The Illusion of Value

We usually think of ink drawing in terms of line, because of the solid black line created with pen-and-ink, we imagine that we can't create tonal value. While this might be, strictly speaking, true, there are many ways that we can create the illusion of value.

Hatching

The most basic method of creating value in ink drawing is linear hatching. Fine parallel lines fill an area, so that from just a slight distance, we have the illusion of value. The closer the lines are, the less white paper shows, and the darker the value appears. Heavier line weight (pressing more firmly or using a bigger nib) also gives a darker appearance.

Crosshatching

Crosshatching uses layers of hatching placed at an angle. Usually, the first layer would be vertical, the next horizontal, the next at forty-five degrees, and so on. This methodical approach can look a little mechanical, so artists often use variation in direction to add interest.

Contour Hatching

Hatching placed at a slight angle creates a moire-like effect, the diamond-shaped fragments of white paper enlivening the denser areas of value. This technique is often used in figure drawing, with the direction of line helping to suggest the cross-contours of the body. Hatching which follows a contour can also help to make objects appear more three-dimensional.

Scumbling and Random Hatching

Scumbling, often called the 'brillo pad' technique, uses layers of small calligraphic, scribbled marks to build up value and texture. Varying the direction and shape adds more interest than a simple circular scribble. Random hatching uses layers of short, straight marks. Various textures result depending on whether these short hatches are applied vertically, at right angles, following a contour or at random angles.

Stippling

Stippling uses tiny dots to create value. The closer together the dots, the darker the tone. Larger dots create a denser tonal value more quickly, but can look coarse.