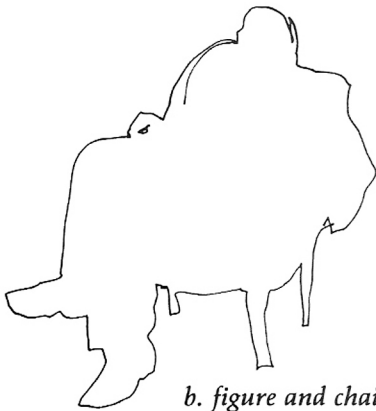
George Dugan

If we can get a strong sense of its shape, we can draw anything.

You can draw several objects in a single, combined shape.



a. flowers and vase



b. figure and chair

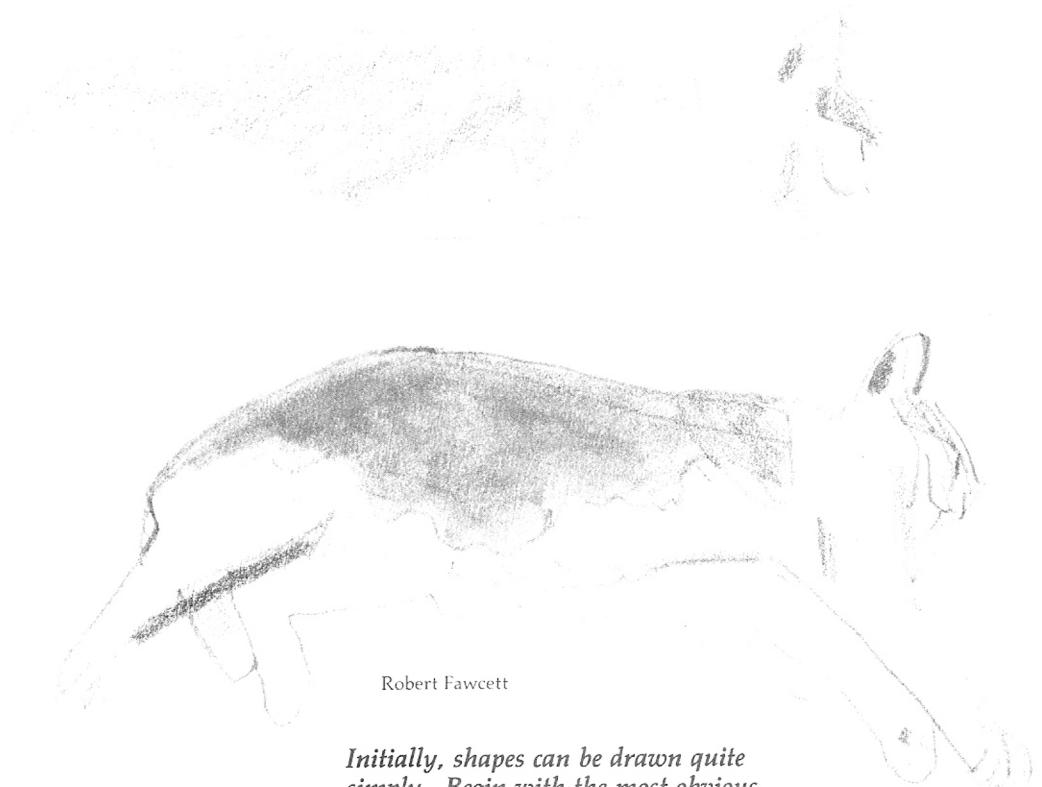
Rule #1. Draw the large shapes first, then the smaller shapes.

Sometimes the hardest thing about drawing is beginning the process. The subject is before us, the blank white paper stares at us, and our pencil is poised. All we have to do is start. But where? How? Rule #1 suggests that it's easier to work from the general to the specific than the other way around. Start with the largest shape you see. Forget everything else and draw that shape. It may be the outer silhouette of a person or subject, or it may be a shape that includes more than one object. Whatever it is, that's where you start.

For example, let's say you are drawing flowers in a vase. Rather than first drawing each flower and then the vase separately, you might first draw the entire silhouette as a single shape. What you've done is capture "flowers/vase" as a *whole idea*. The drawing needn't be executed perfectly, either. This is a way of quickly getting the measure of the subject. Now you have something you can build on, restate, compare with surrounding shapes, subdivide into smaller shapes, etc.

There are no set numbers of major shapes for any given subject. Choosing which are the large shapes in your subject is up to you. If you're in doubt, squinting may help. Then draw first those shapes you see with squinted eyes.

All drawing is *process*. You make some marks on paper. Those marks help guide you to make other marks. You frequently don't know where you're going until you get there. A large shape starts that process.



Robert Fawcett

Initially, shapes can be drawn quite simply. Begin with the most obvious shapes.

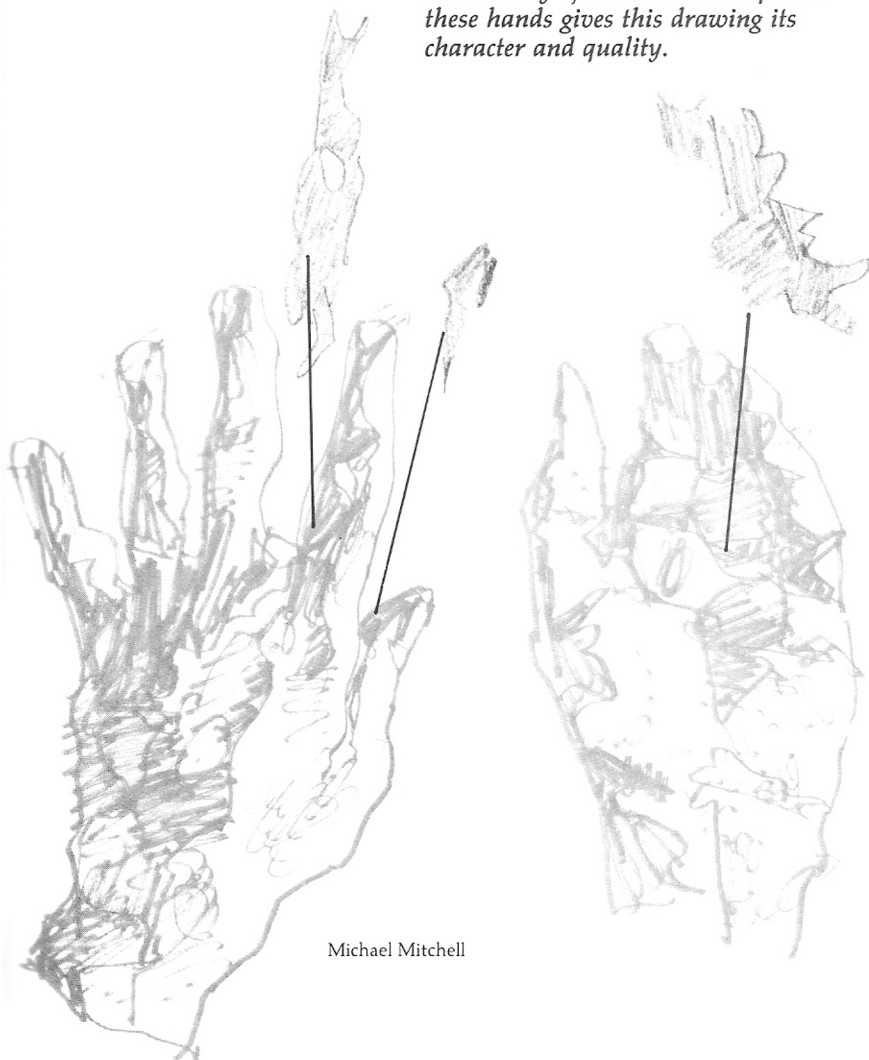
Rule #2. Draw “enrichment” shapes, including highlights, shadows, reflections, patterns and textures.

This rule ushers us into some of the most enjoyable aspects of drawing. Shadows, reflections and the like, those which we call “enrichment” shapes, are so named because they add so much vitality and variety to our visual experience. They do the same for our drawings.

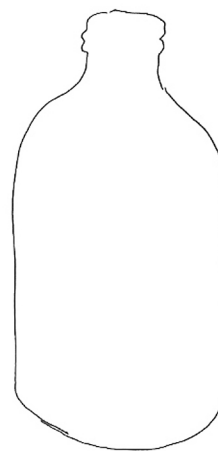
Initially, it may be a large step for you to see them simply as shapes. Such things as a shaft of light falling across the floor, or a dark shadow on the face which is cast by the brim of a hat, or a distorted reflection in a shiny chrome bumper are, indeed, two-dimensional shapes. When you look at them in a fresh way, you’ll quickly recognize that these are geometric figures in their own right — elongated triangles, wobbly trapezoids, dented circles — *shapes* with their specific contours.

Assembling these little bits and pieces of shapes is like creating a quilt. Each highlight or reflection is an added detail to enhance the whole of your work. So often what makes a drawing “real,” what makes it rich and beautiful to the observer is the awareness of its enrichment shapes.

The variety of enrichment shapes in these hands gives this drawing its character and quality.



Michael Mitchell



A bottle has a simple outer shape.

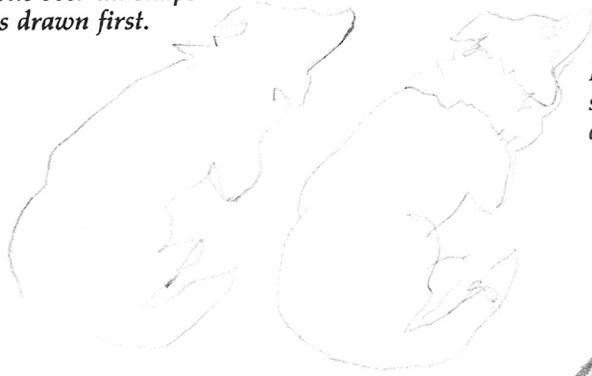


But it has complex inner shapes.

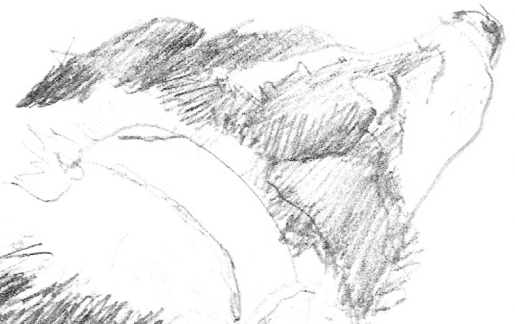
Project 1 - E — Tinted Glass

Select a jar or bottle made of tinted glass (e.g., a soda or beer bottle). Place it on its side turned at an angle in front of you (about a three-quarter view). Draw it as accurately as you can giving special attention to the shapes you see. Draw major shapes first, then secondary shapes, and include the many reflection-shapes in the glass. If the bottle has a label, draw some of the letter shapes. Use a pencil (HB, B, or 2B) and keep the point sharp. Work primarily in line with some added tone to indicate the lights and darks you see. Try drawing blind at least three or four times. Have two or more restatements. Allow at least twenty minutes for the drawing, but don’t be concerned if it takes longer. It only means you are being diligent about finding shapes. Work life-size or larger.

The over-all shape is drawn first.



Markings help divide shape into three convenient sections.



The sheen of the dog's back subdivides into black and gray shapes. Initially, these are drawn as if they were territories on a map.



As the drawing nears completion, many shape edge are softened and blurred.



Your initial drawing may look like a map or jigsaw puzzle.

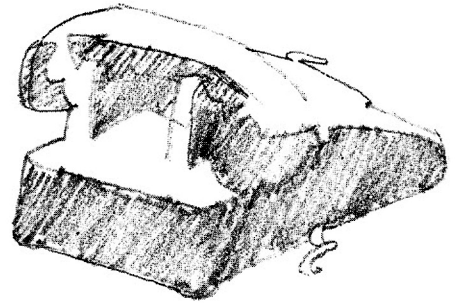
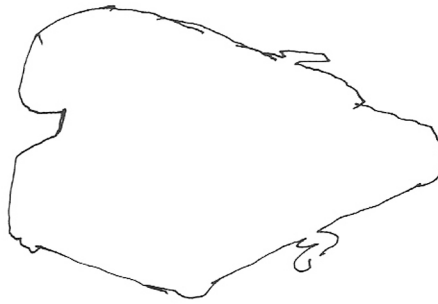


Some shapes are emphasized; others scribbled over or otherwise subordinated.

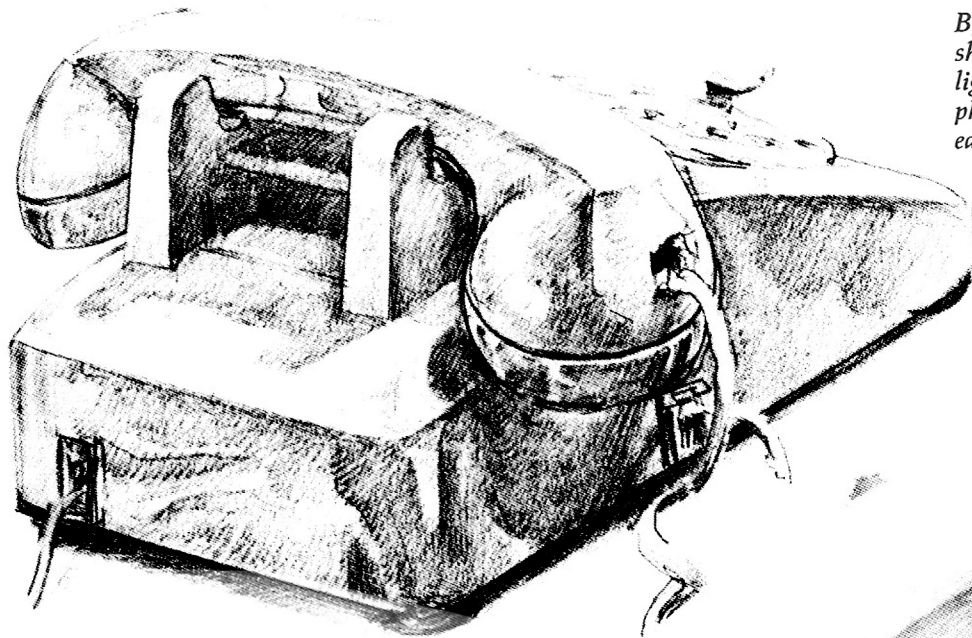


Stronger lighting produces definite shadow shapes.

*Outer shape
is drawn first.*

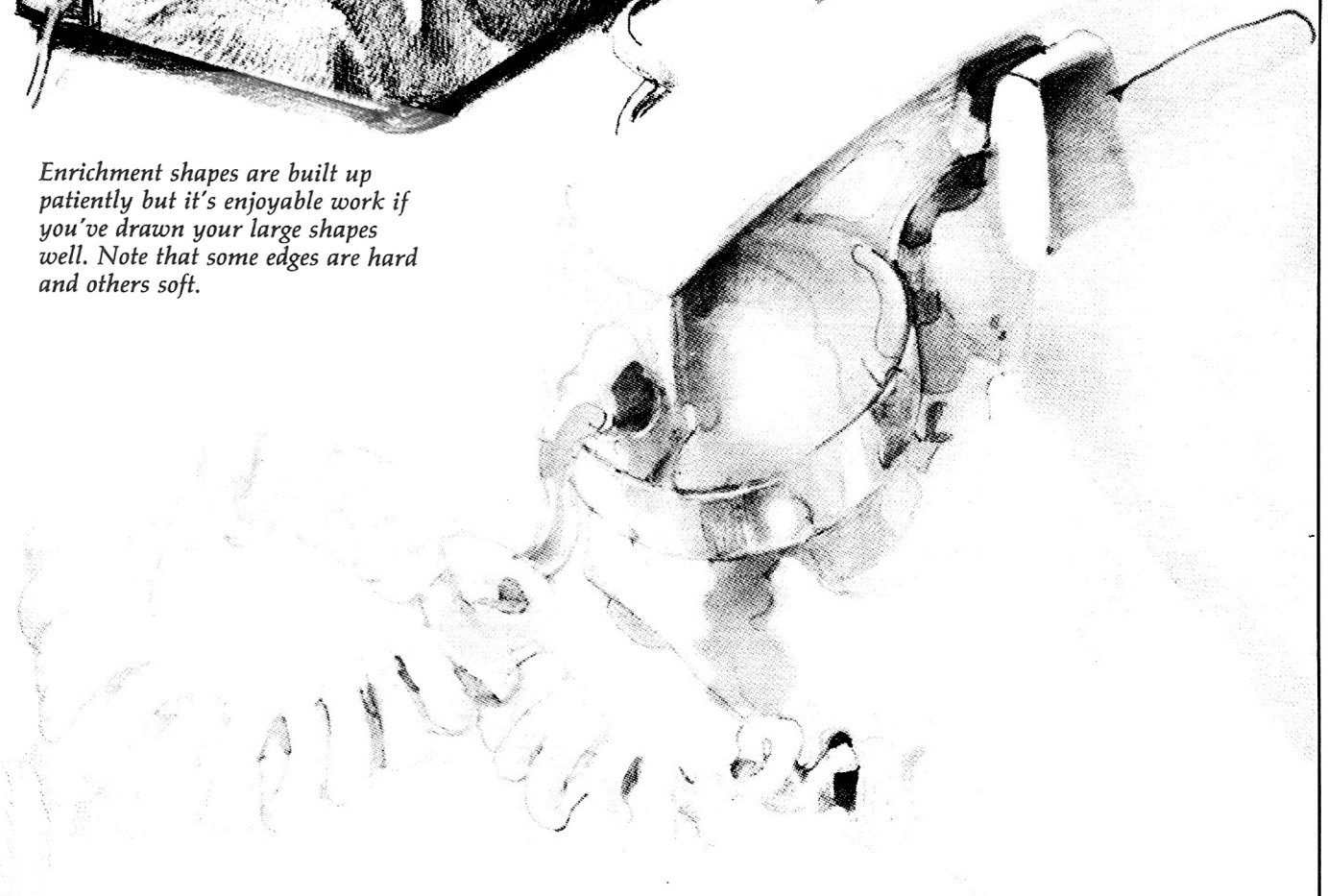


*By squinting, we can make all
shapes fall into a pattern of either
light or dark thus simplifying both
physical and enrichment shapes for
easier initial drawing.*



*Some of the
lights are
picked out with
an eraser.*

*Enrichment shapes are built up
patiently but it's enjoyable work if
you've drawn your large shapes
well. Note that some edges are hard
and others soft.*



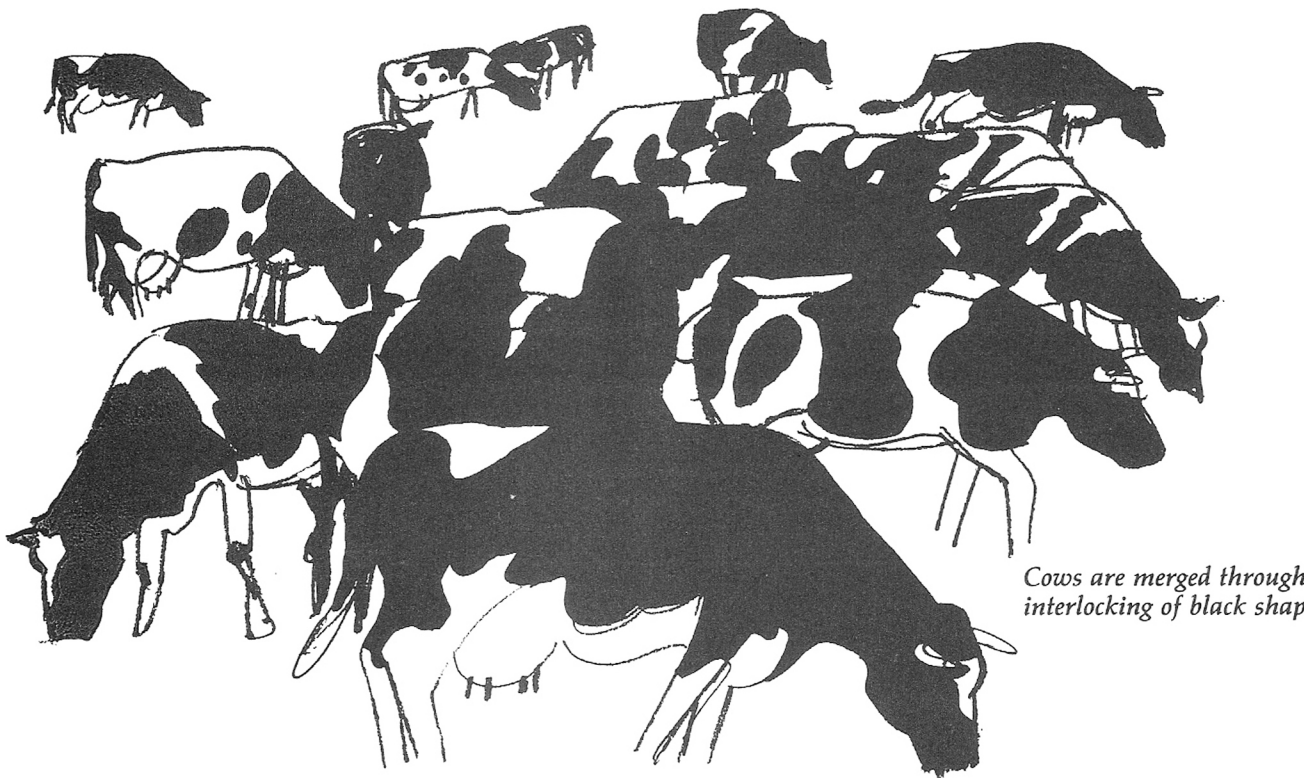
*The simplest subjects can offer fascinating opportunities for shape
play. Note the variety of enrichment shapes just in the cord.*

Rule #3. Tie shapes together.

Rule #3 is a guide for connecting things. It's a unifier, bringing the parts together to create a cohesive whole. The drawing of cows on the lower part of the page clearly illustrates this. By running together the black shapes of their markings — that is, leaving no boundary lines between one cow and another — the artist has created a unified pattern. This is a wonderful design device: We see separate, individual cows and yet, at the same time, we see a continuous uninterrupted black shape running through the herd. This is an example of what I call a "straddle" — embracing opposite qualities simultaneously. We'll discuss straddles in more detail later, but for now let's examine the other shape mergers of the dark of the man's coat with the dark of the background. It's rare that shapes are *totally* merged in this way, but I've included it because it's so striking.

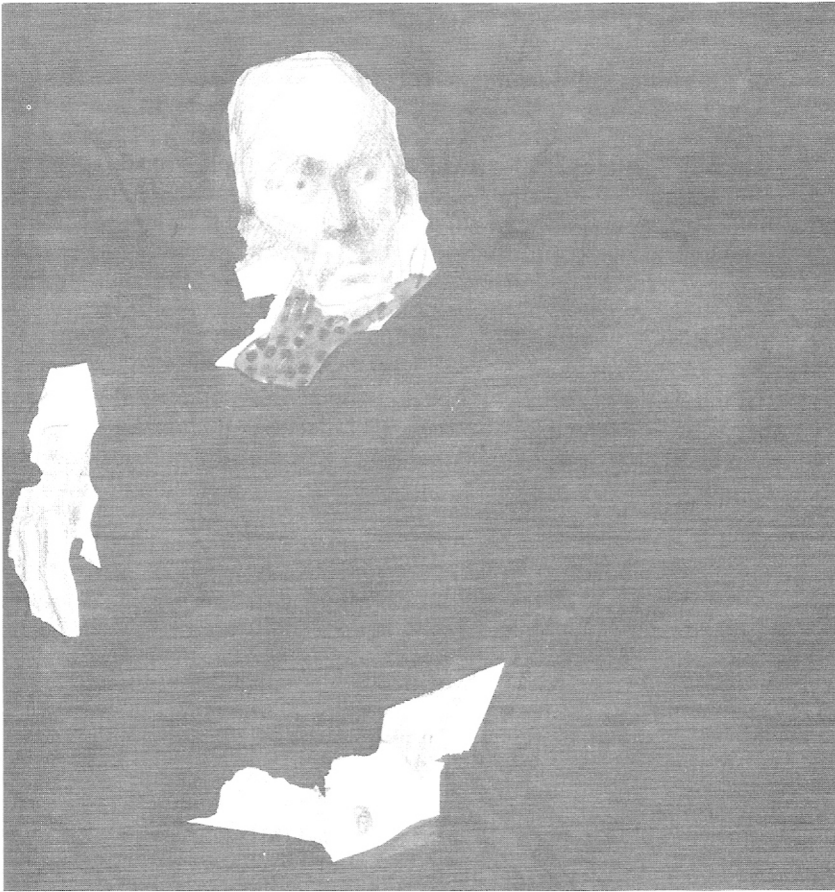
The lower drawing illustrates a more common use of shape merging. Here the two black shapes of the women's dresses are tied together — "merged" — at the knee, but are definitely separate at the shoulder. Frequently, merging the shapes in only one or two places is sufficient.

Rule #3 can be used when any two adjoining shapes are the same tones, or almost the same. We often merge the dark shapes, but white or middle-tone shapes may be merged just as effectively. We'll study merging with light and shadow shapes in Chapter 4.



Cows are merged through interlocking of black shapes

Norman McDonald



A striking effect is created by the total merging of this man's clothing with that of the background.

Robert Baxter

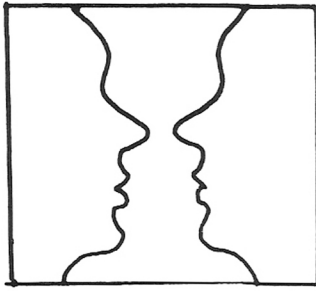


In a partial merger, the black dresses are tied together at the knees but not at the shoulders.

Rule #4. When you see a “trapped” shape, draw it.

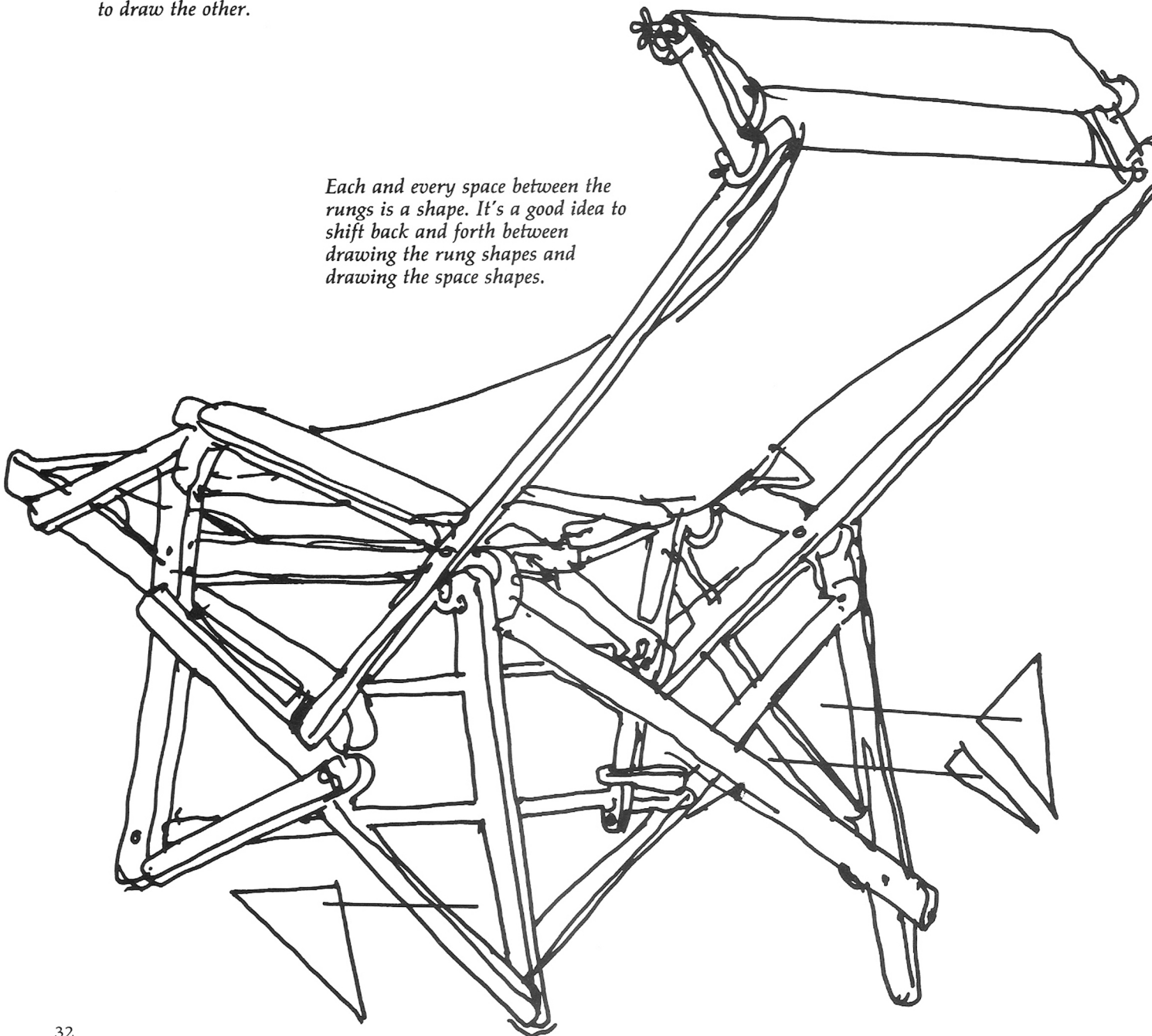
When you bring thumb and forefinger together to make the “OK” gesture, you have created a “trapped” shape in the little space encircled by the fingers. At first glance, it looks like an “O” but if you examine it closely, you’ll notice its more specific characteristics: it’s tapered near the joined fingers, there are little “points” at each of the finger joints, and it has other idiosyncrasies. If you were to draw this shape, you could probably do so accurately and with little effort because it’s not a particular “thing” — just a *shape* which is, as we know, always easier to draw.

You will usually find trapped spaces or shapes in some combination of figure and background. The patch of sky between the leaves of the tree, the spaces between the rungs of a chair, the area of neck between collar and chin — all are



This is a drawing of two faces with a trapped shape between them or a drawing of a vase with trapped shapes on either side. To draw one is to draw the other.

Each and every space between the rungs is a shape. It's a good idea to shift back and forth between drawing the rung shapes and drawing the space shapes.



trapped spaces, as are the white of the eyes and the shape within the handle of a teapot. A standing figure, hand on hip, is a shape and so is the little triangle of space trapped between arm and body. Such shapes are sometimes called "negative" or "background" shapes or merely "spaces," but they are shapes nonetheless.

Now, if it's all shape, it doesn't matter which aspect we draw; the inside of the arm and the outline of the body or the trapped shape they enclose. Since all three share a *common boundary*, to draw one is to draw the other. Since it's easier to draw shapes than things, draw the trapped shape whenever you find it. Also develop the habit of shifting back and forth between drawing objects and trapped shapes to develop a more fluid and flexible drawing approach.

In a similar vein, adjacent shapes serve as proportional checks, so, if you're having trouble with one shape, shift to the adjacent one.

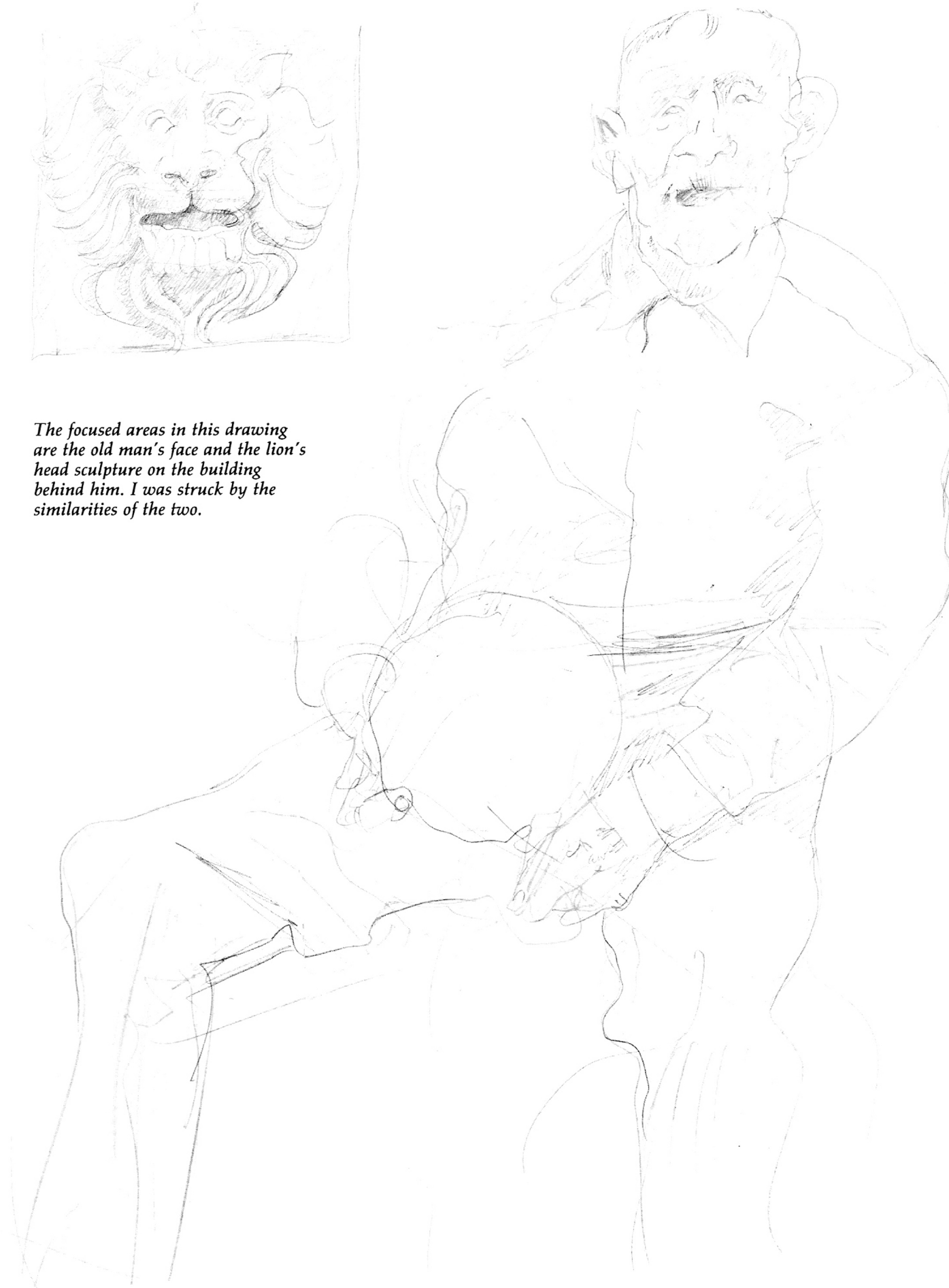
I know an artist who, when beginning a landscape, looks at it upside down from between his legs. He feels this allows him to see it in a fresh way, with new eyes. Drawing trapped shapes has exactly the same "freshening" effect, disrupting our habitually logical way of seeing things. Finding new ways of observing is something we should always try to do.



The dark shape of the blouse is a trapped shape. By drawing it, you also draw a portion of the model's profile.



The focused areas in this drawing are the old man's face and the lion's head sculpture on the building behind him. I was struck by the similarities of the two.



Observation and fatigue

By now you have probably discovered that intense observation is hard work. (Remember, we didn't promise it would be easy!)

Fatigue is inevitable. It often comes on before you realize it. There are, however, several signs you can learn to recognize. One of these is a sudden awareness of time. Ordinarily, involvement in a drawing is like involvement in a dream. You are seldom aware of the passage of time. But, once you become time-conscious, you are probably getting tired. Other indications include an awareness of distractions and a tendency to digress into drawing from knowledge rather than from observation. At these times it's best to simply stop drawing.

The best strategy for outwitting fatigue is to develop the technique of "focusing." This is done by capturing the most interesting parts of your subject before fatigue sets in. Select ahead of time certain areas of interest in your subject and concentrate on developing those areas first at the expense of others which are only briefly considered.

"Focusing" allows you to bunch up both your energies and your time to be spent in just a few areas. For example, in a figure, the interest areas might be the head and hands. The rest of the drawing is treated with utmost simplicity.

With just a few strokes, a face is suggested. The imagination fills in the rest.



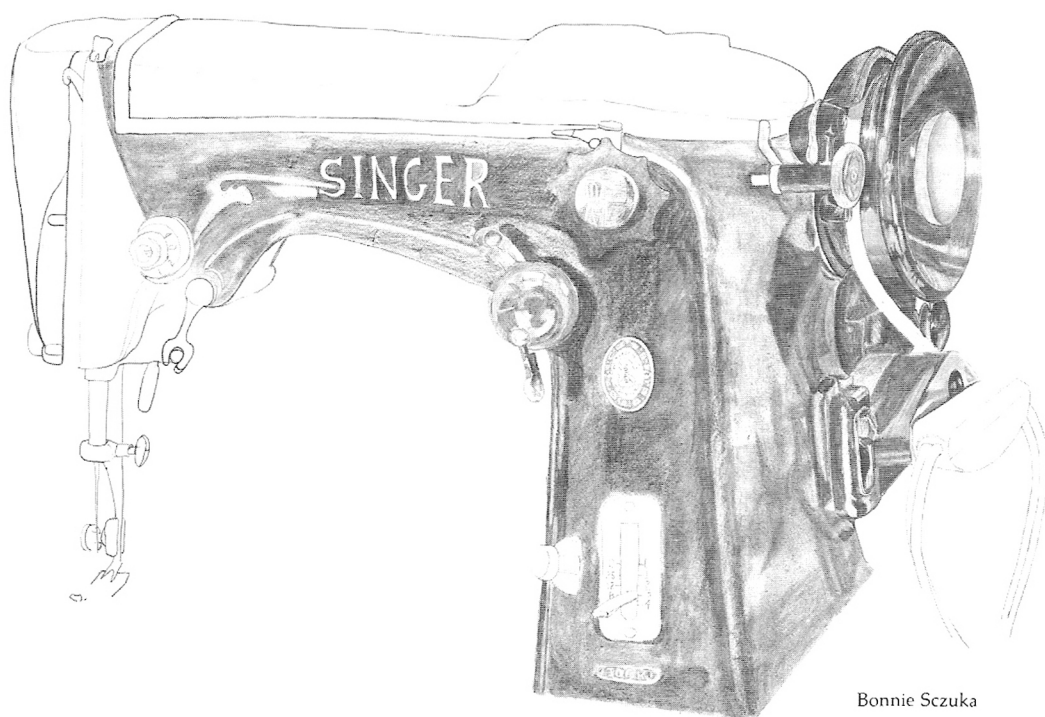
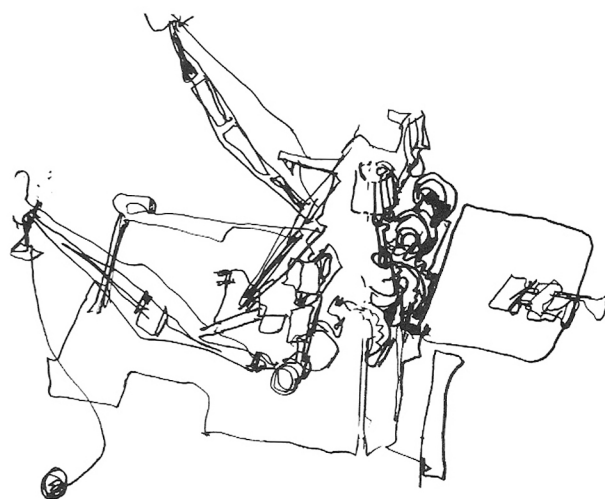


With “focusing,” you are able to capture the best areas before your energies are spent. The result — leaving the viewers to use their imaginations to “fill in” or “complete” the understated forms — adds a great deal to the work.

On these pages, we can see the principle of “focusing,” that is, concentrating on some areas at the expense of others, employed in different ways. Notice that focusing can be used whether the drawing is sketchy or precise. The choice of what is an “interesting” area is a purely personal one. What is interesting to one is not necessarily so to another. What matters is that some areas be selected over others.

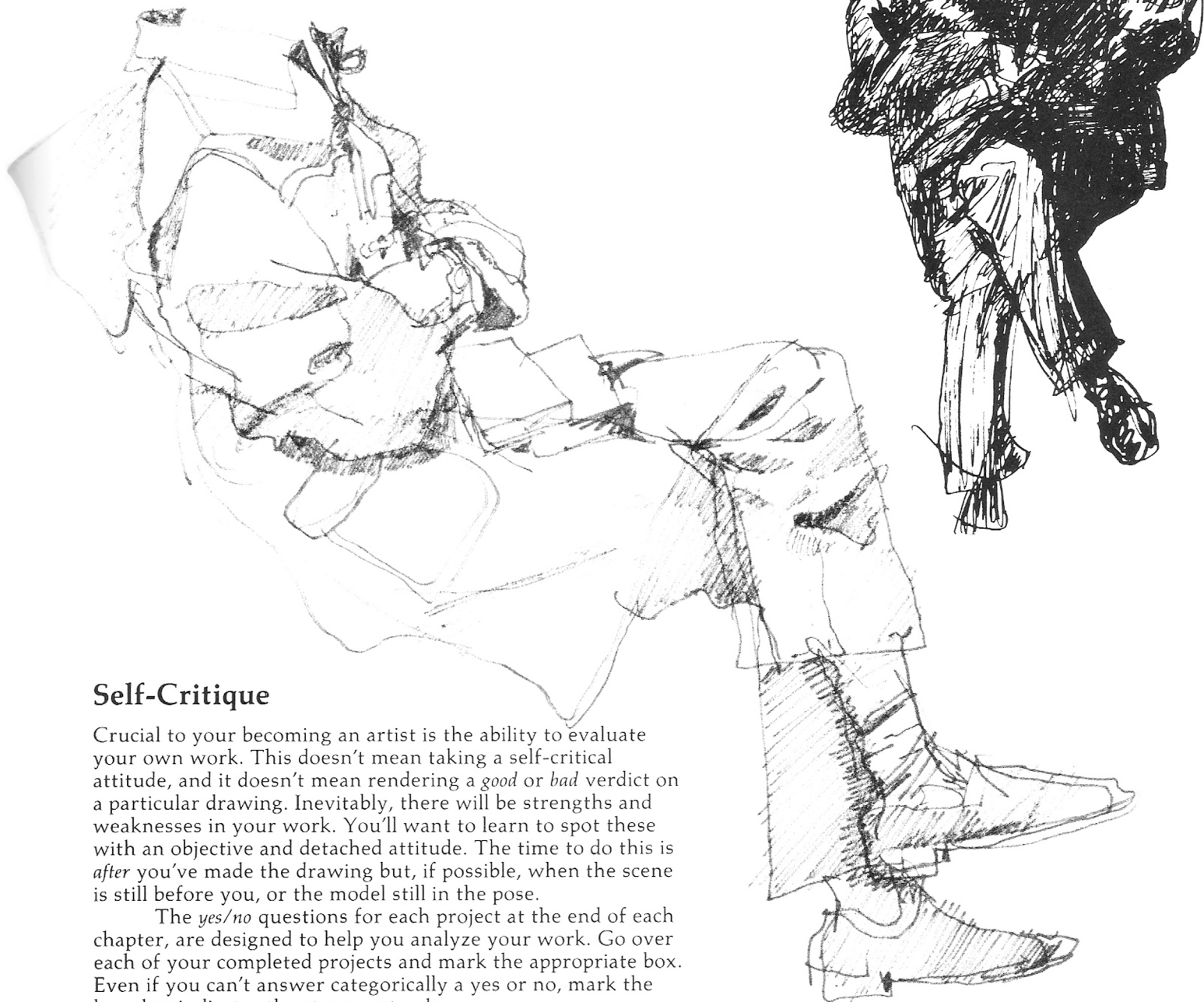
Project 1 - F — Mechanical Objects

Make a drawing of a complicated mechanical object — an egg beater, a sewing machine, a typewriter, or a non-electric rotary pencil sharpener. Use a pencil (2B or HB) and keep the point sharp. Employ “focusing” in your drawing: Select one or two main areas and develop them in detail, treating the remainder of the drawing as simple contours and shapes. Look at the subject more than at the drawing. Search out the major and secondary shapes. (Squinting may be helpful here.) Try drawing blind at least three or four times as you work. Do not erase, but have two or more restatements in your drawing. Allow at least one-half hour. Work larger than life-size.



Bonnie Sczuka

One of the special advantages of drawing over painting or sculpture is that you can stop at any point. There is really no pressure to “finish,” so one may work as long as time, circumstance, and energy permit. At times, drawing becomes a comical race between these elements and your ability to observe and record. In some of these drawings, the race was lost but fun nevertheless. Winning or losing this race is never so important as entering it.



Self-Critique

Crucial to your becoming an artist is the ability to evaluate your own work. This doesn't mean taking a self-critical attitude, and it doesn't mean rendering a *good* or *bad* verdict on a particular drawing. Inevitably, there will be strengths and weaknesses in your work. You'll want to learn to spot these with an objective and detached attitude. The time to do this is *after* you've made the drawing but, if possible, when the scene is still before you, or the model still in the pose.

The *yes/no* questions for each project at the end of each chapter, are designed to help you analyze your work. Go over each of your completed projects and mark the appropriate box. Even if you can't answer categorically a yes or no, mark the box that indicates the stronger tendency.

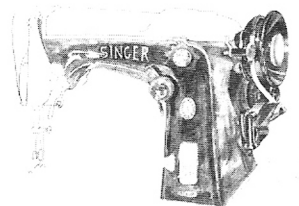
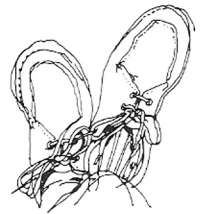
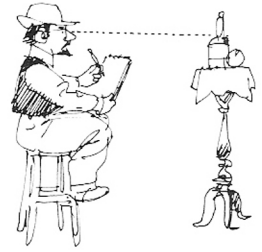
If you check all yes answers, it may not mean you've made a perfect drawing, but it is an indication you are on the right track. It may be that all you need is more practice. Even if you check several *no* answers, if you are satisfied with your effort, go on to the next project. If you are dissatisfied it would be wise to pay particular attention to the *no* questions. This is where your best chance for improvement lies.

KEYS TO CHAPTER 1

The Drawing Process

Chapter 1 presents drawing as a highly learnable skill and stresses the role of drawing from observation in developing that skill. Important keys to remember are:

- **Use practical dialogue.** As you draw, talk to yourself in the language of line and shape rather than in the language of things. Keep your messages curious rather than judgmental.
- **Use triggering words** to direct your hand as you draw. Silently repeat a word that expresses the character of the contour you wish to capture.
- **Draw blind.** From time to time as you work, keep your eyes on the subject while continuing to draw.
- **Restate** rather than erase. When you correct errors or distortions, merely draw the new lines alongside the old ones — which you do not erase.
- **Choose seeing over knowing.** Learn to concentrate on your subject rather than on your drawing.
- **Individualize** by drawing exactly what you see. You will be able to draw specific, unique things rather than symbolized generalities.
- **Simplify shapes.** When you're in danger of being overwhelmed by the details of your subject, squinting will make them manageable.
- **Look for shapes.** Learn to see your subject as a series of interlocking shapes. Draw the major ones first and then the secondary, enrichment shapes. Be alert to possible shape tie-ins and trapped shapes.
- **Focus.** Isolate the more interesting areas of your subject for special consideration while you treat the other areas in a more abbreviated way.



SELF-CRITIQUE OF YOUR PROJECTS

To properly critique yourself, try to answer the following questions carefully. Do not be concerned with how “good” or “bad” you think the drawings are. What is important is how well you met the stated criteria.

Project 1 - A — Feet

YES NO

- Did you observe the subject as much as you observed your drawing? _____
- Did you attempt to draw “blind” at least three or four times? _____
- Did you try “restating”? _____
- In your judgment, does the drawing contain accurate contours and details that resemble what you observed? _____



Project 1 - B — Hand

YES NO

- Did you observe the subject as much as you observed your drawing? _____
- Did you attempt to draw “blind” at least three or four times? _____
- Did you try “restating”? _____
- In your judgment, does the drawing contain accurate contours and details that resemble what you observed? _____



Project 1 - C — Pepper

YES NO

- Did you make the first drawing without either looking at or having just studied the fruit? _____
- In the second drawing, did you observe the subject as much as you observed your drawing? _____
- In the second drawing, did you attempt to draw “blind” at least three or four times? _____
- In the second drawing, did you try restating? _____
- In your judgment, does the second drawing contain accurate contours, tones, and details that resemble what you observed? _____
- In your judgment, is there a significant difference in the quality of the two drawings? _____



Project 1 - D — Eyes

YES NO

- Did you observe the subject as much as you observed your drawings? _____
- Did you attempt to draw “blind” at least three or four times? _____
- Did you try “restating”? _____
- In your judgment, does the drawing contain accurate contours, tones, and details that resemble what you observed? _____



Project 1 - E — Tinted Glass

YES NO

- Did you observe the subject as much as you observed your drawing? _____
- Did you break down your subject into shapes, drawing major shapes first then secondary shapes? _____
- Were you able to record shapes in each of these categories: reflection shapes, shadow shapes, and label and lettering shapes? _____
- Did you attempt to draw “blind” at least three or four times? _____
- Did you try “restating”? _____
- In your judgment, does the drawing contain accurate shapes, contours, and tones that resemble what you observed? _____



Project 1 - F — Mechanical Objects

YES NO

- Did you observe the subject as much as you observed your drawing? _____
- Did you break down your subject into shapes, drawing major shapes first, then secondary shapes? _____
- Did you try “restating”? _____
- In your judgment, does the drawing contain accurate shapes, contours, and tones that resemble what you observed? _____
- Did you employ “focusing” by concentrating your efforts in one or two areas while treating the other areas more simply? _____