The Basement Picasso Basic Drawing Course

Material produced by Peter B. Smith, owner and creator of Basement Picasso. Version 1.0.3

Introduction

Drawing is a fundamental skill for any artist interested in the more traditional methods and techniques. Sadly good drawing skills are taking second place in many areas of contemporary art. It is not clear to me whether this is due to the notion that drawing is of secondary importance to the concept, whether it is because it is deemed too difficult or time consuming to learn, or whether there is just a lack of good tutors who themselves possess both good drawing skills and the skill to teach it to others.

What I do believe is that it is possible to learn to draw (for pretty much anyone) and that it is possible to be taught quickly and effectively. This basic drawing course will introduce a complete method that will teach you the basics of analytical representational drawing and give you the confidence to sit down in front of a subject and begin to draw it. As you develop you may well progress past accurate analytical drawings and become more interested in expressive drawings, but with good basic skills you should find that you are never limited in what you can do. Knowing that you can draw something accurately frees you to explore the creativity in a subject.

This course will introduce line and mark making. It will explain bounding boxes, measurements, horizontal and vertical relationships, enveloping, angle measurements, refining contours and relating the drawing to the edge. It will cover positive and negative shapes. It will show you how to deal accurately yet simply with perspective in all cases and then gradually move you from basic line work into tonal work, explaining tones and how to see them. You will complete the course with a full life drawing plus a drawing project of your own choice.

This may sound like a complex process but each simple module will build on the previous to become, by the end of the course, a simple to follow, easy to understand, intuitive drawing process that can form the basis of any future work. This drawing process is not about producing the slickest pencil drawings or ultra realistic pencil drawings - it is an analytical drawing process that helps you fully engage with, understand and convey the subject before you.

The course uses a simple set of materials (primarily graphite pencils and paper). The course does not look at drawing with different materials (such as charcoal, coloured pencil, pastel pen and ink etc) as they each introduce complexities beyond the scope of this basic drawing course. The course does not look at colour in any way for similar reasons. These will be covered in separate courses.

I hope that you find the course clear to read, enjoyable to use, and that ultimately it helps to improve your drawing skills significantly.

Course contents

The course consists of 20 modules as follows:

- Module **1**   Your first line drawing
- Module **2**   Your first tonal drawing
- Module **3**   Line and marks
- Module **4**   Simple enveloping of objects
- Module **5**   Introducing relationships and measurements
- Module **6**   Taking measurements further
- Module **7**   Further measuring, angles and perspective
- Module **8**   Refining the basic envelope
- Module **9**   Refining the envelope with line quality and weight
- Module **10**   Taking the drawing to the edge
- Module **11**   How to start a drawing
- Module **12**   Not being precious with what you have done
- Module **13**   Introduction to drawing with tones
- Module **14**   Tonal range exercises
- Module **15**   Toning all the shapes
- Module **16**   Following the form of the objects
- Module **17**   Increasing the tonal range
- Module **18**   Dealing with edges
- Module **19**   An introduction to the figure
- Module **20**   A personal drawing project

Course Materials

The materials are listed for each individual module. For the whole course you will need:

- Drawing paper or pad - A4 size and possibly A3 as well. Medium grain cartridge paper will be the best - avoid paper that is too rough (as it will be difficult to get good crisp lines) or paper that is too smooth such as Bristol board (as tonal work can be more difficult, and erasing can easily smudge)
- A range of graphite pencils - 4H,2H,HB,F,3B and 5B would be a good start
- A graphite stick or block (HB)
- Pencil sharpeners (or craft knives)
- Rubbers (hard type not putty rubbers)
- Some objects to draw for still life exercise, such as bottles, fruit, vegetables, boxes of various shapes and sizes
- Good natural light or a suitable lamp of some sort

Time Required

This course should typically take around 30-40 hours to complete.

Module 1

Your first line drawing

Introduction

Welcome to the basic drawing course. This course aims to provide a step by step method that will show you how to develop your drawing. Each step builds on what you have learned in the last one and will lead you through line drawing, showing you how to measure, how to create a basic envelope, how to refine the line work, how to deal with positive and negative shapes and then transitions into dealing with the tone of objects, shapes of shadows and how to deal with form. The aim of the course is to provide you with the basic skills to be able to produce a reasonably accurate, analytical, representational drawing.

Objectives

The objective of this first module is to produce a line drawing to the best of your abilities. It will be very useful as you progress through the course (and hopefully beyond) to be able to look back at your earlier work and see how your work has developed. Hopefully you will find that your drawing has become stronger, more confident and starts to reflect a quality that shows a real connection with the subject.

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 drawing paper
Objects for a still life setup

Module Description

Set up a simple still life to draw from (or use a reference photo, such as this one). Keep the setup reasonably simple but include a mix of simple shaped objects (for example apples, oranges, bottles etc) and one or two more complex objects (for example a pineapple, a plant a flower etc.)

Do a line drawing, focusing on line only. Do not use any tone (shaded areas or cross hatching). Use the rubber as needed to make corrections to the drawing.

Estimated Time

1 hour

Summary

This pre-instruction line drawing will help to show your progress with the course.

Module 2

Your first tonal drawing

Introduction

This module builds on the first module by asking you to do a tonal drawing before you get instruction, to let you see how the course is helping your skills to develop.

Objectives

The objective of this module is to produce a single A4 tonal drawing of a still life subject. You can produce the tone using shaded areas or by cross hatching.

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 drawing paper
Objects for a still life setup

Module Description

Set up a simple still life to draw from (or use a reference photo, such as this one). Keep the setup reasonably simple but include a mix of simple shaped objects (for example apples, oranges, bottles etc) and one or two more complex objects (for example a pineapple, a plant, a flower etc.) The setup from the first module would be suitable. Try to make sure that the lighting is from a single source (lamp or window) if possible, and comes from the side rather than behind or in front.

Do a tonal drawing of the subject using the range of pencils and using shading and cross hatching as you feel is appropriate.

Your drawing may still contain line, as you think appropriate, as well as tone.

Estimated Time

1 hour

Summary

Again, this pre-instruction line drawing will help to show your progress with the course.

Module 3

Line and Marks

Introduction

Having done a couple of modules now to get you to start thinking about drawing and to help determine how strong your drawing skills are, let's start to disassemble the whole drawing process so that we can understand each element in isolation and then start to build a stronger set of skills to use in the future.

Objectives

In this module we will consider how to hold a pencil - something that sounds obvious but something that many people do not consider or think about.

We will then start to explore the variety of line and marks that we can get from a pencil on paper.

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 drawing paper

Module Description

Firstly, let's consider how to hold the pencil. When drawing, many people will hold a pencil in the same way as they do for writing. This is fine for small detail work but is actually quite restricting on the movement of the hand and the arm and prevents more flowing and sweeping movements. It tends to drag the artist into focusing on fine detail.

By holding the pencil further down the shaft you should find that you can get a looser, less tense movement to the pencil tip and can create more sweeping lines and gestures.

Another way to hold a pencil is like a sword, allowing you to draw with your whole arm in large sweeping movements. It is unlikely that you would wish to do this for smaller drawings but for larger drawings, particularly drawing on an easel, you may find that this is a much looser and more energetic way to draw.

You can also hold the pencil more loosely to allow you to draw with the edge of the pencil rather than the point. This can be useful for long straight lines, particularly verticals and horizontals.

Now make an A4 page of marks and line. Experiment with

- Different types of pencils
- Different amounts of pressure
- Different types of lines (Thick, thin, variegated)
- Different qualities of line (straight, curving, wandering)

Make as big a range of marks as you can whilst covering the whole page

Try holding the pencil in different ways to see how it affects the quality of the marks.

Do focus on lines - do not start shading or cross-hatching to produce tone. Do not try to draw anything - you are not making tones or textures or objects.

You should end up with pages that look something like these:
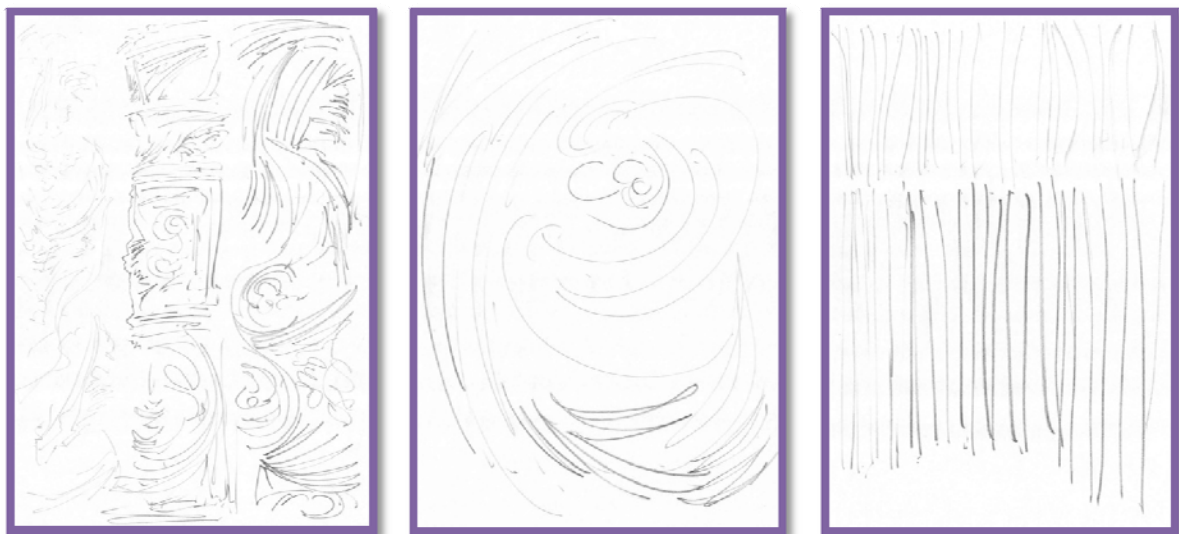
Feel free to cover several pages - really explore the lines and marks that you can make.

Estimated Time
30 minutes

Summary
You will now have considered how to hold the pencil and how that can affect the marks you make. You should also start to have a feel for the dynamic range of marks that it is possible to produce from a small set of pencils.

Module 4

Simple enveloping of objects

Introduction

Having set the benchmark in modules one and two and started to explore and understand the materials in module three, let's go right back to the basics and look at how we can get a drawing started. To do this we will use a method called enveloping which allows us to construct object contour lines by making an approximate envelope which we can then refine to make progressively more accurate.

Enveloping allows us to approximate the outer contour of an object with fewer simple (usually relatively straight) lines. Enveloping can be explained as a two dimensional sculpting process, which makes it sound a little complex but it is actually relatively simple.

An envelope is constructed as follows:

1. Draw a bounding box. A bounding box is the smallest rectangle (or sometimes square) that can be drawn around the object without cutting into it (i.e. to just touch the object). (This is a 2D equivalent to a block of stone)

2. Draw straight lines that cut the box (chip bits off the block) to make the shape closer to the objects shape. Note how we now have a very crude envelope (outline) made up of a few lines (seven in this case). Note that some of the lines are part of the original bounding box.

3. We can repeat this process and draw more straight lines to chip more bits off the envelope, making it a better approximation.

Objectives

The objective for this module is to begin to understand the principle of enveloping to see how it can assist in drawing an object.

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 drawing paper
Objects for a still life setup

Module Description

Set up a still life to draw from (or use a reference photo, such as this one). Keep the setup basic, using relatively simple shaped objects (for example apples, oranges, bottles etc). Try to make sure that the lighting is from a single source (lamp or window), if possible, and comes from the side rather than behind or in front.

Start with one object and draw the envelope around it (starting with the bounding box if you find that helps). Make sure that the general proportions (height to width) are roughly correct.

Start drawing another object using the same principles, i.e. using the minimum number of roughly straight lines to block out the general shape (the envelope) of the object. Check the general shape of the object both for its own proportions and for its relationship to the other object.

Continue this process, rubbing out and adjusting lines as needed and add more objects into the image until the envelope drawing is complete.

Repeat this whole process with 2 or 3 further setups to complete 3 or 4 envelope drawings.

Do draw just the envelope of the outline of the object; do not draw details within the objects or the shadows on the objects.

Estimated Time

1 hour

Summary

In this module we have introduced the concept of enveloping as a mechanism to create the basic outlines of the objects that we are drawing. We have quite deliberately chosen relatively simple objects to introduce the concept, but the use of enveloping will progress (in this course and beyond) to much more complex objects (such as the human figure).

You may find the concept of using an envelope tricky to begin with, particularly if you have done some drawing before, but if you stick with it through this course and beyond it will reward you with quicker, more accurate, and ultimately much more satisfying drawings.
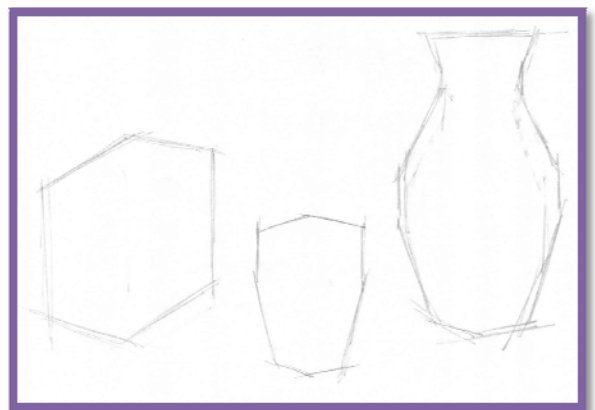
Module 5

Introducing relationships and measurements

Introduction

In the last module we introduced the concept of enveloping an object to approximate the shape (outer contour) of an object. When we draw the envelope for the first object we are simply checking the lines against that single object. We are asking ourselves if the proportions (horizontal and vertical sizes) are correct for this object.

When we start to draw the envelope for the second object we must relate that to the first object, as well as to itself. For example, is the second object the correct scale (size) and in the right place compared to the first.

A simple mechanism to assist with making these judgements is to overlay a grid on the subject. We can simply use the grid to help our eye judge the relative position and size of objects or we can take the assistance a step further and draw a matching grid on the paper.

Objectives

The objective for this module is to see how the measurements that a grid provides can help in the placement of object envelopes and how it helps to relate the scale of objects.

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 drawing paper
Objects for a still life setup

Module Description

For this module it is probably best to use a reference picture so that you can get the larger version and apply a grid to it. You can draw from the screen or print the image. Add a small grid to the image (say 4 to 6 boxes). On your paper - draw a box that is in the same proportion as the image (that is the ratio of width to height is the same) and then divide the box into a grid that matches the number of boxes on the reference picture.

As for the previous modules, start to draw the envelope for the first object but this time you can use the grid to help with the scale and placement of the first object. Look at the object and where it cuts the grid lines and then mark these points on your grid to help place the envelope. When you start the second and subsequent objects use the grid to relate them to the first object.

Repeat this 2 or 3 times to get initial envelope drawings that have been assisted with the use of grids

Estimated Time

1 hour

Summary

This module introduces the concept of measurement and relationship and has shown how we can use these to improve the relationship between the enveloping of different objects to produce a more analytically accurate initial envelope around separate or related objects. Many artists use a grid when transferring a drawing to a different scale, for example to enlarge a preparatory drawing onto a canvas ready for painting.

Module 6

Taking measurement further

Introduction

In the last module we introduced the concept of using a grid to help with the initial placement of the envelopes that we created. In fact the grid actually helps with two separate elements.

Firstly, the grid allows you to make comparative measurements. You can compare height versus width for an individual object, or you can compare height versus height (or width versus width) between different objects. The grid is a very simple but limited way of making relative measurements between objects and we will explore how to take this further.

Secondly, the grid allows you to compare relative positions by using the horizontal or vertical lines to help locate items. For example, is the bottom of an object higher or lower than another object? Again, the lines that are used for placement are a simple but limited way of making relative positional guides between objects and we will explore how to take this further as well.

The grid is very helpful, but it has two limitations:

- It is fixed in size
- It is fixed in position

Ideally the grid would adjust to the size that we need for each appropriate object, and would move to provide the horizontals or verticals that were most useful for us. We can approximate this by using a finer pitched grid (one with more boxes) however a grid will only work when we are working from photos but is not directly useful when working from life. (In the past some artists have suggested various schemes to use grids in real life - a famous example is the system proposed by Albrecht Durer for dealing with perspective which used a window with a grid on it as shown).

So how can we use the grid principle to help us without using an actual grid...?

Objectives

In this module we will learn how to measure and how to relate objects with lines.

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 drawing paper
Objects for a still life setup

Module Description

Set up a still life to draw from. Keep the setup straight forward using relatively simple shaped objects (for example apples, oranges, bottles etc). Try to make sure that the lighting is from a single source (lamp or window), if possible, and comes from the side rather than behind or in front. Ideally you will work from life. If using a reference photo do not add grid lines to it and, when printed, hang it on the wall a little away from you.

Start by creating an envelope for your first object. Check the proportions (width to height) by measuring. To measure - hold the pencil in front of you, in line with the object, then use your thumb to measure the object. Hold the measurement on the pencil and then rotate it to see how the measurement compares. Make sure that the pencil is exactly horizontal or vertical.


Note how this is effectively making (two sides of a single box of) a grid. By sliding our thumb to take a measurement we can effectively make any grid size we need.

Before we start drawing the envelope of the second object - relate the position by extending a horizontal (by actually drawing it on the page) and then hold the pencil up horizontally to help see the relative position of the object. If needed, measure the distance of the gap between the two objects.

Continue to draw the envelopes of the objects but continue to make relative size measurements and also extend horizontals and verticals as needed to help relate position.

Do not remove or erase the horizontals and verticals, leave them as part of the drawing. You may also wish to show which measurements have been used, as shown here.
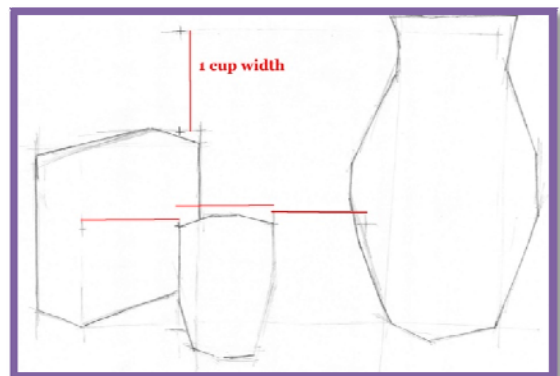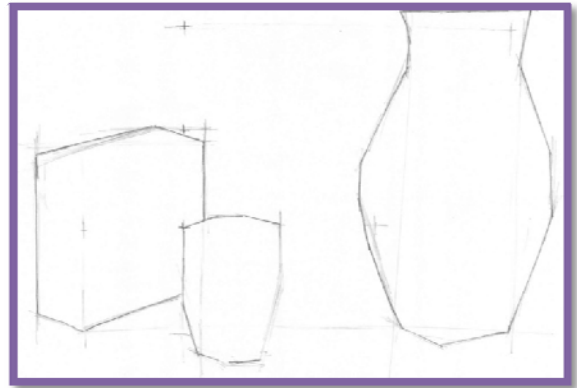
Estimated Time
1 hour

Summary
This module has introduced the concept of measuring. This may seem a complex concept and process to begin with but it is an absolute fundamental of all drawing. It is what all artists do and as you progress you will do this more accurately and train the eye to do the measuring all the time.

Many artists leave construction lines and notation on their drawings, and some artists even leave these marks in their final work, for example Euan Uglow and William Coldstream.

Further Reading
Links for Euan Uglow

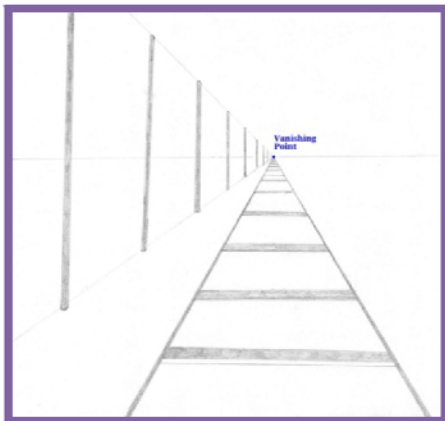http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euan_Uglow

http://www.marlboroughfineart.com/artists/view.asp?id=109

Module 7

**Further measuring, angles and perspective**

Introduction

You may well have heard of the concept of linear perspective before however, for our purposes, in this drawing process it is not necessary to use perspective tools. It is useful though to be aware of these rules of perspective and to understand them. What we can then see is that this drawing process does not ignore perspective but inherently deals with it automatically.

So what is perspective...? The basic rule is simple, if the same sized object is further away from you, it will look smaller. Parallel lines (e.g. edges of a cube, or train tracks) will get closer together as they get further away. The classic example is the telegraph poles or train track to infinity. We can draw lines through the extremities of the objects and when we extend them they converge at a point called a vanishing point.

We can have a 2 vanishing point scheme:

We can even have a 3 vanishing point scheme. In fact each object in a scene can have different vanishing points (depending on the angle and plane that it sits on.
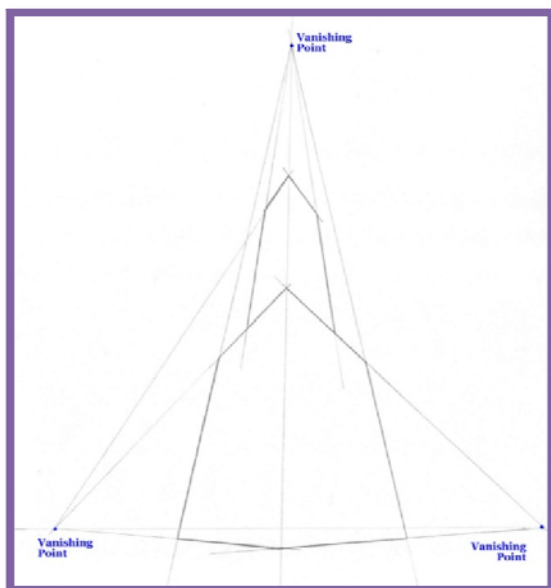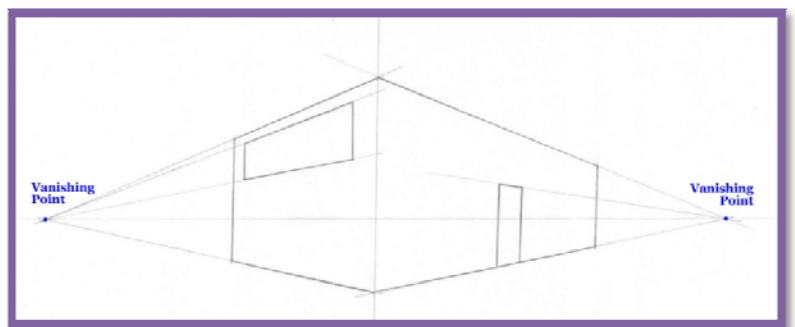
When we draw bounding boxes round objects and draw the envelope we are automatically dealing with the perspective effects of size.

The bounding box will be smaller for the object that is further away and will be placed to reflect the position in space.
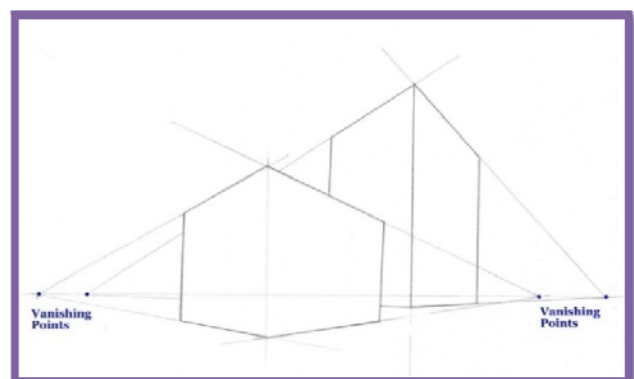
When we cut away at the bounding box with angled lines we are dealing with the perspective effect of the lines (that would go off to a vanishing point) by simple getting the angle of the lines correct.

Objectives

The objective of this module is to see how the drawing process deals with the effects of perspective, firstly by drawing two identical objects, where one is closer to you, and then by drawing a set of boxes to see how we deal with the angles of lines.

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 drawing paper (maybe A3 as well)
Objects for a still life setup including 2 identical objects (e.g. bottles) and a selection of boxes of different sizes.

Module Description

Start with the two identical objects and place one about twice as far away from you as the other. Draw the envelope of the closer (larger) object first. Then draw the envelope of the second object, relating its position and size to the first one, using horizontals, verticals and measurements as before.


Now set up a stack of boxes similar to the one shown. You can start with just a few boxes but this is a great exercise to work with a large stack of boxes too. Draw the envelope of one box to begin with.
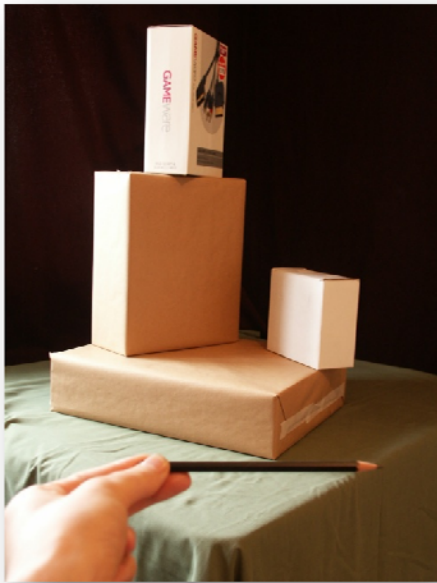
You can get a feel for the angle of each line by using a pencil and holding it horizontally or vertically next to the line. This helps you judge the angle. Also, by constantly referring to horizontal and vertical reference lines we can ensure that the angles of the lines are correct.
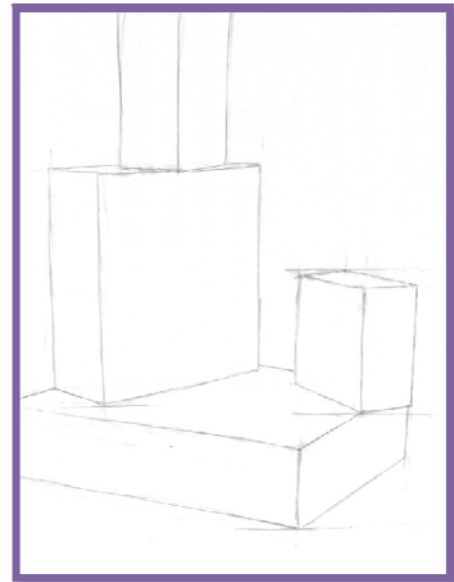
Estimated Time

1-2 hours

Summary

Look at the drawing of the two objects. Even though we know the objects are the same size, we are easily able to draw them as different sizes on the page, in a way that incorporates the effects of perspective on the object, thanks to the use of measurement.

Looking at the drawing of the boxes we should find that by drawing the angles of the lines correctly we have accurately represented the perspective effects of the parallel lines of the object. You might like to extend some of the box lines and see how they actually converge (but note that this will most likely take you off your existing bit of paper - which is one of the issues with trying to use vanishing points in drawings).

This gives you a basic understanding of perspective, and shows that the drawing process that we are using will inherently and accurately incorporate the effects of perspective into our drawing.

Module 8

Refining the basic envelope

Introduction

So far we have introduced the concept of creating a basic envelope around objects and making basic measurements to help us place separate envelopes in order to create the basis of a drawing. These fundamentals are very important to know and understand and we will continue to develop them as we now move on to refine the envelope into a more accurate contour.

The envelope that we have been drawing is a very approximate outline that helps us place the objects relative to each other and to make sure the scale of objects is consistent. However, the envelope is a very approximate version of the contour (the outer boundary) of an object. We have enough basics to look at refining the envelope and drawing the contour more accurately.

Learning the process this way round prevents the basic problem that many new artists face, namely drawing in the detail of an object (e.g. a persons hand) but getting the scale and/or position of it completely wrong.

Objectives

We will look to refine the envelopes of the object to get a more accurate contour.

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 drawing paper (maybe A3 as well)
Objects for a still life setup

Module Description

Set up a still life to draw from (or use a reference photo, such as this one). Keep the setup straight forward using relatively simple shaped objects (for example apples, oranges, bottles etc). Try to make sure that the lighting is from a single source (lamp or window), if possible, and comes from the side rather than behind or in front. Ideally you will work from life. If using a reference photo do not add grid lines to it and, when printed, hang it on the wall a little away from you.

Start by using a light pencil (say a 2H) and draw the envelopes of the objects, making sure to measure objects and to draw horizontals and verticals as needed. Leave all your lines in, including the horizontal and vertical relationship lines.

Once you are happy with the basic envelopes start to refine the contour of one of the objects. Use a slightly heavier pencil (say a B grade). What exactly do we mean by refine? What we are aiming for is a more accurately observed contour that represents the object. Look carefully at the object and start to convey the movement of the contour. Feel free to add more straight lines to approximate the curves more accurately if you find that the easiest way to refine or draw the curves in directly if that feels more natural. Remember to think about how you are holding the pencil when you do this.

Once you have refined the contour of each object (very gently) rub out the drawing - you are not trying to erase any lines - simply use the rubber to gently knock back the lines that are there to make them lighter. Then redraw the outlines looking more closely to try and get an even more accurate line. Use a heavier pencil (say 4B) but do keep it very sharp while you work.
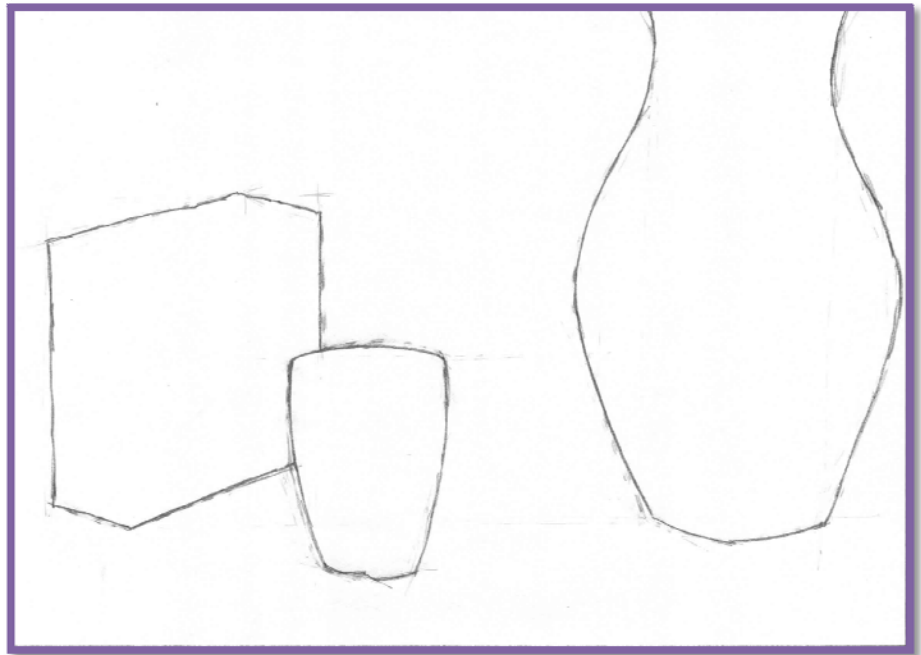
Do not worry about the weight or thickness of the line just yet - just try to keep the lines reasonably even. Aim to do a second drawing in the time allocated, maybe even on A3 paper if you fancy it.

Estimated Time
1-2 hours

Summary
Having set the basics in terms of measurement and enveloping objects, we can now develop the contours, having a greater confidence that the basic shapes and proportions are correct.

Traditionally an outline drawing like this would be called a cartoon and would be used to transfer a drawing onto a canvas ready to paint. Unlike a comic cartoon which has simplistic outlines and is highly stylized and simplified, a traditional artistic cartoon would be a highly accurate outline.

Module 9

Refining the envelope with line quality and weight

Introduction

We have built on the ideas of enveloping and measurement and have now started to refine the envelopes to produce more accurate contours (outlines). We will now continue to build our drawing process by considering what we can add to our drawing using differing weights of the line.

Objectives

To continue to build the drawing process, adding line weight as a tool when refining the contours.

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)

Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)

Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)

A4 drawing paper (maybe A3 as well)

Objects for a still life setup

Module Description

Set up a still life to draw from (or use a reference photo, such as this one). Keep the setup straight forward using relatively simple shaped objects (for example apples, oranges, bottles etc). Try to make sure that the lighting is from a single source (lamp or window) if possible, and comes from the side rather than behind or in front. Ideally you will work from life. If using a reference photo do not add grid lines to it and, when printed, hang it on the wall a little away from you.

Start by using a light pencil (say a 2H) and draw the envelopes of the objects, making sure to measure objects and to draw horizontals and verticals as needed. Leave all your lines in, including the horizontal and vertical relationship lines.

Once you are happy with the basic envelopes, start to refine the contour of one of the objects. Use a slightly heavier pencil (say a B grade). Once you have refined the contour of each object, very gently rub out the drawing - you are not trying to erase any lines - simply use the rubber to gently knock back the lines that are there to make them lighter. Then redraw the outlines, looking more closely again to try and get an even more accurate line.

Use a heavier pencil (say 4B) keeping it very sharp while you work. As you draw the outlines, as well as the shape of the line, consider the weight of it (that is how dark the line it, and how heavy or thick the line is). Where an object is closer to you, try making the contour of the object heavier and darker. Also, where part of an object is in shadow (or is much darker than another part of the object), try making the line darker.
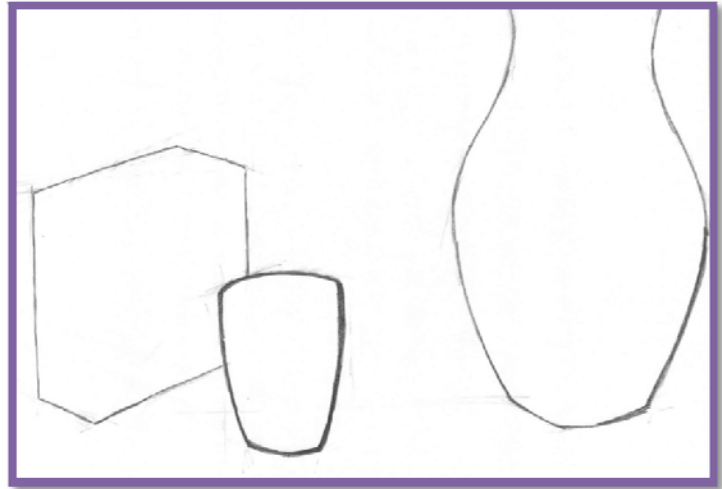
Remember to stick to just line, we are not quite ready to add tone to the image just yet.

Aim to do a second drawing in the time allocated, maybe even on A3 paper if you fancy it.

Estimated Time
1-2 hours

Summary
What we can start to see with this module is what the weight of a line can offer in the context of a drawing. A thinner lighter line will tend to sit back in the distance, while a stronger heavier line will tend to bring an object forward. Also, as the line varies around a single object, it can convey a sense of light and shadow, as well as a sense of weight.

Even without adding shading or tone or texture we can start to convey a greater sense of the object through the use of line, as well as a sense of depth and distance.

# Module 10

Taking the drawing to the edge

Introduction

So far we have been concentrating on the envelopes around objects. These contours around the shapes are referred to as positive shapes. They are positive shapes because the object and hence the shape is something that exists as an object. If we draw a contour of a mug, for example, it is an object that exists - we could walk over to the still life and pick it up and remove it.

If we have positive shapes then we can consider the reverse, namely negative shapes. Negative shapes are the shapes that exist around and between objects. They do not exist directly in real life, as we cannot walk over and remove them from the arrangement. They appear on the drawing as a consequence of drawing positive shapes.
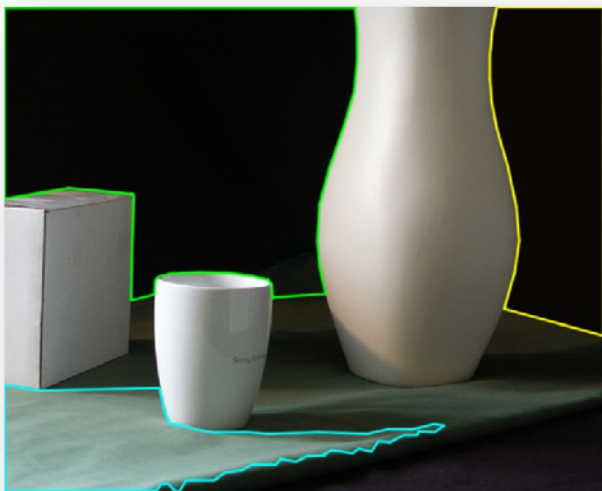
In fact, the negative shapes are every bit as important as the positive shapes, both in terms of the interest that they provide in the drawing, and how they can help us to understand the objects to be able to draw them better.

Negative shapes can be external to objects but they can also be internal to the contour of the object. For example, the mug handle creates an inner shape, a negative shape that is a very important part of defining and understanding the shape of the mug.

The external negative shapes also start to interact with the boundaries of the drawing (usually the edge of the paper that we are using). These outer negative shapes will become an important part of the drawing.

Objectives

We will now consider the whole of the drawing space, right up to the boundaries (which you may have dealt with already in previous drawings depending on where you started the drawing and how big the objects were).

This will enable us to consider both the positive shapes (the contours of the objects) and the negative shapes (both inner ones that exist within the contour of the objects, and the outer ones that interact with the boundary of the drawing)

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 or A3 drawing paper (whatever scale you prefer)
Objects for a still life setup

Module Description

Set up a simple still life to draw from (or use a reference photo, such as this one). Try to choose some objects that have internal spaces to draw (like a mug or teapot). Try to make sure that the lighting is from a single source (lamp or window) if possible, and comes from the side rather than behind or in front. Ideally you will work from life. If using a reference photo, do not add grid lines to it, and when printed, hang it on the wall a little away from you to draw from.

Firstly draw a box on your paper to leave a margin of about 1 cm around the box to the edge of the paper. Although you can draw to the edge of the paper (and frequently will in the future), drawing the box has three advantages:

- The edge of the drawing takes on the same language as the drawing itself (that is to say it is just another pencil outline).
- The space to the edge of the paper becomes a small frame, helping to make the drawing stand out a little more.
- Some of your lines (such as the envelope lines) can extend beyond the box to help you judge shapes and placement.
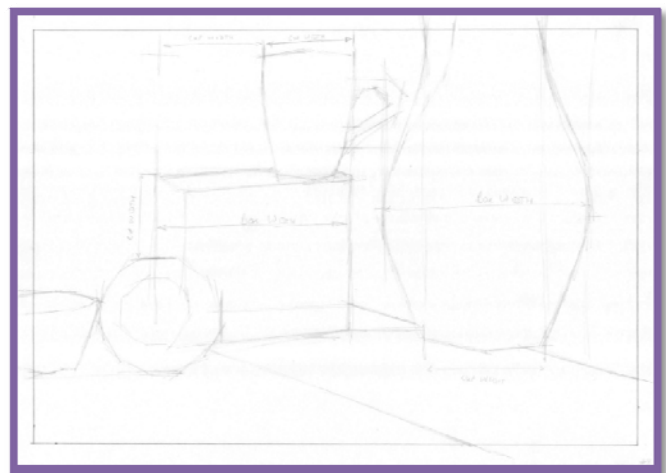
Hopefully you are becoming familiar with the process by now - so start off as usual, enveloping an object - measuring and drawing reference lines etc.

This time, make sure that at least some of the objects intersect the edge of the box, so that you will not be drawing every object completely. You may need to draw the objects on a larger scale to make sure some of them cut the edges of the box. Start to become conscious of the inner and outer shapes as well as the shapes of the objects themselves.

Continue the process as before, refining the lines (with a B grade pencil).

Rub back gently with a rubber, and improve the contours again (with a sharp 4B pencil). As you complete the contours remember to consider the weight of the lines and how it can bring objects forward or push them back, as well as showing something of their shape and form.

Estimated Time
1-2 hours

Summary
We are continuing to build our drawing process, getting the basic shapes down by using the basic envelopes, however now we can consider both the positive and negative shapes allowing us to take the drawing to the whole boundary of the paper (or bounding box).

Look at your drawing now and look at the negative shapes that have been created. You should start to see that these negative shapes are every bit as interesting as the positive shapes of the objects.
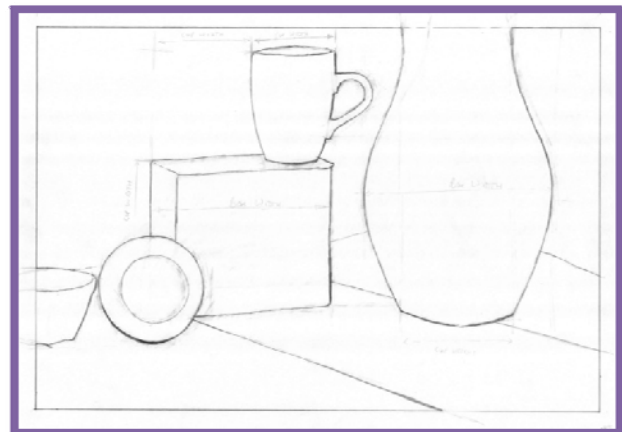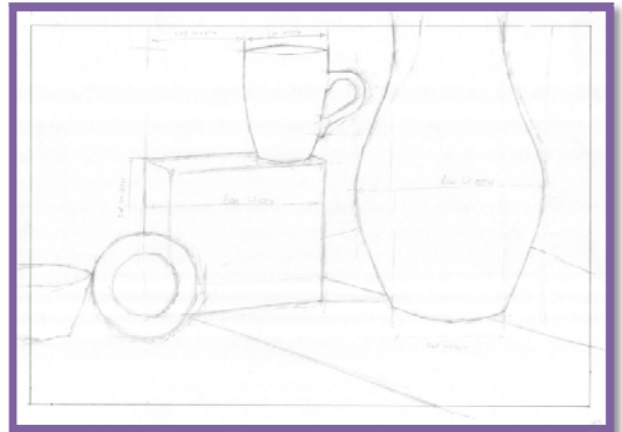
Module 11

How to start a drawing

Introduction

Now this might seem like a strange title for a module. Given that we have done ten drawing modules already, why do we need to consider how to start a drawing...? The answer is that so far we have done specific exercises that have effectively decided what we are going to draw, in that we had a small number of objects and we were drawing essentially all (or most of) the objects. If you were using reference photos then the boundary of what to draw is already firmly established.

More usually we will be presented with a subject that has no predefined boundary for our drawing. This may seem obvious but many new artists will suddenly struggle once they are presented with a blank sheet of paper and a large unbounded subject (such as a big still life setup or a landscape outside etc).

In putting the first few marks down we have actually already made two major decisions:

1.   What elements of the scene are we interested in?
2.   What scale are we drawing things?

Many artists will use a view finder to help decide what they want to draw. By moving the viewfinder around the subject we can find the parts of the subject that are of interest.

By moving the viewfinder in and out we can vary the scale of the objects in the subject. The difficulty most new artist's face is appreciating that the first few marks on the paper settle these two decisions. If the decisions are not done consciously a number of issues can tend to occur showing up as:

1.   A composition that ends up being weak
2.   A drawing that fails to include everything intended in the drawing (the classic example being a figure drawing that is missing the feet because the scale of the head was made too large at the start)

Objectives

In this module we will consider the implications of the first few marks and how it relates to the boundary of the drawing.

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 drawing paper
A4 paper cut into strips to make a frame

Module Description

This exercise is probably easiest to do using a photo from the reference pictures. Probably best to stick to still life pictures. Print out a reference picture and take a sheet or two of A4 (scrap) paper and cut it into 4 strips.

Look at the picture as a whole, and decide on one object of interest. Lay out the strips of A4 paper to frame the subject (and a little bit of the picture). On a new sheet of A4, create a border that is the same proportion (but larger) than the temporary frame you have made.

Make a quick envelope drawing from this. There is no need to start to refine this drawing, but make the envelope of the object of choice darker and stronger.

Now move the strips that are framing your subject, so that your object is still in the picture but is in a different place and maybe a different scale too. Make another quick envelope drawing, again clearly marking (making bolder) the envelope of your object.

Repeat this process another couple of times to end up with maybe 4 or 5 quick envelope drawings. Lay them next to each other and then look at the whole original photograph. Hopefully you will see how the choice of the initial placement of the first envelope lines (your object) will lead to dramatically different compositions.

Estimated Time

1-2 hours

Summary

The first few marks (or the first envelope of the first object) actually set out a lot of our drawing, in terms of what will fit in the drawing, and what the composition will be. By stopping and considering what we are going to draw, before we make those first few marks, we should find it easier to place the first few marks with a bit more confidence.

Many artists will actually do these (thumbnail) drawings every time before they start a bigger piece of work, so that they can explore the composition more fully first before committing the time to doing a more detailed study or drawing.

Module 12

Not being precious with what you have done

Introduction

By now we have established the basics of the drawing process in terms of using envelopes to estimate shapes, how to look at positive and negative shapes that fill the drawing space, how to refine the contours of the drawing, and how to start a drawing.

The next thing to look at is not so much a step in the process as it is a reminder that we have the ability to change things easily. As we start to get more confident in putting down the shapes, objects lines etc, it is easy to get precious with what we have done. If we are reluctant to change things then it becomes difficult to make the changes that can help correct or improve a drawing.

This can range from making a small change, such as moving, adding or removing an object or restarting the drawing because we are unhappy with the initial choice of subject or placement to making radical change such as changing from landscape to portrait or changing the scale of the work.

Objectives

The objective of this module is to produce a line drawing similar to those of the previous modules, considering envelopes, outlines, inner and outer shapes and the boundaries of the drawing. However, this time, before we start to refine the line, we will move some objects to force us to change things on the drawing. By repeating this a few times we can start to appreciate the ability to change and move things around.

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 drawing paper
Objects for a still life setup

Module Description

Set up a simple still life to draw from. If possible choose some objects that have internal spaces to draw (like a mug or teapot). Try to make sure that the lighting is from a single source (lamp or window), and comes from the side rather than behind or in front. You will need to work from life for this exercise as you will be moving objects around or adding objects into the arrangement.

Firstly draw a box on your paper to leave a margin of about 1 cm between the box and the edge of the paper. Draw in the object envelopes, taking some objects to the edge of the image. Start to refine the lines as before.
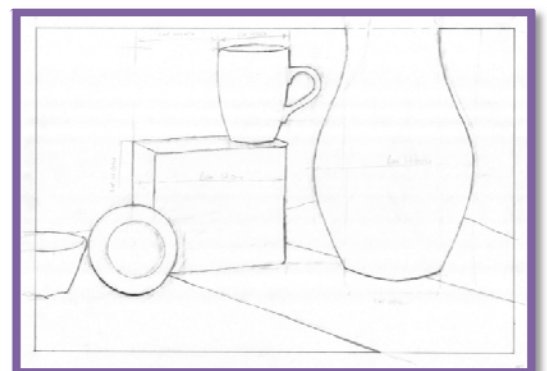
Once you have completed the first round of refinement, change the still life slightly by moving an object to a different place (rather than removing it) or add a new object.

Now consider the new object. Draw a new envelope for the objects that have moved (erasing underlying objects that are now hidden) then refine the lines again.

Repeat this process of adding or moving objects several times, making the necessary adjustments each time.

Make sure that some of the adjustments force you to rub out bits of the drawing - not just add things in.

Estimated Time

1-2 hours

Summary

In this exercise we have looked at gaining confidence in adjusting our drawings and making changes. Initially you may be less pleased with these drawings than some of the previous ones but the important point of this exercise is to help prevent any preciousness that might start to develop in your work.

One of the difficulties that you will face as your drawing develops is the situation where part of a drawing works well but part of it does not. It is natural to be reluctant to make adjustments to the bit that we feel that we like, even if, ultimately, the whole drawing will be much better for it.

Using the rubber as a constructive tool, rather than simply a mistake erasing tool, will also help us in the modules that are coming up, so it is a good skill to take on.

As an artist you are not limited by what is in front of you. If your drawing will work better with an object removed, then remove it. If the composition works better with some objects rearranged, then do it.

Further Reading
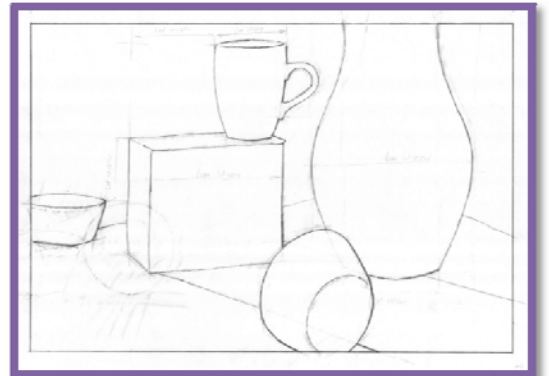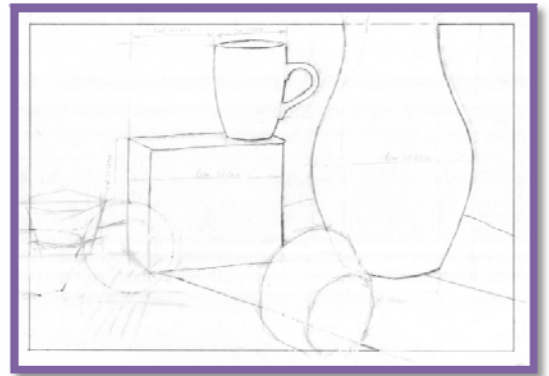
Module 13

**Introduction to drawing with tones**

Introduction

Well firstly, congratulations for your hard work so far and for your patience in sticking with line up to this point. It is always very tempting at the start to rush into using tone and shading in the drawing but you will really feel the benefit of the initial line drawing work as we continue to develop the process. As we move into tonal work we will not be forgetting what we have done so far - everything that we have learnt with enveloping, refining, adjusting, weight of line etc are still very important.

So what exactly is tone? Tone is the lightness or darkness of an object (or part of an object) without relation to its colour. A tone (sometimes referred to as value) can range from white (the lightest or brightest value) to black (the darkest value). Between these two extremes, we have a range of gray values. If we draw them in a line, we get a tonal scale as shown

Sometimes the tonal scale is shown in discrete values, typically using some sort of numeric scale (in this case percentages of light from 0% as black to 100% as white). This can make it easier to judge the actual tonal value of something.
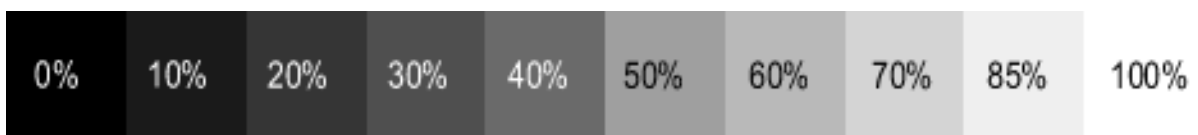
If you remove all colours from an image you get a Black and White image - you can do this on any of the reference photos when you select a larger version of the image.

In real life we cannot switch to Black and White directly however, a trick that you will quickly become familiar with is to squint at an object (almost completely close your eyes until you can only just see the object). You will notice that the tone of things becomes much more obvious when you do this. This effect is because your eyes are more sensitive to light in black and white than they are to colour.

Objectives

For this first module considering tone we will simply look at light and dark as two separate tones (sometimes referred to as the light mass and the shadow mass).

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 drawing paper
Objects for a still life setup

Module Description

We will follow the usual process of enveloping, measuring and refining the contour however, this time we will also look at the general shape of the shadows on the objects and the shadows that the objects cast on other things.


For this exercise you can work from life, although you may find it easier to work from this reference picture. In this picture the objects have all been selected because they are white, and therefore you do not need to deal with the issue of colour and the photo is taken with a carefully placed single light source to ensure that you can see the shadows on the objects clearly.

A simple object and a single light source help us start to understand the way that light interacts with the object. What we are interested in now is not just the general shape of the object (the contour) or any inner shapes, -we want to look at the shape of the lit area of the object (the light mass) and the unlit area (the shadow mass). We are also interested in cast shadows where one object blocks light from another (the handle from the main mug or the mug casting shadow on the table cloth).
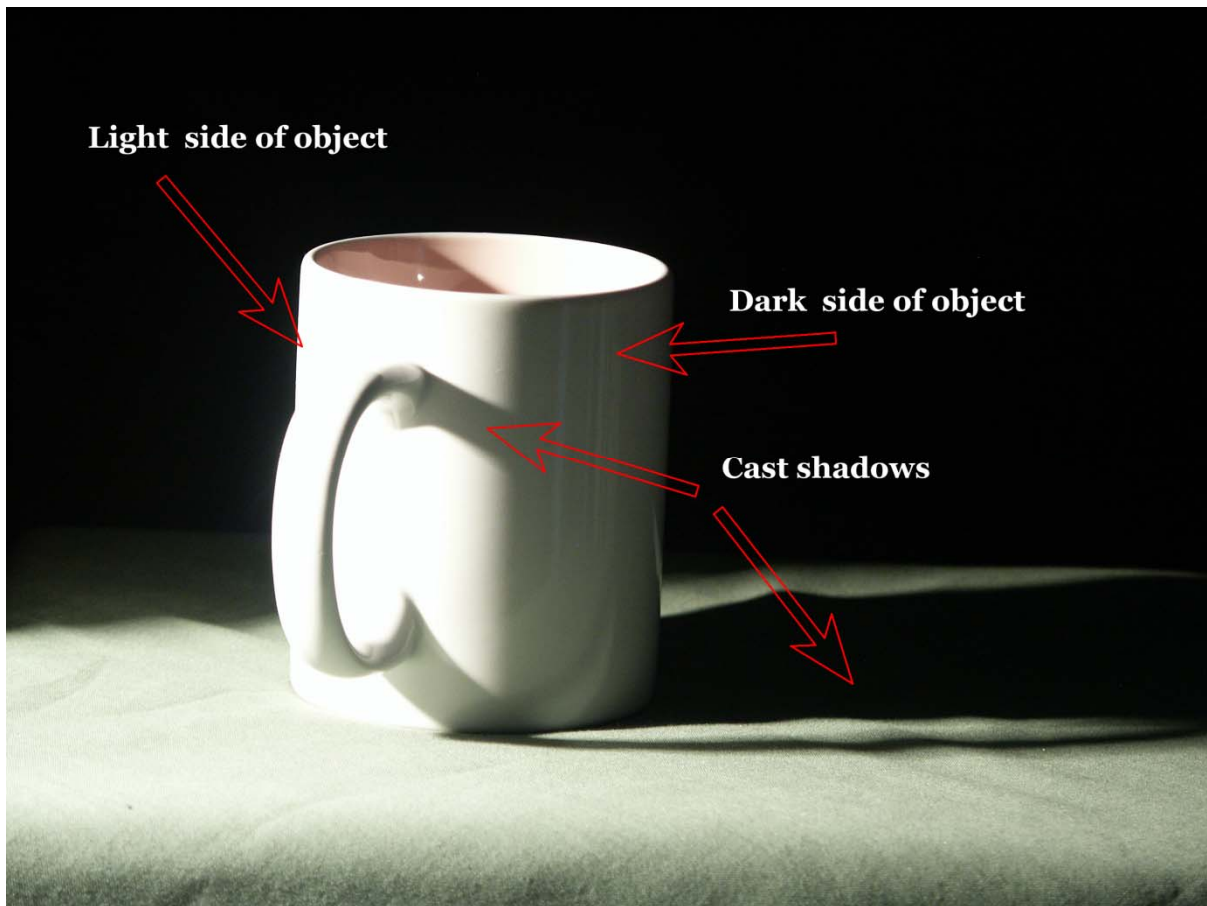
So to begin create a box 1cm inside the edge of the page. Start to draw the envelope of the objects (letting one or two cut the edge of the box). Also draw the envelopes for the division between light mass and shadow mass on the objects and for the cast shadows.
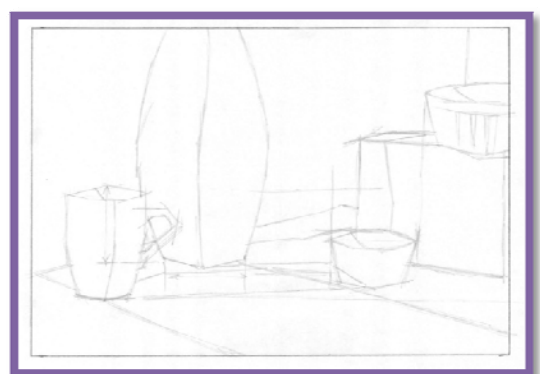
Once you are happy with the envelopes, start to refine the contours, including the contour of the transition between light and dark, and also to refine the shape of the cast shadows. Refine the lines a couple of times if necessary.
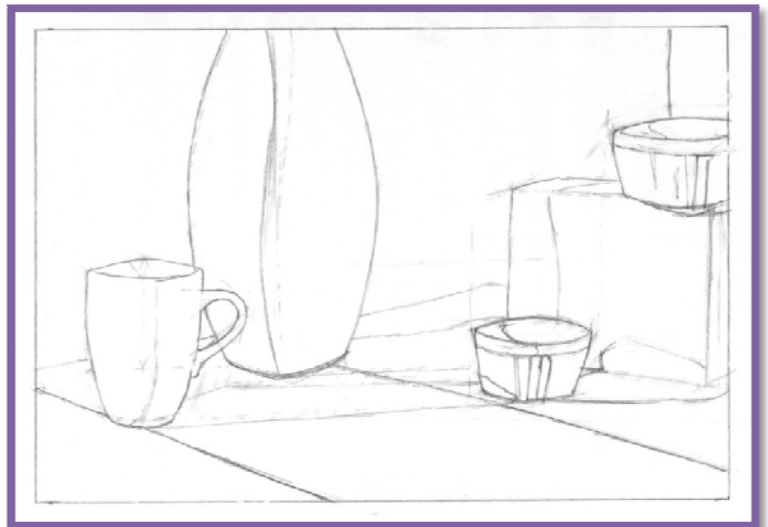
Finally flat shade the shadow area and cast shadows (by flat shade we mean all the shading lines are even and go in the same direction to create a flat shade of the same tone)

Estimated Time
1-2 hours
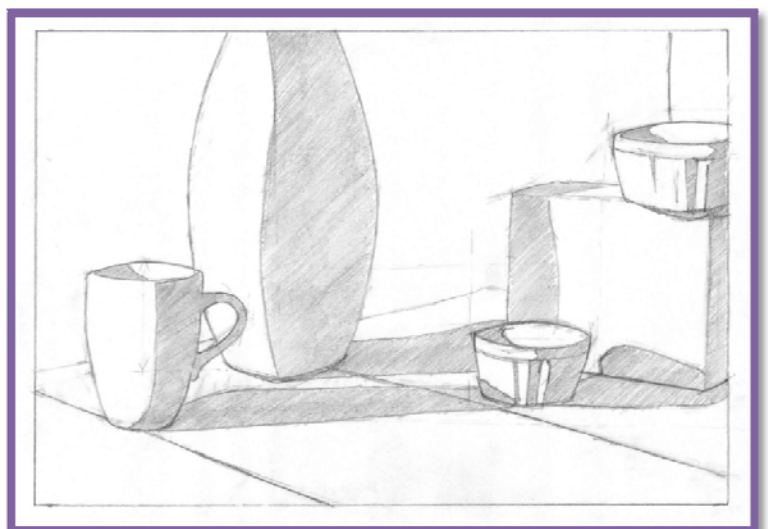
Summary

In this module we have introduced the complex concept of tone and we have looked at adding the basic shapes of the object shadow and cast shadows. When we shade in these shapes we should find that we have enhanced the integrity of our original line drawing and provided solidity through the inclusion of the shadows. Because we are so good at interpreting light and shadow, even such simple shadows provide significant information to the brain about the light source and direction.

Module 14

Tonal Range exercises

Introduction

Having introduced the basic concepts of tone in the previous module, before we take the concept further it is worth spending a little time becoming familiar with the materials we are using to understand the full range of tone that we can produce.

Just as we spent some time becoming familiar with the lines that we could produce with the pencils, we should first spend some time looking at the different tones that the pencils provide to us.

It may be a little tempting to skip this exercise or just have a look at the example pages but the real value of this exercise is in doing it. You need to start to feel for yourself how hard you need to press with a given pencil to get a certain tone. You need to find out how different pencils react to different papers.

Objectives

To create tonal scales with a variety of pencils

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 drawing paper
Print out the tonal grid page

Module Description

There are two basic ways that we can vary the tone that we produce from a single pencil. Firstly we can vary the pressure that we use, pressing lightly for light tones and pressing more heavily for darker tones. Alternatively we can use hatching or crosshatching to vary the tone. When we use cross hatching, the further the lines are apart the lighter the tone (because we see more of the white paper coming through) however if we spread the lines out too far then they start to look like line work rather than a flat tone. We can also use a combination of the two to produce an even lighter tone - use hatching with very light pressure.

What we will find is that each pencil has a minimum tone that it can produce and a maximum darkness that it can produce.

Take five pencils that range in tone from very light (9H) to very dark (9B). The five pencils that you choose are up to you. Start with the lightest (hardest) and take a scrap piece of A4 paper (or the printer paper that you are using) and make the lightest tone that you can and the darkest tone that you can. Now compare these tones to the tonal scale on the printed sheet to work out the minimum and maximum range for that pencil. Now fill in the tonal boxes for this pencil between the minimum and maximum, making each one match the tone corresponding to that box.

Repeat this process for the next lightest pencil in the sequence, and repeat until you have done at least five. You can do more if you wish.
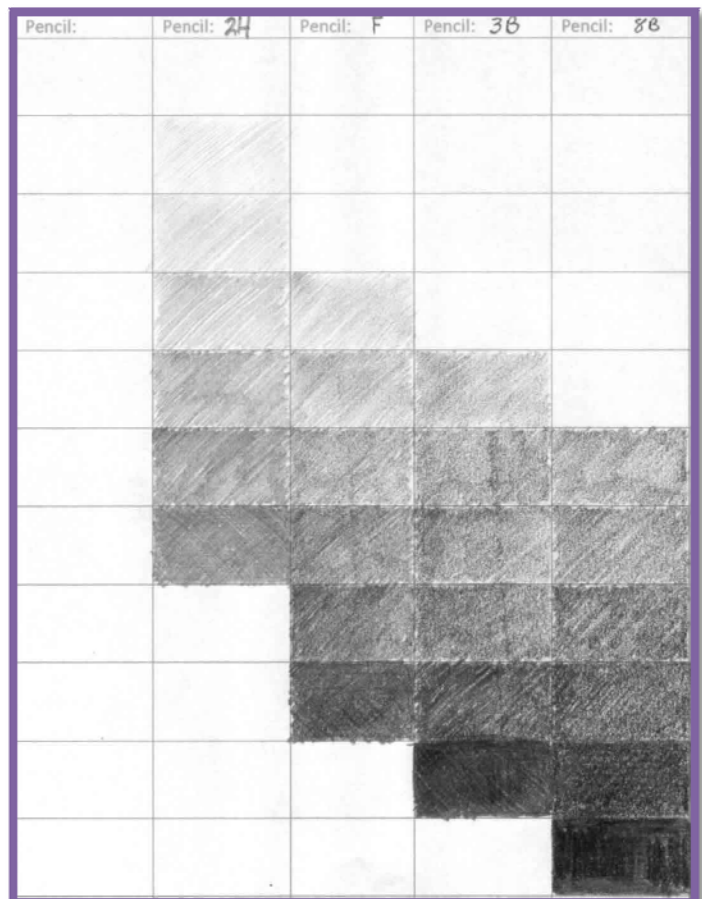
Estimated Time

1 hour

Summary

You should end up with a sheet that gives you a good idea of the range of tones that you can produce with different pencils. You will have discovered that the harder pencils are easier to keep sharp, but do not provide very dark tones. You will also have discovered that darker pencils tend to blunt more quickly. You will also have found that as you press harder with the darker pencils they eventually go shinier rather than darker.

You should now have a much better feel for producing a particular tone and this lays the foundation for the following modules.

Tonal Shading Sheet

Pencil:	Pencil:	Pencil:	Pencil:	Pencil:	Target Shade

Module 15

Toning all the shapes

Introduction

Now we can introduce the wide range of tones that we have practiced in the last exercise into the drawing process, adding yet another dimension to the drawing. Judging tones is a tricky process, particularly when we are trying to judge the tone of a colour, as it can be difficult to ignore the brightness and intensity of a colour and see through to its actual tone. Squinting your eyes should help you to see the tone of objects and shapes more clearly.

When we were considering the drawing, particularly the drawing of envelopes, we were constantly comparing between objects - making relative decisions such as whether an object is higher or lower than other or is bigger or smaller. Similar types of comparative measurements can be made with tones. As well as just trying to gauge the absolute tone of an item, it will really help if you are constantly comparing tones between shapes - which one is lighter and which one is darker. If the relationship between two tones is not correct on your drawing then you can either lighten one or darken the other. As you adjust one tone, other relationships will change.

Objectives

In this module we will shade the whole drawing to produce a flat shaded drawing that captures the range of tones. Because the range of pencil tones is limited we may not be able to get the exact tones that we see. However what is more important is the relative tones - making sure that we see which are the lighter tones and which are darker ones.

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 drawing paper
Objects for still life set up

Module Description

We will follow the usual process of enveloping, measuring and refining the contour and, again, we will contour the general shape of the dark side of the objects and the shadows that they cast.

For this exercise you can work from life or from this reference photo. For now, you can work from the black and white version if you find that easier.

So, to begin the drawing, create a box 1cm inside the edge of the page. Start to draw the envelope of the objects (letting one or two cut the edge of the box). Draw the envelopes for the division between light mass and shadow mass on the objects

and also draw the envelopes for the cast shadows. Once you are happy with the envelopes, refine the contours, including the contour of the transition between light and dark, and also the shape of the shadow. Refine the lines a couple of times if necessary (including the weight and strength of the line as well). Move objects around if it improves the composition.

This time, instead of shading only the darkest areas, we will flat shade every area of the drawing with a suitable tone. Keep the tone in each area as a simple single flat tone. Shade the darkest area first with a suitable dark tone. Then shade the lightest area (as it is unlikely that the brightest areas are actually white). Finally shade the other areas with appropriate intermediate tones. It is likely that none of the areas that you are looking at are actually a flat tone in real life, so you will need to approximate them to a single tone.

Note - flat shading means that all of one area is the same tone, and that all shading lines are going in the same direction. Keep the shading lines in the same direction for each individual area.

Estimated Time
1-2 hours

Summary
You will find that the drawing now looks even stronger and reads very clearly because of the different areas of tone. Do not be surprised if you found this a difficult exercise as judging tone can be a very tricky skill to pick up. Also, because you were working in flat areas of tone, it will not have been possible to get every tonal relationship correct

Module 16

Follow the form of the objects

Introduction

In the last module we took the drawing a stage further and shaded all the areas of the drawing using flat tones. You will probably have noticed that the drawing reads quite well as a three dimensional scene, as much as it reads as a two dimensional collection of shapes. This is largely due to the ability of the brain to read the shadow shapes and relate them to the three dimensional objects that are making those shapes.

We will now take the process another step further by considering how the direction of the tonal lines can help to convey more information. In the last exercise the shading that we added was specifically flat shading. This time we will investigate contour shading of objects, starting with a few simple shapes and then applying the principles to another drawing.

Objectives

Understand how to shade areas to provide information about the form of the object, starting with simple objects

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 drawing paper
Objects for a still life setup

Module Description

Before we start the drawing, let's look at some basic examples to see how shading lines can relate to the form of the object. Here are simple objects (a cube and sphere) which have been shaded horizontally, vertically, diagonally and then using lines that follow the form.
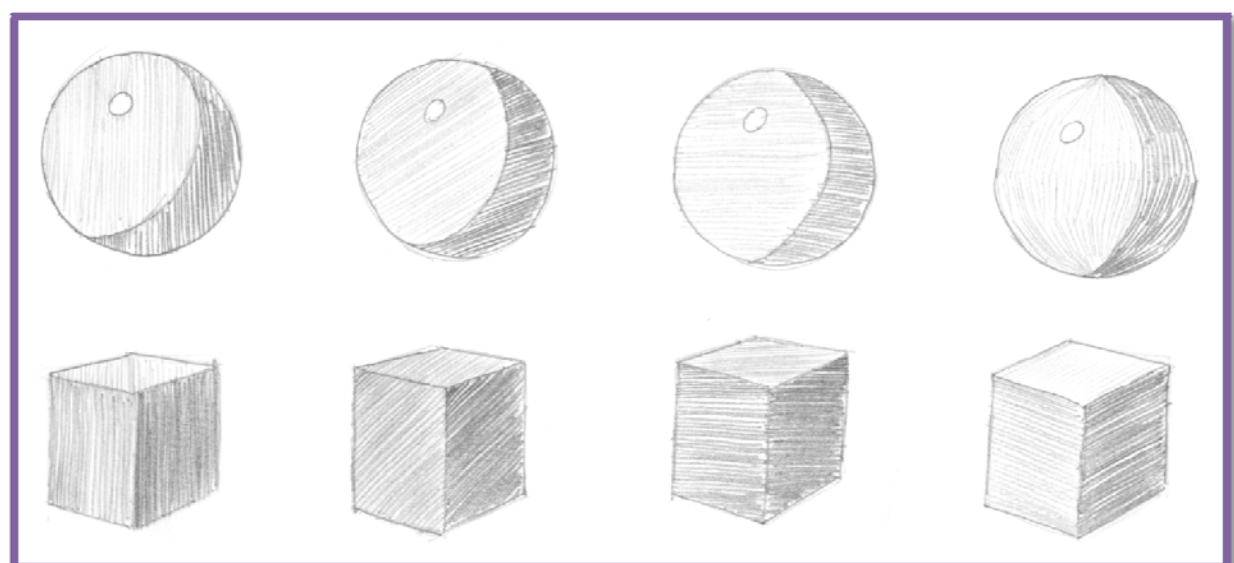
What you should be able to see is that, while all the shading lines help to show the solidity of the object (because the shading forms a tone that helps us to read the light source), if we also follow the contours of the object, we can really convey the form of the object. We can show our understanding of the movement of the surface of the object through the drawing.

In module 19 we will be doing an actual life drawing but, for now, here are a couple of photos that show the same principle on a model. Note how horizontal lines become dynamic curved shapes as the model moves pose. These are the types of contour lines we will be looking for now.
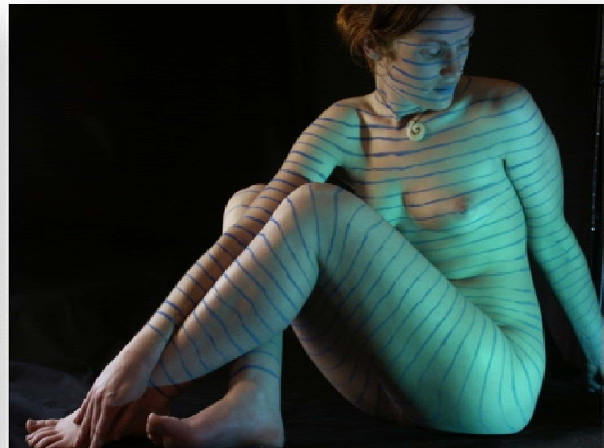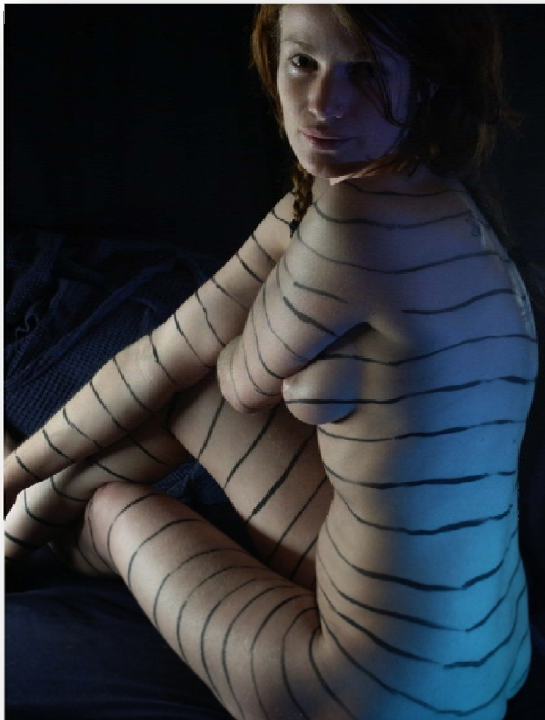
These lines were painted on the model as horizontal stripes while the model was standing. In a different pose the straight lines help to reveal the way the form of the model is moving, forming horizontals, diagonals and curves around the figure.

We will follow the usual process of enveloping, measuring and refining the contour and, again, we will contour the general shape of the dark side of the objects and the shadows that they cast. For this exercise you can work from life or from this reference photo.

So, to begin the drawing, create a box 1cm inside the edge of the page. Draw the envelope of the objects (letting one or two cut the edge of the box). Then draw the envelopes for the division between light mass and shadow mass on the objects and also the envelopes for the cast shadows.

Once you are happy with the envelopes, refine the contours, including the contour of the transition between light and dark, and also refine the shape of the shadow. Refine the lines a couple of times if necessary (including the weight and strength of the line as well).

Now we will shade the drawing, again starting with the darkest area. However, instead of using flat shading, apply what you learnt on the simple objects. Use a single tone for each area but create the tone by following the contours of an object as best you can.

Shade from light to dark or from dark to light whichever you find easiest. Do not be afraid to go back and darken an area as you work through the shading process.

You may find that working with a blank sheet of paper under your drawing hand will help to prevent any smudging of the graphite as your hand moves back and forward across the page.

Estimated Time
2-4 hours

Summary

By getting the tonal shapes correct we provide a lot of information about the object and the way that light is falling on it. By looking closely at the form and considering the form of the object as we shade areas we can provide further information to the viewer and we will become much more engaged with the objects and the form of the objects as we look and draw.

Module 17

Increasing the tonal range

Introduction

We are now well advanced with the steps that are involved in the process of (analytical) drawing. We have a solid basic process that we have built up slowly step by step so that you have been able to see the importance of what each step is contributing.

The remainder of the course will now build on these fundamentals.

This module will look at extending the range of tone that we can create. We will do this in two ways; firstly by using a rubber to create some lighter tones by erasing an established ground tone; secondly by learning to create graduated changes in tone that darken in a continuous manner rather than in the discrete tones that we have been using.

Objectives

Create an initial ground to the drawing and then, during the final shading, use the rubber to help create light shades and use graduated tones for a broader range of tones.

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Graphite stick
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
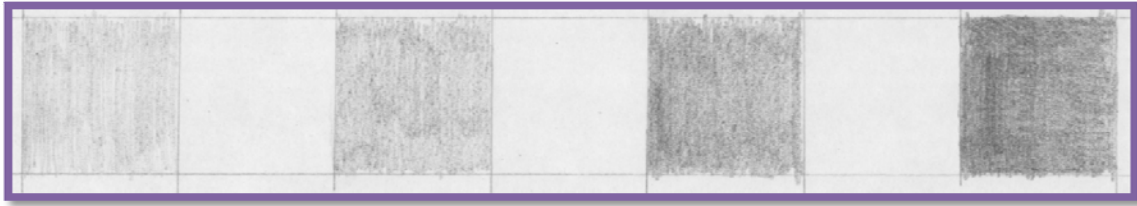A4 drawing paper
Objects for a still life setup

Module Description

For this exercise you can work from life or from this reference photo.

Firstly, let's start with a tonal exercise. Draw seven boxes about 1 inch square in a line. Select a pencil (say H or HB) and shade every second box in a flat tone, going up a tone each time.
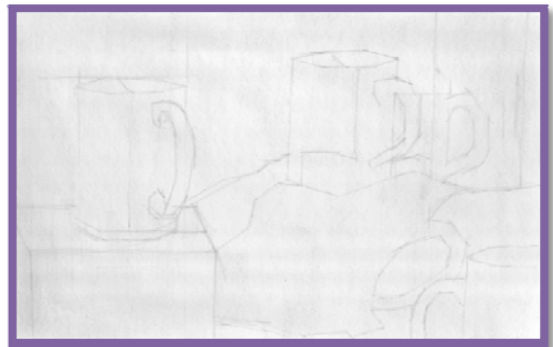

Now fill in the intermediate boxes so that the tones match at each end and graduate towards each other. You may need to work back and forth across the box to match the tones at each end. The aim of the exercise is to get the start and finish tones correct, but also to ensure that the graduated boxes are neither lighter nor darker than the tones either side.
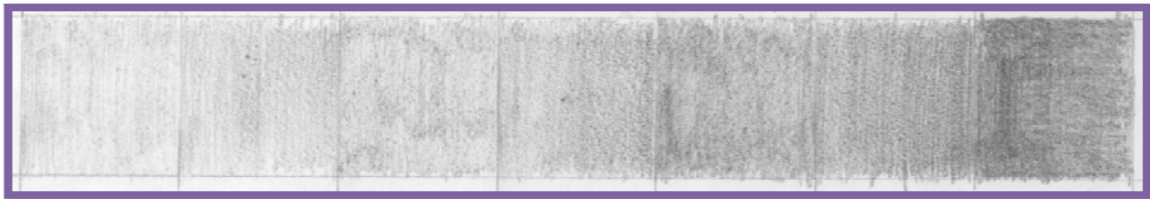

So, to begin the drawing, create a box 1cm inside the edge of the page. Within the box, shade the whole page in a flat even tone (which you may find is much quicker with a graphite stick). Use a soft cloth and rub (burnish) the surface to get a very flat even tone. Make sure that your drawing paper is on a very flat board otherwise you will emboss the surface texture underneath the paper onto the paper. If necessary, cushion your drawing paper with 5 or 6 sheets of paper underneath. Do not create too dark a tone - use an HB lightly to create the tone.

Start to draw the envelope of the objects (letting one or two cut the edge of the box). Draw the envelopes for the division between light mass and shadow mass on the objects and also the envelopes for the cast shadows. Use a blank sheet of paper under your drawing hand to prevent your hand picking up graphite and smudging the drawing. You can use it as a guide for your horizontals and verticals as needed as well.

Once you are happy with the envelopes, refine the contours, including the contour of the transition between light and dark, and also refine the shape of the shadow. Refine the lines a couple of times if necessary (including the weight and strength of the line as well).

If you need to rub out to correct any major errors, reapply the ground where necessary. You should find that you can knock back the lines (making them fainter) by gently rubbing with a soft cloth or tissue, rather than rubbing out.
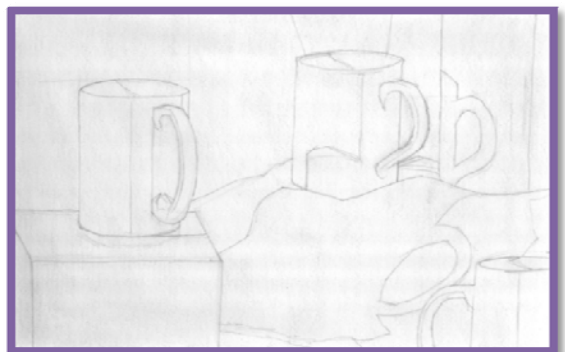
Now we will shade the drawing, this time starting with the lightest area. Use what you learnt previously about the direction of the shading marks. When it comes to the lighter shades use the rubber to erase the ground but remember to consider the form of the object as you erase lines with the rubber (you dont have to completely erase a section, you can draw with the rubber). The rubber will work best if you keep it clean (use a scrap piece of paper) and with a sharp edge by cutting it every so often (with the craft knife).

You may find that shading from left to right (if you are right handed) is easiest, and again, keep a blank sheet of paper under your drawing hand at all times to prevent the drawing from smudging.

As you are shading the drawing allow the tone to vary within the shapes a little to reflect the way the tone changes.

Estimated Time

2-3 hours

Summary

By starting with a ground made with a flat tone of pencil we have the option to create lighter areas by rubbing back as well as making darker areas by adding lines. In general the creative process is always easier when we have the ability both to add and remove and this is something that will be explored much more in future courses.

Moving from flat shaded areas of tone to tones that can vary slightly allows us to pay much more attention to the subtlety within tones. This will be considered further in the next module as we look more carefully at edges.

Further Reading

Module 18

Dealing with edges

Introduction

What you may have already found as you started to work on some of the tonal drawings is that sometimes the line of the object (the contour) seems to be distinct from the shaded areas, particularly where the shading is very similar on either side of the line. Up until now we have being thinking very much in an object based sense - enveloping each object in turn, then enveloping the shapes of the shadows

Although we have considered positive and negative shapes, we can now take this a stage further and consider the shapes of tonal blocks, rather than the shapes of objects directly. Sometimes the tonal shape will correspond directly with an object, other times it may cross several objects to become a distinct shape of its own.

In seeing and defining these shapes, we are making decisions about the drawing that will become very unique to us, in that nobody else will see or draw these shapes in exactly the same way. Whereas two artists could draw the same set of objects as objects and end up with very similar drawings, as we start to consider the shapes of tones we will start to add something unique, something personal to the drawing. This is the first step on a journey of creating a personal visual language.

Objectives

The objective of this module is to start to consider the shape of tonal masses, and to consider the edges of objects and shapes in relation to the tones either side of the objects.

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Possibly a graphite stick
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A4 drawing paper
Objects for a still life setup

Module Description

When we started to look at objects we created an envelope for the object, and then refined the envelope to create a contour of the object. The contour that we were creating was a continuous line, a cut out of the object in question. When we added line quality and weight we were considering how the line could convey more than just the cut out shape by suggesting depth and form depending on line weight and quality. If we take this consideration a stage further and soften (or lose all together) the contour line (as well as strengthening and darkening it) we can start to describe the object without giving it a cut out feel. This principle of softening or losing the edge (the contour) is frequently referred to as the principle of lost and found edges.

Cezanne originally stated that "There are no lines in nature" but eventually conceded that there are lines in drawings and paintings. So what is a line? What are we using the line for?

A line is a kind of short hand notation for a "difference".

- It can be a difference in depth. The object on one side of the line is further away from you than the other.
- It can be a difference in object. A paper lying on top of a table.
- It can be a difference in tone. A shadow is cast across an object.
- It can be a difference in colour. Changes in the colour of the skin of a fruit.

We can take the consideration of line much further, but for now let us just consider it to be the edge of a "difference", and consider edges in a little more detail. When we have a dark tone next to a light tone, a line will tend to work well to define the edge. In fact the line can actually heighten our perception of the shape, as the line tends to mimic the way that our eye sees a brighter object against a darker object. Our eyes tend to increase the contrast around the transition. The gray on the left is the same tone as the gray on the right but seems slightly brighter because of the dark line around it.

The same line around a light object against a light shade will tend to make the object look cartoonish but note that the white box with the line around it again looks brighter:
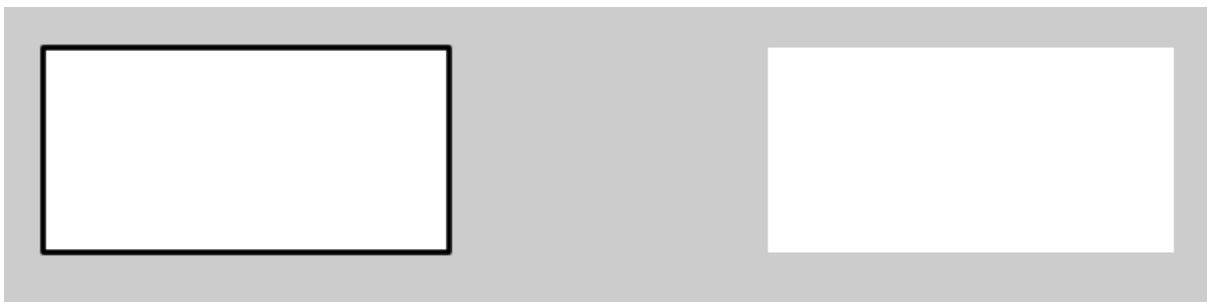

If we have solid edges around all transitions we will tend to accentuate the light to dark transitions, but overstate the cut-out nature of the objects and shapes for lighter transitions:
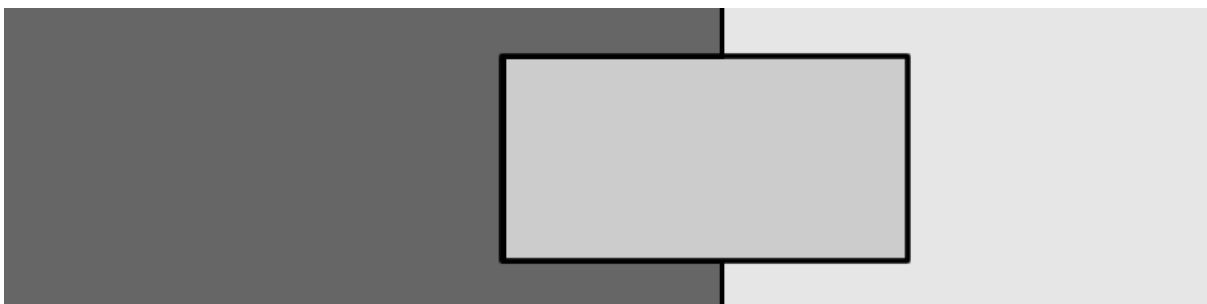
If we have lines around the large transitions and none around the smaller transitions we start to lose the definition of the object:

But if we make our line weight and tone sensitive to the transition that we are describing we can keep a sense of the object and heighten the transition that we are describing without the sense of cutting out the object.
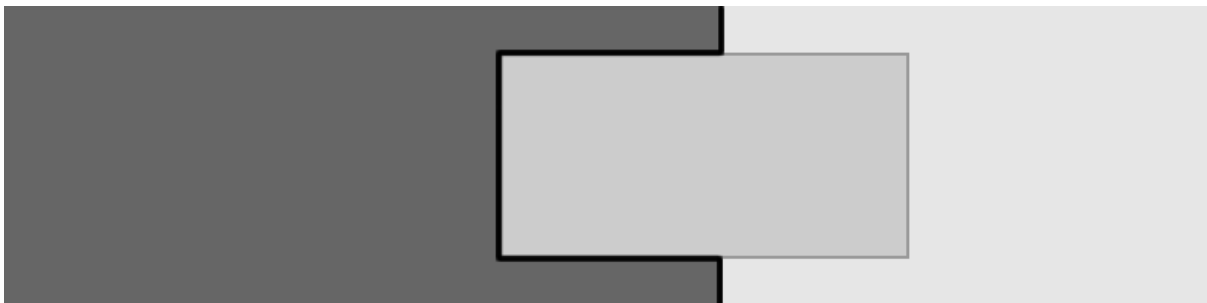

This means that what we are putting down the lines (or in this process - refining the contours) the weight and tone of the line needs to become sensitive to the transition that it is reflecting - before the tones actually go in.
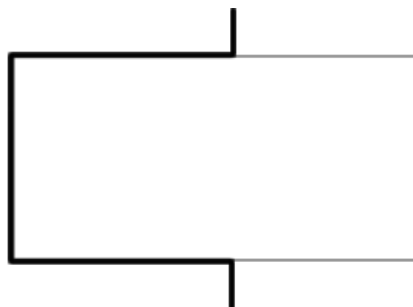
So, to begin the drawing, create a box 1cm inside the edge of the page. Within the box, shade the whole page in a flat even tone (which you may find is much quicker with a graphite stick). Use a soft cloth and rub (burnish) the surface to get a very flat even tone. Make sure that your drawing paper is on a very flat board otherwise you will emboss the surface texture underneath the paper onto the paper. If necessary, cushion your drawing paper with 5 or 6 sheets of paper underneath. Do not create too dark a tone - use an HB very lightly to create the tone.

Start to draw the envelope of the objects (letting one or two cut the edge of the box). Also draw the envelopes for the division between light mass and shadow mass on the objects. Also draw the envelopes for the cast shadows. Use a blank sheet of paper under your drawing hand to prevent your hand picking up graphite and smudging the drawing. You can use it as a guide for your horizontals and verticals as needed as well.
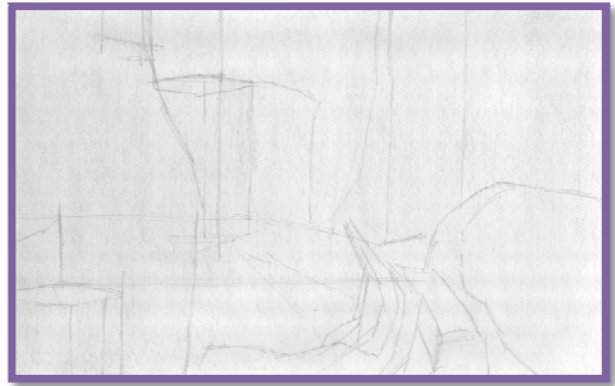
Once you are happy with the envelopes, start to refine the contours, including the contour of the transition between light and dark, and also refine the shape of the shadow. Refine the lines a couple of times if necessary each time considering the weight and tone of the line in relation to:

- The solidity of the object (typically heavier line on the shadow side)
- How close the object is (thicker and heavier lines tend to come forward)
- How great the transition is across the line (darker lines for greater change and softer (or broken lines or even no line) for smaller changes).
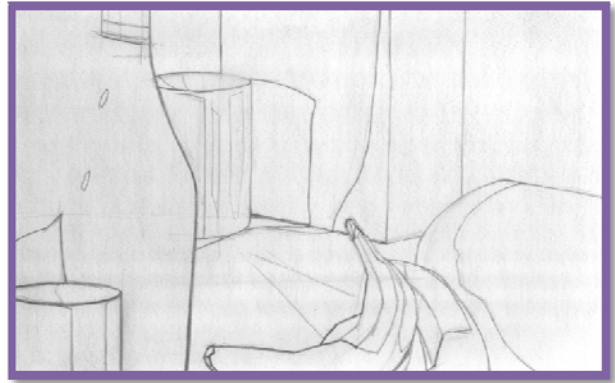
If you need to rub out to correct any major errors, reapply the ground as needed. You should find that you can knock back the lines (making them fainter) by gently rubbing with a soft cloth or tissue, rather than rubbing out.

Now shade the drawing, this time starting with the lightest area. Use what you learnt previously about the direction of the shading marks. When it comes to the lighter shades, use the rubber to erase the ground but remember to consider the form lines with the rubber as well (you dont have to completely erase a section, you can draw with the rubber). The rubber will work best if you keep it clean (use a scrap piece of paper) and keep it with a sharp edge by cutting it every so often (with the craft knife).

You may find that shading from left to right (if you are right handed) is easiest, and again, keep a blank sheet of paper under your drawing hand at all times to prevent the drawing from smudging.

Also, as you are shading the drawing, allow the tone to vary within the shapes a little to reflect the way the tone changes.

Estimated Time
2-3 hours

Summary

When you consider the line that you put down by thinking about the tones either side of it we start a transition from pure object and shadow based drawing and move towards a method of drawing the shapes of tones. We can use a very strong line to really emphasize the transition, or we can use a much softer line (or broken, or none at all) as the transition becomes much softer.

The benefit from this consideration will be the extra subtlety that our drawing begins to convey, and the extra intensity with which we look at the subject and consider the tonal relationships.

This process also helps us shift away from thinking about objects, towards thinking about shapes of tonal areas which will help us as we develop onto more complex subjects.

Further Reading

Module 19

Drawing the human figure

Introduction

The human figure is an endlessly complex and fascinating subject for artists to draw. There is infinite variety in every face and every figure, yet we are so familiar with it that even a person without artistic training will quickly spot when a drawing appears to be inaccurate.

Figure drawing will feature heavily in other courses, but for just now it is worth taking on a figure drawing to show how the drawing process that we have been developing will be capable of serving us as we progress on to (seemingly) much more complex subjects.

There are two keys things to understand and remember as we start to draw the figure:

1. Everything is much more "continuous" than we have been dealing with so far. Previously we had been dealing with a collection of discreet objects which helped us to identify objects to draw. In the last module we started the transition to looking at the shape of tonal areas (areas of the same or similar tone). This is the process that we must continue with the figure. This becomes much trickier with the figure because there will be many more subtle transitions of tone. Our challenge is to clearly see them as tonal shapes and to make decisions on the shape that we see.
2. Avoid labels! As soon as you start to think - "Right now I will draw an ear" or eye or finger - you move away from drawing the tonal shapes and start drawing objects in what will almost certainly be a stylized and cartoonish manner. You will tend to draw what you know and not what you see.
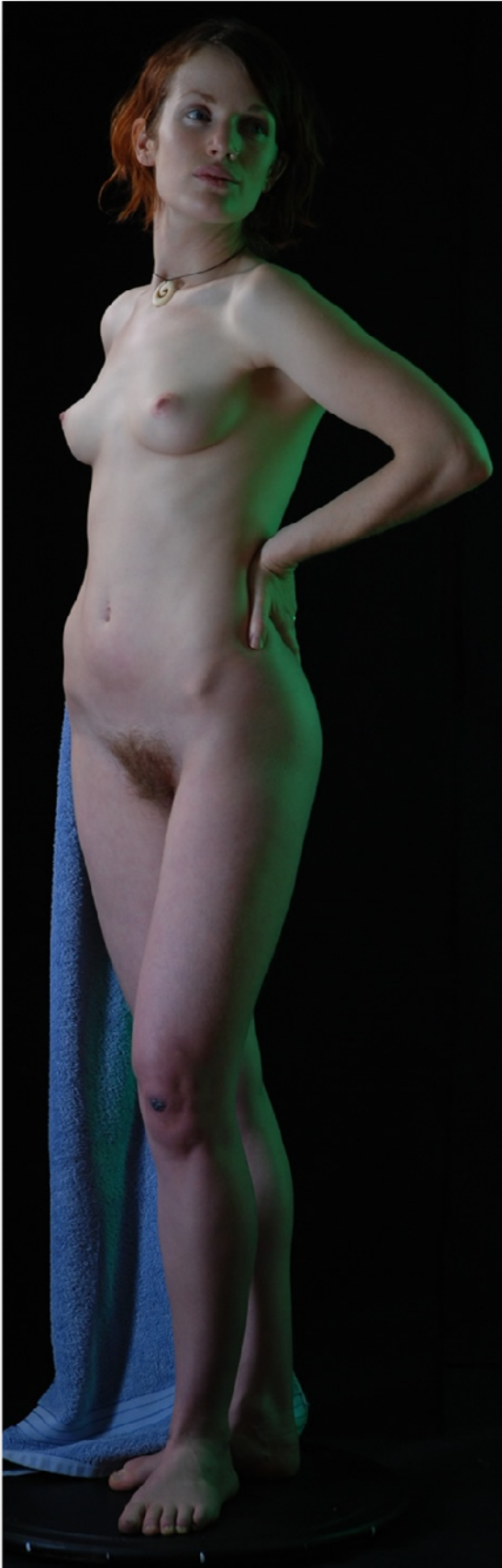
Objectives

The objective of this module is to do a figure drawing

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Possibly a graphite stick
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A3 drawing paper
A life model or suitable reference picture

Module Description

If you can work from life, that would be ideal. Make sure that your model has somewhere private to change, and is warm and comfortable throughout. If you feel more comfortable working with a clothed, partially clothed or draped model, that is fine too. If you need to work from photographic material - use the virtual model section to pick a suitable pose to work from. It is probably best to work from the colour image without grid lines if possible.

Start the envelope drawing with the head; taking a few moments to consider the placement of the head shape on the paper (remember the first few marks dictate scale and composition).

Do not draw details like eyes - follow the process of enveloping a few basic shapes, shadows etc. Make measurements - such as height of head to width. Make relationships - bottom of ear above or below bottom of nose. Measure angles - line through the eyes giving the tilt of the head. If you are getting stuck - simplify - do not add more detail.

Once you have a basic envelope of the head, continue the envelope as usual, making relationships and measurements. Is a point higher or lower? What is the angle between two points? Extend horizontals and verticals wherever it could help you. Where there are subtle transitions of tone - be decisive about the shape - these are your shapes.

Continue with the usual process - refine the envelopes adding extra detail and improving the contour lines.

When it comes to shading you may find it harder if you are using photographic material than if you are working from life, as you will not have that 3D element that helps you see form, so you will have to work harder to find shading lines that help to follow the form.

Estimated Time

2-4 hours

Summary

Drawing the figure, particularly the nude is one of the most complex and challenging things that you can be faced with. There is endless subtlety and complexity to deal with, and it is important to realise that what you can do in a few hours is relatively limited.
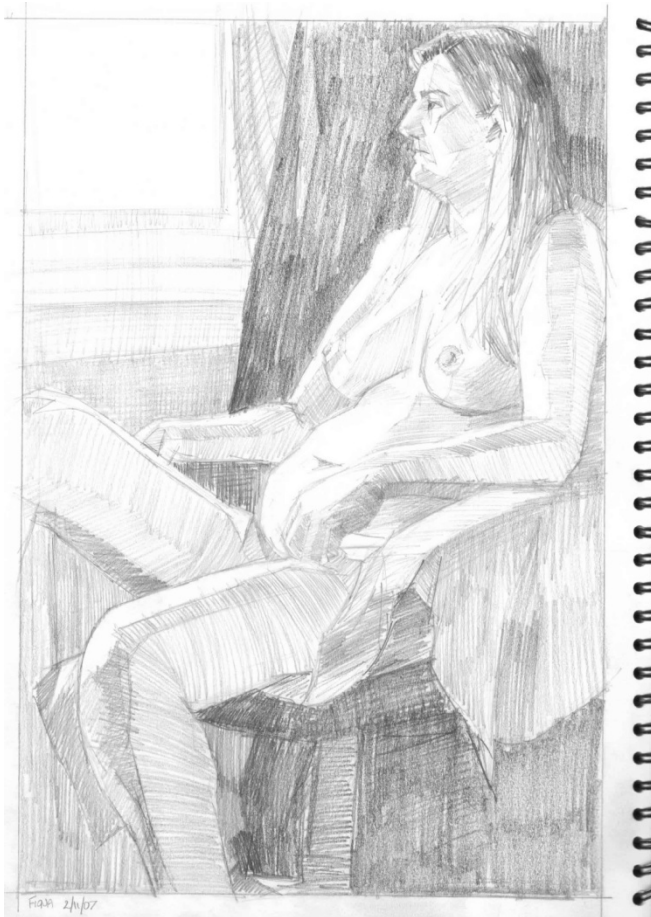
You may have found this exercise extremely challenging, but hopefully you might at least have had one or two moments when the drawing process seemed to come more naturally - to make more sense. If you got this sense while drawing then congratulations to you, whatever your drawing looks like, you have made a huge step forward.

Like all things, practice will make a huge difference. Do as many of these types of drawings as you can. If you are interested, join a life class or use the material on this site to practice every chance that you get.

Even if you are doing quick sketches - think about each step of the process every time and it will quickly become second nature.

Further Reading

Anthony Ryder - The artist's complete guide to figure drawing

Module 20

Your final drawing of the course

Introduction

Firstly let us take a moment to recap the steps of the drawing process that we have built up so far.

1. Initial placement of the first object (which dictates the composition of the drawing)
2. The bounding box and initial envelope
3. Relating to other objects and tonal shapes with horizontals and verticals
4. Measuring (size and angles)
5. Taking the drawing to the edge - positive and negative shapes
6. Refining the envelopes to improve the contour
7. Considering the weight of line to describe
    a. Space (distance from you)
    b. Shadow and solidity
    c. Relative transitions of tone (edge effects)
8. Adding, moving or removing elements in the composition
9. Light mass and Shadow mass
10. Blocks of flat tone
11. Shading that follows the form
12. Working with a ground to add and remove tone
13. Graduation within tonal shapes

The aim of this process is to allow you to sit in front of a subject and to begin to analyse it by drawing it. As you draw it you will become more aware of it. You will see more things in it, things that were not obvious to you when you first looked at it. Your drawing will be a tool to investigate the subject and to record your response to it.

Objectives

Select your own subject and make an A3 drawing, using everything that you have learnt from the course.

Suggested Materials

Standard graphite pencils (2H, HB, 2B and 4B)
Possibly a graphite stick
Pencil Sharpener (or craft knife)
Rubber (eraser) - hard type (not putty rubber)
A3 drawing paper

Module Description

The choice of subject for the final project is completely your own. You are free to do something similar to what you have done before, or you can take on a completely new subject. Ideally it will be a subject that you are really interested in.

Follow the process that we have established.

When you have completed the refinement of the envelopes to create the contours, look back and compare the drawing against the drawing that you did in module 1 to see how your work has progressed and developed. Think about the way you did the first drawing and what you were thinking about as you did it compared to this drawing. Even if the improvements in the drawing are only small you may be able to recognise the improvements in the thinking as much as in the drawing.

When you have completed the drawing, compare back to module 2, again to see the improvements in both the actual drawing as well as the thinking behind the drawing process.

Estimated Time
3 to 6 hours

Summary
Hopefully in completing this course your drawing skills will have improved, maybe significantly, depending on the level that you started at. Hopefully you will start to realise that your thinking about what you are drawing has also improved, and maybe you are now starting to see the connection between drawing and understanding a subject.

This course is intended to be a basic drawing course - there is much that we have not yet covered such as rhythms, qualities and expressionism to name but a few, but these will be for other courses to introduce.

Ideally what you will take from this is a reliable drawing process that will improve with practice. You should also find that this type of analytical drawing will be a really solid foundation for other types of work such as painting.

I really hope you have enjoyed the course and that it has really helped your drawing skills to develop.

The end of the course